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REPETITION, RESISTANCE, AND RENEWAL:
POSTMODERN AND POSTCOLONIAL
NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN SELECTED
FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN NOVELS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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ABSTRACT

Postmodernism and postcolonialism are both offsprings of modernity. To be postmodern does not mean to totally obliterate modernity. In postmodernity, however, the illusions of progress, order, universalism, hegemony, are dissipated. Reason, the very foundation on which modernity was built, and logocentrism, are challenged. Their master-narrative stature is subverted. Emphasis is now on "petits récits," plural voices are listened to. All societies are experiencing the plurality of voices and cultures, and most are expressing them in their cultural productions, such as novels.

One cannot assign dates to the paradigm shift that has accompanied this multiplicity of voices, as it is an ongoing process. It was, however, the publication of two controversial novels in 1968, Ahmadou Kourouma's Les Soleils des indépendances, and Yambo Ouologuem's Les Devoirs de violence, that made critics recognize and pay more attention to the changes in Francophone African novels. The critical perspective that these two novels inaugurated has been enriched and expanded by other novelists all across the African continent. Writers still remain committed to socio-
political and cultural issues, but they now pay less attention to confronting the Western Other. If they do at all, it is not to replace the Other's discourse with some liberating discourse. They do so in order to put their own discourse to a test, and thus, to find out that there is no such thing as the true voice or discourse. Kourouma, Ouologuem, and Sony Labou Tansi forcefully send this message in the domains of history, power, and language. They criticize the discourse of the Other, but they also cast a critical eye on their different societies. Mariama Bâ's concerns for women at first sight only rehash the traditional voices heard in women's songs as they sing while carrying out their daily work on farms. What Bâ does, however, is go beyond those complaints and reassure women that despite conventional wisdom, they can develop on their own terms, if they are willing to assert their individual identities.
Dedicated to my late parents,
Yei Nepor and Tamba Ndomaina
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE POSTMODERN POSTCOLONIAL ALLIANCE.

Le savoir postmoderne n'est pas seulement l'instrument des pouvoirs. Il raffine notre sensibilité aux différences, renforce notre capacité de supporter l'incommensurable. Lui-même ne trouve pas sa raison dans l'homologie des experts, mais dans la paralogie des inventeurs. Jean-François Lyotard, La Condition Postmoderne, 8-9.

Postmodernism is a term that is used to designate very complex and intricate processes. In the domains of science, literature, culture, and the arts it has contributed to changing what Lyotard calls "the game rules." More recently, the emergence of postcolonialism as a critical mode has given rise to similar complexities and it has become more and more evident that the implications of this critical mode reach beyond the borders of the countries that were once colonial entities. The relationship between the two critical concepts has provoked endless controversies. Some critics question the very validity of the two post-critical terms. Others accept a qualified alliance between the two approaches, but in entertaining such reservations
their positions appear paradoxical and ambivalent. In this introductory chapter, I will first of all trace some of the causes of these controversies, then I will discuss the notion of modernity and its relation to colonialism. This will allow me to consider the relationship between the post-derivatives of modernity and colonialism and to bring out the paradoxical positions adopted by several critics of these concepts. Finally, I will point out some specific ways in which the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism can be useful in the domain of literary analysis of post-colonial novels.

To a great extent the controversies derive from the uncertain meaning of the two post-words. It is already banal to say that there is no consensus on the issue of the definition of the two terms. For instance, in the case of postmodernism any attempt at the definition will be futile because there is a proliferation of meanings of the term not only across but also within the various disciplines. As Ben Agger succinctly puts it, "[d]efining postmodernism is as difficult as dodging raindrops" (1992, 293). In literary postmodernism, for example, McHale identifies

"John Barth's postmodernism, the literature of replenishment; Charles Newman's postmodernism, the literature of an inflationary economy; Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism, a general
condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime; Ihab Hassan's postmodernism, a stage on the road to the spiritual unification of humankind; and so on" (1987, 4).

To this list one can add McHale's own postmodernism with its ontological "dominant" which he opposes to the epistemological "dominant" of modernism; there is also Fredric Jameson's postmodernism, "the cultural logic of late capitalism; Jean Baudriallard's postmodernism, in which the simulacrum gloats over the body of the deceased referent;" and Linda Hutcheon's own "paradoxical postmodernism of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions of ideologies of dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world" (Hutcheon 1989: 11). The problem of arriving at a consensus on the definition of postmodernism bespeaks the problem of defining a cultural process of which we are ourselves a part. The same goes for postcolonialism. Therefore, no matter what personal positions we adopt vis-à-vis postmodernism and postcolonialism, or however acceptable or unacceptable any of these definitions of postmodernism may be, the real import of the two critical modes lies less in the way we define them, than in the way they have contributed to define and shape various fields of contemporary scholarly activity and our cultural history in general.

Closely tied to the question of definitions is the problem of historical periodization, or the so-called
historical circumstances that "gave rise" to postmodernism and postcolonialism. The title of a book edited by Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber, *Postmodernism Across the Ages...*, suggests the futility of such periodization. According to Readings and Schaber, postmodernism is "not a new 'now' that came along after the Second World War or when the 1960s ended or began.... To say that the postmodern simply comes after the modern in diachronic succession is to say that it is the most recent modernism". To them postmodernism is "an event, not a moment in the consciousness of things for the artist, for the people, for the spirit of an age; nor is it a realization of the political nature of art" (Readings and Schaber 1993, 6-7). These comments can justifiably be made about postcolonialism also. There is in both critical modes what Djelal Kadir calls "a recursive move back to antecedents, as in the recurrence of modernity in postmodernism and of coloniality in postcolonialism" (Kadir, 20).

The third concern pertaining to this debate is the distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. Since Habermas’s 1980 lecture 'Modernity versus Postmodernity,' and the attack it drew from Lyotard in 1984 in *La Condition Postmoderne* (see Bertens 1995), the distinction between the two terms has been considerably blurred. And attempts at clarifying that distinction have only complicated matters. For instance, Jameson rarely makes any distinction between
the two. Although in his "'Foreword' to the English translation" of Lyotard's book he defines postmodernism as the 'cultural logic of late capitalism,' in his famous essay, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' he "retains the word postmodernism for both the socio-economic periodization and the cultural designation" (Hutcheon 1993: 25). Thus, he conflates the two terms into one.

Ben Agger tries to "distinguish carefully" the two terms but his carefulness renders the distinction between them even cloudier. First, he sees postmodernity as "a civilizational stage" and postmodernism as "a theory of culture and society." Then he stresses the interconnectedness of the terms, but he also points out that "[p]ostmodernism, properly understood, helps reverse the direction of postmodernity.... By postmodernity I am referring not to a concrete stage of civilization somehow set apart from modernity, notably capitalism. Postmodernity ideologically postures as a postmodern stage of world history in order to suggest the end of class, race, gender and geographic inequalities." He further equates postmodernity with Bell's notion of the end of ideology and he sees it as serving "an axial moral and political principle of a new individualism." In the same vein, he explains that postmodernism, which is the "cultural expression" of postmodernity "is not really postmodernism at
all but only warmed-over end-of-ideology theory appropriate to post-1950s capitalism" (182-83, my italics).

For Linda Hutcheon postmodernism is "the cultural notion" and postmodernity is "the designation of a social and philosophical period or condition." But she also points to the confusion over the usage of the terms, especially when some define postmodernity "as a condition determined by universal, diffuse cynicism, by a panic sense of the hypereal and a simulacrum" (Hutcheon 1989: 23-24). Terry Eagleton also emphasizes the distinction between the two terms at the beginning of his recent book, The Illusions of Postmodernism, although he clearly confesses to not respecting those distinctions in the rest of the book. According to him, "postmodernism generally refers to a form of contemporary culture, whereas postmodernity alludes to a specific historical period." He further designates postmodernity as "a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity, and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation" Postmodernism, on the other hand, "is a style of culture which reflects something of this epochal change in a depthless, decentered, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday
experience" (Eagleton 1996, vii, his italics). The complexities notwithstanding, one main thing could be gleaned from the foregoing debates: there is a distinct difference between postmodernity-- the stage or period or condition and postmodernism-- the cultural expression of this condition.

One unquestionable fact about postmodernism and postcolonialism, however, is that they both grow out of and against modernity at one and the same time. As is the case with postmodernity and postcoloniality, the debate over modernity is informed by the lack of agreement over meaning. Lawrence Cahoone begins his discussion of modernity by "provisionally" defining it as:

the ideas, principles and patterns of interpretation, of diverse kinds ranging from the philosophic to the economic, on which western and central European and American society and culture, from the sixteen [sic] through the twentieth centuries, increasingly found itself to be based. (1)

Cahoone's definition raises a number of issues which are usually prominent in the discussion about modernity; namely, the question of origins and the problem of determining its scope in time and the extent of its preoccupations. Stephen Toulmin identifies "two distinct starting points, a humanistic one grounded in classical literature, and a scientific one rooted in 17th-century natural philosophy" (43). He also recognizes that "Some people date the origin of modernity to the year 1436, with Gutenberg's adoption of
moveable type; some to A.D. 1520, and Luther's rebellion against Church authority; others to 1648, and the end of The Thirty Years' War; others to the American or French Revolution of 1776 or 1789; 1895, with Freud's Interpretation of Dreams and the rise of "modernism" in the fine arts and literature" (Toulmin, 5). Jürgen Habermas traces the Latin use of the term modern as far back as the fifth century (92), although the modern era, for him, began when Immanuel Kant "showed how impartial, universal moral standards can be applied to judge intentions and policies in the political realm" (see Toulmin, 8). According to Habermas, the concept of modernity itself began with the advent of the "ideals of the French Enlightenment." He asserts that "[S]pecifically, the idea of being 'modern' by looking back to the ancients changed with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment" (92). Thus, Habermas identifies the Enlightenment as the beginning of the modernity that is in question today, and he traces the roots of the present controversies to the same period. By referring to "the extravagant expectation" of the Enlightenment thinkers, Habermas seems to intimate that indeed, right from the start, modernity has been fraught with inherent problems. What he calls the "extravagant expectation" was the Enlightenment thinkers' assumption that "the arts would
promote not only the control of natural forces but would also further understanding of the world and of the self, would promote moral progress, the justice of institutions, and even the happiness of human beings" (98).

While different critics trace the origins of modernity to specific political, social, or religious events at different moments in the history of Western society, the most commonly cited circumstance is Galileo's and Descartes' "commitment to new, rational methods of inquiry," and the "shared assumptions about rationality" among all parties to the debate (Toulmin, 9). First and foremost, there was the assumption that "the modes of life and thought in modern Europe from 1700 on ... were more rational than those typical of medieval Europe, or those found in less developed societies and cultures today." It was also assumed that the only procedures for handling "intellectual and practical problems" in any field of study were "rational procedures," which were available to only those who set "superstition and mythology aside and [attacked] those problems in ways free of local prejudice and transient fashion." These assumptions, as Toulmin remarks, "were not confined to philosophers, but were shared by people in all walks of life." (Toulmin, 11-12). That is why "the debate over modernity is not the exclusive property of our intellectual mandarins,... It is an everyday topic for thinking people in the street and the lunchroom as well as the seminar room,
and it pervades popular discussion in the media" (Cahoone: 4-5). Whether it is "the political claims of the modern nation-state," or "the rise of industry," or "Newton's creation of modern science," or "Kant's emphasis on universal maxims, or the "faith that science is the proven road to human health and welfare": the linchpin of modernity remains this "conception of 'rationality' established by European natural philosophers in the 17th century, and promised intellectual certainty and harmony," Toulmin reminds us (8-9). This makes the 1630s the most logical starting date of modernity. But, as Toulmin points out, the accepting of the 17th century as the starting point and the attendant belief in the "rational methods in all serious fields of intellectual inquiry" can only be characterized as the "standard account or received view" of modernity, which has persisted to our day (13, Toulmin's italics).

Thirty years after Galileo (in astronomy and mechanics), and Descartes (in logic and epistemology) provided the intellectual foundations for rationality, the "commitment to 'rationality' was extended to the practical realm, when the political and diplomatic system of the European States was organized on the basis of nations" (9). Thus, the commitment to scientific rationality was expanded to include the whole of Europe, as Reason eventually became that "mysterious yet efficacious motive for justifying comprehension as well as action, the undefinable quality
that stood for the very essence of humanity," as Karlis Racevskis would have it.¹ This commitment to rationality was soon to reach beyond its borders; as Cahoon puts it,

the non-Western world has been powerfully influenced and shaped by this culture as well. Through colonialism, trade and the export of ideology, the modern West has injected components of its own civilization into the indigenous cultures of non-Western societies. Most of the world's nations now resemble a kind of historical layer cake, in which social groups living side by side embody the lifestyles of different centuries, and this layering is largely determined by the extent to which a people has been influenced by Western modernity, either directly or indirectly. Most of the people of this earth are born into the world as children or step-children of modernity, whether they like it or not. (xi)

It is in this respect that it would be mistaken to arrogate either of the two post-approaches emanating from modernity to any one particular culture as its exclusive domain of concern. They are everyone's business.

The hegemony of Reason brought with it two important consequences. First, philosophers began casting "all their questions in terms that rendered them independent of context; (Toulmin, 21; his emphasis). Second, Western society grew to define itself as a rational society in which reason became the ethos not only of scientific and technological activities, but also of the government of people and the administration of things. As a result, the debate over modernity will necessarily center on the critique of Reason itself, which postmodern critics see as a mere illusion.
Reason, which has been modernity's engine has proven to be fundamentally deficient; specifically, it now appears self-centered and groundless because its legitimacy has been shown to rely solely on its own claim of invulnerability. Reason, we now realize, could never be the universal and objective interpretation of reality that a traditional representation of Enlightenment once proposed. (Racevskis 1993, 65-66)

Reason has not proven to be the source of progress or the privileged locus of truth, that the Enlightenment promised. It has only brought on the parochiality of humankind in our perception of the world, as Sony Labou Tansi intimates in his definition of the title of his second novel: L'État honte

"[...j'appelle 'L'État honteux,' la condition honteuse: l'ensauvagement de l'humain, l'incapacité de rester vivant. L'homme en dépaysement sous sa propre peau. C'est la faute à Voltaire? Je veux dire c'est la faute à Descartes. L'homme était un beau tout. Aujourd'hui c'est un infirme qui face au monde n'a qu'un oeil: la raison. Il a jeté toutes les autres parties de son corps par-dessus bord pour ne garder que la raison: quelle erreur! Oui quel monstre Monsieur Descartes!" (Sony Labou Tansi; qtd. in Jean-Michel Devésa 1996, 65; note #19).

The received view of modernity has come under increasing scrutiny in the second half of the 20th century. The background to this critique, was however, already provided earlier by such thinkers as Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, and Nietzsche, to mention just a few. Freud, for instance, "dealt a heavy blow to the psychological and anthropological notions characteristic of earlier modernity." He also attacked the "optimistic notions of
social progress" in his later writings. But it is Weber's rather ambiguous position that is of special interest here. Weber began by endorsing rationality because he believed that "[M]odernity exhibits a progressive rationalization of social life and bureaucratization of administration that gradually overcomes the mythical and irrational modes of organization characteristic of past ages" (Cahoone, 2-3). What I call an ambiguity in Weber's position is his questioning of this process of rationalization. He wondered whether this process would eventually lead to a culture of "[S]pecialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (Weber, 182). Weber also saw the triumph of the "secularization" of society as another of modernity's achievements. But, as Anthony Appiah argues, far from leading to the triumph of rationalization and secularization of the world, modernity led to the growth of 'religions' in many societies, only that the religions are now commodified (Appiah 1991, 343).

The debate over the stature of modernity intensified when critics began to realize, as Murray Code argues, that "the claim that rationality is completely bound up with systematic thinking can be regarded as one of the more pernicious modern myths of reason," (2); when the coherent and orderly world that modernity promised us proved to be more of a myth than a reality; when it became obvious that
the "assumption that the economic, social and intellectual condition of Western Europe radically improved from 1600 on, in ways that encouraged the development of new political institutions and more rational methods of inquiry" (Toulmin, 16) no longer bears scrutiny; when it became evident that the claims of Reason and scientific knowledge had an explicit, but also a hidden agenda; finally, as it got more and more patent that not only the theoretical content of science, but also its "social function" was to be a concern of Academia. As Alain Touraine puts it, the Enlightenment idea of scientific progress was not at all a reflection of "the real historical experience of the countries of Europe, where religious movements, the glory of the king, the defence of the family and the spirit of conquest, financial speculation and social critique played as important a role as technical progress and the diffusion of knowledge" (Touraine 1995: 11).

Reason and rationality, Western culture presumed, would necessarily lead to progress, and therefore, it was in the name of progress that Europe expanded its colonial domination. Juliet Schor reminds us how Western colonial powers used the theme of progress to legitimize the "civilizing mission" of colonization and to cloak the real motivation for their imperialist venture. In the words of Schor,

The idea of progress, as it has been understood in Western culture for the last 200 years, turns out
to be a belief in the superiority of the West to the East, the male to the female, the white race to all other races, and the superiority of man to nature. This is why I am no longer a progressive (57).

In the above excerpt Schor raises certain fundamental issues which remain contentious even in postmodern critique; issues such as gender and race relations and the First and Third world dichotomy. Zygmunt Bauman espouses an opinion similar to Schor's, reminding us how order was set as a benchmark for achieving progress. Order, as Bauman points out, demands "classifying" or "naming," or giving the world a "structure: to manipulate its probabilities," a process which ultimately leads to the "acts of inclusion and exclusion," (Bauman, 1-2). Inclusion and exclusion in turn lead to the feelings of what Toulmin calls "superordination and subordination," feelings which pervaded Western society from 1700 on, as "social relations within the nation-states were defined" along such "horizontal" lines (Toulmin, 133). The feelings of "superordination" and "subordination" were then exported beyond Western borders in the train of modernity. And here, they were more pronounced in defining the relations between western and non-western peoples. Hence the colony, for instance, was "a place of excess 'where a Jacobin could be more Jacobin than allowed in France' and Lady Maria Nugent and Pauline Bonaparte Leclerc could be more modern than their counterparts in the metropolis," (Simon Gikandi 1996, 3). The promotion of
order soon became the modus vivendi of Western society. To achieve the desired order and consequently promote the notion of progress, scientists soon made "[D]isorderly, active nature... submit to the questions and experimental techniques of the new science;" thanks to Francis Bacon's "program advocating the control of nature for human benefit" (Carolyn Merchant, 164). The subjection of nature to human will was justified by aspects of the Darwinian theory that assumed "that the rationality of the human organism is bound up with its superior adaptability," thus giving the human organism "apparently unlimited ability to manipulate and control its environment, together with the lives and destinies of all other organisms" (see Murray Code, 10).

This assumed "unlimited ability" of mankind becomes the keystone for the justification of the philosophical outlook called humanism, which "centered on the autonomy of the human being as a unified, rational being possessing the source of truth and right. Humanism had reason and reason alone as its driving force, rather than any external authority (Encyclopedia Americana, 553). The totalizing impulse that this definition carries with it about the unlimited ability of Man is what makes it an object of attack first from structuralist and poststructuralist, and then from postmodern, and feminist critique.

French structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida directed their critique against
reason. It was this critique of reason that created an inroad onto "a more general attack against the philosophy of humanism—a form of rationality whose elaboration is seen to accompany the development of certain strategies of political power in the nineteenth century." Thanks to the structuralist and poststructuralist critique, the "ascendancy" of reason got undermined "on the basis of a totalizing and universalizing view of human experience," and in its place "an autonomous source of thought" was proposed (Racevskis 1993: 4). At best it is the very theory of the dignitas hominis, "le [sic] gloire pour l'homme," in Appiah's words, that comes under attack from postmodernism. The Encyclopedia americana observes that Italian humanists "recognized the human being's fallibility and weakness, and the limitations imposed by life's uncertainties," but humanism principally functioned as an inflexible ideology.

Although humanist philosophy posited a universal human nature, feminist critics have construed it to be basically western-, male-centered. They base this claim, among other things, on the fact that the horizontal division of society perpetrated by the nation-state, was founded on class affiliations, but that these affiliations gave consideration only to the status of men. It was the position of men that determined the place of their wives and children in society, thus leading to the crucial issue of gender discrimination. Many feminist critics therefore challenge the validity of
humanism on the grounds that it promotes a discourse of male domination. Simone de Beauvoir believed that

Humanist discourse postulates a universal essence as constituent of human beings which operates to enthrone socially constructed male traits and activities (such as reason, production, or the will to power) as essentially human. In such modern discourse men are the paradigm of humanity, while women are the Other, the subordinate sex (See Best and Kellner 1991, 206-07).

Such critics as de Beauvoir would therefore suggest a dethroning of the whole category of the universal subject which portends marginality and Otherness. Like postmodern theory, this strand of feminism advocates subject positions from which people can struggle against injustice.

Some feminist and postmodern critics have also taken aim at the very dominant conception of rationality because, according to them, it foregrounds the notion that the 'new' science, especially starting from Bacon, "has developed as a male province." But, according to Carolyn Merchant, male domination has its roots in the language that "most traditional cultures" adopted in describing nature:

minerals and metals ripened in the uterus of the Earth Mother, mines were compared to her vagina, and metallurgy was the human hastening of the birth of the living metal in the artificial womb of the furnace-- an abortion of the metal's natural growth cycle before its time (4)

Geneviève Lloyd also argues that right down to its roots, European philosophy associates "precision and rationality with maleness, and imprecision and irrationality with femaleness." She traces this split to ancient assumptions
about the "ideas and ideals of Reason, expressed in the Pythagorian table of opposites. In this scheme, 'femaleness was explicitly linked with the unbounded— the vague, the indeterminate— as against the [male] bounded— the precise and clearly determined" (see Code, 10). Descartes and his successors apparently took their cue from these ancient beliefs and continued what Susan Bordo has referred to as the "masculinization of thought," or the super-masculinization of rational knowledge" (Bordo, 214), which continued to identify "rationality and intelligence with the masculine modes of detachment, distance, and clarity" (see Code, 10). Besides the exclusion of women, the aspect of the Cartesian logico-mathematical modes of thought that smacks of the masculine is the "disdain for the intuitive and emotional, and its obsession with detached, 'objective' knowledge," as Susan Bordo would have it (215).

The belief in a universal human essence, the basic tenet of humanism, leads yet to another critique of modernity. "The realm of essences" as Racevskis defines it, is a given, it is already there and continues to serve as the system of legitimation necessary for the establishment of any social order: "The efficacy of a principle of legitimacy is proportional to its capacity for defining a stable referent for social order, one situated outside society and functioning as an intangible instance of truth. This referent justifies the nature of domination and the manner in which the latter is exerted by defining the source of domination, its domains and the form of the relation between levels of power and the obeisance required of the
This definition points out the importance of essence as a defining characteristic of modernity. It provides the basis for social order which, as we have seen, is the yardstick for measuring progress, which in turn provides justification for modernity. Categories such as culture, race, identity (especially socio-political identity), and certain strands of feminism would be viewed as essentialist categories by postmodern critique. Since this critique generally resists such categories on the basis that they are only human constructs, postmodernism is subsequently seen as the antithesis of essentialism. The postmodern as well as the postcolonial critique of essentialism occurs in many domains.

In repudiating what she calls "outmoded notions of identity" in defining African Americans, bell hooks makes the following comments which exemplify the critique of essentialism:

We have too long had imposed upon us from both the outside and the inside a narrow, constricting notion of blackness. Postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static overdetermined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of self and the assertion of agency (515).

The rejection of universality is important for African Americans as well as for other minority groups because it serves to bring out the possibilities of new relationships among the members of any given group, and reveals the
illusions of a belief in a collective identity. It "allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience," continues hook. "It also challenges the imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy" (hooks 516).

Cornell West also rejects essentialist politics based on racial identity. He proposes that such politics be replaced by the "postmodern politics of cultural difference" which represents a drive

"to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing". (Quoted in Natoli and Hutcheon 444). West's comments point up the necessity to do away with universalist discourse in defining any given group of people; but more importantly, West also emphasizes the mutability of culture and the need to live with change as it happens. Above all, West seems to be suggesting that it behooves all societies to practice this openness if their various members should benefit from the salutary effect of inclusion. Linda Hutcheon sees an even broader implication of adopting this "'new cultural politics of difference' [which] may unite postcolonial, feminist, postmodern, Marxist, and gay theoretical perspectives, but specificity of focus and of agenda defines the particularity of each
field" (Hutcheon 1995a: 10). The concerns expressed above are echoed by a number of postcolonial theoreticians. Anthony Appiah, in his discussion on "The myth of an African World," rejects the "metaphysical and mythic unity of African conceptions" although the category of "African literature" is to be considered a "useful" one (Appiah 1992: 81). In their introduction to the section on "Universality and Difference" the editors of The post-colonial studies reader emphasize the significance of the critique of universalism in postcolonial discourse:

The concept of universalism is one of particular interest to post-colonial writers because it is this notion of a unitary and homogeneous human nature which marginalises and excludes the distinctive characteristics, the difference, of post-colonial societies. A crucial insistence of post-colonial is that, despite a shared experience of colonialism, the cultural realities of post-colonial societies may differ vastly (Bill Ashcroft et al 1995: 55).

These differences exist not only between, but also within particular post-colonial societies, for what we usually label as a post-colonial society is in actual fact clusters of smaller societies with their distinct characteristics.

The recognition of this distinctness within (African) post-colonial societies undermines the cogency of such essentialist theories as Afrocentricity. While proposing what he calls post-Africanism, Denis Ekpo characterizes Afrocentric theories as "logocentric." The thought process which has dominated a lot of African discourse in many critical domains—such as literary and cultural critique—
has been shaped mostly by two "historical events, namely, European colonialism and African reaction to it in the form of African nationalism and cultural awakening," observes Ekpo. The desire (if not the enthusiasm) to interpret these events through the "Afrocentric" prism has led many an African critic to be caught up in a "conceptual as well as rhetorical trap--the logocentric trap". The net result of such entrapment has been the creation of essentialist categories such as "African rationality", "cultural authenticity", etc, all based on binary oppositions between what is considered African and what is Western. The "metacodes" thus created presuppose universalist characterizations for Africans, thereby ignoring internal differences. This practice makes the legitimacy of an Afrocentric critique highly questionable since it is founded on a principle similar to the modernists'/colonialists' concept of superiority for which the latter are being criticized in such discourse. Ekpo therefore remarks that in order not to fall into such a trap, one needs to be more open-minded in reexamining the African thinking pattern and critical discourse relative to the historical events of colonialism and anti-colonialist movements. And as he suggests, postmodern strategies provide some of the best tools for this open-mindedness.

For instance, while... European colonialism was interpreted through the "Afrocentric" prism of the elite into a collective racial cum cultural trauma,... anti-colonialism cum cultural awakening
involved a metaphysical hypostatization of an *essential* Africa as a basis for specific African rationality, cultural authenticity and political legitimacy....

Consequently, European imperialism and its aftermaths came to acquire in the modern African mind, the eternity of absolute evil, while all categories and paradigms of the African cultural and political self-awareness become inviolate positivities. In other words, the emergence of the modern African mind involved... the invention of a voluntarist and hybrid doctrine called Africanism. Under this umbrella doctrine, totalities, labels, paradigms such as African identity, African nation, African rationality, African personality, African authenticity, etc, were created and turned into *metacodes* of modern African self-awareness (Ekpo 1995: 125-26 emphasis added).

An Afrocentric discursive mode only "replicates and reinstates the oppressive structure of white/black binary opposition that characterizes colonial discourse," as Florence Stratton would have it. Ekpo also reminds us that by laying all the emphasis on "the hypostatized metacodes of the Afrocentric ideal, the lived everyday realities of Africa, including its irreconcilable cultural and natural differences, incompatibilities and obscurities were magically frozen or simply palmed." All conflicts originating in ethnic or gender differences are elided or occluded by the prism of Africanism. A postmodern stance offers to shed a new light on these obscurities and incompatibilities and provides a different approach to the interpretation of relations between the West and Africa. It is therefore essential to reevaluate the uses to which the so-called metacodes have been put.

The notion of Ekpo's metacodes is comparable to what
Jean-François Lyotard refers to as a master narrative, which is "A story that claims the status of universal metanarrative, capable of accounting for all other stories in order to reveal their true meaning.... They thus offer to suppress all differends, to translate all narratives into themselves without loss, to make everything speak their language" (see Bill Readings, xxxiii). Lyotard specifically refers to the conflict which has existed between science and narratives. "Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables" (Lyotard 71). In its quest for the truth science has come under the obligation to "legitimate the rules of its own game. It then produces a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy" (Lyotard 71), which makes appeal to "some grand narratives". An example of grand narratives (or master narratives) is "the Enlightenment narrative in which the hero of knowledge works towards a good ethico-political and universal peace" (72). Other forms of master narrative would be the colonial discourse with its claim to "transcending from unregenerate barbarity into civilization through colonizing acts" (Kadir 18). This discourse was translated into practice more vigorously through the policy of Assimilation in French colonies, where that policy was viewed as the sole means of "civilizing" the native people. To some degree, even nationalist discourse that replaced colonial discourse at independence became a
form of master narrative, to the extent that it was "dominated and used by masters, modernizers, who [employed] it to impose their power" (Tourain 100) on the less fortunate in the newly independent ex-colonies. Postmodernism in its most simplified form would be, for Lyotard, "incredulity towards metanarratives". But as I have mentioned in the case of metacodes, master narratives could be put to many and varying uses. While opposing their ontological notion, a certain heuristic notion of master narratives still remains salutary, especially in the post-colonial context. As Brian McHale suggests in the following quote, we can apply what Linda Hutcheon calls "complicitous critique" to master narratives by making use of them while at the same time "trivializing" them. We can have the knowledge-producing and world-making resources of master narrative without its implications of coercive mastery--so long as we undertake to construe master narratives in a way that might be called the key of "as-if." In the key of as-if (...), master narratives are left intact so far as the productivity of their stories is concerned, but "turned down" or "demoted" so far as their truth-claims are concerned.... I am recommending, in other words, that rather than renouncing master narratives, we deliberately "weaken"... or "trivialize" them, and that when we propose our own master narratives... we do so from the outset in this weakened or as-if form, not as master narratives but as "master narratives" (McHale 1992, 31-32).

Against the communal identity suggested by master narratives, postmodernism sets "the pluralistic condition that arises when the practitioners of the local games no longer pay heed to the constraint suggested by the grand
narratives" (McGowan 1991, 183). The narrative exercised by this pluralistic condition is known as "petits récits". Rather than celebrate the narratives of the "master", postmodernism raises serious questions about how narratives are constructed, what they mean, "how they regulate particular forms of moral and social experience" (see A postmodern reader 468).

The attendant deconstructive impulse of the 'petits récits' brings to light another fundamental tenet of postmodernism: contingency. Zygmunt Bauman defines contingent existence as "existence devoid of certainty." The social sciences, according to Bauman, already demonstrated contingency in the modernist period. But as Bauman contends, this was not what they "bargained for". In providing precious knowledge later to be appreciated as an insight into contingency,... they did it while misconceiving the true nature of their business, or... while trying to pass their product for something rather than it was...: they informed of contingency while believing themselves to narrate necessity, of particular locality while believing themselves to narrate universality... of the provisionality of the human condition while believing themselves to narrate the certainty of the world, of the ambivalence of man-made design while believing themselves to narrate the order of nature. (Bauman 10, his emphasis)

This lack of guarantee, this provisional, "pragmatic" and "until-further-notice" certainty characterizes other critical discursive modes as well. For instance, as Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed have observed, "[f]eminist studies'
worst enemies have been those who have treated 'feminism' like a new religion with dogmas that can allow for only one possible interpretation" (see Lionnet 1995, 188). What is more, this lack of guarantee shows how vulnerable our existence is "to the forces of the intangible, the unexpected, [indeed] the contingent" (Racevskis 1994, 1).

Perhaps the aspect of the debate over modernity that is most crucial to present project is the distinction between modernity and modernism. First, as is the case with their post-derivatives, modernity and modernism are closely linked together. Secondly, as Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi postulate, modernism is at once "a critique of modernity" and a link between modernity and postmodernism (8). For Lawrence Cahoone, modernism which started in the 19th century, combines with postmodernism to form "late modernity. The new artistic, literary, and philosophic movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are still in the orbit of modernity," Cahoone continues (2, his emphasis). The disagreement over the terminology notwithstanding, Cahoone's definition corresponds to what many critics consider as modernism, especially as he points out how this "late modernity" is essentially a critique of early modernity.

Bill Readings and Bennet Schaber see modernism as "a new origin, a break with the past that is the opening of a project, the beginning of the movement that will end in the
revealed finality of a universal idea, of truth, of freedom, of beauty" (10). Hans Bertens proposes to see modernism as "a wholly autonomous aesthetic," and adds the "radically anti-representational self-reflective" character of modernism to the definition (3).

Zygmunt Bauman assents to the view that modernism links modernity to postmodernism. He describes modernism as:

an intellectual (psychological, literary, artistic) trend that... reached its full swing by the beginning of the current century, and which in retrospect can be seen (by analogy to the Enlightenment) as a 'project' of postmodernity or a prodromal stage of the postmodern. In modernism, modernity turned its gaze upon itself and attempted to attain the clear-sightedness and self-awareness which would eventually disclose its impossibility, thus paving the way to the postmodern reassessment (4, notes).

The above definitions all point to the aesthetic, the literary, or the artistic in modernism, which makes it a "form of culture," the same way postmodernism is. But it is particularly the literary aspect of modernism that makes it vital to our discussion.

The intricacies of the relationship between modernity and modernism have been most rigorously examined by Boyne and Rattansi who see modernism as "the set of 'visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them,'... thus including figures in literature, art and music from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." They stress the
importance of restricting modernism to the "artistic, musical, literary, more generally aesthetic movements that emerged in Europe in the 1880's, flourished before and after the First World War and became institutionalised in the academies and art galleries of post-Second World War Europe and America" (6). Boyne and Rattansi refer to four "motifs" in modernism which are,

First, an aesthetic self-reflexiveness, reflected in the tendency of modern artists, writers and composers to make their media of creation and artist procedures objects of attention in their work..... Secondly, juxtaposition or 'montage', which implies a weakening of a straightforward narrative and the creation of unities out of the simultaneous presence of different perspectives.... Paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty figure as the third major theme. Typical here are the creation of multiple narrative voices rather than a single infallible narrator, allowing either the audience to attempt a resolution of the contradictions...or providing very provisional syntheses.... Finally,... the significance of the demise of the 'integrated individual subject'. (6-7)

Boyne and Rattansi's definition in terms of "motifs" is very useful for several reasons. First, while distinguishing realist from modernist art, they provide us with some historical specificity. Secondly, the "motifs" they enumerate point to certain developments welcomed by some postmodernist critics. For instance, in cultural critique, Susan Sontag (certain aspects of whose work can be described as postmodern) celebrates the emergence of a "new sensibility" which challenges the rationalist need for content, meaning and order. This "new sensibility" was
found to be more pluralistic and less serious and moralistic. Leslie Fiedler rejoiced in the breakdown of the rigid distinction between low and high art, and welcomed the appearance of pop art and mass cultural forms. However, he went even further by proclaiming the death of avant-garde and the modernist novel and the emergence of postmodern artforms that effected a "closing of the gap between the artist and audience" (Best and Kellner 11). Another import of the above 'motifs' is that they underscore the insuperable link between modernism and postmodernism, and modernism's critical distancing from modernity. Modernism maintained this distance by refusing "to endorse any simplistic beliefs in the progressive capacity of science and technology to resolve all problems" (8). By thus distancing itself from modernity, modernism got closer in its preoccupation to what has become known as postmodernism. And it is this rapprochement that has made evident the continuity between modernism and postmodernism, "for the latter also constitutes a critique of the pretentions of modernity and in some senses may be said to extend and deepen the critique already begun by modernism" (Boyne and Rattansi 8).

