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Postcolonial Narrative and *The Dialogic Imagination: An Analysis of Early Francophone West African Fiction and Cinema*

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Postcolonial Narrative and *The Dialogic Imagination: An Analysis of Early Francophone West African Fiction and Cinema*

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DEDICATION

Praise be to God Almighty for this work, he did it all, alone. To my mom, Kiné, who taught me everything and made me love literature. To my late father, Pape Moussa who, somehow, wanted me to be an engineer. To the love of my life and best friend, Carol Fruit for her unconditional love and support. To my daughter, Fatima and my sons, Ibrahim and Ismail; they are the ones who keep me going. To my brothers, sisters, friends and students; I love you all.

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ABSTRACT

Francophone West Africa, in the aftermath of colonization, found itself at a crossroads between the necessity to address the problems of neo-colonialism while affirming its cultural identity and the need to embrace a universal message. That dilemma is not shared by literary critics who regard the work of early generation writers merely as an “empire writing back.” In the many classifications of West African literature, the emphasis is oftentimes put either on the importance of a counter-discourse that also rejects Western aesthetics or on the effects of post-independence disillusionment.

This study argues that early francophone West African literary productions took a more universal and humanistic trajectory. The works that are presented in this analysis – such as Amadou Hampâté Bâ’s *The Fortunes of Wangrin* and *The Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane; and films such as Djibril Diop Mambéty’s *Touki Bouki* and *Black Girl* by Ousmane Sembene – constitute key examples of literature and cinematic works that have defined postcolonial discourse in francophone West Africa. These two novels, because of their open endedness, have always been considered ambiguous; as for the two films, they have been subject to conflicting interpretations that cannot look past the idea of Third World Cinema.

This confusion is due to the fact that these works share the same Bakhtinian dialogic framework that is articulated through concepts such as polyphony, heteroglossia, the chronotope, and the carnival, which critics do not usually associate with African

literature. Therefore, this analysis shows that the malleability of early francophone West African fiction and the uniqueness of its cinematic tradition have blazed the trail for a literary tradition that, not only has defined West African postcolonial discourse but has also made it safe from the major criticisms postcolonial theory faces, that of its irrelevance to the condition of the postcolony and the label of being an appendix to Western poststructuralist theory.

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INTRODUCTION

“The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction (Bakhtin 280).”

My central claim in this dissertation is that postcolonial narrative, in the context of Francophone West Africa, has always been motivated by the desire to transcend the limitations imposed by the binary opposition discourses of colonized versus colonizer, First World versus Third World, center versus periphery, and the above epigraph from Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination* serves to illustrate this claim. My position differs from the idea that the ‘empire writes back’ solely to reclaim its cultural identity and humanity from the colonizer. In my view, the main object of early West African narratives was more often a call for a creative and inclusive space for all civilizations rather than a mere anti-colonial discourse. The dialogic principles that are identified in these postcolonial narratives cannot be understood without going back to Mikhail Bakhtin’s conceptualization of the notion of language in the novel as developed in his *Dialogic Imagination* (1975). Language, in the novel, is not a final product that can be analyzed scientifically by a linguist; it is an endless play, a never-ending struggle for meaning. As Bakhtin states in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*: “Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, says Bakhtin (Bakhtin 166).” Therefore, a dialogic discourse for Bakhtin, as opposed to a monologic one, anticipates future answers as well as the potentiality to

answer the answers in any given dialog. For Bakhtin, dialogism is the relation between an utterance and other utterances. Any utterance, therefore, is defined and revolves around the anticipated response of the addressee. To put it simpler terms, Dialogism is the capacity of a discourse to acknowledge its interdependence and relationship with other discourses, both past and future. Unlike a monologic discourse, it does not claim authority based on pre-existing set of rules nor does it claim independence from the ongoing realities of life. Dialogism is an open-ended dialogue.

I also have to mention the notion of dialectics, I would like to put the two terms into conversation in order to explain the reason why the latter term cannot have a central place in my analysis as I will prove later in Chapter Three. In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson selected and commented on the most relevant passages in Bakhtin's work to shed light on the dichotomy dialectics vs dialogics, where dialectics are cast as monological:

“Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics” (N70-71, p.147). Bakhtin's contempt for dialectics was a constant, and appears in writings of the 1920's as well as of the 1970's. Dialectics abstracts the dialogic from dialogue. It finalizes and systematizes dialogue. Individual agency, particular elevations, the rootedness in the world that creates real potential for the unforeseen are reified and die. “Reified (materializing, objectified) images are profoundly inadequate for life and discourse,” Bakhtin insists. “A reified model of the world is now

being replaced by a dialogic model. Every thought and every life merge in the open-ended dialogue. Also impermissible is any materialization of the word: its nature is dialogic. Dialectics is the abstract product of dialogue” (TRDB, p. 293). Dialectics is a typical product of the old, Newtonian, monologic view of the world. From the point of view of dialogics, “the world is a [live] event,” whereas in dialectics it is “a mechanical contact of ‘oppositions,’” a contact of “things,” rather than people. “If we transform dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme (Hegel’s monological dialectic), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill). [In dialectics, we have] a thought that, like a fish in an aquarium, knocks against the bottom and the sides and cannot swim farther or deeper. Dogmatic thoughts” (MHS, p. 162). (Morson and Emerson 57)

My intention is to write an analysis that will unveil the West African “dialogic imagination” that has never been given the attention it deserves. Dialogism, in my analysis of these works, shows how early Francophone West African scholars were very intentional in supplanting the resistance message which is still an integral part of the postcolonial discourse for a message that places the postcolony as an epicenter of a reformed universal humanism. This is not how the Francophone West African postcolony is understood; oftentimes, critics see in those narratives a structure of resistance against dominance and strategies of dissension to counter-hegemony.

Two authors in particular, within the framework of language, translation, and francophonie, link dialogism to a form of resistance. Christopher L. Miller, in chapter

five of *Theories of Africans*, lays emphasis on the dialogic relation between French and Mande traditions in Amadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances*. On the meaning of francophonie, Miller states: "As a cultural construct, Francophonie represents an appeal to reciprocity and dialogism...it was assumed by many that cultural decolonization would be necessary and inevitable, and that language was key to decolonizing the mind (Miller 182)." Miller goes on to say:

We saw how Kourouma made use of a personified reader at the beginning of the novel ("You look skeptical!"), in a context where a monological desire (for Mande authenticity) and dialogical imperative (francophonie) framed the space of narration. The necessity of writing in French detoured the desire to "put in Malinke" and produced a dialogical compromise that attempted to satisfy the monological impulse. (213)

Miller breaks down the complexity of the dialogic structure with which Kourouma "suggests dialogism within a literary-anthropological project"; however, this analysis emphasizes a clear desire in Kourouma to colonize back the French language (Kourouma 1997). These examples show that dialogism, as articulated in the works under my analysis, is driven by the desire to place the postcolony at the center of the global stage where cultures discover and recreate each other rather than seeking any form of dominance.

In the same vein, Paul F. Bandia, in *Literary Heteroglossia and Translation: Translating Resistance in Contemporary African Francophone Writing*, investigates heteroglossia in the context of writing and translation. In *Trop de soleil tue l'amour* by Mongo Beti, Bandia notices:

The plurivocity and heteroglossia woven into the novel throughout reveal a dark humor and echo the chaotic pluralism of the postcolony, directing the reader's attention to deliberate attempts to create discord and block communication between the discourses of the elite and those of the populace. They are a means of expressing resistance to oppression and of exposing the imbalance of power.

When a translator attempts to transpose such representations of the plurivocity of the postcolony, this writing practice changes the terms of translating from a constant search for foreignizing linguistic equivalents to a strategy for reproducing the multiple and conflicting voices of the same source language.

(177)

The rationale for heteroglossia in Beti's novel, as Bandia suggests, is a tool used by the members of the postcolony to challenge and alienate colonial power. In light of Bandia's theory, we will see that Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, in Francophone West Africa, helps uncover the subtle endeavor to subvert and challenge established norms- whether they originate from African tradition or from Western narratives- by turning both West African colonial past and postcolonial condition into an open-ended dialogue.

In this dissertation, I will offer new Bakhtinian readings of two seminal works, namely *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961) by Cheikh Hamidou Kane and *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin: ou les roueries d'un interprète africain* (1973) by Amadou Hampâté Bâ, for these readings will allow me to describe how this Bakhtinian dialogue is articulated in early francophone West African fiction and why it is central to the understanding of the francophone West African postcolony. Along the same line, I offer a revisionist reading of two early and memorable films such as Ousmane Sembene's *La Noire de...* (*Black*

Girl (1966) and *Touki Bouki (The Journey of the Hyena)* (1973) by Djibril Diop

Mambéty in order to shed light on this dialogic intention in the West African cinematic culture. One striking element in this list is that there is always a form of journey at stake; there is always a meeting or anticipated meeting between the worlds of the colonizer and the colonized; and the postcolonial message seems to always lie in wait at the intersection between cultures. This dialogic aspect of West African postcolonial discourse is what I will lay bare.

A dialogical reading of francophone West African francophone narratives reveals the ways in which I foreground the role of language in colonial/postcolonial literary productions; and the emphasis tends to be on the multiplicity of voices. To understand the reason for this emphasis on language by critics of West African literature, we need to better understand Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. In *The Dialogic and Difference*, Anne Herrmann offers a clear explanation of the difference between the dialogic and the dialectic. In her self-interview on the female dialogic, she states:

Dramatic dialogue splits a single discourse into two or more represented voices without threatening the unity of the author's semantic position; the dialogic represents the struggle between opposing discourses arising out of different contexts, either semantic or sociohistorical. Unlike the dialectic, which seeks to transcend oppositions by means of a synthetic third term, the dialogic resists the reconciliation of opposites by insisting on the reciprocity of two or more antagonistic voices. Both the dialectic and the dialogic are based in theories of conflict, but the former attempts to resolve antitheses in a utopian synthesis while

the latter seeks to disrupt the assimilation of differences sought by a monologic discourse. (Herrmann15)

This type of dialogue is not monolithic, and it does not allow any form of discursive rigidity. My analysis of these West African works heavily relies on this core aspect of dialogism which strives to give legitimacy to the different voices in Francophone West Africa.

As mentioned earlier, in *Theories of Africans*, Christopher L. Miller analyzes Amadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* by focusing on the particularity of the style, which has drawn the attention of many other critics. Miller points out the constant presence of an unidentified "Vous" who is often addressed by the narrator:

With this wave of the pen, Kourouma provides a heavy anthropological anchor for any dialogical interpretation of his novel: the reader is identified as non-Malinke, non-Mandeka, although not necessarily non-African. the difference necessary for dialogue and dialectic is given a particular character: it is a cultural, ethnic difference between the Mande and everything outside it. (Miller 214)

The crisscrossing of languages and cultures seems to create here limitless possibilities of discourses. So, we will see in my analysis of francophone West African literary productions how early writers insisted on the multi-layered aspect of language within African cultures— whether it be French or a native West African language – in order to discourage a unitary and monolithic view of the colonial and postcolonial subject. My choice of these two authors is driven by the fact that their two seminal texts are the perfect articulation of dialogism in West Africa in that they bring Western discourse and African oral tradition together at the center of their works.

Dialogism seems to be engrained in West African traditions in general. In *The Dialogical Imagination of Chinua Achebe*, Susan V. Gallagher takes note of the “elaborate heteroglossia” in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. “Throughout the novel, we hear a complex chorus of English and Igbo, Africans and Europeans, district commissioners and missionaries, Igbo speakers from Mbanta and from another region (141).” But for Gallagher, the most striking example of dialogism is the use of Igbo proverbs in that they turn into a dialogical reality what appeared to be mere contradictive statements. She uses as an example the proverb that seems to condemn a child into resembling his father and contradicts it with another proverb that allows the child to rise “beyond the failures of his father”. “Even such an apparently monological form as the traditional proverb thus becomes polyphonic both in its content and in its rhetorical presentation.” (Gallagher 141). This brief detour through a classic work from Anglophone Africa is for the purpose of clarifying the fact that analyzing West African literary productions (Kane and Bâ, Ousmane and Mambéty) through the lens of dialogism and its corollaries heteroglossia, and polyphony is nothing new; but my take on Francophone West African dialogism is that it takes a turn that separates it from the general anticolonial sentiment.

In Kane for instance, all the dialogues involving a clash between a traditionalist view and a more modern one, as in the case of the Diallobé society fighting over whether to embrace Western education or not, or in the second part where Samba Diallo argues constantly with his Western educated friend; one can see that the reader is deprived of any opportunity to solely blame the West.

In Bâ on the other hand, the reader is clearly aware of the negative elements in both societies; whether it is by exposing the wrongdoings of the interpreters and their Western counterparts or by exposing the fundamental problems in both societies.

In the field of cinema, dialogism takes on a more complex form. The combination of culture, religion, language and politics makes it complicated for some critics to fully grasp this miscellany of symbols. For instance, David Murphy, in *Africans Filming Africa: Questioning Theories of an Authentic African Cinema*, warns Western critics against applying their own standards to African cinema as in the example of Sembene's films which are "attacked by critics such as Olivier Barlet and Kenneth Harrow, who characterize them as being based on a series of simplistic oppositions: West versus Africa; urban versus rural, rich versus poor, etc." (Murphy 243) The level of heteroglossia in the movies of Sembene and Mambéty, which we will focus on, is even more striking than in the written narratives. Such a heteroglossic narrative (the multiplicity of voices) – voices of the past and present, western and traditional, the sacred and the temporal – is epitomized, as we will see, by the character of Mory and his motorbike, a modern vehicle mounted with bull-horned skull and all sorts of traditional African religious symbols– the Dogon cross and the skull itself. Furthermore, the back and forth that takes place between the urban and the rural imagery further testifies to the multiplicity of voices, social statuses and identities.

I will also show that heteroglossia in *Touki Bouki* is not limited to the multiplicity of voices and intersectionality of cultures, but it involves a considerable amount of cryptic Senegalese mystic-Sufi tradition, which is necessary in understanding Mambéty's work.

Let me first emphasize that the choice of Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* and Sembene's *Black Girl* as representative of the dialogic intention in West African francophone fiction is not random. Not only are these two films the most discussed and most enigmatic of these two authors, but they are also more often associated with Western filmic traditions as I will discuss later. These aspects make these two films a perfect material for a discussion on dialogism and cinema.

As for Sembene and Mambéty, they are the two most decisive filmmakers in the formation of francophone West African filmic tradition. While Sembene is hailed as the father of African cinema, Mambéty is praised for his experimental style, which has always been an object of comparison to Sembene's work, which has also led me to choose their work in representing a complex aspect in Francophone West African cinema like the notion of dialogism.

Murphy writes: "In *Xala*, money, sexual politics, Islamic culture and animism are all jumbled together in a complex mix of rituals and symbols. It is not Western influence that Sembene rejects (as Barlet and Harrow suggest) but Western capitalism (Murphy 243)." He goes on to say: "Mambéty borrows heavily from Western experimental films in *Touki-Bouki*, but in the process he creates something radically different, adapting such models to his own culture. In fact, *Touki-Bouki* can be read as an exploration of the cultural encounter between the West and Africa (Murphy 243)." I read this "radical difference" as an example of dialogism because it blurs the boundaries between traditional African culture and Western culture as suggested by Diawara in *the Iconography of African Cinema*, and it eliminates any possible appropriation of the discourse in this film. The West will not accept Mory due to the latter's powerful

connection to the traditional, and the traditional will reject him for his modern aspirations. This is a clear elimination of any form of monologic discourse; either the western or the traditional has to accept the possibility of being affected by the opposite culture in order to be able to sit at the table of dialogue.

As for *Black Girl*, Murphy, like most critics, approaches it literarily. As Murphy states in *Postcolonial African Cinema*, the first period of Sembene's film career "was highly influenced by Italian neo-realism and his films explored the artistic possibilities and limitations of this style within an African context (Murphy 51)." This understanding of Sembene's first films is what makes critics, including Murphy, regard *Black Girl* as a psychological portrait of postcolonial subjects. I will, however, focus on Sembene's postcolonial message: the necessity to surrender the return to the source for a new identity that challenges both African and Western cultures.

Now this encounter, between the West and Africa, is at the center of my thesis; and as already mentioned, the dialogism that we are trying to bring to light in these West African works has been made possible by this encounter, this shock of civilizations. This idealization of a global message also resonates in early francophone West African fiction; and I have chosen *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* and *L'Aventure ambiguë* for the level of challenge they bring to all cultures involved in the formation of the postcolony.

In *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* (1973) by Amadou Hampâté Bâ, I will focus on the complexity, multiplicity and meanings of language. This work is unanimously considered a classic because not only does it epitomize West African oral tradition, but it also opens up a world that was not well understood by modern scholars: the world of the interpreters. Critics have emphasized the power that language has bestowed on the

interpreter without suspecting its destructive effect on that same interpreter; in the Pulaar culture of the author himself, the end does not justify the means but instead it helps to gauge the quality of the means: the fate of the interpreter in the end of the story betrays a form of condemnation from society itself. This narration seems to epitomize the very concept of dialogism in that it is replete with voices that create an environment where the power of language, as a medium, can be used for the good or the bad regardless of who possess that power; and anytime two or more of the voices/worlds meet, it creates a new one, which has led Western critics to suspect that it is in fact a fiction. This is not an attack on western critics but an issue that needs to be brought up more often and addressed more carefully.

In *L'Aventure ambiguë*, the same protagonist has been made to evolve in both Western and African environments, both are violent environments to the main character, either physically or mentally. Written right after the independence of Senegal in 1960 and published in 1961, this text could have been a reconciliatory text, but it turns out to be a tragedy. Each voice in this text is confronted and immediately challenged by another, and the voice that purports to be reconciliatory is challenged by that of a mad man or by a non-voice (in the Senegalese culture, a mad man is always regarded as being on the fringe of society, someone who is not bound by the laws of society). The dialogic sense in this text resides in the presentation of the world of the formerly colonized and that of the colonizer through the journey of Samba Diallo; and voices emerge from those worlds to challenge the status quo.

