WRITING AS TRANSLATION: TRANSLATION AND THE POSTCOLONIAL EXPERIENCE - THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN TEXT

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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To My Late Father, Akwasi Gyimah Brempong
My Mother, Afua "Bio" Nyarko; You have been the source of my inspiration
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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

THE AFRICAN WRITER AND THE LANGUAGE OF WRITING

African literature in European languages occupies a unique position. Before western colonization, the novel, for instance, was an unknown genre in Africa. Although there were oral narratives, there were no novelists or novels in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since the colonial period, novelists constitute a special kind of creators who, contrary to traditional poets or storytellers with whom they are in contact, are paradoxically products of colonization. Unlike traditional poets or storytellers, African novelists acquired their art through the possibility of writing. Within the framework of literature, the immediate advantage that writing offered to the African was the means to participate in the development of the prevailing literary genre. However, because of the impossibility (or at any rate the difficulty) for some African writers to write in their mother tongues there arose the need for these writers
to write in the languages of the colonizers. Because, historically, Africans found themselves placed in this linguistic situation, the early African writers started to write in the languages of the colonizers without considering all the implications involved in the use of such languages. In their zeal to destroy the stereotypical images of Africa and to project their African world-view, these writers may have considered the colonial languages as mere tools or means to achieve their objectives. However, as Roland Barthes (1953) points out, "le langage n’est jamais innocent" since a people’s social, political and cultural institutions are reflected in their language.

If one considers what has been written on the language question in Africa, one realizes that the emphasis has especially been on the attitude of the African writer vis-à-vis the European language rather than on the creative use of the language. In fact, the classical question consisted in knowing if writing in the language of the colonizer was problematic for African writers or if they felt comfortable in using this language. Thus, based on the declarations of some African writers,¹ Jacques Chevrier (1978) was able to make this remark:

L’attitude de l’écrivain vis-à-vis d’une langue non maternelle repose, semble-t-il, sur une certaine ambivalence, mélange d’amour et de haine, de saisie et de rejet, qui rend assez bien compte du sentiment du corps à corps avec le langage que provoque parfois la lecture des écrivains francophones. (49)
Although Chevrier’s observation is pertinent, it directs the reflection only onto the ideological aspect of this linguistic question. What has been neglected is essentially how the European language is re-appropriated and given expression in the imagination of the African writer.

In a situation of diglossia and bilingualism, such as that which characterizes African countries, the use of a foreign language as a medium of literary expression raises a certain number of questions. Is any given individual capable of mastering completely his or her mother tongue as well as a foreign language? Although this question can be answered in the affirmative, it is still possible to share the doubt entertained by Todorov (1985) when he writes:

Je me demande si le bilinguisme fondé sur la neutralité et la parfaite réversibilité des deux langues n’est pas un leurre ou tout au moins une exception. (26)

Todorov’s remarks are pertinent in any bilingual situation in view of the fact there is always an unconscious interference of the mother tongue in any individual’s actualization of a second language. This unconscious intrusion is mostly felt at the level of lexis where a bilingual speaker has an unconscious recourse to a lexicon in his or her mother tongue while speaking the other language. But interference may also be realized at the syntactic level where the structure of the second language is influenced by the mother tongue of the bilingual speaker. This linguistic interference which is most visible in speech is sometimes
also perceptible in the writings of a bilingual writer. In the case of African writers, the writings of Nazi Boni, for example, manifest a clear example of the unconscious interference of the mother tongue in the European language of writing while those of Achebe, Okara, Kourouma and the other writers we shall be concerned with in this study show a conscious effort to represent this interference.

Another important question to ask is whether a given language is capable of perfectly expressing a foreign culture. More specifically, in the domain of literary creation, is a foreign language capable of translating in an entirely satisfactory manner an imagination that has its roots in an alien culture? These questions are very pertinent to African literature and the language situation in two ways: on the one hand, the ability of the writer to perfectly master the western language in which he/she writes and, on the other hand, the ability of the western language to translate the specific structures of the African imagination.

The question of language in African literature, then, is very pertinent and continues to be an inflammatory issue for postcolonial African writers. Whereas in other societies language in literature attracts attention and debate only in terms of its effective use in artistic creation, in Africa the question is strikingly different: what language or languages should African literature be
expressed in? Moreover, the different colonial policies pursued in Africa by the colonial powers make the language situation even more complex. While the English allowed for some kind of development in indigenous African languages which led to the earlier indigenization of the Anglophone text, the French policy of assimilation tended to hinder the development of local languages in the French colonies. This has led to a late development of indigenization in Francophone African literature.

As Serge Gavronsky (1978) has asserted, French has been a necessity for the Black writers from the Francophone regions of Africa and the Antilles. French has constituted the writers’ literary discourse and their literary means of expression. According to him, whatever language Francophone writers may have at their disposal, they recognize for a complex set of reasons the need to filter their Africanness through the French language. However, it must be pointed out that, historically speaking, the African and Caribbean writer did not have a real choice in the use of language as a means of literary expression. French, from the earliest school experiences, was assimilated to the future writer’s vision of culture. French assumed the function of a linguistic code within which his literary self could, and did find expression, in contrast to a native code which was systematically degraded. Leon Gontran Damas most searingly defines this condition in his famous poem "Hoquet" where it
is clear that language, in this case the French language, is a status phenomenon, for it defines, per se, one’s class and one’s background, not to speak about one’s education and values. This semiotic correspondence is multiply expressed, but the dialectical opposites are strikingly evident. The irony that informs Damas’s poem appears very vividly when a woman admonishes her child in these terms:

Taisez-vous
Vous ai-je ou non dit qu’il vous fallait parler
français
le français de France
le français du français
le français français
[...]
Non monsieur
vous saurez qu’on ne soufre chez nous
ni ban
ni jo
ni gui
ni tare
les mulâtres ne font pas ça
laissez donc ça au nègres.
(Leon G. Damas, 1972)

In this poem, Damas denounces the type of education given to the Guyanese child of his generation, for it does not take into account the non-Gallic part of the Guyanese child’s cultural heritage. Obviously, in the French educational system there can be only a simple dichotomy in the expression of cultures: on the one hand, there is a "vulgar" system of culture and, on the other hand, there is the hallowed French tradition.

If earlier writers, Senghor being the prime example in Francophone Africa, chose to write in French "Parce que nous
sommes des métis culturels, parce que le français est une langue à vocation universelle, que notre message s'adresse aussi aux Français de France et aux autres hommes, parce que le français est une langue "de gentillesse et d'honnêteté" (Senghor 1964, 225), we can remark, even at this stage, that the French language is a pure signifier. The poet from Senegal, for example, transforms in his own terms, the master's language into the slave's arsenal. In this manner, the enemy's tongue, paradoxically, is both severed and recuperated. Its dominance is modified in a newly ordered structure which redefines the ideological pertinence of the initial French investment. This is not to say that Senghor and the other early Francophone writers proceeded to any organized and systematic deconstruction and decolonization of the African text in terms of the language used. (A notable exception being, of course, Césaire.) Their writings, even where one could detect a specific "African" orientation, belied a desperate need to affirm themselves in a world where, initially, they had been systematically and historically excluded.

In his play, Chants pour hâter la mort du Temps des Orphée, Daniel Boukman (1967) describes the ambiguity that characterizes the early writers' attempt to assert their Africanness and their need to affirm themselves within a French value system. He writes:
Camarades, Orphée vous a trahi, Je dis bien VOUS,
qu'il travaillez la terre, vous les ouvriers des
distilleries, vous les pêcheurs, vous les artisans des
villes et des communes, vous les dockers.... Pourquoi,
parce qu'il a toujours chanté l'Homme nègre, la
Splendeur nègre, la Beauté nègre... teilement chanté,
tellement chanté qu'il a bondi vers les étoiles, et de
là-haut, camarades, pas moyen de voir le nègre des
Antilles, cassé en deux dans les champs de cannes...
(96)

Thus, for Boukman, the early Francophone writers' attempt to
imprint an African aesthetic in their works merely took the
form of empty slogans about the quality of being "black."

However, the period just before and after the
independence of African states witnessed remarkable
modifications in the relationship of the Francophone writer
to the use of French in his or her stylistic and thematic
preoccupations. In Djibril Tamsir Niane's rendition of the
hymn of abundance sung in honor of Sondejata (1960, 144),
French is used without any further explanation. In his
story, "Le Chien et le chimpanzé" (1964), René Philombe uses
both French and the local language. Birago Diop (1958), as
he relates the tales of Leuk-le-Lièvre, has his hero sing
both in his own language, and then, through the author's
discreet intervention, parenthetically, in French. In 1954,
Camara Laye demonstrated in Le Regard du roi that the
African novel could free itself from autobiography by being
enriched with symbolism. In 1960, Sembène Ousmane used the
technique of "unanimism" in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu to
recount the Dakar-Niger railway workers' strike. He avoids
the pitfalls of dramatic dispersion and succeeds in
perfectly individualizing the characters who could have been
dominated or obliterated by the collective action. The very
title of *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (banti-mam-yalla in
Wolof) translates an attempt on the part of Sembène Ousmane
to infuse his writing with an African, in this case Wolof,
world-view. In Francophone Africa, whereas all these
various innovations were attempts to wrestle with the legacy
of European language and models in an African environment,
one had to wait till 1968, almost a decade after Africa’s
independence, to witness a complete decolonization of the
African text with Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des
indépendances*.

If there were no, or just a few, conscious reactions
and reflections on the language of writing on the part of
the first African writers, one can however observe that
their changed relationship with this western language, a
language far removed from the African imaginary world, shows
clearly through their novels. One can detect in these early
writings an unconscious shift from the "standard" French
language and models into what may be termed a new African
mode of narrative, a new African way of storytelling.

A novel like Nazi Boni’s *Crépuscule des temps anciens*
(1962) perfectly reveals this interference. According to
Ahmadou Koné (1992) Nazi Boni is, among the West African
Francophone novelists, "celui qui témoigne le mieux de la
difficulté mais aussi de la volonté d’utiliser une langue
qui tente d’exprimer de façon satisfaisante l’imaginaire de
son ethnie qu’il entendait valoriser" (80). This is partly
because Nazi Boni’s ambition as set out in the foreword to
his novel is to describe African culture, more specifically
the Bwamu culture. However, because Nazi Boni wanted to
address a specifically European audience which had sought to
deny Africa’s history and culture, he felt obliged to write
in French. Realizing that the French language was
inadequate to convey his Bwamu imagination Nazi Boni was
obliged to use purely African expressions which come from
his native language. Concerning Nazi Boni’s use of his
African language Makhily Gassama (1978) writes:

Il n’y a pas une seule page de Crépuscule des temps
anciens où l’on ne rencontre une expression ou un mot
africain ou une tournure de langue maternelle
judicieusement ou maladroitement transposée en
français. Du point de vue de l’apport de notre
littérature romanesque à l’enrichissement de la langue
française, Crépuscule des temps anciens est
certainement notre roman le plus riche. (223)

Indeed, in a concrete way, Nazi Boni has tried to
resolve the difficulty of rendering exactly his African
ideas, thoughts and feelings in French by using, for
example, French words whose meanings depend on the
significations that these words have in his African
language. For example, after breaking an amphora as a
testimony of his love for Terhé, Hakani, the heroine of the
novel, reassured herself by saying that her mother would not
scold her: "La vieille n’avait-elle pas fait son soleil?"
(67). In this sentence, the word "soleil" obviously does not have the same signified in French and in the African language. In French it can be rendered by "temps, ère, époque." The use of "soleil" to mean "time, era, or period" exists in some African languages and it is this meaning that already Sembène uses in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu and which we later encounter in the title of Ahmadou Kourouma’s Les Soleils des Indépendances. Again on page 67 of Crépuscule, the narrator recounts that "Un devin, un jour, remit au jeune homme un œuf. Il lui spécifia que cet œuf contenait sa "silhouette" c’est-à-dire son double, plus exactement Mako, son âme." Realizing that the French synonyms were not enough to convey his African concept, Nazi Boni felt compelled to use the exact word in his mother tongue. Thus, the wish to "reduce the distance between his native language and French leads Nazi Boni to simply translate the African words in an effort to convey his Bwamu concepts as much as possible. Nazi Boni’s writing is therefore an attempt to use the African word in French. For this reason he also attempts to translate forms, speech and thought patterns which come from a long African tradition. It can be argued that Nazi Boni’s effort at imprinting the French language with the mark of his native language may have been an unconscious attempt at sustaining an authentic African discourse albeit in a foreign language. For, like many African writers of his generation, Nazi Boni saw a major
role for literature as the expression of cultural authenticity. Yet, as almost all African writers recognize, language poses an apparent problem for this aesthetic program. Thus, despite the sometimes inappropriate turns of phrase in the French language, Nazi Boni still opened the way for a much more conscious attempt at literary decolonization through the language of writing.

It is therefore not surprising that some writers later became clearly aware of the problems that Nazi Boni was trying to come to terms with. In Anglophone Africa for example, Gabriel Okara has tied theoretical reflection to the linguistic problem which confronts the African novelist in the practice of writing. In his essay "African Speech... English Words" (Transition vol. 10, 1963) Okara explains:

As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folk-lore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as his medium of expression. I have endeavoured in my works to keep as close as possible to the vernacular expressions. For, from a word, a group of words, a sentence and even a name in any African language, one can glean the social norms, attitudes and values of a people. In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each Ijaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise. (15)

Okara's remarks are clear. If one wants to benefit from African culture, if one wants to express the African
imagination, one cannot put aside the African language in favor of an academic European language. Okara has tried systematically to adapt the European language to the African reality. More than Nazi Boni, he has tried an almost literal translation of his language into English and the result of this "fascinating exercise" can be seen in his novel The Voice. One need not understand Ijo, Okara's native language to understand that in this novel the mother tongue influences and disrupts the English language. What Okara has done in this novel is to let the Ijo tongue speak in the English language, as is evident from the following passage:

Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths. Who are you people be?" Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. "If you are coming-in people be, then come in." (26)

In the main, The Voice is written in this way. Of course, there are passages where standard English is written. However, when Okara makes his characters speak or think, he pushes them to literally translate their language. Contrary to the example of Nazi Boni, Okara's writing is a conscious attempt to use the words and expressions in the way he has chosen to use them. According to Chantal Zabus (1991) Okara's syntax creates "a counter-value system which jeopardizes the English logocentric relation between word and referent, between signifier and signified. It also erodes the dominant language's syntax, that which sustains
and most belligerently resists linguistic imperialism" (125). In other words, in attacking and deconstructing Western logocentricism through the translation of Ijo, Okara seeks to free the African text from its foreign domination.

Thus, following the tradition set unconsciously by Nazi Boni and very consciously by such writers as Achebe, Okara and other Anglophone writers, the Francophone writers whose works we shall examine in this study, seek, through their particular styles of writing, a way of giving prominence to the African word in their African text. What is common to all these writers, in varying degrees, is a form of translation that takes place from the African language into French. In order to understand and appreciate the writings of these writers, students and scholars of African literature need to understand that the universe evoked by the writers is a universe permeated by African value systems while the French they use is couched in the linguistic structures of their African languages. For, as the Zairian critic Georges Ngal (1989) asserts, it is the African languages that give form and meaning to modern African writing in European languages. Ngal writes:

S’il faut chercher une spécificité, disons une particularité de l’écrivain africain, c’est que son écriture est travaillée, fécondée par sa langue maternelle d’abord et par les langues africaines. Les romans... ne peuvent être compris avec profit que si l’on connaît le contexte linguistique de ces romans. Certains passages, les noms des personnages... sont une traduction.... (118-119)
In his review of the plays of Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark, Martin Esslin (1960) posed the problem of language in African drama. Even though Esslin’s remarks concern drama, they can be extended to other areas of modern African literature and therefore need to be quoted at length:

But, it might be argued, the work of the two playwrights we are here discussing, Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark, should be largely exempt from these considerations; for after all, they are writing in English. Far from being an advantage, in my opinion, this is a further handicap. Not that these two playwrights are in any way at a disadvantage in using the English language. On the contrary: both are real masters of all its nuances and, indeed, very considerable artists in English. Here again the problem arises from the nature of drama itself. These plays are by Africans about Africans in an African social context. And they are, largely, about Africans who, in reality, speak their own African languages. It is here that the problem lies. We are here presented with African peasants, African fishermen, African labourers expressing themselves in impeccable English. Of course in reality they speak their own languages equally impeccably and the playwrights have merely translated what they would have said in those languages into the equivalent English. Precisely! Which is to say that these original plays labor under the universal handicap of all translated drama.  

Thus, it can be posited that the problematic of modern African literature lies precisely in the issue of language and, I would add, its relation to the notion of translation. However, N’Gal’s "traduction" and Esslin’s "translated drama" are merely the simple formulation of a very complex creative activity undertaken by the African writer writing in European languages. The question is, why do Africans write in European languages? What are the implications of
this choice? How can African writers think, write, dream in a foreign language? How can they find the "right tone" to express an African experience in a foreign language? As might be expected, these questions have never ceased to haunt the conscience and thinking of African writers even well after independence.

It must be obvious that African writers who write in the European languages do not have the same attitude to the languages and therefore do not follow the same approach to their use of language. Different authors have adopted different solutions to this intractable language problem. Chinua Achebe, for instance uses the potential flexibility of English to Africanize his style by manipulating rhythm, register and lexicon. In A man of the people, he experiments in dialogue, using a kind of modified pidgin for colloquial speech to represent in English the multilingualism of African society. On the other hand, Léopold Sédar Senghor’s use of French may be termed "classical" in much the same way as that of the Cameroonian novelist Mongo Beti. "Classical" in the sense that they do not let their characters speak their African languages in French. While the universe of their works evokes an African world view, the language in which the works themselves are expressed is essentially "le long français" (Henri Lopes’s, Le Pleurer-Rire, 278). However, the same thing cannot be said of Ahmadou Kourouma of Côte d’Ivoire, Sony Labou Tansi
or Henri Lopes of Congo and other new writers whom Sewano Dabla refers to as the "romanciers de la seconde génération."

Many Francophone African intellectuals in the 1950s turned to literature, particularly poetry and the novel, as a means of communicating African aspirations. Writers such as Mongo Beti (Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba), Ferdinand Oyono (Une vie de boy, Le Vieux nègre et la médaille), Sembène Ousmane (Le Docker noir), challenged perceptions of the colonizer's civilizing mission in the colony by portraying the devastating effects of colonialism. Because their attacks on colonialism were first and foremost directed to a European audience their language was unequivocally the standard language of the colonizer even though most of these writers tried to introduce African turns of phrase into their novels. Unfortunately, the introduction of these features was "unnatural" and incomplete since it did not fit into the general atmosphere of the novel which was essentially French.

With the independence of African states Francophone African writers mitigated their attack on the evil effects of colonialism and directed it towards the new African elite that took over from the colonizer. Many of the same writers who had written against colonialism were now forced to depict the atrocities that the new African elite was committing against its own people. However, because these
writers had already built a "clientele" in Europe through their European language writing they probably felt obliged to continue writing in those languages. While their novels reflected a new African condition, their languages remained the same. No attempt was made to re-appropriate the French language to reflect this new African condition.

However, with the introduction of formal education in Africa many Africans now constitute a large readership for the literature produced by African writers. Moreover, the themes and concerns developed by the new African writers have a sense of immediacy first for Africans, before having what may be termed a wider appeal or a universal application. For these reasons, there has been a visible diversification of distinctively African varieties of French by contemporary writers and, as Patrick Scott (1990) argues, these more recent and more organic linguistic developments already make some of the earlier stylistic manoeuvrings look tentative or quaint.

Thus, modern African literatures resulted from the encounter between African and European cultures. Their development has therefore been significantly influenced by this encounter. Hence, in their writings, contemporary African writers "translate" their African world view, that is, their cultural values and language, into the European medium of expression. Here, to "translate" means, literally, "to carry across," and this implies all other
forms which carry the prefix "trans." It also means not only transportation or transmission or transposition but also transformation and transmutation; for all these activities take place when the African writer sets out to write in a European language. My approach to the notion of translation will be understood first in its most orthodox sense as the linguistic operation that consists in transporting meaning from one language to another. But, most importantly, I also define translation to encompass the process through which African writers incorporate oral and traditional literary techniques such as proverbs, repetition, folktales, into the novel form.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to examine how translation functions as a critical as well as a creative activity in African literature. Such an examination will lead to an analysis of how the cultural and sociological aspects of African literature are adequately represented in the European languages. In other words, I intend to demonstrate how, for the African writer, writing itself becomes an act of translation. Obviously, while the term African literature is used to cover all the literary activities that take place on the continent, the fact that part of this literature is expressed in European languages presents another problem: a handicap of modern African literature resides in the fact that it does not present the
African reality in one and the same voice. This is because each of the two major European languages, viz French and English, which serves as its modes of expression has its own public and practitioners. Moreover, since not all scholars and students of modern African literature read this literature in the original languages in which they are written, some kind of comparative approach to this literature inevitably takes place in their studies. Quite obviously, translation is the activity that makes this comparative approach possible. Thus translation plays a crucial role not only in the creation but also in the criticism of African literature.

In Chapter One of my study, I will explore some of the existing theories of translation and their relevance to, or impact on African literary texts. As I have pointed out, it would probably not be wrong to state that comparative literature as it is practiced today would not be possible without translation. Most of African literature, whether written in African or European languages, has come to be known by most people largely through translations. In this respect, the reader’s understanding of what constitutes African literature depends upon the translator’s reading of the ideological concepts and the social and political history that produced that writing. Any comparative approach to African literature therefore cannot ignore the
role that translation plays in the corpus of this literature.

The earliest forms of translation that took place in the West were those of the Bible and the Greek and Roman classics. Most of these translations were normative in the sense that translation practice at the time was conceived in terms of "right" or "wrong," "faithful" or "free." Modern thinking about translation may be said to have begun with the publication of the works of Eugene Nida in the United States and those of Andrei Fedorov in the then Soviet Union. With these writers the focus on translation shifted away from literary based-texts to linguistic-based texts. However, theories of translation based on linguistics tended to deal with language as an abstract system, that is, with the Saussurean "langue" instead of "parole," which is language in concrete use.

In The Theory and Practice of Translation Eugene Nida and Charles Taber (1974) define translation as consisting in "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style... The translator must strive for equivalence rather than identity" (12, my emphasis). However, since equivalence focussed on the word as the unit of translation, it is not difficult to see how this notion was not very helpful. Whether viewed under "componential analysis" or "dynamic equivalence" (terms
which Nida later introduced), the notion of equivalence was controversial because it could not account for the style of the message which is just as important as the message itself. Peter Newmark’s categories of "semantic" and "communicative" translation, which were introduced to solve the dilemma of the notion of equivalence, could not themselves avoid falling into the same trap as they also more or less made use of the notion of equivalence.

Somewhat opposed to the linguistics-based approaches to translation was George Steiner’s elaboration of the "hermeneutic" approach to translation. This idea of translation essentially identifies translation with interpretation where the translator becomes a mediator between two texts, indeed between two cultures. Other translation scholars like Popovic and Lefevere on the other hand see translation as acculturation since they contend that translation can teach us about the wider problem of the relation among different cultures in the world.

Translation has also attracted the attention of poststructuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man whose thinking on translation is based on their commentaries on Walter Benjamin’s essay "The task of the Translator." Poststructuralist notions of translation explode the binary opposition between "original" and "translation." Rather than elevate the translation to the level of the original, poststructuralists see the
translation as a work in its own right. For Derrida and de Man, neither the text to be translated nor the translation can be said to be an original semantic unity since (as we shall see with regard to African literature), both are derivative and heterogeneous and consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials.

I have already stated that the African writer who produces work in a foreign language is himself or herself indulging in an act of translation. Thus, to support the claim why the African writer writing in a European language is a creative translator, I will re-examine the language question in Africa since, without doubt, any discussion of translation and African literature has to touch on the question of language. I will also draw on the works of Abdelkebir Khatibi the North African writer who, in his writings, is essentially concerned with the process of writing as translation.

Although Khatibi’s writings are concerned with the act of translation, he is also more concerned with ridding himself of the guilty feeling that the North African writer carries for having to write in French, for having to "translate" into French his or her most local and regional preoccupations. According to Khatibi, the North African bilingual writer need not "suffer" from the use of the French language. Khatibi considers the French language as a tool that enables the North African writer to express what
cannot be expressed in only one language. Thus when Khatibi refers to bilingual writing as "en somme, une question de traduction" (Amour bilinque, 113) one would expect him to be engaged in a process of writing which would tend to "subvert" the syntax and lexis of the target language. In other words, as Réda Bensmaïa (1987) points out, one would expect him to multiply references and recourses to Arabic, and to "dialectiser" or "maghrébinizer" the French language in order to make it refer to the other language (that is, the writer's mother tongue) which it has essentially tended to suppress. However, Khatibi's writing does not lead to the violation of French syntax and lexis. His writing is "classical" in the sense that he does not mix the languages. On the contrary, affirming his "belonging" to two cultures and the way he views words in the two languages, Khatibi seems initially to be willing to give the French language all the chances to operate at the most transparent level. This transparency, however, will still make visible the traces of the mother tongue still present in the bilingual writer's mind.

According to Khatibi, if the North African writer has to liberate himself from the gaze of the other, then writing has to liberate itself, and it has to undertake its own decolonization. In his texts therefore, Khatibi demonstrates his will to detach himself from the literature of representation towards a "pensée-autre," a thinking that
is open to all differences, a thinking which refuses political or literary assimilation but welcomes the other in what cannot be assimilated. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, for instance, he expresses his desire to decolonize himself from the hold of all literary genres, and to free himself even of the concept of identity, while the subtitle of the novel announces his intention to explore the relationship between self-writing and decolonization. Khatibi’s reflections on writing as an act of translation are very essential to African literature in general and to the objective of this study in particular.

I have already pointed out that the term "translation" as it is used in connection with the African text in European languages is a simple formulation of a complex activity. This is due to the fact that in reappropriating and reworking the European language to suit the specific African context of their work, by privileging their African languages over the European languages, and by forcing the European languages to conform to the syntax and semantics of African languages, African writers are in effect producing a viable and authentic African discourse. Thus, the re-appropriation of European languages by African writers is not only a linguistic undertaking, but also a political, ideological and cultural preoccupation through which African writers "implant" an African esthetics in their works by means of European languages.
Whereas almost all Europhone African writers, in varying degrees, have translated their languages in their writings into the European languages, there are certain writers for whom this "translation" process has been very complete and successful and therefore constitutes one of the most important aspects of their writings. This is the case, for example, of Ahmadou Kourouma (Les soleils des Indépendances, Monnè, outrages et défis), Sony Labou Tansi (La vie et demie, L'État honteux, L'anté-peuple, Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez, Les yeux du volcan), Henri Lopes (Le Pleurer-rire), Jean-Marie Adiaffi (La carte d'identité) and Tierno Monenembo (Les crapauds-brousse, Les écailles du ciel. The works of these African writers who, in my opinion, use the French language as the means of an effective expression in the creative translation process, will form the basis of this study. I need to emphasize that, besides standing as an analysis of the linguistic and cultural codes used by the various writers in the creative translation process, the chapters that will be devoted to these writers will also serve as a literary criticism of their works.

With only two novels published so far, the Ivorian novelist, Ahmadou Kourouma, nonetheless stands out as the Francophone African writer who has most successfully blended African modes of discourse with an imported European genre. With his novels, Kourouma inaugurated a new mode of writing
in African literature where the characters were made to speak their African languages through French. Not only does Kourouma transform the French language to make it "African" he also has recourse to oral literature which he introduces and translates into the body of his narrative. Kourouma’s last novel, *Monné, outrages et défis* continues the project he started with his first novel: to make his characters speak their own language and to see history from their point of view. What is even more interesting with the last novel is the fact that the author himself poses the question of language and translation as they are affected by colonization and, it must be added, as they affect African history and literature.

Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des Indépendances* appears to highlight, among other themes, the betrayal of the promises of independence. Throughout the novel, the misfortunes and sufferings of the hero, Fama, as indeed those of the whole people, are linked to what is seen by the hero as one underlying evil: Independence. However it was through its form—the use of African oral literature and a new kind of language—that Kourouma’s novel became a real masterpiece. Contrary to his predecessors, Kourouma is not simply interested in changing the form of the novel, he really makes his narrator and characters speak the language of their native soil and his duty as the author becomes an act of translating their language into French. The most
important characteristic of the writing of *Les Soleils des Indépendances* therefore resides in the fact that it is not the French language that gives form to the discourse in the text but rather the African, or more specifically Malinke model which informs the language of the narrator and that of the characters.

In *Monnè, outrages et défis*, his second novel, he expands his time frame to include the period that extends from the second half of the 19th century to the present as a means of impressing readers with the longevity and permanence of the monnè that afflicts the people in a colonial and neocolonial state. If in *Monnè* the issue of language is presented simultaneously with that of translation, it is because Kourouma wants to highlight the need for and the impossibility of expressing oneself "adequately" as an African in a European tongue.

The Congolese writer Henri Lopes also experiments with new ways of writing. His novel *Le Pleurer-rire* is about the rule of Tonton Bwakamabé, a former soldier in the French colonial army who seized power in his country through a coup d’état. The main theme of the novel is political dictatorship. However, the author does not only describe dictatorship in the way in which it manifests itself, but rather analyzes it in all its complexities. Different voices, different styles of writing, and especially
different languages come together to form the structural unity of the story.

Jean-Marie Adiaffi’s *La carte d’identité* revolves around an opposition which determines its structure and gives the work its meaning. The arrest of the protagonist, Mélédouman, at the beginning of the novel and his freedom by the time the story ends mark the two poles between which the curve of the novel’s plot is developed. They form a kind of framework, encompassing Mélédouman’s imaginary journey for the search of a symbolic Africa which has to regain its dignity and identity, the two features that are a necessary precondition for freedom. Because the novel recounts an African quest for identity, the author privileges certain African terms and concepts that best express his message and style.

Tierno Monenembo’s novels, *Les crapauds-brousse* and *Les écailles du ciel* fall within the tradition of the political novel that opposes, challenges and ridicules the regimes set up after Africa’s independence. The first novel ends on a note of pessimism because no positive character is introduced into the universe of the novel and no solution is found to the problems facing the characters. The second novel denounces the evils of contemporary regimes and the abuses of colonization and even questions the idyllic image of Africa before western colonization. However, whereas *Les crapauds-brousse* describes in a linear way a political,
social and economic reality, *Les écaill es du ciel* attaches a great deal of importance to the imaginary. The greatest interest of both novels resides in the author’s renewal of the process of writing. In both novels the reader is made to feel the power of the African word which the author establishes by transcribing this word to occupy the French space of the novel. In this sense, the French language only serves as a vehicle through which African myths, value systems, and languages are given expression.

Sony Labou Tansi of Congo (who died a few months ago) occupies an important place in African literature. What characterizes the novels of Labou Tansi, as indeed the whole of his work, is the brilliant mastery of writing, the extreme effectiveness of this writing, his power of transformation and representation, and his ability to create a world and sustain it. The story of *La Vie et demie*, his first novel, is the chronicle of a fictional African country, neocolonial Katamalanasie, its savage dictators, and its insurgents, in particular Chaïdana, the beautiful daughter of the rebel leader Martial. According to Eileen Julien (1989), "*La Vie et demie* is as much about language in a time of tyranny as about tyranny itself." The narrative of the novel is an especially effective denunciation of totalitarianism because in its form and language, the novel ridicules and parodies repression.
L'Etat honteux tells the story of the reign of Colonel Martillimi Lopez at the head of a fictional African state, a reign characterized by eccentricities, craziness and the whims of the president. It is a story that revolves around itself since the same story is retold over and over again, enriched with certain variations. As the narrator points out, "Ici, c'est comme cela, dans toutes les maisons où vous allez le soir, on raconte l'histoire... et chacun y met son ton, sa saliva, ses dates, ses lieux, chacun la fait briller à sa guise au ciel de notre imagination" (23). Thus, the very structure of L'Etat honteux reflects one of the characteristics of oral literature: repetitions, and variations on the same theme. The writing of the novel operates as a subversive strategy of the text and transforms the linguistic subversion into a political gesture.

Through quite different narrative structures, L'Anté-peuple and Les Sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopes subvert male discourse and recode it through women's voice. What makes the narrative of L'Anté-peuple possible is the presence of the two women (Yavelde and Yealdara) who, through totally different means, awaken Dadou's consciousness to the political situation in the country. But L'Anté-peuple also brings us into the domain of language where the meaning of words shifts according to context.

Les Sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopes begins as a homage, in the form of a parody, to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's
Chronicle of a Death Foretold. The structure of Les Sept solitudes is informed by women’s liberating discourse of resistance. The old, ineffective and oppressive way of doing things represented by a dominant patriarchal discourse gives way to a collective female voice that carries with it the hope of dignity and stability. The female appropriation of male discourse as a weapon of resistance in a way parallels the appropriation of the colonizer’s language by contemporary African writers. Whereas in the past African realities were seen through the prism of the colonizer’s gaze, now the gaze is turned inward and the African sees himself or herself from within. Hence the recourse to the modes of African oral narratives and a reworking of the French language that finds expression in a certain African way of naming.

Les Yeux du volcan, Labou Tansi’s fifth novel, is the chronicle of a people who do not have a sense of history and for whom the future does not hold any promise. The structure of the novel follows a linear pattern and events follow in a chronological order. The volcano in the title is a metaphor for the people of Africa and oppressed people everywhere, while the symbolism in the novel revolves around the notion of time. What makes Labou Tansi’s novels most compelling is the language of the author as Labou Tansi uses every occasion to emphasize the “bilingual” nature of his writing.
Rather than a simple reminder that we are in the presence of an African text, the African words, accents and rhythms in all these novels are essential to the structure of the work, and to their philosophical, sociological and literary import. Thus, by introducing these features, these African writers deconstruct the form of the French novelistic genre and subvert the Euro-centric discourse to produce their own personal styles and counter-discourse.

As I have pointed out, I have used the term "translation" in connection with African literature in two important respects. First, it is applied to the creative writing process itself through which African writers translate, transpose, and transform models from their mother tongues and cultural institutions into the European languages. Secondly, I am also concerned with the practical aspects of translating African literature from one European language into another since some criticism in African literature is sometimes based on the critic's reading of a translated text. In view of this second aspect of translation in African literature, I will analyse the translation of Achebe's *Arrow of God* into French, and then examine how Monenembo's *Les crapauds-brousse* and Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire* have been translated into English not so much to evaluate the products but rather to point out the specific problems involved in the translation of African literature.
In Part Two I will provide my own translation of *Les yeux du volcan* by Sony Labou Tansi. Obviously, my translation is not at all intended as a model translation. Like the other translated texts that will be discussed, it will provide material for illustrating some of the problems associated with African literature. Indeed, the emergence and continuing growth on the world literary scene of postcolonial anglophone and francophone literatures are bound to challenge and redefine many accepted western notions in translation theory. These postcolonial texts, frequently referred to as "hybrid" because of the cultural and linguistic layering within them, have succeeded in forging a new language that defies the very notion of a "foreign" text that can be readily translatable into another language. In translating this literature we have to go beyond the conventional notions of linguistic equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long been a consideration in translation theory. For these texts written by postcolonial bilingual subjects create a language "in between" and therefore come to occupy a space "in between." Their translation therefore has also to be "in between."

Throughout this study, my approach to the writings of contemporary African literature is posited on the fact that this literature can no longer be considered only from a socio-ethnological standpoint (as was the case in earlier
approaches to African literature) but rather from a 
sociolinguistic perspective, for the genius of these writers 
lies in their awareness of the power of their African 
languages to sustain an authentic African discourse in the 
colonizer’s language.

NOTES

1 Volumes 83, 84, and 85 of Notre Librairie (1986) that were 
devoted to national literatures contain some interesting 
statements made by African writers about writing in European 
languages.

2 Martin Esslin, "Two Nigerian Playwrights" in Ulli Beier 
(ed), Introduction to African Literature, 1967, p. 256, 
quoted by Abiola Irele in The African Experience in 
Literature and Ideology, 1980, p. 52.
CHAPTER I

TRANSLATION THEORIES AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE AFRICAN TEXT

Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.

Genesis xi, 7

The story of Babel relates, in the form of legend, the origin of a constraint imposed upon the human race from the early days of its evolution. Even though the power to communicate is no longer regarded as a characteristically human achievement for which no other animal possesses the capacity, the habit of speaking in different languages is peculiar only to humans. Thus, as Savory (1968) has explained, there has arisen a situation that is biologically unique, the existence of a species in which some individuals are unable to understand the words and expressions of some other individuals. This phenomenon creates a barrier to social intercourse which is encountered whenever people from different language and cultural backgrounds try to communicate with one another. Translation is the
surmounting of this obstacle and it is made possible by an "equivalence" of thought that lies behind the different verbal expressions.

Peter Newmark (1980) reports that the first traces of translation date from 3000 BC, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom, in the area of the First Cataract, Elephantine, where inscriptions in two languages have been found. According to him translation became a significant factor in the West in 300 BC, when the Romans took over wholesale many elements of Greek culture, including the religious apparatus. From republican Rome onward, translation has been used in language teaching in the European educational system. Though the practice has for some time been abandoned, according to Lefevere (1992), its long dominance has helped define thinking on translation in Europe and the Americas. Translation practice was conceived in terms of "right" or "wrong," "faithful" or "free" because institutions (the church, the state and its educational system) were interested in ensuring that the books most often translated were translated in the "right" way, that the translations of, say, the Bible and the Greek and Roman classics were "faithful." But such a tradition is forced to neglect all kinds of other aspects connected with the phenomenon of translation, a circumstance that could teach us many things about how cultures and literatures function.
As Lefevere points out, for a long time, thinking about translation in the West was primarily normative.

Around the 1930s, and more especially after World War II, with the publication of the first works by Eugene A. Nida in the United States and Andrei V. Fedorov in the then Soviet Union, the focus of thinking about translation began to shift away from literary texts, but the thinking itself still remained normative. When the thinking about translation began to shift away from literary texts, it began to look toward linguistics. But linguistics-based translation thinking was not satisfactory for the reason that theories of linguistics deal with language as an abstract system, the Saussurean "langue," whereas translators and translation scholars are interested in language in concrete use, the Saussurean "parole." ¹

The dominant concept in this first phase of linguistics-based translation thinking was that of equivalence, which was gradually to lose its authority over the next forty years. It is not hard to see that any approach to translation dominated by equivalence is likely to focus on the word as the unit of translation, since words can be considered equivalent to other words more easily than, say, the structure of sentences, paragraphs, or texts.

In 1974 Nida developed the technique of "componential analysis" to gauge the degree of equivalence between words and to ensure their correct translation. Words were broken
down into their semantic components, as for example "bachelor = male + unmarried." Another concept introduced by Nida turned out to be much more controversial: the concept of "dynamic equivalence," which attempted to define a translation as the closest natural equivalent to the original. However, the concept of dynamic equivalence is mostly message-oriented and is thus less useful for literary translation, which concerns not just the message but also the ways in which that message is expressed.

Whereas Nida's thinking on translation mainly involved rule giving, other linguists, such as John C. Catford, focused on the very possibility of rule giving. They essentially reduced the study of translation to the study of translatability. Instead of looking at existing texts, literary or nonliterary, and describing what they saw, they tried to establish criteria against which translators were to be judged. Unfortunately, these criteria were primarily based on the notion of equivalence and they were also completely ahistorical. Not only were these criteria ahistorical, they were also completely context-free. For example, "pope" fits Nida's definition of "bachelor" but a "pope" evokes something much more than just a bachelor. The word "pope" evokes a whole range of historical, social, political and religious connotations that are not associated with the simple notion of bachelor.
If the first phase of linguistics-based thinking about translation focused on the word, the second phase focused on text linguistics. The unit of translation for text linguistics is no longer the ideal contextless sentence but the text as a whole. Text linguistics also sees the text not as an isolated verbal construct but as an attempt at communication that functions in a certain way in a certain situation or culture and may not work with the same degree of success in another situation or culture. André Lefevere (1992) gives the example of a sentence like "Don't mess with Texas" which may not be understood in certain parts of the British Isles where the inhabitants are more used to something like "Don't litter." However, it is precisely the function, situation or culture that ensures that listeners or speakers perceive these two utterances as having the same meanings. Text linguistics therefore adds a much-needed functional dimension to the analysis of the translation process and the analysis of translated texts, a dimension that is of the utmost value for literary translation. However, even though this form of thinking on translation used the text rather than the word as its point of departure, it could not also let go of the concept of equivalence in one form or another.

Peter Newmark (1981) sees translation as a function of the culture in which it is produced by distinguishing between "semantic" and "communicative" translation. His
concept of semantic translation belongs more in the realm of equivalence: it tries to supply an equivalent semantic content for words found in the source text, and it concentrates more on the meaning of the source text. Communicative translation, by contrast, is more or less equivalent to a "cultural adaptation" of the source text, so that readers in the target culture find the translated text easier to comprehend. It deals with the message of the original, and it obviously falls into the category of the "functional." As with the earlier theories of translation, Peter Newmark's classification also makes use of the concept of equivalence. The main problem with the concept of equivalence, however, is that its degree can never be determined objectively. In this respect the concept of equivalence has become so vague that it hardly denotes anything anymore, or conversely, it denotes all things to all people.

Along with, and somewhat opposed to, linguistics-based approaches to translation, the period from 1930s to now has witnessed the emergence and elaboration of the "hermeneutic" approach to translation. Translation scholars working in this vein use insights acquired by linguistics-based thinking but they see the relationship between translation and the translator in a totally different light. To them translation means interpretation, and the translator is the mediator between two texts, no longer the one who looks for
equivalences. If we consider this theory of translation in Newmark's terms, translators with this orientation produce communicative rather than semantic translations. The scholar most closely associated with the rebirth of hermeneutic studies of translation is George Steiner. However, perhaps the most productive insight generated by this school of translation studies is the conclusion that no perfect translation is possible and that acceptance or rejection of translations in a given culture may well have much more to do with power and manipulation than with knowledge and wisdom.

Alternatives to both linguistics-based and hermeneutic approaches to translation have been elaborated over the past two decades by scholars like Anton Popovic (1976), whose thinking tends to be more tributary to the linguistic approach, and Itamar Even-Zohar (1981), who has been influenced mainly by literary theory, particularly the writings of the Russian formalists. Both seek to reverse the normative mind-set that has long characterized Western thinking about translation. Instead of trying to prescribe what a translation should be, Popovic calls for a descriptive study of existing translations that can be considered one variant of metatext among others (such as the summary, the review, the paraphrase, the adaptation). Even-Zohar sees translation as a process of negotiation between two cultures, that is, translation as acculturation.
Following in the footsteps of the Czech scholar Jiri Levy, both also describe the translation process not primarily in terms of following and applying rules but as a decision-making process: translators decide, on their own, on the basis of the best evidence they have been able to gather, what the most effective strategy is to bring a text across in a certain culture at a certain time. The scholars who subscribe to the thesis that translation is indeed acculturation reject the finality of the old normative approach, while gratefully incorporating the legacy of some of its techniques, such as componential and functional analysis. They contend that translation can teach us about the wider problem of acculturation, the relation among different cultures that is becoming increasingly important for the survival of our planet.

John Hollander has said that the theory of translation must involve a theory of literature. For this reason, translation must be submitted to the same rigorous interrogation that other cultural forms and practices have recently undergone with the emergence of poststructuralism and its impact on such theoretical and political discourses as psychoanalysis, Marxism, and feminism. According to Lawrence Venuti (1992), poststructuralist analysis of translation provokes a rethinking of translation that is both philosophical and political, engaged in questions of language, discourse, and subjectivity, while articulating
their relations to cultural difference, ideological contradiction, and social conflict. According to the poststructuralist thinking on translation, translation is not only the intellectual, creative process by which a text written in a given language is transferred into another. Rather, like any human activity, it takes place in a specific social and historical context that informs and structures it, just as it informs and structures other creative processes.

Venuti points out that poststructuralism has in fact initiated a radical reconsideration of the traditional topoi of translation theory. Largely through commentaries on Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator," poststructuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man explode the binary opposition between "original" and "translation." Derrida and de Man do not proceed by elevating the translation into another original and turning the translator into an author, but instead they question the concepts of originality and authorship that subordinate the translation to the foreign text. They argue that what makes the foreign text original is not so much that it is considered the coherent expression of authorial meaning, but that it is deemed worthy of translation, that it is destined to live what Benjamin calls an "afterlife" (Überleben) in a derivative form like translation: "Translations that are more than transmissions of subject matter," writes Benjamin,
"come into being when in the course of its survival a work has reached the age of its fame.... The life of the originals attains in them to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering."⁵ According to Benjamin’s thinking, a translation canonizes the foreign text, validating its fame by enabling its survival. Yet the afterlife made possible by translation simultaneously cancels the originality of the foreign text by revealing its dependence on a derivative form: translation does not so much validate literary fame as create it. "That the original was not purely canonical," de Man notes, "is clear from the fact that it demands translation; it cannot be definitive since it can be translated.... The translation canonizes, freezes an original and shows in the original a mobility, an instability, which at first one did not notice."⁶

Derrida’s formulation fastens on Benjamin’s use of organic metaphors. In "Des tours de Babel" (1980) he writes:

If the translator neither restitutes nor copies an original, it is because the original lives on and transforms itself. The translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original which will complete itself in enlarging itself.... And if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself. (188)

The "mobility" or "fault" in the original is what Derrida has described as **différance**, the signifying movement in
language whereby the signified is an effect of relations and differences along a potentially endless chain of signifiers and therefore is always differential and deferred, never present as a unity. This means that the original is itself a translation, an incomplete process of translating a signifying chain into a univocal signified, and this process is both displayed and further complicated when it is translated by another signifying chain in a different language.

Thus, the notion of originality of the foreign text is compromised when one considers the poststructuralist concept of textuality. Neither the foreign text nor the translation is an original semantic unity; both are derivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilize the work of signification, making meaning plural and differential, and exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the foreign writer and the translator. As Venuti puts it, "poststructuralist textuality redefines the notion of equivalence in translation by assuming from the outset that the differential plurality in every text precludes a simple correspondence of meaning, that a ratio of loss and gain inevitably occurs during the translation process and situates the translation in an equivocal, asymptomatic relationship to the foreign text" (7). Even though most translators regard this relationship as mimetic, striving to
create a reproduction based on their estimation of the meaning of the foreign text, the heterogeneous textual work ensures that the translation is transformative and interrogative as well, it sets going a deconstruction of the foreign text. In the journal notes ("Border Lines") addressed to the translator of his essay "Living On," Derrida observes: "The line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations, one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemy, and the other, which goes over into dissemination - this line also passes between the critical and the deconstructive" (93). Accordingly, a translation is never quite "faithful," it is always somewhat "free," and it never establishes an identity. Always a lack and a supplement, translation can never be a transparent representation, only an interpretive transformation that exposes multiple and divided meanings in the foreign text and displaces it with another set of meanings, equally multiple and divided.

As Venuti points out, this point releases translation from its subordination to the foreign text and makes possible the development of a hermeneutic that reads the translation as a cext in its own right, as a weave of connotations, allusions, and discourses specific to the target-language culture. However, Derrida and de Man limit this development by submitting translation to the recurrent
repression of social and historical determinations that characterizes poststructuralist textual theory. This is partly due to the fact, as we have already pointed out, their treatments of translation are mainly in commentaries on Benjamin's essay, especially on Benjamin's notion of "pure language." For Benjamin, "it is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (80). Whatever meaning may be assigned to Benjamin's notion of "pure language," both Derrida and de Man construe it according to the poststructuralist concept of language as a differential plurality.

As John Frow (1986) demonstrates, a text is a heterogeneous artifact, composed of disruptive forms of semiosis (a process in which something functions as a sign to an organism) like polysemy (that is, marked by a multiplicity of meaning), and intertextuality (where texts refer to other texts), but it is nonetheless constrained by the social institutions in which it is produced and consumed, and its constitutive materials, including the other texts that it assimilates and transforms, link it to a particular historical moment. 7

Poststructuralist translation theory therefore lays the groundwork for an incisive method of reading translations. For, as Venuti makes clear "translation emerges as an
active reconstitution of the foreign text mediated by the irreducible linguistic, discursive, and ideological differences of the target-language culture" (10).

As with linguistics- and text-based theories on translation, alternative translation practices have been appearing in the wake of poststructuralist textual theory. In discussing an English-language version of Derrida’s essay "La mythologie blanche," Philip Lewis (1985) argues for a more sophisticated translation strategy that acknowledges the complications poststructuralism has brought to translation, particularly the concept of meaning as a differential plurality, and which therefore shifts the translator’s attention away from the signified "to the chain of signifiers, to syntactic processes, to discursive structures, to the incidence of language mechanisms on thought and reality formation, and so forth" (42). Lewis further observes that:

The real possibility of translation - the translatability that emerges in the movement of difference as a fundamental property of languages - points to a risk to be assumed: that of the strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own. (41)

The point to note here is the rejection of the notion of fluency that dominates contemporary translation in favor of a strategy that confronts the inherent difficulties and contradictions in a text.
"Translation," writes Maurice Blanchot (1967) "is the sheer play of difference: it constantly makes allusion to difference, dissimulates difference, but by occasionally revealing and often accentuating it, translation becomes the very life of difference. 8 This view, in my opinion, aptly describes the very notion of writing in contemporary African literature where the process of writing itself is an act of translation and where the African writer uses language to mark his or her difference.

How do the translation theories we have outlined above apply to the specific translation of African literature in both African and European languages? It is evident that literature is a linguistic event. African literature in European languages presents special problems for the African writer and the translator of African texts because of language contacts and interference. The cross-fertilization of African and European languages throughout the continent has influenced different kinds of artistic expressions on the continent. While literary translation in Africa might be a novelty, there is no reason why it should not be governed by similar constraints which have influenced this kind of translation elsewhere. For this reason, Hartmann's (1980) observations are very pertinent to the relationship between literature and translation in Africa. In Contrastive Textology he notes:
The study of literary texts, their production, transmission, critical evaluation and reception involves the aesthetic concerns of verbal art. The traditions, judgements and methods of literary theory must be respected when we try to account for the ways in which works of literary art cross linguistic and cultural boundaries.... The task of the (literary) translator is to produce an equivalent text, typically for a reader who is not proficient enough to understand the text in the language of the original. (62–3)

Even though literary translation in Africa has not been subjected to the same kind of analysis as has been the case in the West, scholars are becoming more and more aware of the role of translation in African literature. G. A. Mhina’s book, *The Place of Kiswahili in the Field of Translation* raises most of the major problems concerning the translation of African texts and the pivotal role Kiswahili has played in the historical evolution of translation and interpretation in East Africa. It is obvious from Mhina’s study that questions of formal and dynamic equivalence introduced by Nida are major problems to the translator who works with African texts because of the multiplicity of meanings usually attached to specific words in African languages. Mhina’s analyses also prove that most of the western-oriented, linguistics-based translation theories have shortcomings and therefore are not very applicable or relevant to African texts. The major weakness of these theories is that they do not take into consideration socio-cultural factors which underline works produced by African artists.
While African writers may not have formulated their own translation theories, they have been involved with the process of translation, first as creative translators, and then as critical translators who have translated literary works in African languages into European languages. In the translation of African literature from African languages into European languages, we can mention the names of such noted writers as Okot p'Bitek, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. According to Charles Nama (1990), the distinctive, outstanding feature of Bitek’s method of translation is that he adopts an aspect of George Steiner’s "hermeneutic model." In *After Babel* Steiner notes that:

"The mechanics of translation are primarily explicative, they explicate (or, strictly speaking, ‘explicitate’) and make graphic as much as they can of the semantic inheritance of the original.... Because explication is additive, because it does not merely restate the original unit but must create for it an illustrative context, a field of actualized and perceptible ramification, translations are inflationary." (277)

Steiner’s observation here is very pertinent to Bitek’s translation of Acholi songs in *Horn of My Love* (1974). In the preface to his own translations Bitek remarks:

Here is the poetry of the Acholi people: their lullabies and love songs, their satirical verses, their religious songs and chants, their war songs and funeral dirges.... In Part One I have discussed briefly the different dances or occasions when the songs are sung. Part Two consists of the texts, both in the Acholi language and in English. It is important to stress that these are my own translations, and I believe that there can be other versions. It is for this reason that the vernacular had to be included, to give other translators and scholars the opportunity to criticize
my translation and also to attempt their own. In Part Three I have thrown together several items ranging from analysis of the themes in Acholi dirges, the role of poets as historians, a description of the so-called 'praise,' and a rendering of the warriors' titles.... ix-x).

The quotation above shows that Bitek has analyzed specific themes, concepts, philosophies of the Acholi society in order to make the translation of his poems more meaningful. This kind of socio-cultural approach, in which valuable information is added to the translated text, is not generally considered by linguistic-oriented theories of translation. It is also Bitek's kind of translation that Kwame Anthony Appiah has called "thick translation."

Stressing the need for such a kind of translation in the African context, Kwame Appiah writes in his article "Thick Translation" (Callaloo vol. 16.4, 1993):

... a translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing. I have called this "thick translation:".... A thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves... to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others. (817-8)

Bitek's socio-cultural mode of translation is also practiced by Wole Soyinka in translating the work of the eminent Yoruba writer Fagunwa. In his assessment of Fagunwa's works Abiola Irele notes in The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (1981) that "Fagunwa's works belong then to the great tradition of allegorical and
symbolic literature, set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references. His achievement resides in his creation of a form in which the Yoruba imaginative tradition can be given a translation in modern terms, and in the process acquire new vitality...." (182). What Irele alludes to as "cultural references" in Fagunwa's works permeate those of several African writers and present special problems to the translator of modern African literature into European languages. It is the nature of these special problems that Simon Gikandi (1991) has termed the "epistemology of translation." In analyzing the translation of Ngugi's Matigari Ma Njiruungi from the Gikuyu into English, Gikandi notes that the relation between the two versions is not one of equality. According to him the two texts function in a political situation where English is more powerful than Gikuyu. This is because, as he points out, if Ngugi's intention was to make the Gikuyu text the great original to which all translations would be subordinated, this intention is defeated not only by the political repression of Matigari Ma Njiruungi, but by the act of translation itself. By suppressing certain unique aspects of Gikuyu language which give it power and identity (for example proverbs and sayings), Gikandi asserts, the translator of Matigari makes the novel read as if it was originally written in English, thereby defeating Ngugi's
intention of restoring the primacy of the African language as the mediator of an African experience.

Even though Ngugi did not translate *Matigari*, he translates some of his works himself and makes a strong plea for translation to bridge the gap between local and international languages. While dismissing one of the primary tenets of linguistic relativity, that of the untranslatability of languages, Ngugi calls translation, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, a "dialogue between the literatures, languages and cultures of the different nationalities within any one country - forming the foundations of a truly national literature and culture, a truly national sensibility!" (85). As Katherine Williams (1991) points out, by arguing passionately for the mediating tool of translation and by assuming that translation is possible, Ngugi is propounding a double-edged solution to the opposition between relativity and universality. Ngugi preserves his particular culture by preserving his language, but he can also tap into a perfectly workable mode of "universal" communication by calling for a vital community of translators. For Ngugi, in translation lies the dialectical means to resolve the conflict between particular language and universal communication. In Ngugi’s translation model, the linguistic effects of colonialism’s displacement of the self are resolved both in theory and in practice.
If the translation of African literature from African languages into European languages is no easy task, the translation of this literature from one European language into another presents even more problems. This is because, as I have pointed out, African writers are creative translators in the sense that in their works, they convey concepts and values from a given linguistic, oral culture into a written from in an alien language. In this sense, the African writer is an "interpreter" of culture, "interpreter" as used by Seleskowitz and Lederer in Interpréter pour traduire and also by George Steiner in After Babel, in the sense that the African writer is communicating ideas and meanings of sometimes several cultural artifacts in a given society. Consequently, even though he has indulged here in some kind of creative translation, he is evidently analytical and explains the norms of his society. Achebe, for instance, provides insights in his novels on how a society balances its norms, expectations, and the individual, and how complex relationships were in traditional society. The canon of African literature in African and European languages evidently demonstrates the spiritual dimension of the societies. Indeed, a traditional, metaphysical atmosphere pervades most of these works. For this reason the African writer is guided by certain linguistic constraints, especially given the fact that during the creative process,
the writer is in essence mediating between two or more different cultural and linguistic systems. Even though the African writer uses symbols and metaphors that touch on a real African situation to reflect or express and idea, he also goes beyond a particular time and place because, by writing in a foreign language, his final product is invested with meanings which apply in varying degrees to different people and societies. Gadamer's point in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* concerning his views on "language games,"
9 and Uriel Weinreich's observations concerning lexical interference in *Languages in Contact* 10 are applicable to the African context.

Given Africa's turbulent history marked by imperialist interventions, European languages have had to pay a certain price as vehicles of communication. The Africanization or what Chantal Zabus (1991) prefers to call "indigenization" process, which is the ultimate effect of this hybrid of "new language" makes literary translation in Africa particularly difficult in view of the fact that no theory of literary translation for this area has been articulated so far. In this regard, in translating African literary texts, one is bound to analyze one's original or source text very critically from a certain number of perspectives including linguistic, cultural, and socio-political.

In a paper delivered at the Xth World Congress of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) in Vienna in
1984 and entitled, "The Codes and Context of Literary Translation," Jan Vilikovsky (1985) observes:

It has become customary to regard translation as a transcoding process: the translator analyses an SL item and transfers it restructured into a TL item.... The transcoding process should take into account the differences between the linguistic, literary and social contexts of SL and TL culture, and to compensate for them by means of shifts of expression (Popovic 1971).... Traditionally, the concern of translators has been to create something as close as possible to the original linguistically, structurally and culturally.... The text, therefore, is endowed with a certain universality and is culturally extrovert. The translation, on the other hand, arises in response to social and cultural need in the target culture, and is expected to take this into account. The text is, therefore, aimed at the translator’s contemporaries - and the members of the same linguistic community to boot.... Translation is the self-realization of a culture (254).

Vilikovsky’s "transcoding process," which takes into account the differences between the linguistic, literary and social texts of Source-Language and Target-Language culture contains some salient points relevant to the translation of African texts: the translator of an African text should take into consideration the linguistic, social and cultural contexts of the African text.

In addition to the African specificity of the text to be translated, translating the narrative prose of African writers of French expression into English (and vice versa) presents additional problems. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) explain that the most fundamental problem of all translation from French to English lies in the psychological differences between the two languages. While English is concrete and
sees reality from the outside, French is more abstract and sees things from the inside. English defines movement and shape more clearly than French by its concrete verbs and its particles. It has a more marked sense of evolution by reason of its continuous tenses. French is often more analytic and English more synthetic. English has a wider range of vocabulary but not so strict a usage as French, and whereas English words by their very structure suggest the ideas they express, French words often owe their meaning to associations. Therefore, any translation from French to English demands a certain modulation or change in the way of looking at reality. In the field of literary translation from French to English the translator also has to have an appreciation of the cultural differences between the two linguistic groups. A knowledge of the French literary background is essential for, as Brenda Packman (1968) has pointed out, French writers tend to be influenced by their predecessors, to form themselves into "movements," and to be more preoccupied with literary form than their English counterparts.

In an article on the African writer and his public, Mahamadou Kane (1966) has remarked that whereas the literature of any European country is first and foremost national and expresses the intelligence and the sensitivity of one specific people, African literature claims to embrace the cultural realities of a large number of different
countries and peoples. Moreover, by borrowing a language and a literary framework, the African writer is obliged to conform to the spirit of these elements. In other words, the African writer writing in a European language is expressing African realities in terms of the psychology, the collective experience, and the literary traditions of Europe. However, by successfully experimenting with African and non-African forms, writers like Achebe and Kourouma are able to transcend the non-African component to produce hybrid products that can be termed "African." French African writing, for instance, has therefore an essentially hybrid nature imposed upon it by the diversity of the African realities it represents, and the non-African form in which it is expressed. The translator of Francophone African literature for instance has to go beyond the French expression to the other culture, the other psychology which lies beneath it, that is, to reach the African context which is its focus. Although the work to be translated exists in French or English, the translator has to make evident the African esthetic which informs the work of the author and which is its driving force.