To speak of a rapprochement between modernism and postmodernism is not to suggest that we have left modernity behind us. In fact, as Cahoone has stated, both modernism and postmodernism remain "in the orbit" of modernity, and
the dilemma of not just modernity, but of the whole debate, continues unabated. In their Introduction to *Postmodernism and the Re-reading of modernity*, Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen concisely draw our attention to this dilemma as they examine the relationship between modernity and postmodernity:

Can it be persuasively argued that, while modernity saw history optimistically as a self-transcending movement, today this is no longer possible? Or is it that postmodernism is symptomatic of a very modernist form of crisis and renewal and is therefore better understood as a movement within modernity? Or might postmodernism be better understood as an expression of a desired end: that the economic structure of modernity and the cultural regime of modernism which have marginalised women and people of colour are showing signs of instability which may portend their demise. Or, finally, is it an irrationalist and conservative cultural and intellectual movement which seeks to undermine the emancipatory modernist projects of the Enlightenment. (1-2)

Similar questions have been asked by other critics like Cahoone (4). In addition to emphasizing the difficulty of distinguishing the postmodern from the modern the above comments point to the variety of interpretations possible.

The rapprochement between the two terms does not cause them to conflate either. For instance, in opposing legitimating metanarratives modernism did so in the name of other ideals, such as progress, or humanism, or truth. Postmodernism, on the other hand plays tricks on ("trivializes") metanarratives as it deconstructs them. In postmodernism it is not a question of opposing "B to A, but rather [showing] that A is not entirely A and that in fact
it might well resemble B. Then one performs the same operations on B, and so on" (Vagga 22). This "playfulness" shows that "[p]ostmodernism has a fluid, uncontainable, changing quality. Nothing here is immutable. No truths are certain and eternal; truth is continually capsized in postmodernism" (Globus 121).

What I have focused on so far are the various interpretations of postmodernism. I have also already suggested some of the crucial intersections of postmodernism and postcolonialism. However, the relationship between the two terms has its roots in the relationship that existed between coloniality and modernity, which are "cognate phenomena... occupied... with their self-absorbed movement toward their target and with the single-minded pursuit of their 'noble goal'.... And if colonialism assumes the burden of civilization, modernism exacerbates that onus by arrogating to itself the charge to unburden civilization, and certainly premodern cultures, from the weight accrued to traditions that may impede modern civilization's inexorable course..." (Kadir 17-18). Kadir's analysis of the relationship between modernity and coloniality traces that relationship back to the fifteenth century. Which means that colonization was not novel to the western world at the time it extended this practice to Africa and other continents. However, the colonialism that is at issue here, is the one which was based on claims of progress and
prosperity, the fuel to the flames of the European powers' "frantic fevers of imperialism," in the words of Basil Davidson. It is the colonialism which the European powers perpetrated under the pretence of disseminating the "progressive" ideas and ideals of modernity and the stability which their societies had achieved because of those ideas and ideals, to the rest of the "uncivilized" world. The colonial powers deemed it their God-given responsibility to disseminate those ideas and ideals to those societies they considered less progressive and less stable; hence the civilizing mission of colonialism. It was in this way that

Britain and the other European states consolidated their colonies overseas, in Ireland and America, Asia, Australia, and Africa. The horizontal mode of organization that covered the relations of classes and genders was extended to those of races. Patterns of discrimination invented at home were reapplied to conquered peoples: racism became an expression of a God-given subordination of the colonized "inferiors" to their colonizing "betters" (Toulmin, 134).

Discrimination based on distinction of class, gender, and race was certainly not novel experience for Europeans. "[B]ut the new cosmopolitical framework gave such discriminatory patterns a new respectability, implying that they were essential parts of God's plan for nature and humanity," argues Toulmin (134). In the colonies themselves the colonial masters instilled this feeling of "superordination" and "subordination," (to borrow Toulmin's terms) among the colonized. This was specifically the case.
in the African colonies where, capitalizing on ethnic multiplicities, the colonial administrators created ruling classes from amongst ethnic groups of their choice in each colony, in order to carry out divide-and-rule policies. This situation created a lot of tension in some colonies, but the colonial administrators were always quick to quell such tensions through military might. When the colonial period came to an end the old animosities were reawakened in many countries, leading to persistent conflicts. Thus ironically, situations created by Western influence have led Western critics, historians, and commentators today to chant dismay about "tribal" wars. A typical example that illustrates the tragic implications of the colonial legacy is the recurrent internecine conflict that has plagued Rwanda and Burundi for over two decades now. As Basil Davidson rightly observes, these are "two countries in Africa--but culturally, in a large sense, a single country--that the whole desperate confusion of colonial enclosure with its violent and neurotic consequences could well have left untouched," (6).

The formulation and dissemination of the term postcolonialism is generally attributed to Indian intellectuals. Aijaz Ahmad (1995a) traces the origins of the term in politics and to a 1972 article by Hamza Alavi. But the implications of postcolonialism transcend national, regional, and even political borders. Vijay Mishra and Bob
Hodge (1994) have discussed into some detail how "post-colonialism" (hyphenated) was refused an independent entry in the Oxford English Dictionary as recently as 1989. According to them the term has been in use as far back as 1959 but "the 'post-' is a prefix which governs the subsequent element. "'Post-colonial' thus becomes something which is 'post' or after colonial" (276). Arif Dirlik observes that "(P)ostcolonial is the most recent entrant to achieve prominent visibility in the ranks of those "post" marked words... that serve as signposts in(to) contemporary cultural criticism". He limits the geographical sphere of postcolonialism to what is also known as the Third World (Dirlik 1994: 329). This is however a narrow perspective on the sphere of influence of postcolonialism as the efforts of Canadian and Australian intellectuals do show. For example, some of the earliest and most influential postcolonial critique has been done by such intellectuals as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, to mention just a few.

This problematic of the geographical, historical and institutional situation of postcolonialism is taken up by Ella Shohat who is also aware of the shortcomings of the above definitions. Shohat clearly points out that the First World/Third World struggle takes place not only between nations... but also within nations, with the constantly changing relations between dominant and subaltern groups, settler and indigenous populations, as well as in the situation marked by waves of post-independence
immigrations to First World countries.... The notion of the three worlds flattens heterogeneities, masks contradictions, and elides differences (Shohat 1992: 101).

These comments by Shohat reveal how untenable and indefensible the First World/Third World distinction is, because of its essentializing and universalizing implications.

Most of the issues raised in postcolonial critique predate the appearance--at least in popular currency--of the term postcolonialism, which became identified with these themes as recently as the 1980's. The authors of The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literature "use the term...to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present" (2). Therefore they expand the range of the post-colonial to include English literary productions by all societies once affected by colonialism. These societies include the countries of Africa, India, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific Islands. But most striking about these authors' observations is the inclusion of the United States on the list, which gives the term a surprising but new dimension which is bound to change the nature of the postcolonial discourse.

The fact that postcolonial critique predates the appearance of the term and that it encompasses a vast array of countries, renders moot the question of its historical periodization. In fact it is impossible to provide any
historical specificity of the 'post'. Some settler colonies like those in North America, Australia, New Zealand gained independence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; most African and Asian countries in the twentieth century. So "when exactly does the 'post-colonial' begin? Which region is privileged in such a beginning?" enquires Shohat. This leads us to an even more complex question: by putting poor, "Third World" countries of Africa and Asia under this universal rubric of post-colonial, are we not glossing over the crux of the problem? The manners in which these countries broke away from the colonial center and the types of relationship they still maintain with that center all vary. The complexities of these relationships and the differences between and within the various post-colonial societies thus validates Linda Hutcheon's remark that "(E)ven as a generic label,... postcolonial may be misleading with respect to both focus and agenda. The universality implied in such naming risks homogenizing as well as totalizing and thus may mask the complexity of the colonial and postcolonial experiences of diverse individuals and societies in various times and places" (Hutcheon 1995a: 10).

Not everyone agrees with the rather broad categorization of postcolonialism given above. For Appiah, who does not distinguish between postcolonialism and postcoloniality, the latter
is the condition of what we might generously call a comprador intelligencia; a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through the Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa. (Appiah 1991: 348 emphasis added)

The concern that Appiah expresses here is shared by some "native intellectuals" to borrow Dirlik's terminology and it is not restricted only to Africans. It is an issue that stands out in an interview between Gyatri Spivak (one of those who may adequately fit Appiah's "comprador intelligencia"), and Indian intellectuals living in India, in which the local intellectuals express concern over the way Spivak and others in the West represent post-colonial issues. (see Dirlik 337-38). Such issues however, are isolated cases which in my opinion do not warrant the kind of dichotomy Appiah creates. The vast majority of "native intellectuals" are preoccupied with postcolonial issues not only in cultural and literary criticism, but even more so in their fictional works, as this study will show.

Furthermore, some postcolonial writers and thinkers consider what Appiah calls the periphery as a vantage point not for "inventing" the societies they represent in their writings, but as a position that enables them to better explore relationships of those societies with the West and more importantly, to better analyze what issues from those
relationships. Ella Shohat uses her "particular position as an academic Arab-Jew whose cultural topographies are (dis)located in Iraq, Israel/Palestine, and the U.S.A....to explore some of the theoretical and political ambiguities of the post-colonial (99). Edward Said refers to this position as an exilic position. He calls Culture and imperialism "an exile's book" and goes on to clarify the term exile "as not... something sad or deprived. On the contrary belonging as it were, to both sides of the imperial divide enables you to understand them more easily" (Said 1993: xxvi-xxvii).

Bogumil Jewsiewicki and V.Y. Mudimbe prefer "diaspora experience" to exile, because "[O]ne might say that at the end of the twentieth century, the reality of diaspora bears witness to the postcolonial experience". They welcome the replacing of "the rhetoric and politics of blame and politics of confrontation and hostility" suggested in Said's book as an acceptable strategy of postcolonialism. (Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1994: 36-37).

From the foregoing it should be evident that postcolonialism like postmodernism, is far from being a monolithic term. Dirlik demonstrates this by putting forward three uses of the term postcolonialism. First, as a "concrete referent", the term serves as a description of former colonized societies. Second, more abstract and less concrete in referent is the description of a global condition after the period of colonialism. Third,
postcolonial serves as a description of the discourse on the above named conditions (Dirlik 332). Said and Shohat both focus on postcolonialism in the third Dirlikian sense. And Shohat propounds on postcolonialism as a critical locus by extending it beyond "anticolonial, nationalist modernizing narratives that inscribe Europe as an object of critique, toward a discursive analysis and histriography addressing decentered multiplicities of power relations (for example, between colonized women and men or between colonized peasantry and bourgeoisie)" (Shohat 106-07). In this sense the post is understood to mean "after", "because of", and even unavoidably "inclusive of" the colonial.

These categorizations of postcolonialism help clarify the meanings of the term only to a limited extent. The three meanings are far too intertwined to allow for any clear distinction to be made between them. Mishra and Hodge came up with less complex categorizations; namely, "'oppositional postcolonialism' found in its most overt form in post-independent colonies at the historical phase of post-colonialism (with a hyphen), and 'complicit postcolonialism' similar to Lyotard's unhyphenated postmodernism found mostly in former settler colonies like Australia" (Mishra and Hodge 283). The problem with these two definitions, however, is that there was no total absence of opposition or resistance to the assimilationist goals of colonialism in the so-called former settler colonies; in
fact there is evidence to the contrary. The settler populations and aboriginal populations were (and continue to be in certain places) at loggerheads with each other. There has not been uniform complicity in all settler colonies. Similarly, there was little or no opposition at all in some of the "post-independent colonies". Perhaps the safest way out of the impasse, as some postcolonial theorists have suggested, is to speak of postcolonialisms in the plural as we do of postmodernisms. By way of clarification, I shall adopt the usage of post-colonial (with a hyphen) and all its derivatives to mean "after colonialism", and postcolonial (unhyphenated) and its derivatives when referring to a critical mode.

The history of postmodernism and postcolonialism shows that in addition to the tremendous resistance of the two critical modes to "definitions, essences and specifications" (Globus 121), their most insistent commonality is the "problematic relationship each has to its unprefixed referent" (Kadir 18). In the same way that postmodern literature "interrogates the very earnestness of aporetic enactment,... the postcolonial puts into question the very notion of cultural authenticity and genuine national identity either through knowing skepticism, the caricaturesque donning of a factitious identity, or the rabid embodiment of an ethnocentrism that belies its own self-authentication" (Kadir 20).
The obvious convergences notwithstanding, discontent over the postcolonial-postmodern alliance still persists among critics from both sides. One criticism often leveled against postmodernism and which makes it suspect in the eyes of several postcolonial theorists is that postmodernism as a critical mode lacks political commitment or essence. Well, essence it may not have, or need, or accommodate because what postmodernism does, among other things, is to refute essentialism; but commitment it does have. In the area of literary criticism, it is impossible to represent the political, as Roland Barthes once said, because "it resists mimetic copying". But since "the self-reflexive, parodic art of the postmodern" underlines "the realization that all cultural forms of representation... are ideologically grounded, that they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses" (see Hutcheon 1989: 3), postmodernism cannot be said to be lacking in political commitment. In fact, the main thrust of Linda Hutcheon's *The politics of postmodernism* is to remind us repeatedly that postmodernism is "unavoidably political." So, if postcolonial writing has "faith in...narrative's connection to political agency," as Patrick Williams points out (96), that in fact shows one of the intersections between the two modes. Nonetheless, postmodernism unrepentantly realizes the futility of the reconciliation of "political project with the epistemological requirements of objective thinking"
that Appiah advocates. Chantal Mouffe shows us how advantageous this realization is. The failure to reconcile a political agenda with a postmodern outlook does not presuppose mutual exclusion of the categories of the political and the critical; instead,

Once we acknowledge that there is no necessary relation between these two aspects, we are in the position of being able to defend the political project while abandoning the notion that it must be based on a specific form of rationality (Mouffe, quoted in Racevskis 1993: 85).

This approach is, in my opinion, consistent with the new humanism that Appiah sees in postcolonialism, as well as the postmodern perspective postulated by Robert Stern, with its expression of a deeper sense of "social and cultural responsibility." Given the contingency of politics in general, and of politics in post-colonial societies in particular, only a position such as the one described by Mouffe provides a vantage point from which to engage in any meaningful and effective participation. The closer we get to the twenty-first century, the more evident it becomes that politics should be conducted less on the basis of predetermined principles and more on policy tested by experience. The shift from principles to experience became pronounced with the ending of the cold war. With no more ideological big brother to offer guidance from the West or the East, the politics of post-colonial societies are largely driven by situations as they arise. Many a time, there are no rational explanations for what goes on
politically, nor is there any way of determining the trend of future events. I have already referred to Rwanda and Burundi. Somalia is another example. One would have expected that given the relative homogeneity of those societies, they would bear the promise of peace and unity in Africa. But the near genocidal conflicts that have plagued those three most ethnically homogeneous countries of Sub-Saharan Africa since their attainment of independence remind us of the contingency of socio-political relations. These conflicts have proved that even the eradication of tribalism, which is the most bandied-about cause of instability in Africa, is not necessarily a solution. They have indeed belied the effectiveness and nay the existence of any "ethical universal" (the term is Appiah's) to appeal to in dealing with post-colonial issues just as there is none for postmodern issues.

Although, as I have shown above, Cornell West and bell hooks impugn a politics that is based only on racial identity, they also have their reservations about the postmodernism-postcolonial alliance. West is particularly suspicious of postmodernism "because the precursor term "modern" itself has not simply been used to devalue the cultures of oppressed and exploited peoples, but also has failed to deeply illumine the internal complexities of these cultures" (393). We have already seen that the notion of modernity can indeed blur the complexities in every culture
in the name of rational order and certainty. Therefore, if one sees postmodernism's potential to illumine such complexities in certain societies, then nothing debars it from doing same in other societies. The philosopher, D.A. Masolo also has similar concerns as West. Masolo recognizes the "pragmatism" of postmodernism, its "dephilosophizing" of "the conversation of mankind", and the "wider openings" postmodernism has made to "cultural pluralism" (16).

Despite these positive aspects, Masolo is not very enthusiastic about the postmodern critical mode and its usefulness to post-colonial (Third World) issues. He writes:

In postmodernism everyone has a point, there are no centers and margins. Africans, feminists and other perspectival units can have a voice. In other words, the postmodernist picture of society is one in which every human potentiality is given free reign.... The worry is, however, that even the present postmodernism, like surrealism before it, might only be another form of temporary fashion or exotism (16-17, emphasis added).

Masolo fears that postmodernism may end up relinquishing its pluralistic mode and turn out to be another homogenizing cultural mode. These apprehensions are undoubtedly legitimate, given the historical experiences that the "Third World" had with previous critical modes mentioned by Masolo, especially considering the way in which the artistic and cultural productions of the so-called Third World got appreciated solely for their exotic (nay, outlandish) value instead of their artistic and cultural merit. However,
these fears are only based on speculation, and in my opinion, they do not suffice to invalidate the "pragmatism" of postmodernism and its potential for promoting pluralism. It is that potential that sets postmodernism apart from such modernist modes as "ethnographic surrealism" against which Masolo severally measures postmodernism (16-17).

In his review of two books on postcolonialism, Graham Huggan warns against the "self-reflexive abstractions of postcolonial theory" which "run the risk of providing a mask for continued cultural ignorance" (130). Huggan fears that this whole project of postcolonial theory might be a "smoke screen for the out-and-out imperialism of the Western industry". He specifically refers to the enthusiasm with which Western (Euro-American) universities are extending "literary patronage" to postcolonial writers by bestowing honor on and giving money to them. In this sense, "postcolonial seems ironically coterminous with a renewed attitude of colonial condescension toward those writers who are perceived as coming from 'outside' the so-called center... of the West" (Huggan 130-31). Huggan, rather unwittingly, points out a crucial commonality between postmodernism and postcolonialism, namely, their self-reflexivity. On the other hand, Huggan's remarks typify the notion of viewing postcolonialism only as a concept of resistance and opposition. He, like Masolo, is concerned that postmodernism may abandon its grandiose potential of
promoting pluralism. Fredric Jameson is another postmodern theorist who does not see the alliance between the two postwords as a salutary one.

He also reads colonial tendencies in such a relationship, arguing that just as colonialism was related to modernism, so is postcolonialism to postmodernism, with the resultant effect of legitimating domination (see Patrick Williams 91). According to Jameson, there is only one choice left for "Third World" countries; adopt nationalism or succumb to the global American postmodernism. But as Ahmad (1995b) suggests, "nationalism itself is not a unitary thing with some predetermined essence and value" (79). Nor is it a legitimate argument to posit nationalism as the essence of the post-colonial condition, given the exploitation of the nationalist ideal at the expense of the less fortunate in some post-colonial societies. Finally, just because the relationship between the two antecedent terms--modernism and colonialism--produced undesired circumstances does not presuppose that the postmodern-postcolonial relationship will necessarily turn out to be equally unpleasant. Stephen Slemon, and Adam and Tiffin also think that the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism perpetuates neocolonialism. Slemon suggests that in "becoming the dominant political tendency, postmodernism joins hands with its modernist precursor in continuing a politics of colonialist control. Like
modernism, post-modernism needs its (post-) colonial Others in order to constitute or to frame its narrative of refrential fracture" (see Williams, 95). In one of the earliest books on postcolonial discourse, Adam and Tiffin describe post-modernism as

Europe's export to what it regards as 'margins'. (...) the post-modern (in conjunction with post-structuralism) has exercised and is still exercising a cultural and intellectual hegemony in relation to the post-colonial world and post-colonial cultural productions. (...) the neo-colonising role of post-modernism in post-colonial areas (...) (ix-x)

But, as Patrick Williams has noted, whether it is Slemon's "absorbtive, assimilative version" or Adam's and Tiffin's neo-colonial version of postmodernism, the "enormous power" which they seem to ascribe to postmodernism is exaggerated. Williams remarks that "although the former white settler colonies (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) have produced post-modernist writers and texts in substantial quantities, it is difficult to find evidence of very much enthusiasm of post-modernism or signs of its continuing hegemony in the non-white areas of the post-colonial world" (see Williams, 95-96). In fact, there is much resistance toward postmodernism.

Perhaps the most eloquent critic of the postcolonial-postmodern alliance is Anthony Appiah who epitomizes, at the same time, the paradox that we have seen in Masolo's, Huggan's, and West's positions. In the following extract from his book, In my father's house, Appiah first discredits
this relationship, then he goes on to qualify it. He sees the *post* of postcolonialism,

like postmodernism's, [as] also a *post* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of "more than thirty republics." But it challenges them in the name of the ethical universal; in the name of humanism, "le [sic] gloire pour l'homme." And on that ground it is *not* (my emphasis) an ally for Western postmodernism but an agonist, from which I believe postmodernism may have something to learn.

For what I am calling humanism can be provisional, historically contingent, antiessentialist (in other words, postmodern), and still be demanding. We can surely maintain a powerful engagement with the concern to avoid cruelty and pain while nevertheless recognizing the contingency of that concern. Maybe, then, we can recover within postmodernism the postcolonial writers' humanism...while still rejecting the master narratives of modernism (1991, 155 Appiah's italics).

The paradox of Appiah's position is glaring: while trying to distance postcolonialism from postmodernism, he ends up forging an even stronger alliance between the two. This is manifest in the language he uses, a terminology which reinvokes the strategies adopted in postmodern critique.

What McHale has said about master narratives is what Appiah is saying here about humanism; that is, we can make use of humanism but at the same time undermine its essentializing claims. In other words, we can play postmodern tricks on it. This way of using postmodernism's own strategies in critiquing it is what Linda Hutcheon describes in *The Politics of Postmodernism* as "paradoxically complicitous critique" (150, my emphasis). In fact, what Appiah assumes
to be a distinctive feature of postcolonialism has already been identified in postmodernism by Robert Stern who distinguishes between two kinds of postmodernism: "'traditional postmodernism' and deconstructionist 'schismatic postmodernism.'" According to Stern, traditional postmodernism is one that "relies increasingly on representational as opposed to 'abstract or conceptual modes'; as a result, it 'opens up artistic production to a public role which modernism, by virtue of its self-referential formal strategies, had denied itself'." Stern sees in traditional postmodernism what, in my opinion, Appiah sees in postcolonialism: "'a genuine and unsentimental humanism', which expresses itself in a deeper sense of 'social and cultural responsibility'," and which disarms the charge of nihilism traditionally brought against postmodernism. Stern continues:

The fundamental nature of this shift to postmodernism has to do with the reawakening of the artists in every field to the public responsibilities of art. Once again art is being regarded as an act of communication as opposed to one of production or revelation (of the artist's ego and/or of his intentions.... (see Bertens 1995, 63)

We have seen how, in arguing against the postcolonial-postmodern alliance its debunkers end up foregrounding the alliance even further. It would however, be disingenuous to assume that the two critical modes can be conflated unproblematically. Cultural criticism is one of those domains in which the alliance proves most problematic.
Elleke Boehmer provides a prototypical statement of the concerns over the alliance in this domain: "Postmodern notions of meaning as arbitrary, or identity as provisional, are hardly relevant to the lives of those--women, indigenous peoples, marginalized ethnic, class, and religious groups--for whom self-determination remains a political imperative. For them, the signifiers of home, self, past, far from representing instances of discursive contingency, stand for live and pressing issues" (248).

Indeed, it is not a question of postcolonialism becoming postmodernism, or even a "dependency relationship" against which Boehmer warns us. The paradox that is evident in the positions of the various critics discussed above reflects these problems. The alliance I see between the two modes is an isomorphic one; and the intersections between them, some of which I have mentioned already, suggest just that. Like postmodernism, postcolonialism is not a suppression of its antecedent; both of them are in a sense an extension of the relationship that existed between their antecedents. More specifically, anti-colonial discourse was to a large extent a continuation of "the binary logic of the Western philosophical tradition," in the words of Stratton (40).

Put in another way, anti-colonial critique deconstructed and de-essentialized colonial discourse, but only to essentialize its own discourse. Postcolonial discourse, like the postmodern, has adopted the tactic of a
deconstructive, counterdiscourse approach to its antecedent. Even some of the strongest critics like Abiola Irele who criticizes "a new generation of French-speaking African intellectuals" for their "uncritical and possibly disabling fascination" with French philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida, do recognize this isomorphic relationship. According to Irele, "the ideas that are coming out of the Western world today strike us with a certain familiarity, for they address issues of authority, pluralism, and especially the relation between discourse and power." He also points out the inevitability of the intersection of African and Western discourses. In that regard, he comments that "African discourse, by the very force of circumstances, has had to integrate important elements of the Western structure of mind to which African intellectuals have had perforce to relate" (Irele 1995, 24-25).

The commonalities between postmodernism and postcolonialism exist in literature too, as they do in critical discourses. The analyses of postcolonial texts by such critics as Edward Said, Biodun Jeyifo, Florencne Stratton, Eileen Julien, Kenneth Harrow, and many more suggest some specific strategies shared by literary postcolonialism and postmodernism. In fact, Boehmer goes as far as to assert that "postcolonial critism" emerged out of "the intersection of postmodern and postcolonial discourses"
(244). The majority of these critics' works, however, concentrate more on Anglophone texts. In the remaining section of this chapter I will briefly talk about some of the postmodern literary strategies and techniques that are also postcolonial. Then I will mention specific Post-colonial Francophone African fictional works in which these strategies and techniques are reflected. The subsequent chapters will be informed with a more detailed study of the postmodern and postcolonial strategies in the novels. In his review of The Hermeneutic Tradition... Racevskis sees the "conjuncture of repetition and departure" as identifiable features of "the postmodern condition for the hermeneutical enterprise" (1994, 83); that is to say the process by which postmodernism appropriates features from the tradition while at the same time criticizing the tradition itself. Hutcheon prefers to call this procedure "complicitous critique". Helen Tiffin sees post-colonial writing in the same light:

> to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds.... The operation of post-colonial counter-discourse... is dynamic, not static: it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but... to evolve textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases, ...at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.... (96).

Irony and allegory which are the tropes employed in achieving this discursive strategy are common to both critical modes. To this strategic similarity between
postmodernism and postcolonialism one can add the formal, and the thematic and the structural.

The formal technique that operates in both modes as Hutcheon identifies it is "'magic realism' (with its characteristic mixing of the fantastic and the realist)"
and "(I)ts challenges to genre distinctions and to the conventions of realism...." Referring to the Latin American situation, Julio Ortega sees the postmodern text as "an answer to the dominant political neo-conservatism of our neo-liberal capitalist era." It is in this perspective that he does a postmodern study of the works of such magical realist writers as Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortazar, Juan Goytisolo, and Julian Rios, works which "posit... the problem of the heterogeneity and the humanity of 'difference', of the existence and the culture of those 'others', those that are to be considered the victims and the survivors of civilization, those that subvert the identity of the subject and the authority of the vested discourses" (Ortega 1988, 198). Abiola Irele has linked this 'magic realism' with the 'new realism' of African writing "with its emphasis on the localized, politicized and, inevitably the historicized" (see Hutcheon, 130). This intersection of magic realism and the new realism will be studied in two novels by Sony Labou Tansi: La Vie et demie, and L'État honteux. I will specifically read Labou Tansi in light of the strategy of "repetition and departure". Labou
Tansi plays this 'trick' which is also called "complicitous critique" by Hutcheon not only on such modernist tropes as irony and the fable, but also on traditional African modes such as the myth and the epic hero.

Through magic realism the postmodern and the postcolonial enter into dialogue with history. It is the view of some Marxists that the postmodern is "ahistorical because it questions, rather than confirms, the process of History," but this dialogue has been ongoing ever since in postmodernism. And this is where it "overlaps significantly with the post-colonial... which, by definition, involves a recognition of historical, political and social circumstances" (Hutcheon 1995, 131). But even beyond just recognizing these circumstances, postcolonial criticism "reads postcolonial texts as symptomatic of the centrifugal pull of history" (Boehmer, 244). The works of almost all the authors in the corpus of the present study do bear witness to this historicity in one way or the other. This subject will be examined in greater detail, however, in Yambo Ouologuem's Le Devoir de violence. My postmodern reading of this post-colonial text will not only refute the ahistorical claim against postmodernism; it will also question the so-called authentic and accepted view of history, thereby revealing history essentially as little more than discourse.

On the thematic level, one crucial meeting point of the
two critical realms is the "notion of marginalization" or "ex-centricity," and the interest of both modes in what Boehmer calls the "provisional and fragmentary aspects of signification" (244). One generally held view of postmodernism is that it challenges all hegemonic tendencies that have a presumption of centrality. In so doing, it gives value to what such a center considers the margin or Other. The regional character of magic realism, and the local and particular locus of postmodern art are both ways of contesting this centrality, and also all claims of universality. "Post-modernism has been characterized as 'that thought which refuses to turn the Other into the Same'. . . ." Similarly, postcolonial critique rejects the colonial tendencies of modernism (see Hutcheon 1995b, 130-32). The challenge against hegemony and centrality is again evident in all the works examined. I will, however, study particular aspects of this question in Ahmadou Kourouma's two novels, Les Soleils des indépendances, and Monnè, Outrages et défis. In the first novel the focus will be on Kourouma's special use of the French language, which usage, I contend, is Kourouma's way of challenging the norms of "standard" French syntax, semantics, and lexicon. In so doing he seems to be questioning the very notion of imposing one's rules of the use of any given language on other speakers, language is afterward not the exclusive property of any particular group of speakers.
What I have tried to do in this chapter is demonstrate the embattled alliance between postmodernism and postcolonialism, a relationship that is constantly troubled by its debunkers, but which remains troublesome for them because it is a stubbornly ubiquitous alliance. Hence, I have described the alliance in a neologized term: "trouble(d)some". I adopt trouble(d)some to describe not just the postmodern-postcolonial alliance; the term characterizes the general status of the discourse on the relations between the former metropolis and colonies, but even more pointedly it designates the discourse on the relations among the post-colonial subjects themselves within those former colonies. Much as both critical approaches "are believed to demonstrate the fragility of 'grand narratives'; the erosion of transcendent authority; the collapse of imperialistic explanations of the world...;" much as they are believed to be concerned with "maginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, and all things parodied, piebald, dual, mimicked, borrowed, and second-hand" (Boehmer, 244), suspicion still looms large over their alliance as is evident in the writings of the critics discussed above. How this entente cordiale is articulated in literature from Francophone Africa, south of the Sahara will be the subject of the subsequent chapters of the present project.
CHAPTER 2

LE DEVOIR DE VIOLENCE: THE INTERSECTION OF HISTORY AND FICTION.

L'histoire n'est pas un long fleuve tranquille. Son cours peut s'inverser d'un moment à l'autre, il suffit d'un rien: baisse d'attention, contexte économique, religieux ou politique, et voilà que tout bascule. (Calixthe Beyala, Lettre d'une Africaine à ses soeurs occidentales, p.154).

The debate over the intersection of the two discursive modes of history and fiction has been ongoing for decades. One must not ignore the fact, however, that there has also always been a conscious effort to keep history and fiction apart, even though the literary aspect of history has never been completely ignored. Following is how Hayden White has summarized the early stages of the relationship between history and narrative:

Since its invention by Herodotus, traditional historiography has featured predominantly the belief that history itself consists of a congeries of lived stories, individual and collective, and that the principal task of historians is to uncover these stories and to retell them in a narrative, the truth of which would reside in the correspondence of the story told to the story lived by real people in the past. Thus conceived, the literary aspect of the historical narrative was supposed to inhere solely in certain stylistic embellishments that rendered the account vivid and
interesting to the reader rather than in the kind of poetic inventiveness presumed to be characteristic of the writer of fictional narrative (Hayden White 1987, ix-x).

The above quote suggests how history made use of, but at the same time marginalized the literary in its narrative. The most important touchstone of the distinction between history and fiction which traditional historiographers have been ceaselessly poised to perpetuate is the presumed truth of history. Writers of fiction were believed to have invented "everything in their narratives--characters, events, plots, motifs, themes, atmosphere, and so on"--whereas "historians invented nothing but certain theoretical flourishes or poetic effects to the end of engaging their readers' attention and sustaining their interest in the true story they had to tell," continues White (x).

It is so paradoxical that narrative discourse which is part and parcel of day-to-day existence should have been so rejected as a crucial aspect of the truth-producing enterprise. As White has remarked, this paradox is not surprising. It can be imputed to the very fact that "the narrative mode of representation is so natural to human consciousness, so much an aspect of everyday speech and ordinary discourse, that its use in any field of study aspiring to the status of a science must be suspect" (26). Over the years however, theories of discourse took cognizance of the social import of the narrative mode of discourse; then they proceeded to "dissolve the distinction
between realistic and fictional discourses based on the assumption of an ontological difference between their respective referents, real and imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect" as meaning-producing "semiological apparatuses" (White x).

In the same way as theorists of discourse, some historians too have recognized the discursivity of history. E. H. Carr specifically stresses the freedom of the historian to select his or her facts, and the methods of selecting and presenting those facts to the reader. He writes:

"Facts...are not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab." Rather, "they are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use-- these two factors being, of course determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch" (quoted in Kenan Malik, 11).

Carr's comments underline the subjectivity of historical facts which are mediated by the historian's personal interests and perspective. Corollary to the above will be the questioning of the universality of the truth claim of any historical fact. Furthermore, the only mode of representing the "facts of history" is narration, the same mode employed by the writer of a fictional work. As Paul Veyne would have it, "[1]'histoire est anecdotique, elle intéresse en racontant, comme le roman" (22). In fact, Veyne went so far as to call history "un roman vrai" (10).
He draws the following parallel between the writing of history and of fiction "Comme le roman, l'histoire trie, simplifie, organise..." (14). Veyne also states categorically that history is "diegesis et non mimesis" (15, his italics). Hayden White has also written very extensively on this subject. Linda Hutcheon traces the blurring of the line between history and fiction to the classical epic and the Bible.

Despite these shared conventions between history and fiction, it will be disingenuous to assert that the two are part of the same order of discourse. In fact, Hutcheon stresses the fact that "historiographic metafiction suggests the continuing relevance of [the binary opposition between fiction and fact], even if it be a problematic one" (113). It is the installing and then blurring of the line between fiction and history that is peculiar to postmodern fiction. This kind of fiction (historiographic metafiction) comes only fourth in line of the ways to narrate the past. According to Umberto Eco, there are three other ways: "the romance, the swashbuckling tale, and the historical novel" (quoted in Hutcheon, 113). To this list, Hutcheon adds historiographic metafiction "with its intense self-consciousness about the way in which this [narrating the past] is done" (113). The self-reflexivity of the postmodern novel, as we have seen, informs the narrative of Le Devoir. And thus, what appears first as wanton violence
and textual promiscuity committed by Ouologuem, actually qualifies, in my opinion, for what Roland Barthes called the 'healthy' sign. Terry Eagleton's definition of the Barthesian 'healthy' sign as "one which draws attention to its own arbitrariness—which does not try to palm itself off as 'natural' but which, in the very moment of conveying a meaning communicates something of its own relative, artificial status as well" (Eagleton 135), succinctly describes Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*.

Arguably, history has been made a prominent frame of reference for African literary criticism since its inception. The main reason for this, as Irele puts it, is because the "fundamental theme [of African literatures even in the post-colonial era] is that of the cleavage of consciousness provoked by the historic encounter with Europe" (Irele 1993, 161-62). The birth of literary criticism as we know it today in the Francophone "Negro African" world has been attributed largely to the Négritude movement, and then the journal *Présence Africaine*. Taking their cue from Senghor's definition of Négritude as "the sum total of African cultural values" (Irele 1971, 19), a good many historians of Négritude exploited what Irele calls the "black condition." That is, they tried to respond to the "intolerance that characterised the cultural policy of the coloniser" through "a vindication and an exaltation of cultural institutions which were different from those of the
west" (Irele 1971, 15). This caused the historians to offer a sentimentalized history of Africa, heavily burdened with "cultural narcissism," as James Olney would have it. The "exploitation of the black condition in both its historical setting and in its direction towards an ultimate significance" (Irele [1981] 1990, 68), figured simultaneously in the works of Francophone black writers. The manifestations of the doctrines of Négritude in literature are more pronounced in poetry as is evident in works like Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939) by the Martiniquan writer, Aimé Césaire; Chants d'ombre (1945), Hosties noires (1948), Chants pour Naët (1948), Ethiopiques (1949), etc, by the Senegalese, Léopold Sédar Senghor (see Dorothy Blair 1976: 22, 151). As Blair argues, later on, a few novels such as Francis Bebey's Le Fils d' Agatha Moudio (1967), and La poupée ashanti (1973); Cheik Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure ambiguë; and Camara Laye's Dramouss (1966) also treat the theme of Négritude but with less and varying commitment to its original doctrines. Many of these Francophone African fictional works, while focusing on "a passionate exaltation of the black race," to borrow Irele's phrase, also "deconstructed" Western perspectives of African history, and bore a strong anticolonialist message. In the process, a number of the works ended both romanticizing the history of Africa, and producing an idyllic picture of African culture. Far from deflating, the "us" and "them"
dichotomy already created by colonialism, however, they produced what Foucault would call a "discours en retour." That discourse just simply reversed that dichotomy, and the attendant "hierarchy established by the coloniser without contesting the basis on which it was founded" (Irele 1971, 14).

Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*, and indeed many other Francophone African novels of the post-colonial era show us, nonetheless, that the treatment of history in African fictional works has been anything but unidirectional. These novels indeed continue the "correction of misconceptions" about African history, but also represent a departure from the vanguardism practiced by the earlier novels. Discussing *Le Devoir de violence*, as well as the novels of Camara Laye (especially *Dramouss*), and Ahmadou Kourouma, Jonathan Ngaté notes that there is "a noticeable decrease in the obsession with Europe and Europeans: the colonial era has ceased to be the temporal frame in which events are set; strong and pointed criticism has assumed a key function, and an African audience is clearly being cultivated" (Ngaté 58). Since its publication in 1968, *Le Devoir* has remained the subject of endless controversies. It is in light of these controversies that Ouologuem's contribution to the new course of Francophone African literature becomes discernible. The novel has both won its author a Renaudot literary prize and gained him the
reputation of a plagiarist. Ouologuem has won the admiration of many an African(ist) critic but he has also incurred much rancor. He has been praised for his excellent use of the French language and he has been condemned for his violation of the rules of grammar. His book has been called the "true" history of Africa and it has been dismissed as an assault on historical facts. In the first part of this chapter, I will examine some of these controversies. The main focus of the second part of the chapter will be the contrast between the historicity and fictiveness of *Le Devoir*.

In addition to winning the prestigious *Prix Renaudot*, *Le Devoir* received numerous positive reviews upon its publication. *Le Monde* described it as "perhaps the first African novel worthy of the name." All the initial critics were in agreement that "this was a 'truly African novel' and a masterpiece to boot." Robert Kanters called *Le Devoir*, "un livre très beau et très fort." (see Dorothy Blair 1976, 305). John A. Williams adds to the praise of *Le Devoir* by concluding that "[g]reat novels are rare; great novels by Africans are even more rare, but they are on the way.... 'Bound to Violence,' a first novel is a great one and would be even without the 1968 Prix Renaudot.... It deserves many readings, since mistaken views are apt to come out of the first" (7). In fact many critiques of *Le Devoir* have unfortunately reflected these "mistaken views" as the
critics have been scarcely heedful of Williams' percipient words of caution. Charles Larson's reading of the novel appears to me as a revealing example of these "first" readings, especially when Larson contends that "the novel's mode is not fantasy, as one might expect, but stark realism (20, my emphasis).

Larson further describes "Ouologuem's novel [as] a bloody chronicle of violence and brutality," aspects which he takes to be basic factors in African tradition, noting that "it is a fact that these atrocities perpetuate themselves down through the ages that Ouologuem records so sadistically in his novel" (106, emphasis added). What such a reading does is subsume the fictionality of Ouologuem's novel--with its propensity for exaggeration--under a particular theory, in this case literary realism. Christopher Miller provides an effective corrective to Larson's assertions. Miller aptly characterizes Le Devoir as a novel "that consciously engages itself in the cross-cultural and interliterary 'zone of interferences' between the two continents and does so not to forge a synthetic response but to exaggerate and undermine the whole tradition we have been reading..." (Miller 218, emphasis added).

Undeniably, there are suggestions of realism in Le Devoir. In fact, that is one reason why it lends itself to a postmodern interpretation. It is however a different kind of realism from that of say "Cinua Achebe's Things Fall
Apart or Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir,* Anthony Appiah argues. *Le Devoir de violence* does not seek to naturalize concepts such as African culture, or African identity, or a nationalism that, as Appiah puts it, "by 1968, had plainly failed." Appiah describes this kind of realism as postrealist. A close reading of the novel reveals that it is not so much the cataloging of a reality or "facts" that interests the author. The question he addresses, rather, is how are the facts presented in the form of discourse? Who presents them? And from what perspective are they presented? "What if tradition and history are always lies in the service of the power structure, whatever the nature of that power structure might be? And what if reality were other than it is thought to be?" Aliko Songolo, who has done one of the most perspicacious readings of the novel suggests that any answers to these questions "would necessarily be false because the old questions have grown obsolete and inoperative...." Instead, the novel poses these questions as "new hypotheses" (Songolo 150-51). The author of *Le Devoir* himself admitted to a *West Africa* interviewer that his novel is "negative since it provides no solution to the problems posed" ("Malian Prizewinner", 1475). This mode of questioning without providing any definitive answers is one aspect of *Le Devoir* that makes it appropriate for postmodern interpretation.

Ouologuem does this questioning through the use of
fictional techniques. A work of fiction according to Bernadette Cailler, is "la 'vision' qui entraîne l'exercice d'être au monde dans un monde rêvé" (35). Cailler discounts any direct connection between literary creation and the "social contract", because the function of a work of art which focuses on such connection "is the exalting and perpetuating [of] the values and institutions of the society in question" (see Aliko Songolo, 141). Instead, the need for a work of fiction arises "à l'instant où s'ouvre une faille dans le système clos, auto-suffisant de la structure sociale, lorsque l'individu prend conscience de notes discordantes dans le système....," continues Cailler (43). To be sure, Cailler's definition, like any other definition, leaves many problems unsolved, especially when she sees absolutely no direct link between a work of fiction and the society in which it is produced. The existence of that link and Cailler's "monde rêvé" are by no means mutually exclusive. Yambo Ouologuem demonstrates in Le Devoir that the two modes can exist side by side, and, true to Dorothy Blair's definition of novel, Ouologuem's work "transcends purely functional, polemical or educational purposes" (Blair 308). It would therefore be a mistake not to take both modes equally into consideration in one's analysis of the novel.

Le Devoir also struck a responsive chord with African critics living on the continent, who were to crown it with
many glowing commentaries. An article in the *West Africa* magazine of December 14, 1968, reports that Ouologuem had a personal invitation from Leopold Sedar Senghor, then President of Senegal and one of the most influential Francophone writers. According to the same article, *Le Monde* had described Ouologuem as "the first African intellectual of international standing since the Senegalese leader" (*West Africa*, 1474). Indeed, Ouologuem was actually venturing into uncharted territory as the following comments by Wole Soyinka attest. In *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage*..., Soyinka puts Ouologuem among those writers who, "secure in the actuality of their environment, confident--or rather--unquestioning about the validity of their heritage occupied themselves with literature which was not a response, one which refused to acknowledge the claims of any reacting imposition or else, responded with a lofty iconoclasm" (Soyinka 1993, 173). Perhaps it is the iconoclasm of *Le Devoir* that was unfathomable to the "dissenting" voices from the litany of praises for Ouologuem, more so because of the socio-political climate in which the novel was published: it was barely a decade since the first sub-Saharan African colony had gained its independence; Négritude as a literary and cultural movement was popular, especially in Francophone Africa. Ouologuem's novel, with its deviation from what would be considered the norm at that time (challenging colonialism and Eurocentric hegemony), was bound to cause
outrage and ire in a number of writers and critics alike. Not only his failure to vindicate African cultural values, his ironic description of certain African peoples borders on vilification:

Gens cruels, dont le langage est une espèce de croassement, tueurs féroces identiques à l'homme des bois, vivant dans un état de bestialité, s'accouplant avec la première femme qu'ils trouvent de grande stature et d'aspect horrible, très velus, aux ongles extrêmement longs, Zoulous, Jagas, Massaïs se nourrissent de chair humaine,... vont nus, sauvages dans leurs coutumes, barbares dans leur vie de chaque jour, sans foi, sans loi, sans roi... (Le Devoir, 19-20),

These "'revelations' about pre-colonial Africa [evidently] exasperated historians and ultra-nationalists," as Songolo observes (146). It is an irritation that manifests itself in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's condemnation of the theme of homosexuality in Ouologuem's novel. Kane, whose own novel, L'Aventure ambiguë (1962) deals with the familiar theme of conflict between the black and white worlds writes:

"Ouologuem has a concept of love which is atrocious; homosexuality which does not exist in our culture; all that is vice, incest, animality, and many things that belong to white people or exist in white man's mind. He gives all these traits to African characters. This is false" (see Laila Ibnlfassi & Nicki Hitchcott, 142). Kane's comments reflect the very spirit of Négritude, namely, the assumption that there exists a homogeneous African culture which one can claim to know and speak of (and for) in the general
terms Kane uses. Ouologuem virulently criticizes that assumption in his novel as I will show later in this chapter.

Abiola Irele, one of the few renowned critics of Francophone literature in Anglophone Africa at the time of the novel's publication, was among the first to voice reservations about it. Irele compared Le Devoir to "Lautreamont's Les Chants de Maldoror, with its indulgence in incongruities of every conceivable sort. Yambo's novel is a meandering succession of extravagances, presented as an historical narrative of a fictitious but "typical" African empire.... The leading idea of the novel... [is] that the past has only bequeathed to the present generation of Africans a legacy of crime and violence" (Irele 1115).

Undoubtedly, the novel is fraught with explicit scenes of violence. One such scene that causes the reader a chillsome shock is when Chevalier has his two dogs, Médor and Dick perform oral sex on Awa (the woman Saïf sends to the house of Chevalier as a spy), before Chevalier himself has sex with her:

Les doigts sous ses aisselles, redressée sur ses reins, elle criait, percevant contre ses lèvres la rageuse âcreté de la gueule de Dick,... la langue dure et tendue tel un gourdin gluant, Médor fouiller sa vulve....

Ordonnant aux chiens de se retirer, l'homme laboura la femme comme une terre en friche, comme un océan frappé par la proue d'une nef (Le Devoir 71).

To spotlight the bequeathal of violence as "the leading
idea" of the novel is, however, to distort its intent. As Jingiri Achiriga remarks, violence in the novel can be seen as a narrative mode which both violates ("violer") the reader's sensitivity, and goes beyond the "bestial crudeness" to show the double victimization of the African:

Mais il est possible que "le devoir" de tout "violer" n'exclut pas la sensibilité du lecteur. Du reste, on peut dans plusieurs cas aller au-delà de la crudité bestiale.... Le roman nous raconte l'histoire de Saïf, personnage symbolique du "premier conquérant" de l'Afrique noire, qui à son tour devait être vaincu par "Chevalier," symbole de l'Occident (Achiriga 208).

Of course, before Saïf were the Notables, whom the novel delineates as Black Africans who were in point of fact the first to conquer and enslave other Africans. However, what Achiriga's argument emphasizes is that far from being agents, Black Africans (especially la Négraille) are the victims of the violence.

Dorothy Blair sees Irele's comments as displaying "a certain element of African chauvinism". Irele's comments do bring more to the discussion than just chauvinism, however. As he points out, Ouologuem's "very excess makes one wonder whether some irony is not beneath his narrative, whether it is all not meant as a joke, or more precisely, in French student slang, a canular; if this is so, it is not surprising that it has taken in an influential part of the French reading public, since the novel presents them with the picture of Africa they are more disposed to accept" (1115). Songolo also airs a similar view about the irony of
Le Devoir. He remarks how the European reception of the novel "is not surprising because the novel seems to exculpate the former metropolises for crimes for which they had, justly or unjustly, been held responsible" (Songolo 146). This is certainly one way of looking at the irony in Ouologuem's novel; however, to my mind, the implications of the 'canular' go far beyond presenting Africa to "the French reading public," or Europeans. The novel ironizes the so-called History of Africa by calling to question the very sources of that history.

The author does this ironizing by exposing the discursiveness of the history. He also takes issue with concepts such as African unity, and African culture. As Jonathan Ngaté succinctly puts it, Le Devoir transcends the prized descriptors of "traditional" African novels. He observes that, "Le Devoir de violence...deal[s] with a world in which the efficacy of the call to the Ancestors as well as the Ancestors themselves is seriously called to question" (Ngaté 59). Ouologuem himself was not oblivious to the multiple functions of his novel. In an interview with Mel Watkins he called his work "a fresco, an epic, a legend and a novel. It sketches in early African history, chronicles the three kinds of oppression and portrays through the novel form modern-day Africa in which whites are both colonizers and victims" (34). An episode that illustrates this victimization, is the one between Vandame, the French
colonial governor, and the Saif's two agents, Kratonga and Wampoulo. Under the orders of Saif, Kratonga and Wampoulo first terrify the governor with a magic snake, making him lick the head of the snake; then they make him play childish games in terror; and finally he is shot with his own pistol. All this because the zombie of an erstwhile prisoner of the Saif was said to have been hiding in Vandame's house (*Le Devoir* 128-33). To categorize the narrative mode in a work like *Le Devoir* as "stark realism" or as "a fact" is to neglect the complexity of the work. Neglects of this nature made a lot of critics fall headlong into Ouologuem's "canular," to borrow Irele's term.

In the same interview with Mel Watkins, Ouologuem states that what he intended to achieve by writing his novel is to tell the (hi)story of Africa in an another way:

"It is unfortunate that African writers have written only about folklore and legend. Until now African history has been shown only as a conflict between blacks and whites; all African novels deal with this colonial conflict. However, actions taken only in opposition to whites create an atmosphere of paranoia— one does not deal with reality but with the proclamations of others. The problem with this is that it is ineffective in changing the attitude of the slave. It is not just belonging to a continent where historically one has been sold as a slave that creates that attitude; no, the attitude of a slave consists of defining oneself only in relationship to others. The slave or nigger was actually created during the first period of oppression in Africa, when black chiefs began enslaving other blacks" (quoted by Watkins, 34).

These comments essentially go to confirm Soyinka's remarks about the novel. They also reinforce Ouologuem's contention
in the novel that the time had come to go beyond the representation of the tension between the Western colonizer and the African colonized, a theme hitherto cherished by novelists. It was time to point us in a new direction and begin speaking to the ills of all the three forms or stages of colonization of Africans—first by African "notables", second by Arabs, and finally by the white man. The combination of all three is what has created the "négraille with its slave mentality which is evident among both 'pro-white and anti-white black men' and which among white men is perpetuated by 'philistine negrophiles'" ("Malian Prizewinner", 1475). This is how Ouologuem's narrator summarizes the participation of the "notables" in colonization:

Et ce fut la ruée vers la négraille. Les Blancs, définissant un droit colonial international, avalisait la théorie des zones d'influence: les droits du premier occupant étaient légitimes. Mais ces puissances colonisatrices arrivaient trop tard déjà, puisque, avec l'aristocratie notable, le colonialiste, depuis longtemps en place n'était autre que le Saïf dont le conquérant européen faisait --tout à son insu!-- le jeu. C'était l'assistance technique déjà! (31).

It was time to break with "the mimetic, pedagogic, and ameliorist tendencies [of] témoignage literatures," as Kenneth Harrow puts it (189).  

Ouologuem did not go unchallenged on the point of Africans colonizing other Africans. One year after the publication of the novel, Pharao Sossou Dzezer published an
article, "Les Divagations Déclamatoires d'un Prix Renaudot" in L'Étudiant d'Afrique noire, in which he declared that it was a misnomer to call the situation in Africa as colonization, because, "[P]as plus que le servage dans les campagnes moyenâgeuses d'Europe, l'esclavage issu des guerres entre royaumes et empires nègres africains à l'époque précoloniale ne saurait, sans abus de concept, être tenu pour du colonialism." (Quoted in Jingiri Achiriga, 211, note 5). The precolonial domination of Blacks by other Blacks may not have been structured colonialism as the one perpetrated by non-Blacks. But why Dzezer considers terming the situation colonialism as an "abus de concept" is unclear to me. The conquered peoples lost not only their liberty, but were at the same time dispossessed of every belonging, including land, a burden not different from what they bore during colonialism. What in my opinion is misplaced is the very comparison of that situation to serfdom. Ouologuem suggested in the interview referred to above, that his aim was not to predicate his novel purely on Western conceptions of African societies, a point certainly ignored by Dzezer's comments.

James Olney, one of the critics who stress the holistic nature of Ouologuem's project, comments:

"[t]his stylistic pastiche, which combines elements from the historical traditions of family and village, from griot 'achives,' and from Arab chronicles, is matched... by a geographical and cultural pastiche, the elements of which Ouologuem draws from all over Africa; here again he freely
mixes the real with the imaginary and the historic with the mythic to produce a new historic amalgam with a new interpretation." This results in a "symbolic autobiography of a continent" (241-42).

Olney's observations raise three main issues. First, they point to the way in which Ouologuem integrates "form and content, style and matter, theme and expression, motif and literary method," as George Lang puts it (398). In sum, Ouologuem commingles fiction and history to formulate his critique. The process of mixing the historical and the fictive results in tampering with the 'facts' of received history. Second, because of this tampering, and contrary to Olney's assertion that Ouologuem provides "a new interpretation" of history, it is my contention that what we are provided with in Le Devoir is more a possibility for interpretation, rather than interpretation itself. This is why the novel became so anomalous within the canon of contemporary African literature. Third and perhaps most important, is that Olney draws attention to the universalism implied in Ouologuem's project. After all, the author himself did admit to a West Africa interviewer that his intention was to write "the first novel representative of the whole continent" ("Malian Prizewinner" 1475). At the same time, as Levi-Strauss has pointed out in the case of "total history," even the symbolic representativeness that Ouologuem claims cannot but be pretentious, and it is unachievable. In the words of Levi-Strauss,

A truly total history would...[be] chaos. Every
corner of space conceals a multitude of individuals each of whom totalises the trend of history in a manner that cannot be compared to the others.... Even history which claims to be universal is still only a juxtaposition of a few local histories within which (and between which) very much more is left out than put in.... In so far as history aspires to meaning, it is doomed to select regions, periods, groups of men and individuals in these groups and to make them stand out, as discontinuous figures, against a continuity barely good enough to be used as a backdrop. A truly total history would cancel itself out--its product would be nought (257).

A close reading of the novel reveals that the group Ouologuem refers to as the Négraille represents what Levi-Strauss has called "discontinuous groups," or what Linda Hutcheon terms in A Poetics of Postmodernism..., as "the ex-centric parts of society (89)." Moreover, albeit the narrative's allusions to the whole continent by making token references to ethnic groups such as the Masai (from East Africa), and the Zulu (from South Africa), the novel specifically speaks about Sudanic Africa. It actually questions the erstwhile mode of representing the whole continent as a monolith, thereby reminding us that "[t]here can be... no unifying vision of what is inevitably manifold and conflictive. All discourse is ideological. None is salutary, including that of the most ardent defenders of African identity." I therefore elect to label what operates in Ouologuem's novel as strategic universalism, strategic in that Ouologuem's technique puts into question at the same time as it exploits universalism. The author adopts the same technique to erect his assault against those
earlier novels that had been posited as correctives to the misconceptions about African history. The opening paragraph of *Le Devoir* gives the impression that what the reader is presented with is yet another historical treatise:

Un récit de l'aventure sanglante de la négraille... tiendrait aisément dans la première moitié de ce siècle; mais la véritable histoire des Nègres commence beaucoup, beaucoup plus tôt, avec les Saïfs, en l'an 1202 de notre ère, dans l'Empire africain de Nakem, au sud du Fezzan, bien après les conquêtes d'Okba ben Nafi el Fitri (*Le Devoir* 9, emphasis added).

It is undoubtedly this illusion of "véritable histoire" that makes James Olney think that Ouologuem set out to "destroy" the "grossly distorted image of Africa and Africans, replacing it with a valid portrait based on a revision of history and the redefinition of personality, a redrawing of the African image" (Olney 209-10, my emphasis). Indeed, there is some historical veracity in the above quote, such as the year 1202, and the events associated with that date, and the "precise if incongruous geographic locations." And that makes Olney's theory about historical revisionism tenable. Therefore, in agreement with Harrow, one must not ignore the "historical markers" alluded to in the novel, as it seems to be the case for some commentators (see Harrow, 175). Rather than "replace" what Olney calls the "grossly distorted image," however, Ouologuem's narrative, while "discredit(ing) both tradition and written history," steers clear of a downright condemnation of either of them. In fact, the narrator
recognizes the importance of each for, "ce passé—grandiose certes—ne vivait, somme toute, qu'à travers les historiens arabes et la tradition orale africaine...." (Le Devoir, 14). The narrative explores the "possibility of narrating African history," in the words of Miller (228). Or, as Soyinka observes, Ouologuem's "method is invariably iconoclastic; nothing survives in it, not even love or (...) mutual physical attraction" (Soyinka 1976, 101). The realization that Ouologuem's novel does not create a new and more "valid" category of African history dawns on the reader when, towards the end of the novel we are reminded that, l'âge d'or est pour demain, quand tous les salauds crèveront (199)

Of course, the repetition of events in the novel, such as the eternal return of the same Saif as his own successor as emperor of Nakem, suffices to disabuse the reader of any expectations of seeing that tomorrow come to fruition. Kenneth Harrow pinpoints some of the repetitions which, to him, serve as one of Ouologuem's parodic devices that "create the effect of freezing the figures":

The same events, patterns, or names occur. Thus Saif ben Isaac El Héit is the namesake of Saïf El Héît, and the dynasty of the Saifs is based on the name Saïf, which evokes the historical Sef, itself a generic term for ruler drawn from the Arabic. Kassoumi's son Raymond Spartacus becomes Kassoumi; killers are schooled in the same sadistic tricks, their language and instruments of pain, knives, snakes, penises, all are variant means of penetration.... Shrobenius [the caricature of Frobenius's name] is a figura for a generation of Marcel Griaules and Maurice Delafosses, Africanists and ethnologists (178).
The narrator himself finally reminds us not only how much of a phoenix Saïf is, but also how ubiquitous he is on the African political scene(s).

l'on ne peut s'empêcher de songer que Saïf, pleuré trois millions de fois, renait sans cesse à l'Histoire, sous les cendres chaudes de plus de trente Républiques africaines (207).

This multiplying of Saïf is certainly far from gratuitous. It is meant to eliminate any appreciable difference between "violent African and intriguing French sovereigns," given that the Saïf is a symbol of untold atrocities. Hence, what appears first as an attempt at "correcting" history, turns out as a parody and mockery of "the 'epic' list of glorious conquests: famous griot names like Kouyaté, or his subject matter, are turned, inverted, or slyly evoked. Thus history becomes 'history'" (Harrow 175).

In addition to history, the fictive is also made to become "fictive". Harrow's caution not to gloss over the "historical markers", to my mind, also gives historical narrative its due in the novel. That suggests therefore, that that narrative cannot be subsumed under the "discourse of the actors" of the novel, as Harrow later intimates. Several critics have made similar arguments about the non-historicity of Le Devoir. I want to maintain, however, that the narrative sets both that "discourse of the actors" and history on the same pedestal, thus creating what Linda Hutcheon will later call "historiographic metafiction,"
which "refutes the natural or common sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. This kind of postmodern fiction also refuses the relegation of the extratextual past to the domain of historiography in the name of the autonomy of art" (Hutcheon 1988, 93, my stress).

As signifying systems, both history and fiction help us "make sense of the past ("exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination"). In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past "events" into present historical 'facts'" (Hutcheon 1988, 89). Ouologuem's narrator intimates that it is not so much the truth or falsity of those events that is the issue. The issue is the systems that perpetuate the events:

Véridique ou fabulée, la légende de Saïf Isaac El Héit hante de nos jours encore le romantisme nègre, et la politique des notables en maintes républiques. Car son souvenir frappe les imaginations populaires. Maints chroniqueurs consacrent son culte par la tradition orale et célèbrent à travers lui l'époque prestigieuse des premiers États, dont le roi, sage et philosophe, couronnait une épopée qui appelait la plus grande tâche de l'archéologie, de l'histoire, de la numismatique et autres sciences humaines, auxquelles sont venues se joindre les disciplines naturelles et ethnologiques (Le Devoir 14).

What may seem here as a denial of history is more the denial
of what Miller calls "the good faith of its uses in politics." As Miller rightly points out, "the veracity is less important than the persistence of the haunting traditions..." (232-33). In fact, what the author does is add to history and fiction, other discursive categories such as ethnology, which to my mind, suggests the questioning of the grounds of the truth claims of any of the categories. This early mention of ethnology in the text, suggests that Négritude is going to be at issue in the novel. Later in the novel, the theme of Négritude is underlined in the caricature of the German Africanist Frobenius (as Schrobenius) and his "encomiums on the values on which African civilizations rest" (Harrow 183). ¹¹

The questioning of the grounds of historiography is already apparent much earlier in the novel in the description of the hideous violence that provides the background for the lineage of the Saïfs. The novel identifies two sources of information on this lineage: the written sources (the Tarik el Fetach and the Tarik el Sudan), and the oral source (the griot Koutouli). Both sources have traditionally been relied on for historical accuracy, and Ouologuem further authenticates these sources with dates which are anything but imaginary. The juxtaposition of different historical sources, giving various versions of the same event, is a way of exposing history as a human construct. It is a procedure that
underscores the view that the writing of history is a selective process. George Lang refers to these sources as "founding texts," the aim of which, "is to attribute pattern to history and a paradigmatic role within history to the collectivity they espouse, to assert a congruence between the text itself, the myths it conveys, and the singular history of the group who is its subject" (395). It is historiographic metafiction's self-conscious reminder to us that, "while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning" (Hutcheon 1988, 97). Thus, the narrator of *Le Devoir* reiterates that reminder, while at the same time drawing the reader's attention to the divergent sources of African history:

Ici, nous atteignons le degré critique au-delà duquel la tradition se perd dans la légende, et s'y engloutit; car les récits écrits font défaut, et les versions des anciens divergent de celles des griots, lesquelles s'opposent à celles des chroniqueurs" (11).

In terms of a postmodern conceptual framework, these sources constitute a procedure challenging "narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity" (Hutcheon 1988, 90). We find here as well, examples of postmodern self-reflexivity in the novel. While the narrator gives his own account of the (hi)story, he puts into question that same account, for if there is so much uncertainty over the other versions, why should his be any more or less reliable? The point, I think Ouologuem is
making, is that all versions of any narrative are prone to be biased. This does not suggest that the historical account given in Le Devoir is lacking in seriousness, as certain critics would have us believe.

Two commentators who tend to question the seriousness of the historicity of Le Devoir are Sandra Barkan and Derek Wright. For Barkan, "in Le Devoir de violence history is only a screen; it is flattened, "presented," spread out in space.... Instead of historical depth, there is a repeated juxtaposition of good and evil characters, good and evil acts, good and evil values, etc." Barkan goes on to describe the chronological development in the novel as "no more than appearance," and the whole novel as a "patchwork quilt" rather than a "well" (Barkan 101-102). Wright refers to Ouologuem's "idiosyncratic pseudo-history of the barbaric cruelty and oppression of Sudanic Africa [which] incorporates a sardonic pastiche of oral narration which faithfully reproduces the griot's pietistic formulae and rhetorical invocations..." (91).

The first question that obviously comes to mind is which version of the history in question Barkan is referring to, when she speaks of historical depth. And to which one Wright is comparing Ouologuem's version that warrants him to call Le Devoir a "pseudo-history." Most of Barkan's and Wright's emphases seem to be on the fictional aspects of the narrative. For example, according to Barkan, the semblance
of "historical depth...serves primarily as a structural grid
upon which are hung... the fragments of the narrative
pattern" (102). As for Wright, the irony in the novel
"belittles the narrative form... and implies doubts about
its moral and historical reliability" (92-93). Yes, the
historical reliability of the narrative is indeed being
belittled. But the issue is--and Wright himself seems to
agree in the rest of his article--that this belittling of
the historical reliability of his own narrative by Ouologuem
is not for its own sake. He has ironically used that
technique to undermine the reliability of received
history.12

Linda Hutcheon gives this technique as one of the narrative
modes of historiographic metafiction:

[C]ertain known historical details are
deliberately falsified in order to foreground the
possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and
the constant potential for both deliberate and
inadvertent error" (144)

This technique, as Ouologuem employs it in his narrative,
reveals what Barkan has referred to as the shallowness of
history, which suggests that the depth usually attributed to
history may not be there after all. And as the author plays
this postmodern trick on history, he at the same time
systematically blurs the distinction between fictional and
historical narratives, thereby abolishing the binary
opposition that we often see between the two.

The blurring of boundaries occurs also on another level
in the novel; the distinction between good and evil. Yes
indeed, "opposing forces are evoked-- such as with Saïf
versus Henry-- but the dialectic is without a synthesis or
progress," as Harrow puts it (178). Thus, the narrative
does not present us with anything that is good or bad in
itself. The author's attempt at striking a balance in order
to avoid such binary oppositions is reflected in the
narrator's description of Raymond Kassoumi's situation once
the latter gets a scholarship to go for higher studies in
France.

Les jours que vécut dès lors Raymond furent
ceux de toute sa génération.... jeux d'équilibrès
ambigus, où le maître fit de l'esclave l'esclave
des esclaves et l'égal impénitent du maître blanc,
et où l'esclave se crut maître du maître lui-même
retombé esclave de l'esclave (157).

It needs to be noted that Raymond who is the son of Saïf's
slaves is considered Saïf's "propriété, par sa naissance,
son éducation, son héritéité, son avenir-- instrument de sa
politique future" (156). So even before Raymond goes to get
educated and prepared for the high political office of
Nakem's representative in the National Assembly, we already
know the limitations he is bound to face. The point I am
making here is that in the same way that "truth and falsity
may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss
fiction," especially historiographic metafiction (Linda
Hutcheon 109), good and bad may not be either. Just as
"there is rarely falseness per se, just others' truths,"
there is hardly any universal good or bad.
Hutcheon reminds us further how "postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being teleological" (110). *Le Devoir* demonstrates this aspect of the postmodern novel throughout its narrative, but it becomes most pointed in the episode that recounts Nakem's role in the First World War. The narrator perfectly mixes "fact" and fiction, myth and reality in recounting that particular episode. Saïf is seen to fanaticize the soldiers (tirailleurs), first through the use of fetish and talisman, giving them the illusion of invulnerability. To reinforce this, he uses religion, accompanied with blackmail. The soldiers are to consider their participation in the war as a duty to their God, as a way to eternal salvation.

"Ne vous pressez pas de rejoindre le Très-Haut, leur dit Saïf, autrement Il vous punirait:.... bataillez et attendez, car le Ciel ne viendra pas à vous tant que Dieu n'aura pas répandu sur vous le salut et accordé Sa bénédiction. Louons, mes doux agneaux, le Seigneur pour les abondantes faveurs et bienfaits dont Il nous comble en faisant de nous ses adorateurs dévoués, nous préservant ainsi du mal. Allahou akbar! wakoul rabbi zidni ilman! (138)

For sure, Saïf and the "notables" were being protected from all harm and danger in the comfort of their palace where they stayed out of arm's way. The same could not be said about the soldiers who, with heavy grigris hanging around their necks, armed with only knives, hoes, iron bars, slings, and few guns, "fanatisés par les sorciers," were
going to face the heavy artillery of the Germans. On the other hand, while Saïf remains callous to the needs of the widows of the fallen soldiers, Bishop Henry is seen to be overly generous to the impoverished communities, offering them food, medication, and other social services. In other "historical" accounts of the same episode the opposite would be the case. Ouologuem may certainly have made up much of the above account of the war, in the wilful bid to construct meaning, but what is interesting is that he also includes some historical events, dates, and names of historical figures directly involved with the West African tirailleurs (pp 139-43). The fragmentation of history that goes with this wilful invention, like provisionality, is one of the descriptive characteristics of historiographic metafiction, as opposed to the "traditional" historical novel. What Ouologuem seems to be suggesting here by this juxtaposition of the historical and the fictive is that if one is an invention, the other could also possibly be so. Or, as Hutcheon puts it, "the provisionality and uncertainty," which are implied by this meaning-constructing, "do not 'cast doubt upon their seriousness,' but rather define the new postmodern seriousness that acknowledges the limits and powers of 'reporting' or writing of the past, recent or remote" (117).

While Saïf and the "fençèssi" (French) may have had a vested interest in recruiting the African soldiers for the
war, Ouologuem sees it differently. Hence the narrator concludes the episode in a way that points to the futility of the war:

Et depuis, chantent au Nakem-Ziuko les écoliers gondaïtes, les peulhs, n'godos, radingués et zobos, outre la Marseillaise (Soit), Jaurès assassiné (Dieu lui fasse miséricorde), la Marne (Et exaucée), Verdun (L'Eternel), l'Europe en furie (Sur elle le salut), la défaite italienne de Caporetto (Amen), le recul, la victoire (Gloire au Très-Haut), et treize millions de morts (Dieu rafraîchisse leur couche) parmi lesquels l'anonyme négraille trainée sur vingt-neuf mille kilomètres, et tombée pour l'injustifiable. Pardonnez-nous, Seigneur (142-43, emphasis added).

By describing the war as unjustifiable, contrary to Saïf and the flençessi, the narrator gives his own view, thus once again emphasizing the discursivity of history. And as discourse it is affected by the perspective of the person recording it. The issue raised by this inevitable subjectivity is to determine whose history survives. The parenthetical use of prayer tags which punctuate the above extract underscores the irony the narrator sees in Nakem's participation in the war. This sardonic juxtaposition of the sacred phrases and the profanities they are attached to in most cases in the novel discredits the phrases and their seriousness is undermined. In this particular case, the irony is aimed at what could be understood as the true motivation of the perpetuators of the war; namely, glory. The injustice Nakem has suffered by losing so many soldiers in the war is further worsened by the cultural imperialism to which the Nakemian children are subjected. They learn
and sing the Marseillaise, revere French heroes like Jaurès, and learn "facts" about the war which had little to do with them. This is the aspect of the war that the narrator deems important.

By juxtaposing history and fiction, the narrative destabilizes not only the historical, but also the literary. As I have mentioned already, historiographic metafiction contests what Hutcheon calls the "romantic and modernist assertions of the autonomy and supremacy of literature," assertions which are exacerbated by such fictional forms as surfiction or the French New New Novel, and which lead to the "marginalization of literature. Historiographic metafiction, in deliberate contrast to... such late modernist radical metafiction, attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (Hutcheon 108). We have seen how this mixing of the literary and historical informs the whole novel. Ouologuem blends this thematic mixing with the formal in a number of ways. First, there is a multiple narrative voice which talks about every subject under the sun; from violence to love, fact to fiction. Now it is the griot Koutouli, now it is an anonymous voice, now it is the characters themselves in dialogue with each other. The various voices interweave so much that the narrative produces a sort of complex web, making it impossible at times to isolate a single narrator. This obscure identity
of the narrator makes Harrow observe that, "the narrator is not only invisible, he is absolutely nothing but an 'ironizing' voice, and thus a voice that is compelled to revolt, always turning the real names, real heroes, real leaders, real empires, real colonizers, real feelings, real encounters, real historical drives, and especially real relationships (...) into verbal gestures" (Harrow 177). The absolute freedom accorded to the narrator to manipulate discourse—and this freedom spans the entire novel—is often missed by commentators. For instance, Part Four of the novel is constructed as a dialogue between Bishop Henry and Saif over a game of chess. Sandra Barkan speaks of the "elimination of the narrator" in this fourth part of the novel, and according to her, this reduces the whole history of Nakem "to dialogue, played out by two men sitting across a table from each other. Action is transformed into words" (Barkan 103). As Barkan herself suggested in the early part of her essay, the narrative is far from linear. Nor is the narrative style homogenous. This is not the first time the author introduces dialogue in the narrative. The dialogue at the end is just a culmination of the process of fragmentation, and the varying narrative forms that we have witnessed since the beginning of the novel. And the multifarious narrative forms is, to my mind, a studied technique by Ouologuem to emphasize the point of the possibilities of narrating African history. This, in
present day criticism will be called self-reflexivity, an approach Ouologuem has used not only in undermining history, but also in constructing the entire novel.