Subaltern subjects, as it appears in these novels, are in a constant movement between the West and Africa. In this analysis, I will use Spivak's definition of the term

“subaltern,” to refer to those who are outside the hegemonic power structure. In postcolonial terms, Spivak makes it clear that “everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference (De Kock interview 45).” The narratives that represent the subaltern subject living in Africa differ from those of the subaltern living in the West, the discourse of the subject on a journey toward the West contradicts the one coming from it. Dialogism in this form constitutes the evolution/changing of the discourses throughout the journey of the subaltern as opposed to Western narratives that represent the subaltern based on set standards, fixed rules. As I will demonstrate, what these two works have in common is that they take the debate to the West without sacrificing the cultural message. We will see that the postcolonial subjects take on a journey, carrying on their backs all the stereotypes and all the monologic discourses of the former colonizer in order to lay them bare on the shores of the Western world; not to demand answers, but to reopen the case, to question every single aspect of the relationship between center and periphery. This will require a new reading of the aforementioned works that have often times been regarded as mere anticolonial narratives. *Black Girl* for instance is always considered a militant film showing the danger that the West represents for naïve Africans and the disillusionment that always follow; but the importance of the outstretched hand of the former colonized to the colonizer is barely underlined.

This is not, however, how the critics have understood the postcolony. In his introduction to *Contemporary African Fiction*, for instance, Derek Wright classifies the period in African literature – in this case, in Anglophone African writing – in four distinct periods:

The first of these features mainly counter-discourse which “writes back” to colonial narratives, as in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and its imitators, while the second is marked by the expression of post-independence disillusionment and the transference of anger and blame from foreign to indigenous rulers. Thirdly, there is a concerted effort to break away from European aesthetic values and ideologies in pursuit of more authentically African models... Fourthly, there is a movement away from cultural homogeneity which produces greater diversification and hybridization of subject-matter and increased experimentation and formal innovation. (Wright 5)

This is, in fact, a periodization that students of African literature will be familiar with, and the recurring elements are the unchallenged notions such as “write back”, “break away”, “away” and so forth. This understanding of postcolonial Africa has blazed the trail for subsequent theories, while the francophone West African narratives, particularly these works under my study, have always been marked by a dialogic intention.

I have chosen colonial modernity as a general context for analyzing the postcolonial narratives studied here. I find it impossible for modern scholarship to separate itself from the forces of modernity within the context of colonial ideology. The consequences that the discovery of the Americas in 1492 had on the rise of bourgeoisie, on the meaning of empire, and last but not least, on the definition of capital is a factor that cannot be overlooked whenever we set out to analyze our modern era. To define colonial modernity in the broader sense, let us look at Mariam Aguiar’s description of it in *Tracking Modernity: India’s Railway and the Culture of Mobility* (2011). In her book, she describes colonial modernity as a specific conceptualization of modernity that goes

hand in hand with the power of technology, rationality and mobility in order to dissolve differences and overcome the constraints of the natural world. These forces of modernity are universalized and take meaning within the context of colonial ideology as the only way to progress. The British have then created a specific meaning of modernity that fits their colonial project by institutionalizing secularism and capitalism. To give an oversimplified definition of colonial modernity, it is the articulation of the western notion of modernity within the colonial context.

Now, the intersection between colonial modernity and the dialogic intention in francophone West African narratives has created a specific postcolonial discourse that is distinct from the dominant trend we are used to in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial discourse as we will see is marked by a fundamental instability in its conceptualization. Critics and theorists still can neither agree on its scope nor its object. And the major disagreement, which seems to be the one that the leading figures of postcolonial theory cannot solve, is its effectiveness, representativeness and relevance to the postcolony. We will see that both the optimistic and pessimistic views of postcolonial discourse have fervent supporters among the leading scholars of the field; and the debate is centered around whether it is an appendix to Western narratives or not.

This major debate does not profoundly affect my work in that my analysis is more directed towards the francophone West African response to colonial modernity. However, I cannot deny the fact that I am dealing with object that lies at the heart of the debate – that object being the postcolony – in order to find the roots of the dialogic intention in francophone West African narratives. By dialogic intention, beside the Bakhtinian definition, I am also referring to the willingness to sacrifice any desire to “write back” for

the sake of a productive dialogue of cultures, mainly that of the former colonizer and the former colonized.

In his book *West Africa before the Colonial Era*, Basil Davidson, emphasizes that “In the case of West Africa... it can make no sense to study the situation and events of today without first understanding the long and eventful centuries that came before the colonial dispossessions (Davidson 6).” The history of West Africa has been characterized by a phenomenal cultural, religious and ideological instability. The major problem our modern scholarship faces are the fact that the historical sources they rely upon never render the full picture; for instance, the first Western historians to write about the advent of Islam in West Africa namely René Caillé made it into Timbuktu in 1828, 800 years after the Andalusian historian Al-Bakri wrote about it. “Little was known or understood in Europe about this process of African state-formation.

It was believed by European historians that nothing new was done in distant Africa unless it was brought by Europeans and their inventions. So, it was thought that the great empires of West Sudan owed their origins to the traders of North Africa, who in turn had taken their progress from the traders of Europe. Modern archeology has shown these ideas to have been wrong. In 1977 excavations by the US archeologists Susan and Roderick McIntosh at the site of an ancient city called Jenne (now within the new republic of Mali) showed that the city, today a humble town on a tributary of the great River Niger, had become a settlement of iron-making and iron-using people as early as the third century BC, long before any such activity and enterprise was thought to have existed there.” (Davidson 18) In this above quotation, Davidson underlines a common misconception in Western scholarship, since it is undeniable that most of our postcolonial

literary criticism come either from Western institutions or from Western or Western trained scholars; and these historical misconceptions have resulted into flawed literary theories.

My claim that West African narratives are fraught with a dialogic intention is rooted in an understanding of the cultural complexity of this region. There has never been a definitive identity for this region; the instability that has prevailed, which we already mentioned is due to a succession of influences and relations with civilizations from all over the world. Islam came to this region in the ninth century while the Ghanaian empire was at its peak; the Malian empire in the 14th and 15th centuries had diplomatic and trading relations with the Portuguese. The state of Gao of the Songhay Empire was strong enough to have important trade relations with North Africa and Spain. In the late 16th century, Moroccan forces crossed the Sahara with mercenaries from Spain and Portugal and then pushed into Timbuktu and Gao. These diplomatic and trading relations were not limited to Portugal, Spain and Northern Africa, the empire of Kanem-bornu had strong ties to the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. The best remnant of this West African melting pot can be seen today in the city of Timbuktu whose “geographical weakness” has allowed all the forces afore mentioned to have left their cultural and intellectual blue print, and those we have not mentioned such as the French and the Touareg. This historical overview should allow us to see the richness and complexity of this region and the shaping of its ‘*imaginaire*’, which, if not taken into account in the reading and understanding of the literary production, will result in the imposition of worldviews and theories that are totally alien to the former colonies.

In *An idea of Literature. South Africa, India, the West*, Michael Chapman argues that “Xhosa literature would not have taken the form it did had it not encountered British Settler presence on its ancient land. Neither would South African literature in English have followed the forms it did had it not at the beginning encountered a clash of races and cultures. It was the hard content of the frontier, for example, that enabled Thomas Pringle, a Scottish poetaster of late Augustan strain, to find the new human subjects and themes – slavery, war, exile, miscegenation - that would lend purpose and resonance to his voice.” His idea of “recursive looping of cultures” allows for a development based on the fact that “if the translation of culture into another can be regarded as an act of dispossession, it can also be regarded as an act of empowerment...” (Chapman 407-08) So, coming back to the West African question, it is crucial to bear in mind that identity, in West Africa, is a negotiable and malleable reality that is deeply informed by the intersection of different cultures; therefore, in the literary production, understanding this dialogic intention is a condition sine qua non to any cultural study.

I have already mentioned that an analysis of the postcolonial discourse, especially of West Africa, cannot be fully fleshed out outside the context of colonial modernity. We will see that cultural discourses pertaining to the postcolony seem to be a tug of war between the “orientalism” analyzed by Edward Said and the negotiations theorized by Homi Bhabha. Said sets the tradition of speaking from the perspective of the colonizer: how the West treats the other; Bhabha takes the perspective of the colonized, the subaltern. These contours have been very convenient for the third world intellectuals to pick and choose one size that fits all. For the West African critics or critics of West Africa, they become even more appealing due their acquaintance with a movement like

Negritude which posits the assertion of cultural identity as its central claim. Whether it is to denounce the inhumanity of the Western treatment of the other or to flaunt the existence and the richness of the culture of the “Negro”, these contours, as we said, become too binding and overly rigid. However, thinkers like Achille Membe, and Boubacar Boris Diop have succeeded in reimagining a less dislocated postcolony, their project does not estrange the narrative of the “émigré postcolonial writer”, in fact, it reunites it with its roots and re-channels it with its natural agenda which is the dialogue as Senghor imagined it: a dialogue that cannot survive without all races and all civilizations (Senghor 1964). These writers have given an identity to the dialogic intention in that the dialogue they propose starts within the postcolony but its outcome rests in the uncertainties of modernity. Talking about the postcolony, I am referencing Achille Membe’s work *On the Postcolony* (2001) in which his central focus is the question of power and subjectivity in postcolonial Africa.

I will acknowledge the fact that my analysis will be informed by Bhabha’s notion of hybridity and ambivalence due to the nature of the postcolonial condition, which involves a dialogue between former colonizer and former colonized. The common denominator between postcolonial and colonial modernity is the term colonial; therefore, whichever part of the postcolony one decides to analyze, one has to consider the consequences of colonization. In fact, Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence/hybridity, does grant agency to the colonized subject in the form of a “sly civility” (the colonized resisting the discourse of the colonizer while acquiescing to the authority of the latter). This ambivalence of the colonized, this double consciousness has created, within colonial

modernity, a cultural dialogue that is fundamentally authority blind, which is essential in postcolonial discourse. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states:

What is 'English' in these discourses of colonial power cannot be represented as a plenitudinous presence; it is determined by its belatedness. As a signifier of authority, the English book acquires its meaning *after* the traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial, returns the eye of power to some prior, archaic image or identity. Paradoxically, however, such an image can neither be 'original' – by virtue of the act of repetition that constructs it – nor 'identical' – by virtue of the difference that defines it. Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and the difference. It is a disjunction produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the 'other scene' of *Entstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defense, and an 'open' textuality. Such a display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic). (Bhabha 153)

It is important, however, to bear in mind the fact that Bhabha's notion of hybridity cannot be understood in the literal sense of the term as Murphy clarifies in *Birth of a Nation? The Origins of Senegalese Literature in French*:

this hybridity is not simply the resolution of the tension between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized; rather, hybridity reveals a crisis of authority for the colonizer. Attempting to codify colonial authority through a series of

authoritative texts (political, historical, religious), the colonizer, in fact, reveals the limits of this authority. The books introduced by the colonizer launch a process of mimesis and transformation, which allows the colonized to reshape the original message of authority, and this, for Bhabha, represents the fundamental ambivalence of colonial discourse. (Murphy 51)

This ambivalence of the colonized, which throws the colonizer into a nervous condition, still constitutes a powerful weapon in postcolonial discourse; it has been the driving force in the revocation of Western master narratives. In this West African context, this ambivalence is epitomized by the interpreter as we will see in my analysis of *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin*.

In Part One of this analysis, I will select two seminal works from the first-generation writers that are often times labelled as anti-colonial narratives; in so doing, I will underline the fact that the dialogic intention is the central tenet that cannot be ignored in most francophone West African literary productions. This sense is solely for the purpose of creating a space where all cultures will evenly and equally be challenged and reevaluated; and even though there is an undeniable level of “writing back”, which is a natural framework for any culture writing under domination, it has always been a secondary concern.

Fictional works such *L'Aventure ambiguë* and *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* have been subject to miscellaneous interpretations that are often times based on a political or ethnographical reading, which has contributed to the lack of clarity and understanding of their postcolonial scope. We will see that these works suffer from the rigidity of postcolonial discourse as we know it today. The problem here is not just the missed

opportunity of not reading these texts through dialogic lenses, but the way they are interpreted is always in line with the standards of a very limited poststructuralist framework. By focusing on the unfinalizability of these texts, not only will we come to realize the endless possibilities of interpretations they offer, but we will fulfill the desire of the authors who, on several interviews and in other works, have professed their belief in a universal message that transcends African anticolonial discourse.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin claims, regarding Dostoevsky's novel, that "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (Bakhtin 166). This concept of unfinalizability in *L'Aventure ambiguë* and *L'Étrange destin de Wangrin* is what separates them from all other francophone West African literary productions of their time. It might sound surprising to associate Bakhtin's notion of dialogism to West African fiction given the literary and anthropological tradition of looking at West Africa through the lenses of oral tradition in which dialogue is understood in its literal sense; but that surprise vanishes as we pay a closer attention to the evolution of sub-Saharan francophone fiction. We can characterize the origin of the Francophone African novel, which took place in the first decades of the 20th Century as mostly an era of an "empire writing back". This tendency to write back came in reaction to earlier narratives that glorified the colonial "civilizing mission" like Amadou Mapaté Diagne's *Les Trois volontés de Malick* (1920), which is the first work of fiction in French published by an African. In his *Perspective on the African Novel*, Abiola Irele states:

The roots of the francophone African novel in the metropolitan traditions are just as deep as is the case with the lusophone. The French colonial novel, of which *Histoire de Louis Anniba* and *Ourika* are the earliest manifestations, provide the first signs of an African presence in prose fiction in the French colonial novel or *roman colonial*. However, the consistently negative image of Africa purveyed by the French colonial novel rendered it superficial as a representation of the peoples and cultures of the continent. Moreover, the entrenched racism and ideological motivation that shaped its conception, as in Pierre Loti's *Le Roman d'un Spahi*, could not but provoke the reaction marked by René Maran's *Batouala*, published in 1921. (Irele 7)

These works tend to romanticize the traditional Africa before colonization by linking the misfortunes of Africans to either Western occupation or presence.

The first generation blazed the trail for the second-generation novelists such as Amadou Hampâté Bâ (born in 1901 in Bandiagara, Mali) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane (born in 1928 in Matam, Senegal); even though in the case of Bâ, only his work is of the second generation, but he is contemporary with the first-generation writers. This first generation's influence is not ideological at all since their writing is mostly seen as "works of apprenticeship" as Irele puts it in the sense that they simply replicated the style of their Western counterparts.

The writing of Bâ and Kane have given the francophone West African novel its postcolonial identity, they have created an ambiguous environment where all parties are driven into questioning and challenging their core values. In doing so, they have created a league of their own while there were other impending questions that occupied the minds

of scholars of that generation and throughout the century such as the question of what African literature should be. Lydie Moudileno addresses the Laye-Beti controversy where Beti accuses Laye of exoticizing the African narrative. “For Beti, African literature should consist of narratives exposing the crimes of colonialism and to do otherwise is to be complicit with colonial ideology. The Laye-Beti controversy staged a debate that would continue to preoccupy writers throughout the century, namely, the question of realism and of African novelists’ engagement with contemporary socio-political events affecting the continent (Moudileno 130–31).”

This controversy, also, left a permanent impression on francophone African literature that one should not ignore; this post-war era also blazed the trail for the demystification and demythification of the West; in so doing, not only was the meaning of the West redefined but the colonies had to rediscover, redefine and re-evaluate the colonizer-colonized relation.

Bâ and Kane constitute a break from that tradition: they have introduced narratives that goes beyond an “empire writing back”, in novels that transcends the binaries opposing colonizer vs. colonized, African vs Western, oral vs. written. This unique aspect of their novels is what led me to Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue for their narratives are dialogized. It is clear that the polyphony of social dialects and individual voices, the constellation of discourses without any endeavor for a final resolution/synthesis; any dialogue that takes place in such an environment is dialogic.

Now this break from the common narratives, this dialogized discourse in the West African novel that defines the uniqueness of Bâ and Kane did not come out of the blue; its root can be found in African oral tradition. In *Intertextualité et transculturalité dans*

les récits d'Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Diané V. Assi makes a compelling analysis by bringing together three of the first theoreticians of the African novel: M.A. Ngal, M. Kane et A. Koné. As Assi puts it:

Ngal part de l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'écrivain moderne reprend le travail de l'artiste traditionnel et considère le roman comme un discours intertextuel, une sorte de << critique-écriture >> où la frontière discursive séparant la narration << poétique >> de la critique est abolie, [...] Il souhaite transporter dans l'écriture les ressources de l'oralité, << le réel intégré dans l'imaginaire, l'imaginaire dans le réel, le romanesque dans la culture >> notamment le conte. Participation du public à la rédaction du texte, une << littérature ouverte >>. Les matériaux de la littérature orale sont réactualisés par le romancier: proverbes, dictons, devinettes... L'écrivain recourt à l'autorité de cette tradition orale comme à << des lieux d'autorité manifeste >> (Diané Véronique Assi 30–31).

[Ngal starts from the assumption that the modern writer is reenacting the work of the traditional artist and regards the novel as an intertextual discourse, a sort of “*critique-écriture*” where the discursive line separating the “poetic” narrative from the critique is blurred, [...] He attempts to carry on to writing the resources of orality, “the real integrated into the imaginary, the imaginary into the real, the novelistic into culture” mainly the tale. The audience is part of the writing process, “open literature”. The devices of the oral tradition are revived by the novelist: proverbs, sayings, riddles... the writer uses the authority of the oral tradition as “places of manifest authority.”] (My translation.)

This argument from Ngal et al. gives credence to the notion of unfinalizability found in Bâ and Kane's novels. The intersection of reality, the imaginary, orality and culture create an environment for an open-ended discourse.

Along the same lines, M. Kane and A. Koné, as Assi remarks, emphasize the fact that there is a substantial influence of the oral tradition narrative style on the modern novelist: the omnipresence of the author as a narrator-storyteller and the absence of frontier between the genres where the tale meets with mythology, and the epic with reality make West African novel an eclectic genre that epitomizes the dialogized text.

Part two of this dissertation will deal with the carnivalization of Francophone West African cinema. In the preface to Kenneth Harrow's book *Postcolonial Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism*, he raises "the questions that have been preoccupying much contemporary film criticism, such as the role of desire, the technologies of production, the role of gendering, or institutional power; the subversion of the dominant capitalist or corporate machinery or dominant masculinist values—these are often dismissed as western, feminist, universalist, and so on. How we might move beyond these familiar paradigms (Harrow xiii)?" To this I reply with a Wolof saying: "boo xamul foo jëm dellul fa nga jóge", "if you don't where you are headed to, go back to where you came from".

