

FPS

Volume 3, Number 2

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Editorial: Why 'Francophone Postcolonial Studies'?

Despite the impact of postcolonial theory on different academic disciplines over recent decades, the insight it can provide with regard to Francophone studies has yet to be fully assessed. Equally, the contribution that French and Francophone studies can make, and indeed have made, to a postcolonial theory largely perceived as Anglophone frequently remains unexplored.

By providing a forum for postcolonial perspectives, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* aims to promote theoretically driven, analytical studies of the Francophone world, which both question and reinvigorate the more established fields of French and postcolonial studies. The privileging of the postcolonial is in no way intended to imply that Francophone cultural production will be approached according to a single theoretical framework. On the contrary, *FPS* acknowledges the different theoretical trends within this multidisciplinary field, and believes that the complexity of postcolonial theory is best served by encouraging a variety of approaches. This theoretical complexity and multidisciplinaryity is, in turn, ideally suited to studying Francophone cultural production, which is frequently situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and social phenomena where synthesis is neither desirable nor possible.

As outlined in the first number, *FPS* envisages an approach that highlights a distinctive but reciprocal relationship between Francophone studies and postcolonial studies. We would like to invite contributions on any topic related to Francophone postcolonial studies for inclusion in future issues. Suggestions for themed issues to be co-ordinated by guest editors are also welcome. Authors should submit two copies of their article, of 6,000 words maximum, in English or in French, to a member of the editorial team (full contact details are given below). Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA*

Stylebook, providing references in footnotes, rather than the author-date system. All articles submitted to *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from our advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. The editorial team will endeavour to inform contributors of the decision regarding the publication of their articles within 12-15 weeks of receiving the piece. Book reviews, conference reports (700-800 words max.), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

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'The Light in the Heart': Cultural Capital versus Cultural Memory in Assia Djébar's Epigraphs

Assia Djébar's projected semi-autobiographical quartet, of which *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985) and *Vaste est la prison* (1995) are the first and third parts respectively, has received a lot of critical attention in recent years. Yet the complex system of epigraphs framing these texts remains largely untouched.¹ This despite the fact that each of the two novels under discussion here opens with a quotation that elaborates on the title and recurs, in original or moderated form, in the main body of the text. A further one or two quotations then precede each of the subsequent sections. This relative inattention is surprising; since the majority of Djébar's epigraphs are drawn from European authors (eleven of the fourteen in the two texts), her use of them can be considered an example in microcosm of the difficult process of negotiation that characterises her experience as an Algerian writing in the language of the coloniser. Indeed, I will argue that the esoteric nature of Djébar's selection of epigraphic texts constitutes a limit case for this act of negotiation and as such it puts to the test her claims to act as what John Erickson has termed an 'anamuensis for the collective voice of her Algerian sisters of today'.² For as Derrida stated in relation to his own experiences of *l'école républicaine*, 'on n'entraîne dans la littérature française qu'en perdant son accent'.³

Djébar's use of epigraphs encapsulates the conflict between 'cultural capital' and 'cultural memory' that traverses her texts. The issue is this: how does she use a body of knowledge acquired through her membership of an intellectual elite to frame and

¹ Anne Donadey's work is the notable exception in this regard. See for example 'Assia Djébar's Poetics of Subversion', *L'Esprit créateur*, 33.2 (1993), 107-17.

² John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.38.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), p.77.

comment on both her own experience and the accounts of the lives of women who are mostly illiterate? In order to address this question the place of both cultural capital and cultural memory in the texts must first be clearly set out.

1. Cultural capital

My understanding of cultural capital is derived from Bourdieu's formulation of the concept in *La Distinction*.⁴ For Bourdieu, to possess 'cultural capital' is to be in command of the hermeneutic code necessary for aesthetic judgement in a certain society. This code is acquired through the combined acquisition of 'capital hérité' and 'capital scolaire'. The former is that which is acquired in the context of the home and passed on primarily by the parents but also by friends and other family members. 'Capital scolaire' is the knowledge of cultural forms acquired in the classroom. In Bourdieu's experience of metropolitan France, 'capital scolaire' is something that complements 'capital hérité'. However, in the case of a colonised subject such as Djébar, acquiring her 'capital scolaire' at the hands of the oppressor, the two are very much at odds. This conflict is fundamental in structuring both Djébar's autobiographical discourse and her approach towards Algerian culture.

A dichotomy exists between the narrator's 'capital hérité' and her 'capital scolaire'. Her 'capital hérité' has a female genealogy and is in fact transmitted largely by her mother (women are often the bearers of memory; the preservation of the 'écriture ancestrale' of the Tuareg by the women of the tribe is a paradigmatic example).⁵ It is orally or materially transmitted (consider the mother's *trousseau* (*Vaste*, p.170)) and can be loosely defined as Arabo-Berber. On the other hand, her 'capital scolaire' is male and

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

⁵ Assia Djébar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), pp.144-50. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

patriarchal; it is her father, the *instituteur*, who is instrumental in encouraging her progress at school, her teachers are all male and the canon of texts to which she is introduced is overwhelmingly male (she cites Nerval, Alain-Fournier, Claudel). The gendered nature of her formal education is apparent from the opening of *L'Amour, la fantasia* ('Fille arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école [...] main dans la main du père'⁶) and is most strikingly illustrated by the class photo in which she is the only girl (*Vaste*, pp.270-1). This 'capital scolaire' is transmitted and perpetuated through writing – and it is French.

This polarity within cultural capital is admittedly an oversimplification. The narrator's 'capital scolaire' could also be said to include her experience of Koranic school, which, whilst remaining predominantly masculinist, nonetheless involves the oral transmission of a non-Western body of knowledge. Moreover, the narrator's father is not just a vehicle for French culture; he is also responsible for attempting to inculcate an Islamic value-system. This role can have its contradictions, such as when the narrator contravenes her father's wishes to maintain a correspondence with a young man ('ainsi, cette langue que m'a donnée le père me devient entremetteuse et mon initiation, dès lors, se place sous un signe double, contradictoire...') (*L'Amour*, p.12).

2. Cultural memory

For Assia Djébar the process of giving shape to her individual subjectivity through the act of writing is inseparable from the act of representing a collective subject. According to Jeanne-Marie Clerc, for Djébar, 'l'écriture autobiographique s'inscrit dans un 'déjà là' de la mémoire collective des femmes, où le sujet parlant ne repère son identité que dans sa communauté avec l'Autre et

⁶ Assia Djébar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985, repr. 1995), p.11. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

avec leur commun silence imposé'.⁷ Apart from the fact that situating the individual within the collectivity helps reconcile the autobiographical act with the conventional censure of the first person imposed on Arab women, it is Djébar's training as a historian that is evident in her focus on positioning the individual along a historical continuum and in establishing a dialogue between present and past subjectivities. Indeed, Djébar has described her 'démarche' as 'progresser en reculant dans le temps'⁸ on the basis that 'la repossesion de l'identité ne peut passer que par l'histoire. Il faut rétablir le rapport dialectique passé-présent'.⁹ One way to conceptualise cultural memory is precisely as this 'rapport'; it is the shifting presence of a shared past in a commonly experienced present. By prioritising this 'rapport' Djébar places cultural memory at the heart of her autobiographical project.

Djébar's preoccupation with cultural memory manifests itself in two ways; the first is evident in the content of her texts and the second in their form. As a piece of historical writing her text sets out to address the exclusion of women from Algerian history and she does this by lending her pen to their memories. This act, described in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* as the 'première des solidarités à assumer',¹⁰ for a liberated, literate Algerian woman, has been characterised as the establishment of a

countermemory.¹¹ There are a number of ways in which she writes women back into history, of which three stand out.

Firstly, she records the testimony of other women. The *maquisarde* Zohra, who tells her story in part three of *L'Amour, la fantasia* explains the necessity of this act: 'Hélas! nous sommes des analphabètes. Nous ne laissons pas de récits de ce que nous avons enduré et vécu' (*L'Amour*, p.212). In offering a medium for the recording and transmission of these accounts Djébar mirrors the performance of her grandmother, who in her frenetic trance acts as a medium of a rather different sort: 'toutes les voix du passé bondissaient loin d'elle, expulsées hors de la prison de ses jours' (*L'Amour*, p.207). Whereas in *L'Amour, la fantasia* most of the voices are based on interviews Djébar conducted, in *Vaste est la prison* she focuses instead on performing a similar role for her mother, whose family history she sets out.

Secondly, Assia Djébar legitimises her establishment of a female countermemory by contesting the view that the act of writing has always been a male domain. In the middle section of *Vaste est la prison* she details the deciphering of a third language, a written form of Berber, which she believes was the property of women. Reflecting on an inscription found in the mausoleum of the 4th century B.C. Tuareg princess, Tin Hinan, she asserts, 'notre écriture la plus secrète [...] toute bruissante encore de sons et de souffles d'aujourd'hui, est bien legs de femme' (*Vaste*, p.164). Thus not only does she lend her writing to women who have no voice, she also symbolically restores to them writing itself.

Thirdly and finally, she engages in a feminist re-reading of historical texts in order to uncover the experience of those marginalised within them, primarily women. The most notable example of this is in her treatment of the letters and reports written

⁷ Jeanne-Marie Clerc, *Assia Djébar: écrire, transgresser, résister* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p.75.

⁸ Interview with Michael Heller, 'Conversation d'Assia Djébar avec Michael Heller', *Cahiers d'Études Maghrébines*, 2 (1990), 84-90 (87).

⁹ Interview with Josie Fanon, 'Une femme, un film, un autre regard', *Demain l'Afrique* 1 (1977), 62-63.

¹⁰ Assia Djébar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980, repr. 2002), p.9.

¹¹ See Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, decolonisation and literatures* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.78-85.

by the French in Algeria in the 1830s and 1840s which, in reference to Pélissier's report of the *enfumade* at the caves in 1845, she refers to as a 'palimpseste' on which she inscribes 'la passion calcinée de mes ancêtres' (*L'Amour*, p.114). From the very day of the appearance of the French fleet in the Bay of Algiers in June 1830 the narrator asks 'que se disent les femmes de la ville...?' (*L'Amour*, p.17), a query that underpins all her readings of historical accounts. Towards the end of the text she provides a very vivid metaphor for the creative technique she has employed in the attempt to answer this question. She explains how in *Une année dans le Sahel*, the painter Eugène Fromentin mentions in passing 'une main coupée d'Algérienne anonyme' (*L'Amour*, p.313) which he found on a visit to Laghouat, a town which had recently surrendered after a bloody siege. In documenting this gruesome discovery Fromentin offers her 'une main inattendue' which she in turn, grasps and tries 'de lui faire porter le "qalam"' (*L'Amour*, p.313). Djébar articulates this function of writing very succinctly: 'Écrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues' (*L'Amour*, p.285).

However, this memory work is complicated by the second form of cultural memory in the text; the memory contained within the French language in which Djébar writes. Djébar herself is acutely aware of the difficulties of this paradoxical situation; as she explained in a televised interview, reading the letters of the French officers led her to realise that 'dans cette langue française il restait du sang. Parce que *les langues portent aussi la mémoire*' (my emphasis).¹² Thus despite her assertions about reviving 'sœurs disparues' she is also conscious of the impossibility and even the hypocrisy of this project; as she declares to the absent Chérifa, one of her other narrators, 'les mots que j'ai cru te donner s'enveloppent de la même serge de deuil que ceux de Bosquet ou

de Saint-Arnaud.¹³ En vérité, ils s'écrivent à travers ma main, puisque je consens à cette bâtardise' (*L'Amour*, pp.202-3). Arabo-Berber culture is as impenetrable to her French as it was to the army interpreters who found themselves 'incapable de traduire les premiers dialogues' (*L'Amour*, p.52). The extent to which language is a bearer of memory is a staple of postcolonial theory. As Fanon wrote in *Peau noire, masques blancs*: 'Parler, c'est être à même d'employer une certaine syntaxe [...] mais c'est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation'.¹⁴ Derrida likewise is adamant that language forms the autobiographical self and not vice versa: 'on sait bien que le je de l'anamnèse dite autobiographique le *je-me* du *je me rappelle* se produit et se profère différemment selon les langues. Il ne les précède jamais, il n'est donc pas indépendant de la langue en général'.¹⁵ There are enormous difficulties attached to writing the subjectivity of a colonised subject in the language of the coloniser and when, as in Djébar's case, this project is extended to a desire to inscribe a collective subjectivity then these difficulties can only be accentuated.

This difficulty – the conflict between a cultural memory project and cultural capital understood in linguistic terms – has been widely explored in Djébar's work. It is often resolved by remarking that the voices in her texts would be no better served by transcribing them into Arabic or Berber, since all translations from the oral to the written involve some form of corruption. As Djébar writes in the introduction to *Femmes d'Alger*, 'je pourrais dire 'nouvelles traduites de...', mais de quelle langue? De l'arabe? D'un arabe populaire, ou d'un arabe féminin; autant dire d'un arabe souterrain' (p.7). Moreover, whilst the act of writing in French transforms Djébar into a 'fugitive' this exile is an essential

¹² Directed by Kamal Dehane, *Assia Djébar: entre ombre et soleil*. 1992.

¹³ French officers whose writing she has used.

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), p.13.

¹⁵ Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, p.54.

pre-condition of her writing. Although she may feel divorced from her 'richesse du départ [...] celle de l'héritage maternel', the gift of French (a gift that she compares to the tunic of Nessus)¹⁶ has also afforded her 'la simple mobilité du corps dénudé' and above all 'la liberté' (*Vaste*, p.172) without which there would be no text.

3. The Epigraphs

Whilst these arguments do seem to suggest an outcome for the language question, they do not provide a sufficient response to the conflict between memory work and cultural capital as presented in the epigraphs. This is significant in that Djébar's practice as an *épigraphaire* pushes this conflict to its limits, for the reasons outlined in the introduction. The most comprehensive treatment of the use of epigraphs is provided by Gérard Genette in *Seuils*;¹⁷ my analysis of Djébar's practice will be based primarily on this text. Genette identifies four functions of the epigraph; it can constitute a commentary on the title, a commentary on the main body of the text, an act of legitimisation (via the linking of one's own name to a more established predecessor) and lastly simply 'an effect', serving to situate the text within an intellectual or cultural tradition and in which content is immaterial. In general he takes a dim view of the use of epigraphs, arguing, 'la pertinence sémantique de l'épigraphe est souvent en quelque sorte aléatoire, et l'on peut

¹⁶ The story of Nessus tells how Hercules slew the centaur Nessus, who attempted to rape his wife, Deianira. The dying Nessus gives her a potion mixed with his blood under guise of it being a love potion. Later, Deianira, attempting to reclaim Hercules's affection, gives him a cloak soaked with the potion containing Nessus's blood. The cloak burns him horribly, giving him such agony that he causes himself to be immolated. Thus a gift of love is also responsible for the destruction of the loved object. (Information drawn from John Erickson, 'Women's Space and Enabling Dialogue in Assia Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*', in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, ed. Mary-Jean Green et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.304-20).

¹⁷ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

soupçonner, sans la moindre malveillance, certains auteurs d'en placer quelques-unes au petit bonheur, persuadés à juste titre que tout rapprochement fait sens' (p.147). Thus rather than making intellectual connections and opening up possibilities for intertextual analysis, for Genette the function of the epigraph is frequently 'évasive, plus affective qu'intellectuelle et parfois plus décorative qu'affective' (p.147). Moreover, he sees the epigraph as a sign of immodesty, by which an author tries to pre-empt her or his book's critical reception by co-opting an established tradition; the epigraph becomes 'à elle seule un signal (qui se veut *indice*) de culture, un mot de passe d'intellectualité' (p.148) and hence the choice of authors becomes 'plus significatif que les textes d'épigraphes par eux-mêmes' (p.137). On the basis of Genette's argument it is hard not to view Djébar's practice in an unfavourable light, especially since one of the authors he cites as being disproportionately popular with those keen to appear both erudite and *branché* is Hölderlin, an extract from whose poem *In Lieblicher Bläue* precedes the first part of *Vaste est la prison*.¹⁸

Yet within the context of a colonial autobiography, it is not viable to dismiss this element of the peritext as the whimsical gesture Genette's reading suggests.¹⁹ For the epigraphs can also be read as another autobiographical layer, an autobi(bli)ography. In Christa Wolf's account of growing up in Nazi Germany, *A Model Childhood*, she asks, 'How did we become what we are today? One of the answers would be a list of books.'²⁰ So it is for Djébar, who within the main body of her texts makes much of her discovery of French literature (see *Vaste*, pp.291-94, detailing her exposure to the canon of modern French literature). One cannot

¹⁸ This poem is cited in translation as 'En bleu adorable' at the start of part of *Vaste est la prison*, 'L'Effacement dans le cœur', p.17. See also note 31 below. For his comments on the use of Hölderlin see Genette, *Seuils*, p.148.

¹⁹ His theory is derived largely from Stendhal's more haphazard practice.

²⁰ Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, trans. by Ursula Malinaro and Hedwig Rappolt (London: Virago, 1983), p.369.

read Djebbar-*épigrapheuse* other than as an extension of Djebbar-narrator. The problem occurs when the former appears to undermine the latter; how can we reconcile the latter's account of the violence of the French colonial project with such willing recourse to the canons of the *mission civilisatrice*?

Some critics have attempted to use Genette's categories whilst ignoring his cynicism. Simone Rezzoug has for example picked up on the fourth function (situating the text within a cultural tradition) to argue that by her use of epigraphs Djebbar creates 'un système de défense dans le procès de la parole féminine' (within Islamic culture).²¹ Thus her practice is not self-aggrandising as Genette might suggest but in fact self-effacing. This view supports Djebbar's choice of an author such as Ibn Khaldoun,²² but does little to enlighten us as to the references to writers as relatively obscure even to a European readership as Dobzynski or Hermann Broch. John Erickson extends another explanation: according to him, 'the very use of the epigraph, a text marked by marginality, makes it a conveyance *par excellence* of the marginal perspective of postcolonial authors.'²³ However, this analysis conflates physical marginality – the epigraph is indeed a text 'en bord de l'œuvre' as Genette points out (p.134) – and marginal discourse. Moreover, neither critic takes into account the content of the epigraphs chosen. The most sophisticated reading of Djebbar's practice is Anne Donadey's; she draws on both Irigaray's and Bhabha's notions of mimicry to illustrate how Djebbar subverts the

²¹ Simone Rezzoug, 'Écritures féminines algériennes: histoire et société', *Maghreb Review* 9.3-4 (May-Aug. 1984), 86-9, (p.88).

²² Ibn Khaldoun, born in Tunis in 1332 was a famous historian and historiographer, best known for his universal history, *al-Muqaddimah*. He is also widely acknowledged as a forerunner of modern sociology. He enjoyed an illustrious political career in the court of various North African rulers but in around 1380 he fell from favour in Tunis and was forced into exile in Egypt where he died in 1406.

²³ Erickson, *Islam*, p.54.

coloniser's text by reappropriating it and reworking it within her text.²⁴ Donadey uses the example of the quotation from Fromentin which opens *L'Amour, la fantasia* to demonstrate how Djebbar suggests a postcolonial reading of the master-text that highlights its marginal aspects and thus enables a dialogue to develop with the marginal figures in her own text. The problem with this analysis is that the example she uses is one that is hard to generalise; it works only because Fromentin's text also – primarily even – functions as an active intertext and is incorporated into the main body of the text in a way that the majority of epigraphs are not.

The structuralist thrust of Genette's reading means that he also sidelines the issue of content. Although he admits that 'la capacité herméneutique [du lecteur] est souvent mise à l'épreuve' (p.146) he does not explore the forms this 'épreuve' may take; there is no attempt to conceive of a dialogue between texts and his main concern, as shown above, is to dismiss the majority of epigraphic choices as wilfully obtuse. Yet closer investigation reveals a number of the authors chosen by Djebbar to be people who have struggled with many of the same issues as her. This is particularly true in *Vaste est la prison*, where her epigraphs are both more perplexing – there is little ambiguity in the '*Quasi una fantasia...*' that precedes section three of *L'Amour, la fantasia* – and ultimately more rewarding.