Perhaps the biggest controversy surrounding the novel, but one which enhanced the fascination of the reading public with Le Devoir came about with Eric Sellin's charges of plagiarism against Ouologuem in 1971, the year when Heinemann was bringing out the English version of the novel. Having been tipped off by a friend that Le Devoir de violence was nothing more than an imitation of André Schwarz-Bart's Le Dernier des Justes which had won the Prix Goncourt in 1959, Eric Sellin re-read Schwarz-Bart's novel. He experienced "dismay and bewilderment" when he compared the opening paragraphs of the two novels (Sellin 118). He then published the identical passages from the two novels side by side, charging Ouologuem with plagiarism, and concluding that Le Dernier des Justes was a "blueprint" for Le Devoir de violence. Schwarz-Bart's reaction to the "discovery" was one of indifference. In a letter to Seuil, he unequivocally stated that indifference: "I am in no way worried by the use that has been made of Le Dernier des Justes.... I have always looked on my books as appletrees, happy that my apples be eaten and happy if now and again one is taken and planted in different soil." (Quoted in Flamand, 129). Sellin however went further to challenge the status Ouologuem's novel had achieved as the first real African
novel. According to Sellin, "It is as deeply set in European literary tradition as, say, Ferdinand Oyono's Une Vie de boy or Camara Laye's L'Enfant noir" (120).

The charge spread like wild fire when on May 5, 1972, The Times Literary Supplement published another article "submitting the striking resemblance between two pages of Ouologuem's work and an extract from an early novel by Graham Greene-- It's a Battlefield, published in 1934" (Blair 306). Like the novel itself, these accusations were received and still continue to be met with varying reactions; some address the ethical, others the esthetic, and yet others the philosophical implications of the charges; some come to the defense of the author, others are in utter condemnation of him. As for Ouologuem himself, he never denied copying parts of the alleged works, but according to him, they were all included in his text as quotations. It was, he alleged, the publishers who removed the quotation marks. Besides, even before these "discoveries" of plagiarism were made, Ouologuem had admitted to Mel Watkins that his novel "is not traditional.... Afro-American writers have influenced its style and there are Greek and Latin references that are intended to heighten its meaning on a human level. It addresses the problems of all civilizations at specific periods of development; it is not just an African novel..." (quoted in Watkins 7, my emphasis). The author of Le Devoir
also made no secret of the fact that his novel had
"borrowings" from sources such as "the 16th century explorer
Lope di Pigafeti, and a modern detective story by John
Macdonald (...), as well as traditional epic sources in
Arabic, Bambara and Amharic, and even French colonial
documents that he says are still in secret archives," as a
certain "K.W." reported in West Africa (941). In fact, Le
Canard Enchaîné had already "spotted a few lines" from Guy
de Maupassant's Boule de suif in Ouologuem's novel back in
1969 (K.W. 941).  

These "discoveries" drew the attention of Ouologuem's
critics to his Lettre à la France nègre, which he had
published shortly after the novel. And this renewed
interest in the Lettre fueled the flames of criticism of the
author. According to Blair, it contained an essay in which
"the author proposes a blue-print for successful composition
to other aspirant Black novelists, which consists of cutting
promising sections out of the works of established writers
and fitting them together to form a sort of literary jig­
saw" (30). Sellin, who had already retracted his "former
eulogies over the novel," now referred to the Lettre... as a
modus operandi (see Blair 306-07). For Christopher Miller
however, the Lettre à la France nègre shows that Le Devoir
is "a conscious effort to spoil the distinctions between
original and copy" (Miller 228).  

Other critics who came to the defense of Ouologuem on
this question include a certain K.W., and Appiah. In "In Defence of Ouologuem," "K.W." refers to "borrowings" in Le Devoir. The author of that article thinks that what has been called plagiarism was actually "a stylistic technique to further the purposes of the novel." In that same article, the "borrowings" have been described as a "brilliant pastiche" (941). Appiah endorses the same contention that Ouologuem must have committed the so-called plagiarism on purpose. For, as Appiah observes, Ouologuem's academic credentials as they are described on the "back of the Éditions du Seuil first edition" of the novel, it would be foolhardy for him to think no-one could notice if he plagiarized the works of well-known authors like de Maupassant. Therefore, "if this latter is theft," concludes Appiah, "it is the adventurous theft of the kleptomaniac, who dares us catch him at it" (150-51). It is however, what I call Miller's esthetic-theoretical aspect of the Ouologuem controversy, that will be of concern to the present project.

I have already indicated that the critic whose study of the novel fits Appiah's description of "a justly well-respected reading" is, in my opinion, Christopher Miller. Miller has done the most in-depth analysis of the theoretical and esthetic implications of "Ouologuem's plagiarism". The much bandied-about plagiarism, I want to argue after Miller, is an esthetic ingenuity employed by Ouologuem to make form and content coincide in his novel.
The issue of plagiarism involves a whole range of questions about the originality and ownership of a text; the definition of plagiarism and authenticity; and the very identity of Ouologuem's text. Needless to say how dubious those terms are in themselves. As Miller suggests, insistence on the ramifications of this question blurs certain fundamental and more interesting issues contained in the novel. In Miller's words, "[t]he question of originality and plagiarism, once raised, generates a discourse with only one axis, that of truth and falsehood, paternity and kidnapping, white and black.... Le Devoir de violence cuts across those categories with its 'operative gymnastics of writing' and...the continual rocking of those binary questions has precluded another reading of the novel: as an assault on European assumptions about writing and originality.... Le Devoir de violence, both in its narrative method and in its narrated content, posits destructive violence and theft as origin itself" (Christopher Miller 219, my emphasis).

Patrick McGee makes a similar argument when he refers to this "patchwork of other texts," (Christopher Miller 222), as Ouologuem's engagement "in a compelling act of postmodern pastiche which attacks the authority of the Western master narrative by mirroring its violence and demystifying its claim to universal truth" (McGee 158). The assault or attack mentioned by Soyinka and McGee, comes in the form of
what Aliko Songolo has called "the technique of subversion." However, as Songolo rightly remarks, the violence is not directed solely against "European assumptions," but equally against "everything the African novel stood for before 1968, [and] also... the acquired notion of the socio-political role of tradition on the one hand, and the notion of copyright on the other" (Songolo 146). The acquired notion Songolo refers to is especially rooted in the way Africa's past has been represented by various historical sources. That being the case, it comes as no surprise that Ouologuem's "duty of violence" should take aim at not only the European, but all the sources involved in the representation of the history and culture of Africa.

While questioning colonization, slavery, violence, rape, etc,—all techniques of appropriation-- Ouologuem employs another technique of appropriation (whether one calls it borrowing or plagiarism), to construct his narrative. The sources of this appropriation could be examined in two different forms. First, there is what George Lang has called the founding texts; in this case the Bible, the Koran, the Tarikh al Fatash, legends, chronicles, the discourse of griots, and what Harrow has called literature of témoignage". The narrator enumerates some of the sources of what would become the legend of the Saïfs:

...il est raconté dans les annales talismaniques des sages anciens, parmi les récits des traditions orales, l'épopée célèbre... (12)
Now and again we come across portions of, or allusions to, biblical stories in the narrative. It is through one of such allusions that the narrator establishes Saïf's Oriental-and-Western origin as Black Africa's ties with both the West and the Orient, as Christopher Miller points out;

la splendeur d'un seul, notre ancêtre le Juif noir Abraham El Héït, métis né d'un père nègre et d'une mère juive d'Orient (12).

Apart from the said link that this identity creates, the technique employed here by Ouologuem serves to question the very notion of identity. Hence, Saïf and all his descendents would later be described as "fétichiste musulman et négro-juif," which description Miller calls "a multifaceted system of masks that has no one true face. Ouologuem's Saïfs," continues Miller, "thus reflect a conscious effort to be 'any figure that you like'; they are an African exploitation of an Africanist myth" (Miller 231). What has operated between Le Devoir and the "founding texts" could be viewed as intertextuality, yet another strategy of, though not peculiar to, postmodernism. Postmodern intertextuality is, however peculiar in that, according to Linda Hutcheon, it

"is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in new context. It is not a modernist desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the richness of the past. It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature-- and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts (documents). It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power

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through irony (1988, 118).

We have already referred to some of the sources which Ouologuem himself has revealed to "K.W." but which, ironically, his critics did not identify. He also estimated in another interview that he had spent "6,000 hours working on [the novel], including historical research." ("Malian Prizewinner" 1475). There is no question, therefore, that Le Devoir "derives from other texts." There is no question either that Ouologuem does parody most of the information he appropriated from the "founding texts."

Ouologuem's technique of parody is to demystify not only the subject matter of the texts in question, but also the characters. For instance, as Soyinka (1976) has remarked, "the metempsychotic delirium of the wife murderer Sankolo reads suspiciently like a sex-orgiastic parody of Hamidou Kane's transcendentalist apologia for Islamic spirituality" (102). Due to the drugged-into-a-zombie-state-Sankolo's reenacting of a "mock journey south" and his "echoing the refrain of 'Le Sud, le Sud' (from Camara Laye's Le Regard du roi), Kenneth Harrow interprets that delirium differently. What are being mocked, according to Harrow, are Laye's protagonist, "Clarence's experience of the descent into sensuality with his own enslavement to the drug dabali and sexual dependency, and... the king/god who embraces Clarence by substituting the monstrous slave owner to whom he is 'sold'" (Harrow 191). Hence, Sankolo's
comments: Peut-être est-ce un peu cela, une vie de Nègre. Esclave. Vendu. Acheté, revendu, instruit" (Le Devoir 125). When one speaks of other texts in relation to Le Devoir however, what comes to mind first are the texts Ouologuem is said to have plagiarized.

Whatever one chooses to call it, plagiarism or borrowing, the fact remains that Ouologuem's novel contains passages from Schwarz-Bart's Le Dernier des justes, Graham Greene's It's a Battlefield, and Maupassant's Boule de Suif, and maybe other unidentified ones. Thus, the issue is no longer the presence of these passages in Le Devoir, but to what use the author has put the texts. By "cutting" those passages from their sources, Ouologuem has already done violence to the said sources. But even more violent, none of the so-called plagiarized texts appears in its integral form. They have been maimed, lamed, mutilated, and in some cases "prostheticized". Words or entire phrases are omitted, or replaced in sentences to create a new meaning suitable to the theme, atmosphere, and purpose of Le Devoir. The cutting and deforming of other texts--an illegal act--resulting in their disfigurement, coincides with the disfiguring of bodies and other illegal, and socially unacceptable acts in the narrative. We have, for instance, Saïf El Haram, who marries his mother and has the heir to the throne eaten alive by worms; the eating of the brain, and the sexual parts of defeated enemies (p.22);
Chevalier whose dogs have sex with Awa, (70-71); Raymond Kassoumi who has sex with his sister (turned prostitute in Paris), and which sister has her body cut open, thanks to a vicious customer who introduced a razor blade into her bath soap.

Even the most positive instance of intercourse, as Miller would have it, "involves destruction." One such instance in question is the homosexual affair between Raymond and Lambert the Frenchman. Thus, "the creator, progenitor, and lover is also the kidnapper, murderer, and rapist. As _Le Devoir de violence_ narrates violence and the flowing of one body into other bodies and into the world, the narration itself is disfiguring a prior text, violating the integrity of another literary body," observes Miller (235, his italics). The net result of this disfiguring is the creation of a new text which is at once similar to, and different from the original, thereby problematizing the distinction between original and copy. Consequently, the question of ownership of the text comes up. And to talk about owner and "borrower" or "plagiarizer" is to create a position of privilege for the former over the latter. It is such distinctions that Ouologuem's narrative blurs.

A particularly telling episode which demonstrates this blurring of boundaries occurs towards the end of the novel. At the beginning of Part Four of the novel, Bishop Henry--the only white survivor of Saïf's viciousness--narrates his
experience after watching the movie *Zamba*. *Zamba* is the screenplay of the history of the Nakem-Ziuko empire. He enters the movie theater in the middle of carnage, and after watching the whole movie, the following are his comments on what he saw:


In these comments the author cleverly and sucessfully plays on the word *histoire*. The story (*histoire*) which is being played out is the history (*histoire*) of the empire. So what we have here is the joining of the two, which I daresay is another deliberate act by the author to obsure the distinction between the two categories of history and fiction. In fact, the reader does not understand the novel (story) any better than Henry understands the film (history).

A little before the above episode, Henry meets Raymond on the eve of the latter's election to the National Assembly. The Bishop couches his view of the Nakem-Ziuko political situation, and of human relations in general in the following parable:

"Les Chinois ont un jeu: le trait d'union. Ils capturent deux oiseaux qu'ils attachent ensemble. Pas de trop près. Grâce à un lien mince, mais solide et long. Si long que les oiseaux, rejetés en l'air, s'envolent, montent en flèche et, se
The morale of this parable, for the Bishop, is the inevitable linkage of humanity. He concludes,

"L'humanité est une volaille de ce genre. Nous sommes tous victimes de ce jeu; séparés, mais liés de force. Tous, sans exception" (194).

In almost all the interpretations of this parable by critics the emphasis has been on this inextricable connection of humanity. But the link described in the game could also be interpreted as the link between Henry and Saïf, that between "Europe and Africa, and between Le Devoir and its precursors," as Miller observes. Miller also interprets the link as "Ouologuem's vision of the world as a whole: a forced linking of unwilling opposites which proceed to tear each other apart." However, it is Miller's interpretation of the irony of the name 'trait d'union,' that is most pertinent to our discussion. Besides the fact that the birds will "'peck each other's eyes out,' and one or both will wind up dead, all because of this 'union,'" the 'trait d'union' also means 'hyphen,' a link by punctuation, which might describe the authorship of Le Devoir de violence: Ouologuem-Schwartz-Barth," Ouologuem-Greene," or "Ouologuem-Maupassant." As Miller has rightly noted, "the forced linkage between the text and its precursors, [leaves] authorship, authority, and authenticity "teased" ("tiraillé") between the two" (Miller 237). I dare to take
this interpretation a step further to add that the "trait d'union" might be the linkage between fiction and history. This linkage in concrete terms is the novel *Le Devoir de violence* the subject matter of which is torn ("tiraillé") between history and fiction: historiographic metafiction.
I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with its chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" p. 216)

Omniprésence du pouvoir: non point parce qu'il aurait le privilège de tout regrouper sous son invincible unité, mais parce qu'il se produit à chaque instant, en tout point, ou plutôt dans toute relation d'un point à un autre. Le pouvoir est partout; ce n'est pas parce qu'il englobe tout, c'est qu'il vient de partout (Histoire de la sexualité, 122).

The concepts of discourse and power have become very important in academia, especially since the advent of structuralism in the late 1960s and 1970s. The import of the two terms is evidenced in the enormous interest that a great many scholars and critics have shown (and continue to show) in their implications in various fields of study. With this explosion of the use and application of the terms has come the burgeoning of their meanings. Hayden White begins his discussion of the concept of discourse by identifying three fundamental characteristics: antilogical,
prelogical, and dialectical. The word discourse, which, according to White, is derived from the Latin discurrere, "suggests a movement 'back and forth' or a 'running to and fro.' This movement, discursive practice shows us, may be as much prelogical or antilogical as it is dialectical." 17 The antilogical aim of discourse would be to "deconstruct a conceptualization of a given area of experience which has become hardened into a hypostasis that blocks fresh perception or denies, in the interest of formalization, what our will or emotions tell us ought not be the case in a given department of life. As a prelogical, its aim is to mark out an area of experience for subsequent analysis by a thought guided by logic" (3-4). White further explains this 'to and fro' movement as one that takes place between "received encodings of experience and the clutter of phenomena which refuses incorporation into conventionalized notions of 'reality,' 'truth,' or 'possibility.'" But it is also a movement "between alternative ways of encoding this reality, some of which may be provided by the traditions of discourse prevailing in a given domain of inquiry..." (4). The Columbia Dictionary Of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism shows how the terms discourse and power have assumed many and varying meanings over the past three decades. Discourse has moved from its "traditional" meaning of "a formal exposition in speech or writing," to assume first a linguistic, then a narratological meaning. 18
poststructuralist use of the term is at the same time an extension of and a departure from its narratological use. In its poststructuralist acceptation, "discourse refers to texts, but also verbal signification in general. Often the term actually replaces 'text,' thus helping to emphasize (and deconstruct) what poststructuralism sees as an arbitrary and artificial distinction between literary and nonliterary works" (84).

Power, like discourse, has a proliferation of meanings. The definition of power begins with its "crudest and probably oldest view that the powerful are those who possess the greatest brute force." Then there is Max Weber's contention that "those who possess and exercise 'power' usually do so, not on the basis of the threat of physical violence, but on the basis of tradition, legal systems, ideology, consensus, etc."

Classical Marxists, for their part, believe that "power is always in the hands of those who control the economic base," an analysis contested by many feminist critics who contend that male domination of women knows no economic limits (The Columbia Dictionary, 238-39). But most important to the present project is Foucault's seminal contribution in showing the relationship between discourse and power, "the discursive construction of social subjects and knowledge, and the functioning of discourse in social change" (Fairclough 1992, 37-38). Nick Crossley has called Foucault's definition of power a
"praxiological definition" in the sense that Foucault posits that "we dereify 'structures of power' by breaking them down into practices..." (Crossley 1994, 113).

Foucault begins his analysis by first recognizing the insistence on the legislative or juridical form of power which functions in various situations and forms: be it the rights of a monarch, or the ban of a father on a son, or the silencing imposed by a censor, or the lawyer who interprets the law, etc. The effects of such power are measured in terms of obedience, as its general form is that of submission. Foucault writes:

Le pouvoir, comme pure limite tracée à la liberté, c'est, dans notre société au moins, la forme générale de son acceptabilité (Histoire de la sexualité, 114).

For sure, Foucault is referring to Western societies in the above extract, but his comments are nonetheless applicable to all societies. Foucault maintains that in order to analyze power in the day-to-day manifestations of its conduct, we need to free ourselves from the above images of power. By power, Foucault goes on,

je ne veux pas dire "le Pouvoir", comme ensemble d'institutions et d'appareils qui garantissent la sujétion des citoyens dans un État donné. Par pouvoir, je n'entends pas non plus un mode d'assujettissement, qui par opposition à la violence, aurait la forme de la règle. Enfin, je n'entends pas un système général de domination exercée par un élément ou un groupe sur un autre, et dont les effets, par dérivations successives, traverseraient le corps social tout entier (Histoire de la sexualité, 121).

After eliminating these features from his analysis,
Foucault then goes on to give what remains the most comprehensive and encompassing definition of power. Power, he asserts, should be understood as "la multiplicité des rapports de force qui sont immanents au domaines où ils s'exercent, et sont constitutifs de leur organisation." It should be understood also as "une situation stratégique complexe dans une société donnée" (121-23). This complex situation involves the production of truth which sanctions the exercise of power. The engine which drives the truth, in turn, is the discourse in which it is produced. As Foucault has asserted,

...basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relationships of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (1994, 31).

This Foucaultian analysis of the discourse-power relationship has been applied by scholars to numerous fields of study. For instance, Edward Said explores that relationship in discussing what he considers the production of the discursive category known as 'Orientalism'. V. Y. Mudimbe draws heavily on Lévi-Strauss and Foucault to reevaluate the discourses of Africanism. He shows how Western theology, painting, travel literature, philosophy,
and ethnology all form part of the same discursive order. Mudimbe calls this, in *The Invention of Africa* as the "colonising structure," of Western discourse about other cultures. This discourse, Mudimbe argues, continues the Enlightenment tradition of seeing Africa as backward, primitive, and savage. What is new in this new discourse, however, is that "the discourse on 'savages' is, for the first time, a discourse in which an explicit political power presumes the authority of a scientific knowledge, and vice versa" (Mudimbe 1988, 16). The link that Mudimbe has identified between the discourses of Africanism produced in the above domains of knowledge, and power is even more evident in the link between the discursive practice of language, and power. My reading of Ahmadou Kourouma's two novels, *Les Soleils des indépendances*, and *Monnè, outrages et défis* will explore that link.

The first of these novels, *Les Soleils des indépendances* is a three-part novel which chronicles the frustrations, disillusionment, and disenchantment of the precolonial ruling classes with the era of Independence in Africa. The plot of the story is set in two fictitious countries: Nikinai and the République de la Côte des Ebènes. Fama, the protagonist is the symbol of this former elite class and the last prince of the ruling Doumbouya dynasty of the region of Horodougou in Nikinai, his home country that he flees because of frustration:
This brief introduction of Fama which comes at the beginning of the novel bespeaks the arrogant, ostentatious, uncompromising and ambitious, but naive character that he continues to display even during the new era of Independence in which his previous way of life can no longer be condoned. Even though he is "analphabet comme la queue d'un âne," Fama flirts with the unrealistic aspiration of becoming the general secretary of a sub-section of the ruling political party, or director of a co-operation, all because he had participated in the struggle for the Independence of his country. When he is passed over for these posts in favor of some educated "bâtard de bâtardise, Gnamokodé," Fama's anger and resentment against the new rulers increases even more. His frustrations and humiliations are compounded by his childless marriage of twenty years to Salimata, "une femme sans limite dans la bonté du coeur, les douceurs des nuits et des caresses, une vraie tourterelle; fesses rondes et basses, dos, seins hanches et bas-ventre lissess et infinis sous les doigts..." (p.26). In part two of the novel he returns to his native Horodougou, after the death of his cousin Lacina who had usurped his power. He foresees the restoration of his past glory if he returns to his home as...
the honored chief of his native region. He also inherits
the young widow of his deceased cousin, a sure way of
perpetuating the Doumbouya dynasty, as Mariam is "féconde
comme une souris." However, unheedful of the deviner's
admonition, Fama decides to take his new wife to rejoin
Salimata, his first and only wife up till then, in the
capital of the republic of Côte des Ebènes. He makes that
decision in the main because he realizes, as the narrator
tells us, that "dans ce monde renversé, cet honneur sans
moyen, serpent sans tête, revenait à Fama. La puissance
d'un chef d'affamés n'est autre chose que la famine et une
gourde de soucis" (p.92). The entire village has been
reduced to its bare skeleton. It was now a shadow of its
past glory: "De loin en loin une ou deux cases penchées,
vieillottes, cuites par le soleil, isolées comme des
termitières dans une plaine" (p.105). The population of the
village has been reduced to "[q]uatre hommes dont deux
vieillards, neuf femmes dont sept vieillottes refusant de
mourir. Deux cultivateurs!" (p.110). In part three, a
little after his return to the capital, he is wrongly
accused and arrested on charges of counter-revolutionary
activities and sentenced to twenty years in prison. When
the President pardons all political criminals some years
later, he comes out only to discover that both of his wives
have gone with other men. He decides to return to his home
land for good, but is killed by the border guards between
Nikinai and Côte des Ebènes. *Les Soleils des indépendances*, as this brief synopsis shows, raises numerous and diverse questions which provoke many controversies, thereby lending the novel to multiple readings.

Dorothy Blair treats "the collapse, with no hope of regeneration, of the only society into which" Fama the main character "was fully integrated," as the central theme. Closely tied to this central theme, Blair suggests, is that of a childless, twenty-year-old marriage between Fama and Salimata. Blair considers this sub-theme an important issue since childlessness is a "personal tragedy but also a source of social inferiority in an African society" (Blair, 302). For Kwabena Britwum, the novel is at once about Malinke tradition and a social criticism with an emphasis on religion. According to Bernard Magnier *Les Soleils* is a "'Roman du désenchantement', 'roman de la déchéance de l'aristocratie féodale et de l'instauration de la bourgeoisie africaine', ce livre est aussi un roman de l'échec." He also reads the novel as "le récit de la Passion d'un homme seul et démuni" (Bernard Magnier, 543). Mohamadou K. Kane (1982), for his part, stresses the theme of acculturation or the lack of it that the main character, Fama symbolizes. There is also the role of women and treatment they receive vis-à-vis such generic themes as female excision and polygyny; and, of course, urbanization, begun during the colonial era and still encouraged by the

Most of the critique of this novel to date, however, focuses mainly on the unique and innovative way of writing the French language adopted by Kourouma. There are a number of justifiable reasons for that emphasis. Generally speaking, the issue of language has been at the heart of the production of an African discourse for nearly two decades. Abiola Irele ponders, for instance, on what he calls the "ontological status of an African work." He wonders "how far European languages can... properly bear the weight of the African experience, whether the very use of these languages does not ultimately undermine the quality of experience that the African writer is at pains to convey" (Irele 1991, 89). I want to argue that Kourouma's departure from the standard French grammar in this novel is already a practical solution to what Irele theorizes much later. Therefore, I think that the use of language is the area in which the novel responds best to what Jean-Marie Abanda Ndengue calls Négrisme: "a fruitful marriage between the culture of the Negro-African world (Negritude) and those values introduced by the influence of Western colonization--
whether military, economic, political or cultural" (see Blair, 300). Peter Hawkins also refers to Kourouma's style
in Les Soleils, as "one of the most successful and often quoted examples of cultural métissage [as the author]
mingles classical French narrative with Malinke proverbs and expressions" (1995, 10). In fine, Les Soleils, and to
some extent Monné do provide an ontological response to the epistemological problem posed by the imposition of European
languages on colonial subjects.

It is indeed the manipulation of the French language that prominently sets Les Soleils apart from its
predecessors, most of which Senghor called "la littérature d'instituteur." It is this quality that accounts in large
part, for the novel's originality and success. As Magnier rightly points out, "Kourouma crée un langage neuf qui brise
le carcan littéraire traditionnel et confère à son oeuvre une originalité exceptionnelle" (544). What the author does
is indigenize the former colonialist's language to adapt it to the reality of his characters. Therefore, as Sewanou
Dabla remarks, it was this aspect of the novel which "défraiera la chronique littéraire des années 1970." Alain
Ricard refers to the language of the novel as "vigoureuse, libre de la tutelle de Paris, qui ne craint pas le calque de
la langue africaine" (see Dabla, 56). Even though the principal focus of her analysis is the journey motif in the
novel, Mildred Mortimer (1990) also emphasizes the orality
of Kourouma's style. In her opinion, Kourouma uses this style to "[assume] the role of griot to relate Fama's adventure;" and also "to alter the relationship between the narrator and the reading public, to stretch the limits of conventional French syntax, and, finally to transform the journey motif" (Mortimer, 106, 108). Other noteworthy contributions on the language question in Les Soleils come from Jacques Chevrier (1990), and Makhily Gassama who has written a whole book on the topic: La Langue d'Ahmadou Kourouma ou le français sous le soleil d'Afrique.

Gassama's detailed study of the language in the novel shows in many instances the parallel between words, phrases, and whole sentences in the novel, and their Malinké translation. His analysis of the whole linguistic gymnastics and its likely effect on the reader capture especially well the thrust of Kourouma's style. They are therefore deserving of mention in their entirety:

Ahmadou Kourouma asservit la langue française, qu'il l'interprète en malinké, pour rendre la langue malinké, en supprimant toute frontière linguistique, à la surprise du lecteur. Il parvient ainsi à aboutir à des caractérisations intensives: le même mot se promène, tantôt avec une aisance audacieuse tantôt à une allure suspecte, de catégorie grammaticale en catégorie grammaticale, de catégorie sémantique en catégorie sémantique, changeant de contenu à volonté, emmitouflé dans des images d'un extraordinaire éclat, souvent sans détonner, égayant et s'imposant à l'intelligence du lecteur. Comment employer transitivement un verbe habituellement intransitif ou intransitivement un verbe habituellement transitif dans le dessein de mordre sur l'objet ou sur l'action, comme la langue malinké sait le faire? Comment faire admettre le
It comes as little surprise, therefore, that *Les Soleils* and its author had to confront the most hostile criticism from Francophone university circles when the novel first came out. That was the time according to Gassama, when academic critique was "conservatrice, conformiste, étriquée et agaçante du fait de ses tendances pseudo-scientifiques" (20).

Because of this acrobatic play between the two languages, Chevrier remarks that the novelty of Kourouma's style disrupts the French syntax, semantics, as well as lexicon. To mention just a few examples, the author's use of verbs is very disconcerting to a native speaker of French. Now he uses transitive verbs intransitively: "l'homme, à son tour, hurla le fauve, gronda le tonnerre", now he reverses this procedure by using transitive verbs as intransitive: "et un vent, un soleil et un univers grave et mystérieux descendent et enveloppent". Another strange category of verbs is the pronominal verbs Kourouma creates: "dehors le vent et le soleil s'énervaient." Beginning with the title of the novel, where the word "soleil" takes plural markers (Les soleils), the author creates new lexico-semantic categories. The novel opens with a similar
strange use of the word "finir". To report the death of Koné Ibrahima, the narrator says: "Il y avait une semaine qu'avait fini dans la capitale, Koné Ibrahima" (p. 7). The narrator will use the same verb to report Fama's own death too at the end of the novel: "Fama avait fini, était fini" (p.205). Almost every page of the novel is awash with sometimes humorous, sometimes bawdy Malinké proverbs adapted in French.

Various conclusions have been drawn from this new linguistic creation by Kourouma. Jacques Chevrier concludes first, that this innovative aspect is a manifestation of Kourouma's perfect mastery of the linguistic tools at his disposal. Secondly, Chevrier continues--and this seems to be the consensus of many critics-- "l'écriture de Kourouma crée un véritable réseau de correspondances qui rendent compte d'une vision profondément africaine du monde" (Chevrier 1990, 274). Kourouma himself seems to endorse this view, as he intimated in an interview given to Moncef S. Badday:

Qu'avais-je donc fait? Simplement donné libre cours à mon tempérament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s'y mueve. J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain.... Je suis Malinké et j'aborde la réalité de mon peuple de la façon la plus naturelle" (qtd in Mohamadou Kane, 163, my emphasis).

That "réalité de mon peuple" involves much more than the mere translation of the Malinké into the French which,
Kourouma argues, would be too simplistic and doable by any Malinké speaker of French. The reality involves, instead, replacing the rigid French linguistic system by an alternative, more fluid Malinké lexico-semantic system which fluidity is "sa [le malinké] façon de former les mots," the author comments.

"En français vous avez une façon de former les mots qui est stabilisée par le dictionnaire. Alors qu'en malinké, lorsqu'on a un mot à fabriquer, on le fait selon les règles données et ce mot est compris immédiatement à cause de la façon dont il a été formé. On est beaucoup plus libre. Mais à cause de cela justement, les mots ont besoin d'être soutenus par des proverbes" (Interview with Gauvin 158).

The discursive practice of "breaking" the French to restore "le rythme africain," and reflect the reality of the author's "peuple de la façon la plus naturelle," also breaks another rigid boundary. It nullifies the "rigid opposition between 'content' or 'meaning' and 'form'." Such an opposition, as Fairclough observes in another context, is "misleading because the meanings of texts are closely intertwined with the forms of the text..." (1992, 88-89). In the process, the practice reveals the "constitutive nature of discourse," which shows discourse in an active rather than a passive relation to reality. It also shows "that language signifies reality in the sense of constructing meaning for it, rather than [...] merely referring to objects which are taken to be given in reality" (Fairclough 1992, 41-42). Thus the language in Les Soleils
is mostly consistent with the protagonist's "irascible," "atrabilious" character, (as Dorothy Blair describes him), and the subject matter of the novel. Kourouma himself explains this purpose of adapting the language to the character of Fama, to Lise Gauvin thirty years after the publication of the novel.

Le problématique qui s'est posé, quand j'ai commencé à écrire comme tout le monde dans un français classique, c'est que je me suis aperçu que mon personnage n'arrivait pas à ressortir, à paraître dans toutes ses dimensions. C'est seulement quand je me suis mis à travailler le langage que je suis arrivé à le saisir dans sa totalité (qtd. in Gauvin 1997, 154.)

Whether it is the countless inner monologues the omniscient narrator ascribes to him, or the few pronouncements he makes himself, Fama's language is largely rife with obscenities and occasional salacity. He uses this language to verbalize his anger against the Independence regime. One word that keeps recurring as he lashes out at the young, educated elite that hold positions in the government, is "bâtard" or "bâtardise". From Fama's perspective, the society he lives in has been bastardized, thanks to the "suns of Independence". In order to elucidate and make effective his main character's point of view, it is only but proper that Kourouma render that character's story in a bastardized (French) language by creating the strange linguistic categories to which I have referred above.

In fact, the whole novel as an entity can be read as a discursive event, after Norman Fairclough's use of this
term. In his analysis of discourse and its relation to social change, Fairclough points up the importance and distinctive role of discourse in the "constitution and reproduction of power relations and social identities...."

Fairclough also comments on the "phenomena of language standardization, which are closely tied in with modernization" as tenets of modernity. "[O]ne feature in the modern," he opines, "is the unification of the order of discourse, of the 'linguistic market,' through the imposition of standard languages at the level of the nation-state" (Fairclough 1995, 136). _Les Soleils_ is an assault on the norms of such standard language. It is a 'break' through the rigid walls of French grammar to create an essentially new language. And beneath the obvious reasons given for Kourouma's bold step—of going against the normative use of the French language practiced by Francophone African writers before him—, one could discern others. The socio-historic context in which this exercise takes place makes it speak to a more profound reason than just Kourouma's quest to "aborde[r] la réalité de mon peuple de la façon la plus naturelle." At the time _Les Soleils_ was published, there was already a waning commitment on the part of creative black writers to the anti-colonial cause, as Blair rightly observes. The center of interest had shifted to the disillusionment with the newly acquired Independence and the political rule it ushered in. Nonetheless,
Kourouma's literary practice suggests that the political liberation of colonies is incomplete until linguistic liberation is attained. Kourouma's practice, quite unlike most of the current ongoing debate in African intellectual circles about the writing of African literature in African languages, posits a conciliatory message, which is to say that the adoption of these former colonialist languages is ineluctable. He seems to be sending a similar message to the former colonial masters, that once their languages have been imposed on the former colonized subjects, the latter do have the right to use those languages in the best way that reflects their reality. Makhily Gassama also sees the same effect in the novel when he describes Kourouma's style as "un style nouveau, un style né de la rencontre de deux civilisations--la française et la négro-africaine--et deux langues--le malinké et le français" (12).

If the author thus questions the rigidity of the rules of French grammar, he casts an equally critical eye on the society whose linguistic freedom he upholds by this questioning. A first reading of the novel could suggest the impression of the author's nostalgia for the colonial era and his total aversion for the Independence era; or his preference for tradition over modernization. A closer reading reveals that Kourouma avoids such binary oppositions in his discourse, and that he makes no final judgement on the numerous questions he raises. One of the many episodes
that the narrator uses to point to Fama's frustrations with the 'suns of Independence' and over the loss of traditional values occurs when he returns to his home village to attend the Fortieth Day funeral rites of his cousin Lacina. On the eve of the ceremonies themselves, tradition demands that the hunters put up a performance which everyone watches in total silence in deference to the spirit of the deceased. To his utter dismay, when the music begins, half-naked, young, nubile women are made to take the floor and perform what Fama considers to be vulgar, erotic dances. This, he sees as "[b]âtardise!" and one of the woes of Independence.

Bâtardise! Vraiment les soleils des Indépendances sont impropre aux grandes choses; ils n'ont pas seulement déviliarisé mais aussi démystifié l'Afrique (p. 149).

Back in the city, Fama accuses the post-Independence leaders of impeding the economic and political prosperity and liberty that the Malinke enjoyed during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. This prosperity they earned in two ways: through trade and wars. He particularly appreciates the encouragement given by the French in the area of trade during the colonial regime:

Mais l'important pour le Malinké est la liberté du négoce. Et les Français étaient aussi et surtout la liberté du négoce qui fait le grand Dioula, le Malinké prospère. Le négoce et la guerre, c'est avec ou sur les deux que la race malinké comme un homme entendait, marchait, voyait, respirait, les deux étaient à la fois ses deux yeux, ses oreilles et ses reins. La colonisation a banni et tué la guerre mais favorisé le négoce, les Indépendances ont cassé le négoce et la guerre ne venait pas (p. 21).
Fama's charges against the post-Independence period are not entirely true, because the French colonial system of Indirect Rule actually upset the traditional chiefdoms. Having said that, nonetheless, "the new auxiliaries have continued to be recruited among the successors to these chiefs. In other words, the thrones have been upset, but their occupants have been maintained; the traditional chief has been dethroned, but the same man has been designated as the administrative chief," observes Amon d'Alby (qtd in Aristide R. Zolberg, 53-54). As Kwabena Britwum suggests, however, even though post-Independence regimes in Africa may not have consciously embarked on undermining the power of traditional rulers, in practice, the institution of the one-party state, the importance of elected representatives and the power of the local functionaries were all contributing factors to the speedy decline of chieftaincy in French West Africa in particular (see Britwum, 85).