Harrow suggests that we follow Appiah's understanding of the prefix "post", which is a "space-clearing gesture", a "new era", a new beginning; but I will argue that we do not go back just to clear-up the past, but to (re)evaluate it through new lenses, and to focus on the (de)construction of that give-and-take space between colonizer and colonized that has been left unexplored in early African cinema. The works of Sembene

and Mambéty are crucial in this regard; by putting the two authors' works into conversation we can see not only the articulation of a dialogic narrative in a West African environment, but we will also have the rare opportunity to apply the dialogic principles in cinema. I will be analyzing *La Noire de...* (*Black Girl*) by Sembene and *Touki Bouki* (*The Journey of the Hyena*) by Mambéty; I see these two films as the two most cryptic productions in early West African cinema due to multiple references to traditional customs and practices that are difficult to decipher even for a native of that culture as is the case in *Touki Bouki*. As for *Black Girl*, Sembene relies heavily on the use of space and symbols.

As I will discuss later, the concept of carnivalization is central to dialogism; since carnivalization relies on the undoing of rules, the rejections of official narratives and traditions, and the blurring of frontiers, we will see how its articulation in these two films consolidates the Sembene and Mambéty's dialogic intent.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is arguably the central tenet of his life work and philosophy; and all the other concepts such as polyphony, heteroglossia, the chronotope, unfinalizability and so on emanate from and revolve around this central notion. So even though I deal with the question of the carnival in West African films – which will involve, at times, polyphony, heteroglossia, the chronotope, and unfinalizability – my whole analysis points out the dialogic presence in these works as mentioned in the title of this dissertation. As a reminder of Bakhtin's definition and explanation of dialogism, I will give a more summarized definition of the concept of dialogism. For Bakhtin, dialogism is “the relation between the utterance and other utterances”. Any utterance, therefore, is defined and revolves around the anticipated response of the addressee.

Dialogism, however, is so malleable that it lends itself to almost all disciplines; a scholar like Robert Stam has attempted to apply this concept along with its other related notions to film studies. In *Mikhail Bakhtin and film*, Martin Flanagan states:

Although cinema, especially in its most commercially standardized form, is often portrayed as a closed circuit of communication that fixes the spectator in an industrially desirable position, the theory of dialogism can open up this rigid formulation to identify the nature of the role that the spectator plays in the textual process. As the dialogic utterance is tailored to the anticipated response of the other, the filmic text, especially Hollywood product, is shaped by the demands of the audience.... Here, the audience directly intervenes in the shaping of the narrative.... There is no real equivalent to this process in the novel, suggesting that the role of the spectator in film may be more crucial than that of the reader in the novel, the medium that Bakhtin chooses as his model of textual dialogism. The cinematic text is not a closed system but rather a surprisingly open-ended one displaying the quality of ‘unfinalizability’ that Bakhtin attributes to dialogic utterance. (Flanagan 2)

In this analysis, I will put into conversation Bakhtin’s philosophy and early West African francophone cinema for the simple reason that they share the same tenets of dialogue. As I argued for our early fiction, our early cinema too has created an unfinalized and open-ended discourse that is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s dialogic environment. This aspect of our cinematic narrative is, I believe, what created the cacophony and inconclusiveness in the critique of African film, particularly West African

francophone films. So, before I delve into the carnivalization of our cinema, let us, first, take a closer look at the challenges faced by African cinematic critiques.

The biggest problem in the critique of African films is the assumptions Western critics make. This statement might sound blunt but when we take a closer look at the questions that are being asked in regard to African cinema (in this case francophone West African), they often revolve around the problem of authenticity, orality and postcolonial semantics. Now let me be clear that such a blunt statement towards Western critics does not delegitimize their endeavor, in fact, their projection onto African cinema is simply a natural consequence of the context in which francophone West African cinema was born.

In *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, Manthia Diawara gives an exhaustive analysis of the historical context in which our cinema was born. There is no doubt that the history of Francophone African cinema started with our independence in the early sixties, but what is more important is the journey that led to that inception. The French government always felt the need to have absolute control over what the colonies could watch for fear of any anticolonial tendencies or subversion against their authority. That scheme led to the implementation of a law known as “Le Décret Laval” (the Laval Decree) in 1934. Diawara states: “The purpose of the Laval Decree was to control the content of films that were shot in Africa and to minimize the creative roles played by Africans in the making of films. It gave Laval’s ministry the right to examine the scripts and the people involved in the production before giving its authorization for filming (Diawara 22).”

One needs to remember that the Laval Decree and the overall excessive control over film production was part of a greater policy of assimilation that has defined France's colonial project. As Diawara mentions:

The Laval Decree was opposed to Africans filming in Africa, it was not opposed to Africans becoming directors of French mainstream films. For example, Vieyra and Le Groupe Africain du Cinéma were allowed to film Paris in *Afrique sur Seine* while they were denied the permission to make a film in Africa. (Diawara 33)

Now once those countries received their independence, and with both a denouncement of the Laval Decree and a strong support by numerous French and African intellectuals for an African cinema made by Africans, what used to be a decree preventing Africans from making films turned in a so-called will to support African film production. The French government established the French Ministry of Cooperation to form a “binding economic, political, and cultural relations with its former colonies”. So without getting into the details of all the political strategies and pressure – which can be found in the works of scholars such as Diawara, Hennebelle etc. – it is clear that France kept its stranglehold on francophone African film for the following three decades.

My point in revisiting this historical context is to show the natural connection between African cinema and the West, which has created a sort of license for Western critics to comfortably evaluate African films using their own standards. In *Popular Culture and Oral traditions in African Film*, Diawara warns us of such danger when he says:

European critics are afraid to look at African cinema in the same manner that Africans used to be afraid to watch the first movies from Europe....Today, African

cinema must combat this resistance to foreign images. Europeans close their eyes in order not to see the questioning of Western values, the reaffirmation of cultures repressed by the West, anti-neocolonialist discourses. (Diawara 6)

Thirty years after that warning, critics of African cinema suffer from the same phenomenon.

This suspicion toward Western critics, by the way, is not just the prerogative of some ethnocentric Africanists; this concern has always been the elephant in the room, and it is shared by Western critics themselves. In *Africans Filming Africa*:

Questioning Theories of an Authentic African Cinema, David Murphy writes:

For some Western critics, the emergence of African cinema was the source of a grave disappointment. These critics did not know exactly what this cinema should be like, but they knew they wanted it to be radically different from everything that had come before. As the critic Serge Daney has claimed, a certain type of Western critic had been vaguely expecting African cinema to be a non-intellectual, all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza. (Murphy 240)

The consequence of such misrepresentation and misinterpretation of African cinema is that we always end up with a pro forma of our cinematic narrative, the true potential of francophone African cinema remains unexplored. Let us now take a look at the theoretical frameworks through which critics have mostly been evaluating francophone African cinema.

In *The Theoretical Construction of African Cinema*, Stephen A. Zacks identifies three recurring theoretical positions among critics: first, there is neo-Marxism, which he classifies as “the most common and fundamental of the postcolonial discourses”, which

lays emphasis on subverting dominant discourses. authenticity, according to this movement amounts to the distance between a text from dominant capitalistic systems of production and ideologies.

The second theoretical position is neo-structuralism, which relies heavily on differentiating African films from the others. As its name indicates, it uses structuralist methods of textual analysis to invert the conventions. By using the binary opposition tools, it seeks more to describe for audiences, contrary to the neo-Marxist prescriptive forms.

The third position is popular modernism, which “usually focuses on the text as an aesthetic event and glorifies the author as a consequence of having elevated the text to the status of high culture (Zacks 8).” This tradition is known for ascribing more independence to the author and “moves toward universalistic interpretation and critique”. This categorization is not far from the three narrative movements that Diawara identifies: social realist narratives, colonial confrontation, and the return to the source.

The social realists are known for opposing tradition to modernity; any modernist tendency is associated with neo colonialism and imperialism, they reject the romanticizing of traditional values and their focus remains African spectators. Ousmane Sembene is classified by critics as being part of this type of cinema.

As for the colonial confrontation movement, they have brought about more controversy by bringing back historical confrontations in which African spectators find pride while their European counterparts see them as polemical, poorly done “and belonging to the 1960s rhetoric of violence.” *Camp de Thiaroye* by Ousmane Sembene, for instance, was banned in France for almost two decades.

The third movement, the return to the source, is a clear departure from the first two; filmmakers in this category are less political, which, Diawara says, protect them from censorship. Their goal has been to revisit precolonial African tradition to find solutions to contemporary issues, and mostly, to find a new cinematic language. They are seen by most critics as more sophisticated, but some criticize them for indulging into the European anthropologist trope of exoticizing Africa. Films like *Yeelen* by Souleymane Cissé and *Yaaba* by Idrissa Ouedrago are among this category (Diawara 1992).

A critic like Teshome Gabriel could fit in many of the classifications mentioned above, but he is mostly known for his advocacy of the critical theory of Third World Cinema, a clearly neo-Marxist position combined with a return to the source tendency.

For Teshome Gabriel, the role of the postcolonial guardians of memory is perhaps best occupied by radical and politicized filmmakers (which would again align the filmmaker with the traditional griot). As he writes in ‘Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory’: ‘Between the popular memory of the Third World and the willful forgetting of the West, the gate-keepers of the corridors of discourse cannot be but men and women of courage and conscience, committed to an urgent, activist cinema – in a word, Third Cinema’. (qtd in Murphy et al. 16)

The list of theoretical possibilities mentioned above is just a glimpse of the different positions critics take when dealing with African cinema, and that does not include the controversy surrounding postcolonialism, which is organically connected to African film critique as well. This situation must make us bear in mind the words of the famous postcolonial filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha in *Farmer Framed*:

There is a tendency in theorizing *about* film to see theorizing as one activity and filmmaking as another, which you can point to in theory...When one starts theorizing *about* film, one starts shutting down the field; it becomes a field of experts whose access is gained through authoritative knowledge of a demarcated body of ‘classical’ films and of legitimized ways of reading and speaking about films. That’s the part I find most sterile in theory. It is necessary for me always to keep in mind that one cannot really theorize about film, but only *with* film. That is how the field can remain open. (qtd in Murphy et al. 18)

My purpose in this chapter is not to add to the cacophony and inconclusiveness in the critique of African cinema: I will not pick a side or invent a new theory to add to the thousand and one that are already populating the field – not to say that it will never happen – but I have chosen a ground clearing approach. I have not decided to apply Bakhtin’s theory to our film, but it is African cinema that imposed itself on the dialogic imagination according to the definition of dialogism I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. African cinema has an open-endedness *sui generis*, it is a free cinema, it perpetually recreates itself, its possibilities and opportunities are endless.

Since francophone West African films – particularly Sembene and Mambéty’s - tend to be open-ended, I find it useful and necessary to establish its natural relation with the notion of carnival and carnivalization of literature, which, for Bakhtin, amounts to “refers to the transposition of the essential qualities of the carnival sense of the world into a literary language and a literary genre.” In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin states:

Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. Carnival is not contemplated and, strictly speaking, not even performed; its participants *live* in it, they live by its laws as long as those laws are in effect; that is, they live a *carnivalistic life*. Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent “life turned inside out,” “the reverse side of the world” (“*monde à l’envers*”). The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first is all hierarchical structure... (Bakhtin 122-23)

In order to understand how this sense of carnival is going to unfold in francophone West African film, we have to look at Bakhtin’s four categories of the carnival sense of the world: First, “Free and familiar contact among people”; this category, for Bakhtin, is crucial in that it brings together an improbable gathering of people who would have been separated by “impenetrable hierarchical barriers. This unlikely gathering creates an environment of free expression and unity. Second, eccentricity; in the free and familiar environment, any kind of behavior is allowed and welcomed; “it permits – in concretely sensuous form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves (Bakhtin 123).” The third category, Carnivalistic *mésalliances*, allows what used to be separated to become one. “All values, thoughts, phenomena...that were disunified, distanced” are drawn together and combined. The last category, profanation, focusses on “debasings” and “bringings down to earth”. The sacred is devoid of its power.

We will see in my analysis of Ousmane Sembene's *Black girl* and D. D. Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* how these categories of the carnival permeate the two films. In analyzing these two works and the authors, we will see, also, that these carnivalistic elements are supplemented by the notions of polyphony, heteroglossia and the chronotope, which are integral parts of a dialogic discourse.

Before undertaking a close analysis of these two films, let us first define these three terms, which Bakhtin applies to language, but particularly to language in the novel. Polyphony literally stands for multiple voices. These voices represent different perspectives that cannot be subjugated by the voice of the author who can no longer stand between the character and the reader. Heteroglossia literally means "different speechness" or "many language-dness". Here the conflicting discourses within a language or any linguistic activity creates an artistic system that the author's creativity combines in a certain way. Language, therefore, cannot be viewed as a closed system; even within the same national language, there will be multiple perspectives. As for the chronotope, Bakhtin says:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (Bakhtin 84)

Even though Bakhtin refers to the Novel, this above definition of the chronotope is equally relevant to film.

I have purposefully titled my concluding chapter “Our Postcolony” to delineate postcolonial discourse within a specific part of the Global South: Francophone West Africa. I have been mentioning the binary colonizer and colonized in a very loose manner, which would discredit this whole project that is primarily based on the dissolution of poles and binary oppositions. The task here is not to silence a voice and give free reign to another; speaking from the postcolony does not necessarily imply that the focus should be on the colonized subject, my focus is primarily on the dialogue itself. This is due to the fact that the postcolony is not just a location, but an idea; it is the realization that the consequences of colonial modernity has called for the need to recreate a discursive environment devoid of center and authority.

My analysis draws a lot from Bhabha’s tradition of speaking from the colonized perspective (in my case, a former colonized). However, that tendency is not an end in itself; I will focus here on theoretical works that originate from both the Western based and the Global South scholars; and these conflicting world views happen to create a “third space” that negates any form of polarizing discourse. One major aspect in this concluding chapter is the project of decolonizing the colonizer and the colonized; and we will see how the integration of the philosophy of an author like Frantz Fanon will help dissolve the poles (less focus on the binaries: colonizer/colonized) for the creation of a viable space for a dialogue. In *Conscripts of Modernity* for instance, David Scott talks about the concept of “Future’s past” in the sense that earlier generations of colonized intellectuals had a project for the future while for the later generations; that “erstwhile future” is becoming our “disappearing past” (Scott 29). Our postcolony has failed to identify a tangible future – a failure accentuated by the inability to even define what

postcolonial is; and the problem of conceptualizing postcolonial discourse or even defining its scope has had a sterilizing effect on its efficacy to articulate the needs of the postcolony. So, what I propose in this chapter is a sort of denouement in the four-decade-long drama of postcolonial discourse; a denouement that has been made possible by laying bare the francophone West Africa's unique postcolonial discourse.

CHAPTER 1

L'ETRANGE DESTIN DE WANGRIN

Author, Summary and controversy

Amadou Hampâté Bâ's genius comes from his ability to conduct his anthropological project by converging traditional African cultures and orality with cosmopolitanism. With the story of Wangrin, Bâ disrupts the discursive norms of representing the colonized subjects. By opening a window into the complex and unfamiliar world of interpreters for the purpose of reevaluating the history of the encounter between colonizer and colonized, Bâ has created endless opportunities for interpretation. This characteristic of the novel makes the story of Wangrin a classic dialogic text.

This tendency to initiate a transcultural dialogue is not peculiar to the story of Wangrin, it is a motif in Bâ's writing. In *The Anthropology of Transcultural Storytelling: Oui mon commandant! and Amadou Hampâté Bâ's Ethnographic Didacticism*, Justin Izzo states:

In his two volumes of memoirs this device becomes a thoroughgoing literary strategy driven primarily by an avowed relationship to foreign readers, a relationship imbued with a strong sense of pedagogy and strengthened by Hampâté Bâ's undeniable prowess as a prolific storyteller. I call Hampâté Bâ's strategy "ethnographic didacticism" and it allows him to stake out

interdisciplinary narrative terrain on which to link his own virtuosity as a storyteller to a broader, transcultural and cosmopolitan epistemological project. My argument here runs deeper, though: studying these memoirs (and *Oui mon commandant!* in particular) anthropologically provokes us to consider how, for Hampâté Bâ, the African memoir is a narrative palimpsest, in which the writing of one's personal history is also and at the same time an operation of rewriting and writing-over, involving the conversion of autobiography into transcultural dialogue and the reversal of the directionality of ethnographic knowledge production, in a "disruptive articulation," as Edward Said puts it in an essay on anthropology and literature, that is also a transcultural desire. (Izzo 2)

Amadou Hampâté Bâ was officially born in Bandiagara around 1901. But as he claims in his memoirs, he was probably born on January to February 1900. His origin, which can be traced back to the Macina Peuls (Fulas in English), is a decisive factor in his literary career and his knowledge of African traditions. As he mentions in the first part of his memoirs *Amkoullel, l'enfant peul* (1991), Around 1860, Bâ's maternal grandfather, Pâté Poullo, who was a shepherd and leader of his clan, left everything to join El Hadji Omar's jihad (holy war) at a time when the Halpulaars (both the Peuls and the Toukoupleurs) who share the same language were in an ongoing conflict, which resulted in the Toukoupleurs conquering Hamdalaye, the capital of the Macina kingdom.

El Hadji Omar's nephew Tijani and Pâté Poullo later founded Bandiagara. When Tijani learned about the death of his uncle, he went on a killing spree as a revenge against the Peuls; forty males in Hampâté Bâ's family were executed, and one of two males who escaped was Hampâté Bâ, the father of our author Amadou Hampâté Bâ. The young

escapee found refuge in enemy territory, among the Toukoupleurs where he later married Khadija, the daughter of Pâté Poullo and Anta Ndiobdi.

So Amadou Hampâté Bâ, who grew up in this multicultural environment, had to move to the land of the Bambaras after his mother remarried following her divorce from Amadou's father, Hampâté Bâ. Amadou Hampâté Bâ was inspired by the fascinating stories of Koulel who lived in Bandiagara, the greatest storyteller of the region. So, following in the footsteps of this master storyteller, the young Amadou Hampâté Bâ, with his impressive memory, later earned the title of Amkoulel (the little Koulel). This combination of a deep immersion into a traditional West African society, the impressive memory developed at the Koranic school, and the fact that he was enrolled into the "École des *otages*" where he received his Western education made Amadou Hampâté Bâ the prestigious traditionalist he was.