This explains why Paul Bandia (1993) has remarked that translating African creative works is a double "transposition" process: a primary level of translation, i.e. the expression of African thought in a European language by an African writer and a secondary level of
translation, i.e. the "transfer" of African thought from one European language to another by the translator. The primary level of translation results in an African variety of the European language, and the translator's task is to deal with the unique problems posed by this so-called non-standard language. At the secondary translation level the translator deals not only with the interlingual but also the intersemiotic translation process, as both the content and formal characteristics of the African oral narrative are crucial to the full representation of meaning in the written target language. Since, for the most part, the African content and form have already been captured by the African author in his European language of writing, what the translator needs to do is to carry across into the target European language (L2) the same African content and form.

In discussing Achebe's works, Ekundayo Simpson (1979) states that: "Since the author has already bridged the gap between the Nigerian idiom and the European one, all the translator has to do is to find the equivalent expression and register in the foreign language" (79). In other words, the critical translator has to be alive to the sociocultural systems involved in the African text so that his or her translation will be able to carry the African aesthetic into the other European medium of expression. Of course, finding "equivalent expression and register" implies that the translator, as we have pointed out, has to be sensitive to
the psychological differences between the two European languages since these languages do not share the same worldview. This divergence in perception often results in linguistic and cultural differences between the two language groups, which will thus add to the difficulty of "transferring" African thought from one European language into another.

Because language and culture are so interrelated, it is not always easy to "force" one language to lay aside its cultural baggage in order to serve as a medium for conveying another remote or alien culture. The situation is further complicated as even the source text itself involves two cultures - the culture of the European language of writing and the African culture being transmitted. Thus when the two cultures come together the hybrid product that results from this encounter poses additional problems in the act of translation. Because of these factors, there is a subjective dimension to the process since the translation will have to depend on the translator's reading of the cultural and ideological concepts and social history that produced the African text. However, despite the obvious difficulties, the main aim of the translator of African literature is to preserve, as much as possible, the cultural value systems of African thought.

Obviously, writing in a foreign language has not been the exclusive preoccupation of African writers. Many great
literary figures have, at one time or another, expressed themselves in tongues other than their own. If Kafka, a Jewish intellectual living in Czechoslovakia and one of the few Jewish writers who spoke fluent Czech, Hebrew and Yiddish, wrote in German, he never forgot the influence of his mother tongue on his other languages. In one of his journals translated into French he writes: "Voyez vous, je parle toutes les langues, mais en yiddish." Writers like Nabokov, Borges, Conrad, and Beckett wrote some of their major works in foreign languages. These bilingual or multilingual writers continually confront their work in terms of what else it might be, and in fact, what it has to become when their works are translated into other languages. However, while the Nabokovs, the Conrads and the Becketts who choose to write in a foreign language are few and far between, writing in a foreign language is a common plight for the many African writers who decided to "discard" their native languages in favor of the erstwhile colonizer’s. While the Becketts and the Conrads do not have to deal with the power relations that govern languages, while their choice of language may not be governed by a situation of diglossia, and while they may not be bothered by identity crises when they choose one language over the other, or when they express themselves in different languages, African writers, because of their past or present circumstances as (de)colonized persons, have to live and deal with all the
difficulties, contradictions and alienations in their use of language.

What are the peculiar circumstances of the African writer in terms of language and why does translation pose specific problems in the context of African literary texts? This is what we shall attempt to answer in the next chapter which deals with language and literature in the specific African context.

NOTES

1 For a discussion on the development of translation theories, see André Lefevere, Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context, 1992.

2 In Approaches to Translation, Peter Newmark gives a detailed treatment of semantic versus communicative translation in which semantic translation focuses primarily upon the semantic content of the source text and communicative translation focuses essentially upon the comprehension and response of receptors.

3 Steiner's monumental work on translation, After Babel (1975) defends the view that every people has a unique body of shared secrecy in their language. According to this view then, for translation to be possible from one language to the other, the translator can only interpret the message of the source language text into the target language text.
See Adam’s Dream: A Preface to Translation, by Ben Belitt, 1978, 35.


7 For John Frow’s development of these points see his Marxism and Literary History, 1986.


9 In Philosophical Hermeneutics, 1978, Gadamer has this to say concerning language games: "To Learn a new language game, one must virtually repeat the socialization process of the persons who use it. In learning the mother tongue, we learn not only its particular grammar but also the way to make other languages intelligible. We already possess all other language games in principle, not by socialization but through mediation, translation. Learning a new language is an expansion of the horizon with which we began..." (30).

10 Discussing lexical interference in Languages in Contact, 1953, Uriel Weinreich observes that: "The most common lexical interference is the outright transfer of the phonemic sequence from one language to another, e.g. normalized interjections like--Acadian French, ‘faire à la didonce’ ‘to say hello!...’ Another type of interference involves the extension of the use of an indigenous word of the influenced language in conformity with a foreign model.
Romance languages in America have been influenced by English e.g., 'introduire' to introduce, loan translations usually occur, for example, Louisiana French 'marchandises sèches' for 'dry goods' and Canadian French 'escalier de feu' as opposed to the standard 'escalier de sauvetage'" (30).

CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND WRITING IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

It is an act that runs counter to both nature and morality to become a deserter to one’s own mother tongue and to give oneself to another.

Freidrich Schleiermacher, 1768-1834. German philosopher and translator.

The only living language is the language in which we think and have our being. We are given only one... we must content ourselves with the surfaces, grammatical and literary, of all the others.


According to Benveniste, language is a linguistic "system" composed of "éléments formels articulés en combinaisons variables, d’après certains principes de structures."¹ It is through the use of this system that mankind defines itself and gives expression to the world around it: "la langue fournit l’instrument d’un discours où la personnalité du sujet se délivre et se crée."² If, however, language can be approached as a system, we should not dissociate this system from its users. Language is not just an abstract system that exists independently but it is
at the very root of our mental, cultural and social systems. In his study on the dialogism of the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin reverses the strict definition of language as an abstract system and shows the importance of situating the study of language in its cultural and social framework. Bakhtin questions the unitary conception of language. For him, the concept of language as a unitary form is not a given fact but a hypothesis put forth by the linguist who fails to consider the heterogeneous aspect of discourse.  

The South African writer, Daniel Kunene has observed in his article "African Language Literature: Tragedy and Hope" (RAL vol. 23.1, 1992) that "language is the means by which the writer reveals his soul, and by the same token, the writer's language is the vehicle whereby the reader or critic attempts to fathom the depth of feeling he or she conveys" (7). Kunene goes on to say that we can only begin to comprehend, in a small way, the identity of writers--their religious beliefs, folklore, myths, proverbs, superstitions, humor, attitude towards life and death--if we know their language. If language is the determining factor in literature then the term "African literature" carries with it, as Abiola Irele (1990) has pointed out, a particular ambiguity of reference in its present and common usage. According to Irele "the association between language and literature can be said to be "natural" insofar as language constitutes the grounding structure of all literary
expression, so that the unity of a body of literature is more readily perceived in terms of its language of expression than by any other criterion."

The issue of language then is very central in discussions of African literature since literature is inconceivable outside the context of language. Questions pertaining to language always arise in any discussion of the subject. They assume even greater importance with regard to African literature than in relation to other literatures. This is because in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the medium of literary expression is usually not the writer's mother tongue but the dominant, foreign European language imposed over the indigenous African languages in the process of Euro-Christian colonization. Indeed, as Chantal Zabus (1991) points out, the multiplicity of languages and the concomitant language contact situation in African have always been not only a fertile soil for the germination of linguistic conjectures but also a source of challenge and discomfort for those Europhone writers eager to render the postcolonial complexity in their novels. It must be pointed out that even before the imposition of European languages on the continent, most Africans were multilingual or bilingual precisely because of the existence of several languages and the social contact that took place among people of differing linguistic backgrounds. However, these languages existed without any official hierarchization
and the question of which language to use in a given social situation was conditioned by the linguistic milieu in which the speaker found himself or herself. The added imposition of European languages as a result of colonization changed the linguistic landscape in Africa. The African situation was still characterized by multilingualism but there was a re-ordering of the language situation whereby the European languages assumed a position of power and therefore became the languages of official discourse. As official languages, the European languages were privileged and used in most areas of national endeavors. Hence, the most appropriate term to describe the African situation and the practice of literary (and other cultural activities) is the "situation of diglossia."

The term "diglossia" was first used in 1928 by J. Psichari who applied it to the socio-linguistic situation in Greece to account for the relation existing between written Greek and spoken Greek. It was used by the American linguist Charles A. Ferguson (1959) after the Greek word meaning "bilingualism." Yet, it differs from the latter, as Joshua Fishman (1967) argued later, since diglossia can exist without bilingualism and vice versa. A situation of diglossia is generally understood as one in which the linguistic functions of communications are distributed in a binary fashion between a culturally prestigious language with a written tradition and spoken by a minority on one
hand, and on the other hand, another language, generally widely spoken but devoid of prestige. In the African context a situation of diglossia operates where there is a political privileging of the foreign European language which assumes the position of a prestigious language because it is the language of government and other powerful institutions. Indeed, in Africa, English, French and Portuguese (as the case may be) derived their power from colonial history and had little trouble imposing themselves over the African languages because of their three-fold power: (1) they are written languages and therefore modern languages since, in popular consciousness at least, writing is associated with modernity; (2) they have literary traditions articulated around the concept of authorship; and (3) they are "textualized" or chirographically controlled languages, that is, they are languages tied to the written text.⁵

Since Africa had (and still has) over a thousand languages before its contact with Europe, it is not difficult to see diglossia as a result of this social situation (European conquest) and bilingualism or polyglottism as a mark of individual practices. The African writer is therefore essentially a polyglot writer writing in a situation of acute diglossia in a multilingual state. The language of the literature such a writer produces can thus be either the result of the interplay of linguistic codes or registers in the social arena or a literary-aesthetic medium
that bears no relation to the current use of the European language in the social arena.

The question of what language to use as a literary medium in Africa has repeatedly cropped up in literary discussions. Since the sixties, it has generated a large amount of scholarship and criticism which testifies to the socio-historical importance and the necessity of the debate. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o argues that the only way to retain an African literary identity is to write in African languages. However, such a proposition would argue for the recognition of national literatures in the new African States. But critics such as Abiola Irele question the very notion of national literatures since, in Irele’s words, "it is an incontrovertible fact that the European-language literatures in Africa... are not yet generally experienced as having attained such a status largely because the languages in which they are expressed have at best only an official acceptance; they are neither indigenous to the societies and cultures on which they have been imposed, nor are they national in any real sense of the word." 6

In the most quoted article in African literary criticism, "The Dead end of African Literature", Obiajunwa Wali claimed that no African literature could develop except in African languages. He asserts that "until [African] writers and their Western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African
languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration." Many issues were raised then (and they continue to be raised now) concerning the question of language in African literature. Is language the determining feature in African literature? Is it acceptable for the African writer to write in foreign languages? Obi Wali's statements came as a bombshell at a time when most African intellectuals favored European languages, when even Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who was later to champion the cultivation of African literatures in indigenous languages, preferred English mainly because "it had a large vocabulary." It is obvious from the foregoing analysis that in Africa, the language of literature is not just a linguistic event but a political event as well. The political aspect of the general issue of language in contemporary African writing was dramatized in 1977 by Ngugi's decision to turn to Gikuyu in his fiction and drama. "I believe," Ngugi explains in Decolonizing the Mind, "that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples" (28). Ngugi's crusade for the use of African languages in African literature is linked with the general question of whether language constructs culture or is constructed by it. Canvassing the relationship of
language to culture, Ngugi observes in Decolonizing the Mind:

Culture embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values, the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which [human beings] come to view themselves and their place in the universe. Values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis. (14-15)

Language, he concludes, is "inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world" (16). For Ngugi, language is a primary mediation on a more intimate level as well: "Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being" (15). According to him, language has been a primary tool in the colonialist subversion of the African mind and personality. Returning to the mother tongue therefore represents a reassertion of self in a multilingualistic, multicultural world. Ngugi’s preoccupations with language, as indeed the preoccupations of others concerned with the very notion of African literature, represent an anxious interrogation of language as a function of literature.

If Ngugi seems to close the debate for himself by saying "farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my
writings. From now on, it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way,\(^9\) he is so far the only major African writer to announce such a decision. Many African writers continue to write in European languages because of the existence of what Abiola Irele terms "Euro-African intertextuality." Irele sees the development of African literature in European languages as being in a very close relationship with, and sometimes a continuation of European literature. For him, African literature in the European languages can be said to have begun with European writing on Africa, for the Europeans not only initiated modern discourse on Africa but also established the terms in which that discourse has been carried on till the present day. For instance, Africa, seen as an exotic and primitive land, fascinated the English mind at least as early as the Elizabethan era. Thomas Underdowne's *The Ethiopian* (1587) was perhaps the first full length English work in which the African had the leading role. Shakespeare's *Othello* represents in part the fascination with Africa that filled the court of Elizabeth I. The theme of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) was the mysterious heart of Africa, and the quest for the treasures served as its structural mode. In Joseph Conrad's imagination, Africa came to acquire a mythological dimension. His *Heart of Darkness* (1903), set in Central Africa, explores a world of darkness of many kinds among which is the reality of colonial exploitation. Indeed,
there is a long tradition of Westerners or Non-African writers who utilized the subject matter of Africa in their literature before Africans themselves took up the mantle to refute the negative image of Africa that was portrayed in most of the works produced by these Non-Africans. In other words, when Africans themselves began to produce literature in the languages of their colonizers they were continuing a long established tradition of Europhone writing on Africa.

Even though the bedrock of African literature is its orality which is firmly grounded in the traditions of the people, its form and style are clearly modelled on the European conventions of literature. In other words, one could describe the modern African novel, for instance, as a hybrid product which draws on African orature and literature and is clothed in imported literary traditions. The point to note here is that Africans borrowed European literary traditions precisely because of their contact with Europe through colonialism.

Thus, because the modern history of Africa has been linked with colonialism, we are confronted with a broad range of responses to the legacy of colonialism in terms of its impact upon the use of language. Kofi Anyidoho (1992) has categorized the diversity of opinion and practice in African literature (and the literature of the diaspora) under four broadly defined tendencies: (1) an acceptance of the languages of enslavement and colonization as the only
practical, albeit inadequate, tool of self-expression; (2) an Africanization of the colonizer's language and the attempt to transform it into a weapon of cultural liberation and identity; (3) a repudiation of the imposed language of enslavement/colonization and a return to the mother tongue; (4) a reinvention of the "mother tongue" as nation language in the African diaspora. These categorizations all seem to indicate the very fact that African and African heritage literary creators have had to deal with the problem of language at a fundamental level.

We have already discussed the case of Ngugi and his proposal for a return to the mother tongue as the most appropriate means of articulating African identity and culture. Among the other available options outlined above, many chose to accept what Chinua Achebe (1975) describes as "the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature." However, if Achebe and other Africans write in English, this European language has had to pay a certain price as a vehicle of communication on the continent. An excerpt from Achebe's Arrow of God will convey the point. In the novel Achebe describes a scene where the chief priest Ezeulu calls his son, Oduchen, and explains why he wants to send him to the Christian church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place.
My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow. (50-51)

This same text, the author reveals in one of his essays in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, could be rewritten as follows:

I am sending you as my representative among those people - just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man's ways will regret their lack of foresight. (13)

In these two excerpts, it is evident that the linguistic structure of the first version is highly influenced by the author's mother tongue. Achebe believed that such a process transforms the colonial language into what Aimé Césaire calls a "miraculous weapon" with which the colonized African can subvert colonialism. And indeed, some of the finest works in the Anglophone literary canon are works done in this vein. For the most part, such works exhibit a copious transposition of features drawn from African linguistic and oral literary resources. Achebe's manifesto on his own practice published in "The African Writer and the English Language," (1964) is typical of this tendency:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings. (103)

Achebe's success in transposing Igbo proverbs and idioms into "a new English" offers considerable support for this position. However, Achebe's "new English" is not the invention of a new language but rather a translation or, if
you will, a transformation of the syntactic and lexical structures of his mother tongue into the mainstream English language, thereby giving this language a new flavor. Needless to say, this situation has arisen simply because of the fact that Achebe and other bilingual African writers are products of colonialism.

In a chapter entitled "Word against object," an introductory, autobiographical section to After Babel, (1975) George Steiner describes himself in these terms:

I have no recollection whatever of a first language. So far as I am aware, I possess equal currency in English, French, and German. What I can speak, write, or read of other languages has come later and retains a 'feel' of conscious acquisition. But I experience my first three tongues as perfectly equivalent centres of myself. I speak and I write them with indistinguishable ease.... It was habitual, unnoticed practice for my mother to start a sentence in one language and finish it in another. At home, conversations were interlinguistic not only inside the same sentence or speech segment, but as between speakers. Only a sudden wedge of interruption or roused consciousness would make me realize that I was replying to a question put in German or English or vice versa. Even these three 'mother tongues' were only a part of the linguistic spectrum in my early life. Strong particles of Czech and Austrian Yiddish continued active in my father's idiom. And beyond these, like a familiar echo of voice just out of hearing lay Hebrew. This polyglot matrix was far more than a hazard of private condition. It organized, it imprinted on my grasp of personal identity, the formidably complex, resourceful cast of feeling of Central European and Judaic humanism. (115-116)

Compare Steiner's rendition of his plurilingual experience to that of the Moroccan sociologist, novelist and poet Abdelkebir Khatibi in his autobiographical text La Mémoire tatouée published in 1971:
A l'école, un enseignement laïc, imposé à ma religion: je devins triggot, lisant le français sans le parler, jouant avec quelques bribes de l'arabe écrit, et parlant le dialecte comme quotidien. Où, dans ce chassé-croisé, la cohérence et la continuité? (64)

I have quoted Steiner's remarks about his plurilinguism at length and compared it with Khatibi's remarks in order to show at what level bilingualism or multilingualism differs in the two different contexts. At first glance, the experiences of these two plurilingual subjects might appear parallel. However, as Samia Mehrez (1992) has pointed out, a closer look at the position from which each subject makes his statements will prove that their plurilinguism is produced under a set of significantly different historical circumstances. According to Mehrez, whereas Steiner grounds his experience in a Judeo-Christian, European humanistic tradition, Khatibi locates his own within the colonial context. If Steiner has no recollection of a "first language," Khatibi quite obviously hierarchizes the language layering in his childhood: the Moroccan dialect spoken at home, classical Arabic barely mastered at the Koranic schools for Muslim children, and the "imposed" French language of the colonizer learned at the French lycée. Steiner's "mother tongues" operate on a level of equality, they happen almost simultaneously, but Khatibi's linguistic capacities remain unequal, discontinuous and decidedly shaped by a gradual process of acculturation to the dominant, namely the French language and culture.
Accordingly, Mehrez argues, what is absent from Steiner’s autobiographical note, an absence which circumscribes the ideological limits of his project and indeed his entire monumental work on translation, is precisely the political context and power relations within which language acquisition takes place. "Having located his own personal experience within the confines of humanism," Mehrez points out, "Steiner is bound to exclude, in his otherwise classic work on translation theory, questions of colonialism and cultural hegemony which many Third World postcolonial plurilingual writers, writing in the language of the ex-colonizer, must confront."\(^\text{10}\)

In addition, it must be stressed that Steiner’s situation is in fact quite exceptional. Franz Kafka, a Prague-Jew, considered the use of the German language by German-Jewish writers as the: "overt or covert, or possibly self-tormenting usurpation of an alien property, which has not been acquired but stolen, (...) quickly picked up, and which remains someone else’s possession even if not a single linguistic mistake can be pointed out."\(^\text{11}\) It is equally interesting to note that describing his relationship with his mother Kafka noted in one of his journals translated into French:

"Si je n’ai pas toujours aimé ma mère comme elle le méritait et comme j’en étais capable, c’est uniquement parce que la langue allemande m’en a empêché. La mère juive n’est pas une "Mutter," cette façon de l’appeler la rend ridicule (le mot Mutter ne l’est pas en soi
Kafka’s characterization of the use of the German language by German-Jewish writers, and his own experience with language, comes close to the situation of African writers writing in the language of the colonizer.

What is striking in Kafka’s case and that of Khatibi is the recurrence and manner in which they characterize the nature of the problems caused by the encounter of two languages. Although La Mémoire tatouée is Khatibi’s autobiographical narrative, he makes no attempt at reconstructing a linear past. Rather, he actively preserves his tattooed memory. His writing is a means of representing the torn experience of the colonized, bilingual subject. His mutilated memory is reproduced both in his use of the language and in the very structure of his text. The different segmented episodes are reflections on the narrator’s colonized, bilingual childhood. The end result is an amalgam of images impressed upon the narrator’s imagination as part of his colonial experience:

"On connaît l’imagination coloniale: juxtaposer, compartimenter, militariser, découper la ville en zones ethniques, ensabler la culture du peuple dominé. En découvrant son dépaysement, ce peuple errera, hagard, dans l’espace brisé de son histoire. Et il n’y a de plus atroce que la déchirure de la mémoire." (54)
According to Mehrez (1992) Khatibi's text gains its strength from constraints: "son dépaysement," "l'espace brisé de son histoire," and "la déchirure de la mémoire." All these constraints are transformed into creative opportunities, as the narrative proceeds, to re-present the imprints of the colonial imagination. Just as Khatibi accepts and parodies his compartmentalized past, so does he accept, and live, his plurilingualism and the layering that must come with it. This is how the narrator encapsulates his attitude towards his bilingualism and biculturalism towards the end of *La Mémoire tatouée*:

*L'Occident est une partie de moi, que je ne peux nier que dans la mesure où je lutte contre tous occidentals et orientaux qui m'oppriment ou me désenchantent.* (118)

If one considers the fact that the subtitle of *La Mémoire tatouée* is *Autobiographie d'un décolonisé*, it becomes apparent that the word "décolonisé" signifies a gesture towards that double movement of decolonization, the beginnings of a radical bilingualism, uninhibited by the constraints of the past and the present: a war against all oppressive occidents and orientals. In this context, writing, for the bilingual colonized writer, must always become an act of translating a lived experience. For Khatibi, postcolonial bilingual writers must transform their plurilingualism into a radical element that defies compartmentalization and hierarchies. In *Maghreb pluriel*
Khatibi defines the path for the postcolonial bilingual writers:

Sommes-nous destinés à porter la violence contre les autres pour leur faire entendre la voix de la raison? À les menacer de guerre, de destruction et de culpabilité immonde pour que l’Occident se retourne contre son autosuffisance et son ethnocentrisme, maintenant élévés au niveau planétaire? Et pourtant, nous pouvons, Tiers-monde, poursuivre une tierce voie... une subversion en quelque sorte double, qui, se donnant le pouvoir de parole et d’action, se met en oeuvre dans une différence intraitable. (51)

This third way, this double subversion, this uncompromising difference, is indeed what characterizes Khatibi’s *Amour bilingue*. In this novel the question of how one loves as a bilingual serves as a pre-text for the author’s theory and practice of being the bi-langue, rather than the bilingue. Whereas the bilingue would use one language at a time, Khatibi’s bi-langue, in constant motion between the different layers of languages, perpetually maintaining a space "in between," requires a reader who can do the same: what Khatibi calls "la scénographie des double. Un mot: déjà deux: déjà un recit" (*Amour bilingue*, 11). In a preface to Marc Gontard’s *La Violence du texte* Khatibi insists:

La langue "maternelle" est à l’oeuvre dans la langue étrangère. De l’une à l’autre se déroule une traduction permanente et un entretien en abîme, extrêmement difficile à mettre au jour. (8)

And so, instead of simply telling about this constant translation from one language to the other, Khatibi consciously shows it. In *Amour bilingue* there is a
perpetual migration of signs which takes place between
classical Arabic, the spoken Moroccan dialect, and French,
the three main layers that Khatibi juggles, in a constant
state of interdependence and intersignification in the text:

Et en français - sa langue étrangère - le mot est près
de la mort, il ne lui manque qu'une seule lettre... il se calma d'un coup, lorsqu'apparut le mot arabe kalma
avec son équivalent savant kalima et toute la chaîne de
diminutifs, calembours de son enfance: klima... La
diglossie kal(ima) revint sans que disparût ni
s'effaçât le mot mot. Tous deux s'observaient en lui,
précédant l'émersion maintenant rapide de souvenirs,
fragments de mots, onomatopées, phrases en guirlandes,
enlacées à mort: indéchiffrables. (10)

This passage is an instance of the never-ending and
uninterrupted chain of significations and associations which
co-exist in the bi-langue's mind. In Khatibi's view, the
bilingual writer remains constantly aware of the presence of
the two languages in his conscious mind. However, as the
above quotation clearly demonstrates, the complex inner
workings of the two languages can never be completely
analyzed because much of their interaction occurs on a sub-
conscious level. The two words (calma, kalima) one French,
one Arabic, (not to mention the dialectal Arabic word which
is brought to mind by the more erudite Arabic form) are
present in the writer/narrator's conscious mind, where they
affect and "call out" to each other. While this diglossia
is a unique gift, it is also a burden because the language
of the Other can never be a single, unified source of
creativity for the bilingual writer. For Khatibi "la langue
française n'est pas la langue française: elle est plus ou moins toute les langues internes et externes qui la font et la défont" (Maghreb Pluriel, 188). This perspective shows that the language of the Other and the maternal language translate each other. Language then can defy its signifying history, it can be purged of its own past utterances. Even though Khatibi tacitly articulates the voice of the Other, his articulation is ineluctably mixed with signs from the mother tongue, signs which make the voice plural.

As Danielle Marx-Scouras (1986, 8-9)) has argued "in its connotations of universality and hegemony, the idea of "francophonie" becomes synonymous with cultural imperialism.... A society which imposes monolingualism and recognizes only one national language is one which fails to acknowledge that desire is plural, for there are as many languages as there are desires (speaking subjects)". Thus, in the case of Khatibi, the process of translation is a perpetual one, and the traces of both classical Arabic and the dialect are always present within the French. Any reader who approaches Khatibi's text is therefore expected to perform the same act of perpetual translation.

Reda Bensmaïa (1987) explains that the title page of Amour bilinque offers perhaps the most articulate and symbolic rendition of such expectations. The French title appears in bold red letters at the top of the page. At the bottom is its "translation" written in Arabic calligraphy.
Accordingly, this bilingual title page remains semi-readable for the monolingual, just as the text itself would be, if the reader fails to decode its plurilingual strategies. In other words, the complete signification of the French title can only be understood in its relationship with the Arabic title because they are interdependent. According to Mehrez, the understanding of the word _amour_ in the title depends on the unreadable (i.e., for the monolingual reader) Arabic word _'ishq_, which can signify two things: on the one hand, it can mean earthly passion, and on the other, when read within the context of the Islamic mystical tradition, it will mean one of the higher stages of the mystical experience. The French _bilingue_ is rendered in Arabic dual form for the word _lisan_, i.e., _lisanayn_. Hence, the "translation" which appears on the title page, in Arabic calligraphy, is: _'ishq al-lisanayn_. Now, the Arabic title can convey multiple meanings, and it is in this respect that the French title will depend on it for full signification.

Mehrez points out further that the word _lisan_ itself can have more than one meaning. On the one hand, _lisan_ means tongue, both in the physical and figurative meanings of the word, i.e., both the organ of speech and the language which it utters. Hence, the word _lisanayn_ in the title can be read as a sign for the two languages (_langues_), French and Arabic, which are forever simultaneously at work in the North African writer’s mind. This level of signification
explains Khatibi’s invention of the word bilangue in French, as a means to convey the simultaneity of the two languages. On the other hand, the word lisan in its dual form lisanayn can be read as a sign for the internal divisions within the Arabo-Islamic culture itself. The division between orthodox, institutional Islamic discourse and the popular, mystical tradition which has always been marginalized, and which Khatibi brings into the text as part of his total make-up as a plurilangue. Furthermore, lisanayn can be read as the division between classical Arabic (high culture) and the Arabic dialects (popular culture), where the latter have always been devalued. And so, to understand the plurilangue in the text, one must first understand the intricate interplay on the title page.

How does bilingual writing affect the critical translator? According to James McGuire (1992) the act of translating, that is disarticulating and rearticulating, ought to be of primary importance to the bilingual writer who faces the need to choose a language. The bilingual writer vacillates between two or more languages since no single language is capable of articulating the secret functionings of a bilingual mind. In this instance, the fundamental dilemma of the translator resembles that of the bilingual author. Just as bilingual writers betray one language in their choice of the other, so the translator is sometimes bound to misrepresent or be unfaithful to the
original. Any translator can empathize with the loss suffered by the bilingual writer in travelling from one language to another.

Describing the "agony it was to switch from Russian to English," Vladimir Nabokov noted in one of his letters that "not only style but subject undergoes a horrible bleeding and distortion when translated into another language."\(^{12}\) McGuire has pointed out that in any act of translation, there is a residue of infidelity towards language, a trace of the intention to subvert and dislocate it, within the translator's awareness of his or her inability to reproduce the original, to "carry it over" intact.

I have already pointed out Walter Benjamin's rejection of the notion that translation can or should be faithful to the original text, in his essay "The Task of the Translator." According to Benjamin, "the task of the translator... may be regarded as distinct and clearly different from the task of the poet. The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational" (76-77). For Benjamin, poets write experience with language as medium, and their frustration lies in the unsuitability of language to experience. In contrast, translators mediate between language and language. Their intention is parasitic to that of the poet, and they are doomed to be unfaithful to the poet in the same way that the poet is doomed to be
unfaithful to experience. What is treacherous for both the translator and the poet is language. In the same way, the predicament of the bilingual writer consists of the inability of one language to assimilate perfectly the experience that is already imperfectly embedded in the other. The bilingual writer therefore suffers doubly from the failure of both languages to articulate a double self.

Under these circumstances, according to Benjamin, the bilingual writer seeks a reconciliation, a suturing, a healing. In his comments on Benjamin's essay, Paul de Man insists that "the suffering that is mentioned, the failure, is not a human failure; it does not refer to any subjective experience.... The reasons... are specifically linguistic" (38). In de Man's opinion, translation "implies... the suffering of what one thinks of as one's own--the suffering of the original language.... What translation reveals is that (...) alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering" (37). The predicament of the bilingual writer is thus merely the compound suffering that is involved in any act of re-writing. Thus, in Mcguire's opinion, a new displacement from experience occurs at each new scene of writing, and translation is the paradigm of such
displacements. Writing itself, like history, derives from something we believe to be pure, real, sensual.

Benjamin has used the term "reine Sprache" ("pure language") to convey the idea that what one writes is never wholly what one intends. According to him, this intention manifests itself in the act of translation, although he admits that fidelity to the original text will never release its intention. Translation serves rather to elevate the original into the realm of pure language. Although this elevation can never be total, he argues, there is a coming together, an interlingual production of meaning: "the language of translation can—indeed, must—let itself go, so that it gives voice to the intention of the original not as a reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of intention" (79).

The inherent failure of language as it is posited by Benjamin, and as commented upon by de Man, undermines any lingering notions that language can be policed and purified by a history as derivative as language itself. Reda Bensmaïa states that, in the case of Khatibi's writing,

"il ne s’agit plus de savoir s’il faut écrire en arabe ou en français, si cela est nécessaire ou contingent, politiquement juste ou faux, mais de faire apparaître un niveau "autre" (infra-liminaire) d'écriture et de pensée...." ("Traduire," 138).

Thus, as we have seen, the notion of bilingual writing as translation is explicit in Khatibi's fictional and
theoretical work. For example in *Maghreb pluriel*, he writes that "le texte opère une traduction continue de son énoncé (ceci est cela)"
(207). He also states that "l’extraordinaire serait d’écrire en quelque sorte à plusieurs mains, à plusieurs langues dans un texte qui ne soit qu’une perpetuelle traduction" (205). For this reason when Khatibi describes a "jouissance de l’intraduisible" (*Maghreb Pluriel*, 206) and a "folie de la langue" (*Amour bilingue*, 38), his theoretical position becomes strikingly similar to Benjamin’s concept of a "reine Sprache." There is an ecstasy in the contemplation of the untranslatable; and at the same time there is madness, a breakdown of the writer in front of a language that cannot be written. This is Khatibi’s position in *Maghreb pluriel*:

Dès que le bilinguisme et le monolinguisme sont hantés par un dehors intraduisible, les auteurs font appel à des fragments d’autres langues, comme si le texte ne devrait pas revenir à sa langue propre, et se multipliait vers une jouissance toujours plus écartée, et vers un ailleurs qui fait reculer l’indicible, le silence, la folie d’écrire et la confusion des langues dans leurs limites. Parler en langues est le récit de cette folie sous surveillance. Mais la situation peut se retourner et emporter l’écrivain, le briser dans des actes d’affolement et de déraison. (190)

The "ailleurs" in this context is the field of signification, or the "espace de signifiance" described by Charles Bonn (1985) that has been opened up in the interstice between two languages. From the interdependence of linguistic codes in the bilingual subject emerges a third language. Khatibi himself clearly describes the emergence
of what he terms the "bi-langue," a double-tongue
articulated outside of all closed signifying systems:

La langue étrangère, dès lors qu’elle est intériorisée
comme écriture effective, comme parole en acte,
transforme la langue première, elle la structure et la
déporte vers l’intraduisible. J’avancerais ceci: la
langue dite étrangère ne vient pas s’ajouter à l’autre,
ni opérer avec elle une pure juxtaposition: chacune
fait signe à l’autre, l’appelle à se maintenir comme
dehors. Dehors contre dehors, cette étrangeté: ce que
désire une langue (si j’ose parler ainsi) c’est d’être
singulière, irredétable, rigoureusement autre. Je
pense... que la traduction opère selon cette
intraitabilité, cette distanciation sans cesse reculée
et disruptive. Et en effet, toute cette littérature
maghrébine dite d’expression française est un récit de
traduction. Je ne dis pas qu’elle n’est que
traduction, je précise qu’il s’agit d’un récit qui
parle en langues. (Maghreb pluriel, 186).

Thus in Maghrebian literature languages are uprooted,
severed from their "origin" and transplanted as one, their
differences absorbed by an act of translation. In this way,
the process of translation becomes the locus of the
production of meaning in a text. What Khatibi says of North
African literature is equally applicable to sub-saharan
African literature.

Indeed, as Mehrez (1992) argues, the emergence and
continuing growth on the world literary scene of
postcolonial anglophone and francophone literatures are
bound to challenge and redefine many accepted notions in
translation theory which continue to be debated and
elaborated within the longstanding traditions of western
"humanism" and "universalism." These postcolonial texts,
frequently referred to as "hybrid" or "métissés" because of
the cultural and linguistic layering within them, have succeeded in forging a new language that defies the very notion of a "foreign" text that can be readily translatable into another language. With this literature we can no longer merely concern ourselves with conventional notions of linguistic equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long been a consideration in translation theory. For these texts written by postcolonial bilingual subjects create a language "in between" and therefore come to occupy a space "in between."

Hence, in using the language of the ex-colonizer it has been important for postcolonial bilingual writers to go beyond a passive form of contestation, where the postcolonial text remained prisoner of western literary models and standards, restrained by the dominant form and language. It was crucial for the postcolonial text to challenge both its own indigenous, conventional models as well as the dominant structures and institutions of the colonizer in a newly forged language that would accomplish this double movement. Indeed, the ultimate goal of such literature is to subvert hierarchies by bringing together the "dominant" and the "repressed," by exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual interdependence and intersignification.
This process is one where the language of the Other comes to encode messages which are not readily decoded by the monolingual reader whose referential world continues to exclude, ignore, and deny the existence of other referential worlds that are crucial to a more "global" rather than "colonialist" reading of the text. By drawing on more than one culture, more than one language, more than one world experience, within the confines of the same text, postcolonial Anglophone and Francophone literatures very often defy our notions of an "original" work and its translation. Hence, in many ways these postcolonial plurilingual texts in their own right resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: "in between," at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the writing and reading experience. Thus, as Georges Mounin (1963) declares, if theoretically translation is impossible, on a practical level, it does exist. It does exist for the bilingual African writer whose information filters through a different signifier. And it exists for the critical translator who mediates between two or more languages with their attendant social and cultural implications.

The chapters that follow will explore in detail the writings of Henri Lopes, Jean-Marie Adiaffi, Tierno Monenembo, Ahmadou Kourouma and Sony Labou Tansi, their
awareness of the diglossic situation in their societies, and the various means through which they appropriate and re-work the European language through a translation from their African languages in order to subvert and counter Euro-centric models and discourse.

NOTES


2 ibid. 25 & 77.


6 Irele, op. cit. 32.


CHAPTER III

A. HENRI LOPES: WRITING AFRICAN LANGUAGES IN LE PLEURER-RIRE.

In this chapter I intend to examine how, on the one hand, Henri Lopes writes African languages into French and simulates vernacular speech patterns into his written text, and on the other, how Jean-Marie Adiaffi uses writing as a quest for an African identity. I will also demonstrate how the writings of these two writers fall within the creative translation process.

One of the people to whom Labou Tansi dedicated his La vie et demie at its publication in 1979 was Henri Lopes: "À Henri Lopes aussi puisque en fin de compte je n'ai écrit que son livre." When, three years later, Henri Lopes published Le Pleurer-rire he also made allusion to Sony Labou Tansi's La vie et demie when he put the following words in the mouth of his narrator: "Yéhé! Vous allez croire que je me vante, mais je vous assure qu'alors, c'était vraiment ce qu'on appelle "la vie et demie," comme je l'ai lu quelque part, depuis lors" (195). These references by the writers to each other's work do not simply imply that they come from the same country and know each other's works, but they clearly
point to a certain convergence in the way and manner in which they treat the same theme in their respective books. Indeed, the theme of dictatorship and the language for expressing this theme find echo in the works of these authors.

Le Pleurer-rire is about the rule of Tonton Ideloy Bwakamabé Na Sakkadé, a former soldier in the French colonial army who acceded to power in his country through a coup d'état. According to Arlette Chemain-Degrange (1991) Tonton's first name takes up the initials, abbreviated on the Post Office calendar, of Ignace de Loyola, the 16th century Spanish soldier and ecclesiastic who founded the Society of Jesus, and his last name when translated from the mother tongue means "the bad part to be thrown away." (We shall return to the importance of the meaning of the names of the characters later in this discussion.)

The main theme of the novel is political dictatorship. However, the author does not only describe dictatorship in the way in which it typically manifests itself, but he analyses it in all its complexities. As Koffi Anyineffa (1990) points out, Le Pleurer-rire illustrates categories of thinking and behavior characteristic of the phenomenon of
dictatorship. These categories, like pieces of mosaic, constitute the very structure of the novel. Different voices, different styles of writing, and especially different languages come together to form the structural unity of the story.

The first voice in the novel is that of the "Association interafricaine des Censeurs francophones" which, we are told, wrote the "Sérieux Avertissement" (9-12) that opens the book. In this "Avertissement" Henri Lopes raises two important issues for African literature: censorship and criticism. Anticipating that his novel would be censored because it was judged "comme contenant des expressions et imputations téméraires, scandaleuses et injurieuses à la Haute Magistrature en général, à l’africaine en particulier" (9), Lopes raises the problem of censorship in Africa and shows also the commercial and financial advantages a writer can derive from censorship.

By resorting to censorship the government takes upon itself the power to decide which books the citizens can read and arrogates to itself the function of defender of morals and critical ideologies. It is in their so-called role as defenders of critical ideologies that the writers of the "Avertissement" consider Le Pleurer-rire "comme un jouet d’un vaste complot orchestré par des forces obscures qui cherchent à semer la subversion dans chaque recoin de notre cher continent et à y introduire des idéologies étrangères
et dissolvantes." They go on to describe the author as "un esthète anarcho-décadent qui a compris les ressorts les plus primitifs de la psychologie des masses et s’en sert machiavéliquement pour décupler les revenus de la vente de son poison" (10).

The second issue raised in the "Avertissement" is the issue of African literary criticism and its place in the reception of African literature. Lopes satirizes critics of African literature who think they alone possess the relevant criteria under which African literature should be judged. He ridicules those literary critics (in this case represented by the censors) who decide what passes as African literature by commenting on the content, style and language of fiction according to their own set of criteria:

Ainsi, à l’heure où l’Afrique, face à son destin historique, a besoin de héros exaltant les valeurs morales positives et notre cosmogonie ancestrale, à l’heure où vous, lecteurs, réclamez une littérature d’évasion, messieurs nos écrivains, eux, utilisent leur imagination débridée à peindre l’Afrique et les Africains en noir -- mais sur un ton qui n’a rien à voir avec la négritude....

L’Afrique a besoin de clarté et ce livre introduit la confusion. Il égare les esprits curieux, pendant plus de trois cents pages, sur de faux problèmes.
Non, les lecteurs sains savent qu’il n’existe pas de Président aussi léger, burlesque et cruel que Tonton.
(9-11)

And he takes to task literary critics whose judgement on the aesthetics of African literature, especially on style and language, is simply based on what is right or wrong:

Enfin, Dieu merci! ce style d’homme de la rue ne pourra séduire l’amateur du bel art. Si, à la rigueur, c’est
ainsi que l'on parle dans nos rues, ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on doit écrire. LE PLEURER-RIRE est une offense au bon goûte. (11)

The second voice in the novel is that of the narrator, the principal voice which is marked by a consciousness of the act of writing, as well as the desire to tell a story by updating and bringing past events to life. Right at the opening of the book, the narrative game is clearly defined and readers are made aware that the story will be a written testimony:

Manquant de confiance en moi, j'ai consulté un compatriote, ancien directeur de cabinet de Tonton, vivant aujourd'hui en exil. Voici sa réaction aux premières pages qu'on vient de lire. (51)

While this testimony may be taken as a requirement for objectivity ("Je l'ai vu, de mes yeux vu, j'y étais" (87), and a certain detachment ("Le lecteur aura apprécié mon calme tout au long des pages" (260), it is still obvious that the narrator organizes his discourse according to certain subjective modalities whose origin and content he controls:

Je ne raconterai pas la cérémonie de prestation du serment du magistrat suprême de notre nation.... Non, là n'est pas l'essentiel. Je préfère relater ici la nuit d'investiture coutumière. (44)

Sometimes the voice of the narrator is taken over by that of "Radio-trottoir" ("bush telegraph," the rumor mongering machine on the streets of Moundié) which constitutes a psycho-sociological complex in the novel. According to Sewanou Dably (1986):
C'est une conscience populaire dilatée et particulièrement paradoxale: elle rejette souvent le discours démagogique du pouvoir mais admire le maréchal Bwakamabé; ayant intériorisé le discours colonial, elle est extravertie mais apparaît également comme le prolongement de la tradition orale dans son habileté à transformer les événements en récits imagés et satiriques, ou en mythes. (150)

By structuring Radio-trottoir to serve as an extension of popular consciousness, Lopes invests it with authority and significance. As a potential counter-power, Radio trottoir has a psycho-therapeutic function which liberates the people from their frustrations but at the same time, it comes up as a means of self-alienation because of the fatalistic passiveness and strange mixture of ideas (superstitions) that constitutes its essential nature. As a cultural phenomenon and a component of counter-discourse, in the sense that it subverts and inverts official discourse, Radio-trottoir appears in the story as a center of episodic narrative. Its gaze at times goes beyond that of the narrator and rejoins the external voice and gaze of the Directeur de Cabinet (Tonton’s former collaborator who is now in exile) and the foreign newspapers (Le Monde and Gavroche aujourd’hui) which share in the construction of reality as it is presented in the novel. The Directeur de Cabinet and the two foreign newspapers move through the universe of the novel with their more or less subjective commentaries and, in conformity with the other sources of information, manage to objectivize the fictional reality in
which the narrator becomes finally a simple organizer of the
different pieces of information.

We need to point out that the Directeur de Cabinet
plays the role of both historical analyst and literary
critic. Having participated in the system of government
being discussed in the novel, he is in a better position to
clarify and rectify certain details in the information
provided. In this case he becomes the guarantor of the
authenticity of the reported facts. However, he bears the
brunt of Lopes’ irony in his role as literary critic since
it is precisely in this role that he reproaches the narrator
for a heterogeneous mixture of genres (history, sociology,
ethnology, politics and pornography) and the absence of a
positive hero.

The final voice in the novel is that of Soukali, the
narrator’s mistress whose letter, entitled "Quand Soukali
enjambe la fenêtre du roman ou (au choix) de la réalité"
(313), closes the novel. With the voice of Soukali, the
author suggests the fictional as well as the realistic
nature of his story. While denying that the story was
actually written by the narrator, Soukali suggests that it
was rather written by a young cardiologist, and insists that
the Maître and Tonton Bwakamabé exist only in the
imagination of this cardiologist. At the same time Soukali
goes on to assert that:
Même si les noms de personnes et de lieux sonnent étrangers à nos oreilles, même si tu livres ça et là, dans le texte des mots d’un dialecte imaginaire, forgé par toi seul, la plus myope des taupes reconnaîtra "Le Pays". Il y a, entre ton histoire et notre actualité, à peine plus de différence qu’entre un Van Gogh, un Cézanne ou un Modigliani et la photographie du modèle originel. (314)

It is on the stylistic level that the author’s project of writing as translation is evident. In this sense Henri Lopes’ style comes close to that of Ahmadou Kourouma since, like Kourouma, he has also translated traditional forms of story telling into his written medium of expression. From orality the maître d’hôtel, the narrator-actor of the story, conserves a rhythm which is punctuated by exclamatory phrases and expressions that introduce the story: "En vérité, je vous le dis..." (58), "En ce temps-là..." (61), and constitute a way of reassuring the reader: "Les applaudissements fusèrent spontanément. Spontanément, je vous l’assure" (87). He also prevents his readers from setting the story in a specific region. In this way he emphasizes the fictional nature of the story he is narrating:

Certains risqueraient de croire que c’est dans la capitale de leur pays que vit Bwakamabe Na Sakkadé, ce qui est bien sûr totalement faux et absurde. En vérité, je vous le dis, le Pays n’est pas sur la carte. Si vous tenez à le trouver, c’est dans le temps qu’il faut le chercher.
Allez, tournez la page! (58).

This passage makes two important points about African literature: in terms of situating the novel, this passage clearly points to the fact that even if the events
represented in the novel parallel events in a specific country, as a work of fiction the novel has a much more wider application. Secondly, it underscores the point that no criterion is in and by itself sufficient to account for the literary qualities of an African work of art.

The need to communicate directly with the reader, which we shall see in the case of Les Soleils des Indépendances, also comes across very powerfully in Le Pleurer-rire where an imaginary reader is introduced. "Allez, tournez la page!" in the above passage clearly simulates the interaction between the narrator/storyteller and his reader/audience. The imaginary reader becomes a full member of the universe of the novel, finds himself implicated in the story and is linked to the narrator by a relationship of complicity. Thus, the narrator can either tell him about his emotions concerning the events he narrates: "Le lecteur entend bien ma gorge serrée" (109), win his kindness: "Le lecteur n’a pas à regretter les quelques chapitres initialement prévus ici..." (294), or show him how to proceed in his reading: "Tonton montrait de son doigt épais.... Et il parla, insulta, parla, insulta, parla, montra le poing, insulta, parla jusqu’à... (traîner sur le à)" (132-133). Thus, borrowing from oral literature, Lopes achieves the kind of symbiotic relationship that exists between storyteller and audience which is necessary for the successful realization of an oral performance.
Another aspect borrowed from oral literature concerns the notion of time. In oral narratives events can occur in several hundred years or in a day. Past events can be interpreted as if they happened today. Events do not necessarily follow one another in a clear chronological way and they are narrated according to how they present themselves to the imagination of the storyteller. Even if one can situate the time frame of Le Pleurer-rire as the period of the Vietnam war as some of the passages in the novel indicate (pages 15 and 104), one has to keep in mind as well that the dating remains on the whole very vague, as can be seen from these expressions that introduce the chapters or the episodes:

Ce jour-là... (75)
Il n’y avait pas encore, alors, d’avocats africains au pays. (307)

By freeing his novel from a rigid chronology Henri Lopes contributes to a change in the project of fictional writing in Africa. Thus, for Henri Lopes, it’s not just a matter of presenting a period through an individual’s adventure which will symbolize that of the community but rather of revealing the complexity of a situation (in this case that of the exercise and reception of power) whose effects reach the depths of human consciousness. In the final analysis, the only thing that matters is the general sense of turmoil and confusion prevailing in the country. And their translation reveals more of the meticulousness of the narrative analysis
than any precisions of time and space relating to the framework within which are inscribed the significant elements of the events to be narrated. To show that events in the story do not follow any organized chronological order, Lopes makes his narrator affirm:

C'était à Genève, je crois. Peu importe la date, il s'y rendait si souvent.... Le détail chronologique, comme on va le voir, ne change rien au sens du récit (281).

Another stylistic device employed by the author is the introduction of popular expressions or slang into the speech patterns of his characters. He makes them break the rules of etiquette and those of language which require a distinction between the two registers of written and spoken language, between popular language and that of the "gens bien" and intellectuals described as "le long français, long, long, long comme ça" (278). Tonton Bwakamabé himself, the Head of State, for example, resorts shamelessly to curses and insults: "con de sa maman" (214), "je vous encule tous" (138), "petit con" (209), "nom de Dieu" (69), "salopards", (146). As for the narrator, the former cook who becomes the President’s butler, he peppers his account with terms and expressions such as "merde" (27), "trouille" (26), "bouffer" (26), "troufion" (201), "zigouiller" (140), "vos gueules" (147), "couillon" (292), "foutre la pagaille" (259). Even though these expressions are found in the French série noire and they call to mind the style of Céline
in *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, they also attest to Lopes’ attempt to introduce originality in the speech manners of his characters. Besides, what governs the dynamics of Céline’s style, for instance, exists within the borders of the French language (and therefore never suggests another language) in the way that Lopes’ prose does.

At the syntactic level Bwakamabé and other characters constantly disregard the syntactic norms of the language by using an abridged syntax (which characterizes spoken language) and by systematically omitting the subject personal pronoun:

> Non, non, non. Me faut des traces. Comme ça, si y en a un qui demain s’amuse à désobéir, gba, je frappe. Avec les nègres, faut des traces. Sont de trop mauvaise foi. Quand on les punit, au lieu de reconnaître leur faute et de dire pardon, non, vont agiter leur tribu en pleurant que, wo! sont des victimes de l’injustice. (235)

In the above quotation, we can observe the mark of Lingala in the ideophone "gba" and the exclamatory "wo!" In addition, expressions such as "manger l’argent" (16), "la femme-là vraiment" (164), "la bouche, la bouche, c’est seulement pour la bouche et la parlation que nous, là, on est fort" (36) are translated literally from Lingala, thus giving the French an authentic African flavor. The following passage with an interjectional tone presents yet another feature of spoken language:

> Peur que je devienne communiste! Parce que je parle de résurrection nationale et que je rends hommage aux camarades chinois! Toujours leur racisme-là. Alors
que Papa de Gaulle, lui aussi parlait d’indépendance nationale. Comme si ce que j’ai vu là-bas ne mérite pas de louanges, non? Et se mettent à m’insulter. Comme un n’importe qui! Comme un vulgaire individu! Individus, eux-mêmes, oui. (214)

In this passage, the French word "individu" takes on a different meaning in the Lingala context where "individu" is considered an insult, and "individus eux-mêmes" an expression to reciprocate the insult.

Thus, especially important in this novel is the language which is made to convey the new African reality. The author’s language is meant, as in the works of Ahmadou Kourouma and Sony Labou Tansi, to illustrate the specific fictional universe which it contributes to create, and to express this universe as best as possible by coinciding with it. That is why Henri Lopes makes his protagonists speak in their own language through French, thus restoring the linguistic atmosphere of the country "quelque part... en Afrique" (290). Lopes himself explains his method in an interview with Denyse de Saivre (1982):

J’ai voulu trouver le ton qu’emploie le peuple lorsqu’il parle de sa vie quotidienne aujourd’hui en Afrique, et c’est ce ton-là que j’ai essayé d’imiter.... *Le Pleurer-Rire*, qu’est-ce que ça veut dire? C’est presque du petit nègre. C’est le français créolisé avec la saveur que nos peuple savent y mettre. Et c’est la manière de dire du peuple que j’ai essayé d’imiter. Le peuple, lorsqu’il se trouve dans des conditions difficiles dans nos pays, préfère utiliser l’humour.... L’humour... C’est une philosophie que je tire de la culture de nos peuples. Toute tradition orale, les contes jusqu’à "Radio-trottoir" en passant par le chant, en est émaillée. (121-122)
Thus, the originality that Henri Lopes demonstrates in the composition of his novel, appears more evident to readers who speak such African languages as Swahili, Lingala and KiKongo. According to T. Zezeze Kalonji (1984) Henri Lopes has been meticulous in the appellation of his characters:

Parmi les personnages dénommés les plus importants sont: Bwakamabé Na Sakkadé, Polépolé, Aziz Sonika, Mopekissa, Yabaka, Haraka, Soukali et Elenqui [...] Le choix de toutes ces dénominations dans Le Pleurer-Rire ne semble pas fortuit [...] Ces dénominations établissent une relation sémantique entre chaque personnage désigné et le contenu de l’action qui lui est imputée dans l'ensemble du texte. Autrement dit, chaque nom est un abrégé du récit qui lui est assigné dans le roman. (33-34)

It is therefore through a knowledge of the African languages mentioned above and through a hypothesis based on this knowledge that Kalonji defines the correlation between the appellations of the characters and their role in the story of the novel:

Bwakamabé = le dictateur qui cause le mal, la violence et la mort.  
Polépolé = l’ex-président qui gouvernait "lentement", sagement.  
Sonika = le "cher" journaliste qui encense le dictateur.  
Mopekissa = le censeur du régime.  
Haraka = le militaire qui entreprend un mouvement, une action politico-militaire contre le dictateur.  
Yabaka = le héros mythique dont on se souvient.  
Tiya = feu en kikongo.  
Gourdain = homophone parfait de "gourdin."  
Elenqui = bon en lingala.  
Soukali = sucré.  
Mireille = Mirabilis, étonnant, admirable. (42-43)
These names then contain real codes which summarize almost completely the fate of the characters in the development of the novel. Thus Bwakamabé which signifies "the one who sows evil deeds" can be none other than this vile figure who surrounds himself with violence, and Yabaka, whose meaning is "to remember," is an appropriate name for the fiery captain who defies the despot and becomes, in the words of Kalonji, "héros mythique dont on se souvient."

Throughout the novel, the author does not forget to remind the reader about the bilingual nature of his novel. The reader’s action, like that of the novelist, becomes one of perpetual translation. If we look at the first sentence of the novel: "Le damuka s’était réuni dans une venelle de Moundié: avenue Général-Marchand" (14) we are confronted with a Lingala word, "damuka," whose meaning is lost on the monolingual reader until later on in the story.

The first sentence thus sets the tone of the entire novel and the narrator sometimes performs the act of translation for the reader. For instance, when one of the priests conferring the traditional authority on Tonton Bwakamabé declares: "Boka litassa dounkouné!" (47), the narrator comes to the aid of non-Lingala readers by translating the sentence for them: "Ce qu’on peut traduire en français par: "Reçois le pouvoir des ancêtres" (47). In much the same way expressions in French which are not part of normal French usage are explained by means of
translation: "Vexé, le jeune compatriote directeur de
cabinet fermaît son visage, comme on dirait en traduisant
mot à mot du kibotama" (221). In this example the author
makes it clear to the reader that "fermer son visage" is a
translation from the local language. At times the narrator
explains the impossibility of translating from one language
to another: "Et ils ont expliqué, expliqué, expliqué, mais
tout ça était bien compliqué. Si compliqué qu’ils ne
pouvaient s’exprimer en kibotama" (17), or the difficulty
that is inherent in any act of translation: "Un long éhéééé
moqueur, difficile à décrire en français" (310).

According to Sewanou Dabla (1986) there is in Le
Pleurer-rire not only the sonorous hammering out of
onomatopeias and repetitions, the permanent blaze of
metaphors peculiar to the popular volubility found in the
streets of francophone Africa, but also the meaningless
high-flown language of power such as the declamatory
journalism of Aziz Sonika (the one who flatters the
dictator). Besides, if this language knows how to employ
juicy Africanisms (that of Radio-trottoir for example) it
also knows how to render Tonton’s verbal exuberance, his
"couilles de nègre dans la langue de la Sévigné" (216).
What this means is that the introduction of African words or
expressions by Henri Lopes in Le Pleurer-rire is not simply
a ploy to infuse the narrative with a certain local color,
but a way of restructuring the form of the African novel.
B. JEAN-MARIE ADIAFFI: THE SEARCH FOR AFRICAN IDENTITY THROUGH WRITING

In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, T. Todorov (1970) has distinguished three aspects of a work: "semantic" (themes), "verbal" (style and enunciation), and "syntactic" (composition: action, characters, time, space). Although the semantic aspect in the novels we have discussed have received a similar treatment by the authors, the verbal and syntactic aspects have been treated differently.

What characterizes the works of Sony Labou Tansi and Henri Lopes, for example, is the innovation at the level of the "verbal" and the "syntactic" even though other aspects of their writings cannot be ignored. For Jean-Marie Adiaffi on the other hand, the most important innovations in his writing concern the verbal aspect, that is, the style and enunciation. It must be pointed out that Todorov's notion of "verbal aspect" covers two levels of significations: language and narration, where these constitute the form of the work. In the case of Adiaffi the meaning of *La carte d'identité* is reflected in its form.

One is initially surprised by the tenuous plot that evolves in the seven introductory chapters of the novel. Mélédouman, crown prince of Agni in the kingdom of Bettié is arrested by the French commandant Kakatika Lapine. When Mélédouman demands the reason for his arrest, the commandant
makes him understand that as a Black man, he has no right to assert. In addition, the commandant pours a filthy flood of racist remarks on the Bettié prince who, in front of his family, is humiliated and assualted by the guard accompanyng the commandant. Handcuffed, Mélédouman is taken by force to the cercle only to come out blind a week later as a result of the tortures inflicted on him. He is then given a week to produce his identity card. The story, centered on the vicissitudes of Mélédouman, announces a unique and banal action: the search for the identity card for which one expects, in the pages that follow, a linear development punctuated by social and psychological events as is the case in other African novels of this kind.

However, the introduction of certain unexpected elements soon mark the difference in the fictional project sketched out in the first part of La carte d’identité. Unlike Toundi in Ferdinand Oyono’s Une vie de boy or Ibrahima Dieng in Ousmane Sembène’s Le Mandat, for example, Mélédouman is neither submissive nor disoriented. He stands up to the commandant in a long discussion which, even though it does not lead to his freedom, nevertheless reveals his "arrogance et fierté de prince nègre" (15). Furthermore, his story begins like an odyssey: the newly repaired jeep that is to take him to the cercle refuses to start (12); the commandant, after sentencing the prisoner to the "cellule
de vérité" (45), is suddenly overcome with dizziness and nearly faints in front of the guards.

This intrusion of the mysterious and the supernatural into the events is confirmed by the invocation to the ancestral spirit of Anoh Asséman which constitutes the seventh chapter of the novel and serves as a prelude to what will be a quest of a much more serious nature. Henceforth, the first misfortunes of Mélédouman (arrest, torture and blindness) appear both as signs and a pretext for a spiritual and sacred undertaking. Although one can qualify La carte d'identité as an attack on colonialism in the tradition of Oyono’s Une vie de boy, and Le vieux nègre et la médaille, cr Mongo Beti’s Ville cruelle, and Le pauvre Christ de Bomba, one soon realizes that the intention of Adiaffi is not just to denounce the arbitrariness of colonial rule but rather to produce a novel of initiation.

According to Walter Schomers (1982/83) La carte d'identité revolves around an opposition which determines its structure and gives the work all its meaning. This is expressed at the level of the novel’s framework: Mélédouman’s arrest comes at the beginning of the novel and he regains his freedom by the time the story is over. Thus, arrest and liberation mark the two poles between which the curve of the novel’s plot is developed. They form a kind of framework, encompassing Mélédouman’s imaginary journey for
the search of an Africa which has to regain its dignity or identity, a precondition for freedom.

The action is lightened as much as possible and the number of characters is strictly limited. The scenes which are confined to the most important elements aim at a deeper principle through the antagonism between the commandant and Mélédonman. The novel progresses through repetitions or rather the reconsideration of the same theme under a different aspect. Finally, everything takes on the value of a symbol. Symbol and reality interpenetrate and form a network that gives meaning to the novel. From his individual search for his lost identity card, Mélédonman is projected to the symbol of Africa in search of its traditional and cultural values after so many years of colonization. Mélédonman undertakes a real spiritual journey which takes him to highly symbolic places: the "quartier des génies," the Mecca of traditional art (74); Father Joseph's parish (91); the "école régionale" (99) and sacred sites (the cemetery of the Ancestors (129); Krodasso, the ancient city of the Bettié kings (13); the sanctuary of the sacred thrones on which the founders of the kingdom had sat (139).