Given this petering out of the glory Fama and his kind stood for, one would naturally expect him to prefer the colonialist period. On the contrary, Kourouma is quick to defend his protagonist against any accusations of harboring colonialist sympathies:

Surtout, qu'on n'aille pas toiser Fama comme un colonialiste! Car il avait vu la colonisation, connu les commandants français qui étaient beaucoup de choses, beaucoup de peines: travaux forcéés, chantiers de coupe de bois, routes, ponts, l'impôt et les impôts, et quatre-vingts autres réquisitions que tout conquérant peut mener... (p. 21).
The narrator also makes mention, a number of times, of the corruption in the colonial period and the exploitation that the colonized suffered. We have, for instance, the story of the shrewd griot, Diamourou who succeeded in evading the brutal and exploitative rule of the colonial officials, by offering his daughter to the commandant Tomassini. She had two sons with the commandant and later became a courtesan, enriched herself, and most of all, assured immunity and protection for his father. Thus, Diamourou can proudly declare that "[l]a colonisation a passé sur mon dos comme une brise: le griot père de la femme du commandant était toujours excepté" (p. 112).

Within the context of Independence itself, the narrative erects a seeming dichotomy between socialist and democratic regimes, with the scale of preference tipping toward the socialist. A great part of the narrative is set in the Democratic Republic of Côte des Ébènes, thus making the ills of that regime more readily discernible. At the same time, the author's incisive criticism shows no sympathy for the neighboring socialist Nikinai either. The already physically, morally, socially, and materially weakened Fama meets his cruel death at the hands of the callous, indifferent border officers of that country. On board the passenger truck which takes Fama on his final journey, the apprentice driver replaces the narrator. The driver uses the personal story of Diakité and his son to show the kinds
of suffering that people are made to go through under the Socialist regime. The two victims are first of all dispossessed of all their wealth, then the son is tied to a stake and tortured. The father cannot bear the sight, he takes a gun and fires on some of the party officials. He is killed instantly.

It is within the discourse of the novel itself that Kourouma clearly explains that it is not a question of preferring one system to another. He just raises the problems within each system, be it Colonisation, Independence, Democracy, or Socialism, as lucidly as possible. To him all these systems were invented by the same devil:

La colonisation, les commandants, les réquisitions, les épidémies, les sécheresses, les Indépendances, le parti unique et la révolution sont exactement des enfants de la même couche, des étrangers au Horodougou, des sortes de malédictions inventées par le diable (p. 137)

Kourouma does not mention these "develish" systems to exonerate traditional society, however. And this is shown in his less than sympathetic portrayal of Fama, the epitome of that tradition. Fama is presented as an illiterate, uncompromising, recalcitrant character who is unwilling to face up to the changing realities of the society in which he is living. Both Dorothy Blair and Bernard Magnier see the protagonist as a victim of a changing society into which he cannot integrate due to his social psychological limitations. One can however go beyond Fama's victimization
to read the novel as an acknowledgement of a new political arrangement ushered in by the Independence era, and the inevitability of its acceptance by the Famas of Africa. An episode in the novel that foregrounds this inevitability is the confrontation between Fama the traditionalist and Babou the President of the regional committee of the political party. The confrontation occurs over the question of deciding whether Horodougou should remain under the traditional rule of the Doumbouyas or be taken over by the party committee. The two men get engaged in a palaver for several days and nights. Then Fama shows signs of tiredness. As a consequence, the committee demands that Fama kneel down and lick the dust from under Babou's feet, and swear on the Koran promising adherence and faithfulness to the party. Fama's acquiescence to this humiliation would seem to signify the demise of tradition. But as the narrator comments, to a Doumbouya, acquiescing to such humiliation, "était aussi infaisable que manger les crottes d'un chien" (p. 141). Furthermore, it is the secret council of elders ("les anciens"), who would be more inclined toward tradition than modernization, that brings the imbroglio to an end. The decision they reach stipulates that:

Fama resterait le chef coutumier, Babou le président officiel. Et les choses futures aussi: les soleils des Indépendances et du parti unique passeront comme les soleils de Samory et des Toubabs, alors que les Babou, les Doumbouya resteront toujours à Togobala. Et on se réconcilia (p. 141-42)
The above decision obviously underscores the mutability of political regimes as opposed to the constancy of family ties and the communality that defines the traditional African society. The point of the decision seems to go beyond the obvious, however. It points up the fact that in the contemporary society, "traditions have to be justified against alternative possibilities rather than being taken for granted; that relationships in public based automatically upon authority are in decline...; that people's self-identity... is reflexively built up through a process of negotiation... (Fairclough 1995, 137.

Fama's death at the end is another episode one may take for the symbolic death of tradition. Nonetheless, the inner logic of the novel points to a different interpretation. The future tense used in the last paragraph and the conjunction "et..." followed by suspension marks at the very end of the novel certainly invite the reader to look beyond this "ephemeral end" of Fama. As Gassama ends the "Avant-Propos" to his book, "[c]e roman ouvre la voie à la vraie francophonie, à la francophonie de demain, celle qui ne sera fondée sur la charité ni sur la mendicité, mais sur le dialogue libre et fraternel entre deux civilisations, entre la langue française et les langues négro-africaines" (13). Or, as Irele concludes about "[t]he modern African novel, situated thematically and formally between an unfulfilled past and a problematic present," Les Soleils... explores
"the tension between retrospection and prospection... in an imaginative endeavor to chart a course toward the future" (Irele 1993, 169).

If Kourouma meant a futuristic, visionary message in Les Soleils des indépendances, that vision was definitely not meant to be realized in his second novel, Monnè, outrages et défis, published twenty-two years after the first. This novel is, in some regards, a temporal and thematic reversal of Les Soleils. It ends where the first one begins, that is, at the dawn of Independence. Once more, the Malinké people of a small yet mythical kingdom of Soba are the main subject of Kourouma's narrative. Once again the main figure, Djigui represents a royal dynasty, the Keitas. By the end of the novel, Djigui the legendary King has lived for 125 years and his reign spans a period going from the time the French army led by Faidherbe defeated Samory Touré, through the firm establishment of colonisation, the troubles of the two world wars, up to the political developments in the former French West Africa on the eve of independence. If the protagonist of the first novel is presented as a participant (though an opportunistic one) in the fight to topple the colonialist rule, that of the second novel shows minimal opposition to colonialism at the beginning, and ends up as a collaborator. On the other hand, if Les Soleils tells of the prosperity of the Malinké under colonial rule, Monnè leads us through the steady and
systematic political, economic and physical degeneration and demise of Djigui under that rule. Thus, Irele describes Monnè as the "narrative of dispossession" (1993, 162). Nonetheless, the two novels do share some common features. Like its predecessor, Monnè treats a multiplicity of themes, and invites many and various readings. Abiola Irele analyzes it as a narrative and as an example, on the part of African writers, of "the process of reconstruction... of a secure sense of being-in-history" and as providing "a proper sense of belonging in the world of the African subject" (1993, 162). Madeleine Borgomano's analysis places linguistic heterogeneity and the failure of that heterogeneity, at the heart of the novel. Christopher Anderson sees the novel, together with Michel Tournier's Le Roi des Aulnes as "the erosion of culture and the role myth plays in collaboration with an occupying force" (Anderson 1996, 158). Anderson also sees Djigui as a scapegoat who has to atone for the sins of social taboos of human sacrifice and having reneged on his promise to Samory Touré "to commit suicide rather than submit to French rule" (162).

Like Fama in the first novel, Djigui is portrayed as a strong believer in tradition, as resisting any form of change. Hence his death will symbolize the death of tradition to the Malinké of Soba, as the narrator comments after his death: "Après Djigui, notre pays a cessé d'être ce qu'il était" (p.281). Both characters are mainly
preoccupied with the perpetuation of their respective royal lineages, of the royal blood. It is for that reason that Fama, despite his deep love for Salimata and his twenty years of resistance to polygyny, will not have any scruples in taking Mariam for a second wife. Mariam, the griot Diamourou tells us, is a woman of easy virtue, a thief, and a liar. Given that she is "fertile comme une souris," so Fama ignores her bad character and marries her all the same. Similar reasons will lead Djigui to offer abundant human sacrifices so that the age-old prophesy about the end of the Keita dynasty may not come to reality.

Like Le Soleil, Monnè also explores the issue of language, and most critics of the novel recognize that fact. The novel indeed demonstrates an inseparable and complex relationship between language, power, and the production of truth. Actually, the issue of language and its implications are evident right at the beginning of the novel, in the epigraph, where the centenarian questions a white man on the meaning of Monnè in French. None of the words given, "outrages, défis, mépris, injures, humiliation, colère rageuse" satisfactorily translates monnè. This impossibility in arriving at an exact meaning of monnè, in turn announces the central issues of translation and a "failed heterogeneity" (in the words of Borgomano) in the novel. The reader also remains ignorant of the exact meaning of this loaded word until he/she goes through the
287 pages of the novel to learn of the different forms and manifestations of monné that the people of Soba endure as a result of their encounter with the French.

The narrative, which revolves around Djigui, opens with the apprehensions of the king over a prophesy that had been made in the twelfth century about the arrival of a messenger who will announce the demise of the Keita dynasty. He offers numerous human and animal sacrifices, but to no avail. Even prayer only helps to delay but, not avert the arrival of the emissary who bears the ominous message. The messenger finally arrives to announce that "les Toubabs de 'Fadarba' (meaning Faidherbe) descendent vers le sud" (p. 19). The king's first response is "Mensonge". When the messenger talks about the invincibility of Faidherbe's forces he replies again: "Mensonge". The king's stubbornness emanates from the fact that there is a conviction the people have held about their society for centuries, which has protected them, and which cannot fail them now:

Depuis des siècles, les gens de Soba et leurs rois vivaient dans un monde clos à l'abri de toute idée et croyance nouvelles. Protégés par des montagnes, ils avaient réussi, tant bien que mal, à préserver leur indépendance. C'était une société arrêtée. Les sorciers, les marabouts, les griots, les sages, tous les intellectuels croyaient que le monde était définitivement achevé et ils le disaient (p. 20, my emphasis).

It is a discourse of truth that has sustained the power of the kings and maintained the homogeneity of Soba for so long. As the griot boastfully says later in the novel, this
discourse, "crée l'histoire officielle... une vérité historique qui s'imposait" (p. 190). It is certainly on the advice of those producers of truth that the king decides to build a tata around the whole kingdom, save the mountainous areas where they will bury different kinds of fetishes capable of foiling the white invaders entering Soba. What the king does not realize is that "truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth" as Foucault states (qtd. in Fairclough, 1992, 49). Therefore, as the messenger tells him, in the face of all the arduous, backbreaking labor of the people of Soba, "Votre tata ne sera pas la vérité" (p. 31), because a new "regime of truth" is dawning on Soba. The more imminent the invasion becomes, the more estranged the people of Soba become from their received truths and the very sources of those truths. When the structure of the closed society changes as a result of the penetration by the Nazaréens (whites), an inroad for change is created. The Malinké of Soba find themselves compelled to learn and live by new truths. Words have changed, new meanings have to be learned. Thus, the griot, one of the repositories of the truth remarks,

Apprendre les nouvelles vérités. L'infini qui est au ciel a changé de paroles; le Mandingue ne sera plus la terre des preux.... Chaque fois que les mots changent de sens, et les choses de symboles, je retourne à la terre qui m'a vu naître pour tout recommencer: réapprendre l'histoire et les
nouveaux noms des hommes, des animaux et des choses (p. 41).

There is, however, no time to learn these new truths and therefore the people of Soba will live by perverse truths, illustrated by the untranslatability of certain French words and concepts into Malinké. Words gradually lose their meanings, and "when you think you understand them, they just twist themselves perversely," as Borgomano puts it (137). Soba has been accustomed to using words with fixed and concrete meanings. This slippage of the signified under the signifier, comes therefore as an astounding experience for the people. It also means that every discourse produced in this new arrangement will no longer have a stable meaning. This is demonstrated in the way the two world wars and their aftermaths are explained to the people of Soba. Another episode in the narrative that puts the status of truth to a test is the story of Moussoukoro, who started as the king's favorite wife. She fell out of favor, was banished from the king's palace for years, was readmitted, and regained her position. The story changes from one version to another as it is recounted by the griot and the king's other wives.

The invasion of Soba occasions the juxtaposition of two societies, the "rationalist" and the "mythic," in the words of Christiane Ndiaye. Both worlds are symbolized by seats of power. On the one hand is the Bolloda for King Djigui where he is surrounded by the griot Djabaté, his sacrificer Fadoua, his sibirros and sicarios, and numerous wives; on the
other hand, the arrival of the whites disrupts this mythical space and introduces another seat of power, called the Kebi. Established on a nearby hill, it will issue a long chain of commandments on Soba in a bid to impose Western law by bringing teachers, doctors, missionnaries, and especially, skirmishers. There is a constant exchange between the two worlds throughout the novel. It is not so much the king's physical movement between the two worlds and the power he embodies as the way in which power on both sides is affected by the discourse through which it is transmitted. Moreover, the relationship between the two sides is anything but symmetrical. Communication between the two worlds necessitates the introduction of a shrewd character, the interpreter--a narrative device underlining the gap in communication. In the performance of his role, the interpreter not only widens this gap, but permanently changes the course of the history of Soba. As Kenneth Harrow observes, interpreters played a crucial role at the turning point in African history---the inception of colonialism (276). The interpreter for the whites, Moussa Soumaré, happens to be a "frère de plaisanterie des Keita," who, according to tradition, can take liberties with Djigui notwithstanding the latter's status as a revered ruler of his people. Soumaré makes use of this privileged relationship he has with the king, when the whites land on Soba for the first time. In his first direct contact with
the whites, Djigui puts up a challenge in insulting, boastful terms. Aware of the consequences these words would have for the king and all Soba, Soumaré mistranslates them and changes the king's words to a claim of allegiance, thus saving the king from himself. He then turns to Djigui and tells him, "Je suis ton frère de plaisanterie, donc je te connais. Comme tous les Keita tu es un fanfaron irréaliste. Je n'ai pas traduit un mot de tes rodomontades" (p. 36). The interpreter constantly makes reference to this joking relationship he has with Djigui, but the reader cannot fail to note the interpreter's strategy of using his position to produce a discourse that will change the king's own position for good. The reader is equally aware that this discourse has shaken the very foundation of Djigui's power; that all he has lived for, namely, the perpetration of the Keita dynasty, has come to a sudden end. The interpreter's own remarks on the power that he now wields, as he extends his job description beyond that of interpreting speak to that: "De même que le mil ne se sert jamais sans assaisonnement, il ne faut jamais traduire les paroles sans commentaire" (p. 66). His role goes beyond a simple defamiliarization of language which Kenneth Harrow attributes to him. As Harrow himself notes, the appropriation of discourse makes the interpreter into "the key figure in the new age, suggesting that the battle to be fought for the future is not between the French and the Malinké, not between Faidherbe and
Samory, but within the Malinké community" (Harrow, 277). As the contact between the two domains of the Bolloda and the Kebi intensifies, it becomes clearer to the king that translation and interpretation meant indeed much more than the rendition of one language into another. They involve the production of discourse which defines positions of power. As Anderson mentions, the king "understands quite well the power of language and myth in the creation of social identity" (Anderson 161). Thus, in order to maintain a firm control over the remaining power he holds in his Muslim society, Djigui appropriates the ritual normally performed by the Imam. He seems to have come to grips with what an interpreter or intermediary is capable of doing. Thus he decides he no longer needs one between him and God so as not to lose his identity (as God's chosen one) in the religious domaine as well. He no longer needs an Imam when he prays, so that no gap would exist "between the expression of his words and their reception in the divine ear," remarks Harrow (271). The interpreter's behavior has apparently taught the centenarian that "[d]iscourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but it is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized," as Foucault asserts (qtd. in Fairclough 1992, 51, my emphasis). Through this appropriation Djigui has taken social control of the Imam's discursive practice which, in the king's opinion
would re-situate him in a position of producing the discourse of truth. Rather unfortunately for the king, his strategy only produces the opposite effect. He dismisses the defeat of Samory as a lie, but it turns out to be true; he calls the messenger a liar when the latter announces the arrival of the white man, but Soba easily becomes a candidate for colonization. But even more important, the divine message he receives in this new role passes from truth to lies. He himself admits the topsy-turvyness of the situation:

"les oiseaux eux aussi ont commencé à chanter le matin les versets qui habituellement se disent la nuit. Moi-même, dans mes longues prières, j'ai senti que je n'atteignait rien de cohérent.... Quand tout se prépare à se dissoudre, à s'effriter, quand les vérités que nous tenons, en sortant de notre bouche, nous trahissent pour devenir des mensonges, alors, forcément arrive un messager" (p.30).

The king learns that "royal control over the people's lives is threatened and the citadel of frozen, permanent, perfect meaning is undone," (Harrow (274). The king and his entourage are being taught also that in the new era, the new order of power now controls the word and hence the truth. Thus the interpreter replaces a long held truth about religion with the discourse of the white man: "Quand un toubab s'exprime, nous, Nègres, on se tait, se décoiffe, se déchausse et écoute. Cela doit être su comme les sourates de prière..." (p. 54).

This new awareness further manifests itself in the way
new coinages get introduced into the Soba linguistic and conceptual space. Slavery, had been abolished by French law. Thus by implication, French nationals, wherever they may be, would be bound by the principles of that law. Now, labor has to be provided for the construction of the residences of the colonial officials, their military camps, and later the railroad. The people requisitioned for that forced labor--boys and girls, and "les meilleurs maçons, forgerons, sculpteurs, couvreurs du pays," and twenty virgins for the pleasure of the conquerors--are called "les prestataires". In addition, the people have to provide "les prestations" in the form of "les bêtes, les choses et les vivres" (p. 55). The ordeals, the humiliations, the monnies that these conscripts endure are nothing less than what slaves go through. However, once they are called "prestataires" and not slaves the behavior of their masters is still within the framework of the law. Through the use of discourse, the colonizer exonerates himself from any blame of practicing slavery. The lack of an exact translation of "prestataire" and the griot's inability to pronounce it (he is the mouthpiece of the King) produce a corrupt form of the word, "pratati" for the Malinké people. The same corruption occurs to other words like "progressiste" which becomes "progressi," and ultimately "sissi" which signifies "smoke" (p. 265). The word "réaction" becomes "sigui ya son", meaning "assoie-toi en
attendant" (p. 270). As Borgomano observes, these French words "were violently forced into Malinké without any kind of reciprocity," and, according to Borgomano, this has led to a "failed heterogeneity" because, instead of "a harmonious crossbreeding, they produced a freak" (136). Irele also refers to the "epistemological crisis which strikes at the very foundations of their (the people of Soba, and indeed all former colonized peoples) mental universe," as a result of this encounter (Irele 1993, 164). Whether by accident or by design, this corruption of the language turns out to be an attempt to control discourse, and therefore power. Discourse, we are told, "always involves a form of violence in the way it imposes its linguistic order on the world" (Robert Young 1995, 57). It is also a reflection of the corruption that is emblematic of the whole colonial enterprise. Hence, the interpreter never explains the meanings of these words to the king and his people. The same happens for the word "civilisation," which, for want of an equivalent word in Malinké, is rendered as "devenir toubab". The idea of making the colonized subjects "devenir toubab," of course was the underlying principle of the French colonial policy of Assimilation.

The narrator extends the meaning of "civilisation" to include the introduction of commodification in Soba; but most importantly, the author shows us how discourse is used
to make the people lose the value they have believed in all their lives. The unfairness of the trade between the Malinké and the Whites also becomes evident in the narrative:

La civilisation, c'est gagner de l'argent des Blancs. Le grand dessein de la colonisation est de faire gagner de l'argent à tous les indigènes. L'ère qui commence sera celle de l'argent.... La semaine prochaine, un Blanc tiendra un comptoir à Soba. Chacun pourra y échanger son or et ses ivoires contre des billets de banque et des pièces de cuivre. C'est cela l'argent du Blanc qui aura cours dans toute la Négrité et remplacera vos cauris et pièces d'or (pp. 57, 58).

The whole encounter between the Nazaréens and the Malinké later comes to revolve around "civilisation," as this word becomes the watchword in the relationship.

Even as a colonized people, the Malinké still have enormous respect for their king. Therefore, in order for the colonialist enterprise to succeed, the colonizers realize that his collaboration is inevitable. To win such collaboration, they capitalize on Djigui's megalomania.

They begin by flattering him as they name him the "chef principal, le chef nègre le plus gradé de la colonie" (pp. 73-74). Then they go on to promise him a railroad and a train which the interpreter defines as "la plus gigantesque des choses qui se déplacent sur terre" (p. 74). Finally, he will be accorded a visit to France. The Commandant's promises to Djigui suffice to make the latter to impose all the new regime's requisitions, "prestations," and "prestataires," even after he is warned of what the railroad
work involves: "La besogne de tirer le rail était une fatigue immense qui consommerait des hommes, des moissons, du bétail, de l'argent et de nombreuses saisons" (p. 74). Instead, the king goes even further by requesting that the colonial administration construct him a palace, in addition to the railroad and train.

The promise of a trip to France is kept and the king is back from France where he has come into contact with "civilisation" through its greatest mark, the train. The visit also helps to consolidate the king's mythical conception of the train. When the second world war breaks out, it becomes relatively easier for the colonizers to rally the king's support since he cannot countenance the seizure of France's trains and hence the destruction of her 'civilisation' by the "barbares et mécréants d'"Allamas' (Allemands)". The Germans are also portrayed as wanting to "transformer les Nègres en bêtes de somme, inventer des travaux forcés deux fois plus meurtriers et fusiller les déserteurs." In order to forestall such nefarious consequences, "[L]es Nègres devaient se lever pour défendre la terre française, la civilisation, vaincre et annihiler définitivement l'hydre allemande" (p. 109). The success of power, we are told by Foucault, is "proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (see Fairclough 1992, 49). Through the use of 'dispositifs' such as the promise of a train and a palace, and a trip to France, the
colonizers succeed in wooing the king into "friendship"; henceforth they employ him as a shield against their real intentions. He in turn promises them cooperation by offering more elaborate sacrifices to the spirits of the dead to prevail on his subjects to participate in the collaboration.

Meanwhile, the king's collaboration and the method of obtaining labor and military conscripts produces yet another interesting display of power relations, a clear demonstration of the ubiquity and productivity of power. Power does not necessarily alienate or force those who are subject to it. Instead, it incorporates them, and "it shapes and 'retools' them to fit in with its needs" (Fairclough 1992, 49). We have already seen such 'shaping' and 'retooling' at work in the interpreter's intermediary role between the colonizers and the colonized, and its effect on the king. But the effects of this mechanism become even more poignant in the novel with the development of the system after the outbreak of the first world war. France needs able-bodied men from her colonies to help fight the "wicked" Germans. The king's sicarios and representatives of the sub-chiefs who have the responsibility of the conscription of fighters develop a system which the interpreter calls "le travail dans le travail ou le travail avant le travail et que le Blanc dénommait simplement du travail noir nègre" (p. 84). This
is a process whereby the draft officers have the military conscripts work for them, or they sell their labor for profit for weeks before passing them on to the whiteman. This method produces what one may call the "real and effective practices" of power, its "external visage," and the conscripts become "its target, its field of application" (Foucault, "Two Lectures," 1994, 35).

In the same way that no-one has a monopoly over power, so also is the production of discourse everyone's prerogative. The creation of an alternative version of the French language in Les Soleils is extended in Monnè to the production of alternative versions of the same events, especially historical events. The narrative technique Kourouma employs to achieve this is the multiplication of narrative voices which upset the linearity of an otherwise linear narrative of French colonialism. The French commandant Héraud's explanation of the events of the Second World War in the terms of myth and legend, to make them more understandable for Djigui, is an example of such alternative versions.

Les quatre alliés s'en allèrent consulter le plus grand devin de l'univers qui leur dévoile les secrets de guerre du maître de Berlin, ses totems, ses faiblesses et leur recommande des ensorcellement qu'ils pratiquèrent, des sacrifices qu'ils égorgèrent (Monnè p. 216)

While making these events familiar to Djigui, the narrator renders them strange to a French person. As Shona Potts rightly remarks, such alternative discourse "undermines the
monolithic certainties of Western historical discourse and presents an alternative perception of events with equal claims to discursive authority" (Potts 20). The alternative discourses also "raise questions of partiality, foregrounding the limitations of an individual's perspective and prejudice and the difficulties involved in the formation of a collective postcolonial memory...." They call "into question the feasibility of any attempt to produce a monolithic epic narrative of the founding of an African nation-state" (Potts 16). Kourouma apparently directs this challenge against those earlier post-colonial writers who, according to Elleke Boemer, sought "to find and describe networks of racial and ancestral affiliation, to unearth communal memory" (Boemer 1995, 190).

Another aspect of the complexity of power relations that Monné deals with is resistance. The Commandant unsuccessfully opposes the above practice of "travail noir nègre"; the labor and military conscripts express resistance in the form of songs; and Djigui shows the beginning of resistance when he gets frustrated with the failure of the colonial administration to deliver on their promises. When he realizes the exploitation of his population whose decimation he witnesses in the throes of hard labor and extortion, he makes his feelings known to the Commandant, or at least to the interpreter. When the recruiters cannot find enough able-bodied men at the outbreak of the second
world war, the Commandant blames the king, but the king knows that the fault lies elsewhere. The people have been pushed to their limit:

Mais le dénuement des villages.... L'indigence des gens.... Les pays de Soba sont devenus exsangues. La limite de la bête est sa queue; il n'y a pas de forgeron qui à force de frapper transforme le cuivre en or et aucun éreintement ne peut faire tirer l'eau de la pierre (110)

Djigui pronounces this type of discourse of resistance numerous times in the form of proverbs. True to his character, however, the interpreter refuses to translate them so as not to vex the Commandant. Instead, he tricks the centenarian into believing that the French would abandon him and his people, and by implication, leave his grandiose projects unaccomplished. The interpreter also uses the tantalizing strategy of talking about "civilisation," causing the king to once more draw on the experience of his trip to France and persuade his sicarios to use more drastic methods of conscription.

The temporariness of alignments dawns upon Djigui when the new colonial administration with its policy of "le Renouveau" replaces the centenarian with his fifth son, Béma, officially bringing the reign of the Keita dynasty in the Bolloda to an end. Both the king and Béma's mother curse and disown their disobedient son. The king is faced with the fragility of what he mistook for friendship with the Nazaréens. At this point Djigui's resistance takes on the form of armed confrontation which the people of Soba call
"borinana (fin des reculades)." It is also at this point that Soba understands the tricks of the interpreter. Finally, the reaction of the centenarian seems to suggest that because the relationship of colonizer and colonized between the toubabs and the people of Soba was predicated on lies, he could deny even the undeniable; that is, that the relationship never really existed. It is only a figment sanctioned by the interpreter's discourse. He therefore ventures on producing a counter-discourse, a 'discours de retour' to negate the discourse of the "colonizer" and thereby produce what he believes to be the truth for his people. Speaking about the day the whites first landed in Soba, he declares:

*Tout ce qui était survenu après ce mémorable jour n'était jamais advenu: ni la colonisation, ni les travaux forcés, ni le train, ni les années, ni notre vieillesse n'avaient existé. Nous n'avons pas été colonisés parce que nous n'avons pas été vaincus après une bataille rangée. Nous n'avons jamais engagé de bataille parce que le scélérat, le serpent d'interprète Soumaré avait débité des menteries aux Blancs...(pp. 184-85).*

Indeed, one cannot miss the ironical thrust of the above excerpt. The king's statements can be read as a diatribe against the very concept of discourse. To assert that colonialism and its burdens that bore hard on the colonized are only human constructs, a mere discursive practice, would mean to illude oneself. On the other hand, however, Djigui's comments can equally be understood as an affirmation of the concept of discourse. It was through the
discourse produced by the interpreter who, under the guise of translating, created an unsymmetrical alliance between Djigui and the Nazaréens, which resulted in Soba losing its independence. Hence the king employs the same process of discourse production to proclaim the independence of his land and people. The king's comments also illustrate the complex and unstable relationships which exist between discourse and power, whereby discourse "véhicule et produit du pouvoir; [il] le renforce mais aussi le mine, l'expose, le rend fragile et permet de le barrer" as Foucault puts it (1976, 133). The king who has been using the theme of his visit to France to convince his people to save France's 'civilisation' now produces yet another discourse which not only invigorates his subjects in the pursuit of their resistance in the form of Boribana, but it vilifies this very civilization.

Unfortunately, even Boribana does not save the king's political power. Prior to his replacement by Béma, Djigui had already lost a vital component of his power, the griot. The griots whom the narrator describes as the official chroniclers, "des panégyristes... des entremetteurs, des généalogistes et des historiens" (p.40), are the main producers of the discourse which maintains the noble family's grip on power. Therefore, "un noble ne paraissait pas sans être suivi de son panégyriste" (p.40). The establishment of colonial rule does not change that
situation for Djigui. In fact, he acquires a more renowned griot in the person of Diabaté, as a result of the defeat of Samory. It is in the wake of the return of Diabaté to his home country and the subsequent ending of the production of the discourse that sustained Djigui's power, that the latter also loses his throne. When he can no longer contend with the "monnew" of being ruled by a disobedient son, and the principles of the "Renouveau" policy, he takes the unprecedented step of leaving the Bolloda for Toukoro. This journey symbolizes the acceptance of the demise of the Keita dynasty. Upon setting out on his final journey, the king feels the lack of a griot. The last of the Keita rulers needed one to be the "maître de la parole de l'événement" (276). But at this point, the king can only count on the services of the haggard and gaunt Djélicini, "un vieillard de grand talent [mais] à qui il manquait un bout de raison" (p. 276, my emphasis). The latter could not even afford a horse capable of keeping pace with Sogbê, the king's horse. As the distance between them increases, the griot's voice subsequently dies in the ears of the king and it is replaced by those of the numerous defunct griots who have sung the praises of the Keitas over the centuries. The king is gradually disconnected from the world of the living and connects with the spirits of the dead as the images of his ancestors parade before his eyes. The last blow to the king's already crumbling world comes when Sogbê who, up to
this moment has been a loyal and obedient travel companion of the king disobeys him and refuses to move. With the loss of the panegyric discourse that used to spur her on, Sogbê could now afford to disobey her master: "Par quatre fois, le Centenaire lui commanda d'avancer: elle refusa" (p. 278). The king bites the animal out of rage, but to no avail. He can stand the monnê no more. He feels "désobéi, trahi, désavoué et honni" (p. 278). This increases his ire and losing every grain of hope, he draws out his own sword and cuts his own throat. Thus we witness the death not only of Djigui as an individual, but of Djigui as a symbol of the power that the Keita dynasty wielded for centuries. It is death made inevitable by the silencing of the discourse that sustained the power upon which the life itself seemed to depend.
CHAPTER 4

POLYGNY, AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY IN MARIAMA BA'S NOVELS.

Mariama Bâ's two novels, Une si longue lettre (1979) and Un chant écarlate (1981) were published at a time when the landscape of critical discourse was still mostly hostile, if not adverse to the course charted by Bâ, namely, a critical look at the situation of women in an African (Islamic) society. Florence Stratton has specifically referred to Eldred Jones, Abiola Irele, and Frederick Ivor Case as some of the producers of the discourse which strove "to exclude women writers from the canon" (Stratton 1994, 133-34). In comparing Une si longue lettre to the novels of
Abdoulaye Sadji and Ousmane Sembène, for instance, Frederick Case makes the conscious effort of portraying Bâ'a text as a mediocre work. To him, "'novels which have as their focus the condition of women in Senegal have tended to be significant works dependent on a well-defined symbolic structure.'" Une si longue lettre, in his opinion, lacks such a structure, and therefore, "it is of 'limited value.'" This shortcoming, he concludes, 'leads to speculation about the [policies of Bâ's publishers] as well as the criteria used for judging texts for the Norma [sic] Award'" (see Stratton 134-35). But the most acerbic criticism of Mariama Bâ-- and all the women writers of her time that stood for the defence of women's position in African society-- comes from Femi Ojo-Ade. In fact, his name and his two articles on the subject, "Still a Victim? Mariama Bâ's Une si longue lettre," and "Female Writers, Male Critics," that appeared in African Literature Today in 1982 and 1983 respectively, have become a leitmotif in the critical discourse on Bâ. In the first of these articles, Ojo-Ade shows what Stratton has described as "a blatant display of hostility," as he "concludes his discussion of Bâ's novel by threatening to 'tear...up and throw...into the dustbin' any such 'letter', should one be written" (Stratton, 135). Ojo-Ade's acrimony
against Bâ is born of the fact that the latter, like Buchi Emecheta and Nafissatou Diallo, is propagating feminism, 'an occidental phenomenon' which has to offer only 'a fake freedom' to African women. According to Ojo-Ade, these authors are "victims and purveyors of social and psychological alienation; cultural bastardization; a destiny of death.'" He pits them against another group of women writers whom he calls the "'old guard': Grace Ogot, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aido, Flora Nwapa". These writers, by contrast, are "'steeped in the tradition of the land, complaining of their sufferings as subjects of the male master, but seeking solace in a society that has proclaimed woman the mother'" (see Stratton 135). Apparently, the fact that Ramatoulaye, the main character of Une si longue lettre is a mother of twelve, and her friend, Aïssatou the addressee of her letter has four sons--which shows that Bâ recognizes and respects the motherhood of women--is inconsequential to Ojo-Ade. He categorizes the stance of the 'old guard' as "[f]emininity [which] is the virtue of the traditionalist" and opposes it to "feminism, the veneer of the progressive striving to become a man" (qtd. in Nicki Hitchcott 139-40).

Mariama Bâ was by no means the first sub-Saharan Francophone writer to broach the subject of women's condition in the African society. The works of authors such as Ousmane Sembène and Abdoulaye Sadji had, in various ways,
addressed some of the concerns central to Bâ's novels. Two things make *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate* different from their predecessors, however. First, the discourse on the subject of women's situation takes a new and unprecedented dimension in these novels. Second, and more importantly, that discourse is coming from a woman in a male dominated sphere. One may surmise, therefore, that to many of her detractors it is not so much the ideas she defends as Mariama Bâ herself, as a female voice, that is at issue. To her admirers, Bâ is a champion of African women's causes. The controversies emanating from these two poles of criticism have made *Une si longue lettre* one of the mostly contentious African works of fiction especially since it won the first Noma Award for books published in Africa. *Un chant écarlate* published posthumously, has also been gaining reputation in recent years as more critics are paying more attention to it.

Written in the form of a "letter-diary," *Une si longue lettre* is set in Dakar about two decades after the Independence of Senegal. The letter writer, Ramatoulaye is a widowed mother of twelve children, and an elementary-school teacher. The addressee is a childhood friend, Aïssatou who lives in the United States. Both women are victims of failed marriages. Ramatoulaye married Modou Fall, and Aïssatou Mawdo Bâ. All four of them were activists in the nationalist and feminist movements of the
1950's, during their student years. Both marriages demonstrated the radical, defiant tendencies in the young couples. Although a descendant of the royal Bour-Sine dynasty, Mawdo Bâ marries Aïssatou, the daughter of a goldsmith-- one of the lowest classes in the Senegalese caste system. Ramatoulaye, on the other hand, defied her mother who preferred the much older and wealthier Daouda Dieng to Modou as her daughter's suitor. Against every opposition, Ramatoulaye marries Modou, "sans dot, sans faste, sous les regards désapprouvateurs de [mon] père, devant l'indignation douloureuse de [ma] mère frustrée..." (pp. 28-29). The two couples grew up and became part of the professional middle class, the world of the novel's narrative.

Mawdo and Aïssatou have four children, but the husband's class-conscious mother, Tante Nabou never gives up the fight for the perpetuation of the royal blood in her sons's offspring. She prevails on Mawdo to marry a daughter of one of her (royal) brothers. She does this with the express purpose to "se venger de [toi] (Aïssatou), la Bijoutière" (p.43). Tante Nabou achieves her goal, for Aïssatou cannot put up with a polygamous marriage. She leaves with her four children, continues her studies, and gets a job in the Senegalese Embassy in the United States. Ramatoulaye's own marriage of twenty-five years also turns sour after her twelfth child. However, unlike Mawdo, Modou
is not influenced by anyone else when he takes a second wife.