It is also worth noticing that Bâ was appointed to the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN — the French Institute of Black Africa) in Dakar where he used to carry out ethnological surveys and tradition collecting. At the UNESCO executive council, he worked in the field of translation and the transcription of African languages.

The story of Wangrin recounts the journey of the author's friend Wangrin (who would call himself both Samako Niembélé and Samba Traoré) between 1900 and 1935. We are dealing, in this story, with a complex and controversial protagonist whose character can only be defined as ambiguous; he is courageous, cunning, vicious, generous, adventurous to name but a few. The author takes us back to the beginning of twentieth century French West Africa. As a writer, historian, and ethnologist, Bâ opens us to the under documented and unknown world of the African interpreters. Through

Wangrin's story, we realize that not only were the interpreters the sole connection between colonizers and colonized but they also had some form of agency over and in both worlds.

Wangrin was born and raised in a village called Noubigou — an anagram of Bougouni since the author uses anagram for most proper names — a deeply traditional environment until the French colonial administration decides that he should go to “l'école des Otâges” where he receives a good French education. His education and good command of the French language gave him a clear advantage over other interpreters and made him an asset among French administrators. Wangrin became the most prestigious interpreter and his career soared from there on. With an unparalleled intelligence and profound understanding of both Western civilization and African traditions, Wangrin used all the tricks in the book to gain wealth and influence. He took on everyone who stood in his way, be it a fellow interpreter like Romo or a high-ranking French administrator like the Comte de Villermoz, and with his shrewd tactics of surrounding himself with the right people and occult forces, he always came out unscathed. Wangrin became wealthy and thought of himself as invincible; he forsakes all the rules and traditions that made his strength, which led to his fall. Wangrin lost everything and became a vagrant till his tragic death. We will see, however, in the development of Wangrin's story, that the consistency in not allowing the actions of Wangrin and his counterparts to be defined in a finalized way, whether it pertains to the African characters like the protagonist himself or to the Western ones, gives credence to the dialogic nature of this story.

This summary, however, makes the story sound conventional, but when you pay closer attention to the details throughout the whole story, it poses a serious problem, and this is due to the fact that I am writing in a Western environment. What I mean here is that it is almost impossible to make a Western audience accept this story as true; it will always be regarded as a fiction or partly fictitious even though Bâ made it clear in the foreword:

J'ai donc fidèlement rapporté tout ce qui m'a été dit de part et d'autre dans les terms mêmes qui furent employés. Je n'ai modifié — à quelques rares exceptions près — que les noms propres des personnes et des lieux, pour mieux respecter l'anonymat souhaité par Wangrin. Qu'on ne cherche donc pas, dans les pages qui vont suivre, la moindre thèse, de quelque ordre que ce soit — politique, religieuse ou autre. Il s'agit simplement, ici, du récit de la vie d'un homme. (Bâ 9)

(I have faithfully related, then, all that was told to me here and there. Let no one try, then, to look for any kind of thesis, be it political, religious, or other, in the following pages. This is no more than a man's life. But my readers will doubtlessly want to hear a few things about the man whose weird and tumultuous history I am about to recount.; Bâ XVIII)

In my ongoing critique of Western critics for questioning the authenticity of Bâ's story, I would like to take a closer look at Eileen Julien's analysis of *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* in her book *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Julien's approach is clear: she treats the book as a pure work of fiction in an epic form. For her, Wangrin has been "made into a legendary hero". The problem in Julien's analysis is not her treatment of Wangrin's story as an epic form; it is totally legitimate to do so given that epic is a

preferred entertainment form in West African oral tradition and that Bâ himself, even though he claims to faithfully recount this story, acknowledges that he does intend to entertain people as he promised Wangrin.

My contention, however, is that her study does not attend to the dialogic message in this text. Julien uses Bakhtin's discussion on Western epics to suggest that "Wangrin is a cultural hero whose successes seem altogether unlikely in the present... Thus, although the life and adventures of Wangrin the person are situated not so far back in real-time – as a boy, Bâ knew him – they nonetheless participate in Bakhtin's absolute past because their epic mold gives them a certain grandeur that seems beyond our reach today (Julien 53)."

Julien's fundamental mistake is divorcing the supposedly epic world of Wangrin from the world of the author Amadou Hampâté Bâ. Wangrin's world is not out of reach, the story of Wangrin shows a world in formation as well as subjects in formation, and these subjects are negotiating the realities of colonial modernity; therefore, Wangrin epitomizes Achille Membre's "homo ludens" (1992) and Homi Bhabha's hybrid subject (1994), since these two authors' work deal with the colonial and postcolonial subject's negotiation for meaning in the context of domination.

There is another issue in Julien's analysis that is equally as problematic if not more; she claims that "narrative not only manifests culture but also shapes it, then the inclusion of dreams, warnings, and signs in narrative, even if they are due to the demands of performance, may in fact feed back into culture and create a disposition in which they become acceptable predictors. (Julien 65)."

From a discursive perspective and in a Western context, she is absolutely right; but in Bâ's culture, this analysis is empirically false. The inclusion of warnings, dreams, and signs is not due to the demands of narrative, but they are part and parcel of West African culture, particularly the Fulani culture; they do not feed back into culture, but they are culture in Bâ's world. Because of the Islamic heritage, of which dreams are an integral part that cannot be neglected, people use those dreams to determine the next steps they will take in life; and sometimes they will wait for a dream before deciding on a matter. For instance, Lat Joor, a nineteenth-century Damel of Cayor, a Wolof state in today's South-central Senegal, was told by the famous leader of the Mourid brotherhood Bamba not to meet the forces of the French governor Faidherbe in the battle of Dekhele; and the reason was that the Sufi leader had consulted the spiritual world and concluded that the king would die in that specific battle, even though the latter has been to several battles before. Lat Joor, out of a sheer sense of honor and pride as he himself told Bamba, did go to that battle and died as predicted.

As for the warnings and signs, they are, in fact, a result of the syncretic and Sufi nature of West African societies. Other than dreams, it is common in West Africa for people to consult the spiritual worlds when planning for the future. So, what we see in Wangrin's story has nothing in and of itself that shapes an epic narrative tradition; it is, in fact, an accurate representation of West African culture. Bâ mentions in the foreword to his memoirs, *Amkoullel l'enfant peul*, that even though there are different Africas, the belief in the sacred and the relation between the visible and the invisible world is constant throughout all African cultures. And it is important to understand that this claim by Julien

goes against the dialogic nature of the text in that it presents a rigid interpretation of the text while Bâ's narrative is more malleable and open ended.

It is worth noticing that the first major controversy starts even before reading the novel, which makes the dialogic aspect of this work and its unfinalized accent a reality to be reckoned with. However, and in order to respect the dialogic intention of this novel, we will have to understand that doubts and concerns about this text are not mere forms of Western skepticism towards an African narrative, but there are grounds for raising those questions. In the same warning, Bâ also tells us in the previous page that "One day, drawing closer to me, [Wangrin] told me:

"Mon petit Amkoullel, autrefois, tu savais bien conter. Maintenant que tu sais écrire, tu vas noter ce que je conterai de ma vie. Et lorsque je ne serai plus de ce monde, tu en feras un livre qui non seulement divertira les hommes mais leur servira d'enseignement (Bâ 8)." ("My little Amkullel, in days gone by you were a fine storyteller. Now that you have learned to write, you must take down the story of my life and after my death compose it into a book which will not only amuse but will also instruct those who read it"; Bâ XVII).

Amuse and instruct, these are the two words at the heart of the controversy. From a Western scholarship perspective, once you decide to entertain and teach, isn't it fiction? Didn't Bâ say he will faithfully recount everything he was told without changing anything?

To these questions, my answer is twofold; first, one should not ignore the fact that it is Wangrin himself, not Bâ, who demanded that his life story be entertaining and teaching. He handpicked Bâ because he knew very well the latter's storytelling style and

he wanted his life story to go down in history the way it is recounted by Bâ. In this case, it would be more reasonable to doubt Wangrin than the author Amadou Hampâté Bâ.

Second, there is a gaping discrepancy between orality and Western scholarship whether the oral tradition is African or Western for that matter. Since the invention of printing, orality has faced more and more scrutiny and modern scholars are used to the rendition ad verbatim of a story. When I read *Moby Dick*, I expect to read the exact same words from any copy. Western scholars expect from oral traditions what they have not and are not meant to be, from Biblical texts to African novels, oral texts have been revisited and questioned by historians, anthropologists and literary critics. Elizabeth Tonkin, in *Investigating Oral Tradition*, addresses the question of orality:

The first attempts to grapple with orality set going much valuable historical research. Later models spotlight different possibilities. Since orality is a characteristic of human beings in social relationships, all attempts to understand oral production are rooted in assumptions about human action and the nature of society, even if the holders are unaware of their own beliefs. It is of course part of the argument of this programmatic review of Africanist oral history that theoretical-critical awareness is valuable, since it can point up new directions and means of research. There is mileage still in the subject, and ethno-historiography in all its practical and ideological consequentiality is one important journey to be undertaken. Not the most comfortable of journeys, perhaps, for researchers cannot fly over the route looking down for landmarks but have to make their way with the other travelers even while they are trying to study them, and sometimes be forced to give them right of way. (Tonkin 213)

To better have an idea of Tonkin's article, let us look at her abstract:

The author reviews the developing uses of oral sources in recent Africanist history, and argues that the original expectations about 'oral tradition' derived from contemporary structural functionalism. Changing one's model of social action therefore entails a change in the evaluation of oral data, and some of the consequences, according to different social theories, are sketched out. In particular, the perspectives of P. Bourdieu can, with modifications, permit the development of systematic ethno-historiography. (Tonkin 213)

It is clear that dealing with oral traditions, wherever it comes from, constitutes an uncomfortable task for scholars. Wangrin's story is special to scholars due to Amadou Hampâté Bâ's insistence on its accuracy, which has led Ralph A. Austen to physically track down to the minute details Wangrin's life and career in West Africa. Austen's investigations in the *Journaux officiels* of Haut- Sénégal-Niger and Haute Volta, and in Equilbecq's book - Victor Equilbecq is the official who published the collection of folktales assembled by Wangrin, the municipal archives of Bobo-Dioulasso, and several other sources from actual descendants of Wangrin and former colonial clerks have revealed that most of what Bâ recounts is true, but there are aspects of the story that are questionable even though they cannot be proved or disproved. As Austen writes:

The written records confirm the main outline of Hampâté Bâ's narrative. Wangrin, under the names Samako Niembélé (or Gnembélé) was employed first as a teacher and then an interpreter in Haut-Senegal-Niger (mainly Bandiagara) from at least 1906 to 1919. He then transferred to the newly created territory of Haute Volta where he worked in the places mentioned (in thinly disguised form) by

Hampâté Bâ: Ouagadougou, Ouahigouya, and Bobo Dioulasso. In 1924 he retired in the last town and went into private business. [...] it is unlikely that the scenes between [Wangrin and Romo] there depicted by Hampâté Bâ ever actually occurred. There are many other events in Hampâté Bâ's book which cannot be documented although existing records do not render them as implausible as the Wangrin-Moro Sidibé conflicts in Bobo-Dioulasso. (Austen 153–54)

Hampâté Bâ takes the credibility of Wangrin's story very seriously, which explains why he tends to distance himself from the griots. In West African cultures, these griots are the guardians of tradition, they are the ones who know everybody else's ancestry and story, and they pass this information down, orally, from generation to generation. There are, however, a few caveats that bother Bâ; first, the oral aspect of this tradition; second, they are always suspected for embellishing stories; third, they are seen as lower caste. In *From a Colonial to a Postcolonial African Voice: Amkoullel L'Enfant Peul*, Austen states:

There is no direct evidence of such hostility in Amkoullel but early in the second volume of his autobiography he states quite bluntly that "par nature j'ai horreur des cris de louange des griots" 'I have an inborn hatred for the way griots shout praises' (OC 33). Hampâté Bâ's major statement on oral tradition ('The Living Tradition, 1981) devotes only five out of fifty-seven pages to griots, labeling them as "public entertainers" and noting their generally more limited and less reliable access to "knowledge" than true "traditionalists." Finally, it is remarkable that of the major oral texts published by Hampâté Bâ, none, as far as I know, are transcribed from the performances of griots. (Austen 8)

Bâ's stance on the griots will not surprise anyone from West Africa, because from a cultural perspective, even though people might avoid stating it directly for the sake of social decorum, no one who is not from that cast wants to be associated with the image of a griot. In Senegal, for example, even the griots have found themselves a name they tend to use in order to gain more credibility: *Communicateur Traditionnel* (Traditional Communicator).

The way dialogism informs Bâ's work is very particular; Wangrin's story makes it impossible to qualify the colonial subject in a specific way, which makes the colonial subject a free electron throughout history. Wangrin might be the crooked interpreter in a certain reading of historical West Africa; but through different lenses, he might be seen as a hero in the complex formation of a postcolonial subject. In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson describe the traits that make the novel the most dialogic genre in that: "it treats character, society, and knowledge as unfinalizable... In any given classificatory scheme, genres antithetical to the novel are given to claims of certainty, expression of absolute truth, and assertions of timeless wisdom; by contrast, the novel is ever skeptical, experimental, and open to the unpredictable experience of every present moment (Morson and Emerson 303)."

Morson and Emerson's Bakhtinian description of the novel, in fact, gives us a clear insight into the connection between orality and dialogism; orality is neither absolute nor precise, it is subject to the experience of the moment.

Both Worlds Fall Apart

The story of Wangrin epitomizes the concept of unfinalizability in that it disrupts the norms that have for a long time defined the worlds of interpreters and French colonial

administrators. Here we are not given any solution to any particular problem, but we are led to ask questions and question the discourse that has shaped our understanding of West African colonial figures that were almost forgotten in literary works.

Very early in the narrative, we can see how both the western and the traditional are defined in the character of Wangrin. He was born in a very traditional setting then joins the “Ecole des otages” where he receives a Western education. But more importantly, the narrative subtly informs you about what defines Wangrin by laying emphasis on the protagonist’s tutelary deity Gongoloma- Sooké. This deity symbolizes contradiction, confusion and dialogue as the narrator puts it: “Si je suis Gongoloma-Sooké, le dieu bizarre, je suis par ailleurs le grand confluent des contraire... Venez à moi et vous serez servis! Wangrin avait-il entendu cet appel de Gongoloma-Sooké alors qu’il était encore à l’état de fumée, entre terre et ciel, ou à l’état liquide dans les reins de ses pères (Bâ 21)?” (“It is true I am Gongoloma-Sooké, a weird divinity, but I also represent the confluence of all opposites.... Come to me and your wishes shall be granted! At what stage had Wangrin heard that call? When he was still mere smoke, between heaven and earth, or a particle of liquid in his father’s loins?”; *Bâ* 8)? This description of the protagonist and his tutelary deity, early in the novel, is a clear indication of what this whole narrative is about: to bring both the traditional colonized African and the Western colonial discourse to the uncomfortable table of dialogue where everything we knew and took for granted is reevaluated, questioned and challenged.

Since part of working with this novel is to justify its authenticity and the truthfulness of the author’s claim, I will note that this concept of tutelary god and the impact of Gongoloma- Sooké on Wangrin is not fantasy. In most West African cultures,

or should I say the ones I know which is most of them, the belief that a person can be born under the sign of a specific spirit is a common tradition; in Senegal for example, there is this syncretic/Sufi belief that every human soul is connected to specific spirits; those spirits called Rawhan (plural for the Arabic term ruh, which means soul or spirit) or Rap, which means in Wolof any creature that is not human (that includes Jinns and wild animals), are decisive factors in the life of an individual. These beliefs define the way in which a person behaves in specific situations, the type of sacrifices they make, the places they avoid and so on. Wangrin's path in life is clearly defined, he is here to disturb the world of the colonizer and the colonized. So early on in the text, the reader is being informed that it will be almost impossible to benefit from this narrative by simply activating the schemata of our classic exegesis of texts produced in Hampâté Bâ's generation.

And this is reminiscent of Bakhtin's description of the dialogic novel. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, he states:

Dostoevsky's novel is dialogic. It is constructed not as a whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitively)—and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant. (Bakhtin 18)

Wangrin's story is designed in a way that calls for a holistic approach to the story: the traditional and the modern, the spiritual and the temporal are intertwined and equally lay bare the secrets of the life and time of Wangrin.

In this endeavor to challenge both worlds, the journey of Wangrin leads him to meet first with Romo the interpreter, a native like him. His first remark is the interpreter's lack of command of the French language, he speaks the "forofifon naspa", which is also called "le français des tirailleurs" French of the tirailleurs, which does follow its own rules as a *lingua franca*. The tirailleurs were the African soldiers requisitioned and used by France as cannon fodder during the World Wars and other smaller operations. What is important here is that Wangrin immediately looks down on the interpreter because he feels that his own ability to speak French is superior to that of Romo.

Right after the encounter with the interpreter, Wangrin meets with the other part of the dialogue: the colonial administrator. This second encounter is very symbolic, the circle commandant reminds Wangrin that he is not like the other interpreters; he immediately points out the fact that Wangrin received a good education that is both moral and intellectual from the French school. He also makes sure that Wangrin understands what is expected of him, which is to perpetuate the "civilizing mission". "Il faut que tu payes les bienveillances que tu dois à la France en la faisant aimer et en répandant sa langue et sa civilisation. Ce sont là les deux plus beaux cadeaux que l'histoire humaine ait faits aux Noirs de l'Afrique (Bâ 33-34)." ("You must pay the debt you owe France by ensuring that she is loved and that her language and civilization are spread far and wide. In the whole history of mankind, these are the two most beautiful gifts ever bestowed on African Blacks."; Bâ 17) It is very clear that the colonial discourse, in its most classic

form, is unravelling in front of Wangrin's eyes. Symbolically, Wangrin receives three coins from the French administrator, which can be considered bribery. Naked people are engraved in those coins which makes the Peuhl name them "the three naked ones"; but coincidentally, as the narrator puts it: "Dans le symbolism peul, 'se mettre à nu' signifie en effet se dépouiller de sa personnalité et de toute dignité humaine, vendre son âme aux forces mauvaises (Bâ 36)." ("In the Fulbe symbolism "to appear naked" does in fact mean to divest oneself of one's personality and of all human dignity, and to sell one's soul to evil powers"; Bâ 19).