In conformity with the great old African tradition, this is not only a question of a ritual death and rebirth but also the acquisition of a spiritual personality, that which grants the individual the knowledge of the cosmogony,
mythology and moral values of the society. *La carte d'identité* is therefore the story of the protagonist's journey through darkness leading to his eventual freedom as a result of his *prise de conscience*.

Beyond the introductory texts one is at liberty to read the novel as the presentation of Africa's present tragedy and, as I have already pointed out, as Africa's search for "sa mémoire oubliée." After all the historical setbacks, Africa, like the Agni prince, has to reclaim its culture in order to find wise and appropriate solutions to its eternal problems. With *La carte d'identité* the Ivorian writer goes beyond ordinary narration in order to produce an allegorical work. At the same time he undertakes another quest, a literary quest, that is, an esthetic research which expresses and sustains a novel of initiation that culminates in the rebirth of the protagonist.

It is significant that one of the stages in Mélédouman's spiritual journey is set at the "école régionale" where the issue of language is at the center of discussion. For, if the author wants to find, as he declares, "des formes nouvelles qui ne soient ni répétition béate et anachronique des formes du passé dépassé ni mimétisme servile et inadapté de l'Occident,"¹ it is because he realizes for a complex set of reasons the need to give African languages the same support that has hitherto been reserved for the colonial languages. In other words,
Adiaffi recognizes the importance of promoting African languages in all forms of discourse. As the prince points out in *La carte d’identité*:

Il existe une différence fondamentale entre un dialecte et une langue. Et si l’on réduit nos langues nationales à de simple et pauvres dialectes, c’est déjà un choix politique et opéré. Et le choix politique a signé leur condamnation à mort. 

[...] 

Mais vois-tu, une langue est un organisme vivant.... D’abord, nos langues sont aussi belles que les autres. Elle ont fait leurs preuves en permettant la production de cette belle littérature, de cette profonde philosophie, que sont la littérature et la philosophie de la grande civilisation ashanti... Aucune langue ne naît riche; c’est l’usage qui l’enrichit. (104-107)

It becomes evident in *La Carte d’identité* that one of the ways to use African languages as a way to reach a wider audience is to transpose African cultural and value systems into the European language. Hence Adiaffi’s introduction of praise poetry into the body of his narrative. To show that the Agni people have produced literature in this genre, the author of *La carte d’identité* translates one aspect of this poetry into the body of his work. At the same time, he clearly situates his novel within an African context by representing the manner of speech appropriate to the characters involved:

Toi citoyen! Toi citoyen! Individu que tu es! Indigène! Tu te fais de moi. Toi citoyen, un malheureux comme ça. Moi qui connais la France. Médaille militaire. Carporal deuxième classe. Moi été le doudou des Blanches. Toi citoyen, où on a vu ça! Si ce n’est pas à Bettlé... (4)
In the above quotation, we notice the abridged syntax used by the guard which serves to indicate his social standing and the level of his education. We also realize the Agni context of the speech where the term "individu" is considered an insult (as we saw in *Le Pleurer-rire*). Similarly, the language used by the various characters in Chapter 6 of the novel during the trial of those accused of rape is marked by its profanity and syntactic incongruity in French. For example when one of the accused charged with rape explains that the girl involved in his case was a consenting partner, the mother of the girl intervenes: "Heu, heu. Toi-là tu mens quoi. Tu peux boire fétique? Tu peux boire fétique? C’est la Mort qui va payer toi" (50-51). It is obvious in this example that the verb "boire" is being used in a context other than its normal usage in French; which will then suggest that the whole question "Tu peux boire fétique?" is a direct translation from the Agni meaning "Can you swear under oath?"

Also in *La carte d’identité* certain names and concepts are first presented in the Agni language before being translated into French. We saw in *Le Pleurer-rire* how the names of some of the principal characters have important meaning in the local languages. It is this kind of translation that we also find in *La carte d’identité*. Thus the author provides us with the translations of the names of the main characters of the novel:
"Mélédoûman = je n’ai pas de nom; on a falsifié mon nom (3)
Gnamien Pli = Gros Dieu (10).
Kakatika = monstre géant (11).

Mélédoûman is the protagonist who is charged with the task of looking for his identity card. As his name implies, he has no name, or more exactly, his name has been falsified. His search for his identity card will therefore make it possible for him to reconstitute his name. It is interesting to note that when Mélédoûman is considered dead by his people, the nephew who is chosen to succeed him is symbolically called Mikrodoûman ("j’ai un nom," 123), while the worshipper of the sacred stools of the kings of Agni, the guardian of the sacred place, is called Mihouléman ("je ne suis pas encore mort," 147). Mikrodoûman, who has a name, can only rule after the spiritual death of Mélédoûman while Mihouléman can become part of the ancestors only after his death. Since Mihouléman is still alive (as his name implies) he can only be the guardian of what belongs to the ancestors.

The guard who tortures Mélédoûman does not have a proper name but is rather known under a series of nicknames. While he refers to himself by the ironic name of Kan Anaholé ["Dis la vérité" (7), the name given to the instruments of torture used by the colonial guards], the children refer to him as Gnamien Pli (Gros Dieu) since the very instruments of torture make him act as a god who exercises the power of life and death over the people. He is also referred to as
"garde-floco." The author's explanation of the meaning of this name makes it an appropriate name for someone who is devoid of reason and who only does as he is told:

Floco veut dire: celui qui n'est pas circoncis, donc un idiot, un lourdaud, un homme vil, un va-nu-pieds, un fils de chien, un pauvre bâtard qui ne comprend vraiment rien à rien. (7)

As for the commandant his nickname of Kakatika, "monstre géant" marks an irony of situation where a man who has "la taille de pygmée" (11) could hold so much power over so many people. Can we infer from his name a disguised commentary by the author on why a relatively small country like France could hold so much power over a whole continent?

If the reader of Henry Lopes' Le Pleurer-rire who has no knowledge of Kikongo, Swahili and Lingala has to perform an act of translating the names of the characters into French to understand their symbolism in the narrative, the reader of La carte d'identité has an easy task because the author has taken great pains to translate the Agni names and concepts for him/her. In an interview with Janos Riesz et al (1986) Adiaffi explains his procedure:

Ce que je n'aime pas c'est lire un livre où il y a trop de notes en bas. Ça brise le plaisir de la lecture. Je préfère jouer à une espèce de bilinguisme, en prenant les mots africains. Si je ne peux pas les traduire, je les garde et les traduis à côté. Utiliser les deux mots, m'arranger pour expliquer les deux mots, le mot français étant mis en apposition au mot agni pour expliquer. (45)

Thus even though the author writes in French, he does not forget that this language is a medium of expression like
any other. Since La carte d'identité recounts an African quest for identity, the author privileges certain African names and concepts that express best his message and style. The novel therefore becomes a personal work of adaptation and rewriting that takes its root in African soil.

NOTE

CHAPTER IV

TIERNO MONENEMBO: TRANSCRIBING THE AFRICAN WORD IN FRENCH

If the titles of Monenembo’s novels, Les crapauds-brousse and Les écailles du ciel express a certain esotericism, it is because the author draws his inspiration from an old Peulh cultural heritage. The titles of both novels are taken from two popular Peulh legends. The legend that gives form and meaning to the first novel concerns both the adulation and contempt for the bush toad. Monenembo compares the predicament of the bush toad to that of the African intellectual who finds himself in an ambivalent relationship with his society.

Having obtained his diploma as an Electrical Engineer in Hungary, Diouldé, the hero of Les crapauds-brousse returns home, somewhere in Africa, in the country of President Sâ Matrak, in hopes of occupying a responsible position commensurate with his qualifications. However, in spite of his abilities, he is sent to the Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs to occupy a mediocre job in which he spends most of his time writing tedious reports that no one reads. Even though he is full of ambition for his country, nothing has prepared him to enter the complex political and social reality that he finds in the country. Torn between a dying but persistent traditional world, and a perverse, racketeering new world, Diouldé learns very quickly to "dormir d’anxiété" and to "manger de frissons" (15). Having been an unwitting witness to the assassination of an old peasant who opposed the plan of Daouda (an enigmatic, silent and unscrupulous character), to take over more lands, the hero of Les crapauds-brousse finds himself trapped and engulfed in the bloody purges that followed the revelation of a pseudo-plot to overthrow the government.

Monenembo’s first novel thus falls within the tradition of the political novel that opposes, challenges and ridicules the regimes set up after Africa’s independence. As with Ahmadou Kourouma, Labou Tansi or Henri Lopes, one finds in Monenembo’s book most of the themes which testify to the new prise de conscience on the part of African intellectuals: sloppiness of the elite, corruption, confiscation of power for a few people to the detriment of the majority, the arbitrary, police repression, executions, etc. What marks out the author of Les crapauds-brousse, however, is the tone of this story in which neither the author nor his characters give the impression of taking
themselves seriously. In fact, Diouldé, the principal character of the novel may be considered as an anti-hero. An intellectual without caliber, full of complexes, indecisive to the point of the pathetic that call to mind Beckett's characters, he is nevertheless an honest individual who doesn't know how to free himself from the multiple contradictions within which he is struggling. His companions are no good revolutionaries either: greedy, lazy and sensual, they are more concerned with sex and money than with any real desire for change. Besides, he is frustrated in his ambitions by the oppressive monotony of the city:

C'est vrai que la ville écoeur par sa monotonie. Et une sorte de goulot d'étranglement, que la mer a forgé à coup de cisaillement par vagues successives, la coupe en deux: en deux parties dissymétriques, telles qu'on chercherait vainement un centre.... Une sorte de bras de terre presque effilé, avec un rien comme poignet. (19)

The description of the scenery sets the tone of the novel. The monotony that characterizes the city is symptomatic of life in general in this country where the citizens are at the mercy of a political machinery that takes pleasure in brutalities. The two dissymmetrical parts of the city caused by the sea, making the city look like a kind of bottleneck, translate into the two different living conditions for the inhabitants of the city:

"Quelques bâtiments officiels tendent tant bien que mal de ternes étages vers les cieux. De luxueuses villas se cachent désespérément, enfouis dans des buissons de fleurs. (...) Masures, chaumières, baraques croulantes s'enjambent, se chevauchent, s'embrassent, se tiennent
comme pour se retenir, se tricotent en grappes de bidonvilles: un engrenage sans fin... (19-20)

Even though there is no positive character in the novel, and the scenery and city present a very dismal picture, there seems to be a flicker of hope at the end of the novel because the story does not end on the observation of the monotony of life and the political excesses which have become so banal and redundant. On the contrary, the reader learns about the formation of a resistance group opposed to the oppressive regime of Sâ Matrak by a few peasants and especially the madman. Besides, the last words of the novel seem to indicate that the madman holds the secret to the future.

In *Les écailles du ciel*, Monenembo’s second novel, he takes up the themes developed in *Les crapauds-brousse*: in an imaginary country, some pathetic characters are carried along by events beyond their control. However, there is a difference in the way events unfold in both novels. In addition, the author employs different narrative strategies. While the narrative in *Les crapauds-brousse* is carried out by a storyteller that of *Les écailles du ciel* is a discourse sustained by the griot, master of the African word. Indeed, while *Les crapauds-brousse* describes in a linear way a political, social and economic reality, *Les écailles du ciel* attaches a great deal of importance to the imaginary; reality and history are concealed by a whole fantasmatic language and it can be said that if *Les crapauds-brousse* is
"un cauchemar raisonné" (Maryse Condé), Les écailles du ciel, drifts towards fuzziness and the symbolic.

In Les écailles du ciel, the author presents Cousin Samba who, having been cursed right from birth, doesn't say a word from the beginning to the end of the novel. Chased from his native village, he ends up in Leydi-Bondi, the poorest part of the capital where he suffers all the atrocities of the colonial authorities and those of the new regime following independence. Even more than Diouldé in Les crapauds-brousse, Cousin Samba in Les écailles du ciel is an anti-hero, a powerless witness of human folly who, thrown into this "quête faussement biblique d’il ne savait trop quoi" (97), only finds death at the end of his journey. Like the old man in the story, "Le vieux" Bandiougou, Cousin Samba leaves this world without any "héritage à laisser, pas même un conseil" (190).

In both Les crapauds-brousse and Les écailles du ciel, the movement of the story is directed by a movement of exile. The notion of exile, however, is presented differently in the two novels. In the first novel, Diouldé goes to Hungary to study and returns home after independence to the rotten political climate in his country. In the second novel, exile is the solution which the characters strive for, but it is also an intrinsic requirement of the narration. The wish to go into exile and the experience it brings about are the source of the narrative configuration.
In *Les écailles du ciel*, since everything will be consumed at the end of each and everyone’s itinerary, the style signals and testifies to the eradication of the mundane world. Everything collapses, everything is covered and erased at the end of the novel. The world no longer has any probing depth. Most of the time, the one who goes into exile leaves without any provisions whatsoever being put at his disposal. In a certain way, exile is the character’s own precious asset – he leaves every time because he is threatened with death, and he goes away after making his departure the consecration of his freedom.

The distribution of events organized in *Les écailles du ciel* corresponds to a precise distinction of the places through which Cousin Samba passes. His movement from one place to the other is therefore not a simple promenade. He goes through a world gone mad and as he passes through there is also an obscure clash of forces which follow one another:

Thus exile is seen as a form of a missionary journey. However, unlike the missionary who intends to save the souls of other people exile for Samba is undertaken as a form of self discovery and the search for freedom.

According to Ange-Séverin Malanda (1987) three movements determine and stimulate the vision of the universe in *Les écailles du ciel*. The first movement is equivalent to a broadening of the world. It is made when Cousin Samba leaves his native region (97) and goes to settle in the shanty town where he is given shelter by Oumou-Thiaga, the woman who will later be killed during a demonstration that is brutally put down by the colonial authorities (140). Oumou-Thiaga dies while expecting a child who would have been called the symbolic name of Hettaré (**"Indépendance,"** 136). This first movement is linked with the colonial administration and the author uses it to describe the inhumanity and atrocities of the colonial regime.

The second movement of the story specifies the narrowing, the reduction of the world. It begins when Samba and his companion, Bandiougou, come out of the prison where they have been incarcerated following the demonstration:

*Bandiougou écarquillait les yeux, incrédule. Dans sa tête, le sang battait à retardement. Il n’arrivait pas à se faire à la vitesse à laquelle toutes ces nouvelles choses étaient arrivées. Il ne réalisait pas la présence pourtant évidente, de la transformation. (...) Lui revenait en tête cette journée où ils étaient sortis de prison. L’un derrière l’autre, Samba et lui avaient foulé cette vieille terre qu’ils avaient laissée sale de toute la chiotte de l’Histoire et qui,*

We can see from the above quotation that the second movement of the story is obviously linked with the beginning of the postcolonial period. What looks like an exalting and infinite opening up of the political climate at the beginning of this period only turns out to be marked with disappointments. The action of the new leaders annihilates any sovereign projet. Subordination and domination again prevail. Bandiougou and Samba go back to prison: the story inevitably leads them to this infernal place where they are subjected to the most degrading exactions, where they endure the worst kind of atrocities, and where they suffer the most inconsolable ordeals. For ten years they rot in the Fodoba Prison, without anybody thinking about their fate. When they come out of the prison the world they discover seems unknown to them, detached as it were from all reality, and lost beyond redemption, as if "independence" had only been a distressing and extravagant movement or episode (149-150). Interestingly, the description of the prison in Les écailles du ciel takes us back to the description of the "hôpital psychiatrique," appropriately nicknamed cimetière, in Les crapauds-brousse or the description of the Tombeau which the narrator uses as a metaphor for prison (129-130 and 143-146).
The third movement, devastating and horrible, begins when Bandiougou lands up at Chez Ngaoulo (152). The place is described as follows:

"Derrière l'étal repoussant qui lui servait de comptoir, Ngaoulo, le maître de céans, avait vu couler bien des existences, de la bière et des larmes avec cet air qui n'était qu'à lui. (...) Chez Ngaoulo, on avait déjà tout vu.... Les événements n'avaient qu'à se produire et se reproduire; les hommes qu'à passer et repasser. Chez Ngaoulo, on ne s'échauffait pas, on ne s'affligeait pas non plus. On s'en tenait à la vie boudeuse et routinière qui soutenait les lieux comme une religion porte un temple" (15-16).

The arrival of Bandiougou, now an old man, shatters this apparent calm of the place. Soon after his arrival, Cousin Samba's companion declares to the people gathered at Chez Ngaoulo that he is looking for a shadow (17). After which Koulloun, the griot/narrator, recounts the stages of this quest, then accompanies Bandiougou and Samba during a memorable flight to the native region of the shadow who turns out to be no other than Cousin Samba. Thus, the story revolves around itself and ends at the exact place where it begins.

Along with the treatment of themes, the greatest interest of Monenembo's novels resides in the author's renewal of the process of writing. In the two novels, the reader is made to feel the power of the African word. Les crapauds-brousse is a title taken from a Peulh legend which states that at the beginning of creation, the being chosen by God was the toad. Because of a mythical fault, this toad
has been cursed and transformed into the hybrid and poor creature as we know it today. In order to underscore the despair and disillusion which can grip his characters, Monenembo gives himself the power to show how the unusual movement of the myth continues to fulfill itself through contemporary history.

Diouldé, the central character of Les crapauds-brousse, has a status close to that of the toad in the Peulh myth. With seriousness and irony, the author compares Diouldé to a batrachian that is adulated and revered but looked down on and held in contempt in the Peulh society. Diouldé is an intellectual, but like any African intellectual, he is only a new "toad" torn between the thoughtlessness and insanity of a solitary aspiration for happiness, and the exhausting hardships instituted or imposed by the bureaucratic machinery (12-21). To establish this comparison between the new African intellectual and the toad, the author translates the Peulh myth of the toad and uses it as the epigraph to the novel:

Tu es hideusement hybride
Bougrement amorphe
Tu n'as ni pied, ni aile
Tu marmonnnes sans cesse
Des versets que l'on n'entend pas
A la mare
A l'étang
A la plaine inondée
Sale crapaud, rejoins ta boue! (9)

The translation of this legend sets the tone for the story. Since it is based on Peulh mythology the author does
not hesitate to insert Peulh words and phrases into the narrative and then translate them in footnotes. Thus for example, we learn that "Fankou" means "Silence" (23) and "Yettou Alla jarnâmo" means "Salue Dieu et remercie-le" (26). In fact, the whole novel proceeds through this constant translation by means of which the author emphasizes the African origin of the myth which serves as the basis of the novel. Because of this strategy the French text has to refer back to the Peulh words and their translation in order to be understood.

We have already pointed out elsewhere the use of proverbs in African oratory to convey an image or make a point in African speech. Whoever talks about African mythology must also talk about African proverbs. That is why proverbs abound in Les crapauds-brousse. As the author tells us: "Ne crève pas l’oeil de celui qui t’a appris à voir" (51). Also, every sentence and every turn of phrase in the novel is marked by the speech patterns of the Peulh. Exclamations and direct questions which are normally associated with orality are used every time one of the characters speaks. In one of her quarrels with her husband, Râhi, the wife of Diouldé, speaks as if "elle mâche en même temps de la braise":

Porototo! Alors, c’est moi qui suis légère né! Et ton baratin avec la patate de Soriba? Apprends que je sais tout. Vous vous voyez chaque jour à l’hôtel, quand tu prétends de ton sourire hypocrite que tu es au bureau. Wous! Wos! (31).
In the above quotation we recognize the ideophone "Porototo!" and the exclamatory words né!, Nous! and Was! which go untranslated simply because these speech forms are impossible to translate. We also realize that the French word patate is being used not in its original French meaning but rather according to the meaning that the Peulh have given to this word meaning "a fat woman," just like the French word lourde used elsewhere in the Peul context of the novel means "honorable" (47).

It is sometimes agreed that African names are full of meanings and that the name of a character may contain a summary of his or her role in the universe of a novel. We saw this with Henri Lopes' Le Pleurer-rire and Jean-Marie Adiaffi's La carte d'identité. The author of Les crapauds-brousse also takes it upon himself to explain the meanings behind the names of the most important characters of the novel. Diouldé, the name of the protagonist is translated as "fête" and his first name Woûri as "le survécu" (28). Incidentally, the person through whom Diouldé finds himself involved in the shady and dangerous deals of the political machinery is nicknamed Gnavoulata, meaning "Pas-de crédit" (63). Are we to infer from the meanings behind the names of the characters that since Gnavoulata does not "deal on credit" Diouldé, whose name ironically means "le survécu" was destined to pay dearly for his involvement with such a
character? At any rate Dioudé’s fate makes this inference possible.

The title of Monenembo’s second novel Les écailles du ciel is taken from an expression from a Peulh saying. As he did with the toad legend in Les crapauds-brousse, Monenembo translates the whole of this Peulh saying and uses it, among other quotations, as an epigraph to the novel:

Le comble de l’invraisemblable
les signes du désastre
le chimpanzé blanc
les racines de la pierre
les écailles du ciel. (9)

This Peulh saying thus sets the tone for what constitutes the narrative configuration of the novel. The grouping together of improbable things in the Peulh saying characterizes Monenembo’s second novel. That is why legend, tale and realist account occupy the same universe of the novel. For instance there is the magic story of the battle of Bombah during which King Fargnitéré, beheaded three times by three golden bullets, "se baissa, ramassa sa tête et se mit à accomplir la toilette mortuaire que son peuple n’avait pu faire.... Il s’éleva ensuite, à mi-chemin entre ciel et terre, s’enfla d’eau, de grêle, de foudre et de vent" (60). In addition, an important place is given to the imaginary with the intrusion of dreams, nightmares and apparitions of ghosts like the ghost of Sibé which appeared to his grandson, Cousin Samba "tout de blanc vêtu, un cafard dans la bouche, à la main une racine torse et noduleuse" (112).
It must also be pointed out that Monenembo’s writing is characterized by the mixture of genres, varieties of language registers, and the creation of neologisms; all this being stamped with the hallmark of the power of the African word.

In *Les crapauds-brousse*, the author proceeds to translate some of the African words in the novel by placing them in footnotes, that is, outside the flow of the narrative. In *Les écaillés du ciel*, only a few of the many African words introduced into the novel are translated in this way. The rest are left to occupy and form part of the French space of the novel since the author’s intention is to give primacy to the African word. Koulloun, the griot narrator, articulates a series of sentences when, all around him, the world is crumbling and falling apart. The storyteller makes his discourse agree with the informal conditions dictated by time and space:

> Je dois vous dire que moi, Koulloun, j’étais le messager du quartier. C’était par moi que toutes les nouvelles arrivaient, les bonnes comme les mauvaises. On disait d’ailleurs que le bien et le mal s’entendaient fort bien en moi, fakir de légende né avec un corps de gibbon poussif mais doué, paraît-il, d’un art de dire époustouflant. Quant les nouvelles étaient bonnes, je savais les servir, orner chaque détail de bons mots croustillants. Alors, il y avait des fripes, des galettes et du gratin pour Koulloun-le-plaisir-de-vivre. Quand, hélas, elles étaient mauvaises, il ne restait plus à ma face de rat endormi qu’à recevoir les coups de dépit et les crachats de désolation. Ce qui ne me donnait aucune raison de me plaindre. Au contraire, je n’étais pas mécontent de ma vie: la laideur du singe à-t-elle jamais empêché celui-ci de jouir des délices de l’existence? (21-22)
The first sentence of this quotation clearly marks the orality of the speech where the griot speaks directly to his listeners. By this procedure he establishes a rapport with his listeners and expects them to participate fully in the story. It is therefore with a view to eliciting a response from his listeners that the griot formulates the saying that concludes his address in the form of a rhetorical question. Equally worthy of note is the appellation given to the griot when he presents goods news: "Koulloum-le-plaisir-de-vivre." The compound form of this name is a feature that is associated with many African languages where some individuals and places are named according to their possession or lack of certain qualities. Little wonder then that in the novel the names of the streets and shanty towns all over the city are compound formations in French, obviously a translation from the author’s native language(s): "Rue-filles-jolies," "Marché-du-petit-jour," "Pique-nez," "Chauve-souris," etc. Even Oumou-Thiaga, the kind woman who dies during the demonstration carries with her the attribute of her trade, Thiaga being the Peulh word for prostitute.

In both the story and the discourse, the griot gives expression to his consciousness of history as the effects of the breaking up of historical reality. Cousin Samba had left his village only to come back, later, to the starting point of his journey. The distance he covered thus ends in
a regression because the world that Samba and his friends discover is as mysterious as an abyss:

_Mais, il est long le chemin qui ramène au village... Nous avons traversé une atmosphère mauve.... Les hommes étaient morts... Les veaux étaient morts... L’herbe était morte... Les oiseaux étaient morts... Suspendu entre ciel et terre, le lit comme un interminable cercueil blanc et mousseux, le fleuve Yalamowol audissait de tous ses flots le village de Kolisoko... (191)

Since his place of origin has been erased, Cousin Samba’s uprooting is complete. Although Cousin Samba’s journey ends in a world that does not exist, the griot, for his part, tries to conceive his art in positive terms: "Je demande grâce à l’implacable jugement de la postérité, je ne puis me rappeler certains détails... Je dis bien: je demande grâce à la postérité. J’aurais dû veiller, être sur le qui-vive. Tout regarder. Tout dire" (187-188).

Even though the words of the griot are made to be perceived in positive terms and call attention to themselves, not all the words have this quality in the novel. For instance, Cousin Samba, the anti-hero of the novel never utters a word at any place or at any time in the novel. The colonial authorities and the postcolonial power produce, reproduce and circulate statements which they themselves legitimate. Besides, their words are linked with the practical marks of violence. What Monenembo tries to establish is the fact that, whether during the colonial period or after independence, only the griot (whose function
the modern African writer has assumed) has the power to express, whenever necessary, the relationship between speech and experience:

Chaque catégorie d’hommes a son propre type de mort: l’homme ordinaire meurt de faim, de soif, de maladie ou de vieillesse; le roi par l’or, le plus royal des métaux. Mais, le griot constitue un cas à part: il n’a pas une âme comme tout le monde le griot. "Son âme à lui c’est la parole et on ne tue pas la parole." (65)

In both Les crapauds-brousse and Les écailles du ciel Tierno Monenembo tries to establish the importance and power of the African word by transcribing this word into the French language. The French language only serves here as a vehicle through which African myth, value systems and languages are given expression. The author himself has expressed his art in an interview which needs to be quoted at length since he seems to speak for all the African writers whose works form the basis of this study:

L’écrivain africain vit par rapport à la langue française tout un cycle qui peut aller du dégout le plus total à la sublimation la plus totale. Si je prends mon cas: lorsque je m’exprime en français, il y a toujours quelque part en moi la langue peulhe qui m’interpelle et me demande des comptes pour ainsi dire. Lorsqu’un Français écrit en français, c’est un acte banal. Lorsqu’un Africain s’exprime en français, c’est un acte très grave. Il y a là sinon prise de position, du moins une forme d’engagement. Cela crée une atmosphère assez complexe et en même temps assez intéressante parce qu’elle éclaire la littérature d’une lumière nouvelle. Ce n’est plus quelqu’un qui veut dire quelque chose; c’est toute une culture d’une autre structure - qui est une structure orale - qui a une autre manière de voir le monde, qui a d’autres formes de métaphores, d’autres vocables, qui se transfère par un phénomène d’osmose assez complexe et assez douloureux dans une autre langue. Cela produit non pas un double langage mais une double culture.
NOTE

CHAPTER V

AHMADOU KOUROUMA: TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION AS NARRATIVE CONFIGURATIONS OF THE AFRICAN TEXT.

This chapter will focus on Ahmadou Kourouma’s use of a hybrid code which forces the French language to refer to his native Malinke for signification. It will be shown that Kourouma’s use of a "Malinkalized" French in his two novels, Les soleils des Indépendances and Monnê, outrages et défis leads to the production of a Malinke text and the development of an authentic African discourse.

Kourouma’s Les Soleils des Indépendances appears to highlight, among other themes, the betrayal of the promises of independence. Kourouma’s hero, Fama, is the last legitimate heir to the Malinke dynasty of Doumbouya. Political events have deprived him of his rightful position as chief of the whole of Horodougou. Now, reduced to the humiliating role of griot at funerals in the capital of La Côte des Ebènes, he waits for his condition to improve. He especially expects his wife, Salimata, to bear him an heir.
without which the line of Doumbouya will become extinct. Also, he vaguely waits for the overthrow of the "bâtards" who usurped his power; at least he hopes that in the future they will treat him with respect. Fama then inherits his dead cousin's wife, Mariam, and hopes that through this woman, he will have an heir which Salimata has not given him. In the meantime, he is implicated in an insurrection which leads to his arrest and imprisonment. Fama regains his freedom through a calculated presidential pardon. But he waits in vain for his two wives to come and meet him. In desperation, he decides to return to his place of birth, Togobala, to wait for his death. Accidentally, he meets his death on the way.

Throughout the novel, the misfortunes and sufferings of the hero, as indeed those of the whole people, are linked to what is seen by the hero as one underlying evil: Independence. It should be understood, however, that it is not precisely independence as such that is being excoriated here; we are witness rather to a profound sense of disillusionment at the widespread betrayal of its bright promise. As Uwah (1988) has pointed out, the denunciation of independence is not an endorsement of colonialism, nor is it a denial of the people's right to independence. Before independence, the common enemy was colonialism and Fama had taken part in the struggle to end colonialism. But paradoxically, people have become more disillusioned now
that independence has been won. At least, Fama, as a prince, was able to go about his profession as a trader. With the coming of independence, however, government-run cooperatives have taken over and put many traders, Fama included, out of business. Kourouma compares Fama to "la petite herbe qui a grogné parce que le fromager absorbait le soleil; le fromager abattu, elle a reçu tout son soleil mais aussi le grand vent qui l’a cassé" (Soleils, 20-21).

The feeling of helplessness expressed in the above quotation is accentuated by the imagery of the destructive locusts that come in swarms ("une nuée de sauterelles"). Colonialism descended like a locust plague on Africa and destroyed its traditional heritage. Fama, symbolizing the oppressed and disenfranchised people of the continent, "avait comme le petit rat de marigot creusé le trou pour le serpent avaleur de rats, ses efforts étaient devenus la cause de sa perte" (27). Fama’s own native village is now desolate, destitute, thoroughly run down, and the inhabitants are ailing. In his own compound Fama discovers that there are only two able-bodied men capable of working in the fields, whereas there are thirteen mouths to feed. This image of starving mouths is a familiar one in the countries of "les soleils des indépendences."

According to Mortimer (1990) by focussing upon Fama, the disinherited Malinke prince, Kourouma breaks the pattern of writers who portray cultural hybrids in African
literature. Indeed, by presenting an illiterate protagonist in a society where literacy is a prerequisite to joining the ruling élite, Kourouma explores the psychological and sociological effects of marginality in the context of post-Independence Africa. Like most Africans, Fama becomes a double victim. Unskilled in modern technology, "analphabète comme la queue d’un âne" (23), Fama cannot join the ruling elite in the new state. He therefore becomes the victim of a corrupt elite that has lost touch with the people: "Ces jeunes gens débarqués de l’au-delà des mers ne pensent plus comme des nègres" (172). Secondly, without an heir to succeed him he has lost face in the traditional society. In Fama’s mind, therefore, independence is the root of all evil, responsible for his misfortunes and those of his society as a whole. As the narrator of Les soleils asks:

Mais alors, qu’apportèrent les Indépendances à Fama? Rien que la carte d’identité nationale et celle du Parti unique. (23)

Owing to its set of themes resolutely centered on the disillusionment following independence, Kourouma’s novel appeared as a real novelty in African literature. However, the most important innovation that Kourouma brought to the Francophone African fiction was essentially the form of his novel—the use of African oral literature and a new kind of language. Contrary to his predecessors, Kourouma does not simply change the form of the novel, he really makes his narrator and characters speak the language of their native
soil and his duty as the author becomes that of translating their language into French. Right from the opening passage of the novel, the author introduces the reader into the specific Malinke context of the story:

Il y avait une semaine qu'avait fini dans la capitale Koné Ibrahima, de race malinké, ou disons-le en Malinké; il n'avait pas soutenu un petit rhume.... (7)

Rosemary Schikora (1982) notes several oral elements in this sentence: the formulaic opening ("il y avait une semaine"), the euphemistic verb ("avait fini"), the references to the capital and Koné Ibrahima that go unexplained but are understood by those who share the narrator's cultural context, the use of the pronoun ("nous") to bridge the gap between narrator and audience, and finally the proverbial expression, borrowed and translated from the Malinké language ("Il n'avait pas soutenu un petit rhume"). According to Mortimer (1990) by substituting "avait fini" for "est mort" Kourouma thus assumes the narrative voice of the griot, and although limited by the written word on the printed page, he attempts to recreate both the spontaneity of oral performance and the characteristic interchange between performer and audience. Even though readers are confronted with a text written in French, they soon realize that the French language has been subjected to a Malinke syntactic structure. Sentences like "Le molosse et sa déhontée façon de s'asseoir" (7), or "C'était les immenses déchéance et honête, aussi grosses que la vieille panthère
surprise disputant des charognes aux hyènes, que de connaître Fama courir ainsi pour des funérailles" (10) or the much more colorful: "Les deux plus viandés et gras morceaux des Indépendances sont sûrement le secrétariat général et la direction d’une coopérative" (23) -- all these examples show the work of an African author for whom the act of writing in a foreign language is also an act of translation from the native tongue and customs.

The whole novel is constructed in this tone through the use of methods such as repetitions, local words, interjections, parentheses. There is also an extensive use of proverbs, a characteristic aspect of the rhetoric of African orality. This is illustrated in the following examples: "A renifler avec discrétion le pet de l’effronté, il vous juge sans nez" (12), "A vouloir tout mener au galop, on enterre les vivants, et la rapidité de la langue nous jette dans de mauvais pas d’où l’agilité des pieds ne peut nous tirer" (20). It must be obvious that these proverbs and their syntax are not part of the French linguistic and cultural heritage. What the author has done is to translate a way of speaking in his language and introduce it into the French medium of expression. Sometimes too the proverbs are developed to the level of an anecdote or a story, a very common feature of oral literature:

(...) Quant à l’infidélité, euh! euh! les femmes propres devenaient rares dans le Horodougou comme les béliers à testicule unique. Balla le jurait. Faites
enjamber un cheval mourant par une femme n’ayant couché qu’avec son mari, si elle n’est pas rapide, la bête la soulève en se levant. L’autre jour, Balla avait à soigner une jument couchée, il l’a fait enjamber par trois mariées, mères de plusieurs enfants, la bête s’est agenouillé à demi et a crevé dans la nuit. (135)

Apart from incorporating African proverbs in his narrative, the author also makes a conscious effort to render a new sound to an image or a comparison. *Les Soleils* offers a multitude of metaphors and comparisons that produce a highly surprising effect in French because they are embedded in the physical milieu and psychological context of the native speakers. Thus we read that Togobala (Fama’s village) is "asséché comme la rivière Tonko en plein harmattan" (131), and that Fama is undoubtedly "stérile comme le roc, comme la poussière et l’harmattan" (77). Even the geographical references in the comparisons evoke the customary habits of the area:

Mes dires ont donc sonné le silence comme le pet de la vieille grand-mère dans le cercle des petits enfants respectueux. (91)

This conclusion of Diakité’s remarks against the "socialisme de Nikinai" refers to a whole set of social situations (assembly of children listening to the old people telling stories) and manners (respect for old age, observance of hierarchy, of local ethics) and therefore testifies to a rich and original writing. The techniques that Kourouma uses bring a new dynamism and energy to the traditional role of the narrator. By the same token, he alters the role traditionally reserved for the readers, by
making them sense that they are directly participating in the action of the narration.

Various critics have tried to examine the reader's role in literature. Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Hans Robert Jauss (1974) draw upon phenomenology and hermeneutics in their attempts to describe the process of reading in terms of the reader's consciousness. According to Iser the reader makes implicit connections in the act of reading, fills in gaps and draws inferences while drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular. Jauss seeks to situate a literary work within its historical 'horizon' and the context of cultural meanings within which it was produced. In this sense, literature is defined and interpreted by its various moments of historical reception. Michael Rifaterre (1978) presupposes a reader who possesses a specifically literary competence while Stanley Fish (1980) believes that readers respond to the sequence of words in sentences whether or not these sentences are literary. According to Fish reading is not a question of discovering what the text means, but a process of experiencing what it does to you. Jonathan Culler (1981) tries to establish a "structuralist" theory of interpretation which seeks to disclose the regularities in readers' strategies, while recognizing that the same strategies can produce different interpretations.
The importance of these reader-response theories lies in the fact that we can no longer talk about the meaning of a text without considering the reader's active participation in its construction. When applied to the African context, reader-response theories achieve even more significance since African literature has its roots in oral literature where the participation of the audience (listeners) is crucial to the successful realization of the work of art. As a verbal art form, oral literature is based on performance. Thus, since oral literature is meant to be performed, the African oral "text" must of necessity depend on the presence of an active audience, and not on an isolated reader, for its realization.

It is primarily in his treatment of narrator (storyteller) and audience that Kourouma imbues his written text with the immediacy and exuberance of an actual oral performance. It is the narrator who, as the word suggests, narrates, speaks, and from whose point of view the reader receives the story. As Rosemary Schikora (1980) points out, Kourouma's novel reveals many aspects of the engaging artistry of the griot--master storyteller, trustee of the lore, the genealogy, and the wisdom of the traditional African societies. And it is by virtue of its flawlessly oral quality that here, more than in any other African novel written in a European language, the reader encounters the shape and sound of oral performance. Kourouma's novel
elicits the reader's response and helps to sustain a dynamic and flexible relationship between the narrator and audience. From the first sentence, the narrator transforms the isolated reader into an "audience" and then proceeds to enlist his/her sympathetic cooperation. Although the narrator is occasionally reminded that there are non-Malinkés present ("Vous ne le savez pas parce que vous n'êtes pas Malinké" etc), the general tenor of the narrative, strengthened by asides like "Que voulez vous?," "Dites-moi," and "Mais attention," reveals a close bond between the Malinke narrator and the listeners gathered around him. Also, frequent recourse to the first person plural permits the narrator to call attention to himself and at the same time to draw the readers closer, exhorting them to listen well ("Faisons bien le tour des choses," "Nous viderons dans la suite le sac de ce vieux fauve," "Mais asseyons-nous et restons autour du n'goni des chasseurs," "Empressons-nous de le conter" (127)). By drawing upon the aesthetics of the oral tradition to exert a tremendous influence on the novel's tone, syntax, and narrative structure, and by simulating or re-creating oral performance in the written text, Kourouma's work adds a new dimension to African fiction.

In addition to its oral nature, one of the most important characteristics of Kourouma's writing in Les Soleils des Indépendances resides in the fact that it is not
the French language that gives form to the discourse in the
text but rather the African or, more specifically, Malinke
model which informs the language of the narrator and that of
the characters. The author has clearly explained the
modifications he had to make. In a first draft, he made his
hero speak standard French, that is, the French taught in
schools. But Fama did not have any life in him. Kourouma
therefore made him speak Malinke and he, as the author,
proceeded to translate the Malinke of his characters into
French. For Kourouma, therefore, writing is an act of
translation, an act that his readers are also expected to
perform. The following statement throws light on his
procedure:

J’ai pensé en malinké et écrit en français en prenant
une liberté que j’estime naturelle avec la langue
classique. Qu’avais-je donc fait? simplement donné
libre cours à mon tempérément en distordant une langue
classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s’y meuve.
J’ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le
français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain.
(My emphasis)1

Even though Kourouma echoes here Gabriel Okara’s
project of translating from his mother tongue, there is a
marked difference in the way the two writers approach the
process of creative translation. We saw in the introductory
chapter how, in its frequent and conscious departures from
standard English semantics, syntax and narrative stylistics,
Okara’s The Voice constitutes an unprecedented experiment in
the process of writing as creative translation. By relying
heavily on his indigenous literary and linguistic heritage, Okara has boldly rejected the norms of the English literary establishment to produce a work based on the texture of his Ijo language. On the contrary, probably as a result of residual post-colonial language policies in Francophone Africa, "literal" creative translation as undertaken by Kourouma occurs to a lesser degree than in Okara’s prose. In the case of Kourouma, translation especially affects the semantics and a heavy reliance on orature-based devices such as Malinke proverbs and turns of phrase. Through the judicious use of such devices Kourouma manages to achieve a rupture or severance with the French rhythm in order to restore the African rhythm. Thus while critics unanimously claim Kourouma’s writing to be a masterpiece in Francophone literature, other critics such as Chinweizu et al (1983) deem Okara’s The Voice to be a failure because of the focus of rearranging English words according to Ijo syntax. It must be pointed out, however, that both authors succeed in imprinting the mark of their African languages on the European medium of writing.

The title of Kourouma’s Les soleils des Indépendances itself offers an articulate and symbolic rendition of the process of writing as an act of translation. It is a title that shocks by the use of an unusual plural noun: "soleils", translated as "suns" into English. According to N’Guessan Kotchy (1977) while the word "soleil" is presented as a
unique natural phenomenon, it quickly loses its astrological meaning and becomes a symbolic image with this plural. Its use in the title may be traced to Malinke télè, which means "day," or when used with a plural marker [lû], "era" or "time." It therefore designates in Kourouma’s title: era, period, or year. In the Malinke society (as in most African societies) it is by the cycle of the sun that one recounts events that take place in the course of life.

On the other hand, without recourse to the old myths of the sun, "suns" in the sense of beauty and life is in opposition to the obscurantism of colonization. The very fact that the title of the novel is unusual in French attests to the bilingual nature of the text since one has to refer to Malinke to understand the meaning of "soleil" in this context. It is also significant to note that whenever Kourouma has to name elements connected with the metaphysical or the abstract, he uses Malinke words to make up for terms that cannot be adequately expressed in French. Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator talks about Koné Ibrahima’s "ombre." Faced with the difficulty of making his readers understand what he means by this term he uses the Malinke word itself: dja. Kourouma thus takes up and builds upon Nazi Boni’s unconscious project of translation in the Francophone African text. With a much more greater confidence, Kourouma does not put into quotation marks those French terms whose signified is to be
found in his native Malinke; neither does he always write such terms in italics. Unlike Nazi Boni, Kourouma’s success thus comes from a certain appropriateness between the French language judiciously adapted to the Malinke imagination.

In *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, Kourouma proceeds to a decolonization of the African text with the theme of disillusionment in post-independence Africa and a deployment of a French language whose syntactic model is based on Malinke. In *Monnè, outrages et défis*, his second novel, he expands his time frame to include the period that extends from the second half of the 19th century to the present as a means of impressing readers with the longevity and permanence of *monnè*. *Monnè* is the story of Djigui Keita, King of the Soba nation in the Malinke region. Convinced that the sacrifices he offers to the ancestors and the prayers to Allah will be enough to repel the imminent French invasion, Djigui turns down Samory’s invitation to join forces with him in fighting the French and decides to confront the "Nazaréens" on his own terms. Contrary to his expectations, he is defeated by the French troops and obliged to swear allegiance to the new rulers of the territory. Thus begins the long life of *monnè* that destiny imposed upon him and his people.

Even though King Djigui’s collaboration with the French in the enslavement of his people happened during French colonial rule in Soba country, the fact that he lives to be
125 years old, thus to see and take part in the era of "modern" African politics, shows that Kourouma's portrayal of Djigui's actions is also to be taken as a commentary on post-colonial Africa. That is why in the final stages of the novel we are introduced to the beginnings of the political development of a modern African state. The kingdom of Soba arrives at the hour of independence in a pitiful condition. The profound contradictions set forth in the opening pages of the novel, with the announcement of the leitmotif of sacrifice, have played themselves out beyond the limits of endurance. Political manipulations and the party card (which are described in Les Soleils) will replace the whip and the pass law and Djigui Keita and his court will disappear from the scene. The era of modern politics will begin and a new person will rise up to replace Djigui as the providential chief.2

As Abiola Irele (1993) reminds us, the impact of the colonial imposition as recounted in Monné "manifests itself in its furthest reaches as a pathology of language, which to overcome requires an effort of refiguration of the world, an effort to establish a new congruence between the structure of words and the universe of experience."3 It is this refiguration of the world that Kourouma achieves in creating a new French in Malinke.

If in Les Soleils... the fallen world of post-independent Africa is revealed in the novel’s discourse,
with Monné, outrages et défis words themselves become, as Kenneth Harrow (1991) has pointed out, the subject of a novel whose discourse is animated by the themes and images adumbrated in Les Soleils des Indépendances. Kourouma poses the question of language at the outset of Monné by hypothesizing a scene in which the central figure, Djigui, a Malinke patriarch, learns of the impossibility of translating "monné" into French. Thus, the issue of language is presented simultaneously with that of translation both as central to the experience and its narrative representation. Kourouma wants to highlight the need for and the impossibility of expressing oneself as an African in a European tongue. To accomplish this goal he needs a vocabulary, an interpreter, and a reason to interpret. Further, he needs to deal not only with interpreting, but with translating and repeating and their implications of faithfulness, of truth and falsehood, and of power. The novel therefore not only dramatizes the incommunicability that emerges in the numerous misconceptions and misunderstandings that characterized relationships between the colonial administration and the local people in colonial times, but also underscores the lack of communication between the new ruling African elite and the general population in postindependence Africa. Most importantly, it addresses the inadequacy of the European
language to portray the African consciousness, the African historical reality, and the imaginary world of the African.

In Monné the language problem creates an uncertainty factor throughout the novel, adding depth to the interrogation which is its intention and driving force. It also serves as a function of the multiple points of view achieved by Kourouma by juxtaposing two languages with equal rights to describe reality. Through the act of writing then, Kourouma reacts against this impossibility of mutual understanding, thus placing his novel at the threshold of "l'intraduisible." ("L'intraduisible," according to Khatibi, designates what is unnameable in only one language.) Not only is Kourouma translating Malinke syntax and thought patterns into French, he is also interpreting the message of the events in the novel through the intervention of the different characters. In simple terms, the "message" of the events in the novel, if message be the right word, is conquest and colonization. But it is a message that requires interpretation since events, like language, need interpretation. If Monné then reconstitutes the legend of the conquest and colonization of Soba, it is even more about the translation and interpretation of those events. Here, translation and interpretation are to be understood in both ideological and linguistic terms.

For this reason, it is not surprising that the most important figure in the novel is neither the new ruler nor
the old conquered king, Djigui, but rather Soumaré, the mediator, the interpreter, the translator. When Paul de Man (1985) asks why the translator is the exemplary figure in Walter Benjamin’s "The Task of the Translator," he answers the question by positing that the translator, by definition, fails; that the translator can never do what the original did. According to de Man, "the process of translation, if we can call it a process, is one of change and of motion that has the appearance of life, but of life as an after life because translation also reveals the death of the original" (38). Interestingly, it is this failure of translation, that is, the impossibility of a foreign language to express an alien reality and experience that we encounter in Monné. Because the people of Soba and the French speak different languages and share a different world-view, a mutual understanding between them can only be achieved through an effective translation and interpretation of events. Kourouma’s portrayal of the impossibility of such an effective translation and interpretation of events is the irony that lies at the very heart of the novel. For if Djigui, by his actions, is made to collaborate with the French it must also be recognized that this collaboration is based on a monumental error of translation. In an answer to the French captain’s question why he had built a wall around the nation of Soba, a question that was relayed through translation by the Malinke interpreter, Djigui states
clearly that the wall had been built to keep the French at bay. He then challenges the French troops to go over the Kouroufi hills, so that he and his people can prepare for battle, very certain that the French would meet their death as soon as they cross the mountains. When the interpreter translates the speech, the French retreat to the Kouroufi hills, and the king is convinced that they have accepted his challenge to meet in battle. What the king did not know is that his words were not accurately translated by the interpreter who considered them to be a reckless challenge. As the interpreter later tells the king:

Je suis ton frère de plaisanterie, donc je te connais. Comme tous les Keita tu es un fanfaron iréaliste. Je n’ai pas traduit un traître mot de tes rodomontades. (36)

Djigui is thus made to collaborate with the French but his collaboration is clearly based on a malentendu, a malertentendu brought about by the translator’s deliberate act of mistranslation. Later, the interpreter introduces the people of Soba to the new order:

Je traduis les paroles d’un Blanc, d’un toubab. Quand un toubab s’exprime, nous, Nègres, on se tait, se décoiffe, se déchausse et écoute. Cela doit être su comme les sourates des prières, bien connu comme les perles de fesse de la préférée." (54)

Then the griot intervenes, dressing Soumaré’s simple translations in appropriate rhetorical forms and introducing at the same time a second layer of distortion: "prestations" becomes "pratiti" and takes its place in a new Malinke
vocabulary which will develop through the decades of monnew. From these examples we can see how the acceptance of meaning by both Djigui and the French captain depended on the translator’s reading of the ideological concepts and social events taking place at the time.

Since translations cannot always be faithful to the original, since they cannot always carry the message of the original, in the sense that Benjamin and de Man explain, Kourouma achieves the primacy of the African word in French by integrating an extensive Malinké vocabulary into the body of the text. However, these Malinké words, accents, and rhythms are not mere props to convince readers that they are in the presence of an African novel. On the contrary, they are essential to the structure of the work, to its philosophical, sociological, historical and linguistic ambitions. In the same way, the African music of Kourouma’s syntax is determined by the necessity to communicate a particular mental structure which is not French. As a result, Kourouma succeeds in creating a literary version of recent African history as seen and experienced from a Malinké point of view. In Monnè, as in Les Soleils, Kourouma continues to make use of oral literature, and his technique includes syntactic non-conformity, the use of proverbs and a certain rustic humor which gives his work a human dimension. In addition, by introducing an interpreter or translator whose comments are placed side by side with
the griot, Kourouma poses the problem of the task confronting the African writer writing in European languages. For Kourouma, post-colonial African literature is not a simple presentation and development of themes; it is a literature which makes use of forms that are embedded in the oral literature and language of the people.

Even more than Les Soleils, the title of Monné, outrages et défis offers a much more poignant rendition of the process of creative writing in Africa as translation and attests to the bilingual nature inherent in modern African fiction. The original title of the novel as announced in a prepublication excerpt which appeared in Notre Librairie in 1987 was Monnew. It is not clear why and how this became Monné, outrages et défis. Poller (1991) speculates that the final title may have come about from an editorial decision, motivated by a concern for French readers who might be baffled by a foreign title and confused by a plural ending in "w" instead of "s." The addition of the French "outrages et défis" would therefore seem to give the title a clear meaning, with the imposition of "et" to give a reassuring French rhythm! Abiola Irele (1993) also points out that the novel’s prologue "undertakes to explicate the meaning of the novel’s title in terms of both the affront to consciousness which the narrative is about to document and of the disparities in race, religion and world view as codified in language." Within the novel itself, Irele adds, "the
concept of monnè is elucidated more succintly in the expression "les saisons d’amertume" which recurs several times as a kind of leitmotif by which its theme is constantly restated throughout its narrative development."5 Even so, it is obvious that this bilingual title remains semi-readable for the monolingual reader, just as the text itself would be, if the reader fails to decode its plurilingual strategies. Furthermore, the complete meaning of "outrages et défis" can only be understood in its relationship with the first Malinke word in the title. While the phrase "outrages et défis" is a partial explanation of monnè, it does not translate it wholly since the meaning of monnè is more than just "outrages et défis."
The French and Malinke parts of the title are therefore not explanations or substitutions of one term for the other, neither are they interchangeable; rather, they are interdependent because the Malinke word monnè informs and elucidates the "outrages et défis" in the French language.

And so we can see that even from the very first word, Kourouma accomplishes two objectives: he presents the bilingual or plurilingual nature of his work and introduces colonization as a linguistic experience which was made possible because of a profound, extended misunderstanding. That is why, in what serves as an introduction or preface to the novel, the king asks the Toubab the word for "monnè" in French. When the king learns that no such word exists in
French, he concludes that the French have never experienced monnew. Thus, translating monné is but the beginning of a series of demands which are placed upon the reader, even as he/she tries to decode the meaning of the title. And this phenomenon, which evokes the problematics of all translation, is what the author has explored and developed throughout the novel in an infinity of details, nuances, and ramifications. As he declares:

Toute langue, toute société, c’est d’abord un certain nombre de mythes ou réalités. Traduire, c’est trouver les mythes ou réalités correspondants. (12)

Thus, in both Les Soleils des Indépendances and Monné, outrages et défis, Kourouma explores in depth the process of the Africanization of writing in French, a process that goes through a conscious effort to make translation a part of the act of reading and writing an African literary text.

George Steiner (1975) has articulated the emergence, in the charged space between two languages functioning simultaneously, of a metalanguage. Kourouma achieves this effect in Monné, by the sophisticated use of French and Malinké in the fullness of their possibilities. According to Nidra Poller (1991) whereas people who live in the closed world of a single language believe they know the true names of things, the sphere of bilingualism is propitious to fertile self-doubt, to a remise en question, the doubting of one’s own word and one’s own world.
NOTES


2 Incidentally, Houphouët Boigny, "le Vieux" of Côte d'Ivoire, attained the legendary age (125) of a Djigui Keita.


5 Irele, op. cit., 166.

6 Interview with Bernard Magnier, op. cit., 12.
CHAPTER VI

SONY LABOU TANSI: WRITING, CREATION AND THE POWER OF WORDS

Sony Labou Tansi, who died a few months ago, occupies an important place in African literature. Born in 1947, Sony Labou Tansi received all his education in the Congo where he became a teacher in 1971. He taught English at Kindamba College, near Brazzaville, then became Principal of Mindouli College in 1974. From 1977-78 he was Director of the Tchiloango Theater of Pointe Noire. In 1979 he founded the Rocado Zulu Theater in Brazzaville, and in 1980 became Head of the cooperation division of the Direction générale de la Recherche Scientifique.

A celebrated novelist and playwright, Sony Labou Tansi began to write poems while in College. In 1966 he wrote what he considered to be his first novel, a 200-page manuscript entitled Le premier pas (The First Step) which touches on the arrival of a "new student" in school and the problems of initiation. The manuscript was rejected by Seuil because, according to the publishers, even though it

Labou Tansi was, like Molière, a total man of the theater: actor, director, producer, writer. However, as a writer of great versatility Labou Tansi is known not only for his plays but also for his novels. It is easy to see him as the appropriate expression of these dark, turn-of-the-century times, where revulsion may appear to be the only reaction to the massacres, starvation and torture so rampant in Africa, as indeed elsewhere, to the "siècle dououreux... cette parenthèse de sang."¹ Bernard Géniès writes in *L’Avant-Scène Théâtre* (1987) that Labou Tansi had "un ton, une voix inimitable" in which les mots se chevauchent, dérapent, glissent, se percutent de plein fouet."²
In his writings, Labou Tansi did not show at any moment the signs of a crisis or a search for an identity. As he himself stated:

si j’écris, c’est que j’ai toujours eu confiance en cette merveille - scientifique ou métaphysique, peu importe - capable de venir chambarder les données fondamentales.

And conscious of the force at the disposal of the writer, he added:

Je précise n’avoir pas la conviction que ce sera forcément au profit de l’homme.\(^3\)

It is not his status as a Black man that haunts Labou Tansi, but rather his condition as a man: "Je suis le nègre qui va loin sur la route des hommes. L’homme qui, malgré tout, dit tous les hommes. Définissez-moi," he declared in an interview with Edouard Maunick, "comme ... la petite somme de tous les hommes. Mon écriture vient tout simplement de cette somme et de la grosse honte que j’ai de mâcher les mots."\(^4\) What concerns him is the attack on the dignity of man and what he tries to do in his writing is to uphold man’s dignity.

Although Labou Tansi stated that "Je n’ai pas d’écriture, mais une hantise humaine qui a ses moments d’encouragement. J’écris comme on fait une crise,"\(^5\) what really characterizes his novels, as indeed the whole of his work, is the brilliant mastery of writing, his power of transformation and representation, and his ability to create a world and sustain it. In doing so, Labou Tansi proceeds
to create new myths, myths which give rise to a network of motifs that are as coherent in the narrative as they are absurd in reality. Labou Tansi's writing erects the absurd into a system and places in the center of each work a nucleus around which everything is organized.

*La vie et demie*, his first novel, is the chronicle of a fictional African country, neocolonial Katamalanasie, its savage dictators and its insurgents, in particular Chaidana the beautiful daughter of the rebel leader Martial. In the "avertissement" to the novel, Labou Tansi refers to his story as a fable, and indeed it has an allegorical character. As in the fable Labou Tansi's recourse to hyperbole and absurdity pushes his tale beyond the limits of the rational.

According to Eileen Julien (1989), *La Vie et demie* is as much about language in a time of tyranny as about tyranny itself, as the author both reveals the ploy of dictatorship to impose and censor language and subverts that language through the discourse of the novel. In this novel Labou Tansi signals the link between the French words "maux" and "mots." We are confronted with the issue of power and discourse at two levels: the state of Katamalanasie controls or attempts to control the language of its citizens, and the narrator (as well as the citizens of Katamalanasie) subverts that official discourse in his own. Like all totalitarian states Katamalanasie is insecure about its power; it fears
language because language is the foremost vehicle of original, potentially subversive thought. The language act is distorted in the state because the state arrogates to itself the privilege of interpreting meaning. As the narrator puts it: "les mots... disaient... juste ce que voulaient les hommes qui les prônavaient" (83). As in most postcolonial African states, there is no dialogue in Katamalanasie between the government and the population because the state does not speak to its citizens but rather aims its words at them. Government speeches are couched in meaningless rhetoric. The most significant government slogans are the oft-repeated "les aspirations nationales" and "la cause du peuple." Each successive regime proclaims in essence that it alone knows the meaning of those words, that it alone takes those aspirations to heart. In such a state, words such as "la démocratie" and "la république" become meaningless since they can be invoked to justify whatever interpretation or policy the government favors. As in all totalitarian states, Katamalanasie silences individual voices: Layisho’s tongue is cut out; Chaidana’s writings are censored; and the performing artists who sing her poems are hung or buried alive. It therefore comes as no surprise that "En très peu de temps toute la production artistique de la Katamalanasie entra dans la clandestinité" (79). While the state of Katamalanasie censors the language of the masses and privileges its own official discourse, the
narrator’s counter-discourse points to the fact that the official language is not only meaningless but also absurd.

In the annex to *1984* entitled "Newspeak," George Orwell demonstrates that in order to accomplish its objectives a totalitarian regime must first attack language, the means by which human beings form and express their ideas, and act upon it in an unremitting and relentless way in order to make more and more difficult, not only the formulation but also the very existence of free thinking. Thus, the principles expressed in "Newspeak" constitute a bold attempt on the part of Orwell to explain how a totalitarian State proceeds to distort the meaning of words, the basic elements that constitute language. In "Newspeak" Orwell also develops stage by stage the negative and destructive aspects of the intensive manipulation and falsification of language by totalitarian regimes.

Orwell’s analysis of power in *1984* therefore constitutes one of the most important contributions to dystopian literature, that is, the fictional visions of "bad places." According to Daphne Patai (1987) the major twentieth-century dystopian novels produced before *1984* depict societies dominated by "reason," eugenics, and the production process. Eugene Zamyatin’s *We* (1924) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) are similar in their views of mechanized societies whose citizens are deprived of freedom through physical and psychological conditioning.
The rulers of these societies justify their power by moral arguments; that is, they consider their pursuit of power as a means to a socially desirable end. Patai goes on to state that early utopian fiction repeatedly uses a kind of ethnographic model to explain the workings of the utopian society: through long dialogues between a "native informant" and a representative of the familiar old society, the reader is exposed not only to impressions of the new society but also to a closely reasoned presentation of its inner logic. The dystopian literature varies this formula: now there is typically a scene in which the key authority figure explains the logic of domination to the rebellious protagonist. But Orwell explicitly breaks with this pattern by presenting a vision of the immediate future in which no moral justification of any kind is offered for the control exercised by the Party.