Ramatoulaye's situation is more painfully humiliating than her friend's. Without informing Ramatoulaye, Modou gets married to a young woman who has the age of their first daughter. She also happens to be their daughter's, Daba's, best friend. He then squanders all their earnings (his and Ramatoulaye's) on Binetou and her parents. Finally, he abandons his family, in a clear violation of Islamic custom, to live with the new wife. Unlike her friend, Ramatoulaye stays faithful to the ideal of the love that brought her and Modou together in the first place, rejecting the advice of her daughter, who tells her to do as Aïssatou. Five years later, Modou dies of a heart attack in his office. Ramatoulaye and her co-wife Binetou are put in seclusion until the Fortieth Day ceremony. She writes this long letter to her friend Aïssatou to explain her present predicament, how she coped with Modou's deception, and to reminisce about the past.

In Un chant écarlate, the principal motif is again marriage, but this time the scope is wider and more intensive. The mixed marriage of Ousmane Gueye, a Senegalese school teacher of philosophy and son of a disabled veteran of the Second World War, to Mireille de La Vallée, also a philosophy teacher and daughter of a former French diplomat to Senegal, brings two different worlds
together. The two of them had first met as students at the University of Dakar and fell in love, but the relationship is suddenly interrupted when one day Mireille's parents confront her with Ousmane's picture which they had found in her room.

Until this time, Jean de La Vallée has portrayed himself as a liberal-minded French diplomat whose inspiring speeches about the equality of the races and the necessity to fraternize with Blacks distinguished him from other Whites. But this incident reveals to Mireille that behind her father's liberal façade there resides an unrepentant, plain bigot. To her parents' consternation, Mireille defiantly reaffirms her love for Ousmane and asserts her right to love whomever she chooses. She retorts to her father:

J'aime, tu entends. J'aime un Nègre, noir comme de la houille. Noir! Noir! Je l'aime et je ne renonce pas à cet homme simplement parce qu'il est noir (p.45).

This incident brings to an end her university education in Senegal as she is put on the next plane that same day to France. "Tu rejoins notre pays dès ce soir," dictates her father (45, my italics). Far from ending their love, however, the separation further strengthens the two young people's affection, respect and admiration for, and commitment to each other. Unbeknownst to her parents, Mireille converts to Islam, and without informing their parents, the two lovers get married in a mosque in Paris,
and take off for Dakar. The parents on both sides receive the news with disbelief and bewilderment. The La Vallées react with particular violence and disown their daughter. "However, when the mixed couple return to Africa they discover too late that there is a wide hiatus between theory and practice, ideals and reality," comments J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada (1991, 563). Like Modou in Lettre, Ousmane marries a second wife, unknown to Mireille. He then leads two lives, shuttling between Ouleymatou and Mireille. When Mireille learns about the co-wife, she becomes insane with rage, kills Gorgui, their only son, and stabs her unfaithful husband.

Bâ uses Ramatoulaye's and Mireille's stories to strongly defend the cause of women in the African (Islamic) society. Around their two stories, revolve those of numerous other women. She also raises many other problems usually masked by the screen of "tradition". In addition, the novels invite a number of different readings as the works of various critics have shown. Thus, there are those who see in Bâ a new voice of feminist idealism. The point about the defense of women's cause in Bâ's texts has nevertheless, been captured by both ends of the critical spectrum-- her admirers as well as her detractors-- though with different interpretations. Their perceptions of, and responses to the author's message are what distinguish these two groups of critics from each other. Moreover, even
within these groups themselves there is no consensus on the interpretation of the novels.

János Riesz reads Lettre as "an Erziehungsroman" by focusing on the theme of the education of women in colonial French West Africa within its historical context. He points to the "rhetorical flourishes of Revolution and Enlightenment," taking Ramatoulaye's reminiscence of the happy days she spent in school with her friend Aïssatou as the benchmark for that education (31). In fact, according to Riesz, Bâ's narrative, in places, sounds very much like the policy statement of a colonial officer on education in the Francophone colonial setting. Riesz takes Ramatoulaye's summary of the objectives of the "admirable directrice" of their school to be one of such statement:

Nous sortir de l'enlisement des traditions, superstitions et moeurs; nous faire apprécier des multiples civilisations sans reniement de la nôtre; élever notre vision du monde, cultiver notre personnalité, renforcer nos qualités, mater nos défauts; faire fructifier en nous les valeurs de la morale universelle; voilà la tâche que s'était assignée l'admirable directrice (Lettre 27-28).

Such seemingly admiring appraisals of Enlightenment ideals should not be overstated, however, as they are accompanied by an undertone of criticism of those very ideals. There is an irony buried under the façade of praise. Bâ's repetition of the goals of the directrice is certainly tongue-in-cheek, especially when she talks about taking them out of superstition, and denying their own civilization.
According to Adele King, "Mariama Bâ... addresses both women's issues—those she defined as emanating from a 'woman's cry' that has a 'certain unity' everywhere in the world (...)—and political concerns in Senegal" (1994, 176). The focus of Lettre, for King, is the "conflicting claims in women's lives of family and profession, of self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment, of love and individual dignity". Chant, on the other hand, in dealing with the "disintegration of the interracial marriage" defines "both a personal tragedy and a political tragedy, since it is caused by the perversion of the ideals of Négritude into black racism" (King, 176). King also refers to Ramatoulaye's experience as "part of the transitional generation [which] links 'deux périodes historiques, l'une de domination, l'autre d'indépendance' (Lettre 40)." This link, King rightly points out, shows another parallel between the personal and the political (182).

Mary-Kay Miller also refers to the blurring of boundaries in Lettre between the private and public domains. First, in the structural framework, she points to the blurring of the "boundaries drawn between autobiography and fiction":

By creating a quintessential mother figure, Ramatoulaye, who also takes up a place in the public sphere and constitutes herself as a narrating subject, Bâ fashions a female character who breaks down the barriers between private and public, between the reproductive and the productive, between the personas of mother and writer (Miller 1997, 7).
This effacing of boundaries is equally evident in the autobiographical nature of the novel.26 The first-person narrative is the life story of Ramatoulaye, but there are many striking similarities with the life of the author herself. Therefore, "Une si longue lettre affirms the interaction between text and world while maintaining its own fictional status" (7). Even though they shy away from calling it postmodern, characteristics that King and Miller identify point to what some feminist critics see as one of the main similarities between postmodernism and feminism (see Jeniffer Wicke and Margaret Ferguson 1992, and Linda Nicholson 1992). Mariama Bâ continues blurring the boundaries in Chant, especially when in the narrative she neatly and smoothly blends the public story of the 1968 student uprising in Paris into Mireille's personal story. Ever since her repatriation to France, Mireille has been nursing anger and animosity toward her father and all his beliefs and values stand for. The outbreak of the uprising avails her of the opportunity to vent that anger. Jean de La Vallée is presented as the icon of the bourgeois socio-political system that the students are out to destroy. In her letter to Ousmane, Mireille rejoices at the achievements of the uprising:

"La ligne droite, favorite de mon père, n'existe plus. Tout, en ces lieux, est brisé, tordu. La remise en cause de ses conceptions sur l'honneur, le devoir, l'obéissance déséquilibre de mon père (Chant 66-67)."
Mariama Bâ's novels, especially *Lettre*, have even been analyzed as a statement on the economic situation of the newly independent African nations. For Albert Gérard and Jeannine Laurent *Lettre*, is a commentary on the economic condition of women:

[T]he narrator is steeped in the contradictions of a society emerging from a subsistence economy (where polygamy and limitless fecundity make sound sense) into a western-type money economy which offers women openings for more rewarding work than the daily household chores, while comparative affluence encourages and enables men to indulge their lustful whims in complete disregard of the compensatory duties built into true Muslim law.

What Gérard and Laurent say in the above comments about *Lettre* is equally applicable to *Chant*. Although Mireille belongs to a different tradition, the fact that she has converted to Islam and marries a Muslim, subjects her to the same conditions as Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou in *Lettre*. The three husbands in both novels violate every code of marriage prescribed by the very religion and tradition behind which they hide their misconduct. They squander and use their wives earnings to marry co-wives with impunity. Both Islam and African tradition permit polygamy only on condition that the first wife consents and approves, and that the husband is capable of providing economically, emotionally, and otherwise, for more than one wife. None of the three men fulfills these conditions. That explains, to a great extent, why so many critics have read Bâ's novels in light of the negative ramifications of the institution of
polygamy.

Nwachukwu-Agbada reads them as an attack on "the idea of polygyny, which is for her [Bâ] indeed a humiliation of women" (564). Mildred Mortimer also talks of Bâ's "strong attack on polygamy" (1990, 69). Nicki Hitchott sets out in her analysis of the two texts to "examine the semic contents of feminism, femininity/masculinity", but a good deal of her comments focus on polygamy and the "biological apology" that Bâ gives for that practice. Hitchott comments that:

In each of Bâ's texts, the narrative is generated by the formation of and subsequent breakdown of the heterosexual couple: Ramatoulaye/Modou and Aïssatou/Mawdo in Une si longue lettre, and Mireille/Ousmane in Un chant écarlate. Significantly, it is the transformation from a monogamous unit (...) to a polygamous family structure which destabilizes -- and eventually destroys -- the original happy couple (1996, 140).

Bâ's theory for the behavior of her male protagonists is that it is in men's nature to be polygamists, which explains the passive attitude Ramatoulaye adopts when Modou takes a co-wife. The author therefore makes Mawdo Bâ use this biologist defense when Ramatoulaye confronts him about his unfaithfulness to her friend Aïssatou.

On ne résiste pas aux lois impérieuses qui exigent de l'homme nourriture et vêtements. Ces mêmes lois poussent le "mâle" ailleurs. Je dis bien "mâle" pour marquer la bestialité des instincts... Tu comprends... Une femme doit comprendre une fois pour toutes et pardonner; elle ne doit pas souffrir en se souciant des "trahisons" charnelles (Lettre, pp. 52-53, my emphasis).

Bâ stresses the universality of this natural instinct in men in Chant where she has Mireille resign herself not only to
her husband's infidelity, but also to the more general fact that "l'infidélité n'est point l'exclusivité des Noirs!" (p.242). The author undercuts her own argument, nonetheless, when she presents Djibril Guèye, Ousmane's father who, although a devout Muslim, deeply steeped in his tradition, resists polygamy and stays faithful to his wife.\textsuperscript{27} Furthermore, the biological innatism Bâ seems to be defending is "counterproductive", in the words of Uzo Esonwanne, "to the objectives she has outlined for the female writer" (Esonwanne 1997, 94). "As women," Bâ contends, "[we] must work for our own future, [we] must overthrow the status quo which harms [us] and [we] must no longer submit to it" (qtd. in Esonwanne, 92). To take innatism as an excuse for polygamy, Esonwanne rightly argues, "is to surrender the struggle against 'the status quo' to another status quo, namely, biologism" (94).\textsuperscript{28}

Obioma Nnaemeka has a completely different perspective on polygamy in Mariama Bâ's novels. Far from being an indictment of the institution of polygyny, the elaboration of polygamy in Bâ's works, according to Nnaemeka, "stands as a sign of cultural hemorrhage and societal rearticulations, and also as a sign of disciplinary failure in African literary criticism" (1997, 163). The premise on which Nnaemeka bases her argument, that the word "la polygamie/polygamy never appears and polygamy (the institution) never functions" (her emphasis) in Lettre is
rather thin. For are the behaviors of Modou and Mawdo, and for that matter Ousmane in Chant any the less polygamous just because the author does not explicitly label them as "polygamie"? Nonetheless, Nnaemeka's thought-provoking comments about polygamy as an institution divests this theme of its status as a shibboleth which many critics' treatment has made it in Bâ's novels. Her analysis gets away from the binary opposition between tradition and modernity, and instead foregrounds the abuse that is made of these two concepts.

Nnaemeka begins by dismissing the notion that polygamy ever happens in the relationships in the novels. "Aïssatou leaves immediately after her husband marries la petite Nabou; Modou abandons Ramatoulaye for Binetou in spite of the latter's willingness to stay in a polygamous marriage" (163). One might add to the list, Ousmane's neglect of his responsibilities to his family once he secretly marries Ouleymatou. Nnaemeka then goes on to show that contrary to the assertions made especially in the feminist critique of Bâ's texts, polygamy is not exclusive to Africa. She quotes extensively from an article about Alexander Joseph "a businessman and former mayor of the dusty town of Big Water, Utah, 375 miles south of Salt Lake City," (165) and his eight wives, to show that polygamy is in fact not exclusive to African or Islamic societies. That article also shows that contrary to what critics have concluded from Bâ's
novels, polygamy can actually work in the interest of women. For instance, according to one of the wives, Elizabeth Joseph, "[you] would think that polygamy by definition would be oppressive to women... in fact, a plural marriage is actually empowering. This way, I can have the freedom to explore my own potential without worrying about having to tend to my husband's every need" (qtd. in Nnaemeka, 165). Of course, one can easily contest the validity of this analogy between the situation of the Josephs and that of women in polygamous marriages in Africa. Women in Africa, for example are hardly accorded the same opportunity to explore their "potential without worrying about having to tend to [their] husband's every need."

To address the specificity of the African situation, Nnaemeka views polygamy in "Une si longue lettre... as a sign of the rupture that emanates from [the] competing forces and... reworkings" of "two interpenetrating contexts (African-Islamic)... and Enlightenment epistemology" (167-68). What Modou and Mawdo practice in Lettre and Ousmane in Chant is not polygamy; it is "philandering," Nnaemeka argues. "[W]hat is at issue in [these novels] is the transformation of traditional African institutions by 'modernity' and the manipulation of these transformatory stages by men to their own advantage thereby creating the pain of their female partners" (170). The male protagonists in the two novels have subverted the institution of
polygamy, thanks to "modernity [which] has intensified the masculinization of the African tradition, thereby deepening the marginalization of women and creating instances (for the women in particular) where tradition is progressive and modernity reactionary" (171). Nnaemeka then cautions against the "tendency to naturalize, 'normativize,' and generalize the behaviors, inclinations, and actions of characters in the [African] literary works." She stresses that Bâ's novels portray "specific men," by which she means urban, middle-class men (171, emphasis in original). After a thorough analysis of the precept of Islam and the principles of the African tradition concerning polygamy, Nnaemeka concludes, reminding us that "harmony, responsibility, fairness, honesty, equity, order, friendship, respect, satisfaction, sharing, bonding, etc," are all notions underlying a polygamous arrangement (174).

These fundamental tenets are conspicuously absent in the so-called polygamous marriages in Lettre and Chant. What Bâ's male characters exhibit is what Patrick Merand calls "la polygamie géographique," and which Nnaemeka describes as "nothing but a euphemism for formalized concubinage" (174), or the "vulgarization of the institution of polygamy" (175). These categorizations more aptly describe the Ousmane-Mireille situation than what operates in Lettre. Unlike Modou and Mawdo who, in a face-saving bid, each have his wife informed after they marry a co-wife,
Ousmane never gets the courage to let Mireille know the truth until his own sister secretly informs her of it. Nnaemeka also likens the "vulgarization" of polygamy in *Lettre* to Ousmane Sembène's description in *Xala* of "the irresponsible, vagrant, urban polygamist" (175). It would appear, however, that this "vagrant lifestyle" that Sembène speaks of is again more true of Ousmane Gueye who, since his secret marriage to Ouleymatou, divides his life between the two women, constantly giving false excuses to Mireille for his frequent absences from home. Modou and Mawdo, on the other hand, sever all relationships with their original families, thereby shirking their parental and conjugal responsibilities. It is indeed Ousmane who practices the "systemic contradiction" that Nnaemeka calls "monogamized polygamy," in which "the man avails himself of the companionship and services of one wife at a time and totally ignores the existence of, and his responsibility to, the other wife/wives" (175).

As is evidenced by the above discussions, one prominent issue that seems to have been swept under the carpet, or at least has not been given the attention I think it deserves in the critique of Bâ's novels, is that of identity. I have already argued in chapter I that the question of identity is one of the main themes that pervades both postmodernism and postcolonialism. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. stress further in their "Editors' Introduction"
to Identities (1995), that the study of identity spans a vast number of issues such as "the multiple intersections of race, class, and gender..., the intersections of postcolonialism, nationalism, and ethnicity" (1). D.A. Masolo also recognizes the primacy of "the issue of 'identity' in postcolonial theory in most if not all its various forms-- personal, class, race, ethnic, gender, cultural, formal, professional and so on" (Masolo 1997: 283). Whether it is the practice of "monogamized polygamy," or the response of the victimized wives to it, or the roles of the parents-in-law, the propelling force behind the actions of the characters in Bâ's novels is the assertion of identity in one way or the other. One must hasten to point out at the same time, that the issue of identity in the two texts goes beyond its simple assertion and raises more perplexing questions about the very notion of identity.

All throughout her narrative, Ramatoulaye, the author of the letter that makes up Bâ's first novel, affirms her belief in and commitment to Islam, thus suggesting that she would willingly accept to stay in a polygamous marriage, polygamy being an accepted practice in Islam. This is in fact what she does, though her overarching reason is other than religious. One might wonder, therefore, about the source of Ramatoulaye's outrage against Modou and Binetou. Many critics believe it is Modou's infidelity. But how can Ramatoulaye talk about infidelity when she has chosen to
stay in a polygamous relationship? In a polygamous marriage, it is true that the first wife commands the respect of her co-wife or wives. But this respect does not in any way determine what kind of relationship the husband should have with the co-wife. It does not determine the matrimonial rights of a co-wife either. The point I am making therefore, is that whatever amount of love Modou shows for Binetou, is natural in a polygamous situation. In fact, right from the beginning, the reader notices that the letter is motivated more by Ramatoulaye's excessive social-economic and class consciousness vis-à-vis Binetou than anything else. Her social station is, in her estimation, what accounts for the fact that she receives more generous gifts than Binetou upon the death of their husband:

Issue d'une grande famille de cette ville, ayant des connaissances dans toutes les couches sociales, institutrice ayant des rapports aimables avec les parents d'élèves... je reçois les sommes les plus fortes et de nombreuses enveloppes (p.15).

Given her social standing and long relationship with Modou, Ramatoulaye thinks she should occupy a superior place and receive a better treatment from their sisters-in-law during the mourning. The latter, on the contrary, follow the Islamic precept and rules of polygamy demanding that every co-wife be treated alike and each be given their due; hence, Ramatoulaye's outrage:

Nos belles-soeurs traitent avec la même égalité trente et cinq ans de vie conjugale. Elles célèbrent, avec la même aisance et les mêmes mots,
douze et trois maternités. J'enregistre, courroucée, cette volonté de nivellement qui réjouit la nouvelle belle-mère de Modou (p.11, my emphasis).

Earlier she had registered her annoyance at having to be put side-by-side with Binetou during the mourning period: "La présence à mes côtés de ma co-épouse m'énerve" (p.10). She constantly makes reference to Binetou's economic and social status. For instance, she, like the women who brought her the details about Modou's wedding to Binetou, cannot understand why he decided to enter into this "ngol" family, "d'une extrême pauvreté" (p.59). One could wonder if this is the same Ramatoulaye who criticizes Mawdo's mother for her class prejudice against Aïssatou!

What one can ascertain from the foregoing, is that much as Bà may have set out to defend women's rights against dominant patriarchal (Islamic) tradition, in the Ramatoulaye-Binetou saga she drives a class wedge within the very group whose dignity and empowerment she is fighting to achieve and preserve. That makes Lettre read more as a defence of class rather than gender identity. In fact, some feminist critics think that Bà's portrayal of Ramayoulaye is far too conservative. For instance Florence Stratton (perhaps oblivious of the irony) is critical of Ramatoulaye's statement that colonial education has "lifted [her] 'out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom.'" Stratton is right however, in her criticism of Ramatoulaye's interiorizing of dependence when Ramatoulaye refuses to
choose "'the right' and 'dignified solution' of obtaining a divorce," after Modou's marriage to Binetou. Even though her excuse for this refusal is the love and "immense tenderness" she has for Modou, it is clear from the rest of the story that what prevails more in making the decision is her sense of insecurity outside of marriage. She sees herself incapable of attracting another man because of her age. Stratton likens Ramatoulaye's looking in the mirror to examine herself to Beauvoir's "'ageing woman' [whose] 'flesh no longer has fresh bounties for men'" (see Stratton 140).

The roles played by the mothers of Ramatoulaye, Binetou, and Mawdo in Lettre and by Ousmane's mother in Chant show another dimension of the assertion of identity. Ramatoulaye's mother's preference for an older, richer, and more experienced suitor for her daughter makes her hate Modou Fall right from the start of their courtship. She makes every effort to separate the two. She goes as far as to make a prediction about Modou's unfaithfulness, based on his physical appearance. Cautioning her daughter, she describes Modou as "trop beau, trop poli, trop perfait pour un homme." She also refers to the space between Modou's first two incisors as a symbol of low moral standards (p. 26). But all that is in vain. The couple still go ahead with their wedding, however bereft of the usual Islamic ceremonies, and the presence of the bride's parents.

Unlike Ramatoulaye, Binetou is too young and
inexperienced to defy her mother's authority. When Modou first begins to woo Binetou by lavishly spending on clothing for her, the latter jokingly tells her friend, Daba (Modou's and Ramatoulaye's first daughter) that she "tire leur prix de la poche d'un vieux" (p.54), without of course revealing the name of that "vieux". When the "old one" proposes to her, she informs Daba who, upon her mother's suggestion agrees to admonish her friend to turn down the proposal, and continue her schooling. Binetou's mother, on the other hand, eager for the higher socio-economic status her daughter's marriage to Modou would give her, pressures Binetou to accept. Daba comments:

   Je dirai à Binetou de ne pas céder; mais sa mère est une femme qui veut tellement sortir de sa condition médiocre et qui regrette tant sa beauté fanée dans la fumée des feux de bois, qu'elle regarde avec envie tout ce que je porte; elle se plaint à longueur de journée (p.55).

After Binetou accepts the offer, Daba informs her mother how much her friend's youth and future are being sacrificed at the alter of her mother's greed and materialism:

   Maman! Binetou, navrée, épouse son "vieux". Sa mère a tellement pleuré. Elle a supplié sa fille de lui "donner une fin heureuse, dans une vraie maison" que l'homme leur a promise. Alors, elle a cédé (p.55, my emphasis).

Binetou feels no attraction for Modou; hence her disparaging comments about him. She calls him a "Vieil homme! Ventru!" in addition to "Le Vieux" (p.60). She only succumbs to parental pressure and marries a man her father's age, to satisfy her mother's inordinate quest for a new identity.
sanctioned by material wealth.

The two mothers who play the most significant roles in the two novels are Tante Nabou—Mawdo's mother in Lettre, and Yaye Khady—Ousamne's mother in Chant. Coming from a royal Toucouleur family, Tante Nabou enjoys the same prestige and position in her family as Cheikh Hamidou Kane's Grande Royale in L'Aventure ambigué. But unlike the latter who believes in change and thus encourages the exposure of their children to a new culture, Tante Nabou is so imbued with her royal culture that she gives in to no compromise. She is the embodiment of the royal tradition of her ancestors and is bent on preserving and perpetuating "purity" of the royal blood. She is therefore astounded over the marriage of her only son to the daughter of a jeweler, a class far below Mawdo's. Being a Gélewar (Princesse du Sine), she will not be able to recognize herself in the children of a woman of a class as low as a jeweler. To her, honor and dignity, the attributes of royal rank, are absent from the jeweler's class. "Et puis, une bijoutière, peut-elle avoir dela dignité, de l'honneur?" the narrator records Tante Nabou's thoughts.

At first, Mawdo defies his mother and tries to assert his identity and independence as an individual. By marrying Aïssatou, he has crossed class boundaries that seem unbreachable to his mother. Mawdo Bâ's frequent visits to the smithy of Aïssatou's father are also symbolic of his
will to transgress the norms that express the prejudices of 
the Senegalese caste system. Like Mireille in Chant, who 
also defies her parents by crossing racial borders, Mawdo 
belongs to those the narrator calls "résolument 
progressistes" in Lettre. This depiction of Mireille, and 
Mawdo (up to this point) corresponds to Achille Mbembe's 
description of the postcolonial 'subject'. In his 
"Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," Mbembe delineates the 
heteronomy of the subject who lives not in "one single 
'public space' but several, each having its own separate 
logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other 
logics when operating in certain specific contexts." These 
multiple 'public spaces' Mbembe calls the postcolony. 
Mbembe continues:

[H]ence the postcolonial 'subject' has had to 
learn to bargain in this conceptual market place. 
Furthermore, subjects in the postcolony have also 
had to have a marked ability to manage not just a 
single identity for themselves but several, which 
are flexible enough for them to negotiate as and 
when required (Mbembe 1992, 4-5).

The flexibility that Mbembe speaks of is more pronounced in 
the character of Mireille in Chant, who is able to 
distinguish the postcolonial subject from the neocolonial 
one. In response to her father's derogatory and racist 
comments about Ousmane, she first of all alludes to the 
sacrifice Djibril Guèye (Ousmane's father) made to defend 
France in a war that had nothing to do with him, but which 
left him handicapped. Then she questions the so-called

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philanthropy of her father and people of his kind:

Qu'as-tu fait pour lui [Djibril Guèye] en échange? Ta présence ici? Mais elle n'est pas pure générosité. Soldat de ta patrie sans uniforme ni arme, tu es le regard du "maître" sur les affaires d'autrui. Colonisateur hier vêtu d'humanisme trompeur, tu demeures aujourd'hui le même homme intéressé, présent uniquement pour exploiter encore. Je suis de l'autre bord, par choix, par choix irréversible... (Chant 44).

Mireille de La Vallée's conversion to Islam, her marriage to Ousmane, and finally her departure to Africa confirm her choice as an individual. On the other hand Mawdo Bâ fails to rise to the occasion when his mother steps up her opposition and intransigence.

Tante Nabou adamantly pursues her fight against the corruption of the royal blood. She would not condone the shame that this unseemly marriage of her "seul homme" would bring upon the clan. There is, however, much more to Tante Nabou's stubbornness than the will to perpetuate the royal lineage. She goes back to her village of origin to ask her brother to allow her to take one of the former's daughters back to the city. And it is in the words exchanged during the meeting with her brother that we learn of her real intentions:

J'ai besoin...d'une enfant à mes côtés, pour meubler mon coeur; je veux que cette enfant soit, à la fois, mes jambes et mon bras droit. Je vieillis. Je ferai de cette enfant une autre moi-même... (pp.45-46, my italics).

Tante Nabou feels frustrated in her dealings with Mawdo, especially in her desire to gain control over him. To her,
Aïssatou, the stranger is usurping her authority as a mother. Aïssatou's education and profession as a teacher put her yet in another world quite alien to Tante Nabou, thus widening the gulf between the two women even further. This makes it less likely that Aïssatou would tolerate Mawdo's mother in their home. To surmount this problem, Tante Nabou figures out that the only alternative for her is to have a mirror image, a copy of herself, through whom she would regain the access to, and influence over her son. Hence the demiurgic responsibility she assigns herself to mold (create?) la petite Nabou in her own image. The similarity between the two Nabous does not only stop at their names. La petite Nabou learns the same profession—midwifery— that her aunt practices. Tante Nabou also trains her little niece in the art of good, traditional houswifeliness. But most of all, she consciously inculcates aristocratic values and awareness into the little girl. The narrator reminds us that,

Sa tante ne manquait jamais l'occasion de lui souligner son origine royale et lui enseignait que la qualité première d'une femme est la docilité (p.47).

When little Nabou comes of age, Mawdo's mother spares no effort and strategy to convince him to take her for a wife. Even though, as the narrator attests, he very dearly loves Aïssatou, he cannot resist his mother's pressure or countenance the public shame that his refusal would cause her. That ends his marriage to Aïssatou, and ushers in his
unhappiness, as we learn from the rest of the story.

In *Chant* Yaye Khady plays an even more pivotal role in both the childhood and adult life of the main character, Ousmane. Contrary to conventional wisdom, she in fact wields more influence over her son's life than does Djibril Guèye the father. In fact, Djibril Guèye's realization of the enormous influence of Yaye over Ousmane makes him warn his wife one day: "Ne fais pas de ce gosse une femmelette" (p.16). When Djibril Guèye's sister announces her intentions to marry her daughter to Ousmane, for instance, it is Yaye Khady's firm opposition on the grounds that Ousmane has to make his own choice, that foils such intentions. Unlike Mathilde de La Valée whose identity is subsumed under her husband's,— to the extent that she cannot even express her innermost feelings of forgiveness to her daughter for marrying Ousmane— Yaye Khady maintains and asserts her identity as an independent thinking individual right through the novel.

Her insistence on Ousmane's freedom to choose his own wife notwithstanding, when the latter informs them from France of his marriage to Mireille, the news of this choice catches Yaye Khady off guard. She loses her composure and strength of character. How could her only son commit such a betrayal of marrying a "fille du diable"! All her dreams for a traditional daughter-in-law who would replace her in doing the household chores and take care of her in her old
age, are shattered by this announcement. She protests to her husband who gracefully accepts the fait accompli:

Une Toubab [White woman] ne peut être une vraie bru. Elle n'aura d'yeux que pour son homme. Nous ne compterons pas pour elle. Moi qui rêvais d'une bru qui habiterait ici et me remplacerait aux tâches ménagères en prenant la maison en main, voilà que je tombe sur une femme qui va emporter mon fils. Je crèverai, debout dans la cuisine (pp.101-102).

Her anguish over Ousmane's marriage has physical as well as psychological repercussions on her. She gains more weight, has insomnia, and gets excessively depressed. But, like Tante Nabou, she will not give in. Just like Mawdo's mother, Yaya Khady resolves to fight to the last to maintain her place in Ousmane's life.

Elle défiait cette diablesse aux cheveux de "Djinn". Elle n'acceptait pas sa suprématie. "Je ne me laisserai pas détruire pour lui céder la place nette". "L'étrangère ne dévorera pas aisément les fruits de mon labour!" (p.113).

When the couple arrive in Dakar, Yaye Khady's first strategy to show her disapproval of Mireille is to try and starve her. She constantly prepares extremely spicy food, knowing that Mireille would not be able to eat it. Then she serves the food in one big bowl in which everyone is required to dip their hands, giving no consideration to hygiene. This forces Mireille to subsist solely on fruits for several days. There and then, she senses her mother-in-law's disapproval of her. When Mireille gets a teaching job, she and her husband move to their own apartment, hoping that
their separation from Ousmane's family would improve her situation. On the contrary, it worsens.

Although the couple allocate a monthly allowance for the maintenance of Ousmane's parents, and day-long visits every Sunday, Yaye Khady barges in on them whenever she likes. Matters come to a head when Ousmane is taken ill with a fever. Despite Mireille's disapproval, Yaye Khady prevails on him to resort to herbalists and marabouts who prepare numerous amulets that he wears around his neck. Yaye finds an excuse in her son's sickness to make her visits into a daily routine. Even when the fever runs its course and Ousmane resumes work, she keeps coming. When Mireille can stand it no longer, she asks her mother-in-law to stay home assuring her that she will take care of her husband's convalescence alone. When Yaye, full of emotion, explains this decision to Ousmane, he takes his mother's side without asking Mireille. It is an action that begins to create discord in the couple.

After she gets pregnant with their only son, all of Mireille's efforts to mend fences with Ousmane's family come to naught. She soon realizes that what they actually expect of her is to spend every penny of their earnings on them. Yaye Khady thinks out loud one day:

*Tu es assise sur l'argent de mon fils. Par n'importe quel moyen, je te délogerai un jour* (p.150).

As she has done in the case of Binetou's mother, Mariama Bâ
is once again casting a critical eye on the affectation that
plagues the Senegalese, indeed many African societies.
People have the propensity for donning on a false identity
that is ratified mainly by material possessions. The
narrator tells us how much Mireille disapproves of this kind
of ostentation of which, unfortunately, her husband too is
fond:

Elle n'acceptait pas les exigences d'une société
tournée entièrement vers l'apparence, à la
recherche du prestige, et dans laquelle son mari
se mouvait avec une aisance surprenante (p.150).

The frugality with which the baptism of Gorgui, the son of
Ousmane and Mireille is conducted shows Mireille's resolve
to resist her husband's pretentious way of life. It is an
occasion for the narrator to show how much shame Yaye feels
because of this lack of pomp and fanfare. She feels herself
minimized in the eyes of a community that expects so much
from her on an occasion like this.

Meanwhile, during Mireille's pregnancy, Ousmane starts
a love affair with Ouleymatou, a woman who had rejected him
when they were teenagers, because he was "un garçon qui
balaie, porte des seaux d'eau et sent le poisson sec"
(p.18). Now that Ousmane enjoys a more prominent economic
standing, and that Ouleymatou has already had one failed
marriage, she uses Yaye Khady to get Ousmane.

Elle voulait Ousmane et par biais de Yaye Khady, à
sa manière, se frayait un chemin pour le récupérer
(164).

Thus, like Tante Nabou, Ousmane's mother seizes the
opportunity to take a revenge on Mireille. She gives every encouragement and support to the Ousmane-Ouleymatou relationship. When Ouleymatou gets pregnant, it is Yaye who admits Ousmane's responsibility for the pregnancy to Ouleymatou's parents. Then she subsequently pressures Ousmane to marry her without informing Mireille. For the baptism of Ouleymatou's son, Ousmane empties his bank account to spend lavishly on his mother's friends and Ouleymatou's family. Yaye Khady is happy that she has at last made up for the shame she had incurred on the occasion of Gorgui's baptism.

Now that Ouleymatou is officially married to Ousmane, the latter's entire family and friends—with the exception of a few—now consider Mireille an intruder. Yaye Khady no longer visits her, not even to see her grandson. All of Mireille's good-will and persistence to be reconciled with her husband's family yield no result. The resistance that Mireille faces, I wish to suggest, is partly due to the fear of the Other, the unknown, which she represents to Ousmane's family. The violent expression of this fear is seen in the family's racist bias against Mireille. For instance, Yaye Khady bluntly confesses her racism by admitting that not only she cannot recognize herself in Gorgui, but that she is ashamed of associating herself with him. "J'ai honte de son fils à la peau métisse. Va le lui dire," she tells her daughter, Soukenya (p.229). Soukenya, one of Ousmane's
sisters, is the only family member who understands and empathizes with Mireille. Hence it is she who secretly tells Mireille about Ousmane's marriage to Ouleyamatou. Soukenya's confrontation with her mother brings out the hidden reason for the hostility of the whole family and community toward Mireille. She tells her mother:

Tu la rejettes sans la connaitre. Pourquoi? Parce qu'elle est Blanche... Seule sa couleur motive ta haine. Je ne vois pas d'autres griefs (229).

Thus, in addition to asserting her individual identity and influence as mother, Yaye Khady is also caught up in the web of racism. Also caught up and even more deeply entangled in that web is Ousmane.

Using culture and tradition as a pretext, Ousmane begins to alienate his wife first by condoning everything that upsets her. He sees nothing wrong with the unannounced visits of his mother, and of his childhood friends who now make it a routine to spend every Saturday talking in their living room. In addition to the noisy exuberance of Ousmane's friends, Mireille has to withstand the intermittent celebrations with drums beating all night long. When she complains of sleeplessness, Ousmane's refuses to sympathize with her. He retorts:

Je vis ma réalité. J'aime le tam-tam. Tu aimes bien Mozart; même la nuit tu peux l'écouter. Supporte que j'aime le tam-tam. Tu ne peux pas comprendre. Le tam-tam, c'est la vie du Nègre éclatant en gerbes de sons: les rythmes des semaines, des moissons, des pluies, des baptèmes, des prières; et même parfois des rythmes de la
Ousmane's rejection of any compromise or understanding soon begins to show in his appearance. His love affair with Ouleymatou is accompanied with the habit of replacing his European suits with long, African gowns. During his first visit to Ouleymatou's house the latter prepares a sumptuous, well-spiced couscous dinner to which he invites the whole neighborhood. The spicy food burns his tongue and lips, causing him a runny nose and tearful eyes. But, also, like the Proustian Madeleine, the couscous dinner brings back a whole world to him. As the narrator puts it, "[C]es sensations fortes de la vie africaine, il les avait oubliées en vérité" (p.179). The sensation of a burning tongue and lips, together with the melodious sounds of a praise singer, calling him "Ousmane, prince de la culture," has a liberating effect on Ousmane and he rediscovers his identity.