Djebbar herself provides a clue to her epigraphic practice when she explains how she found 'dans l'absolu des héroïnes claudéliennes, comme un reflet de quoi... de ma culture maternelle?' (*Vaste*, p.292); it is thus clear that she recognised the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between European literature and her personal experience from an early age. Certainly, the texts chosen in *Vaste est la prison* all highlight certain key themes that serve to illuminate Djebbar's experience as recounted in the text.

²⁴ See Anne Donadey, *Op.cit.*

The best example of this is probably the extract from Charles Dobzynski that appears on p.119 at the start of part two of *Vaste est la prison*.²⁵ Charles Dobzynski was born in Warsaw in 1929. In 1930 Dobzynski's family moved to France where he was educated. Despite writing in French, his first language was Yiddish and much of his work tackles not only the familiar theme of exile, both geographic and linguistic, but also the problem of a language in decline and the preservation of its oral forms. It is unsurprising that in his evocation of an alphabet 'enterré [...] que je n'employais ni pour penser ni pour écrire, mais pour passer des frontières...' Djébar saw parallels between his concerns and her own in the section entitled 'L'Effacement sur la pierre' (see above). Similarly, Ibn Khaldoun was not only the author of perhaps the most detailed autobiography in medieval Arabic literature (an extract from which introduces the second section 'Les Cris de la fantasia'), he also spent the last twenty years of his life writing in exile in Egypt.²⁶ And from a feminist perspective, Hyvrard's writing is, like Djébar's, permeated with the search for an expressive voice.²⁷ Indeed, in her introduction to *La Meurtritude*, Jennifer Waelti-Walters describes the character Jeanne as 'searching for a sense of self, for her past, the lost heritage of all women, and a language in which to express the completion of her interconnected understanding', a reflection that

²⁵ This epigraph is taken from the prologue to the poem *Alphabase* (Mortemart: Rougerie, 1992).

²⁶ See *L'Amour*, p.71. The full title of the cited text is *al-Ta'rif bi-Ibn Khaldun wa-rihlatihi gharban wa-sharqan*. No English version available. Available in French as *Le Voyage d'Occident et d'Orient*, trans. and ed. by Abdesselam Cheddadi (Paris: Sindbad, 1980).

²⁷ Djébar quotes from *La Meurtritude* by Jeanne Hyvrard, (Paris: Minuit, 1977) on p.341 of *Vaste est la prison* at the start of the final section, 'Le sang de l'écriture'. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

would not be out of place in the introduction to any one of Djébar's works.²⁸

In addition to the dialogue established between the text and the epigraphs we should also consider the relationships created between the epigraphs themselves. Barthes has employed the analogy of an echo chamber to describe his writing practice, an idea used to underline his ideas about the primacy of the agency of language over that of the writer.²⁹ An echo chamber is a useful metaphor to apply to Djébar; as we have seen she is explicit about her desire to provide a channel for others' voices, their mediation in her writing meaning that they will always, *must* always, only ever take the form of echoes. Extending this metaphor also illuminates her epigraphic practice; the echo-chamber becomes a dizzying hall of mirrors, in which a myriad of voices – past and present, collective and individual – bounce off the reflective surfaces of the epigraphic texts ('comme un reflet...' (*Vaste*, p.292, see p.9 above)). In *Vaste est la prison* this technique is particularly effective because so many of the themes in both Djébar's text and the intertexts are shared; her epigraphs may be drawn from a wide variety of literatures (even if mostly Western), but her esotericism reflects less a deliberate elitism and more a genuine concern to draw *le mot juste* from a vast *culture livresque*. Close attention to the texts is rewarded by an intensification of their echoes; the dark heart of the echo chamber pulsates to the rhythm of a *vibration* not *doctrinale* (as in Barthes, p.151) but rather *musicale* (to employ a favourite Djébar metaphor), like a harmonic composed of perfectly attuned frequencies.

Indeed, the epigraphs' echoes reveal *Vaste est la prison* to be a much darker text than its critics have often implied. As it drowns

²⁸ Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Introduction to *Waterweed in the Wash-Houses* by Jeanne Hyvrard, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp.1-8 (p.7).

²⁹ Roland Barthes, 'Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes', in *Roland Barthes: Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993), III, 79-250 (p.151).

in blood and vomit (*Vaste*, pp.338-48), writing struggles to hold on to any redemptive function. This tension between suffering, pain and loss and potential recuperation in language is played out in the epigraphs. For example, both the Woolf short story, 'A Haunted House' (cited in translation as 'Une maison hantée' at the start of part one of *Vaste est la prison*, L'Effacement dans le cœur', p.17) and the Hölderlin poem with which it is paired deal with the passing of time and a lyrically expressed yearning for a lost utopia, a remembered place of serenity.³⁰ In the Woolf text two lovers return to the scene of their former intimacy; the house of their love is boarded up, deserted and haunted by their past selves. At the end of the visit they discover the irretrievability of the past, whilst at the same time uncovering its legacy: 'the light in the heart' ('cette clarté au cœur').³¹ This is precisely the movement that operates in the narrator when after a long absence she encounters 'l'Aimé' on a Parisian street corner: 'Ainsi, mon amour silencieux, auparavant si difficilement maîtrisé, changeait de nature; il subsistait en moi, toujours secret, dépouillé de sa fragilité qui m'avait si longtemps troublée' (*Vaste*, p.116). However, the quotation from Hölderlin, which also deals with a form of resolution, 'la fin de quelque chose,' points towards the violence and the distress that has brought us to this place of tranquility. The end has come at a price – in Djébar's narrator's case at the price of beatings from her husband and a submission to the strictures of a society that forbade relations between young people of the opposite sex ('une nostalgie, pour moi, de cet âge perdu: de n'avoir pas eu de camarades garçons' (*Vaste*, p.53)); it is a resignation born of sacrifice and suffering.

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'A Haunted House', in *A Haunted House: The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Vintage, 2003), pp.116-17. Further references to this edition are given after the quotations in the text. See note 18 above for details of the Hölderlin poem.

³¹ Virginia Woolf, 'A Haunted House', in *A Haunted House, and Other Short Stories*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1943).

Coming at the start of the final section, the quotation from Hyvrard pulls together many of the intertextual threads. Hyvrard's lyrical text is almost the mirror image of Djébar's in another register: she too asks 'Comment retrouverai-je la langue perdue?'³² and struggles to evade the coercive forces of French ('Je ne connais du français que le tintement métallique de la règle contre la table' (Hyvrard, p.57)). The quotation used in the epigraph ('Tu dis que la souffrance ne sert à rien. Mais si. Elle sert à faire crier. Pour avertir de l'insensé...') initially seems to continue to point towards the possibility of redemption through writing and this comes as a surprise at a point in her text when Djébar seems to be despairing of this prospect. Nothing that she can write can ever reverse the senseless murder of twenty-eight year-old Yasmina: 'Aujourd'hui, au terme d'une année de morts obscures, de morts souillées, dans la ténèbre de luttes fratricides. Comment te nommer désormais, Algérie!' (*Vaste*, p.345). In fact a return to Hyvrard's text reveals it to posit precisely the same irreconcilable dilemma as that confronted by Djébar, for her narrator, too, is dying: 'de ce suintement de mots [...] Je meurs de l'écriture' (Hyvrard, p.146). In addition in both cases there is a quasi-Beckettian obligation to persevere; in Hyvrard's case there is no option ('[N'être plus] Que la souffrance souffrante. Que la souffrance de persister. Que la souffrance de ne pas pouvoir dévier') (Hyvrard, p.145). And in Djébar's case there is an ethical responsibility to bury her echo chamber and to transform it into a collective vault: 'Les morts, eux seuls, désirent écrire, et dans l'urgence comme on a coutume de dire!' (*Vaste*, p.346). In another echo, the Algerian dystopia is here the very image of Hölderlin's earth without 'measure', where 'es hemmen den Donnergang nie die Welten / Des Schöpfers'.³³

³² Jeanne Hyvrard, *La Meurtritude* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), p.106. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

³³ 'Is there a measure on earth? There is none. For the creator's worlds never impede the run of thunder.' See 'In Lieblicher Bläue' in Friedrich Hölderlin,

Despite the wealth of resonances they contain, Assia Djebar's choice of epigraphs nevertheless reveals a subjectivity that has been highly conditioned by the French educational experience and that could still be censured for being uncritical of this acculturation. Whilst she acknowledges that language is a bearer of memory to some critics, she seems to deny the role of the French canon in enforcing cultural hegemony. This is all the more important since the exploration of how 'a canon is produced by the intersection of a number of readings and reading assumptions legitimised in the privileging hierarchy of a "patriarchal" or "metropolitan" concept of literature' is usually considered a fundamental trope of post-colonial literature.³⁴ In these terms Djebar's free and extensive use of her 'capital scolaire' in her epigraphs would seem to undermine her ambitions in the field of cultural memory.

As we saw above, Djebar has attempted to address the complexities of writing in the language of the coloniser by employing the analogy of the tunic of Nessus. Having demonstrated that her epigraphs are far from the elitist gesture Genette implies, it seems not unreasonable to understand her mobilisation of a predominantly French cultural capital as an inevitable corollary of the practice of writing in French, sharing the same tensions and the same possible resolution. Indeed, this view is supported by theories of intertextuality which see 'tout texte [...] comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte'.³⁵ Or as Michael Worton and

Poems and Fragments, trans. and ed. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1994), 788-93 (p.789).

³⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.176.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Sémiotiché: recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p.53.

Judith Still have put it in reference to the Derridean notion of 'iterability':

No communication is comprehensible unless it could be repeated or cited. This implies that citationality, which entails an utterance being detached from its context, is a characteristic of any sign and not simply an aberrant use of language. In other words, rather than regarding quotation as a parasitic and unusual activity, we could say that any text is inevitably quoting and quotable.³⁶

There is no reason to see the epigraph as situated outside of this logic solely because it is more explicit about this function of discourse. The question of accessibility remains however; does Djebar's epigraphic practice serve to alienate all but those who share the same capital? By positing the epigraph as an extension of a universal linguistic function the suggestion is that the risk of alienation is no greater than in any text written in a literary register in French. Nevertheless, the act of referencing which separates the epigraph from the embedded citation does seem to impose a duty of recognition on the reader. However, this obligation is as much a product of the reader's vanity as of authorial intention. Riffaterre explains why we should not heed it too obsessively: 'interpretation remains impervious to the intertext's obsolescence because the text [...] goes on pointing to this obverse even after the latter has been effaced by time; all that is needed for communication is the postulation of absent meaning'.³⁷ His analysis is as applicable to

³⁶ Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.24.

³⁷ Michael Riffaterre, 'Interpretation and undecidability', *New Literary History*, 12.2 (1980), 227-42 (239).

obscurity as to obsolescence. We may not have read Hyvrard or Hafiz but we can still sense the darkness of the echo chamber.

The need to enter into a productive dialogue with established canons has long been acknowledged by feminist critics. For Elaine Showalter, women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' (in the Bakhtinian sense) that 'always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritage of both the muted and the dominant'.³⁸ Djébar's willingness to frame the heritage of the muted in the discourse of the dominant should thus be seen not as a capitulation to the values of the dominant culture but rather as an attempt to disrupt a certain monologism in the same way as many women writers have gnawed away at patriarchy from within. The confusion arises in relation to Djébar because from her perspective there is not one monologism but several; there is the discourse of colonialism, but there is also the discourse of Islamic patriarchy and in addition, the discourse of a certain form of post-colonial writing that could be seen as colluding with patriarchy in the oppression and silencing of women. For Djébar as an individual, emancipation at the hands of the coloniser was a real experience and not the charade evoked by male writers such as Fanon (in essays such as *L'Algérie se dévoile*).³⁹ Thus for her, the colonial legacy, constitutive of her cultural capital as deployed in her epigraphs, carries within it a very different, and more complex, set of associations than for many of her detractors. In deploying this cultural capital she offers a genuine insight into just how subjects are 'formed "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference'.⁴⁰ And in her unwillingness to bend her individual subjectivity to the exigencies of any of the prevailing discourses she remains defiant, continuing to entertain the possibility of 'délivrance', even as the prison

³⁸ Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (London: Virago, 1986), p.263.

³⁹ See Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.192.

⁴⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.2.

grows vaster. 'Abandonnez-moi, renversée,' she cries, but always 'yeux ouverts' (*Vaste*, p.347).

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**Stéréotype et réécriture du voyage dans
En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages et
Allah n'est pas obligé d'Ahmadou Kourouma:
une écriture décentrée de l'Histoire**

La remise en cause de l'héritage culturel métropolitain a engendré de nouvelles formes d'écritures que nous pourrions percevoir comme la métaphore d'un acte de protestation, une volonté de se réapproprier une identité longtemps spoliée par l'Histoire coloniale. Les indépendances africaines d'abord, le mouvement de la Négritude ensuite, et le 2^e Congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs, qui en 1959 promulguait l'engagement comme acte nécessaire des littératures noires ont certainement contribué à placer ces interrogations au centre du roman africain.¹ l'histoire, au tournant de ces années, devenait le fer de lance de toute une génération d'écrivains engagés comme Mongo Beti, Emmanuel Dongala, Olympe Bhêly-Quenum, William Sassine, Tchicaya U Tam'Si, etc. Face à l'impérialisme d'un imaginaire français qui a longtemps instillé dans les mentalités une certaine perception littéraire de l'Afrique – comme nous le faisait justement remarquer Edward Saïd dans *L'Orientalisme* et plus récemment dans son recueil d'articles *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* –, nous nous attacherons aux deux dernières œuvres d'Ahmadou Kourouma pour voir la manière dont l'écrivain a su répondre à cette vision falsifiée de l'Histoire.² Comment Kourouma assume-t-

¹ L'artiste noir se devait de rechercher 'l'expression vraie de la réalité de son peuple, longtemps obscurcie, déformée ou niée au cours de la période de colonisation. (...) L'écrivain noir ne peut que participer de manière spontanée et totale au mouvement général précédemment esquissé. Le sens du combat lui est donné d'emblée, comment pourrait-il s'y refuser?', *Présence Africaine*, 24-25 (1959), pp.387-92 (389).

² Edward Saïd, *L'Orientalisme: L'Orient créé par l'Occident*, traduit par Catherine Malamoud (Paris: Seuil, 1994); *Reflections of Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000).

il ses droits à l'autonomie discursive en faisant un retour sur son propre imaginaire? Quelles sont les stratégies d'écriture qu'il utilise pour faire éclater son refus de se reconnaître dans un discours souvent hérité des recherches anthropologiques du 19^e siècle? Le pastiche des grands récits d'explorateurs dans *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* vient questionner une perception réductrice de l'Afrique; l'utilisation du stéréotype dans *Allah n'est pas obligé* permet de repenser la position ambiguë de l'Occident vis-à-vis de l'Afrique.

En se plaçant du point de vue de l'Autre – cet Africain aux mœurs sauvages ou violentes –, Kourouma s'inscrit directement dans le registre des littératures postcoloniales dont *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* dit :

The immensely prestigious and powerful imperial culture found itself appropriated in projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew upon many different indigenous local and hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge. Post-colonial literatures are the result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices.³

Comment donc se manifeste, chez notre auteur, cette interaction entre une culture impérialiste et une identité africaine? En réutilisant certains modes de représentation propres à la littérature occidentale, en jouant avec les différents registres de la langue française, Kourouma entre en résistance pour dénoncer l'intériorisation des schèmes coloniaux et réécrire sa propre perception de l'Histoire africaine.

³ Bill Aschroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.1.

La perversion de la littérature de voyage

1. Le questionnement du voyage ethnologique

Dans *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*, les aventures de Maclélio s'inscrivent dans la pure tradition des récits de voyage du 18 et 19 siècle. L'Africain Maclélio déserte l'armée coloniale pour partir à la recherche de 'son homme de destin' car, selon les dires de son village, celui-ci est porteur d'un funeste norô. En partant à la recherche de son homme de destin, à l'intérieur des terres africaines, Maclélio fait état des us et coutumes des civilisations qu'il croise à la manière d'un 'ethnologue-explorateur' qui consigne toutes ses découvertes sur son carnet : la description se veut la plus réaliste possible pour mieux analyser et comprendre les peuples rencontrés afin de les faire connaître à un plus grand public. Ainsi Maclélio dit des Bamiléké:

Les Bamiléké sont des Bantous. Les Bantous constituent une des ethnies les plus importantes des hommes de la forêt de l'Afrique centrale qui s'attaquèrent au monde des hommes venus par le sud. (p.127)

Chacune des ethnies qu'il traverse est l'occasion pour Maclélio d'un petit rappel historique et géographique à l'attention du lecteur. Par ailleurs, nous pourrions établir quelques parallèles entre la destinée de ce personnage et celle d'un autre explorateur anglais, pour le coup bien réel, Mungo Park qui, en 1795, entreprit un voyage de deux ans, à l'intérieur des terres africaines: il est intéressant de noter que Mungo Park, tout comme Maclélio, s'est

fait détroussé par des voleurs et qu'il est emprisonné par les Maures.⁴

Toutefois, les descriptions, au début très réalistes de Maclélio deviennent de plus en plus cocasses, voire absurdes. Dans nombre des peuples qu'il rencontre, Maclélio est l'homme choisi pour donner un enfant à l'héritière. Il n'a aucune autre fonction que celle de géniteur et doit mourir, une fois sa tâche accomplie. Il est réduit à sa seule sexualité et sa qualité d'être humain se trouve rabaissée à celle de l'animal: Maclélio est un 'margouillat'. Il n'a pas de discours propre et regarde son pays avec les yeux d'un Européen. Sa perception des événements se rapproche étrangement de la littérature coloniale telle que la définissait Jean-Marc Moura dans un article intitulé 'Littératures coloniales, littératures postcoloniales et traitement narratif de l'espace':

L'écrivain se conçoit comme le 'récepteur' d'une réalité coloniale qu'il a longuement expérimentée et dont il témoigne. Il dévoile l'espace autochtone [...]. Cette assimilation a une fonction de contrôle: elle est instrument de structuration fictionnelle qui vient redoubler la structuration politique coloniale. En son fond, elle est idéologique mais elle se donne pour réaliste en accordant une évidente priorité aux aspects objectifs, matériels, de l'espace représenté.⁵

⁴ Mungo Park, *Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1996), pp.156-66. Cf. Chap XI où il parle de sa captivité chez les Maures et des ses discussions avec la Princesse Fatima 'd'une excessive corpulence' (p.162).

⁵ Jean-Marc Moura, 'Littératures coloniales, littératures postcoloniales et traitement narratif de l'espace: quelques problèmes et perspectives', Jean Bessière, Jean-Marc Moura (eds.), *Séminaire de littérature générale et comparée de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle. Littératures postcoloniales*

Kourouma, en prenant un aventurier qui n'en est pas vraiment un, se moque ici des partis pris idéologiques de l'explorateur. Maclélio n'impose jamais le respect, il est asservi par les peuples qu'il rencontre. Le rapport de force est inversé, l'aventurier ridiculisé. Ces impressions transparaissent parfois dans le récit de Mungo Park qui, de temps à autre, est la risée des peuples qu'il traverse.⁶ Mais Kourouma va plus loin dans sa remise en question de ces voyages à but scientifique et dans sa critique des explorateurs : le voyageur qu'est Maclélio ne découvre rien, il n'agit pas, il subit ce qui lui arrive, il erre de région en région à la recherche de son '*homme de destin*'. Maclélio cherche un maître, il ne peut exister que dans ce rapport de dépendance à autrui. Au début de son voyage, il épouse la princesse des Agnis; à la fin de son périple, il devient l'esclave de la reine des Songhaïs et occasionnellement son amant. Le cercle se referme. Maclélio en est au même point, il a même régressé de la condition d'époux à celle d'esclave.