Labou Tansi's *La vie et demie* (as well as his other novels) falls within the Orwellian tradition of dystopian literature. The society presented in this novel is a world turned upside down in which there is no logic and no moral justification for the excessive and arbitrary exercise of power. In addition, just as Orwell did in 1984, Labou Tansi develops the process through which the totalitarian state of Katamalanasis manipulates, destroys and falsifies language. Let us consider the new democratically voted Constitution which contains two articles:
Article premier: le pouvoir appartient au guide, le guide appartient au peuple. Le deuxième article était rédigé dans une langue que personne ne comprit jamais. On disait que c'était la langue des fous. Article deux: Gronaniniata mésé boutouété taou-taou, moro metani bamanasar karani meta yelo yelomanikatana.
Le bruit disait que yelo yelomanikatana signifiait "souverain à vie." N'empêche que le référendum constitutionnel donna les résultats plebiscitaires de 100%. (128)

The significance of this passage resides in the fact that the second article of the Constitution is not only an epitome of false language, it also is a critique of the use of discourse in postcolonial African states. According to Foucault, discourse translates political and economic forces as well as ideological and social control mechanisms into signifying practices. Power is exercised through discourse, he contends, and this power has real effects in the real world. As he points out in *L'ordre du discours* (1971):

... dans toute société la production du discours est à la fois contrôlée, sélectionnée, organisée et redistribuée par un certain nombre de procédures qui ont pour rôle d'en conjurer les pouvoirs et les dangers, d'en maîtriser l'événement aléatoire, d'en esquiver la lourde, la redoutable matérialité. (10-11)

Thus, the authorities in *La vie et demie* have constituted themselves into what Foucault has called a "société de discours" whose function is to "conserver ou de produire des discours, mais pour les faire circuler dans un espace fermé, ne les distribuer que selon des règles strictes et sans que les détenteurs soient dépossédés par cette distribution même" (*L'Ordre du discours*, 38). By determining the conditions under which decrees and discourses are produced,
the authorities of Katalamanasie impose on the individuals who wield power a certain number of rules and in this way prevent the common people from understanding the motive behind official discourse. The point to note here is that if government Constitutions and policies get "unanimous" approval it is only because those who interpret these policies are the very people who initiate them--those who have the power to speak. The narrative of La Vie et demie is therefore an especially effective denunciation of totalitarianism because in its form and language, the novel satirizes political dictators.

Eileen Julien (1991) has also shown that in La Vie et demie, the theme of sexual abuse is in metonymical rapport with politics. Not only does the novel symbolically enact the political order of domination and submission, but also it clearly derives from that order and plays a role in maintaining it. Chaïdana's rape by 363 men is reported in these terms "... Elle resta inanimé pendant trois nuits et pendant trois nuits elle encaissa treize cascades de miliciens, soit un équivalent en hommes de trois cent soixante-trois" (72). Although this passage might be considered as sheer hyperbole, it nevertheless conveys the arrogant view of the world in which rape--physical and psychological--is one of the many routine military acts and abuses of power. Thus, the fact the author does not present the rapes of Chaïdana but rather recounts them in brief
sentences shows that rape is not only an occasion for pleasure, anger or anguish but also a meaningless act. In much the same way, Chaidana’s marriage to the Guide which cannot be consummated is representative of the numerous hollow institutions in the autocratic state.

In *La vie et demie* political repression also manifests itself in the arbitrariness with which the government makes decisions:

Le guide ... avait demandé que toutes les maisons de Kawangotara (il avait changé le nom du pays), tous les troncs d’arbre, toutes les grilles, enfin tout ce qui pouvait frapper l’œil fût peint en bleu; il avait sacré le bleu couleur nationale pour la concorde et la prospérité;... (144)

The arbitrary nature of such an ordinance is made plain by the narrator because its object is a color which is clearly devoid of meaning. It also goes to show that in Katamalanasie, the dreams and ambitions of one man, "le guide," are made to assume national proportions. In the passage quoted above, the utter randomness of the country’s change of name is conveyed by the fact that the narrator puts in parenthesis what should have been an important decision. The fact that the state changes its name from Katamalanasie to Kawangotara and then to Bampotsoata reminds us that the name of the state does not matter since the citizens are subjected to the same brutality and repression. It also serves to point out that these names can represent any country that is marked by tyranny and oppression. For,
despite the fact that the narrator employs the form of fable which manifests no conventional sense of what is realistic, he does not forget to reveal to us the neocolonial state of Katamalanasie, since behind all this apparently incredible state of affairs lurks "la puissance étrangère qui fournisait les guides", an expression that recurs as a leitmotif in the novel.

However, what is especially important about La vie et demie is the style of the author. In his narration, Labou Tansi has recourse to oral literature. But although Labou Tansi makes use of African orality, he sometimes transgresses its principles. By means of expressions and inventions, there is a touch of eccentricity on the part of Labou Tansi as he subverts the double heritage (oral literature and the imported fictional genre) to create a new form of language.

According to Georges N’Gal (1982), Labou Tansi’s "tropicalités" (that is, his particular style of writing) covers "tout comportement ou discours (ubuesques) des personnages (...) et un certain usage de la langue française," which does not hesitate in translating Kikongo, especially in surprising formulas like "mourir la mort" (13 and 86). If, for Labou Tansi, this procedure is developed into a game (for instance, Abaichanko designates Chaidana’s mother, Kapahacheu the pygmy), the shock stemming from the mixture of the languages is meant to create rich phonetic
and poetic effects. The African words are surrounded with a certain mystery, and maintain an opacity in the story which thus remains in part enigmatic and conceals itself paradoxically and partially from the French reader to whom it is however addressed, forcing him/her to recognize it as being different.

The language of *La vie et demie* is thus characterized by numerous neologisms (for example, "gester," 85; "sourissonner," 76) some of which are meaningless outside the context of the story itself. This is especially the case of "pistolétographes" (71), which designates the writers of tracts and graffiti, or of "chaidanisé" (178) which the narrator uses to describe Chaïdana’s grandsons who left Yourma to rejoin their grandmother in Darmellia. Other forms of neologism, though not terms wholly invented by the author, distinguish themselves by the change of meaning that they imprint on the word which suddenly becomes new. In this group is found the word "tropicalité" which covers a very large semantic field whose essential meaning is "disparagement." This is also true of the adjective "excellentiel" which is created from the title of the leaders ("Son Excellence le Guide"...) and which refers to the shameful attributes of the presidents of Katalamanasie.

Numerous compound words equally add poetry to Labou Tansi’s personal form of discourse, a discourse which can be traced to African orality (even though compound formations
are by no means unique to African languages). Thus, it can be said that even though periphrases like "les lèche-reins-du-guide" (15); "les hommes-terre" (131); "les va-pas-s’entirer" (40) are built on linguistic forms already latent in French, they are especially direct translations from the author’s African languages in which such compound expressions are very common. To these compound names must be added onomatopoeic expressions like "le ho-hi-hi final" (118), as well as those formulas that come from the language spoken in the streets of Francophone Africa: "L’ancien monseigneur catholique" (67) instead of "l’évêque," "la maison à louer" (43) instead of "la maison louée;" and these insulting terms "con", slang terms "flic, flicaille" (39) or popular terms "bouffer" (16), "les pontes" (31)... that one only seldom sees in the African novel.6

Thus, according to Sewanou Dabla (1986) one has to put aside the author’s justifications when he affirms that: "Je fais éclater les mots pour exprimer ma tropicalité." (which presupposes a "tropical nature" that remains to be defined), in order to concern oneself with the resources of the author’s language. Besides its rhythmic, concise and expressive values the language of Sony Labou Tansi translates a specific relationship with French which reveals itself not by a respectful submission, but by a utilitarian attitude. As such, the linguistic tool charged with expressing the universe of La vie et demie presents this
appropriate tone, so rare in African prose, and which, in this case, reinforces the meanings of the novel by offering it a supplementary element of internal coherence. This is especially illustrated in the onomastics, the names given to objects and people in the novel. According to N’Gal (1982) "tous ces noms ne sont pas choisis au hasard" (140). They have a textual function because of their sonority and suggestiviness. In La vie et demie social and political values are systematized and turned upside down and language is so deformed that it is devoid of meaning.

It is the same process of systematization that we find in L’État honteux, Labou Tansi’s second novel which tells the story of the over forty-year long reign of Colonel Martillimi Lopez at the head of a fictional African state, a reign characterized by eccentricities and craziness of the president. The story turns around itself and gives the impression of a crystallization of time. The novel begins with Lopez’s rise to power and ends with his resignation; within this framework it is made up of an unending repetition of identical elements and events. The abnormal becomes the norm in all spheres of social and political life. When Colonel Lopez becomes president, his congenital hernia becomes the symbol of his majesty and his open fly becomes his emblem. Everything closely connected with the president and his family takes on a national value: his mother is "Maman nationale;" his excrescence becomes the
national hernia; even the arbitrary and extravagant assume a
dimensional. Violence and blood lead to a condition
of general psittacine. "Oui, monsieur le Président....
Oui, monsieur le Président," becomes a refrain that is
repeated throughout the novel. But the repetition serves to
show that we are in the midst of a state where language has
lost its meaning; where the people do not have a voice of
their own and where they are only left with the possibility
of parroting their master's voice. This psittaceous state
of the people is made explicit by the author with the
introduction of a real parrot in the story to translate the
president's speech: "On fait venir Narka son perroquet qui
peut traduire la suite du discours dans la langue des
oiseaux..." (32). In a state where people are silenced,
where they do not have a voice of their own, they can only
live in fear. But fear breeds fear, and the infernal circle
closes on the President who sees enemies everywhere:

À l'époque, nous vîmes de grands camions se diriger
vers la cité du pouvoir. Nous pensions que c'étaient
des armes amérindiennes, des munitions. Rien de tout
cela. Car ce n'étaient que des pots de moutarde. Il
nous fallut de temps et de la science pour le
découvrir: des pots de moutarde avec mon portrait
dessus, fabriqués par la famille personnelle de ma
nouvelle belle-maman en Haute-Savoie, parce qu'ils vont
m'empoisonner si je me mets à bouffer n'importe quoi;
il venait de prendre la décision de ma maman que je ne
me mourrirai plus que de cette moutarde-ci, terminé
avec les plats de mon peuple, terminé avec les boissons
de vos mamans par lesquelles vous avez essayé de
m'avoir. (61)
Even the narrator himself is affected by psittacine. His narration registers the effect of the president’s gaze and discourse. In *L’Etat honteux* Sony Labou Tansi’s writing provides a perfect illustration of a system where everything is contaminated by the center. The narrator wanders from one street to another: "Ils marchent, rue Dorbenzo, rue Corbenzo, rond point Garcia... rue Fortia, rue Samba, rue Fontaine, rue Tramoni, rue Foreman... Stade Alberto Sanamatouf, quartier Zamba-Town...." Through these wanderings the narrator is able to express the topography of the post-colonial African capital which takes the names of its streets from Spain, Portugal, France, and England. A capital city which, like the nation, has lost its own identity. The narration also wanders from one story to another. The narrator clearly states: "Mais tu connais l’ex-mon-colonel Martillimi Lopez, je vais te raconter son histoire..." but then his narrative starts to recount the story of the late "ex-citoyen Grabanizar." When the narrator begins to recount the story of "ex-mon-colonel Campalouxa mort à l’improviste... " it soon becomes "l’histoire de l’ex-commissaire urbain...."

However, all these stories which are linked together, grotesque and bloody, constitute a History whose "meaning" is entirely contained in this sentence by the narrator: "Mais oui,... puisqu’il n’y a pas de guerre, les tirailleurs foutent la merde" (19). Indeed, whether it is the story of
Martillimi Lopez or that of ex-mon-colonel Campalouxa, it is the same story being re-told, enriched with certain variations. As the narrator explains: "Ici, c’est comme cela, dans toutes les maisons où vous allez le soir, on raconte l’histoire... et chacun y met son ton, sa salive, ses dates, ses lieux, chacun la fait briller à sa guise au ciel de notre imagination" (23).

The notion of variation can also be taken meaning of the "palilalie" of which Martillimi Lopez is very proud. Palilalia, as we know, is a functional disorder of language which translates into the indefinite repetition of the same words. Lopez, the President, suffers from palilalia which makes him repeat incessantly the same words. Besides, the word "palililie" itself is another recurrent word in the text. Thus "palililie" and "hernie" are interchangeable in the text and are sometimes semantically equivalent. However, if Lopez suffers from palilialia, the act of repetition, on the other hand, is a positive characteristic of oral narratives. Thus, the very structure of L’Etat honteux reflects one of the characteristics of oral literature: repetitions, and variations on the same theme. The endless repetitions also convey the sense of a certain hopelessness in the midst of a stagnant situation that is being perpetuated, and which eternally remains the same, from coups d’etats to abortive revolutions which do not change the course of things.
As Roger Chemain (1981) points out, if Sony Labou Tansi has recourse to oral literature, this feature "est ici affecté d’une connotation pathologique, afin de tourner en dérision la logomachie d’un certain discours politique officiel que radio ou télévision remâchent à longueur d’année" (125). In fact, both La vie et demie and L’Etat honteux provide insights into the importance of presidential discourse duly promoted through the media. In La Vie et demie the "Guide" Jean-Coeur-de Pierre was the first to introduce an originality in the use of the media. Each year, his ritual ceremony of deflowering fifty virgins leads to a live broadcast on national television.

In L’Etat honteux, one voice dominates all others. It is the voice of the military dictator, Martillimi Lopez. Like the Messie Koï in Alioum Fantouré’s Le Cercle des Tropiques, Lopez wants his citizens to tune in to their radio to hear his voice:

Puisque les gens ont pris la honteuse habitude de tourner le bouton pendant que je parle, je demande à mon colonel ministre des Frontières de faire mettre des haut-parleurs, dans tous les quartiers, de veiller à ce qu’ils fonctionnent pendant que ma hernie fonctionne, parce qu’il est totalement honteux qu’un peuple n’écoute pas les discours du président, tu les feras mettre Carvanso, et que ça tonne fort, qu’ils m’entendent dans leur sommeil d’animaux honteux, qu’ils m’entendent, pendant qu’ils montent leurs femmes, pendant qu’ils me maudissent et complotent contre moi, pendant qu’ils m’insultent, au moins qu’ils m’entendent et que ma voix les dévierre, faute d’être aimé qu’au moins je sois craint, connu, senti. (22)
In this quotation, as in other passages throughout the novel, official discourse operates as a form of violence against the people. However, if the people are reduced to silence and subjected to violence, the author's writing on the other hand threatens the established power. Through the act of writing the author brings forth another discourse which is independent of the discourse of power and enables the reader to identify the modalities of violence in the actions of those in power. As Elizabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (1991) explains, through writing, "l'écrivain révèle ainsi l'interaction systématique des procédures de vol et de viol qui contribuent au maintien et à la consolidation du pouvoir africain" (104). Writing then operates as a subversive strategy of the text and transforms the political subversion into a linguistic subversion which is actualized on three levels: subversion of language, particularly in its lexical, syntactic and semantic fields, subversion of the very discourse of power and subversion of figures of speech.

In L'Etat honteux certain characters systematically violate the rules of etiquette and the correct usage of language by introducing common expressions into the written language. The author thus makes them break the rules of language which require a distinction between the two registers of spoken language and written language, between popular language and academic language. Martillimi Lopez, the president of the Republic, for example uses curses and
insults in his language: "con de ta mère" (16), "ferme ta
gueule" (29), "son of a bitch" (37), "roupette" (41),
"couilles," (61) expressions which also serve to disrupt his
authority.

In his books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais, Mikhail
Bakhtin explores the liberating and often subversive use of
various dialogue forms in classical, medieval and
Renaissance culture. He stresses the way language is made
to disrupt authority and liberate alternative voices.
Bakhtin’s discussion of "carnival" has important
applications both to particular texts and to the history of
literary genres. The festivities associated with carnival
are collective and popular; hierarchies are turned on their
heads, opposites are mingled and the sacred profaned.
Bakhtin demonstrates that in carnival, obscenity, the
hallmark of the vernacular and of simple and unofficial
discourse, functions as the exact opposite of official
discourse. Obscenity therefore has a function in
literature. It constitutes a weapon.

It is this subversive use of language described by
Bakhtin that Labou Tansi achieves in L’Etat honteux. The
subversive and popular language ascribed to Lopez serves to
humiliate him as Lopez is seen through the speeches he is
made to pronounce. One can therefore see the doubly
corrosive effect of this popular language. The people pull
Lopez down the social ladder by ridiculing him, but Lopez
also demeans himself through his speeches. But most importantly, the use of subversive language in *L’État honteux* not only symbolizes perfectly the depravity of the political morals embodied by President Lopez but it also constitutes Labou Tansi’s own counter-discourse.

At the level of syntax, both Lopez and the narrator constantly overlook the syntactic norms of written language by using an abridged syntax which is a feature of spoken language, and by making no distinction between direct and reported speech. Throughout the novel the narrator always incorporates what the president says in his narration without making any distinction between his own narration and the reported speech of the president. Direct speech (that of the narrator) and indirect speech (the protagonist) frequently interfere with each other:

*I avait juré au nom de maman et à mon nom, au nom de la patrie, vous pouvez me faire confiance, je serai un bon président.... Il s’arrêtait pour manger et boire comme mange et boit mon peuple, il dansa les vraies danses de mon peuple, pas comme vos conards qui faisaient tout venir du pays de mon collègue, moi je suis d’ici et je resterai d’ici, je mangerai ce qu’on mange ici, je boirai ce qu’on boit ici. Il réunit cent trente nationaux et quinze présidents en exil chez nous et vous allez voir comment on fait la politique.* (12-13)

The above quotation clearly shows that the president’s speech overlaps with that of the narrator (which I have indicated in italics), whose speech can be seen to be less compact than that of the president. This narrative style in which direct speech and indirect speech merge reinforces the
oral nature of the novel. Judging from the above example, it becomes obvious that the president’s speech dominates and frames that of the narrator. The president’s speech thus "violates" and subverts the speech of the narrator just as the author’s language violates and subverts the language of writing and the language of power. However, if this form of narration seems an anomaly in written language, it is perfectly normal in oral literature where traditional storytellers can mark the intervention of a character by changing their voice to imitate that of the character.

If Labou Tansi has recourse to oral tradition, it is because this tradition, through some of its techniques (improvisation, nominal expansion, phatic functions), contains an ideal of freedom whose values the writer, by exercising an esthetic violence, wishes to reassert. Thus, according to Mudimbe-Boyi, an ultimate irony is embodied in the reversed relationship that the writer and those in power maintain with the appropriation and violation of language. Whereas in the hands of those in power, appropriation and violation of language function as negative elements of an autocratic and manipulative system, they represent, in the act of writing, a space of freedom in which the writer can advance a political and esthetic claim.

La Vie et demie and L’Etat honteux are about the abuses of power through a predominantly male discourse. In L’Anté-peuple and Les Sept solitude de Lorsa Lopez, there is an
unanticipated reversal of women's roles. Through quite
different narrative structures, each novel subverts male
discourse and recodes it through a woman's voice.

_L'Anté-peuple_ recounts the spiritual journey of Dadou,
the director of a girls' training school, from the moment a
young girl in his school falls in love with him till his
days in the maquis as a revolutionary. Unlike _La Vie et
demie_ and _L'Etat-honteux_, _L'Anté-peuple_ has a linear
structure that holds no surprises in its chronology. Time
passes in a logical sequence and there is a clear succession
of settings within which Dadou passes from one role to
another. However, it is Dadou's verbal tics that cement the
linear structures of time, settings, and the character's
evolving roles. Dadou, who is incapable of naming things,
has the obsessive habit of repeating certain words whose
semantic content shifts each time they are used and which
express mostly a politics of mediocrity.

Two female characters, Yavelde and Yealdara, make the
narrative possible and it is through them that the author
subverts male discourse. While the one triggers Dadou's
spiritual crisis the other takes him through a journey of
self discovery. Yavelde who cannot bring herself to
understand why her director is not interested in her seeks
revenge by renouncing the privileges she enjoys for
belonging to a powerful political family. Yavelde's action
thus symbolizes the activities of the authorities. Just as
Yavelde’s action leads to the senseless murder of Dadou’s two children and drives his wife to commit suicide, so the activities of the authorities are responsible for the countless deaths of the people. As the narrator informs us: "Quant la loi a échappé des mains de ceux qui la contrôlent, elle devient une incomparable machine à tuer. Et ici, effectivement, la loi s’était affolée; elle tuait, elle blessait, elle écorchait" (137).

The second woman, Yealdara, outraged by the injustice perpetrated against Dadou, gives up the privileges that her family offers her and leaves to seek justice for Dadou. She is a nurturer and a mediator for Dadou throughout his journey and without her Dadou could not have escaped from prison. Although both Yavelde and Yealdara play different roles in the novel’s narrative, together they are essential to Dadou’s growing awareness of the injustice in the society.

Linking Dadou to the two women and the events in the novel is the theme of life, the theme that structures the narrative and whose semantic nucleus is found in the very title of the novel. First of all L'Anté-peuple is the author’s own lexical invention. It is presented as a compound noun which can be translated literally as "that which precedes the people," thus echoing another African novel, Ayi Kwei Armah’s The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born.
In other words, it can be inferred from the title that such a people do not yet exist.

The title may also be the author’s way of reminding us of the fictional nature of his novel although certain parallels exist between the events being narrated and the societies in post-independent Africa. According to Nadine Fetteweis (1989) despite the differences in morphology, the word "anté-peuple" recalls "l’Antéchrist." She explains that the novel is structured around individuals and the society. But the society, which is normally supposed to constitute an organized structure according to which the people will shape their existence, turns out to be "cent fois plus moche" (14). Since the society exists by falsehood, it is presented as a monstrous imposter, as the "anté-peuple," in the same way as "L’Antéchrist" is also an imposter. The point to note here is that these two meanings are clearly intended by the author since this ambivalence, this double valence, serves to create tension in the novel.

In *L’Anté-peuple*, as in his other novels, Sony Labou Tansi invents words and shifts the meaning of existing ones. With his fertile imagination he brings us into his domain which is that of language. If Labou Tansi uses such words as "cingle," "connerie," "mocherie," "merder," etc. to describe the people and the society in *L’Anté-peuple*, and if he shifts the meanings of these words in different contexts,
it is because for him the living experience can be represented through the esthetics of language.

Labou Tansi manipulates the French language and bends the rules to suit his purpose. As Jonathan Ngaté (1988) points out, most of the sentences in L’Anté-peuple show that Labou Tansi prefers to use words which call attention to themselves as much as possible. The various ways in which he plays with spatial and temporal relationships, and makes deft use of allusions to key cultural facts or reveals shared thematic concerns with works by other African writers, help to create a sense of intimacy between storyteller and an attentive African audience. The dedication of the novel sets the tone for the kind of language we can expect from Labou Tansi:

A mes morts --
Pour des mots
Qui soient des têtes de morts --
Et parce que mourir
C’est rêver un autre rêve. (9)

This passage recalls the "Avertissement" in La vie et demie where he asks: "À une époque où l’homme est plus que jamais résolu à tuer la vie, comment voulez-vous que je parle sinon en chair-mots-de-passe?" (9) Words, then, perform two functions in the works of Labou Tansi. They translate a lived experience and they are the means to get closer to the ancestors or to address the dead since in ceremonies such as the pouring of libation words serve as the vehicle through which the living communicate with the dead. The passage
also calls to mind the sentence in Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*: "En français, le mot est près de la mort, il ne lui manque qu'une seule lettre..." (9). The writing of *L'Anté-peuple* thus establishes an intertextuality with other African novels.

Labou Tansi's suggestive use of language enables him to achieve the desired effect. In *L'Anté-peuple*, when "citoyen commissaire" Nioka Musanar observes that Dadou is hesitant in responding to Yealdara's invitation to dance, we are told that the commissaire "lui jeta un coup d'oeil compliqué" (36), a complicated glance that was enough to move Dadou to his feet. In much the same way, Dadou's dance with Yavelde is captured with a touch of eroticism and sensousness: "Elle se plantait en lui trop fortement en faisant des remous de viande qui basculaient sa pensée" (40) The image of Dadou as "viande," as a helpless victim, is again evoked by Yavelde: "J'ai dansé avec lui au retrait de deuil du citoyen commissaire. J'ai tellement bien frotté qu'il s'est réveillé. J'ai encaissé une belle intensité. Une belle chaleur locale. Ça pesait bien à travers ma robe. Ça me dilatait" (49).

In describing the nature and implications of the way Yavelde lost her virginity, the author uses a kind of language that is appropriate only in the context in which it is used: "Au retour, elle portait deux douleurs dans les jambes, deux fatigues dans les reins, deux nausées au coeur"
(54). In this quotation, we realize that the author has quantified nouns like "douleurs," "fatigues," and "nausées" whose intensity cannot be "numbered." It is of course this imaginative use of language that allows Labou Tansi to describe a neighborhood in Kinshasa in the following terms: "Matongué, ce quartier chanté par les grands chanteurs du pays. C'était le Poto-Poto d'ici, les filles y sentaient le ciel et l'eau. Elles avaient une tuante dose de soleil dans les reins" (26).

In other instances the author captures the kind of French spoken in the streets of Brazzaville or Kinshasa. Thus, when Dadou vomits on the dance floor someone shouts insults at him: "C'est un cochon. C'est le père de tous les cochons du monde. Il a "merdé" sur ma belle veste. Flanquez-lui un bon "coudoyade"" (41). Here it is obvious that "merdé" and "coudoyade" are clearly understood in the local context in which they are used because these words do not exist in standard French. Similarly, to show that Belgian drinks do not have the desired "force" the author uses a language that is associated with bar goers in Brazzaville: "Dadou trompa sa gorge avec d'insipides boissons belges. Ça vous soule, mais ça ne vous met pas au monde. Ça ne reveille pas les démangeaisons de l'âme, ça vous noie et c'est tout" (105).

Earlier in the novel, to dramatize the fact that Dadou had an electrifying influence on his fans when he was a
football player, Labou Tansi has recourse to the language that is normally spoken in a sports stadium to capture the right tone: "Dadou se rappela ces moments où des milliers de poitrines se pendaient à son pied, suffoquant un instant avant de faire exploser ce terrible "Wooo!" qui fêtaient ses buts" (46).

Baktin’s notion of dialogic voices in the novels of Dostoevsky is apparent in the style of Labou Tansi. His constant use of "mocheries" in various modulations also calls to mind the "bâtardise de bâtardise" used by Fama in Les Soleils des Indépendances to convey his aggravations. Like Ahmadou Kourouma, Labou Tansi sometimes changes the rules of French grammar in order to convey an image in vivid terms. As Dadou’s cell-mate in the novel points out: "On est en prison parce que d’autres, là-bas, boivent et dorment les femmes, parce que, là-bas, chantent les plats et les chansons" (91). We notice in this quotation the unusual transitive use of the verbs "boire" and "dormir" which is due to the personal style of the author.

In other instances the writer’s translations are quite obvious. In the novel there are references to the Congolese musician Tabu Ley. One of Tabu Ley’s songs "Mokolo na kokufa" ("The day I die") is mentioned, evaluated and the lyrics translated and integrated into the narrative of the story:

Il est de jours
où je pense
que je suis là étendu
comme je m’étendrai
le jour
de ma mort...
oui à vos pleurs
mais je ne saurai même pas
qui pleure
comme je suis là étendu... (52).

Thus, in *L’Anté-peuple*, the manipulation of the language of narration and the novel itself would seem to confirm what the author himself said in the "Avertissement" to *L’État honteux*:

J’écris, ou je crie, un peu pour forcer le monde à venir au monde. Je n’aurai donc jamais votre honte d’appeler les choses par leur nom. J’estime que le monde dit moderne est un scandale et une honte, je ne dis que cette chose-là en plusieurs "maux".

Calling things by their proper names necessarily implies putting these things in their proper context. In the African context, it is the African language that gives names to objects and assigns meaning to them. That is why Labou Tansi’s style is characterized by his own African way of naming things. It is this same style of writing that we encounter in *Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez* which begins as a hommage, in the form of a parody, to Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. In *Les Sept solitudes* one finds a profusion of words and a sense of derision characteristic of his earlier works. But whereas in *L’Anté-peuple* the structure of the narrative is informed by the two women, Yavelde and Yealdara through the prism of male discourse, in *Les Sept solitudes* the structure is
informed by women’s liberating discourse of resistance. The heroine, Estina Bronzario, "une fille pleine de vitamines...," (21) and her community must confront a post-colonial state where bureaucracy has brought in its wake dishonor, corruption and the abuses of political power.

The women in *Les Sept solitudes* create history with a collective voice. In Labou Tansi’s other novels male discourse, the discourse of authority and power, destroys both women and history. To restore history and bring dignity to the community the women in *Les Sept solitudes* must usurp male discourse, individually and collectively. Thus, instead of a third person narrative with an omniscient narrator as we have found in his earlier novels, *Les Sept solitudes* has a participatory first person narrative spoken by a woman. And since the narrator is relating a collective tale she constantly refers to herself and the group by the all inclusive "nous". By contrast, the linearity in *L’Anté-peuple* gives way to a fixed point in *Les Sept Solitudes* where events revolve around the same center. As in *La Vie et demie* or *L’Etat honteux*, time loses all meaning. Thus here, as in his other works, Labou Tansi has recourse to various literary traditions, especially the fable and oral literature, with their repetitions, cycles, incantations and Rabelaisian accumulations.

The structure of the novel is built upon a set of antitheses: the town (Valancia) versus the city, (Nsanga-
Norda). Within this set can be seen the larger opposition between traditional values (espoused by the people of Valancia) and "modernity" as it is reflected in the life of Nsanga-Norda. It is also evident that it is within this framework that a politics of matriarchy sets itself against the abuses of patriarchy and neo-colonialism. However, Labou Tansi does not necessarily privilege female discourse over male discourse since either discourse can be oppressive or liberating. As the narrator informs us: "Les femmes aussi sont les hommes" (45).

The female appropriation of male discourse in Les Sept solitudes as a weapon of resistance in a way parallels the appropriation of the colonizer's language by contemporary African writers as a way of decolonizing the African text. Since male discourse has been found to be abusive and authoritative it has to give way to a female voice that can bring dignity and stability. By analogy, since the colonial language was used by the colonizer to mis-represent Africans and their values, the African writer must usurp this language and transform it if he or she is to put a truly African stamp on his or her African work of art. Thus when Labou Tansi wants to present something that touches the culture of the people, he uses the actual words that those people would use in their language before explaining in French the significance of those words to other people. For instance we are told that: "du vivant des anciens la semaine
n'avait que cinq jours: Mpika, Boukonzo, Mutsila, Nkoyi, Bumumgu. Mpika était le jour de repos, Bukonzo, le jour du poisson, Mutsila le jour des tubercules, Nkoyi celui des légumes et Bumungu celui des prières" (125). Elsewhere, the author transcribes the actual words of a local song into the body of the novel before translating the song into French and placing it in a footnote (27). Thus through this stylistic device the author privileges the local language as the real medium for expressing a local reality.

NOTES


3 Sony Labou Tansi, "Avertissement" to La Vie et demie, 1979, 18.


6 For the reasons underlying Labou Tansi’s choice of names and words see Sewanou Dabla, Nouvelles écritures africaines. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1986. See also Arlette Chemain, "Sony Labou Tansi: Affabulation, critique sociale et

CHAPTER VII
WRITING AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

Although the African writers whose works we have discussed may not be concerned with recent developments in translation theory, as creative translators, they employ certain translation techniques in order to convey their meaning and style in the European medium of expression. However, the translation techniques employed by the writers do not always fit into the mainstream western notions of translation. This is because, as creative writers, they are not necessarily concerned with the notions of "faithfulness" or equivalence. Because they are writing in a foreign language, they capitalize on translation techniques that will be able to convey their languages and cultural items into the foreign language. And because most African writers are secondary speakers of the foreign languages in which they write, the techniques they utilize in the creative translation process appropriately fall under the terms of calquing, cushioning and contextualization.

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In his *Introduction à l'étude du roman négro-africain* (1980), Jean-Pierre Makoutou M’Boukou states that it is the linguistic context that determines the comprehension of the message of an African writer, and indeed the message can be totally obscured if the linguistic context is not elucidated. In addition, the novel written in French or English by the African does not reflect just one but rather multiple linguistic structures. In concrete terms, the African writer is in a situation of diglossia because of history. According to M’Boukou Francophone African writers therefore transcribe mother tongue expressions or utterances which they consider to be untranslatable into French. They may insert into the French text several sequences from the mother tongue, or they may resort to their mother tongues through a method of translation. This method of translation is what he refers to as "calque" and it includes the introduction of whole sentences or local expressions that are usually considered to be sayings, proverbs or idiomatic expressions in the African languages. Such calques are language specific utterances that are translated into the European language and which can only be understood in terms of the sociocultural background of the linguistic community in which they are used.

In characteristic fashion, Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des Indépendances* provides ample evidence of the use of this technique. The novel opens with the death of Koné
Ibrahima, an event that is expressed in euphemistic terms in clear Malinke rhythm: "... disons-le en malinké " (1). Right from the very first sentence, the reader is presented with the Malinke project that will inform and sustain the author’s discourse. Thus the phrase "avait fini" to express Ibrahima Koné’s death is a translation from the author’s native language. The fact that the author chose this expression instead of French colloquial expressions like "il a cassé sa pipe" or "il a passé l’arme à gauche," shows that Kourouma wanted his Malinké world view to dominate his novel.

The word "ombre" in the above quotation is also a calque from the Malinke concept of spirit or soul. It is believed among many African peoples that when a person dies, his or her spirit continues to live and move from place to place. Thus, those who claim to have seen Koné Ibrahima may have seen his "spirit" or "soul" and not his person. Because a spirit or a soul in African religious beliefs is not to be confused with the Christian or Islamic notions of the same concepts, the author chose to use "ombre" which does not have a "christian" or "islamic" connotation. But faced with the difficulty of making readers understand what he means by this term, Kourouma eventually has recourse to the Malinke dja.

In Henri Lopes’ Le Pleurer-rire, whole sentences in the local language are inserted into the narrative before being
translated. For example, "Boka litassa dounkounê" is translated as "Reçois le pouvoir des ancêtres" (47), and "Mana foléma, mana toukaré lowisso natina," "Nous lutterons résolument contre le racisme" (191).

Proverbs, which Achebe calls the "palm oil with which words are eaten," are probably the most common form manifesting the use of translated mother-tongue into the European language. Numerous examples abound in all the novels we have discussed. In Les Soleils des Indépendances we come across proverbs such as: "A renifler avec discrétion le pet de l’effronté, il vous juge sans sez" (12) and "L’hyène a beau être édentée, sa bouche ne sera jamais un chemin de passage pour le cabri" (16). Henri Lopes writes in Le Pleurer-rire that: "La souris qui vous mange la plante des pieds n’est autre que celle qui vit sous votre lit" and "Le léopard qui veut vous attaquer ne fait pas de bruit" (168).

As Achebe (1964) points out, "The good orator calls to his aid the legends, folk-lore, proverbs... of his people; they are some of the raw material with which he works." Thus the use of proverbs by the authors points to the fact that if the stylistic features of African oral narrative are to be captured in the African novel in the European languages, then the full range of linguistic resources of African prose traditions must be rendered in the European languages. By making their characters often express their
thoughts in proverbs these writers emphasize their involvement in African culture and wisdom. Moreover, the profusion of proverbs on the part of the writers denote a deeper knowledge of their heritage and linguistic ressources, elements that are given new shape and form in the imported medium of expression.

Another writing technique in African literature which may be considered a form of calquing is the use of semantic shifts. A semantic shift occurs when known lexical items in the target language are assigned features of meaning from the source language such that the derived meaning preserves the African content of the source text, even though the new meaning is not native to the target language. When a writer uses a semantic shift, the European word is assigned a new meaning which can only be understood within the context in which it is used.

In Kourouma's *Les soleils des Indépendances*, there are semantic shifts like the use of "honte" not so much to connote shame, which is its meaning in the French language, but rather to mean reserve, bashfulness and modesty in the Malinké context. We remember that when Fama came out of prison, Bakary informed him about his (Fama’s) wife’s unfaithfulness while he was in prison. In Bakary’s opinion this was "une honte aussi épaisse que celle qui a conduit le varan de rivière à se cacher dans l’eau" (185). The Malinke reader who knows the precise anecdote which serves as the
basis for this metaphor can judge the nature of the "honte" in question. Thus, even without the use of proverbs and other more detailed forms, it can be seen that the desire to describe the African imaginary world in a satisfactory way pushes the writer to resort to cultural presuppositions that are unfamiliar to the monolingual reader. Thus, when Djigui asks (on page 88 of Monnè): "Est-ce cela la totalité du train?" he is referring to a whole set of cultural and historical context that is not obvious to the non-Malinke reader. According to Ahmadou Koné (1992) Djigui’s question is an expression which marks a great surprise in Malinke. It means "Ce n’est que cela?" To understand this expression one has to consider all the miseries and hardships caused by the forced labor during the construction of the railway line. In Djigui’s mind the train can only be a gigantic monster. But the thing itself turns out to be very disappointing. Another example: Djigui’s son Bema boasts of having the support of the whole country behind him in his bid for power, with the exception of his father. And the narrator comments: "Ce qui n’était pas une parole" (270). Here also, the expression comes from Malinké and it means that what has been said is a blasphemy and a silly remark. For the Malinke reader, the expression "ce n’est pas une parole" is certainly more intensely significant than its neutral French translation.
In addition to calquing, by far the most commonly used translation technique by African writers, according to Chantal Zabus (1991), is the twin methods of cushioning and contextualization. By cushioning is meant the translation strategy whereby the African writer tags an explanatory word or phrase in the European language to explain the African word or phrases. Contextualization, as the name implies involves the provision of areas of immediate context for African words and phrases.

In *La carte d’identité*, Jean-Marie Adiaffi explains the meaning of the Agni word, *floco* in the body of his narrative:

> Floco veut dire: celui qui n’est pas circoncis, donc un idiot, un lourd aud, un homme vil, un va-nu-pieds, un fils de chien, un pauvre bâtard qui ne comprend vraiment rien à rien.

In fact, the translation process in *La carte d’identité* relies very heavily on this strategy as Adiaffi almost always provides the meanings of the Agni words he introduces into his text. We have already mentioned the translation of the African names of the characters in the novel. Other examples of cushioning used by Adiaffi refer to certain Agni concepts: "Dihié" ("les nobles," 23), "kita, pagne Tiakoto et Diampa" ("pagne royal, gros calèçon et majestueuse, ample chemise traditionnelle," 27), "Blofouèkro" ("c’est-à-dire le quartier des Blofouè, des Blancs," 117).
Ahmadou Kourouma also cushions the Malinké *dja* with "ombre" (*Soleils*, 106 and 120) or with "principe vital" (*Monné*, 200). *Monné* or monnew is translated by "le temps des ressentiments," (*Monné*, 155) and is repeatedly contextualized so that the expression "les saisons d’amertume" (193) refers back to the word monné. Through this strategy, Kourouma underscores the lexical and semantic inability of French to render the density and richness of the Malinké vocabulary. As the Toubab points out in the introductory part of the novel:

> En vérité, il n’y a pas chez nous, Européens, une parole rendant le monné malinké. (9)

Certainly, if the French language is incapable of fully expressing the Malinke world-view then one understands the difficulty in describing a feeling in a language in which this feeling does not even have a name. Thus, the need to filter the African imagination through the European medium of expression compels the writer to use expressions and conventional forms which derive from African languages.

Faced with the difficulty of describing the intolerable political climate of Moundié under Tonton Bwakamabé in "standard" French, and in an effort to capture the African language-based French that is spoken in his society, Henri Lopes resorts to the strategy of cushioning and contextualization. In *Le Pleurer-rire*, certain African words are introduced and then cushioned or contextualized.
For example: "Le griot entonna le fameux Pouéna Kanda, un air triste et lent qui dit que le pays des Djabotama s’étiole car le trône est vacant, puisque l’ennemi a tué par traîtrise tous les hommes capables de le protéger comme un père son fils" (46). Through the use of this technique Lopes explains to the reader the meaning of Pouéna Kanda, or at least gives an idea of what it signifies.

Also, in an effort to explain the Lingala word *litassa* Henri Lopes cushions it with the French word "pouvoir."

However, since "pouvoir" is not an adequate translation for the Lingala *litassa* he resorts to contextualization:

A la vérité, le mot *litassa* renferme plus de sens que le mot français pouvoir. C’est à la fois le pouvoir de commandement, l’intelligence pour dominer les autres et la puissance aussi bien physique du taureau qu’extra-terrestre. Ainsi est-il possible d’agir grâce à ces moyens auxquels les Oncles ne veulent pas croire et qui vous mettent à l’abri de l’ennemi. Qui a reçu la *litassa* communiqué sans intermédiaire avec les ancêtres. Il lira dans toutes les consciences comme dans l’eau de la fontaine. Nulle femme ne lui résistera. Il pourra marcher sur l’onde et voler par-dessus les montagnes. Il sera résistant à la morsure du serpent. Les balles changeront de chemin à l’approche de sa poitrine. (47)

It is obvious from the above quotation that it is only by creating a context for the African word that its full meaning can be comprehended in the narrative. Even though the context for most African words introduced in *Le Pleurer-rire* is given as soon as the word is introduced, as for example: "le tounka, une chaîne de fer avec de nombreux pendentifs" (47) or "la loukita, qui est à l’origine une
danse de guerre" (48), elsewhere, the meaning of an African word is given in a context which comes several pages later. For example, we are told right at the beginning of Le Pleurer-rire that "Le damuka s’était réuni dans une venelle de Moundié" (14). However, because damuka is not directly translated, the non-Lingala reader has to wait until page 56 to clearly understand the word damuka: "Quel que soit son sort, elle danse et chante, pour se distraire, pour séduire une femme, pour oublier, pour pleurer un mort au damuka" (56).

Put together, what these translation strategies seek is a certain aesthetics in African writing that is accomplished through the violation of the French language at the level of the novels’ themes and structure. At the thematic level, it is significant to note that all these novels present political leaders and their acts of violence perpetrated against the people. In Monné, for instance, (where the cruelty of traditional African kings is mentioned), the destructive violence exercised against albinos, dwarfs, and the weak who are captured and sacrificed seems to sanction the end of a culture, that is, the end of a certain Africa. At the structural level all these novels play another role in the account of violence. They present a humane attempt to control and overcome violence. That is why in some instances the treatment of violence is done with a certain detachment and humor. The increased terrifying descriptions
in the novels create an effect of a distorting image and provocation in the scenes in which one joyful repression follow another at a breathtaking rhythm. In *La vie et demie*, *Le Pleurer-Rire*, and *Les écailles du ciel*, violence against the people seems to have become a way of life. Although it can be said that an exaggeration in the details of cruelty sometimes harms the credibility of these stories, what must be noted is that the authors seek a certain aesthetic quality in the hyperrealism that characterizes the detailed descriptions of violence. In other words, the detailed descriptions of violent scenes is similar to a literary expressionism that establishes the originality of these African novels. The most violent scenes, in which hyperrallism, expressionism and humor go together, are also naturally those through which we enter the text, as in *La vie et demie* and Monnè. Monnè begins with the account of the bloody sacrifices multiplied in an excessive rage in order to prevent the threats of the colonial conquest which hangs over the future of Djigui, king of Soba, and his people. As a stylistic device, plunging the reader right into this violent universe creates an effect of shock, and produces a violent rupture with the reader's daily universe.

Scenes of violence also occur in the search for an esthetic composition. In *Le Pleurer-rire*, for example, the account of the mutilation of the hungry thieves whose hands are cut in the presence of the diplomatic corps convened for
this occasion, to a background of music, contrasts with
tender and calm scenes elsewhere in the novel. The violence
of the abortive coup d’etat (144), followed by the violence
of the repression of the Djakissinis by the Djabotamas
(192), serves as a counterpoint to the interminable
discussions at the presidential palace. In connection with
the other parts of the novel, the violence becomes a motif
in a symphonic composition. Aggressive passages conflict
with relaxed scenes in fragmented stories and the
discontinuity materializes right down to the novel’s
typography (italics, capital letters, large blank spaces).
Public and private scenes, political and intimate sessions,
flashbacks and reflections on the present, follow each other
to constitute a structural unity.

In Monenembo’s *Les écailles du ciel* the description of
atrocities committed against the people contrast with the
carefree life of the griot and his friends who drink away
their problems at *Chez Nqaulou*, and fantasy is blended with
reality. What is most important is that all these novels
fall within an esthetic where violence is done not only to
the narrative continuity but also to the language of
narration.

Furthermore, as Chantal Zabus (1991) has demonstrated,
the translation of a historically repressed language into
the dominant one entails some textual violence. In the
African context, since this violence is directed against and
via the dominant language, the repressed African language struggles to surface in and inhabit the European language. As she puts it, "the African morphemes and etymons thus gnaw at the target language whose hegemony is thereby subverted" (152). The European language is pushed and forced to the position of "minor" language and in that sense ceases to be an instrument of domination. To the extent that African writers privilege their African languages to occupy the position that informs the European language, to the extent that they force the European language to refer back to the African language for understanding and signification, the African writers whose works we have analyzed use translation as a strategy of literary decolonization. However, as Amadou Koné (1992) points out, the success of the effort to translate one's native language and to re-appropriate the foreign language in a meaningful way depends on the ability of the novelist to master his/her mother tongue and the language of writing. It depends also on the writer's ability to construct a system in which context, culture and language are harmonized. The success of the writers we have discussed in translating their languages into the French medium of expression is due to the fact that they set out consciously to express a Malinké, Agni, Lingala, Swahili, or Peuhl imagination in the French language.
CHAPTER VIII
WRITING AS TRANSFERRING CULTURE: SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN THE
TRANSLATION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

It is obvious from our discussions so far that African literature in European languages is greatly influenced by African oral tradition and African languages. Needless to say, it is this influence that has given rise to a variety of European languages of writing (English and French) which may be considered African. And it is the nature of these Africanized varieties which poses specific problems for translators of African literature. As our analysis of the African texts has shown, what the African writer does, as a creative translator, is to unearth the full cultural meaning hidden in his or her language and to transpose this meaning into the European medium of expression.

Thus, in translating a work of African literature, the translator strives to operate at the level of the author to ensure that both the translator and the target audience receive the text as intended by the author. It is therefore
advantageous for the translator to share a similar "life-world" and experience with the author. For this reason, it would be preferable for an African to translate a text of African literature since he or she will be more familiar with the cultural background of the text to be translated and be able to "impersonate" the author. According to Irene d’Almeida (1981):

When it is an African person who is translating an African writer, impersonation is somewhat easier and more effective because the African person is more familiar with the cultural background in which the actions occur and in which the characters are set. Religious rituals, festivals, customs and even day-to-day occurrences are seen from within because they are part of a shared experience. (25)

However, there is no guarantee that the translated text will be adequate simply because the translator is African. This is evident from d’Almeida and Simpson’s translation of Achebe’s Arrow of God from English into French where in some instances Achebe’s translation of Igbo customs and sayings into English could not be easily rendered into French by the translators (as we shall find out later in our discussion of this translation).

It is generally believed in the practice of translation that a native speaker of the language into which a translation is being carried out is best qualified for the task. In other words, there is a general tendency for one to translate into one’s own mother tongue. ¹ However, in translating African literature, interpretation and
understanding play a more prominent role. What is essential is the translator’s interpretative ability and not just his communicative skills, as understanding is a necessary prelude to communication. According to E. Simpson (1980) the European languages used in African writing have been so localized that:

Much may be lost to the uninitiated European translator whose only title to competence is that he is working into his own mother-tongue [...] there are terms used or created by English-speaking Africans which their French-speaking counterparts would express better in French than the mother-tongue French speaker of the colonial metropolis, and vice versa. (14-18)

In this case the "ideal" translator may well be the one who is less likely, to "activate scenes that diverge from the author’s intentions or deviate from those activated by a native speaker of the source language (a frequent cause of translation error)" (Snell-Hornby, 1988, 81). To be successful, any translator of modern African literature should be be able to capture the oral and linguistic features of the African work and the cultural realities they express and render these features into the target language.

I mentioned in the introductory chapter how comparative literature benefits from translation and how certain scholars’ and critics’ notions of African literature are based on their reading of African texts that have been translated from one European language into another. I propose therefore to approach the question of the translation of African literary works through close analysis
of examples from the translation of Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, Tierno Monenembo’s *Les crapauds-brousse* and Henri Lopes’ *Le Pleurer-rire*, not so much to evaluate the products but rather to show how these translations provide material for illustrating some of the problems faced by translators of works of African literature.

Achebe’s *Arrow of God* depicts the cultural crisis that accompanied the consolidation of British colonialism in Igboland in the 1920s, while the two novels of Monenembo and Lopes portray the abuses of power in post-independent Africa. However, the particular interest of all three novels lies not just in their themes, but precisely in the fact that they represent a conscious reconciliation between African and European techniques of storytelling. In other words, these writers have used the written word alone to convey all that traditional storytellers, or griots, formerly conveyed with the help of music, mime, and other para-linguistic means at their disposal; and they also show their concern to retain the essential African quality of image and rhythm within the new framework of the English or French language.

*Arrow of God* was translated as *La flèche de Dieu* by Irene d’Almeida and Olga Simpson. The novel depicts a fictional community of Igbo speakers grouped in six villages collectively known as Umuaro, which falls within the larger colonial territory called Nigeria, where the colonial
administrative and military apparatus and the missionary presence are only beginning to make themselves felt. As Neil ten Kortenaar (1995) points out, Achebe presents a community that defines itself by shared symbols (local deities and established rituals, as well as proverbial wisdom) and by symbolic boundaries.

The very first chapter of the novel introduces us to two of Achebe’s notable qualities as a writer: his unwillingness to compromise with his reader by explaining things, and the complexity of his narrative. A whole string of Igbo words occurs in the opening pages—obi, ogene, alusi, okposi, ofo—and throughout the novel without any direct explanation of what they mean. The reader is therefore called upon to infer their meaning from the context. As to the complexity of Achebe’s descriptions, it must be noted that, among other things, the first chapter introduces us to Igbo religion, agriculture, family life, cooking, architecture, proverbs, and perhaps, most importantly, to Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of the patron deity Ulu. Ezeulu’s introduction right at the beginning of the novel signals his importance in two major respects: first, as the Chief Priest, he assumes the mantle of upholder of tradition, even if he invents the tradition that he upholds. It is worth noting that Ezeulu’s devotion to Ulu is not the culture of Umuaro waiting to be interpreted and judged, but rather his own interpretation of Umuaro culture, with a
judgement inscribed within it. Secondly, because Ezeulu’s name suggests an absolute identification with his role, his own tragedy is the narrative configuration that the author gives to colonization.

It is obvious from reading Arrow of God that it is the Igbo socio-cultural values that inform the narrative structure of the novel. The translator of the text must therefore be able to decode the socio-cultural meaning of the text in the most lucid manner. The translation of the following prayer offered by Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, is indicative of a lapse in the decoding of meaning during the translation process by d’Almeida and Simpson. This is how Achebe renders Ezeulu’s prayer in English:

Ulu, I thank you for making me see another new moon. May I see it again and again. May this household be healthy and prosperous. As this is the moon of planting, may the six villages plant with profit. May we escape danger in the farm-the bite of a snake or the sting of the scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland. May we not cut our shinbone with the matchet or the hoe. May our wives bear male children. May we increase in numbers at the next counting of the villages so that we shall sacrifice a cow and not a chicken as we did after the last New Yam feast. May children put their fathers into the earth and not fathers their children. May good meet the face of every man and every woman. May good come to the land of the riverain folk and to the land of the forest peoples. (6-7)

This passage is translated by d’Almeida and Simpson as follows:

Ulu, je te remercie de m’avoir permis de voir une fois de plus une nouvelle lune. Puissé-je la revoir d’année en année. Puissie cette maison être prospère et en bonne santé. Puissent les six villages recueillir avec
profit le fruit de leurs récoltes, puisque c’est la lune de la récolte. Puissé-t-il ne pas y avoir de danger dans les champs - que ce soit la morsure d’un serpent, la piqûre très venimeuse du scorpion ou celle de la népe. Puissions-nous éviter de nous couper le menton avec la machette ou la houe. Puissent nos femmes porter en leur sein des enfants mâles. Puissions-nous être plus nombreux lors du prochain recensement des villages afin de pouvoir vous sacrifier une vache et non pas une poule comme nous l’avions fait après la dernière Fête de la Nouvelle Igname. Puissent les enfants enterrer leurs parents et non pas le contraire. Puise le bien aller à la rencontre de chaque homme et de chaque femme. Puisse-t-il aller chez les peuples reverains tout comme chez les peuples forestiers.2

A number of problems come up in the way Achebe’s passage has been translated. The first problem is a simple question of mistranslation. If we consider the fourth sentence of the passage in English "May we escape the danger in the farm—the bite of a snake or the sting of the scorpion, the mighty one of the scrubland," it is obvious to us from its structure that it is the scorpion that Ezeulu refers to as "the mighty one of the scrubland." The translators missed Ezeulu’s reference to the scorpion and therefore introduced another animal "la nèpe" which is not mentioned in the English original. In addition, "shinbone" in the fifth sentence is actually "le tibia" and not "le menton" as translated by d’Almeida and Simpson.

But there is a much more serious problem associated with d’Almeida and Simpson’s translation of the passage in question which shows that they were not able to decode the specific Igbo context of Ezeulu’s prayer. In the English passage, the reader is given a series of clues that key
him/her in to some of the codes operating through the novel. These clues include "Ulu" (the deity), the thanks being offered to the deity, and the verb "may" which is used in auxiliary function to express a wish or desire. Thus, in addition to the linguistic, literary and social constraints which should have guided d’Almeida and Simpson in their translation of Achebe’s text during the transcoding process, they should also have been more conscious of the strong religious and philosophic tone which permeates this text.

In effect, traditional African religious concepts and more specifically those of Igbo society which subtend the text should have been conveyed in the translated version. The translation of "Ulu, I thank you for making me see another new moon" as "Ulu, je te remercie de m’avoir permis de voir une fois de plus une nouvelle lune" is inappropriate in this context precisely because of the use of the object pronoun "te." As we have already pointed out, Ulu is an Igbo deity and Ezeulu is its Chief Priest. Ezeulu is therefore Ulu’s subordinate and not a colleague. In an African religious prayer, it would be considered highly inappropriate and gross insubordination to address a deity as an equal. In transposing Ezeulu’s prayer into French, the translators should have been guided by the sacrosanct and solemn nature of the relationship of an African deity to its worshippers. Ezeulu’s use of the pronoun "you" should have been understood as "vous," the equivalent pronoun in
French that marks distance and respect. The translators made the same mistake in translating the prayer said to Ulu by Ezeulu’s younger wife, Ugoye, during the Festival of Pumpkin leaves. If Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, cannot address Ulu as an equal, it would be even more inappropriate for his wife to do so. One gets the impression that the translators were much more concerned with the way the Christian God is addressed in French and therefore missed the specific context of Igbo traditional religion in Achebe’s novel.

I have already alluded to Achebe’s unwillingness to compromise with his reader by explaining things. His use of Igbo words or phrases in the narrative (sometimes without any explanation or translation) must therefore be understood as one of the ways of reminding readers about the "multilingual" nature of the text and also as a way of showing the importance of the African word in his text. A critical translator therefore has to analyze Achebe’s text very carefully before proceeding to its translation. A literal translation, such as the one done by d’Almeida and Simpson, without a critical analysis of the source text, will obviously distort the meaning and the aesthetic quality sought by the author.

Let us consider some examples which demonstrate that the translators of Achebe’s text were unable to go beyond Achebe’s English to unearth the specific qualities that make him a great writer. Achebe writes in Arrow of God:
Moon, may your face meeting mine bring good fortune. But how is it sitting? I don’t like its posture.
... Its legs were up in the air
[...] I did not ask you, ant-hill nose.
You will soon cry, Usa bulu Okpili. (2-3)

The above passage is translated as follows:

Lune, puisse-tu me voir et m’apporter le bonheur. Mais comment s’est-elle placée? je n’aime pas sa posture.
... Ses "pointes" étaient en l’air.
[...] Je ne t’ai rien demandé, toi dont le nez est long comme une fourmière.
Tu vas pleurer, Cou démesuré! (12-13)

The statement addressed to the moon by Ugoye, Ezeulu’s younger wife, is a way of speaking that is common to many African traditional peoples. It falls within a certain register of expressions used in prayers, incantations and religious ceremonies or rituals. The appearance of the new moon is highly symbolic in traditional Africa. One of the beliefs of the people is that the new moon brings good fortune. That is why, in this context, it is personified and given human attributes. Thus, it has a "face" and "legs," and it is capable of "sitting." This analysis goes to show that the translation of "may your face meeting mine" as "puisses-tu me voir" deviates from the local idiom, while "placée" (for "sitting") instead of "assise" and "pointes" (for "legs") instead of "jambes" or "pieds" show that the translators have missed the personal attributes given to the moon in the passage.

Achebe’s use of compound formations in names, and of references and modes of address presented yet another
problem for the translators. In the passage quoted above, "ant-hill nose" is a nickname that Obiageli gives to her brother, Nwafo, because of his long nose. This is translated by d’Almeida and Simpson as "toi dont le nez est long comme une fourmilière." Obviously, the translation takes neither the form of a nickname nor that of an appellation. The oral tradition flavor that Achebe achieves in his use of the compound noun is lost by this rather loose comment in French about the boy’s nose. Since compound formations also feature in French it is surprising that the translators did not think of something like "nez-de-fourmilière" which would have been much closer to the one-word expression, would have maintained its form as a nickname and, consequently, its oral narrative quality. Even more serious is the fact that the translators chose to translate into French, an expression that the author himself had maintained in Igbo. "Cou démesuré" may be the exact translation of "usa bulu Okpili," but it is a translation that defeats the author’s intention. The Igbo expression calls attention to itself and to the Igbo language that serves as the deep structure for Achebe’s English. If Achebe chose to maintain the expression in Igbo it is not because the expression is untranslatable into English. It is, as we have pointed out, to remind the reader that he or she is in the presence of a bilingual African text whose meaning must be inferred from the specific African context.
Thus, by choosing to translate the Igbo expression into French, d'Almeida and Simpson destroy an important stylistic device that Achebe employs in his writing.

In other instances, the translators could not render accurately some of the expressions or sayings that Achebe may have translated into English from his native Igbo. For example, to express Obika's fears when he wonders whether Okuata, his bride to be, is a virgin, Achebe writes:

> When he took his wife to his hut after the sacrifice, would he find her at home—as the saying was—or would he learn with angry humiliation that another had broken in and gone off with the prize?" (133)

> Quand il prendrait sa femme dans sa case après le sacrifice, la trouverait-il "à la maison", comme on dit, ou devrait-il constater avec humiliation et fureur qu'un autre avait forcé le passage, et qu'il était parti avec son prix à lui? (159)

In the above quotation "prendrait sa femme dans sa case" is over-suggestive in a way that "took his wife to his hut" is not, while "la trouverait-il à la maison," a literal translation of "would he find her at home" misses the point completely since the metaphor of virginity is lost in the French translation.

Similarly, when one of Ezeulu's in-laws, Onwuzuligbo, paid him a visit, he told Ezeulu that his people had sent him to say that they would like to pay a visit to him (Ezeulu) the following morning: "We are coming to whisper together like in-law and in-law" (69). It must be noted that this expression is so charged with socio-cultural
implications that an African conversant with his or her tradition will immediately perceive its significance in the passage. Its implication goes beyond the simple idea of conversation or discussion. It connotes the diplomacy, secrecy and solemnity involved in marriage negotiations in traditional Africa. It is possible that, being Africans themselves, the translators were probably too conscious of the sociocultural import of the expression. However, their translation "Nous venons pour vous chuchoter quelque chose dans l'oreille, comme cela se fait entre beaux-parents" (86), sounds more like an explanation than a translation of the English original.

Apart from the difficulty in going beyond Achebe’s English to the Igbo language and culture that serve as the basis of his work, the translators were faced with yet another problem, that of translating into French the passages that Achebe had elected to render in Pidgin English. This is what Achebe writes:

The two policemen conferred in the white man’s tongue to the admiration of the villagers. "Sometine na dat two porson we cross for road," said the corporal. "Sometine na dem," said his companion. "But we no go return back jus like dat. All dis waka waka wey we waka come here no fit go for nating." The corporal thought about it. The other continued: "Sometine na lie dem de lie. I no wan make dem put trouble for we head." (173)

This is the translated version:

Les deux policiers se consultèrent dans la langue de l'homme blanc, à la grande admiration des villageois. - C'est pé-ête les deux hommes-là nous rencontrer sur

(204-205)

It must be pointed out that the Nigerian Pidgin English used by Achebe is indeed a language in its own right with lexical and syntactic peculiarities. Thus, in the above quotation Pidgin appears as a prestige language or "the white man’s tongue" to the villagers who are presumed to have confused it with standard English. In order to render this Pidgin English into French, the translators should have looked for an equivalent "Pidgin French" in the West African subregion instead of inventing what d’Almeida herself calls a "French gibberish" which does not read well, and does not do justice to Achebe’s quality as a writer. Since d’Almeida admits that a variety of "Pidgin French" exists in Côte d’Ivoire, one is surprised why the translators did not experiment with this Ivorian version.