We will see that Wangrin is going to subvert this civilizing discourse, but as we mentioned earlier, it will not be the only discourse that will be challenged, the world of the traditional interpreter will be equally challenged.

In the first confrontation with Racoutié, the former interpreter, Wangrin destroys him in every way. The story depicts a physical combat where Wangrin proves to be absolutely superior, but the meaning of this fight reveals something more complex than a physical altercation.

Racoutié prides himself in being the right-hand man of the commandant, in fact he is a yes man. Wangrin does not just defeat him, he replaces him in order to bring a new type of interpreter, not the one that will do the bidding of the French administrator, but the one that will change the discourse that has prevailed so far. Let us not, however, hope for a historical rupture; I am not in a dialectic endeavor where I would be focusing on a binary opposition between Wangrin and what Racoutié represents, but I am laying a more dialogized story, a full story. Even though Wangrin symbolically replaces the previous interpreter, we are not witnessing an erasure. We can see that Wangrin does not

replace Racoutié by having recourse to unknown elements; in fact, he uses everything available in Racoutié's own environment; he allies himself with griots, community organizations, mystic healers and the French language; the only difference is that Wangrin does it even better. But what is more important, as Austen writes, is that

The life of Wangrin as well as Hampâté Bâ's own memoirs further provide us with valuable insight into a category of West African colonial figures generally overlooked in historical and literary writings: the western educated intermediaries who managed much of the day-to-day business of colonial administration and also played an important role in the local politics of the regions where they served, as well as the "office politics" of the territorial regime. (Austen 150)

This element is critical to the development of dialogism in Bâ's story in that these colonial figures testify to the complexity of the encounter between the West and West Africa; these mixed figures, the interpreters are outside of the usual monologic narratives about the colony, whether those narratives are from Western or African perspective.

Should the End Justify the Means?

In my endeavor to distance the story of Wangrin from the "empire writes back" mantra in favor of a more dialogized discourse where the representation of the colonizer and the colonized is redefined, I have been paying close attention to how Wangrin treats both the native and the Westerner. In his struggle to become successful and wealthy, he crushes anyone who stands in his way irrespective of race or origin, and his cunningness and propensity to corruption seem indefensible. The rationale for Wangrin's ruthlessness towards both races seems to be a form of disavowal of what they represent; neither the

colonial discourse nor the “empire writing back” represent a relevant reality; Wangrin’s personality offers a third reality: the way of dialogue and self-re-evaluation.

The narrator goes along the same line in a very subtle manner; during the trial of the cow scandal that involves Wangrin and Villermoz where the former comes out unscathed even though he is the true culprit, we are introduced to a mixed-race magistrate who, as the narrator puts it: “Il semblait animé d’une envie vorace de croquer du Blanc. Mais paradoxalement, il haïssait également les Noirs. On aurait dit qu’il tenait rigueur aux deux races d’avoir avili la race médiane dont il était le rejeton complexé (Bâ 85).” (“He seemed to be driven by a consuming desire to scrunch up Whites. Paradoxically, he also hated Blacks. One would have thought that he held a grudge against the two races which, by mixing, had adulterated the breed from which he had sprung, filling him with an abundance of complexes.” Bâ 56) Like Wangrin, there is something that bothers him about both races; like Wangrin, he unconsciously yearns for a reality that transcends both cultures. The proof can be found right in the next paragraph; despite his aversion toward Whites and Blacks but, remains a just judge as the narrator remarks: “Il faut cependant reconnaître à sa décharge qu’en dépit de son bizarre comportement, sa droiture en tant que juge fut totale (Bâ 85).” (“It must be said to his credit that in spite of his singular behavior, his manner of judging was unquestionably upright.” Bâ 56)

There is, however, an elephant in the room; the cheating, lying and cunningness of Wangrin cannot go unnoticed. How can the dialogic spirit account for those uncommendable behaviors? It is important, in this case, to understand that dialogism also implies subversion; we are not in a dialectic endeavor where the sense of reconciliation is fundamental. The story of Wangrin is not going to satisfy the reader looking for a form of

synthesis or a resolution; it is designed to raise more questions, open more avenues and create a more polyphonic and open-ended discourse.

But the justification for such behavior is two-fold: first, Wangrin is forcing the reader to start reading and writing History in a fairer manner. When the center commits crimes and does wrong like Wangrin, it is oftentimes overlooked or considered a necessary evil; but when it comes from the periphery, it is immediately demonized and punished. What Wangrin forces us to do is to reevaluate everything, to accept its possibility and to look beyond it.

Second, the personality of Wangrin makes it very difficult to judge his actions. Even though he is a cunning thief and ruthless to certain people, he is also known to be very generous and caring for the weak. The narrator describes him in these words:

Wangrin était filou, certes, mais son âme n'était pas insensible. Son coeur était habité par une intense volonté de gagner de l'argent par tous les moyens afin de satisfaire une convoitise innée, mais il n'était point dépourvu de bonté, de générosité et même de grandeur. Les pauvres et tous ceux auxquels il était venue en aide dans le secret en savaient quelque chose. Son comportement, cynique envers les puissants et les favorisés de la fortune, ne manquait cependant jamais d'une certaine élégance. (Bâ 168)

(Wangrin was a rogue, true, but his soul did not lack sensitivity. Although his heart was consumed by a desire to make money by any conceivable means at his disposal in order to satisfy his congenital covetousness, there was goodness, generosity and even grandeur in his make-up. The poor and the many people who had benefited by his unostentatious help were all acquainted with that side of his

nature. Although his behavior was cynical toward the mighty and the favorites of fortune, it was at no time despoiled of a certain elegance. Bâ 115)

Not only does this contradictory nature of Wangrin make it difficult to issue a final judgment, but it also compels you to reevaluate the established norms. We can see that this oxymoronic trait of the protagonist permeates the entire story; everything seems to be a binary without opposition. We can see that syncretism is part and parcel of Wangrin's life, which is a very common trait in West Africa. "Wangrin 'faisait salame', mais cela ne l'empêchait point de recourir de temps à autre aux dieux traditionnels de son terroir et aux mânes efficaces de ses ancêtres (Bâ 170)." ("Although Wangrin prostrated himself regularly in prayer, he was not averse from time to time to appealing to traditional gods of his own country or to the efficacious spirits of his ancestors." Bâ 117) It is common knowledge in Islam that seeking help from any other source other than God Almighty or having recourse to mystic forces in order to do evil is considered disbelief; however, we see that Wangrin seems to have a genuine faith in Islam, but his belief in these mystic powers is very strong.

Again, we are left to figure out whether Wangrin is a pagan, a Muslim or a straight-out hypocrite; but his characterization and the historical facts do not support the last option. In the post face, Bâ makes it clear he did his own investigations into Wangrin's trajectory as an interpreter throughout West Africa, and everywhere he went, the testimonies were the same: Wangrin would always use his money or influence to make sure poor people who could not pay their debts or taxes do not go to prison, and he would never take credit for it; any city he went to, he would secretly collect the names of the weak, old people and make sure they were taken care of; he would maintain regular

pensions for the beggars and the physically challenged individuals. It seems that Wangrin's personality is not definitive, his motives and reasoning are permanently questionable but up for debate. There is an apparent sense of malleability in the narrative about Wangrin; unfinalizability is a core concept in Bakhtin's notion of dialogism.

Now one might wonder how Wangrin would justify his behavior to himself; and how that could inform a dialogic enterprise. Wangrin's concern is very clear from the beginning, the West's sole intention is cultural and ideological domination; in fact, the end goal is the erasure of the colonized culture for a Western one. In one of his conversations with Karibou, Wangrin warned him: "Il faudra compter avec la bizarre détermination des blancs-blancs à vouloir, coûte que coûte, nous faire vomir nos us et coutumes pour nous gaver des leurs (Bâ 180)." ("One must always reckon with the white-Whites, who are curiously determined to make us vomit our customs at all costs and to ram their own down our throats instead." Bâ 124)

Wangrin's accusations against the West does not result in a fixation on the colonizer as an entity, his concern is more about ideology; that's why, as we said earlier, his enmity is directed both the Whites and the Blacks as long as he perceives them as perpetuating an ideology he considers a threat, and this is the reason why he can't stand Romo who fits this criterion perfectly. "Wangrin, en effet ne pouvait être comparé à Romo qui, toute sa vie, n'avait fait que server les Européens et leur obéir comme un robot—ce qui d'ailleurs ne l'empêchait pas d'obtenir d'eux ce qu'il voulait, sans qu'ils s'en doutassent... (Bâ 114)." ("Wangrin couldn't even be remotely compared with Romo, who had done nothing else all his life but serve Europeans and obey them like a

robot. A robot which, however, did not miss a single chance of exploiting them without awakening the least suspicion...” Bâ 76)

What Wangrin sees in Romo is an entity that will perpetuate Western ideologies and exploit the weak whenever it is given the opportunity. Romo’s race and place of origin do not come into play here. Wangrin goes to see Moulaye Hamidou, a mystic leader for a spiritual support about a dream that seems to haunt him, and where the interpreter Romo and the white commander Villermoz constitute one and the same threat. “Ce songe, où l’on voit en même temps Romo et le compte de Villermoz, presage que mes deux ennemis vont s’unir pour essayer de me posséder. Mais ils ne m’auront pas... Vos prières me garantiront contre eux... Dieu vous récompensera mieux que moi (Bâ 207).” (“A dream where Romo and Villermoz appear together can only mean that my two enemies are going to try to get me. But they will not...! Your prayers will protect me, and God’s reward for what you are doing will be even greater than mine.” Bâ 144) These passages make it clear that Wangrin’s journey naturally leads towards a more colorblind, classless and non-binary society (non-binary as to applying the same sets of standards to the colonized and the colonizer); at a time and place where cultural representation is either black or white, Western or primitive, superior or inferior; Wangrin subverts those norms.

Given the fact that the protagonist Wangrin deliberately chose the narrator Bâ to recount his life story, it is not surprising to see that they both share the desire for a more dialogized world, which is the necessity to rise above the normative classifications and representations for a more critical and open dialogue. In the *Textual Ownership in L’Etrange destin de Wangrin*, Jean-Marc Moura describes Bâ’s career by stating:

Hampâté Bâ's first collections of African oral productions were reinterpreted by French scientific authorities to serve colonial purposes. Yet, he would progressively free himself from this supervision. The course of his career is clear: over some 40 years, through various works of ethnography, history, poetry, theology, philosophy, and autobiography, he attempted to re-appropriate the principles of construction and of evaluation of his Fulani culture, principles that were denied to Africans as long as French colonizers imposed on them their paradigms of classification and representation. (Moura 93)

Since we are dealing with a story in which the protagonist is in fact the true narrator, we also have the privilege to explore his subconscious; often times, we can hear what Wangrin thinks in any given circumstances, but it also allows us to make a psychoanalytic evaluation of the character without relying solely on his statements. And I am not talking about those moments when he is simply thinking out loud about his plans, but when he is in a deep soul searching about his condition; those rare moments are crucial. In chapter eighteen, when the storm in Wangrin's life seems to settle down, we witness one of those moments:

Son esprit, rapide comme la lumière, fit un retour en arrière. Il fit dérouler rapidement, devant son regard intérieur, toute son existence. Il revit le petit garçon bambara, ventre bedon, corps tout nu et gris de poussière, portant en bandoulière une petite besace rectangulaire faite de bandes de coton teintées en jaune lave. Ce petit diable courait comme un forcené, tantôt derrière une souris ou un lézard blessé à coups de caillou, tantôt derrière un écureuil qui, pris au piège, traînait l'appareil dans les herbes pour s'en débarrasser. Il vit la jeune recrue de

l'Ecole des otages, vêtue d'une culotte et d'une blouse d'étoffe grise, coiffée d'une petite chechia ronde de couleur rouge au pompon de soie bleue et marchant nu-pieds. Il revit le jeune circoncis qui, Durant trois mois, avait vécu avec quarante-cinq camarades, habillé d'un boubou jaune fait d'une seule pièce, coiffée d'un bonnet en gueule de caïman, écoutant l'enseignement de Sema, chantant ou dansant autour d'un feu sacré, Durant de longues heures. Il revit le jeune moniteur habillé à l'européenne et portant toujours un crayon derrière le pavillon de l'oreille. Puis il vit tout en un: Racoutié, son premier rival et agresseur, le commandant de Brière, qui lui donna son premier cadeau politique, etc. Mais son attention s'arrêta plus longuement sur le comte de Villermoz et ses deux amis, du Pont de la Roche et Georges Sauvage, et sur leur gros chien détecteur, Romo Sibedi. Oui, ces quatre acolytes acoquinés étaient, pour Wangrin, comme une grosse pierre suspendue au-dessus de sa tête par un fil d'araignée. Pour la première fois, Wangrin frissonna, sans pouvoir dire si c'était de peur ou d'indignation. (Bâ 224)

(With lightning speed, he mentally reviewed his past. His whole existence unfolded rapidly within the recesses of his mind. At first, he saw the little pot-bellied Bambara child, his naked body covered in grey dust, with a little rectangular double bag made of cotton strips dyed a wishy-washy yellow worn as bandoleer. The little devil ran like one possessed, after a mouse, or a lizard he'd wounded with pebbles, or a squirrel who was dragging across the tall grass the trap that had caught him, trying to break free. He saw the young recruit in the school for Hostages, dressed in grey shirt and shorts, a little red round chechia

with a blue silk pom-pom on his head, and bare feet. He saw the circumcised youth who had lived three months with forty-five companions, dressed in a seamless yellow Bubu and a cap shaped like a caiman's head, who had listened to the teaching of his Sema, singing and dancing long hours around the holy fire. He saw the young schoolmaster dressed in European clothes, always sporting a pencil behind his ear. Then he saw all the remaining episodes rolled into one: Racoutié, his first rival and aggressor, Commandant de Brière, who had made him his first political gift, etc. He allowed his wandering thoughts to linger on Count de Villermoz and his two friends, du Pont de la Roche and Georges Sauvage, and on their hefty bloodhound Romo Sibédi. Yes, it was true that for Wangrin those four wretched acolytes did represent a heavy stone suspended above his head by a spider's thread. Suddenly he shivered without knowing whether he was afraid or simply indignant. Bâ 156-57)

This meditation looks more like an out-of-body experience, and it attests to and epitomizes the dialogic nature of Wangrin's story. The way he narrates his vision reveals what his aspirations are. We can divide the story in two parts: part one shows the representation that Wangrin accepts, and that representation is transcultural and reveals a complex identity. He sees his childhood where he grows in a traditional environment with strong West African customs; then he sees his transition towards a Western culture and education. This first part where he sees himself as a product of both worlds seems normal to him and he reacts to this vision peacefully. As for the second part, Wangrin's reaction is not so peaceful. He starts the narration with very dismissive THEN, then goes on to describe the whole as "the remaining episodes". What he sees here is not the combination

of both cultures in the persons of Racoutié and Commandant de Brière, but, as we have already mentioned, he sees a colonizer coming to impose his Western discourse and a colonized who is willing to perpetuate that narrative.

Wangrin's Decline

On a surface level analysis, Wangrin's fall is a natural consequence of his actions, he reaped what he had sown. However, a more critical look at the dialogic framework of this story will reveal that Wangrin's failure is not a failure of a person, but a failure of a social project; the dialogic project. In the introduction by Abiola Irele to Aina Pavolini's translation of the book, Irele writes:

The story of Wangrin's rise to eminence (and of his eventual decline and fall) thus encapsulates the transition in the Sahel from the self-contained world of a precolonial feudalism to a new political and socioeconomic structure distinguished especially by the denial to Africans of historical initiative. In the broader cultural perspectives intimated by the work, Wangrin's experience epitomizes the movement from a heritage of life that, for all its limitations, provided an anchor for the self, to an externally imposed and problematic modernity derived from the Western paradigm. (Bâ XI)

Now what is this "historical initiative" we have been denied? Wangrin's decline provides an answer that reaffirms my theory that West African history and civilization has always stood against unilateral cultural narratives, and the reason why it is crucial to restate this position is that Irele's mention of the "historical initiative" could be understood as a mere cultural shock which resulted from the imposition of a foreign Western culture; however, in Bâ's story, what constitutes the ultimate goal is the

necessity to eliminate Western discourse - or any form of single narrative for that matter- for a more dialogic society.

It is no surprise that Wangrin's decline and fall revolve around the same entities that made his strength. Not only has he lost his ability to navigate both traditional culture and Western modernity, which made him unattainable, but he has also unwittingly sustained some of the Western paradigms he was up against. Wangrin, blinded by his wealth, starts to distance himself from the traditional beliefs that shaped him for a more Western lifestyle. "Il se mit subitement à aimer la chasse. Il partait dans sa nouvelle torpedo à la tombée de la nuit et ne revenait parfois qu'à l'aurore, tuant les animaux par Plaisir, s'éloignant ainsi un peu plus de la pure tradition africaine qui veut que la chasse soit rituelle et utilitaire, et non aveugle et gratuite (Bâ 312)." ("Suddenly he had become fond of hunting. At nightfall he would depart in his new "torpedo" and quite often did not return until dawn. He killed for pleasure, drawing away yet a little further from pure African tradition, which demands that hunting be ritualistic and utilitarian rather than aimless and gratuitous." Bâ 223) This disregard for traditional values gets worse when Wangrin, with such arrogance, makes fun of the fortune teller who is warning him of a bleak future. From this moment on till the end of the story, he keeps disrespecting traditional values, which coincides with his tragic downfall.

As we already mentioned, Wangrin's predicament is not just the result of his breaking of the rules of tradition, but he himself is espousing the capitalistic Western discourse he is supposed to fight:

C'est à cette époque qu'un changement subtil s'opérait dans le comportement de Wangrin. Etait-il subitement étourdi par sa grande fortune? Toujours est-il qu'il

ne fut plus tout à fait le même. Il ne distribuait plus son argent aux pauvres avec la même prodigalité qu'autrefois. Certes, il ne refusait pas l'aumône, mais il était moins large et s'il habillait encore les veuves et les orphelins qui venaient solliciter son secours, ce n'est plus lui qui allait au-devant d'eux. (Bâ 312)

(It was then that Wangrin's behavior underwent a subtle change. Was he stunned, perhaps, by the extent of his immense fortune? Be it as it may, from then on he was never quite the same man. No longer so prodigal with the poor, he didn't of course refuse to give alms, but he was not as generous as he had been in former days and if he still clothed the widows and orphans who came to solicit his help, he no longer actually sought them out. Bâ 222)

And to crown it all, Wangrin starts drinking alcohol, which might seem to be one of the least important changes but has a very profound meaning in the West African Islamic culture. In Wolof culture, we have a saying that goes: "when you cast a spell on a person till he starts drinking alcohol, you can stop because you have won." A non-Christian person drinking alcohol is looked down upon so much that even though many Muslims do drink it, they hide it from people.