Ainsi par l'entremise de ce personnage haut en couleur, Kourouma se moque de ces explorateurs-ethnologues qui cachaient derrière de grands idéaux de connaissance des projets impérialistes qui dont le but principal était le dénigrement de l'Autre dans le seul but de justifier l'entreprise coloniale: c'est parce que l'Africain était sauvage et barbare qu'il avait besoin d'être éduqué. Mais là encore, les postulats d'une telle affirmation

et représentation de l'Ailleurs: Afrique, Caraïbes, Canada, (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1999), pp.173-90 (p.177).

⁶ cf. Park, pp.144-45: 'Il m'est impossible de décrire la conduite d'un peuple qui fait une étude de la méchanceté comme d'une science, et qui se réjouit des chagrins et des infortunes des autres hommes. Il suffit de dire que ma présence fournit aux Maures l'occasion d'exercer à leur gré l'insolence, la férocité et le fanatisme qui les distingue du genre humain. [...] Depuis le moment où le soleil se levait jusqu'à celui où il se couchait, j'étais obligé de souffrir d'un air tranquille les insultes des sauvages les plus brutaux qui existent sur la terre.'

sont à chercher dans le discours que l'Occident a construit sur l'Afrique et non dans une réelle entreprise scientifique. Par ailleurs, en prenant pour explorateur un Africain qui n'a aucun recul sur lui-même, l'auteur stigmatise cette acculturation propre à certains Africains qui avaient fait leur classe à l'école des Blancs, pendant la colonisation: ces derniers se croyaient porteurs d'un savoir tel qu'ils en oubliaient jusqu'à leurs traditions.⁷ Kourouma nous suggère ici que l'Africain sera incapable de voyager tant qu'il ne se débarrassera pas des scories de la colonisation et qu'il ne regardera pas son pays avec ses propres yeux.

2. *Le Bildungsroman ou le voyage initiatique perverti*

Kourouma, tout en critiquant la culture de la violence propre aux guerres du Libéria ou de Sierra Leone, pervertit également le modèle du voyage initiatique dans son dernier roman *Allah n'est pas obligé*, à travers le parcours d'un enfant-soldat, Birahima, qui va raconter ses aventures. L'histoire suit toujours le même scénario: Birahima rencontre un groupe de rebelles dont le chef est 'un drôle de numéro' à la justice expéditive; il devient 'small-soldier' et Yacouba 'grigri-man'. Les deux acolytes sont sous la houlette de chefs de guerres qui se ressemblent étrangement, sortes de doubles parodiques de personnages historiques comme Charles Taylor, Samuel Doe, Johnny Koroma, Foday Sankho ou Tejan Kabbah. Et ces chefs de guerre aux méthodes peu scrupuleuses deviennent des exemples à suivre. L'initiation est pervertie d'entrée de jeu car les modèles auxquels se réfèrent Birahima et son ami sont totalement corrompus. La structure cyclique du roman concourt à illustrer cette absence d'évolution de

⁷ Kourouma précise d'ailleurs au sujet de Maclélio: 'Suprêmes honneurs pouvant être faits à un négroillon de l'époque coloniale, Maclélio fut un soir présenté à l'administrateur blanc de Bondji qui commanda à l'instituteur de lui attribuer dès le lendemain une place sur le banc de l'école rurale' (p.119).

la part du personnage principal: tout ce qui lui arrive est finalement le fruit du hasard ou de la volonté d'Allah. Birahima, tout comme Macledio, ne décide rien de ce qui lui arrive. Ce voyage au cœur de l'enfer ne l'incitera pas à devenir meilleur, puisqu'il apprend comment tuer, voler, mentir et piller. Il n'apprendra pas non plus à devenir plus autonome car il a besoin d'être pris en charge et enrôlé comme enfant-soldat pour survivre, et les guerres tribales constituent son seul gagne-pain.

Cette perversion du modèle éducatif à travers le genre très usité du *Bildungsroman* n'est pas sans rappeler *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*. Koyaga entreprend un 'voyage initiatique' (p.171) dans les hautes sphères de la politique qui ne l'amènera pas à progresser moralement. Bien au contraire. Il ne sort pas grandi de cette aventure politique : au moment où il quitte ses pères, il sait comment rester au pouvoir en maniant le mensonge, l'hypocrisie, la violence, le culte de la personnalité. Ce voyage a contribué à le pervertir un peu plus, lui qui avait déjà fait ses preuves en fomentant un coup d'état pour se hisser au pouvoir. Kourouma joue avec la tradition du récit de voyage initiatique et la pervertit jusqu'au bout puisque Koyaga, tout comme Birahima, n'apprendra à devenir meilleur mais pire.

Bernard Mouralis écrit au sujet du voyage, dans son article sur 'Le même et l'autre':

Le recours au motif du voyage représente ainsi dans la littérature africaine un enjeu essentiel, dans la mesure où il s'agit, pour les écrivains, de substituer leur propre discours à celui que l'Europe a tenu ou continue de tenir sur l'Afrique. [...] A une vision qui tendait à présenter l'Afrique sous une forme globale et à partir d'un regard extérieur, les écrivains africains vont proposer une

vision diversifiée, fondée très souvent sur le point de vue d'un témoin particulier.⁸

A travers le regard conjoint du griot et de son apprenti-répondeur, Kourouma montre comment la colonisation a fait de l'Africain un homme incapable de penser, mais qui dans le même temps méritait d'être étudié par les ethnologues et les explorateurs comme cet 'animal' aux mœurs étranges et mystérieuses qu'il était. Et cette perception de l'Autre passe également par un jeu subtil avec le stéréotype.

Les stéréotypes d'une Afrique 'barbare' et 'sauvage'

Saïd écrit en introduction de *L'Orientalisme* :

Pour ce qui est de l'Orient, la standardisation et la formation de stéréotypes culturels ont renforcé l'emprise de la démonologie de 'l'Orient mystérieux' qui était, au dix-neuvième siècle, du domaine de l'université et de l'imagination.⁹

Nous pourrions appliquer la réflexion d'Edward Saïd au continent africain et nous demander quelle est la portée des stéréotypes dans la perception de l'Afrique actuelle ? Quelles sont les 'suppositions', les 'associations' et les 'fictions' qui 'semblent se presser dans l'espace non familier, qui est à l'extérieur du nôtre' ?¹⁰

⁸ Bernard Mouralis, 'Le même et l'autre: réflexions sur la représentation du voyage dans quelques œuvres africaines', in Jean Bessière et Jean-Marc Moura (eds), *Séminaire de littérature générale et comparée de l'Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle: Littératures postcoloniales et représentations de l'Ailleurs: Afrique, Caraïbes, Canada* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), pp.11-27 (p.25).

⁹ Saïd, *L'Orientalisme*, p.40.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.71.

1. *Un monde de sauvages : un concept hérité de la colonisation*

Mireille Rosello dit du stéréotype: 'A stereotype calls upon a knowledge of certain recognizable social structures and identities.'¹¹ Homi Bhabha ajoute que la force de persuasion du stéréotype est à rechercher dans son principe de répétition:

The stereotype [...] is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated [...] as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that need no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.¹²

La force du stéréotype réside donc dans sa capacité de répétition qui l'accrédite aux yeux du plus grand nombre comme un fait réel et avéré, alors qu'en réalité il ne se base sur aucune preuve tangible.

Kourouma joue avec ce principe même du stéréotype pour raconter comment les colonisateurs européens ont réussi 'une expérience originale de civilisation de Nègres' (p.11) jusqu'au moment où ils se heurtent à 'l'insolite', 'l'inattendu' dans *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* :

Ils se trouvent face aux hommes nus. Des hommes totalement nus. Sans organisation

¹¹ Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Culture*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), p.14.

¹² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.66.

sociale. Sans chef. [...] Des sauvages parmi les sauvages avec lesquels on ne trouve pas de langage de politesse ou violence pour communiquer. (p.11-12)

Le griot reprend dans une sorte de discours indirect libre le vocabulaire des colonisateurs: le pronom personnel (ils) se transforme au fil du récit pour devenir un pronom indéfini (on) qui efface le parti pris de l'énonciateur. Ce n'est plus le griot Bingo qui regarde, avec le recul de l'histoire, l'arrivée de l'homme blanc dans son pays mais le colonisateur qui porte un jugement de valeurs sur les Africains qu'il rencontre – ce sont 'des sauvages'. Le glissement du 'ils' au 'on' traduit ce plurilinguisme que M. Bakhtine évoque dans son livre *Esthétique et théorie du roman*:

Le langage ne conserve plus de formes et de mots neutres, 'n'appartenant à personne' : il est éparpillé, sous-tendu d'intentions, accentué de bout en bout. Pour la conscience qui vit en lui, le langage n'est pas un système abstrait de formes normatives, mais une opinion multilingue sur le monde. [...] Tous les mots, toutes les formes sont peuplées d'intentions. [...] Il ne s'agit pas d'un langage mais d'un dialogue de langages.¹³

Et ce 'dialogue de langages' de rendre compte de la mentalité des Occidentaux mieux que tout autre discours critique sur la colonisation: Bingo reproduit le mode de fonctionnement de l'homme blanc qui, face à l'altérité, utilise son propre système de valeurs pour juger d'un mode d'organisation qui lui est complètement étranger, voire même incompréhensible. Non

¹³ Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp.114-15.

seulement ces hommes sont nus (et la répétition d'accentuer l'étonnement) mais en plus ils n'ont aucune organisation sociale digne de ce nom. La description procède par une juxtaposition propice à montrer le raisonnement des Occidentaux sur la réalité qu'ils découvrent. La conclusion est sans appel: ces hommes sont nus, ils vivent dans l'anarchie, ce sont donc des primitifs, des 'sauvages' avec qui tout dialogue est impossible. Ce raisonnement entre parfaitement dans ce que Edward Saïd appelle 'la domestication de l'exotique'.¹⁴

Pour l'histoire naturelle, pour l'anthropologie, pour la généralisation culturelle, un type a un caractère particulier qui fournit une désignation à l'observateur [...]. Les caractères physiologiques et moraux sont distribués plus ou moins également: l'Américain est 'rouge, colérique, droit', l'Asiatique est 'jaune, mélancolique, rigide', l'Africain est 'noir, flegmatique, relâché' (in John G. Burke, *The Wilde Man's Pedigree*). Mais ces désignations prennent de la puissance lorsque, plus avant dans le dix-neuvième siècle, elles sont reliées au caractère comme dérivation, comme type génétique. Chez Vico et chez Rousseau, par exemple, la force de généralisation morale est rehaussée par la précision avec laquelle ils montrent que des figures spectaculaires, presque archétypes: l'homme primitif, les géants, les héros, sont la genèse de questions de morale courante, de philosophie et même de linguistique.¹⁵

L'Africain est nu, il ne connaît pas la civilisation. La nudité et l'absence d'organisation sociale entrent donc dans une sorte

¹⁴ Saïd, *L'Orientalisme*, p.77.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.142.

d'archétype moral qui vient caractériser son essence: la sauvagerie.

Le lecteur d'aujourd'hui peut ainsi se faire son opinion sur le comportement de l'Occidental vis-à-vis de l'homme noir. Entre 1894, date où commence le roman, et 1998, date de la parution du livre, les opinions ont évolué. La critique de la colonisation tient également dans ce rapport au temps, dans ce décalage d'un siècle: derrière les paroles du griot, Kourouma s'adresse à des lecteurs qui ont une perception toute différente de la colonisation et qui peuvent donc critiquer, avec le recul de l'histoire, un mode de pensées qui n'était basé sur aucune preuve tangible. Tiécoura vient illustrer parfaitement cette méthode de raisonnement fondée sur des propos dénués de tout fondement et pourtant bien ancrés dans la mentalité européenne de l'époque:

Assurément, les hommes nus qui sont les pères de tous les Nègres de l'univers et qui, comme tous les Nègres, sont façonnés de musique et de danse, avaient oublié, dans l'ivresse du jeu, qu'ils étaient en guerre. (p.17)

Tiécoura s'amuse avec les stéréotypes; il les répète pour mieux mettre en évidence la conception que les Européens avaient de l'homme primitif: un homme sans aucune logique d'organisation, incapable d'élaborer un état sur des bases constitutionnelles, un homme qui ne savait que danser et chanter. Un homme qui, pour les ethnologues, s'était arrêté avant l'évolution, dans le stade du pré-logique.¹⁶ À travers les aventures de Tchao, parti combattre, par hasard, avec les Français pendant la Grande Guerre, Kourouma dresse donc un portrait corrosif des colonisateurs européens venus

¹⁶ Il n'est qu'à reprendre les travaux de l'ethnologue Levy Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive* (Paris: PUF, 1922) qui, au siècle dernier, avait perçu que, sans écriture, il ne pouvait y avoir de pensée logique.

en Afrique pour civiliser des 'sauvages'. En mimant le discours des coloniaux et des ethnologues, le griot montre toute la perversité et le caractère absolu d'une 'parole européenne qui tend à se présenter en définitive comme le seul discours que l'on peut légitimement tenir sur l'Afrique'.¹⁷

2. Un monde barbare

Notre auteur joue également avec le mythe de l'Afrique barbare et violente qui est le fait des 'nègres noirs africains indigènes' qui mènent une 'guerre tribale', dans *Allah n'est pas obligé*.¹⁸

Quand on dit qu'il y a guerre tribale dans un pays, ça signifie que des bandits de grand chemin se sont partagés le pays [...]; ils se sont partagés tout et tout le monde les laisse faire. (p.53)

La guerre tribale semble être le sésame qui permet de comprendre la violence dans cette région du globe. Pourtant cette guerre apparaît comme un acte arbitraire, injustifié et illogique. Elle permet une explication qui reste à la surface des choses. Birahima conclut souvent ses commentaires par cette expression qui exprime, à elle seule, la fatalité et la simplification à l'œuvre dans son esprit: 'c'est la guerre tribale qui veut ça'.

Quand un Krahn ou un Guéré arrivait à Zorzor, on le torturait avant de le tuer parce que c'est la

¹⁷ Mouralis, p.12.

¹⁸ Cette expression apparaît à de nombreuses reprises dans la bouche de Birahima (in Kourouma. *Allah n'est pas obligé*, p.140); ou sous diverses variantes: 'nègre noir africain indigène' (p.9); des 'nègres indigènes africains' (p.44); 'des noirs nègres indigènes' (pp.172, 183); 'noirs indigènes sauvages' (p.230); 'africain, noir, nègre, sauvage' (p. 233).

loi des guerres tribales qui veut ça. Dans les guerres tribales, on ne veut pas les hommes d'une autre tribu différente de notre tribu. (p.76)

Nous les avons pris tout de suite en chasse. Parce que c'est la guerre tribale qui veut ça. (p.97)

Birahima propose une image de l'Afrique qui correspond, une fois de plus, à cette vision faite de conflits ethniques que stigmatisait Jean-Loup Amselle:

Some ethnologists in the early 1980s were exasperated by the journalistic failing, then and now, of recounting an event in Africa in terms of 'tribal conflict' or 'ethnic struggle'. If in journalistic fiction, the Arab world is the realm of fundamentalism and that of India the world of caste, then Africa is par excellence the chosen land of ethnic antagonisms. Think for example of the media treatment and the political utilization of conflicts in Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa.¹⁹

Les classifications entre Africains nègres sauvages que Birahima établit sont d'une simplification qui frise la parodie, surtout lorsqu'il évoque le conflit en Sierra Leone:

Les créoles étaient des nègres noirs riches et intelligents supérieurs aux noirs nègres indigènes et sauvages. [...]

¹⁹ Jean-Loup Amselle, 'Anthropology and historicity' in V.Y. Mudimbe et B. Jewsiewicki (eds.), *History and Theory* 32.4 (1993), 12-31 (17).

Avec l'indépendance, le 27 avril 1961, les noirs nègres indigènes sauvages eurent le droit de vote. Et depuis, dans la Sierra Leone, il n'y a que des coups d'état, assassinats, pendaisons, exécutions et toute sorte de désordres, le bordel au carré. (p.172)

Le cynisme est à son paroxysme et cette vision des faits dévoile en filigrane les dangers d'une perception ethnologique qui perçoit l'Autre comme forcément inférieur parce que 'sauvage':

L'assignation de telle ou telle culture est donc le résultat d'un regard extérieur objectivant. Celui-ci produit à son tour toute la gamme des Autres que l'Histoire a pu retenir: le sauvage, le barbare, le païen, le gentil, l'infidèle, le nègre, etc.²⁰

Une fois encore, Birahima divise l'Autre en des catégories immuables, quasi essentielles, héritées de l'imaginaire colonial qui font de l'Africain le 'noir, nègre, sauvage' et barbare.²¹ Il reprend, en les caricaturant à son maximum, quelques stéréotypes qu'il évoquait dans son roman précédent, *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*.

Kourouma se moque de l'ascendant que les Occidentaux, porteurs de la civilisation, ont obligatoirement sur les Africains perçus souvent 'des tirailleurs indigènes hilares et grands enfants'.²² Ce cliché n'est pas sans rappeler l'image du 'bon nègre banania' qui a fortement collé à la peau des Africains et qui se

²⁰ Jean-Loup Amselle, *Logiques métisses: Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (Paris: Bibliothèque scientifique Payot, 1990), p.51.

²¹ Cf. *Allah n'est pas obligé*, p. 233.

²² Cf. *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*, p. 125.

superposait à la perception d'une Afrique barbare et sauvage – devenue un 'exotisme' rassurant – déployée dans nombre de récits coloniaux. Edward Saïd ajoutait dans *Reflections on Exile*, à propos de ces clichés sur l'Afrique barbare et violente qu'ils sont un résidu de la perception occidentale:

as long as Africa is viewed positively as a region that has benefited from the civilizing modernization provided by historical colonialism then it can be tolerated; but if it is viewed by Africans as still suffering under the legacy of empire then it must be cut down to size, shown as essentially inferior, as having regressed since the white man left.²³

Cette violence serait l'essence même de l'Africain qui n'a pas su tirer profit des bienfaits de la colonisation, après les indépendances. Une fois encore l'éternel débat sauvage/civilisé fait son entrée sur le devant de la scène. L'Occident parti, l'Afrique n'a pu que régresser dans cette barbarie 'rassurante' en refusant le bonheur que pouvait lui procurer la civilisation. Les problématiques se sont déplacées: la violence et le chaos ne sont plus le fait de la colonisation; mais de l'Africain lui-même à partir du moment où il s'est révolté contre les règles édictées par la colonisation.

Kourouma, sous forme de parodie ou de démonstration, dénonce ici le travail pervers et manipulateur de l'ethnologie qui installe certains Africains dans une catégorie autre – le barbare ou le sauvage – fondée sur une logique de différenciation simplificatrice, raciste et dangereuse qui aboutit, dans le pire des cas, au génocide:

²³ Saïd, *Reflections on Exile*, pp. 304-05.

L'ethnologie a parfaitement accompli sa mission civilisatrice dans la mesure où les objets de l'étude sont devenus eux-mêmes les émetteurs d'énoncés ethnologiques (feed-back). Dès lors qu'on a affaire à une sorte d'auto-ethnologie, il n'y a plus de distinction à établir entre le modèle local et le modèle de l'ethnologue, puisque les acteurs sociaux se définissent dans les termes de celui-ci.²⁴

Les catégories énoncées par l'ethnologue semblent avoir été parfaitement intégrées par ceux-là même qui en étaient les objets d'étude. L'exemple le plus flagrant est certainement celui de Maclélio qui regarde ses compatriotes avec le regard condescendant de l'Occidental : il a complètement intégré les schèmes coloniaux, lui qui 'vilipendai[t] les traîtres, les suppôts de l'impérialisme' (p.157). Les romans de Kourouma ne sont pas à même d'empêcher les ravages de cette 'auto-ethnologie' fortement incrustée dans les mentalités des Africains eux-mêmes. Pourtant, cela n'empêche pas l'auteur de continuer à les dénoncer.