There are instances, though, where the translators’ style captures admirably Achebe’s use of English. This is especially so in the translation of passages which contain proverbs. Achebe’s masterly use of proverbs is legendary and the translators were able to render the sometimes mysterious atmosphere that is created when proverbs are used in rapid succession, particularly when certain rituals are being performed, as is the case when the spirit speaks:
The fly that struts around on a mound of excrement wastes his time; the mound will always be greater than the fly. The thing that beats the drum for ngwesi is inside the ground. Darkness is so great that it gives horns to a dog. He who built a homestead before another can boast more broken pots. It is ofo that gives rain-water power to cut dry earth. The man who walks ahead of his fellows spots spirits on the way. Bat said he knew his ugliness and chose to fly by night. When the air is fouled by a man on top of a palm tree the fly is confused. An ill-fated man drinks water and it catches in his teeth... (257)

These potent words are rendered in the same esoteric manner in French:

La mouche qui se pavane sur un tas d’excréments perd son temps, car le tas sera toujours plus grand que la mouche. La chose qui bat le tam-tam pour ngwesi est à l’intérieur du sol. L’obscurité est si dense qu’elle donne des cornes à un chien. Celui qui construit sa maison avant un autre peut se vanter d’avoir plus de canaris brisés. C’est l’ofo qui donne à la pluie la puissance de couper la terre desséchée. L’homme qui marche devant ses compagnons repère les esprits sur son chemin. La chauve-souris dit qu’elle sait combien elle est laide, c’est pourquoi elle a choisi de voler la nuit. Quand un homme fait un pet à la cime d’un palmier, la mouche est déroutée. Un homme malchanceux boit de l’eau, et l’eau lui attrape la dent... (294)

The English text consists of nine sentences, each of which expresses a proverb or a wise saying. They are carefully structured to build to a point of climax. The French translation has made an attempt to retain the pattern of nine sentences and the literal translation adopted by the translators is, in this case, enough to capture the mood and tone of the passage.

The inadequacies found in d’Almeida and Simpson’s translation of *Arrow of God* stem from the fact that they failed to understand that an African literary text is made
up of a complex set of systems existing in a dialectical relationship with other sets outside its boundaries. What they have done is to focus on particular aspects of the text (maintaining the syntactic structure of the text through a very literal translation) at the expense of others (the socio-cultural values of Igbo society). What they should have done was to consider the function both of the text and of the devices within the text itself. If they had considered the function of the description of the religious and other cultural practices in the novel, they would have understood the reasons for Achebe’s choice of language. As Bassnet-McGuire (1988) points out, "every prime text is made up of a series of interlocking systems, each of which has a determinable function in relation to the whole, and it is the task of the translator to apprehend these functions" (118).

Tierno Monenembo’s *Les crapauds-brousse* was translated by James Kirkup who, having stated the difficulty he encountered in translating the novel, goes on to say in his "foreword" (to the translation of the novel) that he tried his "best to render Tierno Monenembo’s unique style in a fitting way." However, despite this assertion, there are instances where it is evident that he was not altogether very successful in capturing the orality and aesthetic quality of Monenembo’s work. For instance, in presenting the way the female secretaries gossip about their male
bosses, Monenembo uses the conversational style and speech patterns that are characteristic of his society:

On parlait de sa "démarche de canard"; oui, sa "démarche de canard"; de ses "tenues de rustre" - éeeeee allâh - ses "tenues de rustre". Il apprit de la même façon de quels odieux sobriquets elles le désignaient: "patron-fourmi", "patron-crabe", etc. (14)

The above passage is translated as follows:

They were discussing his 'duck-footed walk'; yes, his 'duck-footed walk'; his 'country bumpkin garb' - Allah! - his 'country bumpkin garb'. In the same way he learned with what odious nicknames they referred to him: 'king of the anthill', 'crab-on-the-rocks boss', etc. (3)

We notice the oral quality of the French original by the repetitions of "démarche de canard," "tenues de rustre," "patron" and by the use of the ideophone "éeeeee" and the invocation of "allah." Two difficulties arise from the translation even though the translator tries to maintain the syntactic structure of the passage: by deleting the "éeeeee" from the English translation the translator misses the appropriate sentence rhythm in an African-based language which relies heavily on tone and redundancy for effect. Secondly, "patron-fourmi" is used to mean an officious boss or a boss who bustles about as busy as a bee, while "patron-crabe" denotes an unfriendly or ill-tempered boss. The translator's use of "king of the anthill" and "crab-on-the-rocks boss" neither conveys the meanings of "patron-fourmi" and "patron-crabe," nor do they maintain the oral quality in the French original.
As we have already mentioned, one feature of modern African writing is the use of onomatopoeias and ideophones to capture an image that would otherwise need several words to explain. Advising Dioulédé, the anti-hero of *Les crapauds-brousse*, to accept the job that is being offered to him even if it is not the kind of job he is looking for, the director of the "service des mutations" talks to him like a father to his son:

Jeune homme! Regardez-moi bien: moi, je suis un ancien commis-interprète. Eh oui! Milité dans le parti, appris à prononcer un discours et hop ketketketket! J’ai monté les marches. (18)

Young man! Take a good look at me. You see before you a former assistant interpreter. Yes, indeed! Active in the Party, learned to make a speech and with a hop skip and jump I was on my way up the ladder. (6)

In the French passage we recognize the oral quality of the speech by the absence of the subject pronoun in "Milité dans le parti, appris à prononcer un discours" and the onomatopoeic "ketketketket" signifying the sound made by someone going up the stairs, that is, the image of the man rising from a humble position to his present job. The English expression "hop skip and jump" as a translation of "ketketketket" illustrates how devastating an essentially English cliché can be to the integrity of an African text like this.

Apart from the obvious difficulty in rendering African speech patterns from French into English, there are instances where the translator simply mistranslates.
Mohenembo writes about how one of Diouledé’s friends was arrested and executed "à cause d’une altercation qu’il avait eue avec un ministre justement à propos de pagne et de dessous" (15). Since the female secretaries had been talking about ministers seducing their secretaries and not tolerating any competition from their subordinates, "pagne et dessous" should have been understood as a metaphor for woman. Kirkup’s translation of the above sentence as "because of a difference he had had with the minister on the subject of feminine underwear" (4) clearly misses the import of this metaphor. In another instance, the author had clearly stated in the French text: "Un autre jour, l’une d’elles raconta que Soriba, le collègue du dessus, s’était permis de lui faire des avances" (14, my emphasis). But the translator renders this as: "Another day, one of them let it be known that Soriba, his colleague downstairs, had been so bold as to make advances to her" (3-4). How du dessus became downstairs remains a mystery.

Such errors of translation become even more serious when they proceed from the translator’s misreading of the context of the source text. As an example of what can happen when the translator misreads the source text, let us take the following extract, the exchanges which take place between Diouledé, the protagonist, and his wife during a quarrel in which they accuse each other of infidelity:
"Porototo! So I’m the flighty one, né! And what about your ding-dong with that fat fanny of Soriba’s? I know all about it, let me tell you. You see each other every day in the hotel, when you pretend with your hypocritical smile that you’re at the office. Wous! Was!"

"And you go and meet Bôri at his place when you pretend to be going shopping. Chickenshit pussy!"

"Pussy, me? Right. But just you watch your step, you filthy old racoon. Look me in the eye if you can! Racoon, yes, racoon, that’s what you are." (18)

The translator’s choice of words reaches some scatological depths when he chooses these obscene words to paint the picture of ghetto dwellers fighting in the street rather than a fight between a married couple in their home.

The problem with this translation comes when it is set against the original French text, and the extent of the distance between the source language and target language version compared. Monenembo’s passage reads as follows:

- Porototo! Alors, c’est moi qui suis légère né! Et ton baratin avec la patate de Soriba? Apprends que je sais tout. Vous vous voyez chaque jour à l’hôtel, quand tu prétends de ton sourire hypocrite que tu es au bureau. Wous! Was!
- C’est toi qui rejoins Bôri chez lui quand tu fais semblant d’aller faire des courses. Misérable chatte!

Of course, since the quarrel is about the infidelities of the couple, there are sexual innuendos in their exchanges. But patate is used as a metaphor for Soriba’s wife, Mâmata, in view of the fact that she is fat and not because of her "fat fanny." In addition, since Diouldé has alluded to his wife’s loose morals by comparing her to cotton (which is light and easily blown away) he refers to
her as a "contemptible cat" on account of the manner in
which she sneaks away to see her lover. And it is because
her husband refers to her as a cat (an animal) that Râhi
retorts by calling him a "raton" (young rat). The
translator's use of "Chickenshit pussy" to translate
"Misérable chatte" shows a wrong interpretation of the
situation and context of the source text, not to mention its
excessive obscenity. Besides, "racoons" are normally found
in North America while "rats" abound on the African
continent. Lastly, the French phrase "regarde-toi un peu"
is wrongly translated as "Look me in the eye if you can!"
Râhi tells her husband to look at himself to find out how
much he looks like a young rat! Thus one of the stylistic
devices that Monenembo uses to mark the oral quality of his
text is his attempt to capture the speaking habits of the
local people: their exclamations, interjections, and
allusion to specific objects found in the local community.

Sometimes the translator makes an effort to capture the
tone and structure of the sayings or proverbs found in the
text. For instance, the following passage which strings
together two African proverbs:

Mais l’assoiffé se fait-il prier pour accepter un verre
d’eau où clapotent des glaçons? Le lion à jeun attend-il
la prière des dieux pour avaler en un coup de gueule
la biche qu’il trouve au détour du chemin? (37)

is translated as:

But does a thirsty man need to be persuaded to accept a
glass of water clinking with ice cubes? Does the
hungry lion wait for the gods to give him permission to swallow at one gulp the kid he finds wandering round the bend of the road? (22)

There are two problems involved with the translation of the French original. In the first place, there is a certain ambiguity associated with the translator's choice of "kid" (instead of "hind" or "doe") for "biche." Secondly, the rendering of "au détour du chemin" as "wandering round the bend of the road" is inapproriate and even adds to the ambiguity in the English translation. In fact, "kid" in the English translation can also refer to a child, a reference that does not exist in the French text. Inspite of these observations, the English translation of the passage maintains the rhetorical nature of the sayings and the sentence structure of the French and attempts to capture the original tone.

Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-rire* has been translated by Gerald Moore as *The Laughing Cry: an African Cock and Bull Story*. We are immediately confronted with a problem in the very title given to the English translation. While the author makes no attempt to claim the truth of his story, must the translator pre-empt the reader's judgement by explaining what he understands to be the significance of *Le Pleurer-rire*? One of the functions that Wolfgang Iser, for instance, assigns to the reader in his reader-response theory is that the reader fills in a certain number of gaps in the act of reading. Obviously, one of the gaps that the
reader fills is that he or she tries to discover the meaning or significance of the text. By describing Henri Lopes’ book as "An African Cock and Bull Story," a description that reads like a summary of the book, the translator usurps one of the most important functions that the reader has to perform.

Throughout the novel Moore’s translation of "Tonton," the appellation of the Head of State, Hannibal Ideloy Bwakamabé, is inappropriate. It should be pointed out that it is the Head of State himself who chooses this form of address: "D'ailleurs, tu devrais m'appeler Tonton. C'est ça la politesse authentique des ancêtres" (33). ("What's more, you'd better call me Daddy. That's the true politeness of our ancestors," 19). 4 There is a whole range of political allusions in the French passage. The French word "authentique" in the Head of State's sentence reminds readers of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and his policy of "authenticité," while the appellation "Tonton" makes allusion to Tonton Macoute of Haiti. Thus, while the French word Tonton which sounds as an affectionate appellation to the Head of State is in actual fact a title of derision, sarcasm and contempt in the context in which it is used, the English word "Daddy" does not have any such connotation. In this case, one essential feature used to portray the megalomania of Tonton Bwakamabé is lost to the English reader.
We have already pointed out that one of the means by which African writers decolonize the African text is by the use of African words to occupy the French space of their novels. While some of the African words are deemed untranslatable by the writers, others are simply used for effect. A translator who tries to "domesticate" the African words used by the African writer may therefore make the mistake of stressing content over total structure. As an example of such a deviation let us consider the following passage and its translation:

Le damuka s'était réuni dans une venelle de Moundié: avenue Général-Marchand. Je me revois encore arrivant au rendez-vous et commençant, comme toujours en ces circonstances, par déposer quelques pièces dans la sébile avant d'émarger au cahier de contrôle. (14)

The wake was held in a little alley in Moundié: the Avenue Général-Marchand. I recall arriving at the place and beginning as always on these occasions, by dropping a few coins in the collection bowl before scribbling in the book of condolences. (1)

This opening passage of *Le Pleurer-rire* introduces the reader immediately to the tone of the work, a tone that will remain throughout the novel because of the introduction of *damuka* and other African words into the text. The author chooses to use the African word not because this word is untranslatable into French but because he wants to emphasize the African conditions under which the *damuka* is organized and through which the novel derives its force and significance. Moreover, by using the phrase *je me revois encore arrivant*, the protagonist in this passage is reliving
the experience of one such event, an experience that will occur at several stages of the novel.

The English translation has not made any attempt to retain the stylistic device of the author. By choosing the English word "wake" for damuka (one of the most important words in the novel because it is used several times to paint the picture of death hanging as a Damoclean sword over the inhabitants of Moundié), the translator destroys the primacy of the African word that the author sought to achieve. Besides, as we saw earlier, the author achieves an aesthetic effect with his use of the word damuka which is contextualized initially and then explained about forty pages into the novel. By simply translating damuka as wake, the translator deprives the English text of the same stylistic force that one finds in the French original. Most serious of all, by his translation, Moore assumes that damuka and wake express the same social reality. However, as Edward Sapir (1956) asserts:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (69)

Thus "damuka" is not the same as "wake." While the English wake is a watch held by family members and close friends over the body of a dead person prior to burial, "damuka" evokes a whole range of ceremonies that are organized by the family of a deceased person to honor his
memory. It is also an occasion for the entire community to come together to pay tribute to the dead and renew their relationship with the spirit world.

The introduction of the protagonist in Lopes' passage as an active participant (through the use of verbs such as "se revoir," "déposer," "émarger") is a key to the reader about the active role that the protagonist will play in the novel. But by translating "je me revois" as "I recall," "déposer" as "to drop," and "émarger" as "to scribble," the English translator presents the protagonist as a passive participant and therefore introduces a different element of characterization. "I can still see myself" for "je me revois," "to deposit" for "déposer" and "to sign" for "émarger" would have thrown light on the active role of the protagonist.

One of the qualities of Lopes as a writer is his ability to transpose the manner of speech of the local people into his narrative. To be successful, a good translator should be alive to this stylistic device and strive to capture it in the decoding process. Unfortunately, there are instances where the translator of *Le Pleurer-rire* fails to decode some of the qualities of Lopes' text. For example Lopes writes:

L'assistance est comme une chambre à percée. Elle tente de retenir prisonnière son envie de rire, mais elle finit par se dégonfler, coup par coup. L'homme poursuit sur la même lancée.
- Laisse la langue d’autre, dé! Parle pour toi Kibotama, ko.
- Kibotama! Kibotama! que voulez-vous incinérer par là, hein? Vous croyez c’est vous seulement qui connaissez frapper falassé-là avec la langue?
- Ah! parle kibotama, toi aussi-là.
- Eh bien, merde! Coutez. (211)

The room was suddenly like a punctured tube. It struggled to restrain its impulse to laugh, but finished by letting it out, little by little. The man continued in the same vein.
"Leave off that foreign tongue, dé. Speak Kibotama now, ko."
"Kibotama, Kibotama! What sort of incitement is that, eh? You think you’re the only one who knows how to knock that lingo with his tongue?"
"Ah, talk Kibotama, you too!"
"Okay. Shit! Just listen. (170)

The French extract points to the difficulties in the speaker’s attempt to speak standard French. Thus incinérer, falassé and Coutez which the author puts in italics are meant to be insinuer, français and écoutez. Because the dialogue itself is carried out in a local version of French, the deviations serve to produce a comic effect. The English translator’s choice of "incitement," "lingo" and "listen" to translate the words in italics misses the point completely.

These observations which obviously do not cover all aspects of the three novels are, however, not intended to suggest that these three novels have on the whole been wrongly translated. On the contrary, the translators have attempted to decode and capture the new tone of African writing in European languages. Obviously, apart from certain words and expressions that are mistranslated, what I have alluded to as errors of translation in the various
texts may simply be a deficiency in reading or a different reading strategy. By identifying them as errors, I believe that I am not so much passing judgement on the work of individuals as pointing towards a whole area of translation that needs to be looked at more closely. However, the fact that they are perceived as errors serves to problematize the act of translating an African literary text. What needs to be emphasized, however, is the fact that there are times when the translators, concerned with providing material for readers in French or English, fail to see that they have before them African texts whose translation demands a whole new approach. This new approach requires that translators of African texts should not just look for equivalents in the target language, or be concerned with simple notions of loss and gain. As Susan Bassnett-McGuire (1991) points out, "again and again translators of novels take pains to create readable target language texts, avoiding the stilted effect that can follow from adhering too closely to source language syntactical structures, but fail to consider the way in which individual sentences form part of the total structure" (115). What the critical translator of African literature has to keep in mind is that he or she is translating a whole culture into a different language just as the African writers themselves have done in their writings.
NOTES

1 "Mother tongue" has to be understood as a person's first language or what linguists call L1. A native speaker here means one whose mother tongue is the L1.


PART 2

EXPERIENCE AND PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING SONY LABOU TANSI’S 
LES YEUX DU VOLCAN INTO ENGLISH

In the Introductory chapter I posited that comparative literature, as it is practiced today, would not be possible without the existence of translation. As a critical activity, translation has played a crucial role in African literature since many students and scholars of African literature have come to appreciate this literature largely through their readings of translated texts. In the first part of my study, I examined the minimal impact that the translation theories propounded by western scholars have on the translation of African literature and sought to establish how African writers themselves indulge in creative translation by incorporating oral and traditional modes of storytelling in their written genre. I also reviewed the translation of three African novels and pointed out how translating African literary texts becomes problematic for
the translator since the linguistic layerings within an African literary text demand a new approach in this area of translation.

In Part II of this study, I propose to provide my own translation of Sony Labou Tansi's *Les yeux du volcan*¹ into English for, as Susan Bassnet-McGuire points out, the mechanic who spends a lifetime taking engines apart but never goes out for a drive in the country is a fitting image for the dry academician who examines the how at the expense of what is. Since my own approach to translation is based on the notion of translation as acculturation, it is my view that in translating an African literary text readers of the target-language text must be made to feel the inherent problems and frictions that African writers bring to their work. The objective of this approach is twofold: it "forces" readers of the target-language text to appreciate fully African oral literature and traditions which subtend African literary creation and it lays bare, as much as possible, the multiple voices and languages that one encounters in the African literary text. Obviously, my translation is not intended as a model translation. Like the other translated texts reviewed in Chapter VIII it provides material for illustrating some specific problems in the translation of African literature.
NOTE

A: THE TEXT

Three crimes for sale

The man arrived one afternoon, around three forty-seven, when the winds were still. We all thought he would go and live with the Argandovs, the only people who continued to receive strangers ever since the day the mayor announced that the Authorities would take reprisals against anyone who offered asylum to Colonels Benoît Goldmann and Ignacio Banda. It was said that the Argandovs and Ignacio Banda had roots in a common blood. Another rumor had it that Benoît Goldmann and Ignacio Banda were one and the same person. Here, time flies. Rumors too. Our village had been hastily transformed into a very big city because of the Hana Petroleum boom and the only three hotels there had just closed down to escape the harsh measures anticipated in the provisions of the law. The law is the law. Here, more than anywhere else. All those arriving in Hozanna had eventually understood it: apart from the Argandovs, nobody accommodated anybody anymore in this town. That is why visitors asked
for the Samany villa as soon as they arrived at the Djoura bridge. They were told to walk alongside the river up to the former location of port Leon. They were shown the Dutch house, to the south, between Emile spire and the Abbé-Ivonne-Glaçons hills where the earth is golden. They were told to pay attention to the swarm of red wasps which attacked passers-by coming from the Kankala-Yoka ravine. They were further informed that, after raining, people as sprightly and well-known as Cardinal Clodius Tenzo fell down on the accursed and re-accursed Massa-Wassa hill. "What do you expect, sir, wet clay can play dirty tricks. And when you soil your clothes on Massa-Wassa, nothing can clean them. Sir, don’t run too fast when you come to this side of the land."

He hadn’t asked for anything. After crossing the bridge he had simply shown his papers and his beautiful teeth before stepping out into the road used by the palm wine sellers. It was the first time he was seeing such gigantic pots inside a city. He had gazed upon them with the smile of an amused kid.

Then he had looked at the river, flowing like a furia of water and rocks along several kilometers in a kind of rhythmless dance. On the other bank could be seen Devil’s rocks and their jagged edges, rulers of a vegetation of misery. In the distance hang a glimpse of an afflicted horizon that was trying to come to terms with the crests of
Hondo-Norte. Valzara, lying behind the island of Abanonso, seemed to scratch its head between the clouds as if to make a protest against the intrigues of the hills which were attributed to the Lebanese, east of the Camora. The man had an all black beard, about one and a half foot long. In the middle of his skull, shaven as bald as an egg, a pocket of thick, pepper-red hairs could be seen going down behind the back of his head like a ponytail and ending in a bundle of multicolored cowries. A high forehead. An ugly nose which seemed to invite the surrounding air. Bushy red brows tousled together over eyes which let out a sparkle like grated metal. At the summit of Abbé-Igor hill the man turned back on his animal as if someone had called out to him. He stopped under the sumac which long ago had served as the palaver tree for the people of Mama’s village, but which, today, is engulfed by the city. We hadn’t seen a horse in our city for many years. Because we had blamed Colonel Yoha for feeding his three thousand eight hundred and twelve percherons with dough belonging to the State. We had proclaimed the horse the devil’s animal and an enemy of the Revolution. What do you expect? We had no choice: we were starving to death while all the money of the Nation was spent in feeding and caring for the percherons. Riding a horse in the middle of our city attracted attention. Because we firmly and unanimously feel hatred for horses, but also because we had become used to the chaotic roaring
of Mercedez Benzes in our alleys that have been eroded by the jungle, the winds and the rains. We sometimes came upon some of these cars stuck in the green water ponds which dot our city from north to south, or stuck in household filth and waste, over which clouds of flies buzzed during the day and a host of mosquitoes took over at night.

It must be admitted that having a horse in our city full of mud and garbage was such a fantastic idea. The kids, the first to arrive, gathered around the sumac to see the animal, as huge as a baby elephant of a few years old, and to see him, the man, the giant as everybody called him. We had never seen a giant like this man, with those eyes of his and the look of someone who had left his thoughts far behind.

Instead of going to the Argandovs’ house as we thought he would, the man went along the river from the former school of the Holy Family Sisters, passed in front of Prophetess Hanga’s concession, avoided the zone of Immortals by taking the main street at the Plateaux, and arrived at the other sumac known to everyone in the city, not very far from the old Leon port; he walked along the river up to the Yamouwa sandbanks, with his eyes riveted on Manou island. He reminded us of that difficult period when those who had horses were summoned to kill them for their meat or to poison them with blue Mithridates, the potent poison produced by the Moors and Lebanese of Barka. The man took
Peace street when he got to Dog market in the old Dutch quarter, stopped for a moment to rivet his beautiful eyes on the green tiles of Anouar cathedral, crossed the Hausa quarter, and arrived at the Musicians roundabout. A thick crowd followed him. It is not known why the crowd began to heap insults on him and then sing his praises when they arrived in the neighborhood of Popo market. The man went up Sixty-Meters hill, crossed the railway track and went past the Orzengi forest. The crowd had become like a glistening tide singing about the return of the prophet in the country’s forty-two languages. People could be seen hurrying up from the Mawenza hills.

"Who are those strange-looking bunch?" asked the mayor on seeing the procession passing in front of the National School of Brotherhood where he had come to inaugurate fourteen desk-seats provided through his personal efforts.

"Nobody knows, Mr. Mayor."

The animal upon which the man was perched was pulling a coach covered with reddish dust. We imagined that the man had crossed the Escora-Muente valley, the region which, according to the unanimous opinion of the Authorities, fomented subversion and produced rebels who were unwilling to serve the State, children of misery, sold out to the worst kind of foolishness, and naïve enough to think that a country is built with useless revolts; ah! fools! since the time of the French uncles, all they do is bring children
into the world only to push them into subversive activities. Poor devils!

We thought that he was going to make his percheron do a quarter turn to arrive at the Argandovs' house by taking Catfish street or by going through Géméraux Hospital. The man did not do any of these things. Instead of going to the Argandovs' house, he went along Arcade street, climbed the Augouard hill all the way up to Saint-Firmin cathedral; he hesitated between making a right turn and a left turn, which would have taken him towards the Mayors' cemetery. Then he made a right turn. He crossed Bougainvillea street and Frangipanni alley and arrived in front of the Chinese fountain, hesitated once more before making another right turn; he went down Crow street, crossed the railway line, and arrived at the foot of Italy mountain. He chose the first left turn while following Airport avenue right up to the Alphabet Primer. Crowds of peoples were singing his praises. They thought he had lost his way when, once again, the man turned into Sixty-Meters avenue, crossed the railway in front of Geese forest, with his back to the north. The percheron hesitated a short instant before entering a kind of river formed by the storms and lying between the historic Rectors' building and the former camp of the Chadian Infantrymen. The man excited the animal by slightly kicking its side with his left foot thereby inciting it to move on. The water was tepid. But the animal was right to hesitate
for, despite its great stature, the water came up to its breast as soon as it first stepped in. The multitude split up into two to avoid the river: one group turned into Castanets street and went all the way up to the buildings of the French Museums, the other group headed for Practice ground and Powder square. The two groups echoed each other by singing the refrain of the praise songs. The man read the following inscription in yellow letters on a small red board nailed to the trunk of a badamer tree:

PICTURE TAKING OR FILMING STRICTLY PROHIBITED

On the man's face was the same smile he had when he saw the gigantic pots (perhaps he was thinking of what people in the street were saying about Colonel Godibar Pedro who had been photographed naked in his bedroom by satellite). He emerged into the former Army street which has now become Poudra lagoon, inhabited by fresh water memoras, snakelike eels, red loaches, prior gurnards and all the aquatic race cast off by the former zoo during the historic rains of March 1976. Having arrived at the site of the old Radio-Equator, the man in turn hesitated, for the water was coming up to his buttocks which he planted firmly on the back of the animal. The coach disappeared halfway into the reddish sludge. On the banks, from north to south, the crowds encircled the man, singing songs of encouragement to him and
making the same kind of screams one hears on game days at the stadium of the Revolution. The animal was already swimming, and the coach had completely disappeared under the waves. On coming out of the lake created by the torrential rains of March 1976, the man had a rather awkward smile on his face: his pockets and the nets covering his coach were full of small fishes. Some red carps were struggling at the bottom of the kind of square fishing net in which the man kept his dirty clothes and where the poor fishes thought they had found a means of sustenance. He stopped to think, not knowing whether to turn left on Eucalyptus street or right under the pink flamboyant trees. Raising his eyes to the right the man saw our television antenna. That was enough for him to decide: he turned left. Then, nobody knows why, the man dismounted and began to walk, pulling his animal behind him. He stopped at the intersection of de Gaulle and Leclerc avenues. There, without hesitation, he walked straight ahead, leaving the Old Gendarmerie camp to his left. He crossed Djoura avenue, stopped to look at the group of Loango musicians dancing at the entrance of the camp to mourn one of their members killed the previous day by lightning. Singers and dancers were all wearing masks. The huge crowd that was watching them left the dance scene and showed interest in the man and his animal, amazed as they were... by the catfish, the red carps and the fry which, caught in the hanging of the coach, continued to
struggle with all their strength. The man and his percheron
seemed to come out from the bottom of some lake, with the
result that some people already nicknamed him "the messenger
from deep waters." He was said to have come from Lake
Tarkayoti or from the mouth of the muddy waters of the Kongo
where, on the orders of the Authorities, the bodies of those
who had conspired on the day of the Blessed Virgin had
shamelessly been thrown.

The man and his animal arrived at the center of General
de Gaulle garden, across from Liberties high school. The
man faced Merchant garden with his left hand towards the
Arabic High School and his right hand towards the Corniche
quarter, his back turned towards the main building of
Liberties high school. He looked for a long time in the sky
where the sun had almost completed its course, lowered his
head, spat three times on the ground as a sign of blessing,
planted his heels firmly into the soft soil, and pronounced
these words: "Mogrodo bora mayitou, it will be here." Then
he kissed the earth four times before eating a piece of it
and added: "if I have to die, well then, may it be here."

He then began to set up a huge tent. We were surprised
that it was in the colors of the Gogons. The crowds that
followed him could not hide their surprise: "With him,
everything becomes immense." Up until nightfall, crowds of
people continued to pour in from the seven districts of our
city to loudly express their amazement at seeing the horse,
the giant and his three-colored tent. One wondered if it was not the famous Colonel Benoît whom the authorities secretly referred to as "the angel with fiery eyes." But the man did not have any of the features corresponding to the description of the Colonel: neither the description given in the legends (he had no teeth from his childhood, he was tiny like all his ancestors from the regions of the Embouchure and the Kongo), nor the one given by the Authorities according to which the Colonel was a hippopotamus of 4 foot 10, sturdily built from his head to the tip of his toes, as bald as the egg of a crocodile, with a row of canines on his lower jaw, and who, since his childhood, knew only how to dress in the ancestral toga of the Gogons. Colonel Benoît continuously chewed birdlime to prevent his canines from coming out quickly. At a certain time, many years before the coming of the giant, it had been established that the colonel was not a man but a dumb woman, a native of the Embouchure. The following information was provided concerning his character: stubborn as a bar of steel, an avid consumer of cola and lemon liqueur, a crazy supporter of the Hozoronte regional team and the apostolic schemers of Yorzango who were unconditional slaves of the pope. Of course, as a reaction to this latest provocation, John-Paul II had sent a motu proprio to our authorities: "Gentlemen, don't take the Good Lord lightly.... Do every damn thing you please, kill whoever you want in your little
corner, but leave Christ and the apostles in peace. As regards foolishness, believe me, you wouldn’t be able to descend lower than the crucifixion. In matters of casualness, you will not beat Pontius Pilate. Every evil has been invented; all you can do is copy them and clown about. Don’t try to make trouble about God’s Word. Don’t turn off the light sleeping in the Word. Kill all the flesh that you damn well please! But gentlemen, leave the light alone."

The first important visitor that the giant and his animal received two days after they had settled in front of the high school was naturally the mayor who had been hurriedly informed by his French friend, Mr. Delos Santos, a man of virtue, a noble-hearted man whom we all liked because of his passion for tennis and cola nut. The mayor swept in like a whirlwind, flanked by half a dozen soldiers in tatters. He was sweating with anger - an anger which had reduced his height from 5 foot 7 to a mere 4 foot 9 since, among other things, anger has the virtue of shortening the height of those who are already less open-minded. He was sneezing constantly, and the crowd that had come to watch the row again attributed the mayor’s sneezing to his anger - an anger punctuated with the fear of losing his very recent appointment because of a fuss over a paspalum smoker. (Unless that is also caused by those buggers who live in the lands of the Gogons, said the mayor to his deputy.
"No, Mr. Mayor," corrected Mr. Delos Santos. "This man is a stranger. He has come a long way. That can be seen from the shape of his teeth and the stature of his arms. The Yogons will never smile like this."

"Then he is going to feel my authority from A to Z" said the mayor who was fond of phrases.)

He had put on his militiaman-worker-son-of-a-peasant outfit, jumped into a jeep with six gendarmes who were clinging on to the body of the coach as much as they could, and then shot off like a madman in the direction of the Liberties high school. The gendarmes jumped to the ground before the car came to a stop to take positions around the tent, their eyes on fire, fingers excited, ready to prepare for any eventuality. The mayor did not fit well into the combat dress which he hadn't worn for several years. His hairy stomach appeared between the buttons causing folds of fat to be seen. We referred to him as "the man accustomed to making love to the people with the voice of his gun."

The mayor mopped his brow with the back of his right hand, adjusted his ferns, his cordon, and his medals before asking in one breath:

"Tell me, sir, who gave you the right?"

The man's only reply was to offer him a cup of tea. But the mayor declined and calmly repeated his question. The giant looked at the mayor with surprise. He asked him what he meant by right in a brothel such as our city, a
brothel operating on sentiments, humor and chance, far from laws, good sense and logic.

"You just can't settle anywhere! This is my city, sir."

"Then, why is it a city?" asked the man in amazement.

"I don't understand your question," said the mayor.

"Stop your anger and you will understand," the man said.

He searched through his bags for a long time as he repeated:

"Just a moment, Mr. Mayor, just one moment..."

Then he held out to him three copies of a title deed carrying the famous signature of his predecessor. Fresh ink. Signature still dripping with ink. With stamps and all that. The mayor put on his glasses to be more certain about it. He had been mistaken on two occasions: which glasses was he to wear: the sunglasses always hanging around his neck, the dark goggles worn by people belonging to old-fashioned gangs, the glasses for his nearsightedness, or the glasses that made him look like a revolutionary and which attracted the young girls at the Karl Marx high school? He was silently amazed that his damned predecessor had been able to sell the Liberties high school playground. For us, everything was clear: we were living in a brothel whose Authorities were above the law. We even thought that our Authorities had become "legivorous." Anybody who had a tiny
bit of authority showed it by nibbling at the Constitution or the articles of the civil code. What remained of the Nation was just a jumble of intentions briskly proclaimed under the red eyes of a wretched flag that was losing its three colors of yesteryear.

"All right, sir," said the mayor with a grim smile. "Your papers are in order. And what are you doing in my city?"

"Since when have cities existed for just one person, Mr. Mayor?" said the giant.

His eyes which had taken on the gleam of heated oil barely moved inside their sockets.

The man made a gesture to offer a cup of tea to the mayor who, quietly, pushed it away with the back of his left hand (he always exaggerated the use of this hand in order to prove to the people that he was in favor of the Revolution).

"What a foolish idea to imagine that one can make use of a city as one uses one's pocket," said the man smiling.

The mayor lost a few other inches of his short height in a new outburst of anger.

"Very well, sir, very well! We will see if this city is not my city."

The giant offered the mayor a glass of milk. As instinctively as he had refused the tea, the mayor took the glass of milk and drank it.
"Let's be reasonable, Mr. Mayor," said the giant. "You don't know who I am. You don't know where I am coming from - nor where I am going. And already you want to throw me out. I've been to ninety-three cities. You are the first mayor who does not have the required human height to be mayor."

The mayor gave the glass back to him and swore by his ancestors both living and dead that he would send him packing just like a vulgar imposter or, as the gods are his witness, he would have his procreation engine split up and offered to the fishes in the river or to those of the Djoura, rather than let himself be humiliated by a damned wayfarer passing through his city, a man who doesn't even have a real roof over his head.

"Sir, you can take my word as mayor for my word of honor."

"Very well, Mr. Mayor," said the man. "Let's allow time to take its own course."

The mayor made a sign for the gendarmes to follow him. He was heard murmuring spiteful things to all Gogons, sketching in a loud voice the traps that he was going to set for the giant, talking to himself about the surprises that were going to force the man to understand that cities belong to their mayors. He wasn't just the mayor, but also a deputy and municipal counsellor for State Investments, and a co-founding member of the Nation and the party...
"I have the power and I will use it," said the mayor as he sneezed on the last word.

He went away with his agents, forgetting his Jeep. He rolled along, fuelled by his anger in a city where all was quiet. He shouted in an attempt to contain his anger. It wasn’t any good.

The second visitor who came to the man, late in the evening, was the eldest of the Argandovs, also a giant, but without the stranger’s shabby appearance and coarse behavior. The eldest Argandov was wearing a white linen suit; he had always dressed like this all his life. The man offered him Indian tea just as he had done for the mayor. They drank and talked about nothing in particular.

We thought that they must have known each other for years. They roared with laughter and constantly tapped each other’s shoulder. In a pleasant voice the man told the eldest Argandov about the visit of the mayor and asked him if his own visit had a hidden purpose:

"People don’t visit other people for nothing in this city."

"There is no hidden purpose," said Diégo Sadoun Argandov. What can one hide in this world, today? Everything is known."

"Alas!" the giant sighed. "Everything has been thoroughly considered. Except the main thing."
He took out a magnificent bottle of agave alcohol. He poured a few drops into a champagne goblet which he offered to his guest. The liquid was bubbling like a feast. He tasted the alcohol with the art of a great connoisseur. He still had his manners from his four years in the diplomatic service.

"One can only hide the Good Lord", he said.

Then he asked for another goblet. Diégo Sadoun Argandov examined the liquid with his big dark eyes before swallowing it. Then, judging that he had waited long enough to satisfy the giant’s curiosity, he began to speak in these terms:

"I was told that you were here to sell some crimes. I am interested in that."

The man poured him a measure of his precious alcohol. He himself savored only the aroma. He reclosed the bottle and went to put it away at the place where he had unearthed it.

"I propose - or rather my family proposes - to buy back the crimes that people say you are selling."

The man gave a little laugh that sounded like the grating of metal. His eyes began to sparkle. He was one of those men who know how to say a lot with silence and say a little with words.

"Don’t laugh, sir. My family is very rich. It buys back all the crimes in the region. We collect them, sir."
"Tell me the story about your family’s riches," said the man as he emptied his cup.

"That is our secret," said Diégo Sadoun Argandov, laughing.

"Then, I will not sell you my crimes," said the man.

"We are offering a considerable sum."

The man offered him a cup of tea. Argandov drank it quickly, standing, as if he was quarreling with the camp chair that the giant had offered him. Then he prepared to leave, but the man held him back.

"Stay. You are so kind. You look like a small beautiful virgin."

Diégo Sadoun Argandov resumed his seat on the camp chair, asked for another tea and began to talk about women who made men’s live miserable. He began to explain the usual network of those who trade in vice in our city.

"It is disgusting, my friend, that women adore telling lies."

"Who told you that I was selling crimes?" asked the man.

"That is always known," said Argandov.

"Why must I sell them to you in particular?"

"Because only my family is interested in these crimes."

He hesitated for a long time, thinking that the man was going to say something, then added:
"Anyway, nobody else has enough dough to pay that much."

"What do you know about my price?"

"Oh! nothing at all. Except that three crimes will cost as much as three crimes."

The two men burst out laughing: two opposing laughers - Diégo Sadoun Argandov’s laughter turned towards a kind of mischief, while the giant’s denoted a skillful way of playing the best role out of pure and simple practice. The man came to the entrance of his tent and looked at his percheron which, instead of sleeping, was grazing in the moonlight on the tall grasses which surrounded the Liberties high school. At this late hour the moon shone like silver making the percheron look like a prehistoric ghost. With a sigh, the man uttered a very famous saying known to all the townspeople, a saying that is normally associated with the hare: "When you are not the strongest, try to be the smartest."

"Give me your final response," said Diégo Sadoun Argandov.

"It will make you mad."

"Give it to me all the same."

"I will not sell these crimes to a horde of cannibals. And especially not in exchange for dough. Money has never meant anything to me: I am keeping my crimes for pleasure."
Diego Argandov asked for another tea, just to continue to stay there for some time. The man told him to boil it himself. Since there wasn’t any more water in the tent, Argandov took the teapot, crossed Djoura avenue and went to draw water from a fountain situated in the compound of the Arabic High school just across from the Liberties high school. He didn’t think he was equal to this chore but it was the only way to prolong the visit and the conversation. The sentry at the Arabic High School refused to let him in. Argandov offered him a brand new beautiful note which he snapped under his fingers. The sentry took the tip but, instead of opening the door, he just took the container from Argandov’s hands and brought the water back to him. The water was a little warm because, at this time of the year, it is very hot during the night in our city.

"Thank you, sir."

"You are welcome, Mr. Argandov."

When Argandov came back to the tent, the giant was sleeping like an angel. Only the incredible drumming of his stuffed nostrils could still be heard. Argandov tried to operate the old kerosene stove that the man had put there for him in front of the entrance to the tent. But he couldn’t do it. The idea of waking up the giant tormented him for an instant. He didn’t dare. He gave up the tea and left the man from whose mouth a pink dribble oozed through sparkling teeth.
The third visitor to go to the man was Lydie Argandov whom our city had nicknamed "the she-wolf with golden eyes." She had arrived at the third cockcrow and taken off her silky clothes. She had lain beside the man on the inflatable, and had begun to caress his hairy chest. The man opened his eyes, which stopped his nauseating snore. With the back of his hand he wiped the pink dribble that was flowing from his mouth, increased the flame in his camp light and smiled at the girl.

"You smell good," he said.


The he began to press her body closely against his muscles. His mouth devoured Lydie Argandov's mouth. They entered into a turmoil of tensed flesh, in the middle of a delightful stuttering. They formed the background of an exquisite choreography. Four times, Lydie Argandov had been pushed to the zenith of her young body, letting the man breathe in her most profound feminine scent. Four times, she had yelled out a kind of villainous insanity: "Harder, comrade! We are making the future." Then she had fallen into a deep sleep, leaving her body open to the man and his caresses. The man got up, turned on the stove and made tea for himself with the water that Diégo Sadoun Argandov had gone to fetch. It was getting to five thirty. The man gazed upon the girl while drinking his tea: Lydie Argandov had an astral body, starting from her face which is lined
with a vicious mouth - he no longer saw the suspicious fire in her eyes which watched over a delicate nose that our city had nicknamed "the arch of Cleopatra," and which, in place of the nostrils, showed two shadow triangles filled with mystery. Nobody had ever, but really ever understood why our city said that Lydie Argandov's bosom smelled of the Americas. But such was our city: champion of the eccentric, and unbeatable in matters of extravagant behavior. We hadn't invented powder. We have always managed that which is only found in great poems: the sap of the world. We have always understood that, despite its filth, its roads filled with holes, its herd of anopheles mosquitoes, its foul-smelling swamps, its location in the muddy jungle, its weakness for insanity, its tendency to become an open wound at the center of the Equator, our city remained a poem in which sludge, flesh and odors attempted to merge without undue difficulty with the scheming of the suns to sing this chorus known to all its inhabitants:

Come and see
The sun has gone mad.
Come and drink
The sky which gushes
The lowest day in the world
Consume the passing time
And put your legs in your eyes.
Lydie Argandov opened her eyes to the sudden and ominous visit of her father. She quickly rushed to get her clothes in order to hide her nudity from the glowering eyes of Benoît César Argandov: she put on her clothes so fast that she wore her skirt inside out and forgot her bra on the camp seat where her clothes had spent the night. The giant was returning from his morning jogging begun at five thirty and which had led him round our city. Old man Argandov spoke like a Chinese loudspeaker. Which attracted masses of students from the two high schools in our city that are closest to each other. The Arabic High School students wore a yellow and blue uniform, while those in the Liberties high school sported a blue and rose uniform embossed with its motto: "Study or die."

"Well, Mr. Pharaoh," said Benoît César Argandov. "Will you sell us your assassinations or you will take them to the devil?"

The man had his usual mother-of-pearl smile. He offered the old man a glass of alcohol.

"I came to find out," continued César Argandov as he drank, "if you are selling your crimes or if you want them to yield a profit."

"Give me time to think about it," said the giant. "I don't have the brain of an elephant."

His voice did not betray any emotion. The whole thing was said between three gulps of hooch: one before speaking,
one after the phrase "think about it," and the last one after the word "elephant."

"Think about it, sir," said César Argandov. "That's good. But know that we have the monopoly of crimes in this city."

The man laughed, a deceptive adolescent laugh; then, just like all the other times when he didn't have much to say, he filled his teapot and began to boil his tea.

"I'll give you forty-eight hours," said César Argandov. "After this deadline, I will be obliged to be very demanding."

"Be reasonable and give me a week for each crime," said the man swapping his jovial laugh for a curious smile filled with mystery, mockery, and a lack of concern.

He took from one of his numerous sacks some kind of a placard: some red letters could be seen swimming in a white background:

I AM LOOKING FOR A QUALIFIED COOK, A GARDENER AND A FEMALE SECRETARY

The letters must have been traced with a shaking paintbrush to give them the look of a breakaway herd of cattle. They had enough flesh tones to catch the eyes from afar. The man put up two posts and fastened the placard using four pink ribbons. Three endless lines were formed in
front of the announcement: the secretaries’ line was the longest: it went from Djoura avenue all the way to Propaganda roundabout. And, like a general inspecting his troops, the giant reviewed the lines and as he came across some people smiling, he picked a secretary, a gardener in the person of Naudie Gander, and a cook by name Mvumbi. He announced their respective salaries in a loud voice. The next day, at the time when they were supposed to start work, three mutilated bodies were found in the Galasso river. Once again, lines were formed in front of the vacancy notice. The giant did not hire anybody.

2

The sad memory of cholera

Paolo de Kasandor is a well-known name in our city’s humble history. He was just about to be named mayor when our nature and circumstances conspired together to make it otherwise. We were going to have an older mayor, one who was less of a womanizer, less talkative, and soaked in alcohol all day and all night long.

Two weeks before the appointment of Paolo de Kasandor, the world suddenly recalled that he had been co-director of the State. The appointment was hurriedly nibbed in the bud. Since then, bad luck reigned supreme in our city. Inconsistency began to take control over us without mercy.
It was said that bad luck was avenging itself in order to curb our cowardice and our meanness to forget too quickly the deceased founders of the State. The first recorded sign of bad luck was the madness shown by Arthur Nola, the younger brother of Emmanuel and tribal cousin of the deceased founder of the State. The Monday preceding the promulgation of the bungled appointment, Nola had turned up in the triage hall of Géméreaux hospital with the carcasses of fifty-five cats and briskly requested an autopsy. He had disturbed all the doctors in the six-storey hospital, bugged the nurses and ward assistants, and bothered the midwives and women in labor: "Stop your stupid habit of turning a deaf ear to my misery."

"What is your problem, sir?"
"The death of my cats."
"And what can we do about it, sir?"
"They were all bubbling with good health yesterday. I fed them myself, just like every evening, with some Ronron that I had bought from the neighborhood Lebanese store. I heard them mewing all night - can you imagine? At seven this morning, they were no more than a jumble of warm carcasses. My poor animals! All dead without a warning. And all because of the Lebanese."
"We don't treat cats here, sir."
"My cats were like humans, madam."
Arthur Nola was really crying his eyes out. His wife could not console him in spite of the gentle words from her beautiful voice. What made everybody laugh was the fact that because of his emotional state, poor Arthur Nola hadn’t had the presence of mind to take off his colonel’s uniform. Even though everybody showed profound pity for the dead cats, nobody could really avoid the temptation to laugh in front of a fifty-year-old man adorned with stars and fourragère, wearing State colors, and whining like a kid. And for what, my godfathers? For cats! The fear of the bad luck had been forgotten.

"What’s going on, amigo?"

"A colonel who is crying..."

"Here we have better reasons to be upset, God damn it!"

The Gémeureux hospital which the ordinary people referred to as "the slaughterhouse of Gémeureux" had only eight hundred beds piled on top of one another like sacks for its two thousand patients. Rust fell from the rusty iron beds. The torn mattresses let out pieces of sponge so filthy that they could be taken for the left-overs from a meal. The air, more worn-out than the iron used in making the beds, gave off a strong putrid smell; the floor was soggy, there was oozing moisture on the walls, and the ceiling was leaking. One could hear the latrines boiling. The most unexpected stench came from the bedding. Death was the only thing in white. Everything revealed misery and
hopelessness. "Don't be afraid of the hospital," our storytellers told us, "one always comes out of it." We are a terrible people in the sense that we know how to believe. As soon as we start to believe something, no matter how cranky it may be, the Good Lord Himself can do nothing on earth to take us out of our aberration. That is why the whole world has given us names, sobriquets, nicknames, first names, and mischievous appellations: to the French, we are the Jews of Black Africa, the Americans find in us the worst kind of failure in all creation, the Russians think we are the spitting image of the Armenians, the Canadians call us by the inexplicable label of nephews of God, the Malians and Ethiopians affirm that we are the most organized crafty devils on the planet. In our opinion, we are the cousins of bad luck with our wretched ancestors who initiated de Gaulle into the cult of the Three Branches, the secret cult of the children of a horned snake to whom tradition has given the obscure name of Ngolo-Ngola.

Our legends are not very clear on the question of our origin. They have harmonized it admirably well with the existence of Mahon-Mahan, the man-god who forged the continents in order to create reserves of fresh water for himself. Other stories assign us to a rather doubtful ancestor, although more reliable in terms of influence and temperament: the apprentice-god Goya-Goyam who tried to swallow the sky and the sea - the bony sky got stuck in his
oesophagus. Goya-Goyam sent his wife (Nodam, the woman-apprentice) to go and draw water from the sea. There, the poor woman met a very beautiful turtle-horse with whom she fell in love. Left alone, Goya-Goyam, in order to save his line, introduced a child into the intestines of a mare (the legend doesn’t say how, but anybody can guess that there aren’t one thousand ways to put a kid inside the belly of a female). The mare gave birth to a band of three daughters. Since his line was still not saved, the apprentice-god Goya-Goyam slept with the youngest of the triplets. Their mating did not produce any male births. The eldest offered herself to her father and destiny agreed to the birth of the grandfather of our clan, known, loved and envied by all of us living at the Cataracts, between Hondo, Westina and Tombalbaye. We have always been without a greater ambition than the proclaimed desire to live from day to day behind the moon and the sun with our brothers following the tradition of the fire... We are called the children of fire. We have always known how to deal with rumors. That is how we could find a link between the arrival of the giant, the whining of Colonel Nola and the death of the cats. We said to ourselves: "Things are going to happen."

The only person who was really able to define our people was without doubt Duardo Lopes who, in a letter to King Joani estimated that we had wasted fourteen races to produce a society of mules, except for the fact that instead
of walking on all fours like mules do, being the gambas that we are, we can only assume a vertical position. We fish for sturgeon, we plant yams, rice and sweet potato, while making the most of the tribulations of a damned existence in which the gods, forgers, the living and the dead mingle. For us, life was also the consummate art of watching the colonels weep and guessing what that means.

"When a colonel weeps, certain things are going to happen!"

We have forgotten the unforgettable, for Colonel Nola could never stop weeping, so much so that some folks were secretly calling him "Pleurotus." Who rememberernd the time when the colonel, like a seven-year-old kid, was mourning the death of Namsir, a grey mouse that the Lebanese of Casa Andra had given him as a talisman? Almost nobody. The mouse enjoyed a special care and the services of a doctor. It had its own butler, dressers, gym teacher, philosophy and science teachers.

"The day it will die, my colonel, you will go nuts."

"No way!"

But fate really means what it says. It does exactly as it pleases. Namsir died at the military hospital, in front of fourteen specialists of all nations. Colonel "Pleurotus" lost his reason and came to live in Hozanna in the shadow of his cousin, the deceased founder of the Fatherland, without his seven hundred and fifteen females experienced in the art
of love making, without beret, without the honors due to the cousins of founders, without his thirteen uniforms embroidered with gold and branded with the name of the Fatherland. He had come there as a wreck, as an ex-immortal, ex-companion of the Revolution, ex-relative of the life-president, ex-professional devoted to the people's cause, ex-thirteenth-July-man...

He mourned the grey mouse for two years despite all the obstacles: a vote by our National Assembly ratified by the Church and the sects formed by the Fetishers of the current founder, the tenant of the people's cause. A breeder of cats and pelicans, the only passion that his brother's thirty years of dictatorship had left in his heart and on his arm was his love for our city which he had chosen in order to flee the memories of the capital. There he was, one foot in the grave, with a hard look in his eyes yelling at the service providers in a carcass of a hospital where they cannot even make the damn difference between a shoulder blade and a tibia, goddamn it!

"But colonel, you are at the root of this mess..."

Arthur Nola wasn't just weeping for his cats. We knew how to exasperate him with our teasing and our insistence on reminding him of his position as the Number Two man in the country, the maker of hymns and slogans.

The second sign of bad luck that followed the abortive appointment of the deceased co-founder as mayor was the
detection of a pernicious cholera by a team working with
Professor Loandzi. This disease was initially in the
northern part of the city before spreading through the
entire city. People were dying by the minute.

"It is worse than Frederico Maradonga's disease."

"People were going to the john and dying there without
a sound."

Estérico Pemba had gone to the smallest room upon
leaving the table. His guests had waited for a good one
hour before wondering what was going on. They had found him
dead, his nose on the earthenware toilet seat. The corpse
was still holding three leaves of toilet paper. His pants
were soiled. One leg, it is not known how, had gotten stuck
in the throne. "I will ask the State for an autopsy," his
tribal cousin Afesso had promised.

"Something dreadful is happening to us."

And we condemned the short memory of those woolly
monkeys living on the Coast who, without a doubt, had
disconcerted the gods by trying to confer the title of mayor
on a man whom the spirits of the dead had openly despised.
Good gracious! They should have known that nature has a
stubborn memory, the source of all our misfortunes.

"What a foolish thing to provoke the gods!"

"They always have more than one string to their bow."

If Colonel Paolo de Kasandor had not been in mourning
due to the death of his sloughis, Adam and Hove, he would
have shouted indignantly: "Gentlemen, I have governed you well, and now you shit on my trustworthy cousin. What an ingratitude!"

The third sign of bad luck was the coming of the giant. The sun was amazed. All the winds were still.

- "Even the stones had opened their eyes to look at him."

"Yes, amigo, to look at him and his animal. Never had anybody ridden in our city with such haughtiness."

"Certainly amigo! He knows how to be silent like the Good Lord."

The houses murmured. The windows winked. The walls whispered. The cat-flaps waited and watched. The curtains crumpled. There were some who said that the giant was coming to put the finishing touches to the famous coup d'état by Colonel Pedro Gazani which has been announced for years. The colonel published the progress being made and details of the operations in the three semblance of newspapers that our city puts out. Taking the opposing view of this nonsense, La Septaine africaine published some contradictory texts: "There are no more rooms at the St. Louis Hospital mortuary or the mortuary at Géméraux Hospital. People are dying in clusters like infested animals. People are dying in the north, south, center, east and west of our city. It is as if dying had become a job... Death is sapping everything. It cripples. It pursues. It
traps and encercles. As if those already dead were starting to die again. Obviously, the price of corruption was going up in all the city mortuaries. Only yesterday, one paid twenty thousand to find a place for one’s dead relative (which is a little less costly than securing a bed for a single patient). Today, the rates have tripled. A black market is born: "You, sir, you can take out the body if you leave me with the "camorra." What a shame! We are the first to enter the age of tipping."

The news had arrived in Hondo that people were dying for no reason in our city. And those who wanted to see the thing with their own eyes were coming; a teeming crowd converged on paths, hills, and in valleys... marching day and night.

"What’s going on in Hozanna, amigo?"

"The end of the world, good gracious!"

That happened only a few months before the arrival of the giant, an arrival which, quite obviously, was not unrelated to our imbecility for having tried to name the deceased president’s ex-younger brother to the offensive post of mayor. We had hardly finished burying those who had died of cholera when the elephant-man arrived, all covered in mud and mystery. He was running, as free as the wind. The populace began to look at him like a savior. They started to weave a myth around him, waking up old ghosts of the democratic war, and stirring up the embers of
a few buried ones. Drinking bars were filled with his legend. His name was associated with the sad memory of the time when bad luck had written its signs in the book of happy days. Like people like misfortune! Like misfortune like memory!

3

The reasons of those who are the weakest

Nobody understood how the Argandov’s last born, Louise, ended up in the rest room of the hotel which, for hygienic reasons, consisted of a pit twelve meters deep, three meters long and two meters wide dug at the back of Isidor-Langouaro street. The pit had to be one quarter full unless, in the days of the cholera epidemic, the Argandovs dumped dead animals into it. The little girl was calling out for help. An urgent solution had to be found, but which one? We thought quickly and loudly: breaking the slab would take too much time and the falling debris would kill the little girl or fill the little air that she had at the bottom of the pit with dust.... Should the slab be lifted? But how, without it caving in? A crowd of helpless men discussed the problem around the pit. The women did not dare come near: they were crying from a distance, a cry of emotion and despair.

"Be calm! gentlemen, let’s think about it," said the mayor, a close friend of the family.
He owed his appointment to them and was counting on being worthy of it on this occasion. He spoke incessantly.

Widening the passage of the shit would entail the same risks as breaking the slab. The little girl was panic-stricken, and Benoît Argandov was stupidly crying out to her:

"Don’t be afraid, Louise, I’m coming."

The cries of "I’m coming" by a man of Benoît Argandov’s caliber made people smile just as much as the mayor’s shouts of "calm!" An unruly crowd had formed on Samany street, in front of the public swimming pool. A blazing sun was pounding on people’s heads which were covered with a multitude of handkerchiefs and madras scarfs. The crowd presented an image of a sunflower field swarming with scarewrows of every color.

"Calm! gentlemen, let’s think about it," said Mr. Delos Santos who, dressed in a tennis suit, had come out of compassion for the mayor with his wife who was weeping with the other women.

Most of us had never seen a White woman in tears. Others believed that was a new sign of bad luck.

Someone floated the idea of sending a net fastened to a rope which the little girl could catch.... But it was so dark at the bottom of the pit that we wondered if the little girl wasn’t going to be afraid of something touching her in the darkness, something which might as well awaken ghost
stories that she had heard from her aunt Martine. There was no way to talk to her. And she was crying so loudly. The toilet hole was a circle with a diameter of twenty centimeters, cut in the middle of the rectangular slab covered with chinaware. Everybody was wondering how Louise Argandov was able to pass through. She was five years old and the Argandovs usually grow very nicely; as the saying goes: "He who eats, grows." "In the end, camels will pass through the eye of a needle," commented a voice.

"Don't worry, Louise, I'm coming," cried Benoît Argandov in the depths of despair and helplessness.

He paced up and down, pulling out his hair, panting, dribbling, breathing silently like an animal in heat, hopping and stamping his feet, crazed with impatience.

The women kept on weeping and their desperate cries drowned what the mayor and his deputy were saying. Plans after plans followed without any solution. Mr. Delos Santos had proposed that a pulley be constructed to lift up the slab, but the four walls of the toilet would have to be demolished first. The mayor's deputy had already ripped off the roof as if it was a pile of feathers. Three men collapsed the walls. Only the slab remained. Maximilien Argandov, the hunchback, suggested that we light up the bottom of the pit by pointing a lighted torch into the hole. The idea was accepted straightaway. But after that?

"Don't worry, Louise, I'm coming...."
The beam of the torch could only brighten a corner of the pit. Nobody could really see through it. And then Benoît Argandov was trembling so much that he let go of the rope which was fastened to the torch.

"What's going on at the Samany villa, buddy?"

"Lydie Argandov has fallen into the cesspool."

"It's not Lydie, but Yvonne."

"No, crony. It's the Argandov's last child: Louise. Little Louise. And nobody knows how to get her out without losing the hotel in a heap."

If these things had happened on a Monday, no one would have been surprised. Mondays are our unlucky days. Ever since the time of our distant ancestors, we always encounter our disasters on Mondays. We know that this day will not let us off lightly. Maximilien Handa, our most famous hero, a man who had never experienced fear and who had fought nine victorious wars against the people of Nsanga-Norda, refused to listen to Dona Cambralero, his wife, who informed him about the misfortunes that befell us on Monday and committed the blunder of going to Eldouranto Island one Monday. Fate used that occasion to make him die like a fly: he, who had been spared by gunfire and shell, died from crab bite. It was a harmless bite. But, a few days later, his leg had begun to swell enormously and then to suppurate. Dr. Ichelle had recommended amputation; to save the life of the hero.
"No way," Maximilien Handa retorted. "I prefer to carry it to my grave. It had served me for fifty years. I won't throw it away at the last minute."

He died on the fourth Monday following the crab bite. Diagnosis: septicaemia and poisoning.