Now interestingly enough, while Wangrin stays in a downward spiral, both blacks and whites around him seem to be doing better:

Après le départ de Chantalba, Wangrin donna à Tenin une très belle dot et organisa son mariage avec Bouraboura, qui ouvrit un restaurant pour Africains... Cette dernière se montrait plus qu'une excellente secrétaire et se révéla excellent directeur adjoint. Quant à son mari, il fonda le plus grand garage privé du

territoire. Il représentait valablement Wangrin dans toutes les réunions, discutait dur et gagnait à tous les coups sur ses rivaux. (Bâ 328-29)

(After Chantalba's departure, Wangrin gave Tenin a very handsome dowry and made arrangements for her wedding with Burabura, who had opened a restaurant for Africans...As well as an excellent secretary, Madame Terreau showed herself to be a splendid deputy. Her husband opened the biggest private garage in the whole territory. He represented Wangrin most competently at meetings, was a hard bargainer, and always got the better of his business rivals. Bâ 235-36)

These two couples, a black and a white one, seem to mirror the essence of what Wangrin was and what made him invincible until now. Tenin, who is Wangrin's god-daughter, has been used by Wangrin himself to control Chantalba, which allowed her to be exposed to the world of the French commander. As for Madame Terreau, she has been a very busy lady with a complex and questionable life both in France and in West Africa. These people seem to replicate Wangrin's journey, and just like Wangrin, the narrative supports their endeavor and makes them successful; while Wangrin, who is unwittingly backtracking on that journey and that endeavor, falls apart.

Conclusion

The story of Wangrin is the story of francophone West Africa; Bâ's story offers a perspective that aligns with our social fabric and experience, and ushers a new order for postcolonial West Africa. As Irele puts it:

The social and moral consequences of the drastic reordering of life undertaken by the French in the Sahel are at the heart of the historical reminiscence contained in *The Fortunes of Wangrin*. The most striking aspect of this process toward a new

order was the assault upon the local aristocracy. The realignments which the new system provoked account for the atmosphere of intrigue and the jostling for power that provides the testing ground for Wangrin's project of self-realization as recounted in this book, in which he is presented as an exceptional individual who takes advantage of the moral confusion and cultural misunderstanding generated by the colonial situation for his own self-advancement. The book can be read as the story of a quest--determined, willful, and even desperate--for self-fulfillment in a world of uncertainty. (Bâ X-XI)

Wangrin gives an alternative in the midst of this "bouleversement social", and that alternative is dialogue; one that is not and cannot be final but one that requires a perpetual re-evaluation of our social and historical discourse. Wangrin's end of journey is very symbolic of the dialogic endeavor; toward the end of his life, he commits himself into ushering in a social awakening:

Il aimait à réunir autour de lui des badauds ou des enfants. Aux enfants il racontait les fables et les contes qu'il avait recueillis tout au long de sa vie et aux adultes il disait: 'posez-moi des questions sur la vie! Je vous répondrai, car je suis un grand voyageur. J'en connais les grandes routes, les montagnes, les caverns, les forêts, les cours d'eau et les deserts. J'en connais les villes, villages et hameaux, j'en connais les rues, ruelles et venelles. Profitez de mon expérience et posez-moi des questions pendant que je vis encore'. (Bâ 346-47)

(He enjoyed the company of idlers and children. To the latter he told fables and tales he collected throughout his life. To the adults, he would say:

“Ask me some questions about life! I will be able to answer you, for I have been a great traveler. I have known highways, mountains, caves, forests, and deserts. I have also known towns, villages, and tiny hamlets, their streets, alleys, and paths. Take advantage of my experience and find out the answers while I am still among you.” Bâ 249)

He is clearly intentional when it comes to coalescing the traditional and the modern, the Western and the African; and he has always understood that such a mixture constitutes a great advantage and he is willing to share that experience with his peers. Wangrin’s life journey is the story of a social project molded by colonial experience; and that journey is heading towards a dialogic society. As the story unfolds, one becomes more and more cognizant of the fact that no part of that journey can be ignored: the traditional and the modern, the native languages and the colonizer’s language, Western education and traditional values are all part of the same puzzle.

The story of Wangrin brings to light a fundamental dialogic trait: the notion of unfinalizability, which is the element that wards off all forms of rigidity and dogmatism in a discourse. We will see that *L’aventure ambiguë* shares the same fundamental dialogic trait; however, Cheikh Hamidou Kane lays more emphasis on the multiplicity of voices. By creating a space for all the actors of the postcolony, whether they are African or Western, he unpredictably achieves a dialogic outcome.

CHAPTER 2

L'AVENTURE AMBIGUE

Author's biography and summary of the book

The endeavor, in *L'aventure ambiguë*, to bring the former colonizer and former colonized to the table of dialogue with an unpredictable outcome is the epitome of a dialogic text. Kane, unlike Bâ, relies more on the multiplicity of opposing voices in order for the reader to realize that a common future between different cultures is necessary.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane was born on April 2nd, 1928 in the village of Matam, North of Senegal. Like A.H. Bâ, he comes from a noble Peul, or Fulani family with a staunch faith in Islam. This northern land of the Diallobé along the Senegal River, mostly referred to as the Fouta Toro, is the entry point of Islam in West Africa. Like A. H. Bâ and any other child from a Muslim Peul family, he first went to Koranic school at an early age before attending the French elementary school. As a young teenager, around the age of thirteen, like Wangrin and A.H. Bâ himself, he was enrolled into the school for the sons of chiefs (l'école des fils de chefs), formerly known as l' "école des otâges". Four years later, he went to high school in Dakar then graduated with the Philosophy option, which allowed him to continue his Western education at the University of Paris. He had a very successful education in France; he earned a bachelor's degree in Law, which allowed him to join l'École nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer (ENFOM), he also had another bachelor's in philosophy. These years of higher education in Paris triggered,

in Kane, a fascination for Western philosophies and also shaped his career and scholarship.

It is important here to give a brief introduction of the characters that I discuss the most throughout my analysis. I will start with Samba Diallo, main character who starts off as a young boy receiving Islamic education, then moves to the West for a French education. Thierno: Samba's Quranic teacher and spiritual leader. La Grande Royale, the chief's sister and a relative of Samba Diallo. The Knight, Samba's father. Pierre Louis: a staunch pro-Western education. Paul Lacroix, a man who literary worships science. Lucienne: a young hardcore communist. Adèle: a mixed character who has lost all contact with her African roots. Both Marc and Capitaine Hubert are Pierre-Louis' sons.

L'aventure ambiguë is divided into two parts: In part one, we are presented with the childhood and background of Samba Diallo. He is from a noble family, but his father, the knight, puts him in the care of the Quranic teacher and spiritual leader of the Diallobé clan, Thierno. The latter puts Samba Diallo under a rigorous discipline which involves going around begging for food and severe corporal punishment. With this training in the wisdom of the Quran and Islamic lore, Samba Diallo becomes very spiritual and God conscious. Thierno sees in the boy a promising future spiritual leader of the Diallobé. When the time comes for Samba Diallo to go to school for a Western education, the community is very divided. Thierno and the elders are absolutely against it; the chief hesitates; La Grande Royale is in favor of the idea and is very adamant believing that it is the only way for the survival of their culture. Samba, finally, was taken to the Western school and being a good student, he earns the privilege of going to Paris to further his education.

In part two, Samba Diallo is in Paris; and due to the isolation and distance from his native land, he is torn between the two cultures, which throws him into a spiritual and emotional limbo. In Paris, he meets with people from different backgrounds with whom he constantly engages in cultural and philosophical dialogue. His father asks him to come back home. Back in his village, Samba meets the mad man, whose mental state is a result of a stay in Europe and the post traumatic effects of war. The mad man sees in Samba Diallo the successor of the deceased spiritual leader, Thierno; however, Samba Diallo has already distanced himself from religious practice. In his disillusionment, the mad man stabs Samba to death.

I have decided to introduce the author's biography at the outset for a specific purpose: to lay bare the connection between the author's life and the story. *L'Aventure ambiguë* is Kane's fictionalized autobiography, a journal de bord or log book about his life journey. The fictionalization of his life story is less a desire to entertain than a need to lay emphasis on archetypal traits of the fabric of his culture. We can clearly see that Kane is very intentional in his dialogic project; In an interview with Professor Barthélémy Kotchy from Ivory Coast, Kane gave us the rationale for such a characterization in his novel:

M.KUTCHY: M. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, à quelle période avez-vous conçu d'écrire ce roman philosophique? Cette époque coïncide-t-elle avec des événements importants de votre vie ou de ceux de l'Afrique?

M. KANE: Je crois que c'est depuis les années 50, lorsque je suis passé de l'enseignement secondaire du Lycée de Dakar à l'enseignement supérieur à l'Institut des Hautes Études de Dakar puis à l'Université de Paris à la Sorbonne

que j'ai senti la nécessité de tenir un peu une sorte de journal qui refléterait l'itinéraire spirituel qui était le mien. Mais il est certain que cet itinéraire spirituel qui était le mien était aussi celui des gens de ma génération placés dans la même situation que moi. Il reflétait dans une certaine mesure aussi le problème devant lequel se trouvait toute la société africaine, du moins la partie de cette société à laquelle j'appartenais, problème qui est celui du passage d'une vie, d'une culture, d'une hiérarchie des valeurs traditionnelles à une vie, une culture, une hiérarchie des valeurs qu'on voyait colportées, en quelque sorte, par l'école occidentale qui venait d'être installée dans notre continent par les divers colonisateurs, et en l'occurrence, par le colonisateur français. J'ai donc eu l'idée d'écrire ce livre, non point dans l'intention de le publier d'ailleurs, mais un peu pour tenir une espèce de journal de bord. Je l'ai donc écrit pendant les 4 ou 5 années qu'ont duré mes études supérieures en France, et c'est seulement quand je suis revenu au Sénégal à l'issue de ces études, que des amis m'ont en quelque sorte conseillé de publier ce livre. Je l'ai à ce moment-là mis en forme et je l'ai publié en 1961. (Kutchy 479-80)

M. KUTCHY: Donc tous sont des personnages réels.

M. KANE: Qui ont existé historiquement, mais ce que j'ai fait et qui justifie en effet votre observation, c'est que j'ai typé, peut-être que j'ai poussé les traits, j'ai souligné certains traits. Ceci pour faire comprendre plus clairement et d'une façon plus concise les problèmes qui sont posés. Ce ne sont pas des problèmes que j'ai inventés, les personnages ne sont pas des personnages que j'ai inventés, mais j'ai simplement en quelque sorte souligné les traits pour faire mieux comprendre la situation que je voulais décrire. (Kutchy 484)

(M.KUTCHY: M. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, at what moment did you decide to write this philosophical novel? Does that period coincide with important events taking place in your life or in Africa?

M. KANE: I believe it is since the 50s, when I left secondary teaching at Dakar high school for college position at the Institut des Hautes Études de Dakar then to the Université of Sorbonne in Paris that I felt the need to have a journal that reflected my personal spiritual journey. But, for sure, that journey was also that of the people of my generation who were in the same situation as mine. That journal addressed, to a certain extent, the challenge faced by the whole African society, at least by the part of that society I am from, that challenge consist of a passage from a life, a culture, a hierarchy of traditional values to a life, a culture, a hierarchy of values that were, somehow, being put forward by the Western school that had just been settled by different colonizers, and namely, by the French colonizer. So, I thought about writing this book, not for publication purposes by the way, but as a sort of logbook. So I had written it during my 4 or 5 years of graduate school in France, and it was only when I came back to Senegal after finishing my studies that some of my friends advised me to publish the book. Then I formatted it and published it in 1961.

M.KUTCHY: So, all the characters are real people.

M. KANE: Who existed historically, but what I did with them which, in fact, justifies your observation, is that I turned them into archetypes, maybe I exaggerated their traits, I emphasized some traits in order to help understand in a more concise way the issues at stake. These are not issues that I created, the

characters are not imaginary people, but I have simply underlined some traits, in a sense, to help better understand the situation that I wanted to describe.) [My translation]

Now, the outcome of the story is totally outside his control. What makes this novel philosophical is not just the discussions that deal with fundamental questions about knowledge and existence that are found in it; but Kane is able to subtly turn his life experience into a platform that is designed to reevaluate the experience of people of his generation; and in doing so, he creates the possibility to reimagine the postcolonial subject outside the classic anthropological representations; while making it almost impossible to separate the destiny of his people from that of the West.

L'Aventure ambiguë stands out as the epitome of a dialogic text in that the whole story seems to go out of the author's control; Kane himself struggles to delineate the essence of some of the characters. The death of Samba Diallo, for instance, constitutes an enigma even for the author, who later felt the need to create an alter ego for the protagonist in the following novel *Les gardiens du temple* where the protagonist, Salif Bâ, somehow continues Samba Diallo's journey. This lack of control of Samba Diallo's fate, which produces a sense of unfinalizability, is in fact a desirable trait in a dialogic text, but it is made possible by the heteroglossic nature of the narrative itself.

Heteroglossia as key Narrative Element

L'Aventure ambiguë is the epitome of the heteroglossic novel. Kane's creation of archetypal characters not only refracts the authorial intention to exacerbate the cultural debate between colonizer and colonized; but it also reveals, within this specific African society, the intensity of the contradiction between the voices and the conflict between

distinct worldviews and values (African characters, Western characters and the mixed cultured ones who are in between). In *Discourse in the Novel*, Mikhail Bakhtin proposes:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—

this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (Bakhtin 262-63)

Now what this multiplicity of and conflict between the voices achieve is to eliminate the long-held assumption that African societies tend to be homogenous, they have been, oftentimes, painted under the big brush of traditional societies devoid of any form of change and critical intellectual progress. The society represented by Kane was already in the process of change as we are going to see; it was simply waiting for a catalyst, which can be internal or external, and in this case, it is external. In *Autofiction and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's l' Aventure ambiguë*, J.P. Little touches on this issue in a few places during an unpublished interview with Kane:

[A]t the time of writing [. . .] it was to some extent to bear witness to Westerners of the existence of a black culture, a black civilization, a black sensibility, because Westerners could have access to that culture, to a knowledge of those values, and to that sensibility only through the medium of writing and books. [...] We ourselves were already committed to the demonstration of the existence of values and culture through the oral tradition, values and culture which were universal and which we could share with others. (Interview 16 Dec. 1997)

There was also the desire, arising from the consciousness already oft but steady loss of these values, to share them with the next generation: "I think there was also a second objective, and that was to supply arms and tools to the next generation of Africans, to inform the young people about these cultures, because, furthermore, we were better rooted in these traditional cultures than the younger generations." (Interview, 16 Dec. 1997)

There is, therefore, a tacit will to universalize in the writing of Kane. In an interview with Maryse Conde, Kane elaborates on the way in which he sees Samba Diallo as speaking for a whole generation—the novel is not simply the recording of one individual's development:

Samba Diallo doesn't only reflect the life of Cheikh Hamidou Kane, but [. . .] he represents a whole generation, that is to say at least several dozen people whom I've known, who found themselves confronted firstly by the problems of the Koranic school, then, around the age of ten or twelve, by the problems of entering the Western school system, and who then found themselves at university in Senegal or in Europe. Therefore, as it were, Samba Diallo is more representative of a whole group and a whole generation than of my own personal story. ("Cheikh Hamidou Kane répond à Maryse Condé"). (Little 74-75)

An example of a society that shares the same characteristics, i.e. the thirst for change, would be the one described by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*; change in that society is not the result of the colonizer's influence, the process of change started already, but the foreign presence did accelerate the eventuality. Many of the cultural values, religious beliefs and ritual practices Achebe showcases in the pre-colonial Igbo society were being challenged long before the arrival of the missionaries.

So, one has to bear this crucial element in mind when reading these stories. In this novel, Kane perfectly exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia which literally stands for "varied-speechedness", by laying bare the diversity of languages within a single language by drawing upon different world views from the same culture. This multiplicity

of experiences and ways of conceptualizing West Africa in Kane's clan creates a conflict and an opportunity to rethink social norms.

Now what do those different voices in *L'Aventure ambiguë* contribute to this change? Since characterization is a main factor in this story, I will more closely examine the main characters and the conflict between themselves and the other characters.

To begin with Samba Diallo, his philosophical quest seems to mostly take place on the second part of his journey, which is when he starts his Western education and engages more with Western philosophies. However, Samba starts engaging with complex and challenging questions early on when he is at the Koranic school before any interference of the French school. In chapter four of part one, we can see that Samba Diallo isolates himself whenever he feels overwhelmed, and his retreat is the grave of Old Rella. The questions he addresses to the dead person keep getting more and more philosophical. "Samba Diallo n'avait pas peur de la Vieille Rella. Elle lui causait de l'inquiétude plutôt et mettait sa curiosité à la torture. Il savait qu'elle n'était pas chair, ni os, ni rien de matériel. Qu'était-elle devenue? La Vieille Rella ne pouvait pas avoir cessé définitivement d'être (Kane 53)." ("Samba Diallo felt no fear of Old Rella. Rather, she caused him a certain mental disquiet, and tormented his curiosity. He knew that she was no longer flesh, nor bone, nor anything that was material. What had she become? Old Rella could not have ceased, finally, to be." Kane 36).