En se plaçant du point de vue de l'Autre – qu'il soit Africain, sauvage ou violent, telle est souvent la perception stéréotypée de l'Occident –, Ahmadou Kourouma entre en résistance pour dénoncer l'intériorisation des schèmes coloniaux. Il détruit de l'intérieur cette image falsifiée de l'Africain et la logique raciale qui en découle.

²⁴ Amselle, *Logiques métisses*, p.31.

Résistance et acculturation: vers une autonomie discursive

Kourouma se réapproprie un espace longtemps spolié par la colonisation et les valeurs occidentales en usant d'une écriture à la confluence de plusieurs stratégies discursives.

1. 'Tricher la langue'

Roland Barthes écrivait dans sa *Leçon* inaugurale au Collège de France:

Mais à nous [...], il ne reste si je puis dire qu'à tricher avec la langue, qu'à tricher la langue. Cette tricherie salubre, cette esquive, ce leurre magnifique, qui permet d'entendre la langue hors-pouvoir, dans la splendeur d'une révolution permanente du langage, je l'appelle pour ma part, littérature.²⁵

Barthes affirme justement que la langue est un instrument de pouvoir qui instaure de fait un rapport de force au sein même de son énonciation. Rapport de force ambivalent puisque se conjugue en elle la duplicité de celui qui la dit, à la fois 'maître' et 'esclave' de son propre discours pour reprendre les terminologies de Barthes. Kourouma ne dit pas autre chose dans *Allah n'est pas obligé*: en prenant pour personnage principal un enfant-soldat qui reproduit à l'envie les discours stéréotypés qu'il entend, l'auteur fustige une certaine perception de la langue qui propage sa vision des choses sans avoir besoin d'être étayée par des preuves. Birahima est à la fois maître de son discours et esclave des rumeurs qu'il propage car il ne se pose même pas la question de savoir d'où elles viennent. C'est là toute la force du stéréotype qui,

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Leçon*, (Paris: Seuil, 1978), pp.16-17.

comme le faisait déjà remarquer Bhabha, tire son pouvoir de sa capacité de répétition. Comment dès lors opposer un contre-pouvoir qui pourrait aller au-delà de la simple dénonciation?

Kourouma choisit de saper le pouvoir référentiel de la langue française en la déstructurant de l'intérieur: le français est truffé d'expressions argotiques comme 'bouffer', 'peinards', 'con' (p.73):

Moi alors j'ai commencé à ne rien comprendre à ce foutu univers. A ne rien piger à ce bordel de monde. Rien saisir de cette saloperie de société humaine. Tête brûlée avec les fétiches venait de conquérir Niangbo! C'est vrai ou ce n'est pas vrai cette saloperie de grigri? Qui peut me répondre? Où aller chercher la réponse? Nulle part. Donc c'est peut-être vrai le grigri... ou c'est peut-être faux, du bidon, une tricherie tout le long et large de l'Afrique. A fofaro (cul de mon père)! (p.129)

L'auteur utilise aussi des insultes en malinké – les expressions 'Gnamokodé' (bâtardise), 'Fofaro' (sexe de mon père) viennent conclure chacune de ses interventions –, certaines constructions de phrases s'inspirent d'un français africain,²⁶ quelques expressions grammaticales sont incorrectes en français de France,²⁷ sans parler des mots africains qui viennent directement terminer une phrase en français: 'La vieille [...] a fait makou, bouche bée' (p.68).

²⁶ Cf. *Allah n'est pas obligé*: 'marcher bon pied la route' (p.47), 'coupé court élémentaire deux' (p.9), 'ouya-ouya': vagabond (p.84) d'après *L'Inventaire des particularités lexicales du français d'Afrique*.

²⁷ Cf. *Allah n'est pas obligé*: 'à cause que' (p.32), 'devenir un grand quelqu'un' (p.34), 'Dans mon intérieur': 'en français correct, on ne dit pas dans mon intérieur mais dans la tête' (p.13)

Ce changement d'une langue à l'autre pourrait illustrer ce que disait Chantal Zabus, à propos des mécanismes de pouvoir qui se jouent au sein même de la langue française:

In a non African setting, code-switching from the European to the African language may be resorted to resist acculturation and emphasize one's difference from the dominant language group. [...] On the strategic level, relexification seeks to subvert the linguistically codified, to decolonize the language of early, colonial literature and to affirm a revised, non-atavistic orality via the imposed medium.²⁸

Kourouma écrit dans un français difficilement reconnaissable, qui met à mal les codes établis par les instances de légitimation de la langue française (comme l'Académie française). Il impose sa propre vision de la langue française par cette stratégie qui consiste à imprimer dans la langue française le parler populaire d'Afrique. Nous pourrions percevoir cette tactique comme une manière originale de 'tricher la langue' en questionnant le pouvoir référentiel de la langue. Nous ne sommes pas loin du parti pris d'un Ken Saro Wiwa qui avec *Sozaboy* a décidé de déstructurer complètement la langue anglaise pour en faire une sorte de pidgin qui épouse l'anglais tel qu'on le parle au Nigeria ou dans les autres pays anglophones.²⁹ Il est vrai que ce 'rotten English' est difficilement accessible à des Européens. Kourouma reprend le concept de Ken Saro Wiwa sans pour autant aller aussi loin dans la déstructuration de la langue car il s'adresse également à un lectorat européen. Birahima s'aide donc de quatre dictionnaires pour

²⁸ Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp.86 ; 107.

²⁹ Ken Saro Wiwa, *Sozaboy* (London: Longman, 1985)

expliciter son 'blablabla' au lecteur, c'est du moins ce qu'il avance:

Il faut expliquer parce que mon blablabla est à lire par toute sorte de gens: des toubabs (toubab signifie blanc) colons, des noirs indigènes sauvages d'Afrique et des francophones de tout gabarit (gabarit signifie genre). Le Larousse et le Petit Robert me permettent de chercher, de vérifier et d'expliquer les gros mots du français de France aux noirs nègres indigènes d'Afrique. L'inventaire des particularités lexicales du français d'Afrique explique les gros mots africains aux toubabs Français de France. Le dictionnaire Harrap's explique les gros mots pidgin à tout francophone qui ne comprend rien de rien au pidgin. (p.11)

Or le recours systématique aux parenthèses pour traduire un mot étranger, la définition presque rituelle des expressions 'X signifie Y d'après tel dictionnaire', la simplification volontairement abusive des 'types' de lecteurs – le toubab est forcément colon, le Noir indigène – sous-tendent une certaine ironie de la part de l'auteur. En effet, Kourouma ne fait pas autre chose que de se moquer de cette visée très pédagogique (et même très scolaire) qui cherche à tout expliquer, à partir de l'usage très rationnel du dictionnaire. Chaque expression, chaque mot, chaque réalité culturelle est passé au crible de la traduction. Les connotations sont évacuées au profit d'une lisibilité et d'une clarté absolue. Pourtant, les traductions entravent la fluidité de la lecture, elles obstruent le flot général des paroles: la critique implicite de l'auteur provient de ce que le plaisir du texte est réduit à une lecture plutôt binaire – qui se voudrait purement informative –, lecture qui n'est pas sans devenir agaçante à force d'être

entrecoupée d'explications théoriques censées la rendre plus lisible. Kourouma pousse ici à son maximum les limites du langage en allant à l'encontre de toutes les conventions de lecture: non seulement, il interroge le lecteur sur les motivations profondes qui l'anime à la lecture d'une œuvre, mais en plus, il met à mal le pouvoir dominant de la langue française en instaurant de nouvelles références qui ne sont plus seulement françaises mais anglaises ou africaines (notamment dans les définitions qu'il donne de mots malinke ou des expressions tirées du français d'Afrique). Tous les dictionnaires sont placés à égalité dans cette orgie de définitions et le français d'Afrique vient trouver une sorte de légitimation dans ce nouveau panthéon des langues.

Les proverbes qui font éclater la poésie du français d'Afrique viennent également ponctuer les affirmations de Birahima comme s'ils lui permettaient de légitimer sa langue par le recours à la tradition. Le griot Bingo a recours à ce même procédé dans *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*. Les veillées se terminaient par un proverbe qui venaient commenter les propos évoqués car comme le faisait remarquer le griot:

Le proverbe est le cheval de la parole; quand la parole se perd, c'est grâce au proverbe qu'on la retrouve. (p.41)

Cette inscription du proverbe dans le tissu narratif nous connecte directement avec la parole traditionnelle et le français d'Afrique. Elle ouvre un nouvel espace de discussion avec le lecteur européen qui n'a pas forcément tous les codes pour décrypter le message mais qui peut s'efforcer d'établir des comparaisons avec sa propre langue.

2. *Emergence d'un 'tiers espace': le dialogue avec le lecteur*

Kourouma nous montre également, à travers le personnage de Tchao, ancien héros de la Guerre 1914-18, que l'assimilation n'est pas sans poser des problèmes identitaires.

C'est quand, totalement rétabli, l'ancien combattant voulut sortir qu'il se rendit compte du dilemme qu'il lui fallait nécessairement trancher. Il pouvait bien se débarrasser des habits, retourner à la nudité originelle, mais dans ce cas, il serait contraint de sortir sans les médailles. Les médailles ne tenaient pas dans les cheveux, ne se pendaient pas au cou, ne s'attachaient pas à l'étui pénien : on ne pouvait pas exhiber les médailles sans nécessairement porter la vareuse que l'armée française lui avait laissée. Tchao hésita. Un matin, il se rebiffa, osa sortir de son fortin serré dans sa vareuse chamarrée de médailles au vu et su de tout le village de Tchaotchi. (p.14)

La colonisation des mentalités a dès lors commencé, et symbole suprême de l'assimilation, Tchao sait manger à la cuiller et fumer la Gauloise, lui qui ne savait que danser et chanter, quand les Européens sont arrivés.³⁰

Nous devons à Homi Bhabha d'avoir parlé du concept d'imitation, cet art de mimer le colonisateur : le colonisé veut être semblable au dominant, tout en conservant bien sûr son identité.³¹

³⁰ Cf. *Allah n'est pas obligé*, p. 15-16

³¹ Homi Bhabha parle de '*colonial mimicry*', à savoir cette stratégie employée par le colonisé pour imiter, mimer le colonisateur, in Bhabha, *The Location of culture*, pp. 85-92. Ces textes s'inspirent de ses lectures de Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* et *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

The discourse of mimicry is constructed around the ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference [...]: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power.³²

De cette double vision impartie au colonisé naît un espace hybride, un 'tiers espace' où s'organisent des formes de résistance. Le vêtement que Tchao se décide à porter fièrement pour exhiber ses médailles peut faire sourire le lecteur: l'Africain arbore la vareuse et la chéchia comme un signe d'autorité, au milieu de ces congénères entièrement nus. Kourouma opère une sorte de distanciation par ce regard décentré et moqueur qui fait fie de l'ordre colonial : le vêtement de Tchao bien loin d'instaurer le respect le ridiculise. Nous pourrions voir dans ce tableau une de ces formes de résistance dont parle Homi Bhabha:

This area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary doubles [...], so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.³³

Le vêtement symbolise bien cet entre-deux où la civilisation est à la fois révérée par Tchao mais aussi critiquée et tournée en dérision par l'auteur – et le lecteur: il symbolise une menace pour l'identité de l'Africain car il représente l'ordre colonial (et tout le

³² Bhabha, p.86.

³³ Ibid., p.86.

processus d'imitation qui va avec) même si, dans le même temps, il lui permet d'acquérir un statut privilégié au sein de ces contemporains. Il est cet espace de l'ambivalence où se noue un dialogue avec le lecteur, seul capable d'évaluer la portée critique des paroles de l'auteur.

La portée critique de l'œuvre de Kourouma se situe dans ce dialogue que l'auteur instaure avec son lecteur. Dialogue qui passe souvent par l'humour et la dérision, comme nous l'avons vu dans la parodie que Kourouma faisait des récits de voyage en ridiculisant les explorateurs.

Conclusion

Le récit de voyage est mis au service d'une certaine conception de l'écriture: la langue de Kourouma emprunte à des genres littéraires (le récit ethnologique, le *Bildungsroman*...) qui ont marqué l'histoire de l'Afrique à différentes périodes. Mais Kourouma, à la différence de ses personnages qui veulent répéter, comme de bons élèves, les choses qu'ils ont apprises, ne fait en aucun cas du mimétisme: il joue avec les règles du genre, il les intègre à l'univers traditionnel du conte africain et établit ses propres règles d'écriture. Son écriture, en mettant à mort une vision stéréotypée de l'Afrique, des Africains et de leur histoire, génère un autre monde plein d'espérance et de nouveauté où la parole a les pleins pouvoirs. Kourouma emprunte à diverses influences littéraires et s'en inspire pour mieux les dépasser en les fondant dans l'espace salvateur de la parole. Il dénonce les méfaits de l'acculturation et prône une écriture de la résistance qui s'enracine dans l'histoire et la tradition africaine.

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Consuming Alterity: Writing Vietnam in French

Introduction

In his book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Graham Huggan locates the dilemma central to the postcolonial field as the 'postcolonial exotic'.¹ He suggests that the postcolonial exotic is the intersection 'between contending regimes of value: one regime, postcolonialism, that posits itself as anti-colonial [...] and another, postcoloniality, that is more closely tied to the global market and that capitalises both on the widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness and the world wide trafficking of culturally "othered" artifacts and goods'.² In his introduction he attests that postcolonial cultural production is profoundly affected by commodification, is subject to fetishisation of cultural difference, is institutionalised in Western commercial and educational systems and is shaped by its contact with the global market. Quoting Appiah he affirms that postcolonial writers and thinkers are 'culture brokers' mediating the global trade in 'culturally othered' goods. The book reviews the contributions of the Booker Prize, works of writers like Naipaul, Rushdie and Arundhati Roy and the contribution of postcolonial studies as an academic field to what he calls the 'alterity industry'. But in his attempt to delineate the inherent ambivalence in the valorised discourses of cultural difference today, he seems to imply that all of these writers recognise their 'complicity with exoticist aesthetics and that most postcolonial writers are aware of their interpellation as marginal spokespersons, institutionalised cultural commentators and iconic figures. But, in reality, do all postcolonial writers and thinkers also known as cosmopolitan, Third World or multicultural intellectuals manipulate the conventions of the exotic to their own

¹ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).

² Ibid., p. 28.

political ends? Do they as a rule practice what Huggan terms 'strategic exoticism'? Can all postcolonial work be collapsed into the 'logic of the market'? Or is institutionalising marginality a way of reviving the mainstream?

My study seeks to respond to these questions raised by Huggan's view of the 'postcolonial exotic' by looking at contemporary literatures in French produced by writers of Vietnamese origin. The last ten years has seen not only a considerable increase in the number of such works but also a significant rise in the number of contemporary works in Vietnamese translated into French by French publishers. Even if the complete body of Francophone African works is definitely more substantial than Vietnamese literatures in French, the recent and growing interest in the Asian angle to Francophone literatures throws new light on Asian diasporic subjectivities and autobiographical voices from France. When one refers to Francophone literatures, one thinks of the celebrated North African, Sub-Saharan, Caribbean and Canadian French writers ranging from the likes of Senghor, Césaire, Henri Lopes to more recent celebrities like Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, and Aminata Sow Fall who continue to enrich Francophone cultures and literatures with their writing. Until very recently, 'Francophonie asiatique' was restricted to a few Vietnamese writers like Phan Vam Ky and Phan Duy Kiem, who wrote in the 1940s and 1950s, and Ly Thu Ho, who continued the tradition until the late 1960s. Since the 1990s, Vietnamese writers Linda Lê and Kim Lefevre have provided an Asian perspective on contemporary Francophone literatures.

Post 1987 Vietnamese Francophone literatures

The complex nature of Vietnam's history and politics after the departure of the French has had a significant impact on the production of Vietnamese Francophone literatures. This literary tradition differs considerably from that of the ex-French colonies

in Africa and the islands in the Caribbean where literary production in the coloniser's language has continued even after decolonisation. Linguistic policies and political systems in post-1954 Vietnam did not favour the development of Francophone writing. Intellectuals and students who left the country and settled in France as part of the post-1954 and post-1975 migratory waves to France pursued the tradition of writing in French. However, they did not burst forth on the Francophone literary scene immediately; it was only in 1989 with the publication of Lefevre's *Métisse Blanche* that the Asian branch of Francophone literature and cultures came into prominence again. Jack Yeager's *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism*, a well-documented survey of Vietnamese literature in French up to the 1960s, is an important contribution to the critical studies of Vietnamese literatures in French.³ This book traces the growth of Vietnamese Francophone literature from the late nineteenth century to the post-1954 period following the partition of Vietnam. Yeager observes that while earlier works centred on local Vietnamese traditions, the depiction of political strife, changes in Vietnamese society and the narration of the clash with the West constitute the pivotal themes in later works. Yeager also claimed in this monograph published in 1987 that the future of French in Vietnam was difficult to ascertain and observed that the peak of Vietnamese literature in French appeared to have passed.

³ See Jack Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French* (Hanover, London: University of New Hampshire Press 1987). The first creative works in French, poems by Nguyen Van Xiem and a collection of tales by Le Van Phat appeared in 1913. Among the more celebrated writers that Yeager writes about in *The Vietnamese Novel in French* are Nguyen Van Xiem, Nguyen Tien Lang, Cung Giu Ngyuen Nguyen Phan Long, Pham Duy Khiem and Ly Thu Ho. Phan Duy Khiem earned the 'Prix d'Indochine' for *Légendes des terres sereines* in 1942 and Pham Van Ky published his first novel *Frères de Sang* in 1947 and went on to dominate the Francophone literary scene even after partition of Vietnam in 1954.

Interestingly, however, this comment is not specific to the Vietnamese context: the decline in Francophone literary productions in the 1970s was also noticed in other regional contexts like Haïti, Africa and the French Caribbean.⁴

While on the one hand there has been a renewal in the Vietnamese Francophone tradition over the last ten to fifteen years, with several publishing houses like Éditions de l'Aube, Éditions de la Différence, La Table Ronde and Christian Bourgois Editeur popularising Vietnamese writers writing in French, there has also been a parallel increase in the number of French translations of contemporary literary works in Vietnamese in recent years. Trin Van Thaodivides Vietnamese Francophone literatures into the following categories: French writings by Vietnamese writers produced in the years immediately following decolonisation; translations into French of poems and prose written during this period; translation of the works of the novels of the post-1975 'génération montante'; and 'Eurasian' literature featuring Kim Lefevre and Linda Lê.⁵ It is interesting to note that in this publication on exilic writings in Vietnamese literature, contemporary Francophone literature of Vietnamese diasporic origin seems to have been given a rather limited place in comparison to translations into French of contemporary novels in Vietnamese. The bibliography contains Kim Lefevre's and Phan Huy Duong's translations into French of post-1987 works in Vietnamese. Kim Lefevre and Phan Huy Duong, both known for their writings in French,⁶ have played important roles in the 1990s

⁴ See Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: PUF, 1999), p. 140.

⁵ Le Huu Khoa, ed., *La Part d'Exil* (Aix en Provence: Université de Provence, 1995), p. 108.

⁶ Kim Lefevre, *Métisse blanche* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Barrault, 1989; Paris: J'ai lu, 1990). *Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 1995); Phan Huy Duong, *Un amour métèque* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), *Penser librement* (Paris: Éditions Chronique Sociale, 2000).

as translators to popularise contemporary Vietnamese literature produced in Vietnam⁷. In this connection, it would be important to establish the position of writers such as Kim Lefevre, who, as well known translators of Vietnamese works, also represent another creative context in Vietnamese diasporic cultures. Translations of resistant writers like Bao Ninh and Duong Thu Huong interest the Vietnamese diaspora for they also create a point of contact between Vietnam and France and contribute to diasporic self-construction as much as Vietnamese literatures in French. It would appear that apart from stimulating home production in Vietnam, the post-Doi Moi years have also had an impact on the sensitivities of a well-integrated diasporic Vietnamese community in France, resulting in the startling growth in the number of novels written in French since the 1990s.