But this was Thursday. Our fetish day. Time passed and the people were hopeful, hopeful because it was Thursday. But would the proposed solutions amount to anything much? Little Louise wasn't crying any more. Her beautiful voice had turned into a strange whistling sound which was thought to be coming from a tender fiber. The whistling changed into an incoherent quiver. Then there was silence.

"Oh my godfathers, what a giant!"

The giant, whom the gathering had diverted off his jogging route from the beginning of the afternoon, headed for the place of the accident. His percheron ran after him, sticking close to him.

"Do something, amigo," said the voice of an elderly man.

"Do something," repeated a woman's voice.

"Do it," said a kid who could hardly speak, and whose eyes were rolling with tears.

The crowd pressed around the giant. All the eyes of the men, women and children gazed hungrily at his gestures and those of the percheron. In a few words, a woman
explained to the giant what had happened: the mayor, his
deputy and the Commander of Security were trying very hard
to find ways and means to snatch little Louise from the
clutches of the shit. They were talking as usual in a
language made cumbersome by State expressions. Mrs.
Argandov broke her booming base voice as a result of making
those shrill sounds. She was past fifty despite the
unshakeable beauty which continued to maintain her stature.
In her distress her long hair strewn with white hairs stood
on end like wildgrasses. The hairs were all covered in dust
and rubble.

"Do something, sir."

The giant smiled. At this moment, Louise Argandov
started to cry again. A hint of voice had come back to her.
Lydie Argandov held on to the giant's chest, her eyes
flooded with tears. Her hair was longer than her mother's
and since she had rolled on the ground in distress and
dispair her hair was covered in thick mud. Her beautiful
face shone under the snot.

"But, gentlemen, the slab must be lifted," said the
giant.

"My daughter will die when it crumbles," Benoît
Argandov protested.

"There is no other solution," said the giant.

"The crumbling could break the walls of the cathedral," said the Mayor. "It could shake city hall buildings."
"What damn buggers you are!" the giant exploded with anger.

"Don’t worry, Louise, I’m coming..."

"Stop your idle talk and get to work."

The giant asked the multitude to break part of the Argandov’s house. And the crowd was only too willing to do it. They devoured half of the villa. And then, following the man’s instructions, the crowd began to dig a kind of canal parallel to the pit.

"Next, we will make a window on top of the pit," the giant explained. "And the little girl will be saved."

"Don’t worry, Louise, I’m coming," Benoit Argandov continued, weeping for his villa and his possessions which have been pillaged by the rabble.

The crowd dug while singing. What had been a misfortune turned into an unbridled enthusiasm. There were screams and shouts of hurrah. Fanfare of pickaxe blows. Amidst the smell of fresh, rich earth was the grating noise of wheelbarrows. Lumps of earth sent into the air came down with a moaning sound at the other side of the Argandov’s concession at the foot of Saint-Firmin Cathedral, under the admiring eyes of Mgr Isidor Langouaro’s mausoleum. Pickaxes, hoes and shovels struck against a strip of granite which sent up a shower of sparks.

"What’s to be done?" asked the mayor’s deputy.

"Comrades, we have to remove the stone."
"At any rate we are more intelligent than this stone."

We sent for Demba-Numbi, the surveyor, who made a quick calculation and was amazed that out of nowhere and in the middle of sediments and chalk one could find seven bars of granite, carved into strange shapes by a human hand. The bad luck had therefore not left us alone.

"Don’t worry, Louise, I’m coming...."

This kind of invective against fate rose up in the middle of fervent songs. We heard it as we tasted the acrid earth, stone fragments and sweat. Our city did not like the Argandovs because of the manner in which they had amassed an undeserved fortune, but especially because of what they did with this fortune: we described them as witless souls, bogged down in a pool of unnecessary ceremonies, and consumers of poor-quality stuff.

The Djoura flowed peacefully at the foot of the slope on which the Samany villa sat imposingly. From there it completed its last journey before emptying its red waters into the estuary, and the sound it makes as it enters the ocean can be heard from the center of the Milda-Cardosa.

Louise Argandov was very dear to us because of the role she had played in Sociasco Montello’s film, la Nuit des nues (The Night of the Naked Women). The child in the film was raised by a family of gorillas who took her off into the muds of the Yambo. At the age of four, the little girl had played her role with the most incredible magic. We loved
her for that. She had symbolized all the struggles of our land from the Portuguese invasion to the nine wars led by Colonel Goldmann whom Hidris Buardo had placed without any desire inside the womb of our crazy sister Estina de la Pitié and then offered to the Benedictines. He became in turn alter boy, cook, colonel and maquis. Five months never went by without the Authorities announcing his death.

"Don’t worry, Louise...."

The crowd pulled the bars of granite with a raging fierceness for which our people are known. They all decided to erode gradually the Isidor-Langouaro hill on which sat imposingly the monstrous fortress left by the Joando kings at the end of the Third Century B.C. Isidor-Langouaro street had been turned into a real quarry, and stones were flying into pieces. Muscle after muscle, heavy hammers tore them into pieces amidst songs, calls and shouts of hurrahs as though it was the occasion of a pagan feast. We sang the words of Louise Argandov as they were sung in Sociasco Montello’s film:

Don’t worry Loyichka
The night is dark but
My heart is coming!

Then came the judge, his eyes hidden behind a pair of old sunglasses with a silver frame. The two militiamen, one
on his left and the other on his right, sounded the bugle together. There was a moment of complete silence, and nobody moved. All eyes were suddenly turned on the judge and his scouts who were playing the old national anthem instead of the current one.

"Don’t worry, Louise," began Benoît Argandov.

"Shut up," the judge ordered. "You are concerned with shit, while we are witnessing the assassination of Roberto Almansor at this hour. You better sit infront of your television sets to watch the live broadcast of the Nation’s silence."

"But, your Honor, a human life is at stake."

"Sir, Roberto’s life was worth an infinite number of human lives."

"Go and have your hair done! Sir. As for us, we would like to save the little girl," said the giant.

The singing resumed with increased madness. The stones began to moan again under the weight of the hammers. The canal was already a few meters deep. The giant explained to us that after digging nine meters we would make a window on top of the pit. A group of men struggled hard to move a strip of granite to the extreme left of the embankment. The mayor led this group while his deputy, all covered in yellow earth, tried to uproot a stump with the help of Benoît Goldmann.

"Don’t worry, Louise, I’m coming..."
At the desired depth, a window was made in the pit. It wasn’t too wide, for fear of it caving in, but sufficient enough to enable Mr. Delos Santos to go down into the pit and come out again with the little girl who lost consciousness once in open air. Dr. Ichelle took the child in his arms and left running in the direction of his clinic. Nobody understood why Father Christian de la Bretelle, aided by the mayor, persisted in pulling the tongue of the stone.

"What are you doing, Mr. Mayor?" asked Diego Sadoun Argandov.

"I’m helping the Father," said the mayor.

"This is an unusual stone. It looked as if some people had put it there to hide something," said Father Christian de La Bretelle.

He made a sign for some christians to come and help him. But the euphoria was at its height. Benoît Argandov, as a sign of thanks, had invited the multitude to drink to the health of little Louise who had been saved from the clutchches of the shit through the giant’s ideas and thinking.

"Make yourself at home, amigo. She is saved and I am offering food and drinks to the whole city. Eat and drink yourselves to death. I am paying."

Only a few christians, less interested in the food and drinks, still helped the mayor and Father de la Bretelle to move the huge strangely-shaped bar of granite. They sang
the infectious song of the Kongo gods, a song known to us all:

Mahungo ko  
Konkoto ko  
Mu bakeno  
Konko tuko  
Ku dia tu mundia  
Konkoto ko  
Ku lumbu ke  
Kokoto ke  
Mu gabeno...

When the stone had been moved, the Father had the confirmation of what kept running through his head right from the start: the stone was blocking the entrance to a cave. The giant who did not feel like going to the binge offered by the Argandovs observed the activities. He smiled with satisfaction, took out his cigar from his inseparable knapsack and lighted it with the declicacy of a connoisseur. He offered one to the mayor and made Mr. Delos Santos understand that he did not have any more to offer.

"Like you, I thought that this stone was hiding an enigma," said the giant.

"I am used to seeing stones which conceal something," retorted the Father.
They looked at each other for a long time as if they were reading each other’s mind; then they came to the agreement that it would be unwise to explore the cave at this late hour. They put the bar of granite back at the entrance. Benoit Argandov came to the giant and pleaded with him to accept a glass of drink in his house.

"That would be an honor to me, Mr. Stranger."

"No, sir," said the giant. I can’t go on a binge at the time of my evening jogging."

The man took his leave of the mayor, his deputy, and Mr. Delos Santos, and began to run behind his animal towards the Dutch cemetery. He went past the old Massamba-Djikita crossroads. Some young children and teenagers ran after him singing and howling. The giant stopped at Tahiti Market, bought an inflatable balloon and offered it to the kid who was running closest to him. The kid exploded with joy and sang very loudly this song recorded by Matsoua’s band:

Kamba ta Biyela ba muhondele e-e
Kani mwatu e-e
Ko kwa kena e-e

The crowd became larger with people of all ages. The giant answered those who asked him if he wasn’t Benoit Goldman with a touch of sarcasm: "I’m not your wretched Benoit, screwed up by those geezers in the capital. I
wouldn’t have been a nobody if, in this age, mediocre activities such as running hadn’t been propelled to the rank of science."

"What a huge man!" said the crowd in amazement.

The man moved off like a tornado. He followed State Highway 1 and very quickly crossed the Dutch quarter, his percheron clinging closely at his heels. Cars stopped to let the runner, his animal, and the crowd pass. The runners looked like a horde of Red Indians. In front of Agostino College, the giant, his animal, and the flood of curious people following him took a right angle turn to the left, going down Abbé-Ivonne avenue, and then to Holy-Mountain avenue. They took the Chinese traffic circle and the Press hill in their stride before arriving at Fiancées’s market through Simon avenue, and emerged into the Three-Francs neighborhood. The crowd hurtled down Aviators avenue to enter the second district in the neighborhood of de Gaulle market and went into Croix-de-Lorraine avenue which they followed all the way up to the end where it joins Old-Gendarme street. They reached the Arabic high school and started to insult the Authorities.

"It’s like a revolution," said Mr. Delos Santos to the mayor’s deputy.

"No, sir," said Argandov who was returning from the hospital where his daughter had been detoxified. "A giant
runs after his horse just to get some fresh air into his muscles. And the people are amazed."

"The world has gone crazy."

"But of course, amigo."

The three weeks that old man Argandov had granted to the man to think about his proposition was spent on trivialities: he continued to go round the city three times a day, his animal at his side; he drank twenty-nine cups of tea everyday, grazed his percheron in the compound of Liberties high school, and went for his three baths in the river, as naked as the day he was born. He spent the nights making Lydie Argandov laugh, and we all knew she was insatiable. Seven times a night we would hear her gulping with laughter interrupted with ridiculous screams and delightful fits of choking. People living in the Icebox neighborhood had finally nicknamed this laughter the "laugh of the comet", a laugh which took place at set times.

Instead of talking about the first, second or third cockcrow, people had opted for the first, second or third "laugh of the comet." Whoever had to get up early would say: "I will leave at the time of Lydie Argandov’s fifth laugh." Others would say: "What a terrible night we had last night! We didn’t sleep a wink before Lydie’s third laugh." Which always happened from three thirty in the morning. The giant had forgotten the insults of the early days.
"Sir, the time is over," old man Argandov came to tell him. "Have you decided on the sale?"

The man offered him a cup of tea. The old man sat down on a seat in the right corner of the tent and began to drink. It is cool in July at the early hours of the day. The tea gave off a curl of white vapor which stirred its own center as though some invisible hand was shaping it in the air.

"I need three additional weeks," said the giant.

He poured tea for himself just to watch the old man’s reaction. But the old man was wise enough to conceal his expression.

"It’s the law of the market, sir," he said as he swallowed saliva to soothe his throat from the hot tea. "We will give you the time you want. But know that we have the monopoly."

The sun was high in the sky when old man Argandov left the tent gnashing his teeth in an uncontrollable anger. Like the mayor, he had forgotten his car and returned home on foot. He only remembered and came for it three months later, at the time of his niece’s seventh and last laugh. The Authorities turned a blind eye to the provocations by the crowd who cheered the giant and began to see him as the liberator, the long-awaited dispenser of justice who must really teach a lesson to the monopolists, traffickers, and mystifiers of the people’s cause.
"He will make light work of all our twisted schemers!"
"Hefty as he is hefty!"
"Shrewd as he is shrewd, amigo!"
"Everybody grovels before him."
"Yes, amigo: they all crawl to him."
"Even if he were to make their concubines laugh, they wouldn't dare raise a finger."

"How he scares the pants off those people! the mayor for example: he sent him packing with a false title deed."

"The giant came to our city with three crimes for sale." The man had dictated this text to Bernardo Maquise, editor-in-chief of la Septaine.

"But sir, your article can't be published. Because of censorship. We live in a city where the law abhors truth and demands cheating. Here, the authorities expect to govern three thousand deaf-and-dumb people to whom they give three soups of slogans a day and a definite prohibition to think."

"Print three hundred thousand copies. I will buy all of them and pass them on to the citizens of this city. You run a newspaper. Don't worry about what morticians do."

"But, sir, do you want them to close down my newspaper and for me to squeal in jail for the rest of my life?"

"Do what I tell you. I will protect you, from your hair to your toes. Unless you want to sell me your newspaper."
"No, sir, I will not sell my life. I will do your damned stupid thing. Keep your dough. I am a man of honor. I will only sell you your three hundred thousand copies if I get mixed up in censorship or if there is a slump."

"It's a deal!, sir."

"It's a deal!, amigo."

We got to know then that the man's name was Managora: that is why he had refused to stay with the Argandovs.

"This is the Thursday edition of la Septaine, gentlemen. The issue which tells the truth about the crimes sold by comrade Managora."

People rushed to the markets and to every street corner.

"La Septaine, ladies and gentlemen.... Buy the truth about the crimes sold to the Argandovs... and their first cousin."

Alphonse Tchicaya, the director of the newspaper, ran his small eyes behind his nearsighted glasses. He was about fifty. His mustache and goatee were dry and sprinkled with white grains. His left eye shone brighter than the right eye. His thin lips wavered between the mischievous smile of a triumphant victor and a delightful bitterness clothed in the usual prudence of a fighter. The circulation quadrupled. Everybody wanted a copy of the truth. The newspaper workers shone with joy, drank, told jokes and sang as they brandished number seven thousand and seventy-two.
"We are selling the truth. At least once in my life I have done something useful."

"The big shot doesn’t look happy."

"It’s the fear."

"No, amigo, it’s the surprise."

"Four million copies sold... four million..."

"What a feast, my godfathers!"

Alphonse Tchicaya thought that the police would come. He had imagined that they would be five or six. It was fate. They would ask for the director. They would handcuff him. He could see himself before the Council. And the first question, he had heard it during the trial involving the little girls. And during the forty-seven trials fomented by the Authorities.

"How can you sell shit, comrade Alphonse! In a country like ours? Organized and prosperous. How can you distribute subversion to citizens who do not want it? How can you incite our people to be stubborn?"

He had prepared an answer to this question. The answer of someone who had only one more thing to say in his life: "You are just a bunch of buggers. Therefore, fuck off, all of you."

For one week, the circulation increased at a galloping rate. And Alphonse Tchicaya waited, with his answer at the tip of his tongue, for the police to come to see him.
The common people began to murmur: "It's over! Democracy is on its way! We have never had Authorities who hold nothing against truth and right. We have never had anything but duties: we are going to have rights - the right to know... the right to ask questions... the right to think aloud... the right to have an opinion... the right to refuse... the right to shout down the arrogance of mediocre people."

But the common people have always had high dreams. The day came when...

"Sir, you published a newspaper."
"Yes, sir, thirteen weeks ago."
"Did you publish insanities?"
"Yes, sir, thirteen weeks ago."
"In the name of the law, you're under arrest."
"I've waited thirteen weeks to tell you that you are just a nasty bugger."

Alphonse Tchicaya was thrown into Rocheau prison. Crowds of people who had come from Tombalbaye gathered in front of the prison. They hooted, shouted, booed, and mingled with the giant's fanatics.

"We are guilty of what Alphonse Tchicaya engineered."
"But, gentlemen, you are committing subversion."

The next day, there were, around the prison, eight hundred and fifty-seven thousand requests for imprisonment backed up by shouts of anger and songs of solidarity:
Damn shit
We will kick out peace
Botch up everything
We will kick out happiness
It's the time for an explanation
Every minute is a head
Scare the pants off everyone
We will screw everything up.

We had never experienced that in our history: five of our city's seven communities stood in line in front of the prison to demand imprisonment as a sign of solidarity. Panic-stricken, the Authorities had to order the release of the director of the erstwhile newspaper La Septaine, which had been suspended indefinitely.

"Never ever do a stupid thing like selling your poisoned sauerkraut. Let those who don't have anything to read go and read the Constitution."

"Yes, sir."

"And a journalist, a good journalist, is the one who repeats the wishes of the people to the whole people."

"Agreed, Comrade."

"Next time, you will have your place under the earth..."

"Yes, Mr... President!"
"This country is full of girls. If you have nothing to do, go and produce citizens."

4

The old salad of Nations

The mayor came to see the giant the evening of the day when old man Argandov had gone to get the car he had left in front of the giant’s tent. He was smiling like a diplomat stationed in an Arab country and he had the expression of a politician during election time. He was all dressed in white which, from his point of view, was an indication of his intention to proceed by means of negotiations since the Septaine’s story had removed any illusion concerning his chances of taking the man by force.

"Our ancestors say that no one has the right to send a stranger away," said the mayor as he offered the man cigar.

"Your ancestors were very intelligent," said the giant who refused the cigar. "My ancestors say that one must not go under water with one’s eyes wide open."

He offered tea. The mayor drank the tea. He found it to be very good but no doubt with an ulterior motive. His eyes sparkled with pleasure. He ran his tongue over his beautiful chops and thought for a long moment as he savored the taste and aroma of the tea before saying, almost with a sigh:
"I've been told that you are selling some crimes."

The giant looked at him straight in the eye. But the mayor remained unruffled. He asked for another tea to show that he would give the moment all his time. He tried to change the conversation by considering that the bottom of the tea had an acrid taste and was just beginning to taste bitter. He talked about women whose flesh he found more and more dull and whose intelligence he considered superficial.

"From a distance, they are very succulent. But as soon as they come very close to you they become just plain flesh with folds, wrinkles and creases. They smell of sweat and other secretions. The beauty is concealed in the fact that we listen to their cries."

A fly flew under the tent, marking the heavy air with its irritating humming, and then fell down dead. The mayor looked at the fly for some time. He thought that the tea was poisoned, but he didn't dare say so.

"They told you the truth," the giant confirmed. "I've three crimes for sale."

The man asked the mayor if he read the news.

"When it talks about me," said the mayor quite openly. "La Septaine wrote about the conditions under which I am selling my crimes."

"Tell me your price," the mayor ventured to ask.

"No, Mr. Mayor. At the risk of making you angry, I will not sell my crimes to those who dig their dough out of
the pockets of the State. Because my ancestors have taught me to respect the people, not to urinate on their misery. It’s a point of honor, Mr. Mayor. It goes far beyond any kind of appointment."

The mayor frowned cruelly, a sudden change of mood which could be placed between a timid shame and a frozen anger. There was a short moment of silence during which time the man emptied his cup and filled another one. The mayor scratched the back of his head and asked for a cigar lighter. He mumbled something that the giant didn’t hear but which, quite obviously, was not a wish for his prosperity. Then he went away. The giant came out of the tent to see the mayor off. It was evening and the delicate corselets of the fireflies were shining blue. It was at this instant that the giant’s eyes fell on Lydie Argandov. She had the shapely figure of a gazelle which seemed to displace the night when she goes past. As always, she was wearing white silk. An irrepressible body. Fresh. A limpid body. Thirsting for flesh. With a hint of reckless abandon. Lydie Argandov flew into the man’s arms and bit gently on his right ear. She kissed his lips and beard hungrily. Her eyes were sparkling suspiciously. Mammalian murmurs. A lake of fire. Lydie devoured the man greedily.

"I love you," said Lydie Argandov. "You’re like a Greek god."

"You’re being silly," said the giant.
"My body is forever excited in the peace you've brought over me."

She bit him on the ear as one eats an orange. She began to play with the hairs in his beard then with the ponytail at the crown of his head. Things were rolling nicely on Djoura avenue. There was a carnaval of light without any of the hullabaloo on feastdays. The man's eyes were swallowed up in the darkness marked by red lights.

"This isn't a city," said Lydie Argandov.

She sprawled into the giant's arms and felt very fragile. There are times when her body had the elegance of the sun. One could clearly feel its radiance.

"You must go away," said Lydie Argandov.

"I'm at home here. I have come to stay."

"This city belongs only to cowards. They will massacre you if you stay."

"I know," said the man. "But I'll not be massacred in peace anywhere else."

Lydie Argandov explained to the giant how the Argandovs enriched themselves overnight from the sale of a dupery known as "the blue of Noah." They possess the largest fortune on the Coast. A strange disease ravaged the land from Ankar bay to the first foothills of the cliffs of Rocheau: it had all begun on one of those Mondays which herald a misfortune. Accursed Monday. Mr. Delos Santos had found a dead fly in a drinking glass containing lemon juice.
Why would he have paid attention to something which is not at all unusual? Flies die anywhere. Well, just by talking to some people, Mr. Delos Santos learned from his conversations that some of the people he had talked to had found dead flies that very morning while others had found dead birds. The deputy mayor had also found a dead grass snake in his bed.

"We can’t afford to neglect this premonition."

"Well today is Monday."

"But, Mr. Ambassador, we are now in the twentieth century. Stop believing in ghosts."

At noon, Judge Alma do Nonso came to see Dr. Youri Argandov with three hundred dead hens from his poultry even though they had been cackling all night. It seemed as if something had frightened them. And then silence had settled on them — the silence of death. Everybody laughed at the poor soul just like the time when Arthur Nola had turned up at Géméraux hospital with his dead cats.

"Doctor, I want an autopsy."

"But, your Honor, these are just hens."

"I will pay for the autopsies."

"I’m not talking about money.... But you’re going to lose your appointment if you start being superstitious."

In the evening people went to see the doctor to demand an autopsy for their pets the cause of whose death nobody knew.
"Oh my godfathers, what a mess! I’ve lost my dogs and parrots. Doctor, I request an autopsy."

The Doctor diagnosed a virus called "the blue of Noah." For several months he shut himself up in his wife’s kitchen in order to cook, grill, burn, boil... brush... It was in this way that he discovered "the crab of Mandrandele," considered to be responsible for the epidemics which, thank God, spared humans and decimated pets only. Youri Argandov had tamed the crab of Mandrandele by means of a liquid that we had nicknamed "oil fourteen" - and which the Authorities referred to as "the honey of Nsanga-Norda." Their appellation was more sensible than ours. Youri Argandov was a native of Nsanga-Norda. His acolytes could give any name they wanted to his discovery. Valancia, Baltayonsa, Hozanna and Westina were laughing, but that was just out of spite. The authorship of the discovery could not be stolen from Nsanga-Norda. Youri Argandov traveled across the Coast, the Cataracts, both banks of the Estuary and the Vasières and as far as the Yogon regions in order to treat the pets. The people of Solitudes had paid loads of money for him to go and treat their pets, but Youri Argandov had always been so scared of the sea that he had declined the offer.

And then the crab of Madrandele attacked humans in the form of a disease which, from the bay of Angler to the first foothills of the cliffs of Ankara, debilitated males and made men lose all their teeth overnight. Their hair fell
out before their fingernails and their procreation baton swelled and broke like a snake made of glass. We called this sickness Frederico Maradonga’s disease.

"God damn it, why this poor Frederico Maradonga?" people wondered in vain.

Because Frederico Maradonga was born without a trace of hair on his head and reached the age of forty-eight without any hair growing on his body. He never grew teeth but in place of the teeth he had a red barrette, as friable as one could wish which luckily grew again by the minute. Because of this he was obliged to live only on porridge, mashed potatoes and chopped vegetable soup. There were rumors that to protect oneself from Frederico Maradonga’s disease, it was advisable to eat a good dose of gynnote meal daily. But this fish could only be caught around Lake Tayo. Now, the lake and its surroundings belonged to the Argandovs who had sold the exclusive fishing rights to the Rakotosson company, a company run by three Madagascans who are strongly despised in our country because of the extreme nature of their methods: they were dumping a Cesar orange-based product into the rivers, a product which we blamed for destroying the water in our rivers. The Authorities to whom we never stopped complaining could only give us promises veiled in a conniving silence: the Rakotosson contributed seventy-six percent to the economy of the State. The Argandovs, like the Rakotossons, became rich because of their exclusive
rights to the fishing of gymnote. Richer than the State, they re-invested the amount of money they got from the sale of gymnote in roads, real estate, the simony of conscience, and electoral malpractices. What could we do about it? The country was starving. Money was killing virtue. People were selling their souls to feed the flesh.

"Sell your crimes or else I will be forced to have recourse to other means," the mayor came to tell the giant on July 14, at the time when the chicken were coming to roost and while in the de Gaulle home the Kimbangui brass band and the Cherubs orchestra were jamming, soaked in champagne and liqueur.

The giant had offered him the camp seat which he reserved for all his visitors. But the mayor who was all wrapped up in a Laurencio Lapey suit informed his host that he had been invited to the ceremonies marking the storming of the Bastille and to the firework display by the French residents who were celebrating this shambles of a Revolution that nobody remembered otherwise than by quaffing bottles of alcohol.

"Mr. Delos Santos will hold it against me if I'm not ...."

"You want to storm the Bastille again one hundred and ninety-seven years after its fall?" the giant asked in surprise.

"That is History, after all," said the mayor.
"I ask you to choose between storming the Bastille again and my crimes," said the giant with a laugh.

"I can't choose," said the mayor.

The giant looked him straight in the eye for a long time. He had a broad smile on his face, drank what was left of the tea he had been stirring since the arrival of the mayor, feigned two coughing fits to clear his throat and said:

"Mr. Mayor, you've reached an age when it is unwise to go out in the cool of July. Drink my tea, it will help you. If you want to buy my crimes, be informed that I will sell them by auction in the presence of Mr. Argandov. Maitre Bemba de Castillo will be my notary, the Authorities will be represented by Colonel Banda. And then, if you are up to date on the origin of this affair, you must know that I have joint ownership of the crimes with Mr. Benoît Goldmann. We have deposited them in a bank known only to us in Argentina.

"But Goldmann is on the run!" said the mayor.

"How can you be a mayor and ignorant?" asked the giant in surprise.

"I will make you regret this foolishness," said the mayor with a sigh. "Or my name isn't Tristansio Banga Fernandez."

"No, Mr. Mayor, you won't have the time. For this city will become a city of law and rights. No longer will anybody trample on another person here for his pleasure. I
have come so that reason will prevail. You’ve run this city like a family vault. You’ve censored people’s lives as it pleased you. That time is over, Mr. Mayor. This city wants to sing and I’ve come so that it will sing. Either it will sing or I will die."

"How can you be a revolutionary and stupid?" said the mayor with a smile.

"Just a moment, Mr. Mayor."

The man went through one of his numerous bags as he repeated "just a moment, Mr. Mayor" - the same way he had done the day when the mayor had come to ask him "who gave you the right." There were about fifteen bags of different colors with inscriptions written in large black characters and in several languages: POSTA DI PORTUGAL, BRITISH MAIL, POSTES DE FRANCE, POSTE ITALIANE, US MAIL, MZILO ILANKA.... From the bag with this last inscription the man brought out a damaged book which might have been saved from a fire.

"Take this, Mr. Mayor. If you have some time, read it and you’ll understand the matter concerning the crimes."

The mayor took the book and looked at the title in the darkness which had swept through the tent a little after his arrival. Since he couldn’t read with his eyes alone, he searched through his coat and pants pockets for the required glasses. He forced a smile to give himself a false sense of power, but the man realized that the mayor had taken the wrong glasses.
"What's really in all these papers?"

"The things that are going to take place," said the giant as he offered a cup of tea. "Therein lies the question of my death or yours."

"The doctor has warned me against all stimulants," said the mayor.

The giant offered him a cup of ordinary water. The mayor drank half of it; then he left without saying goodbye. He held the book tightly under his right arm. Night had fallen. Blue. And terrible. In this silence broken only by the noises coming from the feast given by Mr. Delos Santos in the de Gaulle house.

Instead of going to the festivities of July 14, the mayor who, once again, had forgotten his Jeep in front of the giant's tent, turned his back to the de Gaulle house and emerged into Djoura avenue. All those who met him on the way were not surprised to see him on foot: since his appointment, Tristansio Banga had earned himself the reputation of "the one who forgets locomotion."

People stopped as we went past, taken aback by the insanities coming from his mouth which is rather accustomed to shouting slogans.

"Who's that?"

"The mayor, amigo"

"What's he saying?"

"Coarse expressions."
"We’re living in the dawn of the Animal: we’ve entered into man’s zero conscience."

"Zero intelligence. Zero wisdom. Zero sensitivity.... We can no longer stop messing things up. That’s the end."

When he came home, the mayor threw himself into his bed with his shoes and clothes on. He lay on his back with his eyes riveted on the ceiling. A neon tube diffused a dull off-white light. Some mosquitoes fluttered about around the source of the light. A huge fly came to join the mosquitoes. Its music disturbed the daydreaming of the mayor who, for an instant, thought of killing the insect. But he was afraid of breaking the neon tube because he was so irritated that he couldn’t control his hands and gestures. Mme Tristansio Banga came to lie down beside her husband, exposing the drawn features of her forty-two years to the neon. She looked for some time at the bags of fat on her husband and remembered the far-off days when her own breasts shook firmly, when the roundness of her face and her youthful age had mellowed the heart of Volterano, the mayor of Baltayonsa, who had married her in a mad rush, but who had to get a divorce because of the shameless advances that his entourage made to his wife day and night before his very eyes and in front of the colors of the Homeland, mamma of my mother! Anything, but that!
"Gentlemen, a beautiful woman is for one male only. I didn't marry her for others to enjoy themselves. Stop your goddamn mammalogy of spoiling other people's females."

That same evening, Father Christian de la Bretelle who had spent the day exploring the cave didn't find what he was looking for. The fact that the cave was blocked by a monstrous stone that was rare in the region still puzzled him.

"Why three bars of granite in a sea of clay and sandstone?" he wondered. "Something is amiss."

The Father, who had his doubts, had been going back to the cave since the day the mayor, Mr. Delos Santos, the giant, and himself were convinced that the cave didn't present any archeological interest. He had examined every stone eye, every shape, every hidden piece, every nook of the rock.... In the course of his visits, he became convinced that the cave concealed a mystery. He had therefore gone to see the giant just at the moment when the mayor, mumbling insanities, was leaving.

"Did you make him angry?" asked the Father.

"I wanted to know if a mayor could afford to be ignorant."

The Father felt like pouring out advice but obviously the giant did not need it. He therefore merely caressed his gray beard in a series of gentle strokes before asking for a
goblet of water. The giant served him melampyrum water from Westina. The priest drank it and coughed very loudly.

"Are you making me drink fire?"

"It's natural," said the giant. "You'll not find anything like this on the banks of paradise. But what has brought you here, Father?"

"I've come to hear your confession, my son," said the Father.

"What a pity!" said the giant. "I gambled away all my sins last night."

The man was nibbling at a tripe of meat found at the bottom of the dishes of the previous evening that Lydie Argandov had not washed. She had left in a hurry because she remembered that she had left her father's home without turning off the bathtub.

"Did you return to the cave, Father?"

"I was going to tell you."

"Did you find any leads?"

"I'm afraid not!"

The giant unfolded a parchment that he had found inside his luggage. He indicated a spot to the priest with his right forefinger. A long silence followed his action. The priest put on his glasses to see.

"This cave is marked on the rudimentary maps left over by the Koro-Ngota people. It conceals the treasures of the Comet kings. Do you know what I'm talking about?"
The parchment must have been the skin of a murena-snake. It dates back to the remote period when our fathers wrote in knots and lines.

"Interesting," said Father Christian de la Bretelle.

"It has a very odd name."

"Indeed," the Father said with a sigh, "It's a strange name, "Bone of Tombalbaye."

The two men looked into each other's eyes. Time passed. The film of memory rolled before their eyes. The Father smiled broadly. The giant put his right hand on the Father's left shoulder. The night had already turned on its cortege of stars. A cool wind shook the darkness.

"Let's make the Revolution, Father Christian," said the giant. "God is big enough to take care of archeology by himself."

"Never again," said the Father. "Blood doesn't wash anything."

"Except the blood of a man like Cardinal Baya."

"I'll no longer be part of your load of old rubbish, Colonel Sombro. I say mass. May God do the rest."

"The people are on our side," said the giant.

"They'll get the hell out of here the day you wish to worm information out of them," said the Father. "As in 1967."

The Father got up and wanted to leave. But the man held him back by the sleeve of his black cassock. He looked
him straight in the face for a long time before saying to
him: "Don’t forget that the eyes of the volcano are watching
you."

"It’s over, this load of rubbish," the Father muttered
to himself. "Over for good. For heaven’s sake! We’ve
killed one another long enough."

"Well then, stop poisoning the animals," said the
giant. "The Good Lord will never forgive you for killing
for pleasure."

"How is the condition of Benoit Goldman’s haemorrhoid?"
asked the Father in order to change the conversation.

"Much more better than your archeology," said the
giant. "Benoit has never shown himself unworthy of the
fleet that the Pharaohs have left in his veins. He will
carry on as you are going to see."

One hundred and thirty telegrams and an anger

Benoit Goldmann read out the Book of Genesis loudly
that evening to annoy his wife. Anyway, it was like that
every evening. As soon as bedtime approached, the warrant
officer would fix his eyes on the Scriptures. In this way
he was certain that Dona Alleando would not dare. This
subterfuge of his was inspired by something that goes back in
his memory. Long before the Fourth democratic War, Benoit
Goldmann used to work at the Sino-Congolese compote clay factory. Whenever he felt exhausted, he would go into the shade and begin to read the "Little Red Book." Nobody was permitted to disturb him since at that time there was nothing like the thought of Colonel Mao Tse Tung. He sometimes fell asleep and continued to move his lips. But the Chinese comrades were very pleased with the people's adherence to the most profound ideas of Communism. Habits can sometimes be redeeming. We were far from the time of the democratic wars. Far from the period of the Sino-Congolese compote clay factory. The warrant officer had returned home, savoring the pleasant scent of his native soil. Anytime that he felt his wife was going to bother him with this carnal voracity which he had never really understood (even though, some years back, the warrant officer had been a wolf in that subject), Benoît Goldmann would rivet his eyes and nose on the word of God.

A muffled sound came from his ever youthful mouth, barely separating his thick mustache and his purplish pink nymphal lips. The warrant officer's lips had always had this appearance of a shattered dream in the midst of a sweet pleasure. Compact. Thin. They were a door perpetually opened to the pleasures of the flesh. Benoît Goldmann remained what we call a bronze Hercules, built like a Masai god. An impeccable body. A masterpiece of flesh. Every one on the Coast, from the bay of Anglers to Baltayonsa, had
known the warrant officer since he was seven months old because of certain stories that surrounded his birth: we all wondered through what mystery the Alvano-Salvo do Moesso-Nsa couple had produced a little Black boy with blue eyes. Because of the hardships which have always dogged our existence, we always pay close attention to the mumblings of nature. A little Black boy with blue eyes could well be a warning sign from the ocean about our damned stupid and easy way of doing the bacchanalian dance. Our land had always lived through honor and confusion since the time of our great great ancestors. We began to live cleverly and on cheap drinks. All the same we still wondered how this poor little boy could have gotten blue eyes. The wicked ones attributed Benoit’s eyes to Rev. Father Luxor Sardoun’s stay. Based in Indiana, the Father never spent three Sundays in a row without finding himself obliged to go and release the will of the Lord on the hardened female sinners of Hondo-Norté and Hozanna.

"The proof," said the masses, "is because Salvo did not give his name to the child." Alvano had confided in her husband that at the time the little baby had begun to kick very strongly in her womb, she constantly had this dream: two balls of fire came down from the Arioni cliff, licked the slopes of the Black Hills, razed the valley on the side of the Arlongongolo, then passed through the Estuary to arrive at the sea which they brought to the boil.
The sea changed into an ocean of blue fire. Then, a violent storm of red haze rose, and the trees lost all their leaves. Roofs of houses melted into red ashes. Stones shattered and fell down as dust.... This apocalypse ended with a loud murmur from the ocean.... Solitudes island grew like an arrow in the sky. Mabaya inflamed, and Nkoyi spit out lightning.

"You could all the same have some opinion about it."

"About what then?"

"But about the dream. About this fire which consumes everything. About the child. Red is after all a color which conceals things."

"What was red?"

"The sea. It came right up to Hondo-Norte. Anything that was standing has now fallen down. Have some opinon, God damn it!"

"You can’t change the Earth because you think."

"I’m certain that the little boy is outstanding."

"But Alvano, my love.... You know that everybody is outstanding."

Alvano died some time before the birth of the little boy. The wake lasted for four days because of certain authorizations that the mayor could not sign without the deceased’s birth certificate. The child was knocking against the womb of the dead woman. Overcome with pity, old woman Banata looked for a kitchen knife and performed a
makeshift Caesarean. "Let's see if the tadpole will survive." The skin of the dead woman was very tough and the knife could hardly cut. But the old woman was determined. She opened the stomach.

Fate did not overtax itself to kill Alvano: one night, a strong feeling of sickness, hemorrhage, Géméraux hospital plunged into darkness by one of these power failures, a common occurrence in our city. No, fate did not do much to persuade the nurses to be hard-hearted as they usually are in times of power failures. It was three in the morning. By vague candlelight. And then these poor wretched nurses, lost in the "central slaughter house of Géméraux," starving from three months of unpaid salaries, having eaten or drunk nothing during the day, except a piece of slogan pasted on all the walls, half eaten by termites and the blood of mosquitoes:

WE ARE A MATURE PEOPLE.

And someone, a nurse no doubt, had added these words in a make-up pencil: "A mature people - yeah, right! Ask us to fall down." Before weeping, Camillio Cedra, the dead woman's sister, took her own make-up pencil from her black reticule and wrote at the bottom of the poster: "You are all bastards." She signed the graffiti and went away weeping in the most beautiful language of our land and leaving her hair
in a disorderly manner which nobody changed for years and years. She died with it without ceasing to mourn for her younger sister killed at the first bloom of her youth by the negligence of the Homeland and the military stubbornness of starting a shaky Revolution.

"Three months without a salary: let's admit that can wear anybody out," Anne de Larocheyre explained to her neighbors while we were mourning the dead woman and while the child continued to kick in her womb.

Benoit Goldmann was twelve when his father took him to see the grave in which his mother lay. The child was impressed by the strangely-shaped stones which surrounded the small valley of Rocheau, on the side of the Tangara-Tanga and the rocky hills of Wassa-Massa.

He looked at the height of the rocks known as Isidore abbot in amazement. They looked like the slightly harsh blue of the sky. The dryness of the skyline in the direction of the closest monolithic region surprised him more than the tomb itself, which was just a single heap of stones left in one of those disorderliness. The little boy tried to imagine the face of a woman under those stones, a woman just about thirty as his father had often described her: tall, a shining bronze, beautiful like a wildcat, more charming than beautiful, and rolling in riches. At this age, little Benoit had no idea of death, not even a remote one. He had heard or seen adults crying during a wake in
the neighborhood. In those days, nobody watched over the
dead anymore in the house: they were left in the hospital,
in a mirror cabinet, as if they were slaughtered meat - they
were often piled on top of one another, without any light.
The mayor had decided that we were going to freeze our dead
and it was good like that. Some years later, when Benoît
Goldmann entered the mortuary for the first time, he felt
the same touch of indifference in front of the mutilated
bodies which were being turned over and over. The scent of
blood did not affect him that much. What moved him and held
his attention was the very recent grafitti that some soldier
had written in blood on the party's poster: "Don't say evil
things about God - you are worse than He is." The poster
must have been half a century old since it extolled the
outrageous virtues of the dictator and founder Salonso-
Niarcos. It represented a charriot of fire pursued by a
pack of wolfhounds and bore this inscription:

THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE ARE EVERYWHERE BUT THE EYE OF THE
REVOLUTION KNOWS THEM.

A grafitti writer had added the word "blind" in a make-
up pencil just above the word eye: "the blind eye...."

"She was your mother. A nice girl," said Salvo Do
Moesso-Nsa.
The child was silent. He was not even sad for having walked this far just to see a rather badly piled bunch of stones. He went down the Wildboars bypass, to avoid the detours of the filthy swamps of Patra, south of Tombalbaye. For a good walker, the journey from Rocheau to Hondo-Norte lasted three full days. They had covered the distance in five days, having spent the last night in the small village of the elephant hunter, Alonso Mouisso-Yessa. Five days because of the boy. But also because of Salvo himself, on whom youth had turned its back years ago. He did not want to die with the shame of not having presented the boy to his dead mother, as he had promised the deceased on the day of the funeral. We are a people who can betray everything except our word to the dead.

"I will bring the boy to you when he is old enough to look at your grave. Farewell, dear. Give my regards to old granny Yoko and Aunt Beltaza. Inform them that the Authorities have confiscated our lands on the side of Balthazar."

The sentence came back to him like the sound of a drum. They were going to go down the Mayo-Maye hills to arrive at Hondo-Norte. Salvo took the child in his arms and clasped him tightly to his old chest. He watched the hills pass by, with their poor vegetation exposed to the sky. The clays of Loanga displayed their tangled body. Red. With the softness of blood. Benoit Goldmann looked at the Ozando
hills, stones in a pensive mood which paint the picture of extreme barrenness. What left its mark the most on the child was the crossing of the lagoon as they left Loanga because of his fear of leeches, englenas, spiders, all small animals in general: stag beetles, hermit crabs, mantis, electric eels, geckos, squirrels, cockroaches -- the long list of reptiles -- all inspired a morbid fear in him. And Loanga is abundant in these animals during the months of the dry season.

The most precise memory that he had kept of the Rocheau trip remained the kind of stop that they were obliged to make during the return journey in order to contemplate the gorges. His father had embraced him.... In much the same way that as an adult he now rivets his eyes on the Scriptures, as a child his eyes had been rooted to the exact spot where the Djoura rushes its brown waters into the bowels of the rocks of Yonga, forming a kind of cove that the ordinary folks called "the Devil’s Clock," no doubt because of the luminosity which lit up the night. The old man remembered that the little boy thought he had seen a woman in the whirlpool just above the cove. The woman, dressed in red, did not have any of the particulars of his mother that his father had described. She had walked alongside the furia of the waters. The apocalypse had lasted a few seconds. Today, Benoit Goldmann attributed all that to fatigue. Four days of walking on those stones.
With the humming of a father who never stopped to show him his ancestral lands: "What you see here is Mongo, Soko is over there, Mambidi, Banios, Panana, Bongo forest, Nsekenene, gorges, small valleys..." Then the land messed up everything and became monstrous yellow stones which were going to plunge quite simply into lake Ayo, as if to steal its shifting carpet of hyacinth and its prairie of papyrus. Over there! Seko-Solo, Bololo, Makaya-Makaya, Missenga-Norte, Bazi-Bazi, Moualou, Kimpaka, Makoulou, Mpemba, Moudoumango... "These lands were bought with blood. Respect them and let others respect them."

Beyond the lake lies the Zumbu forest where the Ancestors usually come to speak to the living. The mysterious lake of Polo Sadisa is hidden in the woods, with its bottom covered with gold, silver and the bones of the reckless people who wanted to circumvent the ruthless laws of his management. At night, the waters of the lake flare up and there is thunder to remind those who have short memories how Mounsompa was drowned there for wishing to sell to the Chinese the Tangarahoya crab which was guarding the lake.

During the day its waters go into a monstrous sleep, all covered with water lilies as red as fresh scented blood.

Benoit Goldmann remembered that his father had lifted him up from the ground, thrown him three times into space,
each time higher and caught him at the same height, just above his head.

"In order to see clearly, the eyes need to be serene. Your man's name will be Madioni, meaning "the eyes of the volcano." The beak of the souimanga can penetrate flowers but it can never penetrate fruits. Son! I'm going away now. Remember! The finger points to the horizon but it never touches it. We point to the truth. Only God can touch it. Put your life and days in the service of truth. Only cowards thrive on untruthfulness. Son! honor, dignity... are the only treasures which do not rot!... I'm so happy to know that you're growing.... I'm going away. Not too far from you... the univers is a microbe, son.... Life is a debt. Be strong. Don't betray the blood of our ancestors. Never sell the land, the gods don't forgive those who sell the land on which their dead ones are sleeping."

The warrant officer remembered that just as he was about to die, a year after the trip, his father had murmured these words. His heart had failed on a sentence which the warrant officer could not remember exactly. Something like: the stuff that one finally buys with stupidity... existence is a debt.

The warrant officer was not sure of words. The old man had such a knowledge of them that he would not have been dull to that extent. He always had a dazzling facility with
words. The warrant officer, too anxious looking at death
robbing his father of life, had not listened to what he was
saying. He had to live all that in an instant: fear,
amazement, revolt, resignation, indifference, vagueness,
shame, this feeling of insecurity evoked by the dead body,
helplessness. What arrogance! Silence. Immobility. The
magnitude of the flesh. Features that are not well
negotiated with death. The size of the eyes. The priest
coming to bless the tragedy. The scent of candles. The
scent of new sheets. The flame which flickers foolishly.
The two swabs of absorbent cotton blocking the nostrils are
soaked in blood. The body shakes, all over, and becomes
stiff. The cheeks sink in, and the lips.

And then things had gone on very quickly: the placing
of the body in the casket, the marble cross on the top, the
road to the cemetery, the hearse going at top speed. The
hole waiting. The first three shovelfuls of brown earth on
the casket. Then a faint sound. There was a stone in the
fourth shovelful. The stone had hit the casket. The cross.
The epitaph:

FRANCO SALVO MOESSO-NSA
TRUE BELIEVER IN DEMOCRACY
LONG LIVE THE REPUBLIC!
That evening, on the anniversary of the death of Colonel Franco Salvo Moesso-Nsa, the warrant officer went to light two candles in memory of his father before becoming dreadful of his wife’s seduction. His voice parted his mustache and purplish lips to let out the word of God. On three occasions, Alleando came to flaunt her nakedness at the warrant officer without daring to disturb him. She liked the music in her husband’s voice. But the voice, unfortunately, has never been enough, even though the passages of Genesis are dazzling and Benoit Goldmann read them sweetly: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said: Let there be light, and there was light...." Alleando paced up and down around the warrant officer who seemed to enjoy the words of God to the full. Alleando went round the garden to console her twenty-nine years. However the sky was too low to permit her usual dialogue with the Southern Cross and the other constellations. A sky without salt, as our people put it, playing with an unexciting August. At night, the fragrance from the orchard combined with household scent; in addition to the smell of the woods, there were the exhalations from the farmyard; and the stench of clay embraced the smells of the plowed fields. At this hour, in this city, the hands of one hundred thousand men must be moving under bedsheets,
producing one hundred thousand ways to be with a woman. We have always carried our bacchanalia slung across our shoulder. And August has never ceased to be August. The month of the lowest sky. When the river and the sea have an endless row with each other in a dialogue of the most mediocre. It is the time when women are aroused. There is no longer any mud in August. No ponds now in the streets. No longer a swarm of locusts, no more mosquitoes. There is greenery everywhere on people’s doorsteps to announce the rainy season. What a poem this land is! The old bed of the midsummer heat is draped in sweet perfume. Alleando who had irritably knocked together the dishes at midnight, came back into the bedroom with the firm resolution of stopping the words of the Lord. She waited for the end of a sentence. But the warrant officer was not taken in and he made as if all the sentences in Genesis had suddenly lost all punctuation. Alleando realized the subterfuge and decided to interrupt the reading whenever he stopped to catch his breath.

"You have a telegram. It’s best that you read it immediately. You know very well that Aunty George is sick at Indiani."

The warrant officer lifted up his eyes and looked at his wife for the first time that evening. He found her to be very beautiful, as always at that time of the day. The warrant officer smiled his usual smile, before immersing
himself again in the Holy Book. Alleando was insistent about the telegram. But the only response she could get from the warrant officer was the end of verse 10, chapter 20 of the Book of Revelation: "... was thrown into the lake of burning fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophets had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever...." Alleando threw the telegrams on the fingers holding the magnifying glass and went to sleep. She had heard her body fuming and shaking, had gripped the bolster tightly, had made the bedspring groan, and had shouted to stop herself from weeping. And then she had fallen asleep like a stone on her frustration. When the warrant officer assured himself that his wife was peacefully asleep and not faking her snoring, he closed the Scriptures and went in turn to the garden to take a breath of fresh air. The birds of paradise fluttered and the crucifixes waved about in the darkness in their half-sleep troubled by the winds from the Estuary.

The warrant officer regaled himself with the scent of the sea. He walked for some time under the star-spangled sky. Myriads of pale figures hovered in the majestic blue of the night, released as if by accident into the tissue of the tropical darkness. Everything was quiet on the island which was watched over by the jags of the Ouendo-Porter cliff. Sentries of every season. Of every bad weather. Guardians of fracas at the Coast. Conical and pyramidal
ghosts. Joyful ghosts. Premolars of this part of the world where life and death openly tell the same old story. Where a host of dead people mingled with the living.

Indiari had just gone through its period of inaction, presumed vestiges of a civilization of light, at the time when History was not yet closed to the people of our race. Vestiges just as well of the arrogance of a people who have never concealed their intention to put the infinite in their pocket. Carcassore turned its back towards the continent, to speak better to the ocean. What secret could this frog-shaped island, clumsy as an ox be telling it?

The warrant officer loved great silences. He wanted to go farther but, beyond his own garden, begins the lagoon where he was afraid of hearing the croaking of toads, the foolish sectarian sounds of dogfish and the chorale of frogs. At this late hour, the warrant officer knew that his body was craving for silence. He was mad at the sea for its stupid voum-voum, this smell of bad salt. When he returned to his bedroom, he admired the nudity of his wife before concerning himself with the pile of telegrams that she had put in the armchair, beside the fingers holding the magnifying glass. The volume of the pile reminded him that his eight wifes had, one after the other, told him about the telegrams, but that he had never had the time to read them. They had arranged them in the order in which they were received, and the day when the marriage finally broke up,
they carried away all that they wanted while he kept his eyes riveted on the Scriptures.

When everything had been taken away from the house, the wife who was leaving would come back to the room to say a word of farewell. And this last word had always been: "Don’t forget to read the telegrams, Benoit. They’re shorter than the Bible."

It took the warrant officer some time to realize that the first telegram had been sent to him thirty-seven years ago, at the end of the Third Democratic War. He had then just broken off his relations with the so-called democratic armed Forces in these terms: "I’ll not shove my conscience in a corner of the land, to serve genocide. I am fighting so that the people will live, not just survive. Farewell, gentlemen, make law crimes! I’m getting the hell out of your war which has gobbled up my tail."

Benoit Goldmann had left the offices of the High Command, followed by his body guard and two friends who are not alive today: Grégoire and Ruben. The generals at the High Command had thought that it was a question of appointment. At that time no one could love the Homeland without getting an appointment. Nobody was honorable enough to decline a lucrative post despite the chaos and the mess.

WE HEREBY APPOINT WARRANT OFFICER BENOIT GOLDMANN COLONEL. STOP. WE CONFIRM HIM TO HIS DUTIES AS
GUARDIAN OF THE COAST. STOP. WE RESTORE HIS PENSION
AS A COMPANION OF THE LIBERATION AND HIS SALARY AS A
PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARY. STOP.

THE HIGH COMMAND.

Benoit Goldmann scratched his head in anger and decided
to send a reply right the next day to those donkeys at the
High Command, if they are still alive anyway. He looked
endlessly through his papers for a clean sheet of paper. He
could not find anything, for anger had eaten away the eyes
of his hand. However, his greatest fear was waking up his
wife.

The warrant officer had written nothing for twenty
years. He took down an old poster of the democratic party
and began to compose a rough draft:

THE WORD COLONEL SOUNDS TOO STUPID. STOP. OLD MAN
BENOIT REMAINS A WARRANT OFFICER. STOP. GENTLEMEN,
PUT AN END TO THE RUBBISH. STOP.

B. GOLDMANN.

In fact, the warrant officer had always maintained
that, after the rank of major, the army had only pretentious
mules who spent their time, absolutely all their time,
discharging their fat and rusty bodies between the legs of
young girls, no longer knowing from which metal a bullet is
made and who, in order to justify their fat salaries, would go and shoot at frogs in the Tombalbaye forest. They circulated a rumor concerning a completely imaginary maquis and made up blatant lies about enemy attacks.

The sixteenth telegram was received twelve years after the first one. It had been dispatched from Hozanna and stated:

WE CALL ON COLONEL BENOEIT GOLDMANN UNDER THE COLORS OF THE HOMELAND. STOP. WE COMMISSION HIM TO SUPPRESS THE BOASTING OF THE PEOPLE OF WESTINA. STOP. THE HOMELAND OR DEATH. STOP.

THE HIGH COMMAND.

"They are completely nuts," murmured Warrant Officer Benoit Goldmann.

He lay the repeater rifle between his wife and himself and then went to bed. For a long time, as it had often happened to him, his eyes drifted along the ceiling before submerging into sleep, while his right hand continued to fidget with the rifle. At the time of what we in Hozanna refer to as "the fourth laugh of the comet," the warrant officer woke up and let go off his gun to shoot at a huge mouse who had made the big mistake of passing on his body, a body he had never exposed since the time of the First Democratic War. He never went anywhere without his leopard
dress, and he took off the bottom only to relieve himself. The warrant officer picked up the mouse who was hit in the head and went to throw it into the toilet at the other end of the concession. The rifle shots no longer woke up anybody in the neighborhood since the whole world knew that Benoît Goldmann took out his rifle even to kill cockroaches. Besides, the roof and walls of his house provided a clear evidence. Unfortunately for the warrant officer, the only person who was awoken by the gun and the hail of bullets was none other than Dona Alleando, his wife, who the townspeople knew was stuck in her need for love.

"What is it again?"

"Don't worry, dear! A poor mouse foolishly stuck its nose into my pants. It won't harm anybody anymore."

Dona Alleando usually went back to sleep following her husband's explanations. Like the warrant officer's mother, she dreamed of fireballs which were eating away the cliff of Arioni and the Black Hills. After throwing the heroic mouse away, Benoît Goldmann started to search through his archives: he found other piles of telegrams signed by the High Command, just as he had intuited. He began to read them, one after the other. Until the next morning. Other piles waited.

"They are just a bunch of poor bastards," Benoît Goldmann decided. "Poor bastards... who know only how to cause death. They are without souls. Without honor.
Without any other merit but the damned stupidity of shooting at the world."

Around nine, he suppressed a giggle as he read one of the telegrams:

WE WARN COLONEL BENOIT THAT IF HE DOESN'T STOP FIRING HIS BALLS WE WILL FIND OURSELVES OBLIGED TO SEND HIM SHIT. STOP.

THE HIGH COMMAND

This telegram was twelve years old.

"These donkeys don't even know what is known as shit! They are confusing things."

Like any great military leader, the warrant officer had at first read "firing his rocket." He had to re-read the telegram several times before seeing what it really stated. In order not to stupidly wake up his wife, he stifled a giggle and felt pains in his sides. Dona Alleando was the eighth girl in a row whom Benoît Goldmann married in the presence of five successive mayors in the harbor city of Hondo-Norte. And the only one who has stayed married to the warrant officer for forty-four days. All the others had left right in the middle of their honeymoon for the one and only official reason: advanced physiological inadequacy. To save his marriage, the warrant officer had sworn never, absolutely never to show his procreation button to Dona
Alleando. "May she leave me for some other reason, madre!"
Whenever his wife bothered him, the warrant officer smiled
very broadly exposing his two rows of pearly teeth.

"Well, Alleando. You know the problem!"

The warrant officer stuck his horn tightly between his
legs, swearing not to yield to the temptation. For a long
time their eyes wandered over the ceiling riddled with
bullets. And then sleep overcame them. He dreamed of the
filthy muds of Groanda while she dreamed of the days which
could have been their honeymoon. Sometimes the warrant
officer had a hell of a job going into a tortuous
explanation:

"It's better not to, Alleando. I'll hurt you like the
others."

"Make love to me with your fingers. I'll be happy."

The warrant officer made a rough draft of other
telegrams for the information of those donkeys at the High
Command. And then sleep overcame him. Then he began to
snore loudly like crazy, his eyes half open because of his
years as a maquis. Tufts of white hairs could be seen
through the black beret he was wearing. He continued to
cress the gun with his right hand without stopping to draft
the last telegram.

I'M GOING TO RAISE AN ARMY TO TAKE HOZANNA. STOP.

BENOIT GOLDMANN.
It must have been past noon. Dona Alleando exposed her nudity to the flickering of the night light which was still on. The warrant officer's horn of procreation shook lightly under the vault formed by his leopard-skin pants. Outside the house, the roosters had started their chorus of noisy disturbances to signal the end of the first half of the day.

"Kokodi hé ko!"

"What day is today, Alleando?"

"Another Monday. Keep quiet. We have no need for Mondays."

"Alleando, you can leave if you like."

"My grandmother said that you could love a woman with your fingers."

"I prefer to do it with my gun," said the warrant officer.

6

Tombalbaye

On Sunday November 9, Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann slept very late. Only his right hand moved from time to time on the gun. The first thing on the mind of the warrant officer when he woke up was the gun which he unloaded. The second thing was his cup of sugarless black coffee in which he added a secret plant which we thought was the root of valerian. To keep his blood vessels healthy. Next came his
magnifying glasses and the reading of the Scriptures. The fourth thing was the two-hour jogging which took him from Vasière road to the Euphorbiaceae meadow from where the first sternutations of the Djogora-Goro Falls can be heard.

That morning, the warrant officer wanted to find out how his sister who was sick in Indiani was doing. Nobody in the concession could give him this information; neither his entire brood of cousins and nephews, nor his brothers-in-law, nor his wife who could not be found anyway. While he was enjoying his second black coffee of the day, his cook, Larobotti, began to look at him as if he had never seen him before. The warrant officer however preferred to finish his coffee before asking the cook what he was looking at. The warrant officer relched as he emptied his cup. He thought about smoking a cigar. Larobotti drew closer to him and put on that expression of his whenever he wanted to inform him about something serious:

"Go and take a look, sir."

"A look, where?"

"In the kitchen, sir."

"What’s in the kitchen, Larobotti?"

"The end of the world, sir... sitting on an Arabic bench."

Benoît Goldmann shook with laughter at the idea of seeing the end of the world sitting quietly on a kitchen bench. He stopped laughing when he remembered that his cook
had a genius for the dazzling and never played with words. For the thirty-five years that they have been rubbing shoulders, Benoit Goldmann had never heard Larobotti misuse a single word. He used words in the same painstaking manner that he used salt or spices in his cooking. For this reason he was known as "the storekeeper."

"What's in the kitchen, Larobotti?"

"The end of the world, sir. Go and see for yourself."

The warrant officer put down his enamel cup, took his cartridge pouch and his gun, verified that he had the right ammunitions (the warrant officer used rubber bullets for his training and for frightening the imbeciles who came to ask him to stop his nocturnal shootings). He made his way towards the kitchen, ready to guard against any eventuality. He kept his cigar between his teeth. This way, he had always been able to fire without biting his lips. He remembered that, during the battle of Roambo-Norte, he had bitten his lower lip as he fired several shots.

He lost enough blood from his hemorrhoids and continuous epistaxes to make him feel obliged to save it somewhere else. It was a little bit serious and, in a lot of ways, the warrant officer was a woman because he "had his moons through his nose" for four or five days in a row. The first time that the warrant officer had set foot in Hozanna, many years before the First Democratic War was when, acting on the advice of some true friends, he had wanted to consult
Dr. Anais Lambert concerning his epistaxes and hemorrhoids. Sometimes the warrant officer lost consciousness when the attacks became acute.

Benoit Goldmann had retired to Hondo-Norte with his wife, his epistaxes and his hemorrhoids... because of the stupid reason that, at the end of the last democratic War, instead of choosing justice and law, voters had expressed their preference for Dr. Louis de Andrade, one of the lieutenants of the party that he had founded, who squandered the people's funds in four years and filled the coffers of the Revolution with anger, suspicion, and malicious gossip.