So, the idea that Samba Diallo's internal struggle with his culture and faith is the result of his encounter with Western cultures and civilizations is simply incorrect; and this goes back to the process of change that was already in place in these Africans

societies, as I mentioned earlier. We can see this internal unrest, again, when it is time for Samba to go back to his family:

Mais avant de partir, tu iras prendre congé du maître, avait ajouté le chef. À ce nom, Samba Diallo avait senti sa gorge se nouer. Le maître... En effet, il allait quitter le maître. Son départ pour L. signifiait aussi cela. Il ne verrait plus le maître. La voix du maître récitant la Parole. L'air du maître écoutant la Parole. Loin du maître, il y avait bien son père et sa mère, il y avait la douceur de la maison à L. Mais près du maître, Samba Diallo avait connu autre chose, qu'il avait appris à aimer. Lorsqu'il essayait de se représenter ce qui le retenait ainsi attaché au maître, en dépit de ses bûches ardentes et de ses sévices, Samba Diallo ne voyait rien, sinon peut-être que les raisons de cet attrait n'était pas du même ordre que celles qui lui faisaient aimer son père et sa mère, et sa maison de L. Ces raisons s'apparentaient plutôt à la fascination qu'exerçait sur lui le mystère de la Vieille Relle. (Kane 75)

(But before you leave, you are going to say goodbye to the teacher," the chief added. At this word, Samba Diallo felt his heart rising in his throat and choking him. The teacher.... What it amounted to was that he was about to leave the teacher. That was what his departure for L. meant. He would not see the teacher any more. The teacher's voice reciting the Word.... The look of the teacher as he listened to the Word. Far from the teacher, there were indeed his father and mother. There was indeed the sweetness of his home in L. but at the teacher's side Samba Diallo had known something else, which he had learned to love. When he tried to envisage to himself what it was that kept him so attached to the teacher, in

spite of his burning faggots and cruelties, Samba Diallo saw nothing, except perhaps that the reasons for this attraction were not of the same order as those which made him love his father and mother and his home in L. these reasons belonged rather with the fascination which the mystery of Old Rella exercised over his mind. Kane 57)

It is possible for a reader of this book to come up with theories about the symbolic meaning of Samba Diallo's death at the end of the story; as for the philosophical and dialogic implication, I will discuss it later. There is, however, another death closely related to Samba Diallo that is given less attention. When Samba Diallo returns home, he is reciting the whole Book in front of his parents as it is customary, and the narrator chooses an interesting way to inform us that Samba's ancestors are relics of a bygone society while positing Samba as the new beginning: "Longtemps, dans la nuit, sa voix fut celle des fantômes aphones de ses ancêtres qu'il avait siscités. Avec eux, il pleura leur mort; mais aussi longuement, ils chantèrent sa naissance (Kane 84)." ("For a long time, in the night, his voice was that of the voiceless phantoms of his ancestors, whom he had raised up. With them, he wept their death; but also, in long cadence, they sang his birth."); Kane 64)

From this point on, Samba Diallo never stops asking questions; and more importantly, he never stops questioning himself. It is clear at this point that the questions he asks about himself and his life, as a young person, predict the future Samba Diallo we see at the end of the first part and in part two of the novel. But he does not just question himself, he is very inquisitive about other people's lives. It is not, however, curiosity at

an unconscious level, Samba Diallo knows that these are difficult questions that society might have been avoiding.

This is what happens to Samba Diallo after observing his father who has been praying intensely:

La Parole doit continuer de retenir en lui, se dit-il. Il est de ceux qui ne cessent pas de prier, pour avoir refermé leur livre de prières. Dieu lui presence constant... et indispensable. C'est cette presence, je crois, qui lui colle ainsi la peau sur les os du front, lui enfonce dans les orbites profondément axcavées ce regard lumineux et calme. Sa bouche n'est ni sourire, ni amertume. Les prières profondes doivent certainement incinérer dans l'homme toute exubérance profane de vie. Mon père ne vit pas, il prie... "Tiens! Pourquoi ai-je pensé cela? Pourquoi ai-je pensé la prière et la vie en termes d'opposition? Il prie, il ne vit pas... À coup sûr, nul autre dans cette maison ne l'aurait pensé ainsi. Moi seul pouvais avoir cette idée bizarre d'une vie qui serait, de quelque façon, hors la presence de Dieu... Curieux. Idée bizarre. Où donc ai-je pu la prendre? Cette idée m'est étrangère. L'étonnement dans lequel elle me met e nest la preuve. C'est en tout cas une idée évoluée, je veux dire qui marque un progress de precision sur mon état d'esprit antérieur: elle distingue, elle spécifie. (Kane 105-06)

("The Word must continue to echo within him," the boy said to himself. "He is one of those who do not cease to pray when they have closed their prayer book. To him, God is a constant presence—constant and indispensable. It is this presence, I believe, which stretches the skin tight across the bones of his forehead and sets that luminous and profound expression within the deep-cut orbits of his

eyes. His mouth holds no smile, nor does it hold any bitterness. All the profane exuberance of life must certainly be burned out of this man by his profound prayers. My father does not live, he prays.... “But wait a minute! Why did I think that?” He caught himself up. “Why did I think of prayer and life in terms of opposition? He prays, he does not live.... Certainly no one else in this house would have thought that way. I am the only one who could have this bizarre idea of a life which could be lived, in some fashion, outside the presence of God.... Curious. Bizarre idea. Then where Could I have got it? This idea is foreign to me. The astonishment into which it plunges me is proof of that. It is, in any case, an idea that has evolved. I mean to say, an idea that marks a progress in precision over my previous state of mind: it distinguishes; it specifies. Kane 85)

It is important to understand the seriousness of such a question both in the country and community where Samba is from. Dissociating God from any aspect of life is simply not tolerated.

From this moment on, or let’s say from this question about man’s alienation from God, Samba Diallo’s journey becomes more and more ambiguous. He seems obsessed with the condition of man, namely the Western man in comparison to his own people and culture; and he is already challenging his own father about the French thinker, Pascal, and also refers to the philosophy of Nietzsche.

Now what is interesting about Samba Diallo’s profound interest in his culture in comparison to the culture of the West is not just the philosophical aspect of his questions; but their dialogic nature. In *Cultural Hybridity and Existential Crisis in Richard Wright’s*

The Outsider and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë, Marc Mvé Bekale states:

The Outsider and *L'Aventure Ambiguë* offer interesting perspectives on the question of identity as a constant negotiation and re-enunciation of self. These novels stage two black intellectual characters who find themselves trapped by the ideological and moral forces of their social environment. As we follow Cross Damon and Samba Diallo in their adventures, we realize that these forces are related to the dialectics of displacement, which leads to the dislocation of their individuality. [He goes on to say:] Indeed, the insight they acquire from their spiritual search does not open any doors to them other than those of solitude and dereliction. Samba Diallo's exposure to Western values prompts him to question the traditions that used to cement his being. (Bekale 3)

He uses the argument between Samba Diallo and Captain Hubert who believes that "the West agrees to give" but "refuses to take." in response to that Samba Diallo states:

Je ne suis pas un pays des Diallobé distinct, face à un Occident distinct, et appréciant d'une tête froide ce que je puis lui prendre et ce qu'il faut que je lui laisse en contrepartie. Je suis devenu les deux. Il n'y a pas une tête lucide entre deux termes d'un choix. Il y a une nature étrange, en détresse de n'être pas deux. (Kane 162-63)

(I am not a distinct country of the Diallobé facing a distinct Occident and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave with it by way of counter-balance. I have become the two. There is not a clear mind

deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange nature, in distress over not being two. Kane 134)

Not only does the passage above not support his argument, but Bekale's analysis also falls short on a fundamental level; he analyzed Samba Diallo's journey through a dialectical lense. The social project which Samba Diallo is leading his society towards has nothing to do with a conflict resolution between the two societies. The synthesis of the two societies, their cultural dialogue, is not an end in itself, but a necessary step to plant the seed for a dialogic world. Bekale is not wrong to underline the challenge of "double consciousness" that many in Samba Diallo's generation had to face but making it a central argument is limiting the potential and postcolonial purpose of this book.

Now I have to make it clear that this shortcoming in Bekale's analysis is not something unique to him; it is a generational issue. We have all inherited from the Négritude movement, and particularly from Senghor, that a cultural *métissage* is the ultimate goal and that succeeding it is the ultimate prize, which falls in that dialectic perspective. Even though Bekale does not agree with Senghor, his argument is heavily affected by and revolves around that tradition. So, in trying to explain Samba Diallo's predicament, Bekale doubles down in his dialectic logic:

L'Aventure Ambiguë came out at the time Léopold Sédar Senghor was reassessing his essentialist ideas about the African-Negro personality. Turning from a narrow view of Négritude as "antiracist racism", he became a strong advocate of "cultural hybridity ("métissage culturel") which, he writes, was along with art, "one of the essential features of *Homo sapiens*". While Senghor emphasizes the richness of the mongrelized self, Cheikh H. Kane attempts to bring into the open its dark side.

In a way, Samba Diallo's inability to cope with his "two-ness" signals the failure of Senghor's politics of "métissage" since the cultural landscape described in *L'Aventure ambiguë* shows a sharp contrast with the intersectional space "of giving and receiving" that was supposed to pave the way for "la Civilisation de l'Universel"¹⁴. Rather than fostering any viable individuality, "le métissage" results in what Jean-Paul Sartre has called "engluement", due to the blurring and destabilization of cultural boundaries. (Bekale 4)

I have dealt, in my introduction, with the notion of dialectics, which I put into conversation with dialogism in order to clear any possible confusion. Using a passage in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* where Morson and Emerson used the metaphor of the fish in the ocean and the one in the aquarium to explain the difference between dialectics vs dialogic, we can see that Samba Diallo's journey is not like that of the fish in the aquarium, but the one in the ocean with endless opportunities and innumerable possibilities. He wants to recreate the dialogue by removing boundaries, binaries and by removing all definitions to allow for a deeper, more challenging and more open-ended dialogue. When Marc addresses Pierre-Louis about the West and the periphery in terms of binary opposition pertaining to culture, philosophy and history, Samba Diallo retorted:

Moi je voyais, à propos de votre père, une autre portée, comment dirais-je?... plus historique. La conséquence en serait moins désespérée. Ce n'est pas dans une différence de nature, entre l'Occident et ce qui n'est pas l'Occident, que je verrais l'explication de cette contrariété de leurs destins. S'il y avait une différence de nature, il en eût résulté en effet que, si l'Occident a raison, et parle haut, nécessairement ce qui n'est pas l'Occident a tort et doit se taire; que si l'Occident

sort de ses limites et colonise, cette situation est dans la nature des choses et est définitive... (Kane 163-64)

(“As for me,” he said, “I saw in your father’s words another reach of thought—how shall I say it? —more historic. The consequence of it would be less hopeless. It is not in a difference of nature between the West and what is not the West that I should see the explanation of the oppositions in their destinies. If there were a difference of nature, it would follow in effect that if the West is right, and speaks in a loud voice, what is not the West is necessarily wrong and ought to be silent; that if the West moves beyond its borders and colonizes, this situation is in the nature of things and is definitive....” Kane 136)

What Samba Diallo does in his response to Marc is to prepare the terrain for the next stage; and that next is what defines our postcolonial task: that of “space clearing,” which, not only, will allow the periphery to have a saying in the matter of history, but it will also free both the colonizer and the colonized from the shackles of single narratives, or to use a language more in line with my analysis: it will remove the constraints monologic discourse. Samba Diallo states his goal clearly in his ongoing argument with Marc, Pierre-Louis, Adèle and Captain Hubert, all of whom seem intrigued by the story of the Most Royal Lady, La Grande Royale:

Je ne pense pas que cette difference existe dans la nature. Je la crois d’artifice, accidentelle. Seulement, l’artifice a forcé dans le temps recouvrant la nature. Ce qui nous manque tant en Occident, à nous qui venons de la périphérie, c’est peut-être cela, cette nature originelle où éclate notre identité avec eux. La conséquence est que la Grande Royale a raison: leur Victoire sur nous est aussi un accident. Ce

sentiment de notre absence qui nous pèse ne signifie pas que nous soyons inutiles, mais, au contraire, établit notre nécessité et indique notre tâche la plus urgente, qui est le déblaiement de la nature. Cette tâche est anoblissante. (Kane 165)

(I don't think that this difference exists in nature. [he said again] I believe that it is artificial, accidental. Only, the artifice has grown stronger with time, covering up what is of nature. What we miss so much in the West, those of us who come from the outlying regions, is perhaps that: that original nature where our identity bursts forth with theirs. The result is that the Most Royal Lady is right: their victory over us is also an accident. This feeling of exile which weighs upon us does not mean that we should be useless, but, on the contrary, establishes the necessity for us, and indicates our most urgent task, which is that of clearing the ground around nature. This task is ennobling." Kane 136-37)

It is very important to pay attention to Samba Diallo's description of the problem: he makes it very clear that the status quo is an "accident", a new normal which is "artificial"; whereas what we should try to establish, what is true "nature" is that place where our identities "burst" together: a common destiny.

Now Samba Diallo takes on a grave tone by making it clear that there can be no excuse for the periphery not to take responsibility in this matter. So, when Captain Hubert challenges Samba Diallo again as to why not "accept the inevitable", the latter explains what is involved in our "ground clearing" task:

C'est que, si nous l'acceptons et nous en accommodons, nous n'aurons jamais la maîtrise de la chose. Car nous n'aurions pas plus de dignité qu'elle. Nous ne la dominerons pas. L'avez-vous remarqué? C'est le même geste de l'Occident, qui

maîtrise la chose et nous colonise tout à la fois. Si nous n'éveillons pas l'Occident à la différence qui nous sépare de la chose, nous ne vaudrons pas plus qu'elle, et ne la maîtriserons jamais. Et notre échec serait la fin du dernier humain de cette terre. (Kane 166)

(It is because if we accept it and accommodate ourselves to it, we shall never have the mastery of the object. For we shall have no more dignity than it has. We shall not dominate it. Have you noticed that? It's the same gesture as that of the West, which masters the object and colonizes us at the same time. If we do not awake the West to the difference which separates us from the object, we shall be worth no more than it is, and we shall never master it. And our defeat will be the end of the last human being on this earth. Kane 137)

Cheikh Hamidou Kane did not use the term dialogics, but his characterization and analysis of Samba Diallo's adventure is fraught with all the components necessary to create a dialogic environment. When Professor Kotchy asked Kane to define the term "ambiguë" in the title of the book, he seemed to be desperately looking for the notion of dialogism but could not come up with the term:

M. KUTCHY: Alors donc, vous avez pris le mot «ambigu» dans son sens étymologique et non-pas dans le sens d'équivoque?

M. KANE: Non. Cette ambiguïté ne signifie pas que les êtres qu'on pourrait caractériser ainsi seraient des êtres équivoques. Cela veut simplement dire que, depuis le contact, en quelque sorte, entre ces sociétés dites traditionnelles, telle la société des Diallobe, et la société, et la civilisation, et la culture occidentales, il y a eu un processus de confrontation et d'essai de synthèse qui, du reste, maintenant,

affecte le monde entier, l'univers entier. [...] Personne ne peut demeurer isolé. Personne n'est plus isolé. Si nous ne sommes plus isolés, si nous vivons les uns avec les autres quotidiennement, il va falloir que nous lâchions du lest les uns et les autres et que nous tâchions de mettre au point des formes de civilisation qui retiennent l'essentiel de ce à quoi nous sommes attachés les uns et les autres. C'est en ce sens, que je parle d'ambiguïté; c'est naturellement à la société Diallobé que je pense, c'est à Samba Diallo, mais c'est aussi, depuis quelque temps, au monde occidental lui-même qui commence à devenir ambigu parce qu'il subit les influences de ce Tiers-Monde, il subit les influences de l'Afrique, il subit l'influence de la civilisation et de la culture noire. (Kutchy 480-81)

(M. KUTCHY: So, you used the word “ambiguous” in its etymological meaning but not in its equivocal meaning?)

M. KANE: No. This ambiguity does not mean that those people who one can characterize as such are equivocal beings. That simply means that, since there was a contact, somehow, between these societies called traditional, like the Diallobé society, and the Western society, civilization and culture, there has been a confrontation process and a synthesis attempt that, now, affects the whole world and the whole universe. [...] No one can remain isolated. No one is isolated anymore. If we are no longer isolated, if we live with one another daily, we will all have to make concessions and we will need to work out forms of civilization that retain the essential of what is dearest to one another. It is in that sense that I use ambiguity; I am, naturally, thinking about the Diallobé society, about Samba Diallo, but it has also been, for some time, the Western world itself which has

become ambiguous due to the influence it receives from the Third-World, it is influenced by Africa, it is influenced by the black culture and civilization.) [My translation].

Kane makes clear here that cultures can no longer keep themselves isolated from the rest of the world, which confirms the author's obsession with creating a space for dialogue; and this space turns out to be a perfect dialogic environment in that it has become unpredictable, unfinalizable and subject to different interpretations.

The Interaction of Philosophies

Now how about the other characters in the novel? How does their journey affect the dialogic message in general? These characters are the personification of the different paths that are presented to Samba Diallo's society; however, they represent the fixed version of him, the monologic discourse. Each one of these characters is, in a sense, Samba Diallo's alter ego, or at least most of them; except that Samba Diallo does more than just proving that there is an irreconcilability between the two cultures; instead, he renders them irrelevant.

The Diallobé Characters and Their Relation to Dialogism

The characters Samba grew up with can be divided into three categories: those who categorically refuse a dialogue with the West, those who are open to dialogue and the ones that are hesitant and undecided. As for the ones that refuse, we can use the example of Thierno, the Koranic teachers. He is the representation of a true man of God in his society, and his mysticism is nothing new in a society that is majorly Sufi. He represents the category that is doomed to die out; he has no place in the postcolonial

future projected in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, whether the dialogic project is implemented or not, and he seems to be aware of that:

Je ne suis rien, dit le maître haletant. Je vous supplie de sentir avec moi, comme moi, je ne suis rien. Seulement un écho minuscule qui prétendit, le temps de sa durée, se gonfler de la Parole. Prétention ridicule. Ma voix est un mince filet qu'étouffe ce qui n'est pas ma voix. La Parole don't prétendit se gonfler ma voix est l'universel débordement. Ma voix ne peut pas faire entendre son bruit misérable, que que déjà la durée par deux fois ne l'ait bouchée et emprisonnée. L'être est là, avant qu'elle s'élève, qui est intact, après qu'elle s'est tue. Sentez-vous comme je suis l'écho vain? (131)

("I am nothing," said the teacher, panting. "I beg you to believe with me, like me, that I am nothing: only a minute echo which claimed, while it lasted, to be swollen with the Word. A ridiculous claim. My voice is a thin little sound stifled by what is not my voice. The Word by which my voice claims to be swollen is the universal outflowing. My voice cannot make its miserable sound heard—a sound already twice corked up and imprisoned. The being is here, before it is raised; then it is killed. Do you feel how it is that I am the vain echo?" Kane 105)

Kane does something interesting in this passage; for the postcolonial reader, the person reading it through dialogic lenses, it confirms the irrelevance of the category we just mentioned, but the Diallobé Sufi will hear the last words of a believer who shows the utmost form of humility and reverence towards God.