From this point on, he recognizes Mireille less and pays more attention to Ouleymatou. He even develops a strategy to get rid of Mireille:

"L'isoler dans son monde. La laisser pourrir de lassitude...Accepter sans réaction la couverture de reproches qu'elle tisse...La préparer à la fuite et retrouver sans équivoque un rôle à la dimension de mes rêves, avec la garantie de mes mains libres..." (226).

The irony of the situation is that most of Ousmane's friends in mixed marriages disapprove of his. According to them, there is no justification for Ousmane's marriage to a White
woman at a time when their country is experiencing a rebirth. When they did it during the colonial era, it was out of "égoïsme, paresse, faiblesse ou opportunisme" (p.184).

Ousmane's infidelity to Mireille and attraction toward Ouleymatou can be looked at from another angle. One culture that Ousmane seems to be defending but which he is silent about, is that of the male. It is clear that in his relationship with Ouleymatou, all he is doing is salvage his male ego which has been seriously hurt by Ouleymatou's initial rejection of him. Therefore, by having Ouleymatou as a wife he is at once asserting his masculinity and redeeming the prestige he thinks he has lost by marrying a stranger (an Other). Ouleymatou is nothing but a status symbol for him.

The attitude of Ousmane, his family and community, towards Mireille, and indeed that of Mireille's own parents vis-à-vis Ousmane, reveal what Elias Canetti refers to as "the mass-soul in ourselves". In his disturbing novel Auto-de-fé, Canetti tells us about the "the mass-soul in ourselves",

In certain circumstances [it] can become so strong as to force the individual to selfless acts or even acts contrary to their own interests. 'Mankind' has existed as a mass for long before it was conceived of and watered down into an idea. It foams, a huge, wild, full-blooded warm animal in all of us, very deep, far deeper than the maternal. In spite of its age it is the youngest of beasts, the essential creation of the earth, its goal and its future (Canetti 1946, 411)
Calling it an "adhesive instinct...that binds," Hassan also underscores the ambiguity of this "mass-soul in ourselves", which causes it to "[create]...the dreaded, desired, despised figure of the Other. In short, "Hassan continues, "it is the ancient basis for defining human identity" (Hassan 1997, 13).

The roles that Mariama Bâ assigns to some of her characters, help to define these ambiguities and indeed undermine the "mass-soul" concept of identity. These characters have not been given much consideration by critics, probably because of their textual insignificance. In Chant, the example of a happier, more successful mixed couple such as Lamine-Pierrette underlines the negotiability of identity. Lamine is the cousin of Ousmane who was the only person present at their wedding in Paris. They all now live in Dakar, but Lamine and his wife are so happy in their marriage that Mireille envies Pierrette. The narrator describes Lamine as:

Un homme ouvert, qui ne subissait pas de tortures idéologiques. Sa négritude ne le hantait pas. Ne la prenant ni comme une tare à extirper, ni comme une valeur à prouver, il s'y mouvait avec aisance (150).^25

Lamine is the first person to notice the ill treatment Mireille is suffering at the hands of Ousmane, and to scold his cousin. He tries to make Ousmane understand the difference between marriage and a master-servant relationship. To Ousmane, however, any compromise would
mean capitulation or defeat. Instead, he accuses Lamine of being assimilated, of living the life of a toubab he has denied himself. But Lamine shows that he is not a slave to any culture, and that culture itself is a human construct which we can adhere to or reject. He retorts:

_En quoi manger à table et manger du steak au lieu du riz peuvent-ils changer un homme? Dépenser mes grains pour ma femme au lieu d'entretenir des paresseux, en quoi cela me nuit-il? Eh bien, si respecter ma femme et la laisser s'épanouir selon ses options signifie être colonisé, alors, je suis colonisé et je l'accepte. Je désire la paix. Cela ne veut pas dire me renier (153)._

Another one who tries to reason with Ousmane is Ali, a friend. Ali and his wife impress upon Ousmane how morally wrong his treatment of Mereille is, and how much he is going against the principles of the very (Islamic) culture he claims to be upholding. They caution him to change his ways, but to no avail. Ousmane has been the source of respect and inspiration for Ali since childhood, especially because of the former's intellect. He used to be an ardent defender of cultural openness. Now Ali reminds him:

_Ainsi les théories les mieux assises croulent devant les réalités de la vie! Ceux qui les formulent fougueusement s'avèrent, à l'épreuve, de piétres exécutants! (203)._

Now that he is faced with a situation where he can practice what he has been preaching all these years, Ousmane instead "se recroquille...sur lui-même, sous prétexte de ne pas trahir 'l'enracinement'!" Ali even goes so far as to point out how heavily the "mass-soul" in Ousmane is weighing on
him. He helps Ousmane know something about himself which he has not been conscious of all this time. "Tu es raciste maintenant...," Ousmane's friend tells him.

Bâ's criticism of what I call collective identity begins in her first novel. Jacqueline is one of the multiple women whose story is integrated into that of Ramatoulaye. She is an Ivorian woman who is a Christian and who, like Mireille, defies her parents and marries a Senegalese Muslim, Samba Diack. The only differences between Jacqueline and Samba are the results of colonization: their countries of origin and religions. They both grew under the same French colonial domination. They are both black; indeed they are both Africans. These similarities notwithstanding, when the couple come back to settle in Samba's home country, Jacqueline is subjected to a treatment by Samba and his society very akin to what Mireille gets. She nearly meets the same fate as Mireille. When every effort on her part to integrate herself within the Senegalese society fails, the frustration lands her in a psychiatric hospital.

The lesson to be learned from Jacqueline's saga is that such categories as an African or racial identity are illusions, as Masolo (1997), and Appiah have so effectively argued. In In My Father's House, Appiah cautions us that:

'Race' disables us because it proposes as a basis for common action the illusion that black (and white and yellow) people are fundamentally allied by nature and, thus, without effort; it leaves us unprepared,
therefore, to handle the 'intraracial' conflicts that arise from the very different situations of black (and white and yellow) people in different parts of the... world (176).

The lack of preparation for eventualities such as she had to face in her new situation, causes Jacqueline excessive depression and mental illness. The narrator dispels the illusion of an African identity further when she reminds us that, "l'Afrique est différente, morcelée. Un même pays change plusieurs fois de visage et de mentalité, du nord au sud ou de l'est à l'ouest" (p.64), comments which, in my opinion, summarize Bâ's position on the issue of identity, that is that there is no such thing as a collective identity. Bâ's treatment of this question should also serve as a caution to critics of African literatures to get away from viewing Africa as a monolith. We can draw a similar conclusion about polygamy, that as an institution it has its shortcomings, but the abuse of the institution is what Bâ condemns more in his novels than the institution itself.
CHAPTER 5

NEW REALISM IN THE FICTIONAL WORKS OF SONY LABOU TANSI.

[Reality is not only what we see on the surface; it has a magical dimension as well (Isabel Allende, Eva Luna; qtd. in David Danow 1995, p. 70).

Sony Labou Tansi's first novel, La Vie et demie (1979) has been widely acclaimed as an innovative event in the history of Black African Francophone fiction (see Sewanou Dabla 1986, Jonathan Ngaté 1988, Kofi Anyinefa 1990, Eileen Julien 1992). As the foregoing chapters show, however, La Vie et demie (1979), and indeed all of Sony Labou Tansi's fictional works may have taken that history to a new level, but the innovative process started well before Labou Tansi published his first novel. Undoubtedly, Labou Tansi remains not only one of the most prolific, but also of the most talented writers of his time. Before his untimely death in 1995, he had published five novels between 1979 and 1988. His sixth novel, Le Commencement des douleurs was published posthumously by Seuil a little after his death in 1995. He wrote over a dozen plays, and he was the director of the Rocado Zulu Théâtre of Brazzaville, which he founded the

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year he published his first novel. He also wrote poetry, although with relatively little success; and two novellas, both of which won him Concours Prizes organized by l'Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique in 1971 and 1979 respectively. Sony Labou Tansi owed his success essentially to his theatrical productions and his participation in Radio France Internationale's Concours théatral interafricain, which he won at four different times—before publishing his first novel. It was, however, the publication of La Vie et demie that put Sony Labou Tansi on the literary map and gave him international acclaim. Les Éditions du Seuil released the novel in Nice at the time the first Francophonie Festival was being held in that city. It is on that occasion that Labou Tansi was awarded the "Prix spécial du jury" for his first novel, and his career as a recognized novelist took off. "Le jeune Sony Labou Tansi appartenait désormais à la fratrie des écrivains congolais," comments Jean-Michel Devésa (1996, 78).

La Vie et demie, and Sony Labou Tansi's fictional works in general, have been compared to works from all geographical locations and historical periods. La Vie et demie... suggests Jonathan Swift at his most savage (as in A Modest Proposal...), Henry Miller at his most scabrous, Rabelais at his most scatological, with the burlesque hallucinatory
vicissitudes of Voltaire's *Candide* interspersed with the grotesque absurdity of Jarry's *Ubu* (Dorothy S. Blair 1995, 39).

He has, also been likened to Shakespeare, and Sembène Ousmane (Julien 1992); to French surrealists (Devésa 1994); but more pointedly, to the Latin American novelists of magic realism, especially Gabriel García Márquez (Sewanou Dabla 1986, Devésa 1996, Peter Hawkins 1996). This last aspect of Labou Tansi's work will be central to my reading of his novels. As I have already discussed in chapter 1, there is a parallel to be drawn between magic realism and new realism, and between new realism and postmodernism. It is within this configuration that I will discuss new realism in two of Labou Tansi's novels—*La Vie et demie* and *L'État honteux*—in the present chapter. My study of the novels will be based principally on Sylvain Mbembe's theoretical insights into the new realism. A few comments about the two terms magic realism and new realism will be in order at this point.

Like postmodernism, magic realism has known a variety of definitions since the term came into currency in the field of painting over half a century ago. It is therefore impossible to pin it down according to any one definition. Geoff Hancock, in his "Introduction" to *Magic Realism: an Anthology*, has characterized the term as "a blend of fantasy and everyday reality, and indeed, magic realism is the conjunction of the two worlds in one place" (1980, 7).
In his discussion of the concept Hancock draws on well known theorists and novelists of magic realism. In the domain of fiction he identifies G.K. Chesterton, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, (who wrote articles about the subject in 1932), as "some of the very real theorists" of magic realism. It was Chesterton who stated that "[m]agic realism is preternatural but not supernatural." Caseras and Borges "rejected realism for a fiction based on metaphor and magic" in their joint article, "Narrative Art and Magic,". Borges further attacked "realistic and psychological novels which sought to imitate real life,..." He proclaimed "the superiority of detective stories and popular adventure stories in which plot is essential and the old wisdom of magic prevails" (Hancock 11). Borges's definition is overly restrictive however, in the sense that he sees magic realism in purely "anthropological terms-- as a complete system, with its own logic and theory of causation, intolerant to loose ends, and, in fact, more rigorous than the system of the natural or scientific world" (Hancock 12).

Other notable names in Hancock's analysis include Miguel Angel Asturias, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Richard Burgin.

With the passage of time the implications of magic realism in fiction were expanded upon and developed. Alejo Carpentier (1949) argued that "[t]he marvellous real... accurately summed up the fusion of geography, history, myth, politics, culture, language and oral traditions of Latin
America" (Hancock 12). I want to argue that one only needs to replace "Latin America" with Africa, to make Carpentier's comments applicable to Labou Tansi's novels. In "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction" (1955), Angel Flores speaks of the "amalgamation of realism and fantasy in a single literary mode" (qtd. in Hancock 12). As Hancock has pointed out, the main event that made magic realism capture the attention of the literary world was most certainly the publication in 1967 of the English translation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. That novel has influenced not only English, American, and Canadian authors, as Hancock points out; it has also had a telling influence on the new generation of African authors too. It was Marquez in particular whom Devésa had in mind when he wrote that "les romans de Sony Labou Tansi s'inscrivent dans la même veine, celle d'une écriture baroque, voire carnavalesque, empruntant largement au modèle latino-américain" (1996, 218). Many such similarities between the narrative styles of Marquez and Labou Tansi have been highlighted by other critics such as Dabla 1986, Anyinefa 1990, Julien 1992, Aizenberg 1995.

In a further discussion of magic realism in *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (1968), Burgin emphasizes the attention to the practical details, details which would normally be inconsequent to the author of a modernist novel.
Many people are apt to think of real life on one side, that means toothache, headache, travelling, and so on, and then on the other side you have imaginary life and fancy and that means the arts. But I don't think that that distinction holds water. I think that everything is part of life (qtd. in Hancock 7).

This depiction of life as it is, in its minutest details, is a defining characteristic of the postmodernist novel; it is also that of the postcolonial new realist novel. "Magic realism"-- like new realism, one might add,-- "returns the marvellous to literature and lifts fiction away from the scruffy earth. As a series of devices, magic realism, like telescopes, microscopes, and polarized filters, offers us a way of seeing truth somehow excluded from our vision" (Hancock 14). Sony Labou Tansi himself seemed to be conscious of the insuperable link between the so-called real world and the world of the marvellous, as his comments in a conference on Magie et Écriture au Congo suggest.

Nous sommes tous les magiciens. C'est pour échapper à cette réalité et à la part incontrôlée des choses dites vraies que nous jouons à l'illusion de contenir par la raison la spéculation perpétuelle...

Toute réalité est une vaste cabale, une conspiration même, un complot ourdi contre la dimension explosement des infinis. Ne me parlez plus de réalisme. Ce que nous nommons réalité est la lisière des infinis, le rivage où se promènent, comme sur une plage déserte, nos yeux, notre intelligence, notre émotion, notre infinie petitesse et notre ignardise achevée (Labou Tansi 1994, 57-58; emphasis in original).

That Sony Labou Tansi adopted the narrative mode of the fable in his first novel comes therefore as no surprise. Although he does not call L'État a fable, the narrative
One explanation of magic realism that is applicable
to Sony Labou Tansi's project is provided by Miguel Angélis
Asturias.

There is a kind of dream, of unreality, which
when told in all its detail seems more real than
reality itself. From this springs what we call
"magic realism". There are events that really
happen and afterwards become legends, and there
are legends which afterwards become events; there
are no boundaries between reality and dreams,
between reality and fiction, between what is seen
and what is imagined (qtd in Hancock 7-8; emphasis
added).

The effacing of boundaries, as I have argued in the
preceding chapters, is among the major defining
characteristics of postmodernism. Brian McHale makes
similar comments to those of Asturias's about postmodern
fiction, especially when he speaks about "the instability
and reversibility of... mimesis and diegesis. Pressed hard,
mimesis turns out to be diegetic and vice-versa" (1988, 13).
The process of doing away with boundaries takes many forms
in Labou Tansi's fictional works, but the process appears in
its most concrete manifestation in what the author himself
alleges to be the genesis of his first novel. La Vie,
according to Labou Tansi, was inspired by a very troubling
dream he had in 1977 about a very good friend of his, the
former President of Congo, Massemba-Debat.

In his dream, someone brought Labou Tansi two suits,
"une veste 'léopard' tachée de sang dans laquelle il a
reconnu celle du Président en exercice, le Président Marien
Ngouabi, et un costume 'civil' qui était celui de Massemba-
Debat..." (Devésa 1996, 75). A believer in dreams, Labou
Tansi was so troubled by this vision that he boarded the train the next morning to go meet his friend.


A few days later, Labou Tansi saw his friend again in another dream, and the latter said the following words to him:

"Ils m'ont pris la vie mais toi, tu as la vie et demie..." (Dévésa 76).

Hence the title of the prize-winning novel, _La Vie et demie_.

The dream aspect of the novel is evident in its narrative form as Kenneth Harrow notes in his brief analysis. "At the beginning of _La Vie et demie_ we are in the presence of a world in which the boundary between "réalité" and "rêve" [dream] is rendered problematic." While such distinctions and boundaries, Harrow argues, are the foundation upon which "a fiction of realism is erected," Labou Tansi's narrative rejects them, and "creates in its place dialogic discourses of postrevolt magical realism" (Harrow 331).

What Harrow designates as postrevolt is actually the emergence of a new socio-political reality in the postcolony. More than two decades before Harrow, Sunday Anozie had labeled this new reality as "le nouveau réalism," which he saw depicted in the narratives of Yambo
Ouologuem's, *Le Devoir de violence*, and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born*. Anozie sees these two novels as "franchiss[a]nt une étape romanesque en Afrique."

Anozie defines the new realism in African fiction as:

un rapport génétique structural entre les crises socio-politiques internes de l'Afrique d'une part, et les 'types' de personnages et d'intrigues romanesques de l'autre. Ce réalisme ne repose d'ailleurs sur aucune préférence de l'un ou l'autre "type" de trois "déterminations"... Par contre, il se montre à travers une tentative d'équilibre nouveau mais toujours précaire entre celles-ci (1970, 250).

Anozie stresses the precariousness of the new realism by suggesting that we not consider it as "la découverte d'une quelconque unité ou solidarité mécanique primitive de l'Afrique; on devrait le saisir plutôt dans le fait nouveau qu'à travers l'œuvre et grâce surtout à elle, l'individu commence à s'affirmer de plus en plus librement en tant qu'être clairvoyant..." (250-51).

The new postcolonial reality has also been designated as postrealist by Anthony Appiah. The postrealist narrative mode, Appiah contends, is a defining characteristic of what he calls the "second stage" novels in African literature. Like Anozie, Appiah takes Ouologuem's novel as an example of this new form of narrative. To Appiah, the "second stage" novels seek "to delegitimize the forms of the realist African novel, in part, surely, because what it sought to naturalize was a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed. The national bourgeoisie that took on the baton of
rationalization, industrialization, bureaucratization in the name of nationalism, turned to be a kleptocracy" (Appiah 1992, 150). Whatever one chooses to call it, this new form of discourse has been taken, and continues to be taken to different dimensions since its inception, by different writers, notable among whom is Sony Labou Tansi.

In his discussion of La Vie Jonathan Ngaté sees the new realism's focus on "writing as a mode of invention, as a way of writing oneself into being with words that are so many pieces of one's own flesh" (1988, 132). Antoine Yila also stresses the power of writing in his analysis of the novel. He describes writing as "parole énergétique" and also refers to the "magie de l'écriture" (Yila 1994, 122). Alain Ricard made similar comments about all of Labou Tansi's novels:


Sony Labou Tansi's novels are a demonstration of this upsetting, not only of words, but of the whole narrative tradition in the Francophone African novel. It is, in fact, one respect in which Labou Tansi's novels can be called postmodernist. For, as Claude Richard observes, it is the task of the "post-modern fabulator" to scatter "the overpowering presence of causality at all levels of the graphic structure... He is challenged to upset the order of words, supposedly pre-determined by God, Nature or the Mind, to suspend the misreading of the signifier as cause of the
signified in order to dispel the pre-semantic apprenhension of causation as the law of the constitution of the verbal sentence" (Richard 1983, 9). The comments of Yila, Ngaté, and Ricard draw our attention to the shift that devalorizes the documentary littérature engagée reflecting the colonial period and its attendant binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized. The shift of emphasis does not, however, lead new realism, (or postmodernism, or magic realism) into pure formalism. It brings up other issues affecting the post-colonial society. Such issues, as Sylvain Mbembe has suggested, in "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," should no longer be viewed in a Manichaean way even within the post-colonial society. "Instead," Mbembe cautions, "the emphasis should be upon the logic of 'conviviality', on the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, which inscribe the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme" (Mbembe 1992, 10).

Perhaps nothing summarizes magic realism (and indeed new realism) better than Garcia Marquez' own comments in his 1982 Nobel Lecture. He terms this magic realism as an "outsized reality" which is "a reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty.... Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbriddled reality, we
have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable" (qtd. in David Danow 156; note #3). Even a first reading of Sony Labou Tansi's novels reveals the author's rejection of conventionality.

Sewanou Dabla's observation that the story told in La Vie is only deceptively coherent, unified and simple, already begins to suggest the unconventionality of the Labou Tansian narrative. In actual fact, there are two main stories going on simultaneously in the novel. First there is the story of the successive reign of the "Providential Guide" dynasty over Katamanalasia (later become Kawangotora, then Bampotsoata). This shifting identity of the fictitious state demonstrates the "nonnecessity of the world [the novel] portrays, its man-made-ness and thus its arbitrariness," to which Julien refers (1992, 140). Parallel to the story of the Guides is that of the Martial family, (called the wreck-family in the narrative) which, over the period of three generations (father, daughter, and granddaughter) puts up an undaunted opposition against the Guides. The family's struggle comes to a head in a war between Katamanalasia and the seceded region of Damellia, where the granddaughter Chaïdana and her thirty "Chaïdanised" sons take refuge. Mid-way into the novel (chapters 4 and 5), another story is told; the struggle of the Pygmies for integration. The three stories are set in
such a way that they give the semblance of one compact narrative.

le "roman" de la folie des dirigeants de la Katamanalasie appelle celui de la révolte et des luttes des "gens de Martial" comme il entraîne celui de la "pacification" des Pygmées chez lesquels Chaïdana, petite fille de Martial, s'était refugiée (Dabla 1986, 134-35).

In the Avertissement to the novel the author insists on his inventive imagination, warning his readers that the novel takes place entirely in him. "Qu'aucun aujourd'hui politique ou humain ne vienne s'y mêler" (p.10). The further we go into it, however, the more it dawns on us that the novel is in fact in the process of bridging the gap between the worlds of imagination and reality, of magic and reality. Labou Tansi calls his novel a fable, but, as Julien rightly observes, Labou Tansi's use of the fable, quite unlike the fabledness in "African tales, Aesop's Fables, and the fables of La Fontaine,... is not a matter of anthropomorphization of animals." It springs from the author's "'intellectual and moral impulse'" (126). In the same Avertissement, the author underlines what makes him different from the earlier novelists: his goal is not to teach, but to invent. We also learn about the refusal of La Vie "to be bound by the rational and by the documentary impulse of many first-generation African novels" (Julien 126).

j'ai cruellement choisi de paraître comme une seconde version de l'humain— pas la dernière bien entendu— pas la meilleure— simplement la
différente... A ceux qui cherchent un auteur engagé je propose un homme engageant (p. 9).

*L'État* is even more difficult, if not impossible to summarize. Apparently, it is the story of the long reign of Colonel Martillimi Lopez over a fictitious African State. In the opening sentence of the novel the implied narrator presents us with that story:

Voici l'histoire de mon-colonel Martillimi Lopez fils de Maman Nationale, venu au monde en se tenant la hernie, parti de ce monde toujours en se tenant... (p. 7).

What takes place in the 157 pages of this novel, nonetheless, is more of a non-story, having no precise plot. We are in the presence of a cluster of unrelated, incoherent episodes that walk us through the forty or so years of Lopez's reign, up to the day when he packs up his suitcases in haste, runs to the airport on foot, on his way back to his native village of Moumvouka. Unlike *La Vie*, however, *L'État* has a protagonist in the person of President Martillimi Lopez, around whom the whole narrative revolves. Beginning with its title, the language of *L'État honteux* lends itself to confusion and ambiguity. Until one of the characters defines the word *état* much later into the novel, the reader is led to consider it solely in its geopolitical acceptation.

Maintenant, monsieur le Président, il est question de nous, nous et l'état honteux (entendez état condition) où nous sommes. C'est le pays, le continent, la race et enfin l'homme noir qui parlent en moi. L'homme noir et l'homme tout court, l'homme en lutte éternelle contre sa
Indeed, as Anyinefa asserts, Labou Tansi describes a moral condition in this novel. But this condition, this state is explained in a spatiotemporal setting, a State, "un État d'ailleurs anonyme pour la simple raison que ce n'est pas tellement lui qui compte, mais avant tout l'état honteux dans lequel il se trouve" (Anyinefa 149).

Even though the author shies away from engagement, La Vie, and L'État remain strong statements about the "grotesque and deplorable state of affairs in which African nations find themselves," more than three decades after political independence from their former colonial masters (Julien 127-28). Hence the change of tone in the narrative proper of the novels, from the noncommittal claims in the Avertissement of La Vie. For instance, when the Providential Guide's doctor who saves Chaidana from the Guide finds himself being threatened, he proceeds to change his identity, as he comments: "Moi je vais prendre une nouvelle identité. C'est le pays, ma chère. Et le pays nous demande d'être forts dans l'acte de fermer les yeux" (P. 30). It is Chaidana's awareness of the corrupt tendencies of the authorities in Katamanalasia that helps her succeed in her project of revenge against the establishment. She calls that project as "l'amour au champagne," which consisted of throwing herself at the political and military officials and after making love,
poisoning them with contaminated champaign. The authorities, as the narrator informs us, are motivated by three things: women, wine, and money. Thus, they lead "la vie de VVVF, qu'on appelait la vie avec trois V" (p. 36). When Chaïdane witnesses the torture of doctor Tchi at the hands of the Providential Guide she cannot but express the type of frustration as Ahmadou Kourouma's narrator expresses over the era of Independence. Chaïdane recalls her father's phrase, "L'indépendance, ça n'est pas costaud costaud" (p. 42), a statement that clearly resonates the general mood of disillusionment of the postcolonial subject. What I call Labou Tansi's engagement begun in _La Vie_ becomes even more pronounced in his subsequent novels. In fact, the fable, which is the narrative mode Labou Tansi assigns to his first novel, is equally applicable to the others. The fable, Mbembe has argues, is also a very apt mode for defining the socio-political situation of the postcolony since, "[T]he postcolonial polity can only produce 'fables' and stupefy its 'subjects', bringing on delirium when the discourse of power penetrates its targets and drives them into realms of fantasy and hallucination" (Mbembe 1992, 16).

In the _Avertissement_ to the second novel there is a drastic change of tone from the first, and the novelist bluntly spells out his moral obligation as the basis for his inventive imagination.

Le roman est paraît-il une oeuvre d'imagination. Il faut pourtant que cette
imagination trouve sa place quelque part dans quelque réalité. 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 leurs noms. J'estime que le monde dit moderne est un scandale et une honte, je ne dis que cette chose-là en plusieurs "maux".... L'État honteux c'est le résumé en quelques "maux" de la situation honteuse où l'humanité s'est engagée (L'État, Avertissement, emphasis added).

The most obvious narrative feature of this Avertissement which continues in the rest of the novel, and in Labou Tansi's subsequent writings, is the play on words. But under this veneer of playfulness one can appreciate the distance the author has come from his first to his second novels with regard to his goal of speaking to the conscience of his reader. As the author claims, both novels take place in him, but words, which in La Vie were "pieces of oneself," (to use Ngaté's phrase) have now become the source of an acute pain. Writing which was done in La Vie to create fear in the author, now becomes a clarion call to "le monde à venir au monde". It becomes the author's personal cry to dissipate the hurt; hence Devésa will refer to writing as a form of therapy for Labou Tansi. Seven years after the publication of L'État Labou Tansi gave an interview to Diagonales in which he announced the titles of his last two novels. In that interview, one thing that stands out again is Labou Tansi's reiteration of his goal as a novelist.

"Je regarde les rues, les places, le monde autour de moi. Le tout est enveloppé de silence. Cela me donne toujours envie de crever le silence. Spirituellement, cela est horrible de se taire devant l'intolérable. Alors j'écris comme on
Thus the more the novelist matured, the more it became clear to him that he did not write just to write "[himself] into being with words," as Ngaté remarked about his first novel; he wrote indeed, to say something. It is his mode of saying what he had to say that sets him drastically apart from novelists of the earlier period. It is that mode that makes some critics mistakenly refer to Labou Tansi as a noncommitted novelist. I might add, after Kenneth Harrow, however, that Labou Tansi's engagement is quite different from that of "a militant revolutionary, and even less that of a self-assured ideologue." Instead, the keystone of his commitment seems to be the awareness that his novels create in the postcolonial subject of her/his part in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in the "chaotically pluralistic" postcolony. In order to tell a story reflecting this new commitment, Labou Tansi has had to employ a narrative mode that exemplifies the socio-cultural reality of the postcolonial subject.

Within the three main stories making up the plot of La Vie are numerous others, functioning as digressions from the principal narrative. Thanks to this multiplication of plots and their various characters-- none of whom could actually
be called the protagonist of the novel—Labou Tansi has cleverly avoided the traditional linear and chronological narrative of the earlier African novels. Non-linearity in Labou Tansi's narrative is further emphasized by his treatment of time. From the opening sentence of his first novel, Labou Tansi insinuates that the traditional concept of time is not at issue in his narrative.

C'était l'année où Chaidana avait eu quinze ans. Mais le temps. Le temps est par terre.... C'était au temps où la terre était encore ronde...

(La Vie 11).

The liberty which the author accords himself in the treatment of time allows him to abolish the notion of time altogether. The use of the indefinite past tense in the above extract is an exemplary case in point illustrating the murky distinction of the past from the present. That same liberty sometimes leads the author to ignore all differences between past, present, and future time. As Anyinefa observes, "[L]e passé, le présent et le futur deviennent très fluides, versent l'un dans l'autre" (130). Devésa also comments on the strangeness of Labou Tansi's use of time:

Sony Labou Tansi mélangeait allègrement le passé et le présent: dans ses textes, légendes, mythes et traditions se situent dans un temps à part qui n'est jamais ni le passé historique ni l'actualité immédiate, mais celui d'une fiction rendue vivante (1996, 245; emphasis in original).

With very minimal differences, the reign of each successive Guide in La Vie reads like a mere replication of that of the first. Thus, Dabla is right to describe time in that novel
as a "cercle mythique".

Time is crystallized in *L'Etat* also through the endless repetition of identical events and elements. Hence, Anyinefa describes the treatment of time in that novel as "un certain 'dérèglement' du temps" (150). The novel is purportedly about the forty-year tyrannical reign of the megalomaniac Colonel Martillimi Lopez. The closing sentence of the novel seems to support that assertion.

Nous reprimes ses caisses de moutarde et son seau hygiénique comme quarante ans auparavant, et le conduisîmes à Moumvouka le village de Maman-Folle-Nationale... (L'Etat 157; my emphasis).

This final trek seemingly ended Lopez's reign. Nonetheless, much earlier in the novel, we are told that the municipal drama company of Yambi-City, *El Commedia de la Outa* had come to perform in celebration of the forty-ninth anniversary of his accession to power (p. 113). Anyinefa regards this "temporal ambiguity" as the narrator's way of underscoring "une durée mythique, finalement assez longue pour qu'elle ne souffre pas de la soustraction ou de l'addition de quelques années" (151). These nine uncertain years still leave the reader in doubt as to when Lopez's reign ended and when that of his successor, Carvanso started. Thus we are confronted with a similar perpetuity that we witnessed in *La Vie*. The overlapping of the two reigns, or the blurring of the point of transition from one era to the other suggests that "le changement des hommes à la tête de l'État n'entraîne point..."
de changement. La situation est restée honteuse: l'état honteux se perpétue au-delà du règne de Lopez" (Anyinefa 151). There is, in addition to repetitiveness, what one may call the freezing of time in the Labou Tansian narrative, instance in the way La Vie ends.

... à la fin du livre, l'histoire n'est pas achevée; elle se trouve seulement suspendue, avec de fortes possibilités de répétition. Certes le Darmellia a disparu, la Katamalanasi est devenue le Bampotsoata, mais l'essence de ce monde reste immuable dans l'oppression et les ripailles (Dabla 137).

Sometimes Labou Tansi speaks of time in such impersonal terms that one has the impression it exists as an entity all of its own, having nothing to do with the characters. "Le temps passait en Katamalanasi, toujours de la même façon. Les gens ne cherchaient même plus à savoir d'où venait ce temps, où il allait, qui l'envoyait" (La Vie 133).

In analyzing the grotesque and the carnivalesque in South American magical realist fiction, David Danow identifies non-linear time as one of the defining features of most magical realist narratives as well.

Time is thus frequently presented as cyclical, rather than linear. What occurs on one occasion (which is not likely to be the first) is destined to take place again on another, perhaps different plane. The result is the ready potential for a kind of "eternal recurrence," whose principle aspect, however, is rooted more in dire repetition than in an implicit acknowledgment of eternity (Danow 1995, 74).

Danow also points up the association of death with "(re)birth and new life" in the magical realist fiction, as
another one of its defining characteristics. He opposes that kind of death to the depiction of death in "the literature of the Holocaust... without its carnivalesque, regenerative effect" (40). In Labou Tansi's novels, especially _La Vie_, this "carnivalesque, regenerative effect" is felt in various fashions. First, there is Martial's grotesque, bizarre tenacity with which he hangs onto life even when the Providential Guide hacks him into pieces.

When the Providential Guide uses the same knife he is using to eat to cut Martial's throat, pluck out his eyes, open up his bowels, the latter repeatedly says to him: "Je ne veux pas mourir cette mort". Then the Guide takes his revolver and fires two shots in Martial's forehead, but the 'wreck-father' still shows his resolve to live.

Even when Martial disappears physically, he resists being wiped out, in every sense of the word. His ghost keeps haunting the Guide and he also manifests himself in the form of the famous black ink, which becomes an anathema that will cause the Guide to outlaw the black color in all of Katamalanasia. The Providential Guide feels even more
threatened when Chaidana's three thousand 'pistoléto graphes' use the black ink to write Martial's "Je ne veux pas mourir cette mort," on every door in Yourma city, on Christmas eve. The sentence appeared as close to the king as the third innermost portal of the "excellential" palace.

La réaction du Guide Providentiel fut des plus systématiques, on arrêta tout ceux qui pouvaient avoir de la peinture noire chez eux, et le noir fut décrété couleur de Martial, tous les citoyens furent sommés de faire disparaître tout ce qui avait la couleur de Martial à part leurs cheveux et leur peau pour ceux qui l'avaient sombre, les vendeurs de charbon furent sommés d'arrêter leur commerce, les gens en deuil furent déshabillés en pleine rue (p. 45).

The Guide's reaction here shows the folly of dictatorship, but more importantly, it bespeaks the fragility of the power he wields over the people of Yourma, and finally it suggests the limits of coercion. Therefore, the Guide's measures will all but restrain Martial. While he prepares to address the people of Yourma in a public meeting one day, Martial appears on the podium, pushing him away and taking his place. The enthusiasm that the people show on seeing Martial goes further to show how little an effect coercion has on the people. Pandemonium breaks out as the people hail Martial imploring him to address them, thousands are killed (p. 40). Martial also manifests himself by "magically" writing the word "enfer" on the forehead of one of the later Guides, Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père. Every effort to get rid of this word is vain. Even a surgical operation does not help, for after removing his skin and

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flesh, the doctor sees the word engraved on his skull. Ashamed and despondent at the same time, the Guide chooses the name Jean-Coeur-brisé, and later condemns himself to the stake. Perhaps the closest Labou Tansi comes to "(re)birth and new life" as Danow describes it in relation to magical realism, is in Martial's thirty great grandsons and their activities. They are thirty of the countless sons of "le roi du sexe," who turn against their father and take refuge to Darmellia, to join forces with their grandmother, Châidana. They become known as the "Chaïdanized" (151). They are the ones who, towards the end of the novel, will conduct the full-scale war against Yourma. I read this enormous influence that Martial wields over the public which reacts so spontaneously to his ghost as a demonstration of what Harrow calls the "melding of life and death" in the novel. That is, Martial's ghost, the symbol of death, injects vigor into the living but dormant "gens de Martial," and stirs them to physically stand up to the oppressive rule of the Guide. This is an action they would otherwise not have taken on their own accord, but the ghost makes them break through the barrier of intimidation and be ready for the ultimate consequence of the death of thousands of them.

In and of itself, the tenacity that Martial's ghost displays is a familiar theme in relation to traditional African folk tales. In fact, Antoine Yila sees it as just another way of documenting the age-old African traditional
belief in the cohabitation with the dead, which has been popularized by Birago Diop's famous poem "Leurres et lueurs" of 1960. What makes the ghost's tenacity peculiar in La Vie, as Dabla opines, is that the exaggeration and attention paid to minute details in Labou Tansi's narrative cannot be justified by the supernatural powers and valor of even such epic characters as Soundjata. The 'gleaming gold saber', usually attributable to the military prowess of admired epic heroes now finds itself in the hands of the vile, obnoxious Providential Guide who thrusts it into the pupils and bowels of his own people.