As he opened the kitchen door with the care imposed upon him by his career and his fears, Benoit Goldmann saw exactly what his cook had called the end of the world, in miniature, he thought, but which could not be called by any other name than the end of the world: his wife, Alleando Calero, was sitting on a bench. His glance at first came to rest on the plush red and bushy glowing carpet of her luxuriant puberty triangle which continued in small streams of giant hairs up to the lock on her navel.

Next, his eyes came to feed covetously on her breasts, round and firm like those of a virgin, with the nipples set just like the head of a nail in a general atmosphere of innocence and peace. Through the triangle of hairs one could catch a glimpse of the face of another triangle, this one made of flesh, with a moistness and a stickiness that
the eyes could see. Like a sculpture, Alleando's body was streaming with the darkness of the place. Alleando Calero was cutting her skirts into very small pieces in the same way as we cut vegetables. She put the thin slices in a big cooking pot which she had begun to boil on the large burner of the gas cooker. Alleando had already cut her dressing gowns, blouses, bazins, madras scarfs, other scarfs and crinolines. A few scraps were lying about on the floor beside the bench where she sat like a praying monk. At the time when the warrant officer arrived, his wife was throwing her jewels, gold earrings, gold bracelets and all the things that had made her the center of admiration in Hondo-Norte and Hozanna into the cooking pot. She must have stayed in the kitchen all night considering the amount of clothing that had been cut into thin pieces. The warrant officer tried to recover his voice. He swallowed a little saliva which tasted bitter in his mouth. Without taking his cigar from his lips, he muttered some words which seemed to come from a dead body:

"What are you doing, Alleando my love?"

"Revolution," said the warrant officer's wife without looking up.

She cut some onions, parsley, pepper and some cloves. She added a pinch of salt, poured the whole thing into a sauce that was waiting by the bench, and then into a steaming pot. A mild aroma soon enticed the warrant
officer's nostrils. The man remembered that he had not eaten anything the day before because of the funeral of Colonel Matheus Dolveins, his comrade-in-arms who died at the age of ninety-five under the cheerful auspices of the Homeland. He also remembered that he had tried in vain to look for his wife at the cemetery. Death, what a blunder! It turns everything topsy-turvy. Alleando Calero added a head of chicory and a bunch of sorrel to her cooking, then a pinch of Ceasar's powder and three peppers from Nsanga-Norda. Next, she poured three whole bottles of olive oil into the pot from which wafted up an appetizing steam in the form of a thick tree. She tasted it.

"What are you doing, Alleando my love?" the warrant officer asked again.

Alleando Calero's only reply was to throw into the pot, without cutting them into thin pieces, a set of women's panties, bras, and her supply of tampons. She removed the lipsticks from their case before cooking them. One of the panties that she had put aside smelled of body odor. Alleando sniffed at it, poured a few drops of drinking water in a basin and carefully washed the panties before throwing it into the pot with a little satisfied laugh.

"What the hell are you doing?" grunted the warrant officer.

"Don't bug me," replied Alleando Calero. "I'm cooking the Revolution, it's my right."
It was only then that the warrant officer realized that his wife had just become insane. He took her in his arms and tried to kiss her on the lips. She bit off his upper lip. The wound was deep. It unleashed a flow of blood. The warrant officer went back to his room. He went to the main door and began to look at the rocks in the direction of Tombalbaye. They were all still clad in the same mystery and that off-white color which gave them the appearance of ancient thinkers, without being able to conceal their desire to take over the horizon in the direction of the bay of Anglers. The blood continued to flow.

Twenty-nine years in the maquis without losing a single drop of blood apart from that which he lost through his epistaxes and hemorrhoids. Damn it! The warrant officer pressed the soaked handkerchief firmly on the wound and returned to the kitchen. The pot was hissing on the gas cooker. The warrant officer looked at his wife with a deep tenderness. She giggled away insanely.

It was the hour when the streets of Hondo-Norte were filled with Khadafi\(^1\) sellers who could be heard shouting and squealing. The warrant officer listened to their patter which was full of humor. Prostitutes with aching sex were returning home. They kept their booty under their camisole which distorted the way they walked. Some of them were very beautiful, mostly girls from Baltayonsa. They were

\(^1\)Contraband gasoline
conversing in the mountain languages and in those of the high plateaux. They tried to remember the false patronymics that they gave to their clients. The warrant officer could hear them chattering away. In the distance Carcassore dragged its luxuriance along with a parade of clouds accustomed to brushing against ridges and arrows in the game which always pitted it against the uniform blue of the Tombalbaye sky. After watching the sky and the prostitutes, the warrant officer’s gaze fell again on his wife’s naked body. A capital body inscribed in the midst of a new-found peace despite her troubled features. Her serene, barbarous, and powerful hips let out like an army in the unbearable rigor of her complete curviness. A stomach sprinkled with strings of shaggy hairs which lapped at the apex of her navel. Alleando Calero had always given the impression of being a stone sculpture thrust into a woman’s body. Especially because of the surprising harmony which surrounded her body and accentuated her figure. Even now that she was crazy, one could, without hesitating, call her just as she had always been called: Calero-Plenitude. With her nose watched over by two fiery eyes. Her fruity face. Her thick lips like those of the fetishes of the people of Baltayonsa. The rigor in her breathing. This permanent dream which inhabited her skin, her hair, all her body. And this darkness in her gaze. She resembled the exquisite
desorderliness which inhabits Pongou masks or the face of the dead.

"What do you want, Alleando Calero?" asked the warrant officer stupidly.

"You are really a pigheaded person," said Alleando Calero. "Would you like things to stare at you, to stand to attention, in a state of finite certitude... in death's clothes?"

The warrant officer tormented the hairs of his mustache one after another not knowing exactly what to make of what his wife had said. Was it on account of derision, or quite simply a new reality that he needed to accept? He spent the day in bed trying to read the Scriptures. The Word of God could not stop his wounds or his astonishment. Late into the night he remembered that one day, a Monday as is always the case with great misfortunes, Alleando had come in while he was reading the Scriptures and interrupted him: "I'm sleepy, Benoît," to which he had responded "Good night, Alleando."

He did not even take his eyes from the Holy Book. Alleando, all naked, had begun to shout at him in a terrible anger, without showing any respect for the Scriptures. The warrant officer's only reaction was to put his two swabs of cotton in his ears. He was afraid for a moment that the birdbrain would take God's book and throw it out of the window. She had however gone to bed to calm her nerves.
while he had stood by the window to contemplate the night. The blue that had been formed in the sky had the delicacy of a river. The warrant officer felt like drinking something strong to contain his distress. While looking for a glass in the sideboard, he suddenly remembered his hemorrhoids, epistaxes and Sarmanio Numbi's strict warning: "You'll die like a fly the day you'll drink just a drop of alcohol."

(Benoit Gol) Benoit Goldmann's hemorrhoids and epistaxe

the time when, after the Fourth Democratic War, he had begun to drink mescaline; when he always entered the bar of his former comrade-in-arms, Colonel Zeder, right after seven in the evening only to come out half-dead at closing time, around four in the morning.)

Instead of sleeping his wife began to sing the Madondola, the anthem of the women of Tombalbaye. Her voice had the purity of metal. It was the difficult season of a relationship whose ramifications the warrant officer had not considered. "Women adore being loved right to the end," Dr. Abel Sonsa had once told him. Benoît Goldmann closed the word of God and made his way towards the bed where his wife was singing that naïve song of those women who could only come from a place like Tombalbaye. Women who were a disgrace to their sex and who, instead of making love, took it upon themselves to commit subversion.

Just like the other night, Alleando had buried her face in her hair. He eyes were full of tears, a limpid voice
sang the refrain. He stood beside her. He laughed with the wound on his lip. It had stopped bleeding. Alleando Calero got up in her disturbing nudity; she had a bronzed, copper-like complexion; her eyes were red from too much weeping and her lips dry. She saw the wound on his lip and screamed with panic.

"Did I do that?" she asked, horrified.

Warrant Officer Goldmann nodded. Alleando Calero dashed to the medicine cabinet, looked for cotton, gauze, iodine and some Ceasar’s powder. She almost banged herself against the bedroom doorpost. Her hands were shaking. Her lips were trembling. She was shaking all over. She asked the warrant officer to lie down on the bed and nursed his wound. She dressed the wound in such a way that his upper lip was accentuated in a very funny way. The warrant officer smiled at her, but her mind was elsewhere:

"That will teach you how to prefer the Scriptures to me."

"Please don’t blaspheme," said Benoit Goldmann.

"There’s absolutely no salvation for man outside divine imbroglio."

"Don’t worry, Benoit. It’s only a sick woman speaking."

The warrant officer felt pity for her. He wanted to call his friend, Dr. Abel, but he remembered that the telephone was not working. He prepared a mixture of
acanthus and gave it to his wife. She drank it instantly. The warrant officer burned some raffia resins and capsella roots to keep off the influence of the new moon. Seen from behind he found his wife very beautiful. He thought he would help her with all his strength to overcome her disease.

"I wish we could go back to Tombalbaye," said Alleando Calero. "Life was better over there."

The warrant officer wasn't unduly alarmed. He thought his wife spoke just for the sake of it or to exercise her memory. He told her to get dressed and wait.

"You don't like Tombalbaye," she said.

"For you, I would be able to like anything," said the warrant officer. "I left the war because of you. I, the artistic shooter, black soul of the Revolution, for your sake, I became a damned disabled person, condemned to shooting at animals."

Tombalbaye is situated north-west of Kanapophée, between latitudes 7° and 8° north, at the same level as Bogota, and it is closer to the meridian of Greenwich than to longitude 30° east. The warrant officer knew these facts because he had fought in the region. He used to grope his way to land his aircraft despite the fog which swallow up the city and its surrounding areas for nine months. The pilots nicknamed Tombalbaye and its surrounding areas
"devil's lake." Alleando asked Benoît to make love to him, over there in Tombalbaye.

"Wait until you get stronger," said the warrant officer. Dr. Abel arrived unexpectedly one morning. Alleando Calero had had a violent attack of vesania the whole night. She had continued to shout at the top of her voice that she wanted to go to Tombalbaye immediately.

"Tombalbaye or Hozanna, but not this place which smells of soot."

"I'll take you there, darling," said the warrant officer, who was also suffering from an attack of epistaxes.

"But yes, I love her," thought Benoît Goldmann. "Yes, love remains that thing which goes through the body at speeds which the blood does not understand. Yes, behind love lurks the shadow of God in all His greatness, God who must be laughing because our way of showing love is so clumsy...."

The doctor examined the sick woman and prescribed Nembutal. He then had a discussion with the warrant officer.

"It's this selfsame problem of sexual frustration."

"But doctor, how do you expect me to remedy the situation if my life is at stake? And maybe hers too."

"I understand," said the doctor. "I don't have the right to lecture you on an issue which is connected with your own life."
"Is it really a moral issue?" asked the warrant officer.

Alleando Calero was sleeping under the effects of the Nembutal. It was to engage in a sound discussion and to talk about their military past that the doctor seized the least occasion to go and see Warrant Officer Goldmann. Sometimes they contemplated reviving the maquis. They laughed at Colonel Pedro Gazani’s coup d’etat, planned briskly, announced, deferred, put back, delayed....

"We can travel together... if you’re going to Tombalbaye. My wife want’s to live in Hozanna."

"I’ll wait for her to be more calm and for my attacks to quieten her just a bit," replied the warrant officer.

"Things that have never been seen before are happening in Hozanna," said the doctor to whom the warrant officer offered a glass of hooch.

"Since when have serious things ever happened in a place like Hozanna?" asked the warrant officer in amazement. "This city has always been the land of despair. It will remain so until the second coming of Jesus Christ. It’s the land of silence and cowardice."

While the doctor was enjoying his hooch, the warrant officer spoke about the Cabrando campaign, at the time when the jungle in the direction of Westina had become a pond of fire, when everything smelled rotten, when everything smelled of ashes. The swamps of Baltayonsa burned as if
they were lakes of kerosene; large stretches of land had been turned into burning coal laughing day and night the weired laughter of war.

The warrant officer evoked these memories without any deep emotion. The past is only made to be forgotten or be made banal.

"What times we’re living in! What arrogance and what foolishness," declared the doctor.

Since the sick woman wasn’t about to wake up, the doctor proposed a game of petanque. They went to the garden. They had hardly begun their game when the mailman, José Cabral, brought in a telegram. The warrant officer asked the mailman to go to the house and serve himself a drink, while paying attention to his sick wife. "Don’t you worry, Mr Goldmann. I will be as silent as a cat." The warrant officer opened the telegram and read:

COLONEL BENOIT GOLDMANN IS SUMMONED TO APPEAR BEFORE THE COMMITTING MAGISTRATE FRANCESCO BONA BASED IN HOZANNA. STOP. ANY REFUSAL TO COMPLY EXPOSES HIM TO SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES. STOP.

THE HIGH COMMAND.

The warrant officer showed the doctor the dispatch date of the telegram. The two men laughed a great deal.
At the end of the game of petanque they decided to do their afternoon jogging together.

The warrant officer gave a jersey and a pair of shorts to the doctor. Before leaving they made sure that Alleando was asleep. They chose the slopes of Zuarta. When they arrived at the Lhomani forest the two men took the path used by the mushroom pickers. They reached the coast through the cliffs of Youlmaou. It was here that the warrant officer, during his evening and morning jogging, usually caught up with Dr. Fagnen’s daughter. They would then run together up to Saint-Mengo bay without exchanging a single word. She was tall considering that the women of Hondo-Norte are not always tall, with a nice upper body.

The two men came out onto the first bumps of the cliff. The warrant officer liked the rocks on that side because they always seemed to be looking you straight in the face. The stones conserved a certain great distinctness all the way to the Seta bridge and seemed to give their opinion on the repeated impudence of Pagani forest. They became more rugged and wild once you pass the ruins of Igara: there, they began to be surrounded by a strong smell of death, a smell that was too tough for the lungs. Among the things that the warrant officer loved most, one must count the countryside which he devoured with a certain unrestrained piggishness. The warrant officer hated cinema because this art took it upon itself to measure people’s destinies.
Between the cast and credits nothing else had the right to hinder or get in the way of the course of things recorded on the film. And besides, all that was a pack of lies.

"There's our imagination and our sensitivity," pleaded the doctor.

"Yes, but they are trapped," said the warrant officer. "Which is not the case with jazz. Which is not the case with a virgin landscape."

The warrant officer loved novels because, according to him, words travelled farther than an image when a good craftsman jostled them together in the most beautiful manner with the harshest reality. "A dream is the reality of tomorrow, amigo."

"Words are perhaps the best part of our soul, since words go as far as to God. A word is the perpetual event which makes love with an endless beginning."

The sun was trying to shine on a rather dull day. The warrant officer thought about the telegrams. And about those donkeys at the High Command. The doctor ran slowly, no doubt because of the fat which was beginning to form under his stomach muscles. Fifty-eight is the age when the muscles are already thinking of turning their back on you, especially if you neglected them between the ages of fifteen and thirty. The doctor, however, had a harsh look and he was a hard thinker. He was one of those men who are said to spend their entire life inside their brain.
The two men ran along the slopes of Yoltana, so that to their left they had the sea beneath them, if however one can call sea the kind of cordon which the Atlantic sends out on reconnaissance to the cliffs behind the Igara ruins. Their feet crushed the small igneous rocks as they came in contact with the soles of their shoes. Their lungs breathed in the best part of the air that the Coast could offer. From time to time they waved their hands to an acquaintance in greeting. They crossed the basil fields situated on the Tarangongo slopes.

For Benoît Goldmann, running together with the doctor became something more than running: it was going in search of the universe, in the face of this ocean bathed in a fantastic blue which makes everything look really beautiful. According to what people said, the warrant officer was one of the few servicemen who have kept their eyes in order to see, a mouth to talk, ears to hear, hands to touch, legs to walk, blood to move about and a brain to think; the others having palmed off their being on their uniform and on the reasoning of their rifles. All these men in khaki were reproached for managing the Coast with a heart that came from the Coast. In memoranda, records, and government edicts they were referred to as "soldiers of the people." However, the people considered in all legitimacy that they were soldiers of phallus and night clubs, armed for the benefit of a gang of retarded, arrogant, and uneducated
brutes who stuffed their heads full of the only signs of their knowledge: champagne and foie gras. They didn’t even know how to make their own rifles; their uniforms were provided by the foreign country which kept them there to watch over the manger, the ex-colony which has come under the chains of a cheap sovereignty, and which sang of its freedom to pay its debts, kill its fellow citizens and shout its head off about the future.

When he returned home at the stroke of four, the warrant officer found his wife still asleep. He thanked the doctor and saw him off after the doctor had emptied the snifter which the warrant officer had served him after taking a shower. Colonel Pedro Gazani arrived at the moment when the doctor was taking his leave of the warrant officer. The people loved to call him general-on-parole to evoke the twenty-nine years during which time his rank was frozen. Everybody knew, and the Authorities were the first to know this, that Colonel Pedro Gazani spent his time preparing a coup d'état of which the Coast had been informed to the smallest detail, so much so that Radio Hozanna had announced it on several occasions.

In Tombalbaye people said that Colonel Pedro Gazani was preparing an outdated coup d'état. They told him to go to the devil. Who would have taken seriously the piochi-piocha of Colonel Pedro Gazani who had become a soldier through the strangest way that any man in this profession had ever
taken: utter madness? The Third Democratic War had just begun at the time when Pedro Gazani had been afflicted with a slight mental disorder. The colonel who was a draftsman at the time had taken his two hunting rifles and had gone to Bandoum forest with three boxes of buckshot.... Helped on by his madness, Pedro Gazani had begun to fire without respite. Two days later, the army which at the time was dying from famine must have sent fourteen trucks to pick up Pedro Gazani’s game.

The trucks had entered the camp filled with fruit bats and squirrels, without counting the green sangamis and the leopard-rats. The next day, at parade time, Pedro Gazani had been called to do military service and was promoted to the rank of colonel. Since then, depending on the circumstances, he had honored this rank by a few additional miraculous game.

"How far have you got with your coup d’etat," Colonel Pedro, joked the warrant officer.

"How far have you got with your hemorrhoids?" retorted Colonel Pedro Gazani.

While his friend was serving him a drink, the colonel had begun to examine a map of staff headquarters pasted on the wall in front of the main entrance to the warrant officer’s house. Like all the days of his life, Pedro Gazani was wearing a battle dress worn out by age and by the fantasies of kids who bothered him at the time of his
attacks by setting the uniform on fire. This war veteran, a hero of the food campaign, carried across his shoulder a Russian gun that he himself had cobbled together to be transformed into a rudimentary machine gun which, as we all knew, was the main gun to be used in his plot. His feet dragged along a hideous pair of garden boots. The colonel must have painted them in the colors of the Gendarmerie. From his waist to his chest were three rows of belts filled with buckshot. All the pockets of the colonel’s uniform were filled to breaking point. Pedro Gazani began to think aloud, alone in front of the map of staff headquarters. The warrant officer brought him a glass of hooch. The colonel took the glass instinctively to his lips, then spat out.

"Are there any people around who still drink this sort of "water?" he said in amazement.

He threw the contents of the glass out of the window and searched through the pockets of his uniform. He brought out a bottle which bubbled with a greenish liquid. He shook the bottle vigorously, opened it and poured a few drops of the liquid into a glass other than the one defiled by the hooch.

"I call this "kabronahata": my brain-child. It goes down more easily than your hooch. And it is as strong as metal."
Pedro Gazani put on an air of profound seriousness, pulled up a chair and sat down. He stared at the warrant officer and asked him how his wife was doing.

"She had an attack," said the warrant officer. "Me too."

"That will be her last attack, Colonel Goldmann," said Pedro Gazani.

"No, amigo," said Benoit Goldmann. "I’ve turned down this rank. I want to remain a warrant officer."

"I spent fifteen years to find this elixir. I have come to cure you. Because you must be in good shape for my coup d’etat soon to take place in Hozanna. You can then make love as you see fit!"

The two men laughed heartily, just like the time when they used to laugh under the bullets of the democratic War in the muds of Valancia. Colonel Pedro Gazani prepared a mixture meant for Benoit Goldmann’s wife, poured a dose in a big enamel goblet. He asked the warrant officer to drink the rest to stop his chronic epistaxes and hemorrhoids. The warrant officer did as he was told.

"At your age you continue to believe in miracles," he said.

"I’m sure you’ll like it," said the colonel. "Drink it and wait. Don’t worry about the rest. Give what’s needed to your wife. And... make love all night long. This mixture was revealed to me in a dream."
Benoit Goldmann did not dare to wake up his wife once Pedro Gazani had taken his leave of him. He looked for his glasses to dissect the Scriptures in minute detail. But he couldn’t read more than three lines: his procreation shaft was moving at the bottom of his leopard dress. He couldn’t believe his body....

The false Colonel Pedro

That morning, the mayor and old man Argandov arrived together to see the giant. The man had already gone round the city with his animal and just returned home, tired after running, and dripping with sweat. Seated in front of the entrance to the tent, he was mopping himself as he looked at the Arabic Lycée. It was getting to ten. The mayor and old man Argandov greeted each other before shaking hands with the man. The cook brought a seat for the visitors. He asked his master if he wanted tea for himself and for his guests. The man accepted the offer with the smile of an American diplomat. The tea gave off a sweet aroma that is associated with the herbs of Nsanga-Norda.

"Well, Mr. Mayor? What brings you here?"

"A short courtesy call," said the mayor.

"Great," said the giant. "Courtesy is always contagious. And you, Mr. Argandov?"
"A business visit," said Argandov. "It’s a good thing that the mayor is here. He can settle the issue for us."

The mayor scratched the back of his head, a gesture which betrayed his embarrassment. Old man Argandov knew the mayor inside out. And so to get him out of his awkward position he added: "If he doesn’t have any major objections anyway."

"I have a stake in the affair," said the mayor in order not to look a sorry sight.

At that very instant cheers, singing, cries of joy, repeated whistling, clapping, and the sound of footsteps could be heard like an explosion from the direction of the Djoura. The song which dominated this hullabaloo carnival was very beautiful, accompanied by drums, gongs, buggles, trumpets and bronze bells. It was a great song and, very quickly, everybody in the city joined in the singing. Millions of voices sang the feast of a million chests to the beat of buggles, cymbals and sanzas. A huge crowd emerged from Djoura avenue. An unruly crowd. A raging crowd, running after a gentleman on a white Percheron. The gentleman himself was dressed in white from head to toe. The animal was pulling a carriage decked with flags, followed by another gigantic carriage in which a little fellow kept on ringing the Coast’s sixteen bells and those of the people of Yogon. Two damsels dressed in red played the trumpet. All the horses were white, caparisoned in gold
and purple. In the last three carioles, twenty virgins smiling very broadly played the clarinet on and off. The sound of their instrument was drowned by the singing of the crowd.

"What's going on, amigo?"

Wa luwidi eh ko kwa kena?
Kamba ta biyelo bamubongele.
Kani mwatu eh kokwa kena!
Ngana ta Malela bamugondele,
Kani yaya eh kokwa kena²!

The crowd followed the same route that the giant had taken the day he arrived in our city: The Chinese traffic circle, Three Francs, Aviators avenue, Croix-de-Lorraine street, Djoura avenue, the former Leon port, Dutch Hospital, Dogs market.... They went through the lake that had been formed by the March 1976 tornadoes. The feet of the animals were full of mud that smelled of compost, a smell which followed them wherever they went. They were troubled by a horde of flies once they were out of the water.

"What's going on, amigo?"

²"Seems the bearded one is killed?/ We know he is alive./ Seems they've killed the old man?/ Make no mistake, he is alive!"
"Revolutionaries, amigo, all dressed in white."

"In Hozanna, singing is always a sign of a catastrophe."

"You know, amigo, today is Monday."

"These people are stupid. They are singing their own death."

"This singing is infectious, amigo."

The newcomers settled in the compound of the Liberties lycée, facing the giant's tent. They put up some portable structures, all in white. On the whole there were two hundred and fifty to three hundred souls. This number could be brought up to five hundred if animals had souls. Once they had settled down, the strangers went to greet the giant and his guests. The mayor wondered where they had all come from while old man Argandov seemed to understand what was going on.

A fat man flew into the giant's arms and began to embrace him on the lips saying: "My brother, my long-standing brother! Here we are." He followed closely the giant's movements with his malicious little eyes, while ignoring the presence of both the mayor and old man Argandov. The crowd sang and danced, releasing into the air numerous bunches of red inflatable balloons. The mayor wondered where his population had found these balloons which could be seen going up in the form of dense clouds. He wondered what could very well lie behind this blatant
effontery, and how the Authorities were going to feel about it. Around three the inflatables obstructed the sun’s passage and our Monday in March turned into a half-day which reminded us of the frequent eclipses on the Coast. Around noon the clouds of inflatables had become real heavenly mountains. The day ended and the crowd that had taken the initiative to come and greet the newcomers began to march past their tents. For four days and four nights, the false Colonel Pedro Gazani shook hands continuously with the crowd by the side of the giant. Without thinking, the mayor and Argandov who couldn’t figure out how to leave the place also began to shake the people’s hands. It’s not known when day broke or when night fell because of the wall of inflatables which covered the sky. In the middle of the fifth day, the giant asked his cook to bring him a cup of tea and a chunk of bread. The man drank his tea and ate his bread without stopping to shake hands. When the hand with which he was feeding himself got tired, he would shake hands with the other hand that was not holding any food. The mayor and the judge, hampered by the operation, acted exactly like the false Colonel Pedro and the giant. On the sixth day, we began to see among the ranks of those shaking hands, people from Yгон, Nsanga-Norda, Vasière, and nationals of the bay of Anglers, as well as those of Tombalbaye. On Sundays people arrived from the islands, from the islands of Solitudes, Eldouranta and from Devil’s islands. In the
course of the second week, the false colonel who was tired of greeting the crowd, asked permission from the giant to sleep for one night. The mayor and Argandov took advantage of the situation to disappear on foot, because they couldn’t find their jalopies parked somewhere in this sea of people singing and dancing.

"Colonel Pedro’s coup d’etat is well under way," whispered the mayor to his fellow coward.

"I know the colonel. He doesn’t have this look of a dinosaur. He takes pride in his appearance. This man is a puppet."

Three months later Lydie Argandov, who was recording the number of hands shaken by the two men, arrived at the figure of nine hundred and seven thousand, two hundred and forty-three for the giant and nearly as much for the false colonel Pedro Gazani. The mayor fabricated a rumor according to which people were shaking hands to escape Frederico Maradonga’s disease. Unfortunately for him however, such information invited people from faraway regions where this disease was rampant. For several months on end the false Colonel Pedro operated his hands-shaking machine. Some of the Authorities came incognito to shake hands with the colonel with the intention of penetrating the mystery. We got to know of this subterfuge thanks to Generals Mangela and Yorgollo-Yamba who, when they appeared on television, could not hide from us their habit of
sticking their left index finger in their right nostril every time an anti-democratic word burst from their lips: they were anxious to make up for it at all costs by using a much more official turn of phrase, a slogan or a platitude. The mountain of presents brought by those shaking hands for the false colonel Pedro sat imposingly beside the giant’s tent. On the fourth day of the seventh consecutive month during which time the giant shook hands with the people according to a fixed schedule, our sister Catharina Opangault closed the trunk containing checks and envelopes that had been offered to the man who, with a simple handshake, was said to cure every ill including famine. "A nation, what a joke!" said the mayor with a sigh.

"My godfathers, what a myth this raging bunch is!"

"This Colonel Pedro," the Authorities thought, "has become initiated into an irresistible fetish: those who shake his hands suddenly become his partisans."

"This zouave is perhaps Benoît Goldmann."

"We all know Goldmann, amigo. He’s killing himself to take care of his wife in Tombalbaye. This man is Pedro Gazani. But, good heavens! why do the people now shake hands with a madman like him?"

Handshaking was declared illegal throughout the entire Homeland in the name of hygiene and public health. We learned of the existence of a law which limited the citizens of our country to four greetings per day. After this number
it was the duty of the police to arrest and charge those shaking hands with incitement to unrest and anti-patriotic behavior.

"When will they learn to be afraid of appearing ridiculous," murmured the crowd.

"They’re playing their role as keepers of the manger," declared the false Colonel Pedro.

That morning, the giant refused to shake hands after his jogging. He explained to Lydie Argandov, for whom he hadn’t procured any laughter since the first handshaking session, that he wanted to go away with her to the Labari-Muerte cataracts or to Hondo-Norte for a week or two.

"Members of my family don’t go to Hondo-Norte," said Lydie Argandov. "Our blood prevents us from going there. Because Hondo-Norte is a shameful city."

"Only humans soil their reputation, every place is a holy place," said the giant.

While the giant was getting his Percheron ready, Father Christian de la Bretelle came in running, his cassock rolled up to his thighs and his tongue sticking out. His chronic cough had started up again and he had lost his voice from the running. We said to ourselves that the Authorities must have nationalized Saint-Firmin Cathedral. During the thirty-five years that the Father had been sent by the French catholics to take care of the lost sheep of Hozanna, nobody had ever seen him running. He is recognized for his
talent for organizing shows on the life of Jesus Christ. These shows took place in the small valley of Huarzolo for a reason known to everyone: in his spare time, after the departure of the multitude which came to watch his drama, the Father then indulged in his main passion: anthropological archeology and advanced sciences. He stayed in the hills to examine even the smallest stone and to pray for the poor. The crowd broke off shaking hands with the colonel to watch the Father who was completely out of breath and who had forgotten to let down his cassock held above a pair of thighs that nobody had ever seen before. He put his arms around the giant's neck and used up the energy left in him in laughing, hugging and kissing, and shouts of victory. His face glowed.

"What's going on, Father?" asked the giant in amazement as he continued to inspect his Percheron.


"The return of Christ?"

"No," said the Father.

"Then I don't know," replied the giant with a broad smile.

"You sir, guess," said the Father to the false colonel who, after the initial surprise, had begun to shake people's hands again while uttering the ritual expression known all
over the Coast: "Chevalier of love and light, may peace lead you, for the age of foolishness is over."

"Guess, sir," said the Father to Lydie Argandov, no doubt because her faded jeans suit, her khaki helmet, her boots and her dark glasses gave her a masculine appearance, despite the half a meter of hair tied in the form of a big ball behind the back of her head.

"I’ve found some skulls," said the Father at the height of ecstasy.

At that moment, we saw the mayor coming followed by his deputy and the judge. Contours of fat and folds of skin showed through his professional revolutionary shirt. His stomach appeared between the buttons that had been done with difficulty.

"What’s going on Mr. Mayor?" asked the giant.

"Shit, that’s what is going on," said the mayor coldly.

He held out a telegram to the giant. A kind of standard text, just like the one sent to his predecessor. The postmaster never signed this kind of telegrams:

PUT SOME DAMN ORDER IN YOUR PLACE OTHERWISE WE’LL BE OBLIGED TO REVOKE YOUR APPOINTMENT. STOP.

THE AUTHORITIES.

"I’ve found some skulls," said Father Christian de la Bretelle.
"What should I do?" the mayor asked the giant.

"Do what they ask you, Mr. Mayor," said the giant.

He jumped onto his animal and held out his hand to Lydie Argandov to help her get on the horse. She wasn't used to horses in any way. Besides, no girl of her age could have the opportunity to mount a horse because of the problems that the Authorities had had in Colonel Yoha's case. The giant spurred on his animal towards Tombalbaye. The false Colonel Pedro continued to shake hands. The crowd continued to pour in singing, dancing, and glorifying the giant and his animal.

"Hozanna turned into a place of pilgrimage. It was a festival of tents, wood fires and huts that had been put up along Djoura avenue. And everybody sang day and night."

"What a country of mad people," said Father Christian de la Bretelle with a sigh. "Jesus will not recognize it when he returns."

Kids climbed trees, shook the branches and sang. Others were on rooftops dancing without stopping. The streets, town square and avenues were bustling with people, fires lighted here and there, singing, explosions and popular choruses. Everything that the democratic Wars had closed to us, all that they had restricted or banished, exploded shamelessly everywhere in our city. The mayor tired himself out brandishing the long arm of the law at the population. The judge and the sergeant, Carlos Bondo, gave
him their unreserved support. However, everybody knew that the sixteen thousand gendarmes stationed in Pointe-Rouge didn’t have ammunition (the Homeland, weakened by the democratic Wars, didn’t have the wherewithal to honor these retarded policemen with ammunition; the shortage had been cause by the suppliers; some contingents were defending the Homeland with rubber bullets), or as it was the case in Hozanna, the gendarmes spent their time looking as if they were armed.

Kwa lwidi eh ho kwa kena?
Kamba Zeka-Taba ba mugondele
Kani yaya eh kokwa kena?

A small crowd had tried to follow the giant by singing praises to him, but the man had left very quickly. He wanted to be alone with Lydie Argandov. The crowd had to abandon their aim when they arrived at the foot of the Vancouver hills. Father Christian de la Bretelle interrupted for an instant the work of the false Colonel Pedro to explain to him how he had just found the skulls.

"Sir, we all have our skulls. If someone had lost one, we would have known it," joked the false colonel.

He continued to shake hands. The judge learned that the act of shaking hands guaranteed a robust health and protected one from the nasty acts of fate. He put on some
of the toupees which he used in spying on the people (for, among other jobs, the judge had to give the Authorities an account of the non-official behavior of the citizens whom the devil had taught to make love with subversion and proclaim very loudly their love for the Authorities while cursing them from the bottom of their heart). He stood in one of the four lines which were moving closely towards the false colonel Pedro. The toupees that the judge was wearing made him look like warrant officer Benoit Goldmann, except that nobody had ever seen the warrant officer without his rifle, never!

"Benoit Goldmann," the crowds whispered, "is joining the giant. What a bright idea! Times are certainly going to change."

"What a magnificent arrangement!"

As the disguised judge was about to shake hands with the false colonel Pedro, a powerful voice boomed to put an end to all their movements.

"Be careful, Mr. Goldmann! It's a trap! This man is not Colonel Pedro."

The false colonel Gazani flew into a thunderous rage, tore off his clothes and toupees while shouting in his mother tongue and in all the languages of the Yogons:

"Cassabandre doni mara kota.... These sons of a bitch will make me lose my appointment!"
The man threw away his jewels, his false wisdom teeth, and his fake beard characteristic of the people of the Estuary. He removed his fake earrings worn by people belonging to the tradition of Liberation comrades. In his anger and shame, he erased the insignia of the Great men of the Coast that he had drawn with a lipstick on his forehead and we recognized, oh, Lord! Colonel Hondo, mayor-to-be of the city of Balthayonsa, a setter of lies, held in contempt all over the Coast, and cursed by his own father who was hanged while he stood by in hopes of getting an appointment. The crowd began to sing and dance his disgrace creating a scene and a rumpus of all kinds managed by our land and our History.

"Colonel Hondo, the wild beast! May the devil follow you!"

"A man without honor, an unscrupulous man, even the stones curse you!"

"Cousin of the devil! colonel of shit and piss! You made us think like loonies."

"What exactly did Hondo want?"

"He wanted to buy the giant’s crimes and to pass them on to the Authorities in exchange for a measly appointment."

The crowd threw stones at him and spat at him. They sang against his father, his mother, his aunt Yomassi and all his ancestors. His name was written on a stone that was
thrown into Loandi's grave so that he would be cursed by the dead.

8

The era of skulls

Father de la Bretelle explained to the giant how he had found the skulls. He told him in what terms he had written to the International Associations for the advancement of anthropology, the CNRS, Peale's Museum and several other scientific institutions in Europe, Asia, Oceania, America.... Some of the onlookers took notes and photographed the skulls which the Father had named "Little Louise's men."

The giant nodded his agreement but he was particularly thinking about Lydie Argandov, about the wild passion with which he had made her laugh: in the water, on the beach, in the papyrus fields, and on the straws in Yogonland. They had slept on the bare red clay of Ouembâ-Norte, under the Florensa waterfalls. For a month, they had lived on laughter, fruits and fresh water. The giant remembered the day when the scarcity of food had driven them to eat glass snakes. He remembered their arrival in Tombalbaye. Upon entering the ancient city of kings, they had found a ghostly, dust-covered world, where everything was in tatters, including the mayor. People who have been dead for
centuries. Their city seemed to have emerged from the silt of a remote period, the evidence of an unknown planet. There was oozing moisture on the walls of Tombalbaye, like an old container with holes in it. Their houses looked like skeletons whipped by winds and dust. Animals, dogs for the most part, very puny, moved along painfully, their bones and emaciated joints jingling. Trees and sky presented a picture of the same desolation. Everything was whistling...

Men and animals were plagued by an endless coughing fit which could hardly be distinguished from the never-ending whistling of the trade wind. The town was infested with a mass of swarming cockroaches and glass snakes which, because of the lack of sustenance, were eaten raw by the inhabitants. Tombalbaye was going through the First Democratic War, clad in clothes full of ashes, dust and soot.

While Father de la Bretelle was explaining to the onlookers under what circumstances he had found the skulls at the bottom of the caves, caves which had been discovered as a result of little Louise’s accident, there were rumors that the giant would address the people at the Dutch Square and that he was going to tell the population everything.

"No, amigo! If he really wants to speak, advise him to use Archbishop-Emile Square."
"I would have advised him to use the cove of Carpantra. If we get mixed up in shit, we can swim to Valancia. The sea is calm around the bay of Anglers at this moment."

The people in the community wondered what the giant was going to talk about. Some people bet that he was going to explain the matter of the red scorpions which infested Hozanna and whose existence, according to the people, was connected with the dusty coach that the man had brought on the day of his legendary arrival. These nasty creatures evoked the memory of the mice that had found their way into the country through the baggage of the Cuban contingents during the Third Democratic War and which were by far more voracious: they ate the fingernails of people who were asleep. Since then nobody went to bed any more without rubbing his or her hands and feet with arsenic. Other people, out of hatred for the Cubans and their mice, attributed Maradonga's disease to the use of the arsenic. The mice had been at the source of the closure of all the libraries in the city because of the voraciousness with which they devoured the library books. The librarian, Wello Lassamba, had had to struggle at the risk of his life to save the Leopard Central Library. His love for his books had afflicted him with hemiplegia. Since nobody else had dared to risk his or her neck for a jumble of books surrounded by red mice, the mayor had gone ahead and closed it officially, through a speech full of revolutionary anger.
Giant scorpions with their rectangular claws arrived after the red mice. We had rightly nicknamed them rattle monsters: when someone carelessly drove these creatures to become aggressive and to bite eventually, their claws would send out a kind of rattling noise like that made by castanets. Fortunately, the rattling of their claws warned of the danger. It was then necessary to crush the shells of these creatures. These scorpions stank very badly. Because they were very hairy, their carcass left behind tufts of red hair everywhere which were coiled up like the shape of their body, a shape that was always fresh in people’s minds because of the terror these creatures inspired and the fetid smell they gave off. Others thought that the giant was going to talk about the crimes he intended to sell in our city. However, this assumption seemed less likely since the masses were hardly interested in this gruesome business.

"He’s going to explain how to guard against the bull frogs which are destroying the cultivation of rice in the Tombabalbaye region."

"But, amigo, bull frogs are not herbivorous."

"A new breed of these creatures has appeared in Tombalbaye. These are red bull frogs which destroy rice seedlings and any other green vegetable found in this region."

"I bet the giant will talk about the skulls discovered by the Father."
"How do you expect a bone to live for three million seasons? Unless he wants to talk to us about the development of Pedro Gazani’s coup d’état."

When the people speak, words assume their exact value. They turn into madness and devastate everything. History loses its raison d’être. Those who write novels ought to know that one will never be a better novelist than the mouth of the people. It creates something new from the remotest recesses of speech and the slightest nuances of a word. The word-of-mouth story will remain unbeatable in every respect. In our societies, stories spring up like mushrooms. They imitate the luxuriance of the jungle. They broaden the scope of an insignificant existence which ends up confining us. All our histories and stories try to take us out of the geometry drawn by this moribund reality in which we have been trapped by material deprivation and the devirginization of our conscience. Spiritual starvation is the most stupid of all miseries. It is to fight against this that we are doing our utmost to invent the inflation of languages. We have always managed to find a dazzling way out in the court of words. We are the only people in the world whose case has been dismissed for lack of evidence before the tyranny of language. Damn it! We are smarter than words.

The news travelled from ear to ear: the giant was going to speak on that Sunday. At the Dutch Square. While the Father was explaining to him the story of the skulls, a
story to which he paid no attention, the giant heard what
the rumor was saying about him. Lydie Argandov had come to
snatch him from the Father:

"It seems you’re going to say who killed Bronzario?
Just leave the dead alone."

She was sweating profusely. Her copper-colored
complexion could not conceal her confusion. She had asked
the giant to withdraw for an instant with her just to tell
him what the rumor was cooking up. At the moment when Lydie
Argandov was pulling the giant away from the gossiping
crowds, the mayor arrived followed by the judge, both of
them clad in the colors of the Homeland.

"It appears you want to sell the State to the
population?" asked the mayor in a low voice.

The giant made his face look like he was smiling. He
offered a cigar to the mayor, in keeping with his habit of
offering something to his interlocutors. It’s a tic he has
which he avoided only rarely.

"We are a nation of rights, Mr. Mayor. It is up to me
to establish the conditions for my bargaining."

"We don’t bargain over the Homeland, Colonel Sombro," said the mayor.

At that very moment, they all raised their heads and
this is what they saw: Benoît Goldmann, smiling and a cigar
between his lips, followed by his wife and Colonel Pedro.
They were riding red Percherons and all three of them were
dressed in red. Gold epaulettes and fourrageres of the same metal sparkled on their shoulders and beneath their lungs. Numerous medals beat on their chests. All three were wearing blue leather hats which harmonized with the neatness of their appearance. They moved forward at a trot as they played the bugle, thus reminding us of the time of the war against the Dutch and the days of the Franco-Italian governors who, in order to differentiate themselves from the Germans, played the bagpipes on Poor Sunday.

"Who are this bunch of people?" asked the mayor.

"The gentleman here comes from Tombalbaye, and my wife and I come from Hondo-Norte. We are following the rumors about our old comrade, Colonel Ignacio Banda. It’s said that his life is threatened with imbecility. We’ve come to help him."

All three dismounted as if they were going to a wedding.

"I’m not Ignacio Banda," said the giant.

"Me neither," said the judge foolishly.

"Ignacio Banda was hanged because of his numerous subversive activities," said the mayor. "It was in 1868, and it happened before the eyes of the whole people."

"Sir, who made you mayor?" said Colonel Pedro in amazement. "You’re not very knowledgeable in history."

"Don’t worry, Mr. Mayor, they are nuts," said the giant.
The mayor scratched his head in a helpless gesture. He turned his eyes around, but the twenty-seven gendarmes of his special forces had shaken hands with the giant and had already gone to throw their rifles, including ammunition, in front of the main entrance of city hall, as a sign of their collective resignation. "We cannot spend our damn life shooting our friends," their leader, Warrant Officer Edinongó Pitra Mongo, had shouted.

"Keep your monthly pay of eighty stones," Emmanu Fandra do Ngualo, his deputy, had added. "It’s quite nasty to spend one’s damn life constantly battling with people."

They had thrown away their uniform, wearing only their G-strings, and they had danced the farewell dance to the mayor and city hall singing:

I’m fed up with shooting the people
I piss on your poor-quality stuff
I’m moving over to the side of the people
I’m not a poor blind infantryman.

At the time, our country was governed by telegrams and radio messages. The mayor had sent a laconic telex to the Authorities in the capital:

ENTIRE ARMED FORCES HAND IN RESIGNATION. STOP.
UNBEARABLE SITUATION. VERY URGENT. STOP
"I'm not Ignacio Banda," explained the giant to Colonel Pedro to whom he had offered tea.

"We have nothing more to hide from each other," said Colonel Pedro.

"That's no reason for me to be somebody I'm not," insisted the colonel.

Colonel Pedro gestured to Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann who took out his bundle of telegrams as neat as new clothes. He went through the batch and pulled one which he held out to the giant. The giant put on his short-sighted glasses and began to read:

COLONEL BANDA IN TROUBLE IN HOZANNA. STOP. WAITING URGENTLY FOR HELP. STOP

IGNACIO BANDA.

Benoît Goldmann gave him three other telegrams taken from the same batch. The giant skimmed through them one after the other, each time adjusting his short-sighted glasses. As he had stopped shaking hands, two girls waited silently. The giant in turn gave the telegrams to Colonel Pedro, with a little wicked laugh; the little wicked laugh of the people of Moango.
"Your note dates back to before the time of the edge-tool makers, long before telegrams were invented. Do you want to con me with papers that are more than five hundred years old?"

"How can that be?" asked Colonel Pedro in amazement as he eyed Benoît Goldmann greedily.

"Read for yourself," said the giant. "As if these telegrams had been sent by Jesus Christ to Pontius Pilate!"

"It's a trap," exclaimed Colonel Pedro. "They set a trap for me. But my last word will be full of fire. You're after my coup d'état. But I'll not let myself be pushed around."

He aimed his gun at the giant, his eyes on fire, his teeth clenched. He mumbled his words. His eyes swirled round as if nothing really held them in place at the bottom of their sockets. "I'm going to burst the balls of the first person to budge." He roared with anger. His animal started to back. The colonel fired a hail of bullets in the air when he got to Djoura avenue, turned his animal in the direction of Wambio and spurred it on. The animal threaded its way through the traffic, drawing a flood of dismayed looks behind it.

"Who then is this crazy person?" the giant asked Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann.

"That's Colonel Pedro," said Alleando Calero. "He can't bear the effects of the new moon. But what do you
"expect?" she added, "the whole country has become a shaggy-dog story. My husband, for instance. I haven't succeeded in making him accept that Colonel Banda could no longer send telegrams because he had been hanged."

The giant asked the warrant officer and his wife to go inside the tent because there are certain things that are not said in public. They tied down the animals and went inside the tent.

The warrant officer refused the tea offered by the giant which his wife brought to him. Alleando Calero had to drink it herself to put the giant at ease. Outside, the crowds began to sing the verses of Prophet Mouzediba and the tirades of Colonel Claudio Lahenda.

"The doctor has warned him against stimulants," explained Alleando Calero.

"My tea has never acted as a stimulant on anyone," said the giant. "It's rather a tranquilizer."

"We left Tombalbaye three years ago," Alleando continued.

The giant looked at her in utter amazement. But Alleando carried on with her remarks as if it was a question of something indisputable. She spoke in a low voice. Tombalbaye was eight hundred and twelve kilometers northwest of Hozanna, in the sludges of Moango, where the vegetation seem to grow before your very eyes. It takes away the whole sky with it. The green hell where water
speaks loudly of water. Everywhere. Eight hundred and twelve kilometers of mud. The maps which indicated this distance dated back to the time of the war against the Dutch when, for strategic reasons, most of the facts were doctored. Since the Authorities didn’t have the money needed to start the work over again, the documents prepared at the time of the war against the Dutch had been approved, decreed and certified to be valid. That is why in the official registers Baltayonsa was forty-five kilometers from Tombalbaye. According to official information, Hondo-Norte was only a village, isolated somewhere in the jungle and had only eight hundred souls. All those who came from Hondo-Norte spoke about a monster city of five million human lives. Without counting the Atsonas and Gantsiés who were not considered as human beings because of their custom of eating gifted men in order to improve their race.

"What are you doing in Hozanna?" Alleando Calero asked the giant.

"It’s a long story," said the giant.

"All our stories are shorter than our lives," replied Alleando Calero.

"That’s true," admitted the giant. "People here live for a long time."

"And how about this damn business of crimes?" she ventured to ask.

"I’ve sold them," said the giant.
"To whom then?" asked Warrant Officer Benoit Goldmann who had been going through his haversack since they went inside the tent.

"I sold my crimes to Colonel Banda four days ago. He needed them to cure his wife's painful menstruations. And to prepare his damned Revolution."

"So Colonel Banda is alive?"

"But really, Mr. Goldmann!!! do you take the people for a corner of your pants? You really think that a people like those from Wambo can hand over their children to that kind of nonsense. Ignacio Banda has spent his entire life to protect and to love. He is always cultivating friendship and peace. What a naive thing to think that the people of Wambo, whose dignity and consciousness he has awaken, could hand him over. And to whom? To the beggars of Tombalbaye? And for what reason? For him to be hanged! No, Mr. Goldmann. The people of Wambo had deceived the Authorities by presenting to them a false Colonel Banda who was actually a livestock thief. What do you expect? truth is hard of hearing."

At that moment the crowds outside stopped singing.

"Popular assertions," said Benoit Goldmann while filling his tea cup.

"I can provide evidence of what I'm saying," said the giant. "But not in your wife's hearing."
To kill time the warrant officer read the bunch of telegrams signed by the High Command, by the Authorities or Colonel Banda, or by the officers in charge of the Third Democratic War.... He arranged them according to year and theme. As he was getting ready to put his piles of telegrams back into the haversacks where his wife had advised him to put them, Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann found a suspicious paper in the middle of the seventh bundle, between the fiftieth and forty-ninth telegram. It was a vellum paper in the form of a trapezoid on which something had been scribbled vigorously, with a make-up pencil, in a language that the warrant officer could not read. He showed the paper to his wife. But Alleando Calero said that she didn't have the time to decipher that nonsense. She was afraid of missing her jogging. She put on her sports clothes, a pink shorts, and a "crazy bathing suit" of the same color, with Colonel Banda's head drawn on it. She imprisoned her hair in a kind of black dust cover, which made her look like a swimmer. Alleando Calero had the beauty of a young virgin, gentle, who had been left for far too long on the borders of a generous age, with a glitter in her eyes which kindle desire at first sight, and which women lose once their innocence is shattered. She ran off to do her jogging without worrying unduly about the two men drinking tea. The warrant officer had shown the paper to the giant who looked for his glasses to read it. For a long
time, the man absorbed the message silently while his face betrayed no emotion.

"I know this writing," he said.

"What does the note say?" asked Benoît Goldmann.

"It's a joke," said the giant. "I'm being warned that you want to kill me."

He emptied his cup, looked for a lighter, lighted it and destroyed the note. A blue flame slowly consumed the paper. The giant watched this flame go out. There remained a kind of black peeling which the giant crushed into dust with his sports shoes.

"What does the note say?" repeated the warrant officer.

"Nothing serious," said the giant with a smile.

The two men put on their sports clothes and went out for the last jogging of the day. The sun was setting. Vast crowds ran after them singing their praises.

Kamba nga Biyelo ba mubongele
Kwa lwidi eh ko kwa kena
Ngana ta Kubelo ba mugondele
Kwandi nionge ko kwa kena

The multitude went down Djoura avenue up to the Cataracts bridge, shouting, whistling and singing at the top of their voice. The giant's Percheron didn't follow his master. It had tried several times to tear the leather with
which it was attached to a young acacia, facing the statue of General de Gaulle. Then the animal had realized that its efforts weren’t paying off. It had then gone back to graze quietly on the few grasses growing around the tree.

"Why are all these people running, amigo?"

"It’s because of the bullshit: the giant is going to explain who killed Bronzario."

"Stop talking rubbish, amigo. Bronzario has withdrawn to Rocheau where she is leading the peaceful life of an old aristocrat. She has married Ignacio Banda."

"No, amigo. Ignacio Banda is fighting in the sludges, in the direction of Hondo-Norte. The greatest name in the Resistance. It’s him that the masses are singing about."

"The people are singing about the skulls found by Father Christian. Don’t make any mistake about that, amigo."

Kamba ta Misolo ba mugondele
Kwa luwidi eh ko kena

The sun vanished in a huge explosion. The crowds reached Stanley street. They lighted torches, turning the street into a stream of multicolored lights. The procession emerged into Dutch square, and began to form endless blazing circles.
The mayor had of course sent a telegram to the Authorities to inform them that a spell had been cast on his population. He asked for a detachment of green berets to quell the uprising. The answer he received was strange:

MR. MAYOR, NOW IS THE TIME TO PRACTICE MILITARY SELF-SUFFICIENCY. STOP. SINCERELY. STOP.

THE AUTHORITIES.

"Buggers, all of them," said the mayor indignantly. Up until four in the morning, the crowds that had gathered around the Dutch square sang as they waved their torches together in the weak light. A fine drizzle poured into the middle of the flames. The breeze caressed the shadows. In the distance, towards the old Sarah market, frogs and toads matched their croaking to the whinny of the Loama cataracts.

"What are the gods up to!"

"They’re waiting for the giant to denounce Estina Bronzario’s assassins."

Rumors circulated within the crowd. Those that were sensible. Those that were not. Those fabricated by the mayor, his deputy and the judge in order to poison the generally held rumor. While the multitudes assembled at the
Dutch square sang and danced in the rain with their lights, the mayor had gone to see the giant and suggested to engage him in what he termed a friendly talk.

"Keep on talking, Mr. Mayor. I'm used to listening to those who come to me wearing the clothes of friendship."

"See how beautiful the sky is tonight," said the mayor as he watched Warrant Officer Benoit Goldmann sleeping in a camp bed in the middle of the tent, beside his wife.

Both of them were snoring silently.

"I'm listening, Mr. Mayor," said the giant.

The man arranged his purple silk pyjamas. The outfit conferred on him the imposing bearing of a Roman Emperor and the peace of a Maya sage.

"Ever since you came here, this city is no longer what it used to be," said the mayor. "It has lost its head and soul. Everything has gone wrong: our customs, our codes, our way of thinking and behaving, everything is going to the dogs. Sir, I don't know who you are, but I've come to offer you a deal: go away before misfortune befalls us."

"Don't you worry, Mr. Mayor. I'm destiny. You cannot gag destiny. I came to this city to make a Revolution. Go and tell it to whoever you want: I won't leave this place before the Revolution. The real Revolution. Not the shady one involving those fat hypocrites. I've come so that the whole brood will stop nit-picking."
The man seized the mayor by the collar and dragged him to the street. It might have been four in the morning. Benoit Goldmann and his wife were fast asleep. Her mouth was open showing her beautiful white teeth. He, just as he has done all the nights of his life, was sleeping with his rifle in his hand, his right index finger caressing the trigger.

"That’s just too bad," said the mayor. "If the sky should fall on your head, Colonel Sombro, don’t you blame this city. It will have warned you."

The eyes of the volcano

Right from Monday, the news spread like a quick blaze that the giant had given the mayor a slap in the face and had postponed his address. The first explanation for the postponement of the address went like this: the Yogon people might have informed the giant that they too wanted to be present at what they called "the Nation’s coup d’état." The second explanation maintained that Colonel Ignacio Banda who wanted to be there in person preferred the November-18 stadium to Dutch square. However, at the appropriate time, the people will outsmart the Authorities: a rumor began to go round that the giant would speak after the match in the stadium forecourt. And everybody passed around the West
Indian saying: "When you are not the biggest, be the most agile - when you are not the strongest, be the smartest." It was Professor Idelio Lamaxime who had passed this saying on to us. We used it in the same way that good wine or good cheese is used. We ate it to our fill and drank it to our thirst.

However, the truth about the postponement of the meeting was something different: in the evening of the day when the giant had made public his intention to speak, the mad epileptic Claudio Lahenda had gone to see him. The madman must have waited for one whole hour since the giant was at his third jogging of the day. The hens were beginning to dose on the gallows when the giant, followed by a teeming crowd, came out into Crox-de-Lorraine avenue, then turned to the forecourt of Liberties high school which, meanwhile, had become National high school of the Constitution. The multitude sang a chorus of the wretched of the earth as they always did before taking their leave of the giant:

Wa mana bindamana
Beto bala mambu we yola.

This refrain denounced the idea of genocide that the Authorities were nourishing against Hozanna and Nsanga-Norda, cities of the devil accused of cultivating
subversion. Claudio Lahenda, the madman, went up to the giant with an air of respect bordering on obsequiousness. He was all dressed in black and the giant couldn’t make him out until he was right under his nose.

"What brings you here, Claudio Lahenda?" asked the giant.

"I’ve come to talk to you, Colonel Sombro."

"Don’t say that name," whispered the giant who hastened to take the madman inside the tent.

He made cold tea and offered it to the madman. The madman accepted the cup but when the liquid touched his palate he spat it out grumbling:

"What a bright idea, Colonel Sombro, to make me drink a disgusting brew, me, the soul of toughness."

He poured the rest into one of the flower jars with which Lydie Argandov had cluttered the room and in which some aristolochias and begonias were growing. Lydie had turned the tent into something very pleasing to the eyes. So much so that Father Christian used the least pretext to, as he said, "go and take a fragrance shower in Lydie Argand’s green paradise." The Father had never managed to fully pronounce the Argandovs’ patronymic because of his simplistic anti-sovietism. People said that he would not see the gates of heaven because, where the commandment states that we should love one another, he showed an insurmountable deficit of two hundred million Soviet souls.
To redeem himself the Father had gotten his two hundred and thirty thousand, four hundred and eleven parishioners to declare communism a mortal sin and the invention of Lucifer.

"The Scriptures don't mention it," his sacristan, Manuel de Toundera, had always asserted.

"How do you interprete Nebuchadnezer's golden statue?"

"Nebuchadnezer wasn't a marxist, Father."

Claudio Lahenda had gone for a gourd from the bag containing his possessions which he carted around with him everywhere, day and night, and poured himself three mouthfuls of a liquid which smelled of fire. He drank it and picked another gourd form which he took out some red powder which he snorted three times, twice through his right nostril, once through the left nostril. He offered two drops from his first gourd to the giant who hesitated for a long time before swallowing it without any enthusiasm, his brow creased.

"You make it look as if I had asked you to swallow a red scorpion, Colonel Sombro. We ate muck together in Hondo-Norte, for months...."

"I remember that," said the giant. "But tell me what brings you here."

"You no longer know how to let time take its own course, Colonel Sombro. At fifty-two, that is understood."

He poured himself a little of his liquid and snorted the tobacco. He sneezed three times. He had a great smile
which showed his clear teeth. Because of the careless manner in which he had left his beard, and the fact that his tattered clothes were so filthy, it was thought that the only real lively things about him were his teeth and his eyes. He seemed to have a tired expression in his eyes that evening, just like the giant.

"It is reported that you would receive instructions from Colonel Ignacio Banda?" said the madman.

"Who are you to assert things without proving them?" replied the giant.

"I can at least prove that you don't have any instructions from Colonel Ignacio Banda," said the madman.

The man went through his bag again (an old postal bag on which one could still read the print POSTE ITALIANE covered in grease and filth), and took out an old rifle which he cocked abruptly. He pointed it at the chest of the giant who began to drip with clear drops of sweat as big as the eggs of a frog.

"What are you doing?" asked the giant.

The tone of his voice had become muffled and he mumbled his words with difficulty. His lips began to tremble. His hands were sweaty, sweat that dried up immediately as it fell on the ground. His eyes watched the finger caressing the trigger. He wanted to speak but he was speechless.

"You can't kill an unarmed man," he whistled at last.

"Oh! you know!" said Claudio Lahenda, the madman.
There was a long silence. The giant scratched the back of his head, but the madman called him to order as he moved his rifle forward nervously.

"You amaze me," said the madman.

"What do you mean?" asked the giant.

But the madman didn’t say anything. He merely gave a wicked laugh, picked the gourd containing liquor, which he at first mistook for the other one, corrected his mistake, and poured a few sporangia of sneezing powder on the back of the hand not holding the rifle. He inhaled the powder and sneezed a couple of times. Each sneeze let go a salvo towards the giant.

"You can’t kill me: the eyes of the volcano are watching you," said the giant.

The madman looked the giant straight in the eyes, mixed up the gourds again, made another correction, and poured the drink directly into his mouth, after which he drank the tea left on the floor by the giant.

"The password has changed," said the madman. "That’s five years ago."

"The eyes of the volcano are watching you," repeated the giant.

It was at that moment that Lydie Argandov arrived escorted by four men carrying a postal bag with the inscription: POUOCHTA CCCP. They put it at the giant’s feet and left again quietly.
"What do they expect from me?" asked Lydie Argandov.

"Don’t be around during the killing of a deserter," said the madman. "His blood can follow you."

Lydie Argandov cleaned the teapot, turned on the stove and began to boil water. Outside, the night was still. Crowds of people who wanted to shake hands with the giant early in the morning continued to chat away as they sat around wood fires. They had heard the six rifle shots, but because the giant’s visitors, especially Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann, had the nasty habit of playing with their guns by firing an entire hail of bullets into the air, their ears had finally got used to hearing these shots. When the tea was ready, Lydie Argandov filled a cup for the dead man and one for herself. The madman drank the dead man’s share. An endless humming of a thousand insects filled the night. New wood fires had been lit in the court of the lycée.