Minority literatures and cultural politics of difference

This new dimension to the cultural politics of difference in the Franco-Vietnamese context merits closer examination. Anthologies and mainstream journals and critical reviews would still perceive writers like Kim Lefevre and Linda Lê as 'marginal' and in the French context they would come under the category 'Francophone' writers. As Françoise Lionnet points out, 'for many people today the referent for the word Francophone often lies outside of France, paradoxically evoking differences of race and

⁷ Translated works include Nguyen Huy Thiep's *Un Général à la retraite* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 1990), and *Le coeur du tigre* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 1993), Bao Ninh's *Le chagrin de la guerre* (Paris: Philippe Picquier, 1994) and Duong Thu Huong's *Histoire d'un amour raconté avant l'aube* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 1991). *Terre des Éphémères* (Paris: Picquier 1997) is a collection of works written by resistant authors and translated by Phan Huy Duong. Other collections include *En traversant le fleuve* (Paris: Éditions Philippe Picquier, 1996); *Le Héros qui pissait dans son froc - Vu Bao et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Éditions de l'aube, 1996).

ethnicity as well as language and culture.⁸ Critics maintaining the difference between French and Francophone literatures inadvertently subscribe to continuing hegemonic relationships in literary production where Francophone refers to literature from the margins. Some critics prefer the term 'world literatures' or 'literatures of migrant writers'. Many of these writers, today, see themselves as cosmopolitan intellectuals for whom the choice of language is not political but functional, while others still see themselves as diasporics with nationalist attachments. Academics like Françoise Lionnet, Christiane Makward and others call for the pluralisation of the term in order to resist the homogenisation of Francophone authors and their cultural specificities. While it is true that issues related to the problematics of language choice are central to Francophone literatures, one cannot help observing that increasingly even these authors challenge the academic differences between French and Francophone writings. This study argues that their location largely depends on how they are viewed by the mainstream reading public and promoting media.

Writings of individuals of Vietnamese origin in the French language form part of a larger body of exilic writing by intellectuals who are now in America, Australia and France and who write in English, French and Vietnamese. These works in French are also an important part of an increasing body of work called Francophone literatures, the French language equivalent of postcolonial literatures. These works under consideration, therefore, constitute a specific kind of writing at two different levels: one with respect to Vietnamese diasporic literatures, and another with respect to Francophone literatures that include African, Canadian and Caribbean literatures in French. More importantly they form a body of 'marginal' works when compared

⁸See 'Introduction' in Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould et al (eds), *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp.ix-xxii (p.x).

to mainstream metropolitan writing in French. According to Deleuze and Guattari, minority literature does not come from a minor language; it is that which a minority constructs within a major language. They add that the 'three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation'.⁹ The definition of Deleuze and Guattari underlines the counter-hegemonic function of minor literature, assumes that it attacks the hegemonic definition of identity and proclaims that it automatically opposes canonical literature. Arguably, 'understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people', as bell hooks claims.¹⁰ While bell hooks also perceives the margins as a strategic location of resistance, Trinh T. Minh Ha adds that marginality is not unrelated to the politics of definition: 'Marginality: who names? Whose fringes?' and she defines its locations as 'an elsewhere that does not merely lie outside the center but radically striates it'.¹¹ These definitions define marginality in terms of resistance politics even if they locate it differently with respect to the centre. However, by limiting the definition of marginal literature to its counter-hegemonic function Deleuze and Guattari, like bell hooks and Trinh T. Minh Ha, fail to see its contribution to mainstream literatures. This study argues that the margin is also a dynamic site of adaptation, appropriation and negotiation.

'Are so-called marginal writers self-designated combatants [...] or are they called upon to revitalise a listless mainstream culture? Is marginal writing adversarial or paradoxically subversive? Does

⁹Deleuze and Guattari, 'What is Minor literature?' in Ferguson, Gever et al (eds), *Out there: Marginalisation and Contemporary Literatures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 59-70.

¹⁰bell hooks, 'Cotton and Iron' in Ferguson, Gever et al pp. 327-336.

¹¹Trinh T. Minh Ha, 'Marginality as site of resistance,' in Ferguson, Gever et al, pp. 341-344.

it work towards social change, or does it tacitly preserve *the status quo* while claiming to celebrate cultural difference?'¹² These are some of the issues that the politics of difference raises, states Huggan, in his essay on Rushdie and Naipaul in *The Postcolonial Exotic*. In order to answer some of these questions in the context of my study it would be interesting to observe how the members of this 'minority' group position themselves and how they are perceived as individuals and as authors of a collective cultural production of Vietnamese literature in French. What complicates the issue in this context is the way in which a number of publishing houses, bookstores and libraries include in the same corpus diasporic creations in French by the Vietnamese minority in France as well as translated works of contemporary literatures in Vietnamese.

Exilic writing and 'border zone' productions

A very brief incursion into the perception of overseas literature in Vietnamese may be of use to the discussion at this point. Intellectuals of the diaspora writing in Vietnamese consider that writing in exile takes the form of a combat for liberty and democracy. Vietnamese academic Nguyen Hue Chi,¹³ recognised for the first time the parallel existence of a diasporic literature and a national one and seeks a convergence between literatures of Vietnam and overseas. He sees in the immense popularity overseas of Nguyen Huy Thiep a sure sign of the universalisation of Vietnamese literatures. The writer Dang Tien, in response to Nguyen Hue Chi,¹⁴ delineates three generations of writers of exilic literature in Vietnamese: those belonging to a first generation that quit Saigon in 1975 and who wrote to preserve their Vietnamese

heritage; a second generation, part of the boat people in the post-1980 period, nationalist-humanist writers with a focus on writing as form, an emerging third generation since 1987 who are less beleaguered by their past and are more concerned by their new diasporic identities.

A mon avis dans le climat de réconciliation et de rencontre actuel, l'essentiel pour les Vietnamiens du dedans et du dehors réside dans la recherche d'un principe de consensus commun sur la base du retour à la source.¹⁵

While the more conservative Nguyen Hue Chi still believes that national reconciliation can be achieved through such a convergence, Trinh Van Thao like Dang Tien calls attention to the more diverse trajectories of the post-1987 generation of writers overseas, who are less encumbered by the political and literary history of their country and wish to seek new roads and new readers. They read the works of writers in Vietnam from different angles, seeking, perhaps, a consensus with respect to the art form rather than a convergence of nationalist ideals.¹⁶

Trinh Van Thao's words also reflect the works of the Vietnamese writers in France and the consciousness of the diasporic Vietnamese in France today: 'être vietnamien d'ailleurs, d'outre-mer'. On the cover of his second book, Nguyen Hu Khoa writes: 'j'ai voulu placer ce roman sous le double signe de l'attachement et du détachement, de la tendresse et de l'ironie[...] Mon ambition, somme toute modeste, est d'extraire ce qui dans la sensibilité asiatique me semble essentiel pour l'intégrer dans l'universel.'¹⁷ The writers of the new generation of Francophone

¹² Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, p.85.

¹³ Le Huu Khoa (ed.), *La Part d'Exil* (Aix en Provence: Univ. de Provence, 1995), p. 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁷ The first book in Nguyen Hu Khoa's trilogy is *Le Temple de la Félicité Éternelle* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence 1985). This was followed by *La*

Vietnamese literatures like Linda Lê, Nguyen Huu Khoa, Kim Lefevre, Bach Mai and Phan Huy Duong tackle problems of a universal nature and challenge earlier narratives that were tied too closely to colonialism and to the wars of independence and the socio-political conflicts in Vietnam. The inevitability of the cultural clash in a dichotomised colonial environment with its resultant ambiguities has given way to a new form of writing that wishes to challenge existing categories of race and gender. These contemporary works have taken up new themes with fresh approaches. Nguyen Huu Khoa's trilogy juggles with space and time to render his creation 'un projet en écriture'. Their writings challenge traditional notions founded on centre-periphery binaries and lay claim to linguistic citizenship within French space. These Vietnamese writers writing in French from France appropriate the language of the *colon* without locating their identities in the bordered linguistic space that this choice indicates. Their writings challenge the boundaries between French and Francophone writing, notions that reinforce the centre-margin binaries. Kim Lefevre's remark, 'ma France, c'est la langue française',¹⁸ illustrates this characteristic trait of contemporary Francophone literatures. Linda Lê's comments in an interview for *Lire* define the author's choice of language of expression in a manner that defies the conventional relationship between the coloniser and colonised: 'Je me sens comme une métèque écrivant en français. Je dis métèque avec beaucoup d'orgueil. Je suis une étrangère au monde, au réel, à la vie, au pays dans lequel je vis, à mon propre pays'.¹⁹ *Métèque* is a pejorative word for a foreigner, one who is looked upon

Montagne Endormie (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1987) and *La Métamorphose de la Tortue* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1995).

¹⁸ Trans My Hong and Emmanuel Deslouis, 'Entretien avec Kim Lefevre' in *Eurasie*, http://www.eurasie.net/articles/entretiens/kim_lefevre.html, 5 January 2001.

¹⁹ Catherine Argand, 'Interview with Linda Lê', *Lire*, April 1999, <http://www.lire.fr/entretien.asp?idC=35595idTC=4&idR=201&idG>.

unfavourably in his host country. Proud of belonging to the border zones, these writers declare themselves marginal not only to the centre but to the margins as well.

Kim Lefevre asserts that 'la fondation de la personnalité est vietnamienne, mais l'outil d'expression c'est le français'.²⁰ These writers are also conscious of their duality and play it to their creative and artistic advantage. Françoise Lionnet states that 'all our academic pre-conceptions about cultural, linguistic or stylistic norms are constantly being put to test by creative practices that make visible and set off the processes of adaptation, appropriation and contestation that govern construction of identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts'.²¹ She feels more comfortable using the term transculturation when talking of border zone productions because 'its specifically spatial connotations demarcate a pattern of movement, across cultural arenas and physical topographies that corresponds to the action of appropriation, a concept more promising than acculturation or assimilation and one that implies active intervention rather than passive victimisation'.²² Writing in French for these writers is not a passive usage of a colonial heritage but 'to write in French is thus also to transform French into a language that becomes the writer's own: French is appropriated, made into a vehicle for expressing a hybrid, heteroglot universe'.²³ Lionnet sees this creative act of 'taking possession' as a form of linguistic métissage. As Lefevre has pointed out:

²⁰ Nathalie Nguyen, 'Entretien avec Kim Lefevre', *Intersections*, http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue5/nguyen_interview.html, January 2001.

²¹ Françoise Lionnet, 'Logiques Métisses' in Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould et al (eds), *Postcolonial Subjects-Francophone Women Writers*, pp.321-43 (p. 322).

²² Ibid., p. 322.

²³ Idem.

Je ne reviendrai pas au pays. Je l'ai réalisé très tardivement après la publication de *Métisse blanche*. Je me suis guérie du Vietnam. Si j'en parle avec autant de certitude, c'est que j'ai pris du recul. Ecrire m'a conforté dans ma prise de conscience: j'étais française. J'ai appris beaucoup de cette culture. Ma France, c'est la langue française. Je suis Française par la langue.²⁴

Interestingly, both Lefevre and Lê negotiate their marginalities differently. While Lê manipulates her marginality in mainstream linguistic space from outside ('je suis une étrangère au monde', 'une métèque écrivant en français'), Lefevre who has displaced herself from the margins ('je me suis guérie du Vietnam') seems to manipulate her duality from within mainstream linguistic space ('Ma France, c'est la langue française').

Metropolitanised margins-renewing mainstream

On both sides of the binary system, difference can become the reason for exoticising or othering. These writers underline the dialectical tension that exists between local variations and a worldwide system of interdependent cultures, between diversity and resemblance, between relativism and universalism. These writers belie Deleuze and Guattari's definition of marginality as mere contestation, but consider it as a lived site of adaptation, appropriation and contestation. But Lionnet's analysis notwithstanding, public positioning is an important aspect of this self-definition and it is here that one remarks considerable differences between critical studies, media leanings and individual standpoints.

²⁴ 'Entretien avec Kim Lefevre' in *Eurasie*: http://www.eurasie.net/articles/entretiens/kim_lefevre.html, [5 January 2001].

Kim Lefevre is aware of her privileged situation as migrant. She wrote her first book almost thirty years after arriving in a country where she found her racial métissage more acceptable. In fact the book entitled *Métisse blanche* is about her rejection by the Vietnamese and the sequel is a confirmation of the resolution of her own identity:

Donc si vous voulez, l'expérience de l'immigration, c'est assez aisé parce que je n'ai pas fait partie d'un mouvement d'immigration historique, comme par exemple les gens qui sont venus en 75 jusqu'aux années 80. C'était dans les années soixante, donc c'était individuel, c'était assez facile [...] Pour la première fois maintenant, je trouve que les deux parties de moi-même sont réconciliées, c'est-à-dire aujourd'hui, je suis les deux, les deux de façon importante, et je le sais moi, et je n'ai pas besoin que quelqu'un me l'attribue. Je n'ai pas besoin que la société vietnamienne me reconnaisse ni que la société française me reconnaisse. Ecrire en français, c'est être français.²⁵

In *Métisse blanche*, Lefevre narrates the first twenty years of her life in Vietnam and her threefold displacement in Vietnamese society, as a girl, 'métisse' and illegitimate offspring. She relates how she was shunted between places and families all over Vietnam. Placed for a while in an orphanage, ignored by her stepfather, rejected by her legitimate siblings, her nationalist uncle and her more sophisticated cousins, the narrator survives, proves her self-worth by succeeding at school and eventually leaves for France in 1960 to pursue further studies. In her second book

²⁵ Nathalie Nguyen, 'Entretien avec Kim Lefèvre': http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue5/nguyen_interview.html, [5 January 2001].

Retour à la Saison des pluies the narrator takes up the story of her life thirty years after her departure from Vietnam. The title of the two sections of Kim Lefevre's travel narrative is very revealing of the migrant's predicament and inscribes the concept of home into a space-time framework. In the first section entitled 'Le Passé Resurgi', the physical shunting narrated in *Métisse Blanche* is transposed to a kind of psychological/emotional shunting as Kim reconstructs the present of her past through encounters with old Vietnamese acquaintances, people she had scrupulously avoided in order to forget her past before the publication of *Métisse Blanche*. The second section 'Le Retour' narrates the deferred return. The actual physical return to geographical and historically present Vietnam is completely overshadowed by the perpetual return that the various narrative voices construct. The narrative that positions a return (to her past) in another return (to her mother's past) in yet another return (her fantasised physical journey to Vietnam) and finally in the actual arrival (her physical return to Vietnam) reflects the perpetual discontinuous state of being that the migrant embodies. As such, *Le Retour* does not attempt to recapture an imagined wholeness in physical space and historical time but traverses a variety of physical and cultural bodies.

Lefevre's interview by Bernard Pivot on the famous TV show 'Apostrophes' contributed enormously to her status as the exoticised marginal. It is precisely the locating of her 'métissage' in white space that won her accolades from the French press while the same literary strategy was interpreted by critics like Yeager as an attempt to 'gender' colonial history. Her migrant identity still contains that element of cultural difference for it to be seen as Huggan's 'postcolonial exotic' by media and mainstream critics even if Lefevre herself denies any kind of identification with either culture.

Kim Lefevre and Phan Duy Houg are as conscious of writing a certain 'Vietnameseness' as they are of their functional choice of language of expression. In their multiple capacities as writers and

translators, they could be faulted for the practice of what Huggan terms 'strategic exoticism'. But Linda Lê very consciously chooses to sever all connections with an essentialist, nationalist image of Vietnam. In an interview with the magazine *Lire* she says that Vietnam is like a dead child that she is carrying. Ironically however, even if she models herself on Conrad and sees herself as 'truncated' ('tout a été tranché') from Vietnam, the media still perceives her as fierce and exotic, 'une étrangère irréductible'.²⁶ Despite her personal comments, the media still sees her work primarily as a remembrance of the father she abandoned in Vietnam. Emotionally cut off from her past and her country of origin, Lê's idea of exile is that of the modernist vision of estrangement. Some critics distinguish between the modernist mystique of exile and the postmodern migrant who symbolises mobility and habitation simultaneously. If the diasporic migrant were seen as one who favours transnational subjectivities,²⁷ Lefevre would be a prime example. Lê, on the other hand, would probably qualify as a cosmopolitan subject for whom migrancy 'calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation'.²⁸ As she herself declares:

Ecrire, c'est s'exiler. En écrivant, vous n'avez plus de toit, juste le ciel comme abri et c'est cette nudité devant les choses que vous aimez. Un écrivain ne peut écrire qu'en se sentant un enfant trouvé, un bâtard. Etre le fils de personne, d'aucune patrie, c'est pour moi la seule attitude possible. Je crois que l'on ne reste en vie que si l'on manifeste un désir de résistance à tout très

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Caren Kaplan, 'Travelling Tourists', in *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp.101-42 (p. 141).

²⁸ Iain Chambers quoted in Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p.139.

ancré en soi. Une résistance à tout ce qui ne vous paraît pas relever de la beauté, de la vérité. Je refuse de faire cause commune.²⁹

Lê's texts revel in their hybridity and signify a movement away from constrictive spaces. Her *Calomnies* (1993) relates the tale of the 'unnatural love' of a brother for his sister. This 'slander' becomes a secondary issue in a text that questions racial, ethnic and national identities. The text is 'slandorous' because it challenges genre boundaries and disconcerts its readers with its blurred social, historical and geographical boundaries. Lê questions frontiers in geographical space; borders of lucidity and insanity and the limits of *francité*.³⁰ Locating one's site of expression is a crucial aspect of postcolonial writings. Francophone literatures by and large are centred on the binary coloniser/colonised, centre/periphery. This dichotomy is subverted in Lê's work because instead of insisting on the differences, she conceives space as a network of social relations. In *Calomnies* Vietnam is never named. (It is referred to as *le pays*, as in her earlier novel, *Les Evangiles du crime*.) The female narrator's race and national origins are hinted at but never mentioned. The niece is 'un écrivain originaire d'anciennes colonies' and we know that 'les hommes en noir' took over her country. Corrèze, the site where madness and reason coexist, is the only place that has been given a specific name. The specificity of *le pays* is not confined narrowly to its own history (naming it would have provided it with a fixed socio-political baggage). France and *Le Pays* are spaces situated in a fluctuating context of social inter-relations that

²⁹ Argand, 'Interview with Linda Lê'.

³⁰ See Ravi, 'Towards a progressive sense of space: Linda Lê's *Calomnies*' in *Frontières*, 10 (Paris: PUPS, 2003), pp. 55-68, for a detailed analysis of this novel.

permits the narrator to construct a space in the margins where she can assume her hybridity.

The female narrator's name (her space of expression) with its 'nom et prénom accolés' (given to her by her two fathers) reflects the fluid nature of her identity. Her own apartment is hardly described and she is almost always *in the process* of mapping her own space as she goes on her promenades in the city with Ricin. She is both subject and object of her own narrative. With Ricin she creates her own space while, as object of the cobbler's obsessive pursuit, she finds herself restricted in her movements. The physical navigation between spaces literalises the interconnectedness of the different zones designated by the narrative. The sea-town D, for all the apparent liberty that it is supposed to represent, remains quite confining to the narrator, who associates this space with her French partners Bellemont and Weidman with whom she is unable to arrive at any meaningful relationship. The relationship between the narrator and her French lovers symbolises her attempt to negotiate with her adopted space (France). The mad uncle who is called upon to provide alternative boundaries of his niece's existence eventually denies his origins as well as hers: 'Nous sommes de Nulle Part.'³¹ By committing suicide he chooses not to create his own space whereas the niece chooses her 'espace d'énonciation' as the space in between fathers, in between confining fatherlands, thus challenging the frontiers between French and Francophone, between immigrant and national literature, between ethnic groups.