The Labou Tansian new realist narrative is awash with the 'poetics of excess', a mark of magic realism which, as Danow holds, "extends, within a broadly delineated typology, from the fantastic to the hyperbolic, and from the improbable to the possible (Danow 67). The poetics of excess is equally a mark of postcolonial discourse in general, and also of that discourse as it is depicted in the new realist novel. Mbembe reminds us that "[T]he postcolony is characterised by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion as well as by distinctive ways in which identities are multiplied, transformed and put into circulation" (Mbembe 1992, 4). La Vie opens with such excesses as is exemplified by the fantastic element in Martial's resistance to death. There is also the author's
dealing with figures. When the Providential Guide's personal doctor wants to save Chaidana from the persecution of the Guide, he gives her a check for the amount of eighty-seven million, just to pay her way out of the city; Chaidana requires three thousand boys (pistoléto graphes) to write her father's famous sentence on the doors of all the houses in Yourma; by the time Chaidana becomes the 'excellential' wife she is already going by her ninety-third identity (Mademoiselle Ayele); Chaidana's stubbornness causes the ghost of her father to write the order, "Il faut partir avant cette date" in her room one million times; about one hundred men rape Chaidana in one night; Layisho, who shelters Chaidana away in his fisherman's village is imprisoned for eighty-seven years before dying at the age of one hundred thirty three years and nine months; the Guide Jean-Coeur-de-Pierre has two thousand sons all named Jean.

Towards the end of the novel when Jean Calcium, one of the reneged sons of Jean-Coeur-de-Pierre releases flies which wreak wanton destruction on people and property. Despite his belligerent disposition, Jean Calcium shows despair and comments on the insanity of war in general.

Tous nos rêves ont été tués. On n'a plus tout à fait le droit de se battre. Mais on s'accoche à la guerre. La guerre c'est notre tic. Avant, quand c'était la guerre de la paix, on se battait comme des hommes; maintenant qu'on est entré dans la guerre pour la guerre, on se bat comme des bêtes sauvages. On se bat comme des choses. On geste, un point c'est tout (p. 185).

The somber denouement of the novel is disconcerting to many
critics, who have taxed Labou Tansi with pessimism. Koffi Anyinefa, for one, uses these last incidents of the novel to underline tyranny and the opposition to it as the central motifs of La Vie. Taking into account Danow's observation about the place of joy and misery in magical realism-- as well as in the new realist narrative-- I would like to argue that Labou Tansi's focus is more on realistically depicting the reality as it is, than on such oppositions as Anyinefa identifies.  

In fact, the author's portrayal of characters avoids any black-and-white opposition between the good and the bad, a practice characteristic of earlier African novels. If the narrator stresses the depravity of the Guides so much, the Martial people are themselves not virtue incarnate, notwithstanding their idealism. If the "gens de Martial" are good intentioned, their good intentions are tempered by the means they employ to achieve those intentions. Chaïdana has no scruple in prostituting herself, "pour voir descendre le scandale;" she accepts to marry the Guide, her father's assassin in the masochistic hope of having "un enfant, un fils de monstre". As for her father, the most appropriate way he thinks he can correct Chaidana's obstinacy is by brutalizing her, then subsequently, ravishing her incestuously.

Martial entra dans une telle colère qu'il battit sa fille comme une bête et coucha avec elle, sans doute pour lui donner une gifle intérieure. À la fin de l'acte, Martial battit de nouveau sa fille
qu'il laissa pour morte. Il cracha sur elle avant de partir... (p. 69).

For their part, the so-called Chaîdanized pacifists will let themselves be drawn into an escalation of violence which culminates in Jean Calcium pouring out his "vibrations meurtrières" over Katamalanasia, "où la terre avait pris feu et fondu" (p. 187). Hence, "la monstruosité est [dans ce roman] la chose la mieux partagée," observes Nicole Vaschalde (1994, 207). It is this lack of hierarchy of blame that justifies Marie-Noëlle Vibert's blanket categorization of the Labou Tansian character as "un animal féfoce qui se débat dans sa férocité, sa matérialité, son chaos pour tenter de s'humaniser, de se 'mettre au monde' en tant qu'homme" (Vibert 1996, 119).

Throughout his novels Labou Tansi has adopted a narrative device which has ever since been in currency among African novelists; namely, irony. His use of this device demonstrates once again his departure from the tradition established by his predecessors. Irony for the Labou Tansi, Julien contends, meant staying "within the laws of the system and thus mock from within; there are thus two levels of meaning, the stated and the unstated, which erodes the former" (1992, 139-40). This type of irony is what Alan Wild refers to as "the 'disjunctive irony' of modernism [which] sought to master the world's messy contingency from a position above and outside of it...." (see McHale 1988, 15-16). Irony in La Vie, on the other hand, fits the
definition of "postmodern 'suspensive irony' [which] takes for granted the 'ironist's immanence in the world he describes, and, far from aspiring to master disorder, simply accepts it... [as] 'manageably chaotic!'" (McHale 1988, 16; my italics). The postcolonial, new realist discourse, also rejects the modernist insistence on disjunction and disengagement. Mbembe speaks at length about the new direction for that discourse, which direction should not "insist on oppositions (dédoublement) or, as conventional analysis has it, on the purported logic of resistance, disengagement or disjunction..." (1992, 10).

In both magic realism and the postcolonial new realism, this irony can take various forms, including obscenity, the grotesque, the baroque, and the carnivalesque. I have already referred to the use of the grotesque in La Vie. These motifs are even more dominant in L'Etat. For Bakhtin, the grotesque and the obscene belong in "the province of ordinary people (la plèbe).

He maintains that as a means of resistance to the dominant culture, and as a refuge from it, "obscenity and the grotesque are parodies which undermine officialdom by showing how arbitrary and vulnerable is officialese and turning it all into an object of ridicule" (Mbembe 4). Mbembe proposes a "shift in perspective" in our analysis of the grotesque and the obscene in the postcolonial context. Such a shift, he suggests, will enable us to understand that
"the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can be characterised as illicit cohabitation..." (4). The grotesque and the obscene, Mbembe rightly maintains, are integral parts of the daily goings-on in the postcolony with its penchant for the "theatrical and its violent pursuit of wrongdoing to the point of shamelessness." We must therefore attach no moral connotation to the notion of obscenity in the postcolonial context. 39 As Mbembe argues, "[O]bscenity here resides in a mode of expression that might seem macabre were it not that it is an integral part of the stylistics of power" (1992, 14). One of the numerous textual manifestations of the "illicit cohabitation" and the theatrical display of the grotesque occurs in an episode very early in the novel.

Cajoled by the seeming docility of his people, and the appearance of peace and quiet prevailing in the capital, the self-assured Martillimi Lopez decides one day to disguise himself as a peasant and mingle with the common people, to test the political waters.

Et il se déguise en paysan pour écouter ce que le peuple dit de moi. Il se mêle à ce groupe d'hommes qui appellent le pisé. Il descend dans la boue et piétine avec eux. Personne ne se doute de sa présence. Ils chicanent, chantent et disent du mal de sa hernie, ils insultent Maman Nationale qui nous a donné un fils aussi honteux, Maman Nationale qui fornique au lieu de considérer son âge, ils parlent de mon-colonel Carvanso chien couchant de sa hernie, ils parlent de son frère qui a foutu les Finances nationales en Suisse comme si nous on n'avait pas besoin d'argent, ils
disent du mal des tirailleurs qui pissent sur la patrie sans honte et sans modestie... (p. 42).

The President keeps his composure while all this is going on; he joins in the singing and dancing. The jeans he is wearing get all muddy. Everything seems to be going well for the group of men until Lopez all of a sudden starts singing out of tune, adding words of the national anthem to the song. The President's singing out of tune reveals that he is an illicit presence in that milieu. He is reprimanded, but takes no heed; he starts dancing rather crazily, and steps on one of the men who smacks his face with a handful of mud. The man then throws him down into the adobe. The whole group is petrified when they see his hernia, thus discovering his identity.

This episode also exemplifies what Mbembe refers to as the simulacrum that defines the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in the postcolony. According to Mbembe,

This explains why dictators can go to sleep at night lulled by roars of adulation and support only to wake up the next morning to find their golden calves smashed and their tablets of law overturned (1992, 10).

But again, true to the postcolonial situation, Labou Tansi denies the ruled with this exclusive opportunity. Thus, as the ruler lays himself bare through his awkward performance, he himself subsequently unmaskes the ruled in their act of rehearsing what might have led to the "smashing" of his golden calf and the "overturning" of his tablet of law. In

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fact, the novel underscores the complicity of everyone in the simulacrum of postcolonial living as the narrator asserts that, "ici tout le monde s'arrange pour être dans un semblant de monde, en train de croire des semblants de trucs, et ils vivent un semblant de vie, et puis tu sais qu'ils ne diront pas..." (p. 124). In light of this simulacrum, one might argue that Koffi Anyinefa's insistence on the dichotomy between the ruled and the ruler misses the thrust of novel.

The afore mentioned episode shows the people in the process of usurping the right of free speech, which is otherwise denied them. They require no formal platform or media to vent their real feelings about the President and the entire system. The singing and dancing that go with this socio-political discourse and more especially the President's partaking (however halfheartedly) of the discourse, give it an air of festivity, of carnival. In discussing the carnivalesque in magical realism, David Danow maintains that it "supports the unsupportable, assails the unassailable,... takes fiction as truth, and makes the extraordinary or 'magical' as viable a possibility as the ordinary or 'real,' so that no true distinction is perceived or acknowledged between the two" (Danow 3). The symbolic gesture of the President's mingling and playing with the people in the mud to muddy the distinction between the ruler and the ruled is a representation of the carnivalesque à la
Danow in the Labou Tansian novel.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Labou Tansi's oeuvre, and especially L'État is its narrative style, made effective by the author's special use of the French language, which Devésa describes as an attempt at the "négrification" of French. This special use of language, Devésa argues, has resulted in the production of "la sensibilité noire et africaine" in its most authentic form (1996, 92).

Des images, des termes, des expressions, des anecdotes, des proverbes et des légendes, empruntés au kikongo, ont... été sollicitées pour donner au français un souffle nouveau (Devésa 1996, 105).

Kourouma's works, which I have discussed earlier, show that Labou Tansi was no innovator in the above respect. Nonetheless, whereas Kourouma has translated literally the "standard" Malinke into the French, Labou Tansi went a step further. "His is a rumbustious amalgam of neologisms, euphemistic obscenities, traces of Portuguese and poetic metaphors with colloquialisms borrowed from Brazaville slangy street language," observes Dorothy Blair (1995, 40). The French language was too normative and frigid for Labou Tansi; it needed to be adapted to the mood and temperament of other users of the language. To achieve that purpose it was necessary to,

"faire éclater cette langue frigide qu'est le français, lui prêter la luxuriance et le pétilllement de notre tempérament tropical, les respirations haletantes de nos langues et la
chaleur folle de notre moi vital" (qtd. in Vibert 122).

It is with this goal in mind that Labou Tansi wrote his novels and plays in a language that Devésa styles as "frankongo." He invented such neologisms as "révolvérisé", "tropicalité", le lit "excellentiel", le "regardoir", "ministéreux", les "franconneries", "hérotique", "têtument" or "extravagamment", to cite but a few (see Vibert 122).

One can agree with Kenneth Harrow that the narrative of L'État is "Martillimi Lopez's stream-of-consciousness discourse," but as Harrow has suggested, the presence of the voice of the implied narrator cannot be ignored (Harrow 331). Every page of the novel bears witness to the presence of these two voices, demonstrated by what I elect to designate as the juggling game with je and il. I would also suggest that this technique serves to de-emphasize the individuation of the discourse, and it goes to sustain the notion of "conviviality" among the postcolonial subjects, suggested by Mbembe. "Voilà pourquoi le je ne renvoie pas vraiment à un individu mais à la foule, et à travers elle, à toute personne qui tente de prendre à son compte l'Histoire des siens," argues Devésa (1996, 247). As we have seen in the episode referred to earlier on, the President merges into the crowd becomes one of them (at least temporarily), thereby blurring his individuality and the distinction that exists between that individuality and the crowd.

The chaotic nature of the narrative in Labou Tansi's
novels goes to support the fact that form is a manifestation of social consciousness. The chaos in those novels reflects the sociocultural life of the "chaotically manageable" situation of the postcolony. The use of multiple voices in the rather incoherent stories juxtaposed in the novels represents a way of coping with the constantly shifting realities of the postcolony. Just like Labou Tansi's plot and characters the postcolonial happenings defy every logic. In fine, what may seem at first sight as sheer virtuosity is actually a strong statement about the postcolonial condition.
CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show in the foregoing study that because they are in themselves the definition of the cultural stage we are living in, postmodernism and poscolonialism defy all definitions. Both critical approaches are "believed to demonstrate the fragility of 'grand narratives'; the erosion of transcendent authority; the collapse of imperialistic explanations of the world...;" they are both believed to be concerned with marginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, and all things parodied, piebald, dual, mimicked, borrowed, and second-hand" (Boehmer 224). The above commonalities notwithstanding, suspicion still looms large over their alliance. Critics of the alliance, as I have shown in my introductory chapter, however, find themselves caught up in postmodernism's gaping, yet invisible trap of paradox. Such is the case with Masolo, Irele, Appiah, Cornell West, bell hooks, and many more. In his book, Theatre and Drama in Francophone Africa, John Conteh-Morgan dismisses postmodern strategies as "a luxury, indeed a 'utopian thrust' that Francophone, indeed African dramatists cannot afford to put on their agenda" (1994, 33). To my mind, the only luxury about
postmodernism, as I have tried to show in the works treated within, is the realization that because of the unpredictability of the social, cultural, and political day-to-day happenings in the postcolony, we cannot be sure that any "liberating meanings" we may want to assign to the events of the lives of the postcolonial subject will hold true for any appreciable length of time. The postmodern thinker accepts the world in its "manageably chaotic" state, and in so doing, the postmodernist is set free from the anxiety with which the modernist approaches the disorderliness and contingency of the world. What the dramatists cannot do, Conteh-Morgan seems to concede, the novelists have been doing since the 1950s, as his analysis of Camara Laye's works shows.

Laye was concerned not so much with colonialism—the fact of foreign political domination—as with the Enlightenment project of a civilizing modernity inscribed in colonialism's heart and heralded by it in the empire. The issue for him, in other words, was not one of hostility (...) to a colonialism that failed to deliver on its otherwise beneficent modernizing promises. It was, rather, one of profound disagreement with those very promises, whose results he had witnessed and experienced in France (1997, 414).

Is this another case of being caught in postmodernism's trap? Certainly so, but Conteh-Morgan's comments are interesting for a different reason. They go to reinforce one of the links I have identified between postmodernism and postcolonialism; that is that historical periodization is of very little consequence to both concepts.
In my analysis of the embattled alliance between the two terms I have emphasized their consanguinity, both descending from modernity. I have also resisted seeing one term as the positive norm, against which the other is read. I do not think such a hierarchical relationship exists between them. Only an understanding of the leveling of the two terms can allay any suspicion and fear of a colonizing tendency of postmodernism, usually expressed by critics. The embattled nature of that alliance—-the fact that it is under constant scrutiny but resists every attack—is emblematic of the status of the discourse on the relationship between the metropolis and the former colonies. It also, reflects and more pointedly so, the "intrarelationship" among the postcolonial subjects themselves, whether it is between the rulers and the ruled, or the rich and the poor, or the male and the female. But maybe most of all, this troubled/troublesome (or troubling?) alliance bespeaks our state of mind and incapability to understand and define a cultural reality of which we are a part.

The presence of their antecedent terms--modern, and colonial-- in postmodernism and postcolonialism respectively, indicates that the two post- terms are in themselves, marks of repetition, resistance and renewal. In many ways, each of the concepts of postmodernism and postcolonialism is a perpetuation of its antecedent. "[H]ow can we exceed the
modern? How can we break with a program that makes a value of crisis (modernism), or progress beyond the era of Progress (modernity), or transgress the ideology of the transgressive (avant-gardism)?" queries Hal Foster. In the answers that Foster provides to his own questions we appreciate the resistance to and the renewal of the modern.

"One postmodernist strategy (allegorical, contingent, opposed to the modernist strategy, which is unique, symbolic, visionary) (...) (is) to deconstruct modernism (...) in order to open it, rewrite it; to open its closed system (like a museum) to the 'heterogeneity of texts' (...), to rewrite its universal technique in terms of 'synthetic contradictions' (...) to challenge its master narrative with the discourse of the others.'" 40

The same questions that Foster asks about postmodernism can be asked about postcolonial literature in its relationship to colonialism. For how can Francophone African literature free itself from colonialism, when the very language used to express that literature is the vehicle of the colonial legacy? Who are the target readership of that literature but the assimilated (at least linguistically) postcolonial subjects? Where do the authors of the texts of that literature turn for publishing, if they want a wider readership and international recognition, but to French publishing houses? That, in essence, explains that postcolonial literature does not need postmodernism for a colonial master. It does not need to be called postmodern to exhibit the colonial legacy. In fact, far from colonizing it, a postmodern outlook on that literature
reveals the strategies of resisting the already existing colonial vestiges, and it is those strategies that I have discussed in the texts I examined in this study.

Repetition, resistance, and renewal occur in all the texts studied. Kenneth Harrow is right in asserting that no discourse arises in a vacuum. This, as Harrow points out, is even more true of the African cultures where the word, as a sacred part of those cultures, is usually traced to an origin. Therefore, even where they have produced what I have labeled as postmodern discourse, one can clearly discern echoes of their predecessors' concerns. Hence when we read Sony Labou Tansi's novels, for instance, he readily reminds us of Camara Laye in *Le Regard du roi*, first published in 1954. In the resistance put up by the people of Soba in Kourouma's *Monnè, Outrages et défis*, or in the expression of that resistance in the form of language, one can see a resonance of themes in pre-independence novels by Mongo Beti and Chnua Achebe. I have read Yambo Ouologuem's novel partly as the blurring of boundaries between history and fiction. The treatment of history in African literature is, however, not Ouologuem's invention. As Alain Ricard has pointed out, "[l]a littérature donne sens à l'expérience historique: telle est bien sa fonction essentielle en Afrique au cours des siècles..." (1995, 245). Irele also views history as "the conditioning factor of all modern African expression" (1993, 162). Abiola Irele goes further...
to assert the fictionality of history, and the historicity of fiction:

For us, history is much more-- or, perhaps much less-- than a matter of dramatic events and of striking personalities; it manifests itself in the 'structural' forms of collective existence, in the ruptures and strains that traverse almost on a continuous basis the fabric of social existence everywhere on the continent. Thus, one might say that in Africa today, history takes on the character of a daily drama, of fiction; and fiction, in a quite natural reciprocity, that of history, so that in our modern literature we witness an immediate correlation of life and textuality (Irele 1993, 167, emphasis added).

What the new discourse in the novels I have analyzed does is challenge not only Western discourse, as Irele suggests, but question the authority and authenticity of even the African sources, in the same way as the novels question their own very sources. That is what Ouologuem does in his novel.

The authors resist the production of a discourse that would be considered a replacement for what they are subverting. Subversion in the works of the postcolonial/postmodernist authors is a site "where literature opens us onto the possibility of multiple meanings," as Harrow puts it. Like their predecessors, these novelists have produced works that are a response to contemporary political, cultural, and economic realities. But they have renewed this response by emphasizing through form and theme that "literature is a dynamic and always unfinished process that comes to fruition, not in mystification but in interrogation" (Julien 1992, 158).
Indeed, as Kourouma's second novel shows that challenging of
the authenticity of both Western and African discourses
reveals that no single voice can convey a full and impartial
account of the social reality of the postcolony, which makes
the need for openness even more pressing. They also refute
authenticity which characterized the works of Négritude
writers, in order to avoid the polarization of the world
that Négritudist writers displayed. For authenticity, as
Julien holds, divides the world between "self and the other,
good and bad, on the basis of an arbitrary value, practice,
or heritage deemed essential by some institution or person
who claims authority" (154). With this "Bolekaja" fallacy
of authenticity, as Harrow designates it, goes a "xenophobic
rejection of foreign influences on African culture" (343).

Mariama Bâ's strong defense of women's rights, her
attempt to give voice to women who have known "trente années
de silence, trente années de brimades," her speaking against
the abuses of polygamy and other forms of oppression of
women are not entirely original. She questions what Nwamaka
Akukwe calls "the twin marriage destroyers: polygamy and the
extended family system" (1997, 82). What Bâ resists though,
is making a blanket condemnation of these systems. That is,
instead of blatantly condemning polygamy as an institution,
she cautions that we make a more critical assessment of it,
and rather, speak against the abuse that middle-class,
Western educated men are making of that institution. Bâ
sees the lot of women in African Muslim societies changing for the better, as the marriages of Daba and Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye's two older daughters show. That change is also evident in Aïssatou, the addressee of Ramatoulaye's long letter. Ramatoulaye's response to the polygamous marriage of her husband Mawdo shows that women, especially the middle-class, Western educated, have the option of rejecting certain traditional and Islamic practices, and still succeed on their own terms. The fact that Aïssatou takes her four sons and raises them successfully demythifies the traditional belief that the success of a family solely depends on the presence of a father. Aïssatou has shown that in fact, African women can assert their independence and still succeed. Hence, she ends up being the source of financial help for her childhood friend, Ramatoulaye who still holds the opposing belief that she would only succeed under the umbrella of a husband. As Akukwe emphasizes, however, Ramatoulaye also represents the voice of independence for women in her refusal to marry her brother-in-law, Tamsir, after the death of her husband. The mental illness and collapse of Mireille in Chant seems to send a pessimistic message about heterogeneity, especially in the domain of marriage. The cultural difference between the couple is even rendered weightier by the influence of the extended family system, as the effects of such influence on Ousmane show. Bâ cautions her readers, however, that even
in the midst of tradition's overpowering influence, we as individuals, can assert our independence within such collective identities as tribe, or religion, and still lead a happy life in our traditional society. This is what the Lamine-Pierrette couple exemplifies.

Universalist concepts such as Négritude, Afrocentrism, African identity, nationalism, and so forth, that the writers studied here contest, are not bad in themselves. I do indeed believe that they could be put to a teleological use even today. For instance, as Sewanou Dabla has remarked, much as one may be right in challenging the global economic and political vision for Africa as reductive, it is difficult "à suivre la perspective nationalitaire de certaines critiques de la littérature africaine, car [on] trouve plus de convergences intéressantes dans les thèmes et le style nouveaux que de distinctions qui désigneraient tel ou tel pays" (Dabla 1992, 25). In fact some of the concepts, such as nationalism and Négritude did serve very vital and liberating functions for the Africans when they first came into currency. What is bad about them is the use and abuse to which the concepts have been put by certain groups within the postcolonial society. And that is what has necessitated their replacement with what Lyotard has called "petits récits," in which the plurality which is the principal defining characteristic of the postcolony is articulated. Thus, while recognizing the import of history
and historical sources, Ouologuem questions the validity of the hegemonic tendency of any one particular source. In order not to produce a master narrative in the process, Ouologuem undercuts the authenticity of his own very source. The form and content of *Le Devoir de violence* demonstrate this self-questioning. It is in that light that I have examined "plagiarism" in Ouologuem's novel.

While operating within the colonial hegemony by writing in the French language, Ahmadou Kourouma and Sony Labou Tansi subvert the prescribed rules governing the use of the colonial master's language. They both add their voices to the epistemological debate over the language of African literatures. But instead of adopting the more radical solution proposed by critics such as Ngugi wa Thiongo, which solution stipulates that the languages of colonialism be replaced by African languages, they take a more practical, ontological approach. That is to say, that Kourouma and Labou Tansi seem to challenge the notion that the French language is a property of the colonial master, and therefore, the erstwhile colonial subject can, and should put that language to a purposeful use. Once French, (or any other colonial language for that matter) has been imposed on the then colonial subject who, for better or worse accepted it willy-nilly, it becomes that subject's language as well. Therefore, s/he has the right to use French in the best way that reflects, and responds to his or her sociolinguistic reality.
Ahmadou Kourouma portrays the protagonist of his second novel, king Djigui, as a collaborator with the colonial system that physically, materially, and morally drains his people dry. Djigui's henchmen, his griot (praise singer), and the conscriptors for the labor and military forces of the colony, all contribute to the sufferings of their compatriots. When Djigui finds out, rather too late, that the grandiose promises the colonizers made to him and the hopes born out these promises are unrealizable, collaboration turns into resistance. This realization then leads him to deny the undeniable. He tries to convince himself that in fact he and his people were never colonized. It is the role of the intermediary, in the person of the interpreter that manipulated the whole situation. The discourse produced by the interpreter, which the king now labels as a lie, is what led the colonizers into believing that he, Djigui, had accepted domination and collaboration. Djigui further contends that the power that the colonizer wielded over his people was all predicated on that discourse. In fact it was the discourse itself that was the power. Called into question too in that novel, is the authority of discourse production on the colonial and postcolonial situations.

In a way, Labou Tansi continues what Kourouma had started two decades before him. In questioning the validity of the received version of French, these two authors also
question their predecessors' practice of assigning the blame for the colonial legacy only to the colonizers. They both demonstrate what Lise Gauvin calls "la surconscience linguistique" of Francophone writers, for whom French is not "un acquis mais plutôt le lieu et l'occasion de constantes mutations et modifications" (1997, 5). The mutations and modifications, based on the multiplicity of languages in the postcolony, have led to a "nouvel aspect de l'imaginaire francophone, non plus celui des singularités et des tensions créatrices des langues." Labou Tansi's focus is, however, more on the power relations within the postcolony. He essentially demonstrates what Achille Mbembe has called the "mutual zombification of both the dominant and those whom they apparently dominate" (1992, 4). Those at the helm of power, Labou Tansi's novels suggest, are not the only people responsible for what Eileen Julien has called the "grotesque and deplorable state of affairs in which the African nations find themselves." Labou Tansi also provides an answer in a way, to Ngugi's often quoted query about the impossibility of couching the realities of African societies in irony any more. This impossibility, according to Ngugi, is due to the fact that what used to be hidden is now blatantly displayed by the people in power. Labou Tansi demonstrates that it is only in the postmodern suspensive irony that these realities can be effectively captured. And the use of new realism, akin to magic realism, in the Labou Tansian narrative,
effectively reflects the "chaotically manageable" situation of the postcolony.

As Aijaz Ahmad warns us, "in most cases,... postmodernism in one variant or another, has been imbibed already as the self-evident politics and procedure, [and] what remains to be done is the selection, appropriation and interpretation of the texts that are to be included in... the emerging counter-canon of 'Third World' literatures" (1992, 126).
Notes

1. Karlis Racevskis gave this definition of reason in a lecture note on a course on postmodernism in the spring 1994 (p. 1).

2. This demonstrates the insuperable link between modernity and postmodernism.

3. Belinda Elizabeth Jack extensively discusses this subject in the third chapter of her book, Négritude and Literary Criticism.... (pp. 57-79). Négritude only features here as part of a larger subject—history. It is in his attack on the ethnological foundation of the movement that Ouologuem's assault on the cultural history (advocated by Négritude) becomes clear.

4. Although Dorothy Blair identifies only three novels as capable of satisfying the category of "historical novels" (Paul Hazoumé's Doguicimi, Djibril Tamsi's Soundjata, and Nazi Boni's Crépuscule des temps anciens), she admits to the arbitrariness of such categorization. There is actually a proliferation of the theme of history in Francophone African fictional works, as Blair has noticed. (African Literature in French 73-74).
See also J.-J. Sewanou Dabla' Nouvelles écritures africaines... 13.


6. Charles Larson groups Le devoir de violence with Timothy Aluko's One Man, One Matchet; Mongo Beti's Le Roi miraculé, Le Pauvre christ de Bomba, and Mission terminé; Cyprian Ekwensi's People of the City...; Camara Laye's Dramouss, and Le Regard du roi; Gabriel Okara's The Voice; Sembène Ousmane's Les Bouts de bois de Dieu; etc., to call them "particularly strong examples of the situational novel" (120-21).

7. Appiah actually reads the novel as an assault on realism, but which assault foregrounds what he terms as "postrealist." In his conscious effort to shy away from the term postmodernism, Appiah calls the novel "postmodernization; not an aesthetics but a politics..." (1992, 152). This view, of course, gives the assumption that postmodernism does not deal with politics. I take exception to that.
8. Among others, Kenneth Harrow cites Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* ([1953] 1973) and *Le Regard du roi* ([1954] 1982) as examples of témoignage literature. In the former, we are presented "with the growth of a child in the successful passage to adulthood-- a mimetic mystification based on the notion of the organic unity of life;... *Le Regard du roi* presents us with Clarence's allegorical journey, along the path already traced by the beggar, to the South and to the encounter with the king-- a mystification based, this time, on the notion of organic spiritual wholeness. Against both Ouologuem erects the repeated journeys of the "négraille," always in the form of flight, always leading to defeat and disintegration" (191).

9. See George Lang, p. 398.

10. Kenneth W. Harrow carefully demonstrates the accuracy of some of those historical facts, and geographic locations mentioned in the novel:

"Nakem is an anagram of Kanem, a medieval empire located indeed to the south of the Fezzan, and ruled by the Sefawa dynasty, which derived its name from the ruler Sef [Saif]. Fitri is the name of the lake within Kanem (now Chad); Oqba (Okba) ben Nafi did conquer the Fezzan in the seventeenth century, so that the rise of the Saïfs was indeed 'long after the conquests of Okba ben Nafi el Fitri.' The date 1202 is important for the temporary ascendancy of the Sosso king Soumangourou... who saw his kingdom eclipsed by the rising star of Sundiata in Mali." (Thresholds of Change in African Literature... p.175).

See also Songolo, p.148.

11. The connection with Négritude is that Senghor is said to have relied on the findings of Frobenius in formulating his principles of Négritude (see Appiah 152).

12. See Derek Wright, p.93.

13. According to Sellin, his friend, Mohamed-Sallah Dembri had told him "that the publisher had even told him that Seuil had commissioned Ouologuem to write an African Dernier des Justes." He thereby suggests that in fact Seuil was very much part of the fraud. However, in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* of May 19, 1970, later reproduced in *Research in African Literatures* of spring 1973, Paul Flamand denied those allegations. "(1) I have never met Mr. Dembri and I don't know who he is. (2) Mr. Ouologuem did not write his novel *Le Devoir de violence* at our instigation," he said.

15. For a detailed bibliographical information on the 'Affaire Ouologuem,' see Dorothy Blair 1976, p.307.

16. In his defense of Ouologuem, Seth I. Wolitz reproduces the passage said to have been plagiarized from It's a Battlefield and the original English version side by side. Then he italicizes the words Ouologuem changed (Wolitz p.132). Christopher Miller does the same with the Boule de suif passage (235). Both Wolitz and Miller reach the same conclusion that Ouologuem's text in each case is a new and different text.

17. White, however, replaces the word dialectical by "diatactical," in order to absolve discourse of the character of the "transcendental subject or narrative ego which stands above the contending interpretations of reality and arbitrates between them." The term diatactical, on the other hand, suggests that "discourse, if genuine discourse—that is to say, as self-critical as it is critical of others—will radically challenge the notion of the syntactical middle ground itself" (Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse..., 4.)

18. Norman Fairclough refers to two uses of the term discourse in linguistics: first, "'discourse' is sometimes used to refer to extended samples of spoken dialogue, in contrast with 'text.' More commonly, however," Fairclough continues, "'discourse' is used in linguistics to refer to extended samples of either spoken or written language. In addition to preserving the emphasis upon high-level organizational features, this sense of 'discourse' emphasizes interaction between speaker and addressee or between writer and reader, and therefore processes of producing and interpreting speech and writing, as well as the situational context of language." Discourse and Social Change (Cambridge, UK: Polity P, 1992).


20. The best known voice on the language question is Ngungi wa Thiongo, both a writer and critic, who has published numerous articles and essays on the issue. He has also written plays and novels in his native Kikuyu. All of these works, however, end up being translated into European languages in order to reach a wider readership, which undercuts what I call Ngugi's simplistic solution to the language problem.

21. In an interview given to Lise Gauvin in 1997, Kourouma explains the title of his first novel:
"En malinké, le soleil au singulier, c'est le soleil que nous connaissons tous. Mais quand on dit 'les soleils', on veut dire l'ère, le temps, la période. On dit par exemple 'le soleil de Français' et cela renvoie à la période de la colonisation française" (qtd. in Gauvin 158-59).

22. Most of the preceding examples have been adapted from Jacques Chevrier's Littérature africaine: histoire et grands thèmes (pp.272-74).

23. This, however, is not an entirely new phenomenon as it has been identified as one of the defining features of African fictional works, even before Kourouma's novel.

24. Un Chant écarlate will be cited hereafter as Chant and Une si longue lettre as Lettre.

25. On the question of love and individual dignity, I do agree that there is a conflict in Bâ's female protagonists. Nonetheless, as far as the conflict between their professional and family lives goes, I differ with King. Neither of Bâ's novels stresses this kind of conflict.

26. It needs to be emphasized here that Mariama Bâ herself consistently denied that her novel was autobiographical.

27. Much as the biological differences between men and women with regard to sexuality may have influence on our behavior, they do not excuse our overall behavior, argues Deborah Blum in Sex on the Brain. It is mostly a question of personal choice and self-discipline. "Sex on the Brain," we learn from the dust jacket, "presents a convincing case that we are products of both our biology and our culture--- and that the two perform an intricate dance whose steps are, to some extent, one we can choose (my emphasis).

28. Mariama Bâ seemed to be completely convinced by this biologist argument in favor of men's infidelity as she made it clear in an interview with Barbara Harrel-Bond (1980):

   "It has been thought that man, not because he is black or white, has a different physiology from that of women. A woman is always more easily satisfied. She is different. There is this polygamous desire which is not specific to the black race, which inhabits all men-- black or white.... All men are basically polygamous" (qtd. in Nicki Hitchott, 140).

29. It is clear that these comments are also aimed at the Négritude movement and what it stands for in general.
30. Hereinafter referred to as La Vie and L'État.

31. Although Mbembe does not explicitly use the word new realism, his analysis of the new postcolonial reality, especially in the realms of politics and culture, does fall within the confines of the definitions of the concept provided by Anozie and Appiah.

32. See Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas, especially A. Kibedi Varga's chapter, "Narrative and Postmodernity in France" pp. 27-44.

33. The three "déterminations" Anozie refers to and examines in his book as the driving force behind African prose until Ouologuem's and Armah's novels came out in 1968 are:

1. Détermination traditionnelle, ou le conditionnement de l'individu-héros par des valeurs conservatrices.
2. Détermination intro-active, ou lorsque l'individu-héros est conditionné pour des valeurs internes.
3. Détermination extro-active, ou le conditionnement de l'individu-héros par des motifs ou par des buts progressifs" (22-23).

34. The author explains that life in footnotes as "Villas, voitures, vins, femmes" (p. 36), which reminds us of Mariama Bâ's characters, especially Modou Fall.

35. The word "enfer" has been previously banned from the vocabulary by Jean-Oscar-Coeur-de-Père himself, and anyone caught saying it is to be gunned down by executive order.

Before long, four hundred seventy-two people have lost their lives (p. 133).

36. Yila insists particularly on the power of writing as the successful means employed by Labou Tansi to bring the two worlds of the dead and the living together:

Birago Diop réanime des êtres que le temps a anéantis.
Chez Sony Labou Tansi, cette énergie scripturaire qui redonne vie et force à la matière inerte, conforte davantage, au niveau des moyens et des fins, cette distance qui existe objectivement et métaphysiquement entre les deux mondes: le monde des vivants et celui des morts (Yila 1994, 120).

37. For David Danow, it is not a question of optimism or pessimism; things are as they are reflected in magical realist texts. The authors are of course not oblivious of the problem of credibility:

While negotiating the tortuous terrain of credibility, magical realism manages to present a view of life that exudes a sense of energy and vitality in a world that promises not only joy but a fair share of mesery as
well (Danow 67).

38. See JeanMichel Devésa;'s Sony Labou Tansi: écrivain de la honte et des rives magiques du Kongo p. 264.

39. Jacques Chevrier considers obscenity as the most repulsive and boring element of L'État:
   Que Sony Labou Tansi veuille me pardonner mon impertinence, mais je trouve que son dernier roman donne fâcheusement dans le genre "pipi-caca pour adultes avertis"! Tout au long de ces cent cinquante sept pages qui composent L'État honteux ce ne sont en effet que défécations, fornications, assorties il est vrai de viols, tortures et autres sévices qui viennent heureusement pimenter un récit dont la dominance scatologique finit à la longue par engendrer [...] l'ennui (qtd. in Anyinefe 154).

40. For Hal Foster's full comments, see Julio Ortega, in Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas p. 207, note #4.
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