"Colonel Sombre," said the madman to the corpse, "I’m sorry. But you’re too human to lead a revolt. You have been procrastinating for three years. That’s unforgivable."

The madman asked Lydie Argandov for a cup of tea. He took the cup, inhaled it, poured a few drops of his liquor into it, and began to drink quietly without taking his eyes from the giant’s body.

"I’ve lived with death all my life," said Lydie Argandov. "I hate violence," she added. "The Revolution is
possible otherwise than by fire. What do you think, colonel?"

The madman said nothing. He snorted his tobacco and began to sneeze. A kind of gust. His nose was running. Lydie Argandov gave a little silly laugh. The madman looked at her.

She was quite beautiful. He thought: "Women often become ravishing beside a corpse." The madman hadn’t moved the muzzle of his gun away from the dead man’s chest.

"What do they expect from me?" repeated Lydie.

"Not a thing," replied the madman.

"Colonel Lahenda, if it’s your intention to gag me deep inside a corpse, I won’t deprive you of that pleasure. I’ve been your chausgarnière for twelve years. It’s all over now. I’m giving you back my weapons."

"We’re working for Ignacio Banda," said the madman.

"With the utmost respect and friendship I suggest that you respect the dead for there are some corpses that even History will never be able to bury. You know very well that I kill reluctantly."

He kissed his gun. His face was saddened. His greasy tattered clothes began to shake. His hand was seized with a strange agitation. He fired a hail of bullets into the air.

"Open your eyes," he said. "A war is a war: you can’t kiss it with your mouth."
The cock crowed. The air was damp with dew. The streets were quiet. Those shaking hands were awake. Their shots pierced the night with an uneven red glow, subjected to the blowing of the continental winds, and watched over by the unpleasant ocean wind. The madman fell asleep beside the dead man while the multitudes continued to sing:

Bo Badindamana
Beto bala wa sala
Basala
Oh Oh simba nasakala
Dibundu eh simba
Nsakala. 3

At sunrise the mayor swept in like a whirlwind. The judge had followed him. Both of them were shaking with annoyance. "Offer a chair and a glass of water even to the one who has come to kill you." This saying has been in existence since the foundations of our city were laid. In this way, we offered a chair to the Dutch, the Portuguese, and then to the French, in order to guarantee them the peace with which they have waged war against us for five centuries. "Offer a chair and a glass of water even to the

3Those who hate us will be dealing with God./ The struggle continues, brother./ The fight to sing.
one who had an affair with your wife: people sit down to settle matters. That enables the dead to be present." The mayor pulled a seat and slumped in it as if he had just lost his manly strength. The judge didn’t move. His little eyes rolled behind a pair of glasses belonging to a distant period. These glasses, according to what was said about them, had lived through all the Democratic Wars, but had never left Hozanna. The populace explained this situation by the fact that the post of judge wasn’t really envied anymore since the hotheaded Alfonso Lazeria had put fourteen buckshot in the thorax of the judge’s predecessor, following the "Nsanga-Norda honey" case. No, really! Nobody found any use in letting his balls be blown for such an incredible starvation wage. "Not even enough to buy a bag of rice," grumbled the populace. The judge has been asking strongly to go on retirement for years but a replacement had not been found for him and that is why he has remained in his post despite being bent double with his eighty years of age.

"What brings you here, your honor?" asked the madman.

"The war ended twelve years ago. Give me back your rifle which you have continued to keep illegally."

The madman had a little exquisite laugh which he ended with a sip of his liquor. He went through his belongings and pulled out a bunch of papers defaced by the weather. He looked through the bundle. Pulled out a navy blue paper
which he held out to the judge. The judge changed his glasses to read.

"This rifle is a gift from the Republic to Colonel Claudio," said the madman. "As the attestation stipulates, the colonel is a companion of the Liberation. He must keep his weapons which will be buried with him the day death will decide to kill him."

"All right, Colonel Claudio. I’ve remembered that in this brothel some war veterans have been highly placed above good sense and the law."

"I’m not responsible for this situation," said the madman.

"Even so, you have disturbed every silence of History, Colonel Lahenda," said the judge. "You have been sentenced to death seven times by hanging, three times by the usual firing squad and two times in the electric chair. Reported dead fourteen times. Buried nine consecutive times in Hozanna, Tombalbaye and Valancia. You have a tomb in Vasière and another one in Hondo-Norte. A mausoleum has been built for you in Westina and Wambo. Admit that one seldom has such a pernicious existence. Instead of going on retirement, you persist obstinately in marketing disorder under the fallacious pretext of reunifying a rotten country. Well, well! Colonel. Stop dreaming about the carcass of a land that even God has forsaken."
"The eyes of the volcano are watching you, comrade judge. And if you want to kill time take care of the dead body before it begins to smell."

The judge looked for a seat. Unable to find one within reach, he sat on the plastic bottle in which the giant used to store his drinking water. The bottle must have been full because the judge couldn’t move it a notch. The mayor helped him, but the two men came up against the same difficulty. The judge had to content himself with staying far from the madman although he had shown his intention to have a word in his ear.

"All right, Colonel, the eyes of the volcano are watching us," said the judge. "However, neither you nor I have the right to throw stones at the classic ghosts of democracy."

"What’s the use of a life filled with grime?" asked the madman.

"Let’s leave to God the leisure to evaluate his creation," said the judge. "Ignacio Banda himself knows this: you cannot plot, even scientifically, against God."

"The volcano is watching you, comrades," said the madman as he offered the judge a cup of tea. "Be that as it may, Colonel Sombro deserves our admiration."

The mayor looked at the body of the giant which seemend to breathe again, impeccable in the midst of quite a superb death. The madman got up. That was the first time in years
he didn’t worry over his morning jogging. He mounted his red donkey, and made his way straight towards Dutch square. The mayor run to send the first of the three daily telegrams that he’s been sending to the Authorities since the beginning of the uprising, through singing, by a populace which had always accepted everything.

COLONEL CLAUDIO PREPARING RETURN OF COLONEL BANDA.
STOP. HOPING FOR REINFORCEMENTS. STOP.

THE MAYOR

Dutch square, formerly known as Lebanese cemetery, had been declared Devil square by the Authorities because of the treason organized there by the June 12 mercenaries. "Massacre them all. May their bones and blood be eaten away on the spot. May this place be cursed and decreed soiled for a century." With the exception of swallows, flies and dung-beetles, nobody had ever frequented the place since the Second Democratic War and the June 12 infamies of those impudent people. That morning the place from the entrance of the fourth Lagoon to the Joando peninsula turned into a sea of hands, singing mouths, madras scarfs that were being shaken like a pendulum swing, sprays, palms and multi-colored garlands. The madman tore through the multitude on his donkey, greeting people with his right hand. An explosion of chests, hands and feet stamping rhythmically on
the ground was heard. One would have thought that the cliffs of Joando and those of Grabanizar were going down into the sea in an incandescent madness of stones and fire.

The madman raised his right hand and motioned for silence when he arrived at the center of the square, which was also the center of the multitude. The crushing and crashing stopped. Chests could be heard breathing. Everything was still except the madman and his donkey who turned in all directions to size up the crowds. Then the puppet coughed and said:

"Comrades, the Revolution has been put off. Colonel Banda won't come today. His hemorrhoids prevent him from walking."

The crowds dispersed in the utmost peace and quiet. Nobody asked anybody for anything. The only voice that could be heard was the hollow voice of Father Christian de La Bretelle who, while everybody was going away, had gone towards the madman and his animal.

"And what about the skulls, amigo?" he asked. "The Americans want to buy them. They are offering an astronomical amount of money. What should I do?"

"God will take care of the skulls, Father," said the madman.

The Father signed himself. Nobody knew if this action was an answer to his interlocuter or the simple manifestation of a tic. The Father went straight ahead towards the
Liberties lycée, through Frangipannies street, and Montango traffic circle. He followed Lebanese avenue up to Powder Magazine square, crossed the ex-camp of the Chadian Infantrymen, emerged into Djoura avenue through Solitary square, arrived at the Penitentiaries police station, and went along Mafoua street all the way up to the French library. He wanted to ask the giant’s opinion about the skulls but, upon entering the tent, he only found his corpse: his mouth was dribbling, and his eyes were staring into space.

"My God!" said the Father. "They’ve let him bleed to death like a pig."

10

Widows’ day

We recognized Dona Petra and her mother when they arrived in front of the sumac tree. There was no longer any doubt in anybody’s mind: the giant was really Colonel Sombro. Fourteen hangings, five known states of grace, four of them doubtful, five official refusals, shot in thirty two public executions, sentenced six times to drink poison, twenty eight corpses put on display at the stadium of the Revelation, displayed on the front page of newspapers, with his perpetually new and inevitable pair of black and white Adidas slippers soaked in blood. Forty five years of combat
and subversion. The only time the people of Hozanna almost believed the death of the colonel was a few months before the giant’s arrival in our city, when the Authorities had decreed for everyone to go to Hondo’s Frederico Maradonga stadium: fifty thousand people to see a corpse? What bullshit! For three weeks, crowds of people had kept going to the stadium until the morning when they had found all the doors and trees surrounding the stadium covered with a text signed by the colonel, a poem that he alone could write:

In our hearts
Nothing
Slept tonight
The stones stayed awake
The dead
Came to cry out
We have
Remained
The memory of those
Who are leaving
Some day
Perhaps one night
In these days at least
The killers
Will be
Sucked
Comrades
Don't shoot at
The light...

Nobody else could write these lines. They were his and they had the sharpness of his ideas.

"We have two poets, amigo: Ignacio Banda and Affonso Sombro. In any case you are not simply going to forget about it under the pretext that you come from the Kambrozangala-Nuate hills?"

Incensed at losing such a source of revenue overnight, the Authorities found another channel to fully sell the reputation of the colonel and his partisans: they sold his tracts in the State market. "There's always someone cleverer than you, amigo!" His signatures were sold as a lucky charm and as a guarantee for long life. In their usual naivety, the Authorities had ended up selling the stories about the resurrections of Colonel Sombro to a populace which had a blind belief in them. They had sold his least philosophical wild imaginings. They had printed the colonel's most famous words on hundreds of millions of tee-shirts which had sold like hot cakes. We all thought that the colonel's words cured hemorrhoids, rheumatism, circulatory trouble and stomach aches, diseases which are very widespread among the Kambas in the Iodrabégon massif. Some people claimed that
the colonel's words cured leukemia and the attacks of arborescent syphilis which were rampant in Tombalbaye.

"We made the Authorities rich by our odd habit of devouring words without looking at them critically."

"I don't wish to hear about it, amigo. The colonel is a miracle. How could you ask the people of the Coast to live on anything other than miracles? Tomorrow, Affonso Sombo will be a classical colonel, stuck between the teeth of History, and taken over by the untruthfulness of time. Let the populace live it today, for heaven's sake!"

"Who is this ravishing female?" asked the mayor on seeing the giant's wife.

"How do they appoint mayors who have no brains?" asked the woman.

"No, madam," the mayor whined in his three mother tongues. "May heaven and the whole earth insult me in any way that heaven and earth wish. May the devil's own behind insult me. But in my country, ever since the dawn of time, women don't insult a man born of the legs of a woman. And to show you my indignation, I will inform you, by a note signed by me, of the day, the hour and the place where I will hang myself to wash away your insults."

Dona Petra and her daughter were not in the least affected by the preachings of our city's mayor whom we knew for his extreme cowardice and his outrageous lack of education. (Once, during the trial of the Holy Family
conspirators, the mayor, who was then the provisional president of a tribunal that the Authorities had shamelessly set up had, to the utter stupefaction of the twelve million intelligent people who were watching the proceedings on television, fiercely begun to support the argument of "a bone fracture in the body of Amadouz Banga, the child of the people, by those who have sold themselves to the devil's cause, leading to a splinter in the femur of his respiratory system which had caused the death of the poor man.... You see, since the reaction is one hundred percent vicious and mortal, it always strikes in the back...."

"Do you want to say, Mr. Mayor President, that Amadouz Banga died twice, and that the femur is placed side by side with the lungs in the corpse of a revolutionary?"

"Mr. Nemba," said the mayor angrily, "a lawyer, a very good lawyer doesn't have the right to mix up issues. Mind your own business, and I'll mind my own. Defend the accused without giving yourself the leisure to smear our conscience."

"I withdraw my case, Mr. Mayor President," the lawyer had said with a sigh to stifle a laughter that was building up in his chest and which would have jeopardized the Revolution.)

The two women had followed the same itinerary as the giant on the day of his arrival. They stopped at the same places. Like him, they were riding a plain Percheron which
was drawing a coach. They were dressed in the same traditional outfit that they wore on the day when their hanging was broadcast live on television (the most ordinary instrument for announcing death sentences and the deepest intentions of the Homeland). Sandals made of salamander skin were hanging from their feet. Their heads were covered with red and white madras scarfs. They had put on fur-lined gloves which the people of Tombalbaye wear on carnaval days. Their gandouras were in the colors of the Homeland: blue, yellow and red. People made a mental calculation of the weight of the fabric making up the gandouras. Every now and then the two women would operate a pair of megaphones and would take turns to say that the following day would be the market day for the crimes that the colonel had not been able to sell.

"We’re here to reveal the secret crimes committed cowardly by this city since the period of the Democratic wars."

The crowds sang and exploded with joy.

"We’re going to say how Joando Kenga assassinated Estancio Benta."

"You’re going to know where and when Artamio Zengi killed our brother Yambo in order to establish disorder and negligence."

"God is God, amigo! No one will leave this very side of life without knowing how Father Kamillio de la Pitié
disappeared, assassinated one Monday evening at the the Soleil hotel. And Colonel King’s food poisoning."

A multitude of widows swarmed into Dutch square where, they thought, the population would be let in on the crimes. The widows sang the Routine song and danced the rumba invented by their colleague Martine Bianca, and which they had named "rumba-solitude."

"What a block of naivety this earth is, amigo! It has always sung in the pot of its miseries, just as cooked meat sings on the fire. It will dance even in its setbacks. Always."

"We are born to look sulky. Our silence is also our speech. The earth, with its blazing stones, its valleys and lakes, its expanse of blues skies, its wealth of greenery in the direction of Wambo and the severe aridity of the lands of Yogon, teach us how to shout down bullshit and the schemes of those who have dwarfish minds."

From Nsanga-Norda to the bay of Anglers, the earth cries out with all its stones to denounce crimes and cowardice. How can you not sing? How can you not show this joy and this serenity which is eating at your heart? The Coast drives its luxuriance well into our blood. What a beautiful celebration, amigo!"

The two women arrived at the lake left over by the March 1976 floods between the Rectors building and the former Infantrymen’s camp. The water was rust-colored. It
smelled of compost and mud. Without hesitation, the two women drove the animals into this water. The crowds applauded, stepping up their songs and cries of joy. The elderly people who no longer had the strength to participate in this explosion of joy merely stayed in front of their concessions and, with their pipes between their teeth, nodded their head as a sign of support. The whole city boiled, shouted, ran and sang, enraptured to hear how scheming had been able to overcome the uncompromising Paolo Cerbanto, and how the same scheming had invented the suicide of Yanko, his brother. And what a pleasure to hear those things from the mouth of a kid, the daughter of our beloved late Colonel Sombro, loved even by the arrant uneducated people of Wambo. She had built his name in all hearts, amidst ways of dreaming, and in the midst of all hopes. She was a fire of stories and enthusiasm whose passion was really frenzied.

"The master is not the one who commands; it's not even the one who is right. A leader is the one who invents the generosity of others. In this way, he participates in the stakes of his time. The master is the one who teaches and practices self-sacrifice. Colonel Sombro is dead. We mourn him through the eyes of his only daughter."

The Poudra lagoon had lost some of its waters the day the giant arrived. Numerous tadpoles were shaking their tails. The drop in the water level had forced the memoras,
loaches and gurnards to get to the darkest areas, in this case in the area around the former Radio Equator. The two women left the river by taking the byway which led to the French museums. There, they sounded the bugle.

The multitudes fell into a great silence. Dona Petra took her megaphone and said:

"Comrades, don’t forget to be at the Poudra tomorrow at nap time. Colonel Banda will explain how and why our beloved brother Colonel Bernado Brouille was killed, and by whom. He will explain how and why his wife and daughter were killed and by whom. How the Fathers in Wambo were poisoned and who did it...."

We all thought, all of us really, that Colonel Bernado Brouille had been reported dead for convenience sake, but that in actual fact, just like Colonel Banda, he had been enjoined to shut up by being forced to retreat to the country of the Yogons. This idea was reinforced by the fact that, of the thirteen thousand, one hundred and thirty subversive notes posted at night in Hozanna by members of his group, none evoked the death of Colonel Brouille. However, since this fantastic revelation was coming from Dona Petra’s own mouth, nobody would have had the impudence to doubt it. The Authorities, as a grist to their mill, talked about handing over Colonel Banda’s killers to the people. However, we knew very well that it was a ruse to accord an odor of legality to their small group of
criminals. Everyone on the coast, from Hozanna to Nsanga-Norda, whispered what was very obvious: "They take the Nation for less than the bottom of their pants. Individuals who don’t even know how to hide their pilfering from the coffers of the Homeland. Fabricators of disappointments which have been whitewashed with the colors of the law. Shameless killers."

After crossing the Poudra lagoon, the two women followed the itinerary of the giant on the day of his arrival. They took the old Castanets road that had been renamed by the mayor who had found it judicious to call it Beggars Pouch road.

"But why Beggars Pouch?" people wondered. The change of name had been linked with the mayor’s fear of losing his appointment after the population, during a march in support of Colonel Banda, had refused to recognize the name "Radio street," preferring instead the contentious name of "Castanets street." Time had done its work.

In the vicinity of the old Radio Equator, just like the day of the giant’s arrival, the water came up to the rump of the horsewomen, making the bottom of their clothes wet and marking them with the stamp of this mud which is found everywhere in our city. The animals, no longer able to touch the bottom, began to swim.

The crowds applauded and whistled to encourage them. When the two women arrived at the bank they shook off their
clothes, just as the giant had done on the day of his arrival, to get rid of the red carps which had bitten into the braids, laces and buttons of their clothes. The women dismounted at the place where the giant had also dismounted, and continued by walking. They went along the camp up to the place where the giant had looked at the sky for the first time. The crowds gave them an even more impressive ovation than before.

They stank. Their bodies were covered in mud, seaweed and rot, with the exception of their heads which sparkled with joy, impeccably covered with our city’s symbolic madras scarf.

"Who are you, companion," a woman’s voice asked.

"Revolutionaries," said Dona Petra. "We are members of Colonel Sombro’s group."

"The colonel is dead," said a man’s voice. "Because they didn’t want him to tell the truth about the crimes."

"We will tell it anyway," the giant’s wife said with a sigh. "Immediately after the funeral."

The telegrams business

All night long, the megaphone had asked those who were going to meet at the Dutch square to dress in white as a sign of mourning. All night long, in the light rain which
was pounding through the darkness, the voice had repeated the message; it had been heard above the piercing sound of the winds and the more muffled noice of the neighborhood gossip. On some occasions, it had rivaled the thunder which grumbled at sporadic intervals. A lake of white shadows had set themselves up at the square. The muezzin sang at the mosque of Cherche-Ville. The shadows lighted a torch and there was a sea of flying sparks which engaged the darkness in the language of metal. Around six, the rain began to fall very lightly as though it intended to respect the tranquility of the lights that the crowd had lit.

Our eyes looked everywhere. Someone had just spoken. We saw Colonel Banda at the commencement of Mâchoirons street. He was wearing a woolen cloth embroidered with gold and whipped with purple. The hairs on his head and those of his beard had turned white. A white which contrasted with the red Percheron he was riding.

"No, amigo! We are right in the middle of making a mistake. This man is an imposter. Ignacio Banda had died of old age. We’ve been hearing about it since our childhood. Who, but who really, can bury himself at Solitudes for forty six years, feeding on lizards and scorpions? Who? In spite of all the cold and amoebas. In spite of the tsetse flies. At any rate not Colonel Banda, a champion at eating well, as he was known to everyone. Since the age of fifteen, he never spent a day of his life without
munching a female. How could he have spent forty five years looking at the Waya-Mayo volcano?"

"That’s true. But could Ignacio Banda die without contacting his friends? The great men of our land don’t die that way. They always give a warning sign."

It is true that, in this matter in which the die has been cast regardless of any form of logic, something continues to speak to our naivety. "The existence that they are refusing you has a hard skin, amigo." At night, when we went by canoe in the neighborhood of Solitudes, a window with a yellowish light stood out in the darkness. It indicated the walls of the stone and iron building left by the Chinese since the third century B.C. but whose construction has been attributed by History to the Dutch navigators. The puny silhouette of Colonel Banda seemed to peep through this window.

A few archeology fanatics, such as Father Christian, had tried to position this place on the rudimentary maps of the Solitudes Islands. Impossible.

We knew in any case that since the dawn of time (which we considered to be from time immemorial when the Island was still accessible), it was there that the Chinese had raised the Great Cohotia. Since then nobody had been able to come alongside the huge conical rock that is known as Solitudes. While Eldoura, its proud neighbor lying some one hundred meters to the south, received vessels full of tourists,
Solitudes remained the proud property of the whirlwinds of Huenda. A hard earth, given over to every kind of Atlantic arrogance, heartless, and without a sky above its head.... The undisputed Homeland of vultures and flying foxes which are eaten only by the uneducated people of Joharto.... The Homeland of giant crabs which weighed up to thirty pounds.... No, such a land couldn’t keep a man alive for forty five years of banishment. To please public opinion, the mayor and his acolytes kept alive the rumor about Colonel Banda. To please public opinion, but also to justify the presence of about a dozen Cuban soldiers posted at the entrance to the cliffs of Hondo-Norte.

The sun had already inflamed the ridges of the Katamango rocks, searching for its path between the foothills of the bay of Anglers. We saw a few people dressed like leopards in the midst of the crowds that were waiting: soldiers in pants, without tarboosh, and wearing Adidas sports shoes. They concealed their rifles in their raincoats, but they didn’t deceive anyone. We knew that they were from Emouta, the only place where the failure and negligence of the Authorities continued to be respected. Some of them were barefooted.

"He is by the side of Colonel Sombro’s daughter."

"No, amigo, this man isn’t Ignacio Banda. He is too young."
It was raining cats and dogs. The crowds stuck together and struggled to protect themselves from the rain, forgetting for a moment what concerned them: the appearance of the colonel. But we knew it, just as we had always known: heaven wants to have its say in the operation of our difficulties. A lot of those who had expected the interference of the heavens had taken shelter under the sheds which, at the time of the great rubber and tobacco fever, had served as warehouses for the "South Season-Fruit." We were afraid of an accident: the sheds were in a very bad shape after fifty years of existence. And besides, the vipers and red scorpions had transformed them into a property over which only the puppets of our city dared to fight them. Around eleven, the rain calmed down. The crowds sang to overcome the cold. They stamped their feet like cattle in the pink mud that their feet were churning.

"I don't understand how the populace can be so persistent...."

"What do you expect, amigo? The people are strong-minded."

While lightning rent the day, the megaphone ordered people to be calm and asked the multitude to look towards the east, between Wambo and Tombalbaye, just at the height of the Maya rock.

We turned round. And we saw him. He was dressed in pink from head to toe like an Arab. Brandishing the
megaphone like a rifle and riding a mauve donkey. His beard and hair seemed to grow before our very eyes. His big eyes were flashing like heated metal. Barefoot. We were intrigued by this detail. In front of him, on the shoulders of the animal, was a postal bag whose huge white print could be read from a distance: US-MAIL. Then, leaving the megaphone, he went through the bag and threw a first, then a second bundle of telegrams before honoring us with an excessive laugh. A laugh that he alone could have enough breath to laugh to the end. With his snow white teeth, he tore a fourth bundle of telegrams as clean as a wedding linen.

"How naive, you people," he shouted. "Really! To believe that Ignacio could, bent under the weight of his ninety two years, come to set fire to your age-old damn stupidity? That I, see, with my false beard and false hair.... With my fake laughter that you have always hated.... That I, whom you hold in contempt! Me, yes, me! You're a nation of donkeys. You want prophets in order to give yourselves some balls. Well then, here they are, my own balls!"

He pulled out his false hair, and with a gesture took off his false beard. Threw all the telegrams contained in the postal bag in all directions, without stopping his laughter. He removed the red scarf which held a false stomach onto his real stomach and tore the silver and gold
embroidered gandoura. "You’ve been had," he shouted as he turned up the bottom of the postal bag in which no telegram remained. We recognized Rouvierra Mendès do-Sandoval, the epileptic puppet who has gone crazy since the Second democratic War, who disappeared into the Zongo forest, and who, when there is a new moon, would bark behind the Massa-Wassa stream. All eyes examined him in silence. Malicious people hurled insults at him. They spoke ill of Colonel Sombro who had been led off his mission by the wriggles of young Lydie, just as, some years back, the larger-than-life bosom of Francesca Ravillo Moses had made Etienne Carbonso forget the ways of the Revolution. We recalled the extremist position taken by Anne Taossiéra, Carbonzo’s lawful wife.

"No, Carbonzo! you’re not going to exchange the Revolution for the young legs of a kid!"

Whereupon he said:

"I’m in love, Anne. That doesn’t happen to me often. But I can feel it: my blood has given in to this woman."

"She is not a woman, Etienne. Just a kid. And I’ll kill you if you dare."

"Of course not, Anne: you can’t kill me – since you love me, you too."

That very evening, while Etienne Carbonzo was asleep dreaming about rocks and scorpions, Anne killed him in a fit
of mad frenzy by making him hold a tension of 227 volts in a
bouquet of pink roses.

"What do you expect, amigo? Don’t let us ask God to
create the world one hundred times over. Everything occurs
repeatedly, and History with it."

"We have wasted forty five years waiting for Ignacio
Banda! What extravagance!"

"Have you read the papers, amigo? They report that the
Russians have dug toilets on the moon."

"What a load of rubbish to go and shit so far away when
they can’t even greet their neighbors! They’re buggers just
like you and me: all right, they’ve kicked the grub out on
time! They don’t even know how to make love anymore, they
don’t know how to eat anymore, they don’t know how to sleep
anymore, they don’t know how to think anymore.... They’ve
built hospitals with magnificent beds while people are dying
on the freeway. They’re as screwed up as you, me and our
Colonel Banda. Whatever is the world coming to?"

"Even so, we’re worse than some kids...! Throwing away
forty five years of our life waiting for a crook! It must
be done, amigo."

"Let’s go and drink some beer. After forty six years
in the maquis, don’t hope for any other pay than a glass of
beer."

The crowds talked, swore and hustled. People walked
without daring to look at one another. The sun shone
nervously. Our city was engulfed in a motley of perfumes mixed with the smell of refuse from the Djoura and the Estuary. That reinforced the idea according to which our land was nothing but a garbage can.

Samory street. Emma Argandov's strange smile. She arranges it like a make-up. She had the same smile as the day we went underground. With her hands on her hips. Dressed in the selfsame orange apron which makes her look like an Indian doll, Emma Argandov was waiting for us. She repeats, God only knows with what devilish precision, forty five years of a smile which even age has not managed to disturb. Benoit was the first to sit down. He didn't see that the Argandovs had changed the sign on their villa to an amazing designation: "The telegrams business." I sat on the same bench I had sat on forty five years ago. Just as I had done formerly, I left the other end (the end which forces you to have your back to the cliff) to the warrant officer.

"What can I serve you?" asked Emma.

"The same thing."

"And you, Mr. Goldmann?"

"Give me anis. Beer will be tasteless this evening."

"I know that André will ask for herb whisky. As for you, Colonel Pedro, you never stop wishing to impose your big batrachian eyes on the whole world: I bet you're going to ask for pepper brandy, like in times past."
Gradually, the place was filled with the same faces, as though we had left only the day before or two days previously. All my old friends. Elise. Petra. Benoît Goldmann fired a hail of bullets to kill a red mouse which was passing at the end of the store. We didn’t even notice that he had a new rifle. He hatched his two rows of pearly corn for all to see, as he greeted with the hand not holding the rifle.

"How’s your wife, Benoît? And how about your hemorrhoids?"

"My wife is doing fine. My hemorrhoids also," replied the warrant officer.

"Our country is a shame...."

"We don’t have the right to talk about it. We’re too fat for that. Let’s leave that to the young ones."

"The eyes of the volcano are watching you," said an old man sitting in a corner, his limbs eaten away by gout and rheumatism.

We all turn round. The old man takes off his hat: one miserable felt hat worn out through time and constant use.

"But it’s Ignacio Banda!"

For a long moment, no one dared to speak. The old man who remained seated in front of his glass of anis gets up and walks over to the counter. Benoît Goldmann fires a crazy hail of bullets to kill another red mouse. The animal falls down, torn to pieces, beside Colonel Banda’s glass of
anis. The old man disarms Benoit Goldmann in a reflex that nobody would have guessed possible for his age. An angry gleam inflames his eyes. In the same voice which drew our attention to him, but this time at the peak of indignation, he said slowly:

"Benoit Goldmann, I demote you for counter-revolutionary actions. Go back to your hole and wait for my directives. Otherwise you will be saberred in the same manner as Colonel Sombro was killed.

The man drinks the anis after taking away the mess made by the mouse. Before withdrawing, he asserts once again that the eyes of the volcano are watching us and that we can’t afford to blunder.

"It’s him," whispers the warrant officer.

"It’s him," Emma replies.

"The eyes of the volcano are watching us," says the doctor.

Dona Petra and her mother come in. We are all here. With the exception of Colonel Sombro. Claudio Lahenda barks in the street. We recognize his voice. He often speaks that way at the time of the new moon.
B: COMMENTARY AND TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

In Chapter Six we discussed how Labou Tansi transposes African words, songs and expressions into the body of the narratives in French with or without their translations. It is this same style that we encounter in *Les yeux du volcan*, Labou Tansi’s fifth novel. According to Singou Basseha (1988) the author was inspired by two things to write this novel.¹ In the first place he wanted to write about Brazzaville, his hometown. Secondly, he was concerned with the speed at which events were changing in the city. Some streets had changed names seven times in fifteen years and therefore, according to him, the city had lost a part of its history. Given that history is essential in nation building and in any planning for the future, it was obvious to him that Brazzaville, which now lacks a viable history, is heading for disaster. *Les Yeux du volcan* is therefore the chronicle of a people who do not have a sense of history and for whom the future does not hold a promise.

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The structure of the novel, like that of *L'anté-peuple*, follows a linear pattern and events follow in a chronological order. A giant riding a horse-driven carriage arrives in an African town (Brazzaville) and sets up a tent in the compound of a high school. Having declared that "si je dois mourir, eh bien! que cela soit ici," (16) he shakes hands with the crowd that has gathered to see him and receives the visit of the most important personalities in the city some of whom are interested in the crimes that he is supposed to be selling. He offers tea and cigars to his visitors while evading their questions about his identity and the crimes he has for sale.

The title of the novel itself is a cry, a cry from within, which explodes like the events in *La Vie et demie*. The volcano in the title is a metaphor for the people of Africa and other oppressed people. The giant in *Les Yeux du volcan* is a maquis who had been sent to carry out a mission and who is killed because he could not accomplish his mission. The symbolism here revolves around the notion of time. Because the eyes of the volcano are watching, time is of the utmost importance in the sense that it kills those who are inefficient and slow to action. Africa is condemned to make a real revolution, a spiritual revolution, which would be more generous and would have the utmost respect for human lives. This real revolution finds expression in the novel’s symbolism that characterizes Benoît Goldmann’s
refusal to go to war. Today, when human beings have to choose between war (total death) and life, Benoît Goldmann is the prophet who dreams the dream of the future and who respects human values. That is why he shoots at cockroaches and mice instead of shooting at humans.

However, what makes the novel most compelling is the language of the author. Without resorting to the kind of translation that Kourouma achieves in *Les Soleil des indépendances* or *Monné*, Labou Tansi nevertheless uses every occasion to emphasize the different languages present in his novel. If we keep in mind the fact that the very first words pronounced by the giant, the protagonist of the novel, are in the local African language, "Mogrodo bora mayitou..." (15) which is later translated as "Si je dois mourir...," (16) we can safely posit that the Lingala or Kikongo of the text is made to inform the French which becomes comprehensible to the monolingual reader only after translation. The French and African languages are therefore made to assume equal importance, as each of them has the capacity to sustain a discourse.

In addition, the introduction of songs into the body of the narrative serves to underscore the recourse to traditional oral literature where singing and dancing are part of storytelling. It is interesting to note that some of these songs are inserted into the text without any translation into French:
Mahungu ko
Konkoto ko
Mu bakeno
Konko toko
Ku dia tu mundia
Konkoto ko
Ku lumbu ke
Konkoto ke
Mu gabeno” (54).

This is because, according to the narrator, this song is known to all; it is "le chant contagieux des dieux kongo, connu de nous tous" (54). Ironically, however, the fact that the song is only in Kikongo indicates that the all inclusive "nous" refers only to the people of Kongo (and by extension Africans) who share the same cultural heritage, and in fact excludes the monolingual reader who can understand the song only after it has been translated. Thus in this particular instance, the narrator’s statement contrasts with an earlier one made about a song "connu de tous les habitants" (29) of the city but which is made accessible to all readers because it is translated into French:

Viens voir
Le soleil est tombé fou
Viens boire
Le ciel qui pisse le jour
Le plus bas du monde
Mange le temps qui passe
Et mets tes jambes dans tes yeux (29).

In other instances, while certain songs are inserted into the text without any translation, as for example "Kamba ta Biyela ba muhondele e-e / Kani mwatu e-e / Ko kwa kena e-e" (56), others are translated in a footnote by the author:
"Wa luwidi.... kokwa kena" (127), "Bo Badindamana...
Nsakala" (166), while others are explained in the body of
the narrative:

Wa mana bindamana
Beto bala mambu we yola.
Ce refrain dénonçait l’intention de génocide que les
Autorités nourrissaient à l’égard de Hozanna et de
Nsanga-Norda... (159).

Rather than a simple reminder that we are in the
presence of an African text, these Lingala words, accents
and rhythms are essential to the structure of the work, to
its philosophical, sociological and literary ambitions. By
introducing these words and songs, these African turns of
phrase Labou Tansi deconstructs the form of the French
novelistic genre in order to produce an authentic African
text. Les Yeux du volcan thus becomes the dream of an
African future, an Africa that is condemned to make a
revolution viewed from a Lingala/Kikongo point of view.

Even so, the novel is also rich in allusions as it
makes references to certain events which have a significant
impact on African history and studies. On page 70, for
instance, the discovery of "pétrole quatorze" by a doctor
calls to mind the work of the Senegalese historian and
anthropologist Cheik Anta Diop who was famous for his work
with "Carbon 12," while the name of Tombalbaye (one of the
cities in which the story is set) and a reference to "des
Tirailleurs tchadiens" (13) recall the events of the Chadian
civil war. (It must be noted that Tombalbaye was the name
of the Chadian president whose overthrow led to that country's civil war.) Elsewhere, the narrator comments on the taking of the Bastille and refers to this French Revolution as "un bordel d'une Révolution" (73), thus removing the sacred aura surrounding the revolution on whose ideals France's "civilizing" mission may be said to have been based. Missionary activities in Africa also come up for scrutiny. While Labou Tansi does not devote entire pages to the critique of the actions of missionaries in Africa in the manner of Mongo Beti (Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba) or Ferdinand Oyono (Une vie de bov), he nevertheless stresses the dubious character of some of the missionaries who were in Africa to win more than souls. Thus in the novel, the birth of a black child with blue eyes is attributed to Father Luxor Sadoun who, "basé à Indiana, ne passait jamais trois dimanches de suite sans se voir obligé de venir lâcher la volonté du Seigneur sur les pécheresses invétérées de Hondo-Norté et de Hozanna" (83).

Les yeux du volcan is also rich in intertextual references. For example, the expression "maman de ma mère" calls to mind Labou Tansi's other novel, L'État honteux in which this expression figures prominently as one of the favorite phrases of the president. In addition, the events of Les yeux du volcan take place in the cities of Hondo-Norté, Westina, Hozanna, and Nsanga Norda, the same cities in which the events of Les sept solitudes de Lorsa Lopez are
set. Similarly, when we come across "le temps des des Oncles français" (12) we are reminded of Henri Lopes' *Le Pleurer-Rire* where the French people are also referred to as "les Oncles." *Les yeux du volcan* is also to be seen as a critique of the political situation in African since the actions of the Authorities are typical of the actions of other political figures already denounced by Labou Tansi. One can therefore add that with *Les yeux du volcan* Labou Tansi continues his project of conjoining political denunciation and style.

The problematics of translation:

As we saw in Chapter One the most fundamental problem of all translation from French to English lies in the psychological differences between the two languages since each language possesses its own proprieties and carries its own peculiar meaning. However, this problem becomes even more pronounced in the case of a writer like Labou Tansi who deploys a kind of French that is at once both strange and personal but, at the same time, marked by a certain local quality that can be termed "African." In other words, because he is a talented writer, Labou Tansi has managed to twist the French language to suit his own purposes, and in the process has shown his mastery in creating new words and shifting the meaning of existing ones. However, although we refer to Labou Tansi's style as being highly personal, there
is a sense in which we can describe his language of writing as one based on the African languages and the special kind of French spoken in the streets of Brazzaville.

Thus the other major problem that arises from the translation of his work resides in rendering and maintaining the form and meaning of his idiosyncratic manipulation of French into the English language. Let us take an example extracted from his description of the flow of a river and the vegetation that surrounds it:

_Puis il avait regardé le fleuve, lancé comme une furia d’eau et de rochers sur des kilomètres, dans une espèce de danse blanchâtre. L’autre rive montrait les rochers du Diable et leurs dents, gestionnaires d’une végétation de misère. Au loin, flottaient les lambeaux d’un horizon affligé, qui tentait de régler sa mésentente avec les crêtes de Hondo-Norte. Valzara, derrière l’île d’Abaono, semblait se gratter la tête entre deux nuages, comme pour protester contre les agissements des collines attribuées aux Libanais._ (8-9)

The most difficult expression to translate in the above extract is "danse blanchâtre." Since this expression is used to describe the kind of whitish substance that forms on the surface of the river when it flows over the rocks, a literal rendition of the expression as "a whitish dance" or "an off-white dance" would be meaningless in English. The other alternative would be to derive the meaning of the adjective "blanchâtre" from "blanc" meaning "pure" or "innocent." However, a critical reading of the passage will demonstrate that while the narrator attributes human actions to the non-human objects in the passage (for example "régler
sa mésentente," and "gratter la tête"), he describes the flow of the river, the surrounding vegetation, and the skyline in very negative terms. The word "furia" illustrates the intense, disordered and destructive rage of the river, while the very name of the rocks, "Diable" continues the image of disorder and destruction. In addition, while describing the vegetation as poor and the horizon as being "afflicted" the author’s choice of the words "mésentente," "gratter" and "protestar" further serves to expand on the image of desolation painted in the passage. Hence, the appropriate translation of "danse blanchâtre" would therefore be a translation that retains the negative image portrayed by the author. Since the flow of the river has been described as disordered and disorganized, the dance must perforce be characterized as disharmonious or without rhythm. Thus, my translation of the above passage goes like this:

Then he had looked at the river, flowing like a furia of water and rocks along several kilometers in a kind of rhythmless dance. On the other bank could be seen Devil’s rocks and their jagged edges, rulers of a vegetation of misery. In the distance hang a glimpse of an afflicted horizon that was trying to come to terms with the crests of Hondo-Norte. Valzara, lying behind the island of Abanonso, seemed to scratch its head between the clouds as if to make a protest against the intrigues of the hills which were attributed to the Lebanese.

Similarly, a word like "ramardage" in the expression "Quel ramardage magnifique!" (137) has to be understood not in terms of its actual meaning in French but in terms of how
it is employed by the author. "Ramardage" in French refers to the action of repairing fishing nets after the fishing season. In the novel, it is applied to the coming together of the giant and Benoit Goldmann, two apparently different people, for a common cause. Thus the expression has to be understood as a form of arrangement. I therefore chose to translate the above expression as "What a magnificent arrangement!"

The other major problem concerns the translation of the names of streets and other places. To retain the Francophone "flavor" of the original text, the initial strategy was to leave those names untranslated in the English version. However, names of places such as "l'ancien marché aux Chiens," "la colline des Soixante-Mètres," and street names like "la rue des Poissons-Chats" or "la rue du Corbeau" will create an unnecessary exotic effect in an English text. As we pointed out in our analysis of the novel, one of the reasons the author put forward for writing Les yeux du volcan was to point out the ridiculousness of the speed at which names of streets and places were changing in his hometown of Brazzaville. Thus, the author's choice of names serves to achieve the effect of emphasizing the absurdity in the names themselves and the preposterous nature of their change, an absurdity that leads to the production of a comic effect in the French text. To achieve the same effect as the one in the French version, the best
possible alternative was to translate the names into English. Two examples will illustrate this point:

L’homme emprunta la rue de la Paix au niveau de l’ancien marché aux Chiens, dans l’ancien quartier des Hollandais, s’arrêta un moment pour river ses beaux yeux aux tuiles vertes de la cathédrale Anouar, traversa le quartier Haoussa, arriva au rond-point des Musiciens... L’homme monta la colline des Soixante-Mètres, traversa le chemin de fer, dépassa le bois d’Orzengi. (11)

[The man took Peace street when he arrived at Dog market in the old Dutch quarter, stopped for a moment to rivet his beautiful eyes on the green tiles of Anouar cathedral, crossed the Hausa quarter, and arrived at Musicians roundabout... The man went up Sixty-Meters hill, crossed the railway track and went past the Orzengi forest.]

The second example is even more illustrative of the absurd nature of the names of the streets and avenues which, in this case, are made up of plant names (Bougainvillées, Frangipaniers), a bird (Corbeau) and a book of alphabets (Abécédaire):

Il traversa la rue des Bougainvillées et l’allée des Frangipaniers, arriva devant la fontaine des Chinois, hésita une autre fois avant de choisir une autre fois la droite; il descendit la rue du Corbeau, traversa la voie ferrée, arriva au pied de la montagne d’Italie, choisit sa première gauche en empruntant l’avenue des Aérogares jusqu’à l’Abécédaire. (12)

[He crossed Bougainvillea street and Frangipanni alley and arrived in front of the Chinese fountain, hesitated once more before making another right turn; he went down Crow street, crossed the railway line, and arrived at the foot of Italy mountain. He chose the first left turn while following Airport avenue right up to the Alphabet Primer.]

The translation of ideophones and onomatopoeias presents yet another problem in translating African literature.
Although Labou Tansi does not utilize many of these forms in his writing, a translator of his work still has to be alive to their presence in the text. In *Les yeux du volcan* for instance, he describes the cry of the cocks in the following terms:

> Au-dehors, les coqs avaient commencé leur concert d'engueulades pour marquer la fin de la première moitié du jour.  
> - Kokodi hé ko! (102)

Two remarks can be made about this passage. In the first place Labou Tansi does not characterize a cockcrow as a triumphant cry, the way it is understood in French, and he does not use the standard French exclamation "cocorico!" to represent the sound made by the cock. Thus, the fact that he describes cockcrow as a noisy disturbance and elects to present the Congolese (or African) sound made by the cock in the French text attests to his design to emphasize the African specificity of his text. For this reason, rendering "Kokodi hé ko!" as "cook-a-doodle-doo" would not only be inappropriate, since it will ascribe to the text an English context it does not have, but it will also destroy the African foundation upon which the text is based. The best strategy, in my opinion, is to leave the Congolese onomatopoeic sound in the English text in much the same way as the author has done in the French:

> Outside the house, the roosters had started their chorus of noisy disturbances to signal the end of the first half of the day.  
> "Kokodi hé ko!"
Another problem encountered in the translation process concerns the translation of songs from French into English. As I have already pointed out earlier, the author himself has elected to translate some of these songs from the local language into the French narrative. Although he does not provide the Lingala original, we realize that he has been able to achieve a certain rhythm and rhyme in the French. Let us take two examples to illustrate this point:

Viens voir
Le soleil est tombe fou.
Viens boire
Le ciel qui pisse le jour
Le plus bas du monde
Mange le temps qui passe
Et met tes jambes dans tes yeux. (29)

In this example, the structure of the song is marked by the rhyme scheme ababcdc and there is an alliterative sound "t" towards the end of the song: "le temps, tes jambes, tes yeux." Unfortunately, in my English translation, I was not able to carry this poetic quality that the author achieves in his French translation of the Lingala song. Since it was not possible to achieve the same stylistic qualities as those of the author, my translation focussed more on the meaning of the song rather than on its structure and style:

Come and see
The sun has gone mad.
Come and drink
The sky which gushes
The lowest day in the world
Consume the passing time
And put your legs in your eyes.
The second example, which the narrator describes as a song of solidarity, builds on the poetic qualities mentioned above. The whole song is based on a rhythm of assonance /ou/ and alliteration /t/. As in the previous example, it was impossible to transfer this quality from French into English. Here is the French version:

Foutez la merde
Nous foutrons la paix
Bâclez tout
Nous foutrons la joie
C'est le temps des comptes
Chaque minute est une tête
Foutez la trouille
Nous tout-foutrons debout. (29)

And here goes my translation:

Damn shit
We will kick out peace
Botch up everything
We will kick out happiness
It's the time for an explanation
Every minute is a head
Scare the pants off everyone
We will screw everything up.

Thus in the two examples quoted above, my strategy was to capture the tone and meaning of Labou Tansi's language since it would be impossible to transfer his very personal style into the English version.

I have already mentioned Labou Tansi's skill at creating new words and shifting the meaning of existing ones. Fortunately, the meaning of some of the words he creates can be discerned from the immediate context in which they appear. Let us look at the following example:
Pour nous, tout était clair: nous vivions dans un bordel dont les Autorités étaient au-dessus des lois. Nous pensions même que nos Autorités étaient devenues "légivores." Celui qui avait un rien d’autorité le montrait en grignotant la Constitution ou les articles du Code civil. (20)

In this quotation it is easy to see that "légivores" is a combination of "légal" and the Latin word "vorare" (to devour). For this reason, it is not difficult to translate "légivores" as "legivorous" since the sound of the English word will create the same effect as the French:

For us, everything was clear: we were living in a brothel whose Authorities were above the law. We even thought that our Authorities had become "legivorous." Anybody who had a tiny bit of authority showed it by nibbling at the Constitution or the articles of the civil code.

The same reasoning can be made for a word like "Pleurotte." From the context in which it is used, this word can be said to mean "Crybaby." However, I opted to translate it as "Pleurotus" in order to maintain the sound quality. Although "pleur" in "Pleurotus" does not convey the meaning of crying in English as it does in the French word "Pleurotte," readers of the English version can still get the meaning from the context in which it is used:

Nous avions oublié l’inoubliable, car il arrivait sans cesse au colonel Nola de pleurer, à telle enseigne que certaines language l’appelaient en silence colonel "Pleurotte." (37)

[We had forgotten the unforgettable, for Colonel Nola could never stop weeping, so much so that some folks were secretly calling him "Pleurotus."]

In other instances, it is clear that Labou Tansi employs certain words in a personal why while exploiting the
meaning of those words in normal usage. We shall take one example to illustrate this point:

"Je vous ai gouvernés, messieurs, et voici que vous chiez sur mon cousin de confiance. Quelle mocherie!" (40)

In this quotation, it can be recognized that although "mocherie" is the author's own creation, it is based on an actual word "moche," meaning "ugly" or "rotten." However, what the speaker alludes to in the above passage is not simply the notion of ugliness or rottenness but rather an attitude of ungratefulness. Based on this interpretation, I translated the passage as follows:

"Gentlemen, I have governed you well and now you shit on my trustworthy cousin. What an ingratitude!"

Sometimes when Labou Tansi employs a word of his own creation or a word from an African language, he cushions its meaning in the course of the narrative. For instance when Colonel Pedro Gazani refuses the drink offered by Warrant Officer Benoît Goldmann, he produces his own drink and explains:

"J'appelle ça le "kabronahata": une invention de mes méninges. Ça pisse moins fort que votre gnôle. Et c'est dur comme du métal." (123)

In this example the word "kabronahata" presents no difficulty since the author provides an explanation:

"I call this "kabronahata": my brain-child. It goes down more easily than your hooch. And it is as strong as metal."
Like the other authors whose works we have studied, Labou Tansi makes use of proverbs or sayings to explain, to illustrate speech. The translator has to recognize these sayings and render them in the same manner as the author. For instance when the mayor pays a visit to the giant, he starts their deliberations with a local saying. And as is often the case in such situations, the reply from the giant is also couched in the form of a saying:

- Nos ancêtres disaient qu’on n’as pas le droit de renvoyer un étranger, dit le maire en proposant un cigare à l’homme.
- Vous avez eu des ancêtres intelligents, dit le colosse qui refusa le cigare. Mes ancêtres à moi ont dit qu’on ne doit pas aller sous l’eau les yeux grands ouverts. (65)

To be adequate the English translation must capture the structure and tone of the African sayings:

"Our ancestors say that no one has the right to send a stranger away," said the mayor as he offered the man cigar.
"Your ancestors were very intelligent," said the giant who refused the cigar. "My ancestors say that one must not go under water with one’s eyes wide open."

Although the last sentence could be translated as "my ancestors say that you must look before you leap," doing so will destroy the primacy of the African idiom that the author establishes in the narrative.

Aside from the difficulty in finding the appropriate English words for the individual words that Labou Tansi employs, the greatest problem that faces the translator of Labou Tansi’s work is the task of transferring the quality of
his language, the ways in which he manipulates the alien and potentially alienating French language, into an adequate and appropriate English medium. A good number of the passages in Les yeux du volcan point to this assertion. There are instances of what may be termed "francogolais," that is, the use of French in a Congolese context, whose "equivalent" in English is very difficult to determine. Let us look at the following sentences contained in the admonition of Jean-Paul II to the authorities of Hondo-Norte: "Foutez la merde que vous pouvez, tuez qui vous voulez dans votre enclos.... Foutez la viande que vous voulez! Laissez la lumière en paix, messieurs." (17) which I translated as "Do every damn thing you please, kill whoever you want in your little corner... Kill all the flesh that you damn well please! But gentlemen, leave the light alone." Or the turn of phrase we hear when the people describe a sleepless night: "Quelle cuite d’enculé nous nous sommes donnée la nuit dernière! Nous n’avons pas fermé l’œil avant la troisième rigolade de Lydie" (58) which I translated as "What a terrible night we had last night! We didn’t sleep a wink before Lydie’s third laugh." Although my English translation of these sentences is not as forceful as the French, it is still an attempt to capture Labou Tansi’s unique style and meaning.

Another problem that confronts the translator of Labou Tansi’s text is finding appropriate English words for the
different language registers present in the French. In *Les yeux du volcan*, not only does the Congolese author employ popular terms like "foutez," "enculé," and "badinez" throughout the text, he also resorts to the use of slang terms like "zigoto," (a strange looking individual) "pognon," (money) and "baraqué" (to be well-built) as well as such technical terms as "bousingot" (leather hat), "vésanie" (insanity) and "lagotriche" (woolly monkey). An effective translation of *Les yeux du volcan* will therefore be one where the translator is not only familiar with the African context of the narrative but also sensitive to the different shades of meaning that Labou Tansi manipulates in his use of the French language.

Quite obviously, in the translation of Labou Tansi's text, as indeed any African literary text, Western definitions of equivalence should be approached with caution since the translator of an African literary text is not just concerned with establishing equivalence of natural language but rather of artistic procedures. For an African text, these procedures cannot be considered in isolation but must be located within the specific cultural-temporal context within which they are utilized. As we have already pointed out, the creative manipulation of English and French in postcolonial Anglophone and Francophone literatures makes it necessary to challenge and redefine many accepted notions in translation theory. Because these postcolonial texts are a
hybrid of indigenous and imported modes of storytelling, and because of the linguistic and cultural layering within them, conventional notions of equivalence, or ideas of loss and gain which have long dominated western translation theory are in and of themselves inadequate as translation tools. Indeed, since the ultimate goal of such literatures is to subvert hierarchies by bringing together the "dominant" and the "repressed," by exploding and confounding different symbolic worlds and separate systems of signification in order to create a mutual intersignification, their translation must of necessity confront, redefine and, in the process, deconstruct existing translation theories. An African literary text has both an autonomous (in the sense of being based on African culture) and a communicative (the cross-fertilization of the different languages) character to it. The translator must therefore bear in mind both its autonomous and its communicative aspects and any theory of translation should take both elements into account.

NOTE

1 Interview with A. Singou Basseha, in Bingo, August 1988, 52-53.
CONCLUSION

The analysis of the creative use of European languages in African literature shows very clearly how great is the debt owed to translation. Our examination has shown that translation is significant in African literature in two senses: it explores the practice whereby texts are transferred from one culture to another in the ordinary sense of the word (Chapters VIII) and, more importantly, it explores the process whereby, as a result of the post-colonial legacy, writers in a "weakened" culture transpose and transform their languages and models into the dominant culture (Chapters III-VII).

The first sense of translation has come to play an important role in the criticism and interpretation of African literature since more and more African work (in African or European languages) is being translated into other languages. Translators who struggle to translate African literary texts will enable many people of different cultural backgrounds to know, understand and appreciate...
African culture. However, as we have already remarked, the translation of African literary texts involves more than the possession of a certain linguistic competence. The translator, in addition to his/her linguistic competence, must be able to show proof of certain extra-linguistic abilities which consist of analyzing and interpreting the context in which the African literary text is embedded. Unfortunately, because most translators of African work adhere too closely to the tenets of translation theories developed in the West (Chapter I), their translated texts give primacy to the European languages that the African writers had sought to subvert in their act of writing.

The second sense of translation, the sense that I refer to as creative translation by African writers, manifest itself in African writing in forms which we have identified as calquing, cushioning, and contextualization, but especially in the authors’ transposition of African oral and traditional literary techniques of storytelling into the European written genre. It must be pointed out that one difference between the modern African novel and its European counterpart is that of narrative form. For stylistic and ideological reasons, African writers tend to have been inspired by oral literature and traditions. Thus, oral literature is important in two ways: it is important to the writer and it is valid in itself. The primary reason oral literature is vital to the African writer is that it is one
of the strongest traditions he/she knows, a living tradition that has both literary and moral consequences. This tradition has helped to shape the writer's conceptions of the world and his/her relationship to the external world. In the act of creative translation, oral literature is identified by the use of its elements: imagery, proverbs, wise sayings, myths, folktales, dramatic factors and lyrical language. In the African context, proverbs are associated with the art of speech making and they embody the wisdom of the community. However, as Theo Vincent (1989) points out, it must be emphasized that the time significance of oral literature in modern African writing does not lie in how much of it is abstracted into any one literary piece. It lies rather in the deeper (spiritual) atmosphere which it provides for a work and the meaning and structure that its aggregate presence gives to a particular work. Thus, to paraphrase Abiola Irele (1993), the major forms of the African oral tradition are employed in modern African writing to project structures of the collective mind that serve as explicative narratives of the world.\(^1\) Undoubtedly, Chinua Achebe and Ahmadou Kourouma are the grand masters in the transposition and re-creation of this verbal art form into the creative translation of African literature.

According to Bassnett-McGuire (1988) just as literary study has changed its nature and methodology since its development outside Europe, so notions of translation have
begun to lose their overly European focus. Thus, just as literary studies has sought to shake off its Eurocentric inheritance, so translation thinking is branching out in new ways, because the emphasis on the ideological as well as the linguistic makes it possible for the subject to be discussed in the wider terms of post-colonial discourse. The Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade has introduced a new metaphor, one that may be applicable to the African situation - the image of the Brazilian writer as cannibal, devouring the colonial language in a ritual that results in the creation of something completely new. The metaphor of the post-colonial writer as cannibal is based on a revised notion of what cannibalism signifies, considered not from the perspective of the European colonizer, but from the perspective of those peoples whose cannibalistic practices derive from an alternative vision of society. When applied to the African context, the cannibalistic notion of writing involves a changed idea of the value of the colonial language in relation to its place in the production of African discourse. The African writer no longer considers the European language as the only viable means of narrative construction and expression. Faced with the charge (such as the one by Ngugi wa Thiongo) that by writing in European languages that is spoken, let alone read, by just a few million speakers in Africa, African writers are in effect participating, however inadvertently, in the further
canonization of European-language literature, contemporary African writers seek new ways to sustain a discourse that can be called African. Thus, their act of writing in the dominant European tongue is both linguistic and political. As we have already seen, their writing reveals the stakes, conflicts, tensions and the power struggles between the European and African languages. By choosing to "Africanize," that is translate, their languages and models into the European language the African writers question the historically established authority of the European language and establish their languages as equally viable means of producing discourse.

In this perspective, creative translation is mobilized for the sake of the reaffirmation, re-appropriation, and re-examination of African cultural identity, and as a means of differentiating one's self from the other, where the other, in African literature, implies European languages and models. Thus, just as the colonial discourse marginalized African languages and institutions, so the Europhone "Africanized" novels reveal the otherness of the European languages. In other words, in the post-colonial moment, the act of appropriating the European language leads to a reversal of roles that relegates the colonizer's language to the position of minor, so as to dominate it.

In this respect, for the Francophone African writers, writing is the experiment of blending African models with
European models on one hand, and on the other, subverting or "violating" the European models. The distortions imposed on syntax, the introduction of an unfamiliar vocabulary, borrowings from local languages translated or not, in the form of a "collage," expressions of traditional orality, the use of French spoken in the suburbs of African capitals, the insults, songs and proverbs introduced into the story—all these techniques interrupt the narration in French and force the reader to reconstruct the text. In certain instances, understanding is denied the monolingual reader who is then forced to recognize the importance of the other language in the narrative reconstruction of history and reality.

In an effort to decolonize the African text in the European language of writing, the authors draw from the vocabulary registers of the different African languages. They conjugate transitive verbs in the absolute, abuse nominalized adjectives and invent adverbs. As Senghor (1961) had earlier written in Noctures: "Que meure le poème se désintègre la syntaxe, que s'abiment les mots qui ne sont pas essentiels." The result of this initial destruction is the re-creation of a rich and original language that has to be considered in its own right. In other words, if these writers "violate" the academic or standard French, they do so in order to create works which are enriched by their respective mother tongues and whose poetic value can be easily recognized. In this sense the destructive violence
of a norm liberates the creator in these writers. At the same time the crudeness and violence of the language and the deliberate penchant of the authors for the macabre express a post-colonial condition marked by the seal of hopelessness.

As a corollary to the decolonization of the African text the violence inflicted on the language and the violence represented in the exercise of power by African leaders can also be seen as the only possible response by the writers to the violence that permeates the African post-colonial universe. According to E. Mudimbe-Boyi (1991) while the excesses of power lead to the underdevelopment of African countries and continue to humiliate Africans, "la violence de l'écriture crée dans la littérature africaine une dérive de la francophonie (et de la francographie), porteuse de valeurs positives qui témoignent d'une appropriation totale de la langue et qui fondent ainsi la liberté créatrice et le pouvoir d'invention de l'écrivain" (117). In other words, the writings of this generation of new writers cannot be analysed only in terms of the kind of socio-ethnological, historical, and cultural readings that characterized critical approaches to earlier African fiction. With these writers one now needs to place the emphasis on the creative process itself, that is, on the politics and process of writing. As Jacques Chévrier points out, "le récit ne se résume plus à un sens univoque: il devient l'espace d'une vérité à reconstruire de toutes pièces. Il en résulte qu'on
s'oriente vers une conception plus symbolique de la littérature au détriment du sociologue. À une écriture de la politique succède une politique de l'écriture" (64).

At this moment in Africa's history, Francophone African literature, which arises from the need to reaffirm and reclaim African original orality, and springs from a will to assert itself in relation to the West, actualizes the African imaginary world in a time of crisis. The violence that it sometimes exalts should not be taken as an end in itself. It fits in with a conscious process which makes it possible for us to understand the traditional African culture. Thus, at odds with the colonial literature in its beginnings, and drawing from the traditional culture and the mother tongue in its "modern" formulation, the Francophone novel in its most recent actuality, is constructed in conformity with an esthetics of violence and rupture, where violence and rupture are enacted through language.

NOTES


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