Linda Lê problematises Huggan's thesis that marginal spokespersons manipulate the conventions of the exotic to their own political ends. Lê's preoccupation is individualistic; her Vietnam is not a 'cause commune' but her personal link. As stated in an interview quoted earlier, she is 'étrangère au monde, au réel,

³¹ Linda Lê, *Calomnies* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Editeur, 1993) p. 83.

à la vie...'³² She does not choose the autobiographical style consciously as does Kim Lefevre. Ironically however, in her desire not to belong, the self-exiled, fiercely individualistic writer who refuses to take up a collective cause makes herself even more exotic to the French media who see in her the perfect 'mystérieuse'. 'Exilée farouche, étrangère irréductible, elle marche au bord de l'abîme. La folie la hante.'³³

In a review article of *Evangelies du Crime*, author and characters are conflated to reinforce the image of the violence that a gentle face conceals:

Perverse Lolitas... Humbert Humbert virtuels, méfiez-vous de Linda Lê. Car, tandis qu'en prédateurs avertis vous évaluez hâtivement la douceur de ses attraits, cette jeune femme complotte contre vos dernières désillusions. Les apparences sont trompeuses, vous le saviez pourtant. Aviez-vous oublié qu'un visage de nymphe cache toujours une meurtrière? Voici plusieurs livres déjà que Linda Lê affûte, aiguise, affine sa plume: *Un si tendre vampire*, *Fuir*, *Solo*, des œuvres à la noirceur prometteuse, qui laissaient présager la patience de leur auteur.³⁴

Another reviewer stereotypes her silence and enhances the sense of mystery that emanates from her while acknowledging her skills as an experimental and innovative contemporary writer compared with and evaluated against her metropolitan contemporaries:

³² Argand, 'Interview with Linda Lê'.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sarrola Florence, 'Les délits de Linda Lê', *Le Monde*, 20 March 1992.

Deux livres pour mieux apprécier le talent de cet écrivain: un roman de deuil et de rupture et des essais de lectrice passionnée. La très silencieuse Linda Lê continue, toujours sans bruit, son chemin d'écrivain. Elle travaille sa phrase, dans la simplicité, en veillant à ne pas faire de fausses notes. Comme elle ne reçoit guère les journalistes, comme sa lucidité lui interdit de se comparer à Joyce, comme son sens du goût la dispense de poser en chemise de nuit dans les magazines, elle demeure inconnue du grand public.³⁵

Francophone writings are, for the most part, acclaimed critically for their realist, forceful and effective portrayal of the 'postcolonial' condition. But Lê's writings have been compared to other European writers and recognised for their literary merit and creative ingenuity as contributions to French metropolitan literature.³⁶ Notwithstanding critical acclaim that thus reinforces mainstream criteria for recognition, Lê is still perceived first as a Francophone writer as is attested by her presence in the Jury awarding the Prix des Cinq Continents made up primarily of 'Francophone writers.' This is a clear case of how marginality, perceived as purely counter-hegemonic by Deleuze and Guattari, is manipulated by mainstream cultures to fetishise differences and to invent the postcolonial exotic.

³⁵ Josyane Savigneau, 'Linda Lê, au nom du père,' *Le Monde*, 7 May 1999.

³⁶ Some of Lê's other works are *Marina Tsvetaïeva* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 2002); *Autres jeux avec le feu* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2002); *Les aubes* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2000); *Lettre morte* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1999); *Voix* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1998); *Les trois Parques* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1997); *Les dits d'un idiot* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1995); *Calomnies* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1993); *Les Evangelies du crime* (Paris: Julliard, 1992); *Solo* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1990); *Fuir* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1990); *Un si tendre vampire* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1990).

Translated margins, refreshing the exotic

As mentioned above, publishing houses tend to lump together works by writers writing in French with those whose works have been translated into French. It cannot be denied that a translated work is not a mechanical copy but a recreated piece. The translators themselves (Kim Lefevre and Phan Duy Huong) have discussed the challenges and difficulties they face and do not deny their role as mediators between cultures. Successful cosmopolitans like Rushdie and Naipaul have proven that the margins have arrived in the metropole. With the success of Linda Lê as a rising star in French literary circles, erased cultural differences may have to be revived in order to refresh the Francophone exotic. Today, thanks to an avalanche of translated works, Nguyen Huy Thiep is seen as a model writer both in Vietnam and in the diaspora. Jean-Luc Douin writes in *Le Monde*:

Aujourd'hui, si Thiệp est devenu un modèle, tant chez lui que dans la diaspora vietnamienne aux Etats-Unis, en France, en Europe de l'Est, c'est à cause de ce qu'il évoque dans ses nouvelles, petites histoires limpides à la cruauté feutrée, mais aussi grâce à un style subtil, ciselé, difficile à percevoir dans ses traductions, qui se réfère à une vieille culture orale, aux racines d'une société matriarcale. Les Vietnamiens disent y retrouver, musicalement condensée, une âme nationale. Ils les connaissent par cœur. Elles sont régulièrement rééditées. Peu soucieuses d'exprimer la politique officielle, elles privilégient l'individu, ses joies, ses peines, ses conditions de vie.³⁷

³⁷ Jean-Luc Douin, 'Nguyễn Thiệp en solitaire', *Le Monde*, 14 July 2000.

The write-up is stereotypical. The reference is to a valorised 'other' as well as to a universalised notion of humanity. The 'national spirit' is referred to as an abstract notion glorified by the Vietnamese. Nguyen Huy Thiep stands for a certain idea of 'Vietnameseness' that the French would like to preserve – an idea that totally ignores the French colonial connection with Vietnam.

While Nguyen Huy Thiep is lauded for his literary skills and narrative expertise in 'writing Vietnam', it is hardly a wonder that the darling of the French media is Duong Thu Huong, although not perhaps for the same reasons. Detained in Vietnam, she is the only Vietnamese writer whose entire work has been translated into French. She personifies a form of romantic resistance, a marginal from the margins, a 'postcolonial exotic' who does not trample on French colonialism. But unlike Huggan's 'marginals in the centre' who use exoticism strategically, Duong Thu Huong is 'strategically exoticised':

Le chemin que j'ai choisi aujourd'hui est de lutter pour une société démocratique. Je n'ai pas la qualité d'un leader politique. Je ne peux pas former un parti ou me battre dans une arène politique car je ne sais pas comment le faire. Mais je me battrai par ma plume pour convaincre les autres que l'homme a besoin de la démocratie et de la conscience de ses droits. C'est comme cela que la vie mérite d'être vécue.³⁸

³⁸ Interview with writer Duong Thu Huong, Radio Free Asia, 4 July 2000. 'Le Vietnam a jugé humiliante une remise de décoration à une romancière dissidente par le ministre français de la culture. Les relations de Hanoï avec Paris se sont rafraîchies ces dernières semaines. Les Vietnamiens ont notamment mis certains freins aux relations culturelles bilatérales, en annulant ou en reportant des voyages d'officiels vietnamiens en France ainsi que de Français au Vietnam.'

The dissident writer is indeed quite a celebrity in France since she was decorated by the French government and has seen her entire work translated into French. She is acclaimed as the greatest Vietnamese writer partly because she is seen as the one who disturbs the Hanoi regime: a clear case of categorising the exotic without raising any controversies concerning France's own historical realities. France champions Duong Thuy Thuong's campaign for democracy and human rights. Her personal history and skirmishes with the Vietnamese government have made her a *cause célèbre* and her translations have thrown a new light on Vietnamese literatures and given a new angle to diasporic politics of difference. In his interview Phan Huy Duong, responsible for the 'collection Vietnam' at the Picquier publishing house, sums up the reasons for Duong Huy Thuong's extraordinary success: her status as dissident writer in Vietnam, the 'metropolitanising' of her marginality and her narrative skills.³⁹

Jean-Claude Pomonti, 'Les relations entre Hanoi et Paris se refroidissent', *Le Monde*, 1 February 1995.

³⁹ Elle est très connue au Vietnam: le tirage de ses oeuvres va de quarante mille jusqu'à cent mille exemplaires. Depuis son arrestation en 1991, aucun de ses écrits nouveaux n'a été publié au Vietnam. Ainsi *Roman sans titre* et *Myosotis*, édités en France, ne sont jamais sortis au Vietnam. Cette personnalité est connue sur le plan international pour sa lutte en faveur de la démocratie et des libertés. Son succès vient aussi de son extraordinaire talent de conteuse. En quelques pages, elle réussit à captiver le lecteur. On la respecte car elle dit tout haut ce que beaucoup pensent tout bas au Vietnam. Avant Duong Thu Huong, aucun auteur vietnamien n'osait envoyer ses manuscrits à l'étranger. Maintenant la majorité des écrivains suit son exemple ! Elle a fait s'écrouler de nombreux tabous. Dans son roman *Les paradis aveugles*, elle fut la première écrivain à avoir le courage de traiter des thèmes de la réforme agraire et du processus de dégradation du statut d'intellectuel sous la contrainte du pouvoir communiste', Emmanuel Deslouis, 'Entretien avec Phan Huy Duong', <http://www.eurasie.net/index.html>, 14 septembre 1998.

Duong Thu Huong does not evoke the same reaction from her other 'othered' counterparts like Nguyen Huy Thiep. The latter perceives his competitor as a writer whose literary ambitions are limited and who is more involved in an open combat against the political system.⁴⁰ Even if the translator Phan Duy Huong does not believe that diasporic Vietnamese pose a threat to the government in Vietnam, he suggests that resistant writers have a great impact on a Francophone reading public. As a writer of Vietnamese origin in the French language, Phan Huy Duong negotiates with the centre to secure his identity. However, as a translator *from* the metropole and mouthpiece for the 'Other', this 'metropolitanised marginal' contributes to the rejuvenation of the exotic. His edited collection *Terre des éphémères* brings together the writers of the 1987 post Doi-moi generation.⁴¹

Nguyen Huy Thiep's mastery over the short story genre is best revealed in 'Cun', the first short story in the collection. Brief, violent, incisive, the ironic account of an imagined biography of a University lecturer K's father subverts discretely but surely the conventional concepts of academic authority, fictional realism and social façade. In the imagined tale, it is Cun the severely handicapped beggar who fathers the intellectual K. Infatuated by the inaccessible and beautiful Dziu he agrees to give her his life's savings in return for spending one night with her when he finds out that she had been cheated by her husband. Cun dies eventually of cold and misery after watching Dziu give birth to his son from outside her window. Duong Thu Huong's 'Une voile dans le crépuscule' is a poignant tale of a clash of values between generations and brings to light in a more open and blunt manner the corrupt functioning of the government, the decline in family values and the cruel functionalism of today's youth in Vietnam.

⁴⁰ Jean Luc Douin, 'Nguyễn Huy Thiệp en solitaire', *Le Monde*, 14 July 2000.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Deslouis, 'Entretien avec Phan Huy Duong'

The old wounded general who wishes to write his memoirs in order to immortalise the events of the war is humiliated by his no-good son who not only openly ridicules his father's request but expects his father to use his old military connections to get him out of prison. Phan Duy Huong's 'Un squelette d'un milliard de dollars' is the tale of the political might of the American dollar in post 1987 Vietnam. Tinged with dark humour at the outset and ending on a sardonic note of reference to the success of a globalist culture, this is the tale of an American millionaire who exploits Third world poverty to locate the remains of his only son who died in the Vietnam War. Using the usual techniques of neo-colonial powers – heavy investments, technological expertise, artificial intelligence, laboratory facilities, tele-communications, consensus of local government, exploitation of local poverty, rigorous advertising and aggressive campaigning – he launches a mega-hunt for his son's skeleton, even offering a token reward to those who come up with just any skeleton in the hope that his son's would be found at all costs. The skeleton is eventually found to have been buried by an old man who had protected the millionaire's son from the wrath of the fighting Vietnamese soldiers. Having discovered that the old man's daughter had had a child by his son, he leaves his son's skeleton behind, takes the ashes of an unknown soldier and holds a grand burial in the States. He eventually marries his Vietnamese 'femme de service' and fathers several children, with one of his descendants becoming the first woman President of the US.

While both Vietnamese writers Duong Thu Huong and Nguyen Huy Thiep are concerned with the moral ills and material woes that plague contemporary Vietnamese society, Phan Huy Duong, as a diasporic and cosmopolitan, takes the question further beyond local issues and national frontiers. In 'Vacances', a short story in

his collection *Un amour mèteque*,⁴² Phan Huy Duong narrates the predicament of a returning migrant who can come to terms neither with the transformed reality of his native land nor with the illusionary reality of his present in France.

Why does Phan Huy Duong include his French piece in a collection of Vietnamese short stories translated into French? Is it merely a practice of strategic exoticism, an attempt to be a part of the renewed 'Indochic'? Can it not be seen as an effort to redefine the 'marginal' in an era of diasporic and migrant cultures that continually disturb French-francophone, centre-margin binaries, in an era where the self is located neither in the centre nor in the margins, but in writing, since 'a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'.⁴³

Conclusion

Lefevre, Linda Lê, Phan Huy Duong, Nguyen Huy Thiep, Duong Thu Huong are each different in their own way and have been dealt with differently by media and critics alike. While Lê and Lefevre negotiate their marginalities from the metropole, Duong Huy Thuong and Nguyen Huy Thiep have been 'cosmopolitanised' by the metropole. Phan Huy Duong has consciously chosen to move between margin and metropole without settling into a static border zone: mediator, writer, translator, he epitomises the ambiguity of the 'global soul'⁴⁴ whose identity can never be fixed. Neither happy globalism nor the unproblematic assumption of transnational identities can solve the dilemma of the postcolonial exotic. More importantly, the

⁴² Phan Huy Duong, 'Vacances', *Un amour mèteque* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994).

⁴³ Adorno quoted in Kaplan, *Questions of travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p.119.

⁴⁴ See Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul-Jet lags, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

postcolonial exotic does not pose itself as a dilemma in the same way in all linguistic contexts. It is not the writer who decides on methods of strategic location or exoticism but the media and academic discourse that propose definitions that vary across time and space. Very clearly in the case of postcolonial writings in French, French and Anglo-American academic circles do not have the same agenda, just as the French and the Vietnamese media do not share the same opinions of the literary importance of some of these authors. By positing postcolonialism and postcoloniality as oppositional practices, Huggan fails to take into consideration the various geographical and historical complexities that contribute to the definitions of these terms. As a result his initial objective to locate the ambivalence contained in the postcolonial field becomes transformed into one that dismisses it as being controlled mainly by market forces commodifying cultural differences.

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The Impact of Roots and History on Francophone African Women's Novels: Any Margin for Postcolonial Studies?

How does the artist work and function
within a plurally fragmented world?
(Edward Braithwaite)

Introduction

The polemical stance of Ngugi wa Thiongo on the fallacy of Europhone African literature is well known. So also is the position of Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize laureate, on the need for Africa to adopt Kiswahili as the official continental language. Equally widely known is the Africanisation of European languages by such high-profile novelists as Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembène and Ahmadou Kourouma. These writers, all male and all educated during the colonial era, belong to the first generation of post-independence African novelists.

For various reasons – cultural, infrastructural and historical – the blossoming of Francophone African feminist fiction was only made possible by the relative post-independence democratisation of formal education which itself coincided with the almost worldwide explosion of feminist movements. The question then arises: how does Francophone African women's fiction react to the issues of language and cultural hegemony? Put another way, how do African women writers transcribe indigenous art forms and languages into their works written in French?

1. Mother Tongue Politics, Colonial Heritage and Women's Lot

What has now come to be known as the language question has not only been the subject of much debate in African intellectual circles but has also been passionately discussed by civil society and by

policymakers. Government officials often cite the multiplicity of indigenous languages, the absence of common orthography/linguistic standard/wide vocabulary for the various mother tongues and the need to position Africa in relation to the challenges of globalisation and the 'information age' as reasons for a cautious approach to the language issue. Further, given the volatile nature of 'ethnic politics', citizens' emotional attachment to their local tongues and the sheer vulnerability of the postcolonial state since independence, political leaders are reluctant to show open bias for any particular indigenous language, or still less to raise it to the status of an official language at the expense of rival linguistic and cultural endogenous groups. The result is that it is the exogenous colonial language that paradoxically gives legitimacy to the state and binds the nation loosely together.

Obligated, however, by local pressure groups and well-intentioned international bodies to recognise the critical role of the mother tongue in education and in the construction of identities, various African countries have formalised, some very reluctantly, the use of the mother tongue in their educational systems while at the same time maintaining inherited colonial languages as official languages. The ambivalent official attitude towards the imperial language may suggest that even as they cling to the metropolitan linguistic legacy, postcolonial African states are consciously, unwittingly or unwillingly preparing the ground for a more sustained assault on hegemonic languages by the future products of current pro-mother tongue curricula.

Greater exposure to formal education coupled with increased urbanisation will, while consolidating Africa's links to the global market economy, indeed bring colonial languages into greater conflict with indigenous ones. In a similar vein, bequeathed colonial languages will come under greater pressure from cross-border/obtrusive African languages like Kiswahili, Lingala, Hausa,

Yoruba, Jula, Wolof and Akan, especially as Africa moves towards greater regional integration.¹

Whether this postcolonial linguistic spiral will eventuate, in Africa, in greater pidginisation, creolisation, linguistic Europeanisation, the formation of tentacular African lingua francas or the use of only hegemonic European languages or dominant African languages remains for the time being an open question. What is certain is that the tension between indigenous languages and adopted European languages on the one hand, and small indigenous languages and dominant African ones on the other, will inspire much vibrant discourse on the postcolonial condition — the coexistence of languages, dislocation, glottophagia, emergent cultures and counter-discourse — for, as Bill Ashcroft rightly observes, each process of cultural domination generates its own forms of resistance.² Educationists, linguists and officials will have interminable discussions on the benign, baneful and complex effects of linguistic coexistence on learners' academic performance in both colonial and local languages. All of which goes to underline the importance that postcolonial studies will assume in the years to come in issues related to the periphery, not least African feminist discourse.

The importance of language in the consolidation of colonial conquest has never been lost on the empire and its modern avatars. As Tzvetan Todorov rightly observes: 'language has always been the companion of empire'.³ It comes, therefore, as no surprise when Georges Hardy, the first inspector of French West African

¹ For a study of the linguistic situation as it pertains in Senegal, see Fallou Ngom's 'Les Variables linguistiques dans le journal satirique sénégalais *Le Cafard Libéré*', *The French Review*, 75.5 (2002), 914-24 (914).

² Bill Ashcroft, 'Postcoloniality and the Future of English', in Dele Layiwola, *Understanding Postcolonial Identities: Ireland, Africa and The Pacific* (Ibadan: Sefer, 2001), pp.1-22 (p.5).

³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p.123.

schools, claims that the French language possesses universally acknowledged virtues which predispose it to the clear expression of noble ideas for both coloniser and colonised, and make it the very language of civilisation.⁴ As E. Amouzou and M.P. Nadjir have pointed out, such a position leads to a systematic peripherisation of indigenous languages.⁵

Hardy also envisioned using educated African women for the cause of cultural imperialism: 'Quand nous amenons un garçon à l'école française, c'est une unité que nous gagnons; quand nous y amenons une fille, c'est une unité multipliée par le nombre d'enfants qu'elle aura'.⁶ Even more direct is the following assertion:

Pour assurer la cohésion de notre empire, pour faciliter les relations et rapprocher de nous les indigènes, nous voulons répandre l'usage de la langue française. Quand les mères parleront le français, les enfants l'apprendront sans effort et nous arriveront déjà dégrossis; le français deviendra pour eux, au sens exact du mot, une langue maternelle.⁷

However, lack of total support from other servants of the empire, coupled with African resistance to the policy, ensured that too few African women were educated for this imperial dream to be

⁴ Georges Hardy, *Une conquête morale: l'Enseignement en Afrique occidentale française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1917), p.186.

⁵ E. Amouzou, 'Etude des obstacles au développement socio-culturel de l'Afrique noire: le cas de l'adoption de la langue française', and M. P. Nadjir, 'Langues nationales: outils d'intégration sociale et facteurs de développement culturel endogène en Afrique noire', D.D. Kuupole, *An Insight into Teaching and Learning of Languages in Contact in West Africa* (Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 2003), pp.1-14 (p.6) and pp.33-44 (p.35).

⁶ Hardy, p.75.

⁷ Idem.

actualised. Flawed as Hardy's position was, because premised from the start on the false assumption that educated female subjects would always use French to talk to their children without any resistance or contact from the colonised community, he nonetheless brings to the fore the pivotal role of women in cultural transmission and cultural amnesia.

Reflecting on the crucial role of African women in acculturation several decades later, Rachel Efoua-Zengue observes: 'In Cameroon, as in Africa, women stand at the heart of culture. They are culture's nerve-centre.' Her reasons are simple:

On account of her primordial role as mother, begetter and educator of men, a role entrusted her by nature and acknowledged by all men, woman, by this token, is first of all an essential agent in the life process and therefore in the cultural process. This handing down of cultural values operates through social and linguistic factors which the mother alone imparts to her newborn child.⁸

For all this promising rhetoric, however, there is no denying the gap between women's valorised role as primary educators and their socio-political exclusion in post/(neo)-colonial Africa. African women writers such as Mariama Bâ (Senegal), Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria), Rebecca Njau (Kenya), Marie-Gisèle Aka (Ivory Coast), Justine Mintsa (Gabon), Calixthe Beyala

⁸ Rachel Effoua-Zengue, 'Cultural Identity and the Cameroonian Woman', *Colloquium: The Cultural Identity of Cameroon* (Yaoundé: Ministry of Information and Culture, Department of Cultural Affairs, 1985), pp.515-19 (p.515). For a similar view on the value of women in postcolonial Kenya, see Ciarunji Chesaina, 'Women's Voices and Gender Pedagogy in Postcolonial Kenya', Dele Layiwola (ed.), *Understanding Postcolonial Identities: Ireland, Africa and the Pacific* (Ibadan: Sefer, 2001), pp.196-212.

(Cameroon), Amma Darko (Ghana) and Goretti Kyomuhendo (Uganda) have not been spared this peripherisation. Mostly educated during the post-independence era, they produce discourse from a variety of colonised sites on account of their gender, subjection to cultural imperialism and unfair international trade, late entry into written literature, victimisation by traditional African patriarchy and general vulnerability in times of conflicts, disasters and pandemics like AIDS. Indeed, the African woman's burden is worsened by a certain insidious globalisation captured thus by Francesca Canadé Sautman: '[The] elements [of globalisation] are paralleled by world-wide tensions around uniformization of cultural products and social custom, and linguistic dominance'.⁹

Inevitably, delicate issues of survival, family and intimate life, vulnerability, silence breaking, consciousness raising and education as well as the politicisation of the private feature more prominently in African women's fiction than in African men's writing, which is often driven by the privatisation of public office, that is corruption and derailed independence.¹⁰ There are also palpable differences between English-speaking women writers and their French-speaking counterparts in much the same way as there are margins within margins. As imperial languages, both English and French in the African postcolony are associated with political power, scholarship, modernity, business, prestige and the centre while the various vernaculars, in spite of their wider usage, are

⁹ Francesca Canadé Sautman, 'The Race for Globalization: Modernity, Resistance, and the Unspeakable in Three African Francophone Texts', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 106-22 (110).

¹⁰ There are of course several exceptions to the rule; inevitable margins within margins and possibilities for growth. For example, pro-feminist male writers such as Sembène Ousmane and Chenjerai Hove have offered the public perceptive insights into women's life and gender partnership while the radical feminist Beyala has, over the years, distanced herself from initial binary oppositions and combative positions.

linked with poverty, tradition, rural life and the periphery. It should be stressed that the colonial legacy of assimilation, direct rule and centralisation has, however, had a deleterious effect on the development of local languages in the former French colonies. On the other hand, in British-administered Africa, a more proactive linguistic policy and a more favourable educational programme ensured the relative nurturing of traditional culture and endogenous languages compared to what obtained in the French territories. For Francophone women writers from Africa like Bâ, Beyala and Mintsa, then, the inscription of the mother tongue and orality constitutes a greater imperative, a greater valorisation of roots and a more daunting challenge than for their Anglophone counterparts such as Emecheta and Njau.

The Francophone women writers whose novels will be discussed in this work are from Senegal (Aminata Sow-Fall, Mariama Bâ, Nafissatou Niang Diallo, Ken Bugul and Mariama Barry), the Ivory Coast (Tanella Boni, Régina Yaou, Fatou Bolli and Marie-Gisèle Aka), Cameroon (Werewere Liking and Calixthe Beyala) and Gabon (Ntygwetondo Rawiri and Justine Mintsa). The justification for the choice is borne out of the fact that most Francophone African writers come from Gabon, the Ivory Coast and particularly Cameroon and Senegal. Further, each of these four countries has a peculiar linguistic and historical legacy. Before independence, Senegal was the most assimilated of the French colonies in Africa with its four special communes — Dakar, Saint-Louis, Rufisque and Gorée — conferring automatic French citizenship on Senegalese people. Senegal is besides a highly Islamised country. In the course of its history, Cameroon has been colonised by three imperial powers: Germany, Britain and France. By reason of their relative economic prosperity after independence, the Ivory Coast and Gabon became the most gallicised countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Given this complex historical heritage, an assessment of the sensitivity of women

writers from these countries to local languages would be worthwhile.

2. Postcoloniality: Theory of Resistance and Resistance to Theory

Credited with the writing of one of the first books ever published in France on postcolonial theory, Jean-Marc Moura nevertheless rejects the monoglossic, diglossic and polyglossic taxonomies established by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, stressing that a literary text is rarely uniform from a linguistic point of view since it incorporates various registers into its main idiom.¹¹

Indeed, in spite of the myriad of charges levelled against the concept, the theory has been able to provide much sharper insight into emergent written literatures and their relations with colonial languages. This awareness informs the stance of Dele Layiwola: 'The whole field of postcolonial studies, at its most profound, does not dwell on peoples and individuals but on the cultural relations and relativities that define our lives in the language of exchange'.¹² In apparent response to the oft-repeated accusation of hegemonism, Ashcroft holds: 'postcolonialism brings to cultural studies its own well established concepts of diversity, particularity and local difference'.¹³

As an extension of their belief in the politics of cultural difference, postcolonial critics like Ashcroft, Homi Bhabha, Chantal Zabus, Abdul JanMohammed, Caren Kaplan and Edouard Glissant have coined, borrowed, recreated and relativised terms such as double vision, third code, interlanguage, interculturality, palimpsest, relexification, reterritorialisation, deterritorialisation, hybridity, rhizome, abrogation, appropriation and minority

¹¹ Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: PUF, 1999), p.73.

¹² Dele Layiwola, *Understanding Postcolonial Identities: Ireland, Africa and The Pacific* (Ibadan: Sefer, 2001), p.viii.

¹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.15.

literature, in order to explore the captivating discursive space between dominant languages and colonised subjects. For Bhabha, 'what is theoretically innovative and politically crucial is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences'.¹⁴

2. From the Margins towards the Centre

2.1. Postcoloniality and Francophone African Women's Fiction

By stating as Bill Ashcroft claims, that postcolonial studies will cover 'the full range of responses to colonialism, from absolute complicity to violent rebellion and all variations in between', postcolonial theory opens its flanks to attacks of over-ambition and homogenisation.¹⁵ However, the theory by this very definition makes provision for a wide and fascinating scope of variations. It is within this space, this margin, these variations between extremes – absolute complicity and violent rebellion – that this paper will attempt to situate postcolonial novels in French composed by African women such as Bâ, Beyala, Mintsa and Aka. Ashcroft's concept of the poetics and politics of transmission will be used to appreciate these works. For Ashcroft, '[a] poetics of transformation recognizes the myth of parent and child, trunk and branch, stream and tributary by which the postcolonial is marginalized and replaces it with a perception of the rhizomic nature of discursive power and resistance'.¹⁶

Ashcroft sets the agenda for the politics of transformation in these words: 'the politics of transformation works constantly within existing discursive and institutional formations to change them, rather than simply to attempt to end them'.¹⁷ The conscious utilisation of French by colonised subjects of Africa such as Sow-

¹⁴ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁵ Ashcroft, p.19.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Idem.

Fall, Liking, Boni and Rawiri means a deliberate choice to accommodate imperial linguistic legacy, operate within it and infuse it with their personality and African worldview. Even as they resist patriarchy and the totalitarian sweep of French, they build a multifaceted relationship with the metropolitan language and attempt to change it from within. Making the best of their postcolonial linguistic predicament implies subversion and dialogue. Style, which is the creative use of language, becomes a site of resistance, enhancement and negotiation. The result is that African women's discourse in French deconstructs, transforms and complicates power relations.

Calixthe Beyala is arguably the fiercest, the most anti-racist and most iconoclastic writer from Francophone Africa. Her confrontational disposition notwithstanding, Beyala believes that the French language also belongs to Africans. In her interview with Eloise Brière and Béatrice Rangira Gallimore, she explains her position in these unambiguous terms:

Le français a toujours été, pour moi, une langue extraordinairement élastique ; ce qui signifie que je peux le peupler de mes propres traditions et de tout ce que j'ai reçu comme culture de base, culture fondamentalement animiste. Pour moi, le français n'est pas seulement la langue de Baudelaire, il est aussi la langue des Africains, en ceci que nous pouvons la retransformer, la pressurer et la recharger de notre culture, et ainsi en faire ce que nous voulons.¹⁸

¹⁸ Eloise Brière et Rangira Gallimore, 'Entretien avec Calixthe Beyala réalisé par Eloise Brière et Rangira Gallimore', Rangira Béatrice Gallimore, *L'Oeuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala: Le renouveau de l'écriture féminine en Afrique francophone sub-saharienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp.189-210 (p.190).

In Beyala's view therefore, the French language can be reworked, compressed and indigenised to express African experiences from an African perspective. Such a position gives further legitimacy to Ashcroft's poetics and politics of transformation. The attitude of this radical African feminist towards the French language is reflective of the general position of Francophone African women novelists. In an interview granted to Cécile Lebon, the moderate Aminata Sow Fall stresses that the insertion of Wolof in her novels is both intimate and relieving: 'Je n'emploie pas le wolof pour abâtardir le français mais parce que le wolof vient ajouter quelque chose au français, quelque chose qui n'était pas prévu au départ. Ces mots ou expressions en wolof ne sont donc pas là pour exotisme. En fait, c'est tout à fait personnel, intime.[...] je mets le mot wolof et je me sens soulagé'.¹⁹ She also adds that the recourse to orality is designed to bridge the gap between French and other languages, between written discourse and speech:

D'une façon curieuse, je pense que l'oralité peut venir en aide à l'écrit, notamment au niveau de la réception des œuvres. Vous savez, ce n'est pas parce que mes romans sont rédigés en français, qu'ils ne sont pas connus par les lecteurs non francophones. L'oralité vient pallier la 'différence,' le décalage des langues.²⁰

In a similar vein, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* is built on the principle of cultural coexistence and dialogue of cultures for the simple reason that 'La vie est un éternel compromis' (p.108).²¹ From its

¹⁹ Cécile Lebon, 'L'écriture, une parcelle de rencontre:Entretien avec Aminata Sow Fall', *Notre Librairie* 136 (1999), 64-69 (66).

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre* (Dakar: NEAS, 2000), [Orig. Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: NEA, 1979].

transparent dedication, 'A toutes les femmes et aux hommes de bonne volonté', the novel defends the cause of tolerance, polyphony and gender partnership.

It can be argued that Francophone female writers courageously create works and words out of their limitations and from the margins in order to teach and to reach present and future generations. Eternal teachers of language, they convince us of their status as the repository of tradition, of their role as transmitters of mother tongues, in short, of their readiness to nurture local languages in new directions and in new art forms in order to rejuvenate the 'transcultural energy' which characterises Francophone African women's literature and which can be appreciated from the standpoint of the valorisation of the margins. Women's reclamation of power and their rehabilitation of traditional culture can be investigated at two levels: first, the 'intrusion' of traditional verbal art forms and second, the infusion of indigenous languages into literary works written in French.

2.2 The Legacy of the Traditional Storyteller

Inherent in African women writers' resort to orality is an undercurrent of resistance to cultural hegemony and to the politics of exclusion championed by latter-day misogynists. In effect, the recourse to orality by African writers, from the moderate Bâ to the radical Beyala, allows for the eclectic reactualisation of ancestral wisdom in a womanist/feminist vein and reflects the rhizomatic nature of discursive power and resistance to which Ashcroft refers. Such discourse subverts, enriches and transforms the very dominant language in which it is crafted. And who are better placed for this task than the first storytellers, the primal teachers of humanity and the begetters of humans? They will use traditional art forms to reach and teach various generations of readers and impress upon them that women writers are responsible guides who deserve to be part of decision-making and the ideological centre.

African fiction by women in French oscillates between neo-realism — Sow-Fall's *La Grève des Bâttu*, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, Barry's *La Petite Peule*, Beyala's *Les arbres en parlent encore* — and magic realism.²² In the latter, elements of the fantastic are woven into the fabric of the narratives in the tradition of oral literature. Orpheus dies and is resurrected in search of Nyango, his newly wed wife in Liking's *Orphée-d'Afrique*, Anna-Claude metamorphoses into Tanga in Beyala's *Tu t'appelleras Tanga*, while in *La Petite fille du réverbère*, as in *Femme nue femme noire*, transformations, as strange as they are, defy the rules of logic.²³ If seances and transfigurations sometimes dictate the pace of Beyala's novels, fantasy and surrealistic lunacy regulate the tempo of Bugul's novel *La Folie et la mort*.²⁴ The supernatural indeed animates the plot of Bolli's *Djigbô*, Rawiri's *Elonga* and Régina Yaou's *Aihui Anka*.²⁵ In the view of Claire L. Dehon, the fictional manifestations of the supernatural, in addition to representing African reality, embellish literary works.²⁶ But they do more than that: they attest above all to the desire of writers to perpetuate and re-energise age-old traditions in new art forms. It goes without saying that novels of both the neo-realist and magic realist traditions always resort to the storyteller's techniques to put across their messages.

²² Aminata Sow-Fall, *La Grève des Bâttu* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1979); Mariama Barry, *La Petite Peule* (Paris: Mazarine, 2000); Calixthe Beyala, *Les Arbres en parlent encore* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

²³ Werewere Liking, *Orphée-d'Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981).

Calixthe Beyala, *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (Paris: J'ai lu, 1988).

Calixthe Beyala, *La Petite fille du réverbère* (Paris: J'ai lu, 1988).

Calixthe Beyala, *Femme nue femme noire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003).

²⁴ Ken Bugul, *La Folie et la mort* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2000).

²⁵ Fatou Bolli, *Djigbô* (Abidjan: CEDA, 1977); Ntyugwetondo Rawiri, *Elonga* (Paris: Editaf, 1980); Régina Yaou, *Aihui Anka* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1988).

²⁶ Claire L. Dehon, *Le Réalisme africain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), p.251.

Sustained by the traditional storyteller's craft, Bugul's six novels to date are all anti-genre novels creatively mixing drama, poetry, fiction and aphorisms.²⁷ The author explains in her interview with Mongo-Mboussa that she does not believe in the straightjacketing of artistic works into genres.²⁸ The other striking characteristic of these works is the infusion of rhythm and music into the narrative as seen in the refrain: 'Il fait nuit/Une nuit noire/Une nuit terriblement noire/Une nuit étrangement noire' (*La Folie et la mort*, p.15). In addition, *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* which is actually based on a village folktale, is punctuated by the formulaic and phatic 'On dit que...on a dit que...', often used by the traditional *conteur*. In her review of Bugul's *De l'autre côté du regard*, Meyer describes the work as a poetic novel that sings to the heart of the reader from the start.²⁹ Indeed, all the works of this *avant-garde* writer strike the reader with the unmistakable character of the diverse that celebrates a plurality of perspectives and experiences – African, Muslim, French, cosmopolitan.

The rhythm of Beyala's *La Petite fille du réverbère* and *Les Arbres en parlent encore* is also regulated by the phatic formula: 'Ils disent...ils disent', borrowed from the traditional storyteller. In her interview with Chemain-Dégrange, Beyala affirms that it is the voice of her dead sister, the very sister who used to tell her folktales, that imperceptibly emerges as the subterranean narrative authority in her novels.³⁰

²⁷ Ken Bugul, *Le Baobab fou* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1982); Ken Bugul, *Cendres et braises* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994); Ken Bugul, *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1999); Ken Bugul, *De l'autre côté du regard* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2003); Ken Bugul, *Rue Félix-Faure* (Paris: Hoeboeke, 2005).

²⁸ Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, 'La Passion de la liberté: Entretien avec Ken Bugul', *Notre Librairie* 142 (2000), 104-106 (106).

²⁹ Nicole E. Meyer, 'Bugul, Ken: *De l'autre côté du regard*', *The French Review* 78.1 (2004), 189.

³⁰ Arlette Chemain-Dégrange, 'Rencontre avec Calixthe Beyala', *Littérature et Francophonies* (Nice: CRDP, 1989), pp.101-108 (p.104).

Beyala's novel *Les Arbres en parlent encore* is presented in the form of a folktale recounted during sixteen wakes by an old lady, Edène. Each of the sixteen constituent chapters is preceded by pithy ancestral sayings. Whereas the third wake begins with the traditional dictum 'Celui qui ne voit pas .../ N'est pas forcément aveugle' (*Les Arbres en parlent encore*, p.41), the fifth wake has 'L'homme sage perd sa sagesse.../Lorsqu'il court derrière un fou' (*Les Arbres en parlent encore*, p.67). Traceable to the influence of the traditional *conteur*, the mixture of genres is also noticeable in Sow-Fall's *L'Appel des arènes*, Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and Boni's *Une Vie de crabes*.³¹ Equally striking are the strategies of involvement deployed by the various creative writers. The strategies come in the form of direct addresses to the reader/narratee as in the prologue and some chapters of *Les Arbres en parlent encore* and *La Folie et la mort*, the use of pathos, invocation and proverbs in *Une si longue lettre*, direct challenges thrown to the reader in *La Petite fille du réverbère*, the rhetoric of association in *Orphée-d'Afrique* and persuasive argumentation in *L'Appel des arènes*.

Drawing mainly on Cameroonian literature, Jacques Fame Ndongo identifies anthropomorphisation, exaggeration, reification, and mythologisation, initiatory structure of narratives, iteremes (the structures of repetition), zoomorphisation, among others, as recurrent features of contemporary Europhone African Literature and considers them to be the ineluctable intrusions of orality into modern African fiction, drama and poetry.³² Illustrations of mythologisation and exaggeration are discernible in the transfiguration of Grandmother in *La Petite fille du réverbère*, the

³¹ Aminata Sow-Fall, *L'Appel des arènes* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1984).

Tanella Boni, *Une Vie de crabes* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1990).

³² Jacques Fame Ndongo, 'Les Sources traditionnelles de la littérature écrite', *Notre Librairie*, 99 (1989), 95-99.

presence of Mami Water in *Les Arbres en parlent encore* as well as in the reincarnation of Orpheus in *Orphée-d'Afrique*. The phenomenon of zoomorphisation takes two forms, depreciatory and laudatory. In the case of iteremes, examples can be found in the obsession with the father figure in Aka's *Les Haillons de l'amour*,³³ the recurrence of the betrayal motif in *Une si longue lettre*, the tapestry of aberration and thanatic forces in *La Folie et la mort* and the topos of attraction in *L'Appel des arènes*.

Quite apart from their ideological significance in so far as they serve to stress themes (resolve, vengeance, triumph, *inter alia*), the iteremes convey a sense of melodic rhythm while at the same time highlighting the type of mnemonic code so important in traditional verbal discourse. Iteremes testify to the creative force of repetition to such an extent that Ndongo rightly contends that, contrary to a certain popular misconception that sees in repetition a mark of creative bareness, repetition is the very basis of artistic invention.³⁴ In a similar vein, Anyidoho has demonstrated that linguistic parallelism and repetition are at the heart of traditional Akan appellation poetry.³⁵

The orality-based works in French attest to the resilience of the mother tongue, that is the very language that women writers impart to generations, female and male alike, and the irrepressible female spirit that has managed to survive various forms of colonisation, exclusion and pandemics. It takes readers back to the roots and source of traditional culture. Much more than men, women writers, by the very fact of their marginalisation, have a greater need to use orality in order to build multicultural and political bridges, to reassert themselves, to reconnect with tradition and to give greater ideological dignity to the very act of speech which they teach women and men.

³³ Marie-Gisèle Aka, *Les Haillons de l'amour* (Abidjan: CEDA, 1994).

³⁴ Ndongo, pp.96-97.

³⁵ Akosua Anyidoho, 'Linguistic Parallels in Traditional Akan Appellation Poetry', *Research in African Literatures* 22.1 (1991), 67-81.

2.3 The Use of the Mother Tongue

The second level at which the transcription of traditional culture into Francophone African women's novels can be investigated is indeed in the use of language. African women's marginalisation from the centre generally accounts for the different ways in which they, as opposed to men, perceive writing. From Bâ to Mintsa, creative writing is equated to procreation, the perpetuation of life, the building of bridges and the reclamation of their rightful place in society as indispensable teachers, responsible caregivers and worthy organisers, undeserving of political ostracism and aphasia.

Although both male and female African writers are interested in the affairs of the state, men are often inclined to perceive politics from a rather public and competitive perspective, while women tend to view governance from the private, intimate and bridge-building angle. This impulse is visible in the use of vocabulary related to women's space, the intimate and the movement from the periphery to the centre. For example, Beyala uses indigenous words drawn from the kitchen while Barry privileges dressing and culinary terms, thus sharing personal experience with readers and subtly politicizing domestic life. The interest of writers like Sow-Fall, Bâ, Diallo and Bugul in the complexity of human sexuality is conveyed through the phenomenon of 'Goor-jigeeen'/'Gôr djiguène'/'Gor Djigen', the local Senegalese homosexual or transvestite virtually occluded from African men's writing. Women's creative writing thus brings the sexually and fictionally marginalised into socio-cultural and political power relations.

Each novelist discussed here has crafted African linguistic practices into her novel such that it becomes a veritable text, that is a woven work, with strands from two main cultures: Western and African, and even sometimes three cultures — Western, African and Islamic. African idioms are transliterated into French while African speech patterns are carried over, consciously or

unconsciously, into French in a dual process of mutual subversion and enrichment.

As Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana remarks, the expression 'Je ne demande que ses os' (*Une si longue lettre*, p.47) used by Bâ is a transliteration of the Wolof idiom: 'Yakham rek la soxla'.³⁶ Papa Samba Diop and Herzberger-Fofana also point out that the lofty discourse that Bâ skilfully deploys in her first novel is indeed a recreation of what the Wolofs have for centuries known as 'was bu rafet', the 'beautiful speech'.³⁷ The work becomes then a hybridised discourse, sustained by the dynamics of the mother tongue and an exogenous language.

This discursive hybridity is evident in the different strategies used by the authors to inscribe local terms in their writing. The three strategies used by Barry in *La Petite Peule* are typical. First, there is the occasional internal translation placed beside indigenous terms. Second, indigenous words such as 'ndiayène' (*La Petite Peule*, p.39) and 'loumo' (*La Petite Peule*, p.225) are not translated but understood from their context. Third, most local words are often translated into French in footnotes. Interestingly, in *Les Haillons de l'amour*, the polyglot author Aka who was born in Lebanon and has spent much of her life abroad shows sensitivity to local languages by using words like 'toubab' and 'attiéke' without italics and explaining them in footnotes respectively as the Wolof term for a European and an Akan term for a cassava-based meal. For her part, Beyala, in her novels, often refuses to translate local terms. Most of them carry no typographical marks: italics, asterisks or inverted marks.

³⁶ Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine francophone d'Afrique noire, suivi d'Un Dictionnaire des romancières* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.66.

³⁷ Papa Samba Diop, *Archéologie littéraire du roman sénégalais* (Frankfurt: IKO Verlag, 1995), p.286.
Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, *Littérature féminine francophone d'Afrique noire, suivi d'Un Dictionnaire des romancières*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.319.

The use of Wolof by Senegalese women writers offers an interesting case of discursive heterogeneity. Sow Fall, Bâ, Diallo and Bugul are all native speakers of Wolof, whereas Barry, of Fulani parentage but raised in Dakar, has two mother tongues: Fulani and Wolof. In the use of Wolof by the five authors, two patterns emerge: uniformity and variation. In the case of uniformity, it is observed that both Bâ (*Une si longue lettre*, p.17) and Bugul (*Riwan ou le chemin de sable*, p.121) use the Wolof word 'gongo' to mean sweet-scented powder and spell it the same way. Similarly, 'néné' (baby) is used and spelt the same way by both Sow-Fall (*L'Appel des arènes*, p.52) and Ken Bugul (*De l'autre côté du regard*, p.13) while both Bugul (*Riwan ou le chemin de sable*, p.38) and Barry (*La Petite Peule*, p.133) spell 'tangana' (a low class restaurant where hot meals are served) the same way.

But a widely spoken language, as the five Senegalese writers have shown, is bound to register variations. For example, while Diallo (*De Tilène à plateau*, p.19) opts for the spelling 'Goor-jigéen',³⁸ for a homosexual or a transvestite, Bâ, offers two different spellings of the same term: 'gôr djiguène' (*Un Chant écarlate*, p.107) and 'gor djiguène' (*Un Chant écarlate*, p.197). While highlighting the absence of acceptable orthography for local languages, these variations in spelling in the works of Sow-Fall and Bâ (there are also examples in the work of Diallo, Bugul and Barry) are also symptomatic of resistance to the hegemony and codification of Wolof and may be a pointer to future dialectal transformations and, therefore, resistance from the margins. As a rule, the strategies of inscription of indigenous words in Francophone African texts take one or more of these forms: translation in footnotes, internal translation placed after the local word, translation and explanation in a glossary, italics, asterisks,

³⁸ Nafissatou Niang Diallo, *De Tilène au plateau* (Dakar/Abidjan/Lomé: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975).

inverted commas, brackets, absence of typographical marks and absence of translation. Often governed by the editorial and marketing policies of the various publishing houses, these formats predictably tie the books to in-house traditions, consumer expectations and global distribution chains. Although internal and contextual translation — with or without typographical marks — are practised by virtually all the publishing houses, it is interesting to note that most of Beyala's books, either in their French originals or translated English versions, contain no footnotes, endnotes or glossary, apparently at the insistence of the author. In the same vein, neither Liking's *Orphée-d'Afrique* published by L'Harmattan nor Diallo's *Le Fort maudit* by Hatier contains footnotes.

On the other hand, most Francophone and French publishing houses, Nouvelles Editions Africaines (*La Grève des Bâttu, Un Chant écarlate*), Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal (*Une si longue lettre, Le Baobab fou*), CEDA (*Les Haillons de l'Amour*), Présence Africaine (*Riwan ou le chemin de sable, La Folie et la mort*), Mazarine (*La Petite Peule*), Gallimard's Encre Noire Series (*Histoire d'Awu*) and Le Serpent à Plumes (*De l'autre côté du regard*) favour the use of footnotes. Strangely enough, when some of these same works are translated into English, the translated and glossed terms are either placed at the beginning (*The Beggars' Strike* by Longman) or at the end of the narrative (*So long A Letter* and *Scarlet Song* by Heinemann).³⁹ However, whatever the form that the inscription of local terms might take, their mere presence confers on the texts a distinctive aura of the foreign which is hailed

³⁹ Aminata Sow-Fall, *La Grève des Bâttu où les déchets humains*, trans. by Dorothy S. Blair, *The Beggars' Strike*, (Harlow: Longman, 1981). Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, trans. by Modupé Bodé-Thomas, *So Long a Letter*, (London/ Ibadan, 1981). Mariama Bâ, *Un Chant écarlate*, trans. by Dorothy S. Blair, *Scarlet Song* (Harlow: Longman, 1986).

by Antoine Berman, Lawrence Venuti and Paul Bandia as a hallmark of cultural diversity.⁴⁰

Postcolonial discourse has indeed directly or indirectly impacted on the need for cultural diversity in translation. Berman valorises 'l'épreuve de l'étranger' in the name of the politics and ethics of difference. Similarly, Venuti opts for foreignising or minoritising strategies in translation which respect cultural differences as against domestication strategies that reinforce cultural hegemony. Berman and Venuti's preferences have far-reaching positive implications for translating African works. But even more importantly, the concepts of foreignising / minoritising strategies and 'l'épreuve de l'étranger' reflect the peculiar literary creation in foreign languages by colonised subjects, as the works thus created are politically invested with an unmistakable air of the alien and of the diverse. The degree of the foreign varies from novel to novel. Yet, in all the works studied, from Sow-Fall's *L'Appel des arènes*, characterised by copious footnotes to Beyala's *Femme nue femme noire*, marked by the absence of translation, there is an indisputable presence of the foreign, not the exotic, which, while challenging and mystifying non-indigenous people, Africans and non-Africans alike, obliges them to live a discursive multicultural experience.

The presence of orality and local idioms in works by Senegalese, Cameroonian, Ivorian and Gabonese women writers bears ample testimony to the fact that the imperial language has, in spite of colonial and neocolonial pro-French policy, not been able to obliterate the mother tongue from their psyche. The co-

⁴⁰ Antoine Berman, *L'Epreuve de l'étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998).

Paul Bandia, 'Le concept bermanien de l' "Etranger" dans le prisme de la traduction postcoloniale',

<<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ttr/2001/v14/n2/000572ar.html>>, 20 octobre 2004, pp.1-15.

existence or hybridisation of languages in Europhone African literature can, depending on the angle one adopts, be termed decolonisation or recolonisation of metropolitan linguistic heritage, literary diglossia, vernacularisation, interference of languages, fictional code-switching or palimpsest. Chantal Zabus uses the terms 'relexification' and 'deterritorialisation' to describe the inscription, by African creative writers, of indigenous expressions into the dominant European language.⁴¹ For his part, Joseph Paré uses the term 'reterritorialisation' to capture the subterranean current of African speech in an otherwise European-dominated literary discourse.⁴² For critics like Ashcroft, the literary work so written becomes consciously or unconsciously a work of resistance that subverts hegemonic culture from within but equally facilitates the mutual growth of the two languages in contact.

Taking a contrary view, Albert Gandonou holds that the presence of African words in Francophone African literature is an exemplification of 'xénisme', which he defines as the borrowing of linguistic items from a foreign language.⁴³ This definition appears slightly different from that given by *Le Grand Robert* which defines 'xénisme' (from the Greek word *xenos* meaning 'stranger') as a lexical form (word, expression) coming from another language and used in another language without it having been completely assimilated as are other linguistic borrowings.⁴⁴ That Gandonou labels the presence of African literary words in

⁴¹ Chantal Zabus, 'Under the Palimpsest and Beyond: The 'Original' in the West African Europhone Novel', Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), pp.103-21 (p.106, p.120).

⁴² Joseph Paré, *Écritures et discours dans le roman africain francophone postcolonial* (Ouagadougou: Kraal, 1997), p.22.

⁴³ Albert Gandonou, *Le Roman ouest-africain de langue française* (Paris: Karthala, 2002), p.23.

⁴⁴ *Le Grand Robert*, Tome 6: Ramb-Z, (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2001), p.1993.

Europhone African literary works xenist amounts to saying that, since the language of Francophone African literature is French, the presence of African words is nothing but an incidental accessory. The thrust of this thesis is that the novels so produced belong to French culture. African terms in such literary works are strange, exotic expressions.

Gandonou's position falls short of restating the views of Ngugi. Be that as it may, it is probably unfair to ignore the palpably extensive African linguistic presence, the obtrusive African worldview and therefore African cultural manifestations in literary works produced in French by Africans, which in fact gives these works the stamp of hybridism and makes them deserving of the designations 'Francophone African literature' and 'postcolonial discourse'. Indeed to Zabus, the substratum of African culture transforms such discourse into an 'ethno-text'⁴⁵ and a 'schizotext'.⁴⁶ Such a position mirrors J.C. Blachère's (1993) submission that African works written in French are 'Négritures'.⁴⁷ Rosemary Marangoly George's views on the subject are equally apposite:

Writing alongside nationalist movements and the concomitant resistance to imperialism, the colonized use [the literary tools of the colonialist] to assert a subject position for themselves and for the communities they wish to represent—a subject position that draws its validity and energy from a new engagement with the space that can now belong exclusively to our 'people'.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Chantal Zabus, 'Under the Palimpsest and Beyond', p.105.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.114.

⁴⁷ J.-C. Blachère, *Négritures: Les Écrivains d'Afrique noire et la langue française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993).

⁴⁸ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p.5

It is equally instructive to remember, as Sow-Fall stresses, that her use of indigenous words has nothing to do with exotic motivation.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it might perhaps be helpful to appreciate that as result of the colonial and postcolonial underdevelopment of indigenous languages in French territories/ 'French-speaking' countries, Francophone African writers, together with the large masses of their compatriots, remain largely unlettered and unschooled in their African languages, which are paradoxically also termed 'national languages.' Therefore, if writers from 'English-speaking' Africa, given the comparatively favourable linguistic environment, have greater ease writing in local languages, the same cannot be said for their Francophone counterparts. Moreover, to the extent that French/Africanised French, and not an indigenous language, is used to define the national ethos and the national identity, and to the extent that it remains the language that binds the various ethnic groups into a nation-state, it assumes the character, certainly not of a communal language, but of a national language of sorts.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the degree of hybridisation, decolonisation/recolonisation, code-switching, vernacularisation, diglossia, palimpsest or reterritorialisation varies from text to text, from author to author. Yet all the works are sustained by the common aim of presenting a highly polymorphous and dialogic world to readers, of celebrating cultural diversity with the limited linguistic resources at each writer's disposal, of making the best of their linguistic handicaps and of laying firm foundations for a futuristic, hybrid rhizomatic culture.

⁴⁹ Cécile Lebon, 'L'Ecriture, une parcelle de rencontre:Entretien avec Aminata Sow Fall', *Notre Librairie* 136 (1999), 64-69 (66).

There is always a clear political dimension to Francophone African women's fiction. The very presence of such discourse is a challenge to the masculinist monopolisation of speech and power. It thrives on the politicisation of the private, on the valorisation of women's experiences and on the movement from the margins to the centre. Surely, Francophone African women writers artistically teach and celebrate traditional lore, wisdom and craft through their works, and by so doing, revitalise African culture and transform French, the colonial language, which, at the global level, is under much pressure from languages such as Spanish and, especially, English. To the extent that this concern is shared by their male African counterparts, one could say that linguistic, discursive and cultural transformation is a common denominator of Francophone African writers of both sexes. However, as first educators of humans, Francophone African women writers also seek to use their creative works to reclaim their rightful place in society. In that respect, their discourse from their plural margins constitutes a challenge not only to metropolitan hegemony but also to patriarchal (dis)order.

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Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink et Katarina Städtler, eds, *Les littératures africaines de langue française à l'époque de la postmodernité: Etat des lieux et perspectives de la recherche*, Studien zu den Literaturen und Kulturen Afrikas (Oberhausen: Athena, 2004). ISBN 3-89896-164-8.

This volume contains contributions by leading German Africanist scholars who critically analyse the evolution of African francophone postcolonial studies in Germany and Austria, and assess the significance of the different ways in which the concepts of postmodernity and postcolonialism are viewed in Africa and in the West. The twelve studies brought together here focus on four closely linked areas that draw out the key elements of the relationship between African francophone writing and the postmodern. At first sight, the overall structure of the volume is not obviously coherent and it is left to Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink to elucidate in his detailed introduction.

The first of the four areas of interest concerns a rethinking of the intercultural relationship between African and European colonial and postcolonial writing. Isaac Bazié's study of the problematic relationship between African writing and its reception in the cultural arena of the Occident is of particular interest here as he explores the significance of the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Soyinka in place of Senghor; a decision that, Bazié argues, exposes the problematic tendency to assimilate too closely a man and his work.

A second focus of the volume is the textual interculturality of African literatures and the recognition of a need to rethink a series of relationships. The relationship between African culture and Western culture, between the written and the spoken, the colonial and the postcolonial, Lüsebrink remarks, all characterise the postmodern nature of these literatures. In his paper, Justin Biswansa takes an intercultural approach to African literatures in his exploration of the plurality of meaning and in his examination

of the political and socio-cultural realities by which it is constituted. However, Pascale Solon's exploration of the work of Amin Maalouf shows that a writer's interculturality is not restricted to his writing, but in Maalouf's case, manifests itself too in his concept of culture as multifaceted and in his reversal of perspective on historical events, which in turn invites reflection on the concepts of identity and alterity, Self and Other.

Several contributions to this volume examine the complexity of the relationship between literature and culture, serving to refute the belief that literature is autonomous and largely detached from other cultural practices. Beate Burtscher-Bechter's analysis of the relationship between journalistic photography and the fictional writing of Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra draws on the *technique de l'instantané* developed in photojournalism and later theorised by Roland Barthes in *La chambre claire* (1980). Likewise, Sonja Lehner's contribution draws on the parallels between journalistic writing and *la littérature engagée* in her exploration of the work of Norbert Zongo of Burkina Faso. Both papers explore the ways in which writers challenge perceptions of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* as peaceful and civilising, presenting instead the brutality of the exploitation of Africa and exposing the absurdity of the values of French colonial discourse in Africa.

The fourth centre of interest of this collection of papers concerns the challenges of the postmodern era, in the face of which African writers are faced with new social, political and cultural realities such as globalisation, the spread of diseases such as AIDS, new forms of communication, as well as continued and new forms of conflict in Africa. A paper that illustrates most clearly the challenge faced by writers is Ute Fendler's study of the representation of AIDS in African literature, drama and film. Fendler signals the importance of these genres in communicating the threat of AIDS, whilst noting that their fictional quality permits a certain distancing from reality that facilitates the reception of the message they contain.

Les littératures africaines de langue française à l'époque de la postmodernité also contains a brief introduction to the current state of research in African francophone literatures in Germany and Austria in the form of Katarina Städtler's study. Unfortunately, the paper adds little to the research already undertaken by Flora Veit-Wild for the anthology, *Nicht nur Mythen und Märchen: Afrika-Literaturwissenschaft als Herausforderung* (2003) – the title of which translates as 'Not only Myths and Fairy tales: African Literature Studies as Challenge' – that closely examines recent developments in the field of African studies in Germany. However, the growing legitimacy of African literary studies as an independent field in German universities is signalled by the depth and breadth of the studies included in this volume and, despite their seeming diversity, the papers are of particular interest for their critical exploration of the work of individual African writers, locating their work in relation to the postmodern world.

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In association with the **Department of European Studies and Modern Languages of the University of Bath**, the **Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS)** and the **Association Internationale des Etudes Francophones et Comparées sur l'Océan Indien (AIEFCOI)**

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