The other version of the teacher is the mad man, and ironically, most of his conversations are between him and the teacher. Unlike Thierno, he is not a man who

grew up in the Diallobé environment and knows nothing else about Western culture, he lived in the West and has been to the Great War; it is the combination of those shocks that made him a madman. What is interesting about the character of the madman is not the fact that he is the “advocate for the refusal” to integrate as Kane himself explains it in the interview with Kutchy, but it is the fact that he pays a greater price than the teacher does; as the outdated, bygone voice of the teacher cannot be heard in the dialogic environment since it represents a rigid religious outlook on life, the madman who benefitted from experiencing both environments is punished for not getting his voice heard. He is punished for failing to support the dialogue. Even though he is depicted as a madman, when it comes to the question of the dialogue between the two societies, the narrator treats him as a sane person who is aware of the magnitude of the choice the Diallobé society has to make, but he simply refuses to acknowledge or accept that reality. Here he warns the teacher of what will become of their society: “jet e le dis: dès que tu mourras. Toi seul retiens la metamorphose. Toi vois, quand tu mourras, toutes ces maisons de paille mouront avec toi. Tout, ici, sera comme là-bas. Tu sais, là-bas... (Kane 99).” (““I tell you, from the time of your dying. It is only your survival that delays the metamorphosis. [...] You see, when you die, [...] all these houses of straw will die with you. Everything here will be as it is down there—you know, down there...”” Kane 78) “Down there”, meaning in the West.

Now let us oppose the other two kinds of characters left in this group: the ones that are hesitant like the Knight, Samba Diallo’s father and the ones that are open to Western cultures, namely the Most Royal Lady. Surprising as it might seem, the Most Royal Lady, who has the most progressive mentality in the whole Diallobé society, seems

to be less prepared for the dialogic environment I am laying emphasis on in this novel. She is presented as a strong proponent for opening the Diallobé society to Western cultures, but her rationale for joining the conversation is based on the wrong principles. Even though one cannot blame her for having a survival mentality, her understanding of this cultural encounter as a war where one type of discourse will survive, defeats the purpose of the dialogic project:

Notre grand-père, ainsi que son élite, ont été défaits. Pourquoi? Comment? Les nouveaux venus seuls le savent. Il faut le leur demander; il faut aller apprendre chez eux l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison. Au surplus, le combat n'a pas cessé encore. L'école étrangère est la forme nouvelle de la guerre que nous font ceux qui sont venus, et il faut y envoyer notre élite, en attendant d'y pousser tout le pays. (Kane 48)

(Our grandfather, and the élite of the country with him, was defeated. Why? How? Only the newcomers know. We must ask them: we must go learn from them the art of conquering without being in the right. Furthermore, the conflict has not yet ceased. The foreign school is the new form of war which those who have come here are waging, and we must send our élite there, expecting that all the country will follow them. Kane 33)

She has no desire for the ideal of a new society where all voices—colonizer and colonized—could be part of a greater dialogue; her choice is merely practical as she tells the Diallobés: “I come here to say this to you: I, the Most Royal Lady, do not like the foreign school. I detest it. My opinion, nevertheless, is that we should send our children there” (Kane 40).

As for the Knight, he is presented as a codicil to the Most Royal Lady's understanding of the social contract. He is portrayed as hesitant towards this new journey; and his hesitation turns into profound questions about Western culture, but he seems to be more concerned about the future of mankind in general. His vision for the future is more in line with Samba Diallo's trajectory, and his proposal of a model of society is purely dialogic. During a conversation with Paul Lacroix about Western science-oriented philosophy versus non-Western philosophies, the Knight says: "Je ne conteste pas la qualité de la vérité que révèle la science. Mais c'est un vérité partielle, et tant qu'il y aura de l'avenir, toute vérité sera partielle. La vérité se place à la fin de l'histoire (Kane 88)." ("I do not contest the quality of the truth which science discloses. But it is a partial truth; and insofar as there will be a future, all truth will be partial. Truth takes its place at the end of history." Kane 69)

And he insists more on the unfinalizable nature of the task at hand and the open-endedness of the future he envisions:

Nous n'avons pas eu le même passé, vous et nous, mais nous aurons le même avenir, rigoureusement. L'ère des destinées singulières est révolue. Dans ce sens, la fin du monde est bien arrivée pour chacun de nous, car nul ne peut vivre de la seule préservation de soi. Mais, de nos longs mûrissements multiple, il va naître un fils au monde. Le premier fils de la terre. L'unique aussi. ... Monsieur Lacroix, cet avenir, je l'accepte. Mon fils en est le gage. Il contribuera à le bâtir. Je veux qu'il y contribue, non plus en étranger venu des lointains, mais en artisan responsable des destinées de la cité. ... Dans la cité naissante, telle doit être notre oeuvre, à nous tous, hindous, chinois, Sud-Américains, nègres, Arabes; nous tous,

déginganés et lamentables, nous les sous-développés, qui nous sentons gauches en un monde de parfait ajustement mécanique. (Kane 90-91)

(We have not had the same past, you and ourselves, but we shall have, strictly, the same future. The era of separate destinies has run its course. In that sense, the end of the world has indeed come for every one of us, because no one can any longer live by the simple carrying out of what he himself is. But from our long and varied ripenings a son will be born to the world: the first son of the earth; the only one, also. ... M. Lacroix, this future—I accept it, he said. My son is the pledge of that. He will contribute to its building. It is my wish that he contribute, not as a stranger come from distant regions, but as an artisan responsible for the destinies of the citadel. ... In the city which is being born such should be our work—all of us, Hindus, Chinese, South Americans, Negroes, Arabs, all of us, awkward and pitiful, we the under-developed, who feel ourselves to be clumsy in a world of perfect mechanical adjustment. Kane 72)

Now even though there is a clear disagreement within the Diallobé group, it is in the method than in the principle; the disposition for a dialogic society is there. Whether it is for pragmatic purposes or for the true belief in frontierless future, the voices in the Diallobé society, wittingly or unwittingly, call for a dialogic future.

The Western(ized) Characters

Most of the characters Samba Diallo meets in Paris present the same problem as some of the characters we analyzed earlier in the Diallobé society: they believe in a monologic, rigid type of discourse where there will be dominant cultures and secondary

voices. There is the example of Pierre-Louis who, just like the Most Royal Lady, thinks all blacks should learn European languages and laws because he sees them as a weapon; just like Lucienne who believes that communism is the right weapon. As for Paul Lacroix, he is one of the most dogmatic characters in the novel who believes that science is the ultimate truth.

Adèle, however, represents another ambiguous adventure, whose journey calls for more compassion. Her hybridity (which is not really hybridity) represents the danger of the assimilation narrative put forward, mostly, by the French colonizer. Unlike Samba Diallo, she has never been given the opportunity to dive deep into both cultures. In the West, the uninformed eyes see these characters as a perfect example of hybridity because of the way they look while performing like their peers in the West; but in fact, they are nothing more than Western citizens. Their skin color or signs of origins does nothing except to put them on the spot whenever there is a problem related to their origins, or to remind them of the depth of the severance with their roots.

L'exil d'Adèle, à bien des égards, était plus dramatique même que le sien. Lui, du moins, n'était métis que par sa culture. L'Occident s'était immiscé en lui, insidieusement, avec les pensées dont il s'était nourri chaque jour, depuis le premier matin où, à L., il avait été à l'école étrangère. La résistance du pays des Diallobé l'avait averti des risques de l'aventure occidentale. (Kane 168-69)

(Adèle's exile was in many respects even more dramatic than his own. He, at least, was a "half-breed" only by his culture. The West had become involved in his life insidiously, with the thoughts on which he had entered the foreign school

in the town of L. The resistance of the Diallobé country had warned him of the risks of the Western adventure. Kane 140)

What we can learn from Adèle's story is that even a dialogue can be monologic. Adèle's appearance of representing both worlds is purely cosmetic; she, in fact, represents a monologic discourse. Unlike Samba Diallo, she is not equipped to challenge the rigid Western narratives, she can only reflect her Western identity.

Conclusion

L'Aventure Ambiguë is a book of opportunities; opportunity to explore the different possibilities offered by a dialogic discourse. Kane has blazed the trail for a generation that does not believe in a clash of civilizations, but one that has, instead, been grappling with the urgency of a dialogue between cultures in the most open-ended way. That is why putting *L'Aventure ambiguë* in conversation with Bakhtin's notion of dialogism constitutes a necessary and long called-for step in our postcolonial experience. In *Autofiction and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë*, J. P. Little reminds us of Kane's family tradition of integration of cultures:

Kane emphasizes his family was responsible for both the Muslim and the French education of a great number of families in the Futa, both by providing a number of notable marabouts and school teachers, at certain periods even practicing at the same time in Matam, and by showing them that a French education did not inevitably lead to a loss of tradition. The open attitude of the family is all the more remarkable, given the deeply conservative nature of Tukolor society in general, already alluded to. What is presented in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, therefore,

as a new debate on education, had in fact been going on since the time of Alpha Ciré's sons. (Little 79)

One crucial moment in this story is the death of Samba Diallo, which can be subject to many interpretations and speculations. Now before discussing the dialogic implications, let us stay in the interview between Kane and Little in order to know what the author himself makes of this death.

Regarding autobiographical elements in the novel, what Cheikh Hamidou Kane now has to say on Samba Diallo's death, provoked by *le fou*, is full of interest. He projects in several ways beyond the fictional death, to speculate in various directions as to what "might have been," even to a certain extent disclaiming authorial responsibility for the death:

If the madman had not assassinated him, Samba would still have been alive, and he would have undertaken to train the people, to open them [...] in matters of agronomy, in technical matters. If he had survived, he would have explained to the Diallobe that you can be a good Muslim, or not a Muslim, while being a good Diallobé. He would have explained to them that you could be Muslim without following the most extremist, the most exacting tendencies of the fanatics and the fundamentalists. He could have explained that. That's what he would have done. But he didn't have the time to do that, and therefore society hadn't yet had the possibility of perceiving the message. He had been told to go and learn else? where to "join wood to wood," to "conquer without being in the right," to acquire arms and tools to make society go forward, and he had learned the lesson well. But he wasn't given time to explain what he had learned. (Interview, *IJFS* 115) In

terms of an account of Samba Diallo as we see him in the novel, this seems to me to be unsatisfactory. (Little 84-85)

Ironically, J. P. Little disagrees with Kane's perspective even though he himself is not clear about the authorial intention. Little believes that Kane is projecting beyond the hero's death onto Salif Bâ, the main character of his second novel who comes back to serve his country; into the author himself as an intellectual who enlightens his people; or into the past when people benefitted from colonial education. In all three projections, J. P. Little's suspicions seem corroborated by the author's own confessions from the interviews, which brings Little back to ground zero. So, he concludes:

What we seem to have, therefore, is a highly individual use on Cheikh Hamidou Kane's part of autobiographical material. The author both is and is not the character he has created, making him a repository for cultural aspirations that continue way beyond the text. He kills this character off, in ambiguous circumstances, but only to resurrect him in further fictional form, and in richer guise. Behind him there is the whole weight of a centuries-old culture, which both Samba Diallo and his creator bear proudly, but which is treated in fictional form with great discretion and discernment in the choice of detail. Everything is concentrated, reduced to essentials. If the resulting fiction is sometimes ambiguous, it is a rich and suggestive ambiguity. The central dilemma remains crystal-clear, doubt surrounding only the resolution of that dilemma. (Little 88)

Not only have I been delighted to see Little struggle with the meaning of Samba Diallo's death, which justify his very inconclusive conclusion, but I am also thrilled to see Cheikh Hamidou Kane lose control over the character of Samba Diallo. This is a testimony to the

unfinalizability of a dialogic text. I would be very disappointed if there were valid evidence that Salif Bâ, somehow, is Samba Diallo; they are very different characters: while the former is a fixed, predictable character, the latter is malleable and unpredictable. The character of Samba Diallo has more discursive life in him while dead than being alive.

Comparative analysis of the Two Novels

What we have learned from the richness, complexity and ambiguity of these two novels is that they transcend any simplistic and monologic view of African fiction writing. Not do the works of these two authors discard the notion of “writing back”, but they also weaken the theory of an African literature driven by the “will-to-identity” principle. What we have here is a high-profile case of universal humanism – the philosophical belief in the centrality of human agency and morality. Even though protagonists in both novels embark on a very ambiguous journey, they are unequivocal in their willingness to challenge both their culture and the dominant colonial one.

And what is remarkable here is not their willingness to challenge cultures, but the fact that their society is predisposed to produce such a discourse. Everything that Wangrin does is enabled by the fabric of his society, which has made it very difficult to criticize his character without attacking the whole society that created such a phenomenal character. As for Samba Diallo, it is not just his adventure that is ambiguous, but the adventure of his whole society is so. One can observe the fact that all the troubling questions that the protagonist grapples with in the later stage of his life were in fact latent in his society. All the unrest he feels in his soul is in fact symbolic of his society’s internal struggle for meaning.

The dialogic nature of these two works is not just found in their unfinalizability, but also, as we will see, in their polyphonic and heteroglossic nature. This dialogic aspect has earned them a timeless pertinence to postcolonial discourse in Francophone West Africa. *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* and *L'Aventure ambiguë*, even though they were set in Mali and Senegal respectively, they are the most taught and commented novels in schools throughout francophone West Africa. This authority is a direct result of the endless possibilities they offer; every generation seems to find an inspiration in these works. Not only have these two authors, Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Cheikh Hamidou Kane inscribed West African literary culture with in a permanent ink, but they have influenced subsequent generations of writers throughout the region.

Kane's *L'Aventure Ambiguë* is more philosophical in the sense that he is more comfortable dealing with foreign ideas and philosophies as a source of knowledge as valuable as those of his own culture. As for Bâ, even though *L'Etrange destin de Wangrin* is purely dialogic in the sense that it creates an open-ended dialogue which does not seek to establish any cultural norm as morally superior, he sees oral tradition as a preferable form of knowledge transmission. The fundamental difference between the two authors is easily discernable in their discursive style. While Bâ believes that faithfully recounting the stories he was told gives authority to his work, Kane is perfectly comfortable extrapolating from his own experience and drawing lessons from it.

CHAPTER 3

LA NOIRE DE: POLYPHONY, HETEROGLOSSIA AND THE CHRONOTOPE

The Filmmaker

Even though he is neither the first filmmaker on the continent, nor are his films the first ones produced in sub-Saharan Africa, Ousmane Sembene is unanimously regarded as ‘the father of African cinema’. To paraphrase David Murphy, “Sembene is credited with a series of landmarks ‘firsts’: the first film by a sub-Saharan African in Africa, *Borom Sarret* (1962)”, despite all the challenges that the former colonial power posed; “the first feature film by a sub-Saharan African, *La Noire de (Black Girl)*, 1966), and the first black African film in an African language, *Mandabi (The Money Order)*, 1968)” (Murphy 104). These impressive landmarks conceal something even more impressive: his ability to transcend the theoretical, philosophical and literary constructs of his time and place to create a cinema that is still relevant four decades after its inception. I have come to understand that in order to stand any chance of understanding Sembene’s work, one has to place him in a dialogic environment. The concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia, and the chronotope are conditions sine qua non for a full perspective of Sembene’s cinema. We are all accustomed to the Sembene of the critics; the social realist director whose desire to fight injustice and resistance to authority trumps everything else. For instance, critics such as Olivier Barlet and Kenneth Harrow incorrectly accused

Sembene of applying simplistic (structuralist) binary opposites to a complex social reality. In *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, Murphy states:

The vast majority of the criticism on Sembene's work has focused on social and political themes. Most of these 'political' critics of Sembene's work have contented themselves with cataloguing the various themes evoked in the course of his novels and films, explaining away their relative lack of interest in aesthetic matters by casting Sembene as a straightforward social realist who is only really worth reading (or watching) because of the social issues that he raises...One major reason behind this critical approach is most analysis of Sembene's work is produced by French-language critics of African literature who have, at least until recently, retained a fairly traditional approach to literary criticism, and thus lacks the theoretical framework provided by the mainly English-language poststructuralists (a situation which is not repeated areas other than postcolonial literature, it must be noted). Therefore, one often finds oneself confronted in such works with a dose of aesthetic musing, accompanied by the almost obligatory detour into the favorite theme of critics of African literature, namely the 'tradition versus modernity' debate. (Murphy 6-7)

However, Sembene's work is more complex than the reductive view of the modernist binary opposition versus postmodernist cosmopolitanism painted by some critics. In order to understand Sembene's cinema, we need to bear two elements in mind. First, his motivation to become a filmmaker after independence. He realized that literature for an uneducated population was counterproductive, which made him shift

from writing novels to filmmaking after travelling throughout West Africa and further south to assess the condition of the masses.

Second, his tradition and education as a Senegalese makes his narrative style uncanny in the cinematic world. As Diawara notes in *Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African Film*: “filmmakers, like novelists, are influenced, consciously or not, by the narrative forms of the oral story-teller. They have been initiated into oral tradition before going to Western schools (Diawara 10-11).”

There is always, in Sembene’s film, the appearance of a social and ideological conflict. Are there appearances of Manichaeism as in *Camp de Thiaroye*? The answer is yes. Are there also signs of awareness raising against the need to stand against a certain type of bourgeoisie in *Xala*? The answer is still positive. But while Sembene’s work might be seen as solely militant, I see it as challenging to the audiences it is addressed to. And where more sophisticated critics see a purely postmodern representation of a complex postcolonial society, I see the uniqueness of a style. As Murphy convincingly puts it:

His films are in fact structurally designed to inspire debate: using a variety of techniques, both ‘African’ and ‘Western’, Sembene taps into the capacity for film to act as a space in which social, cultural and political issues can be addressed, in a similar fashion to the role African popular theatre as described by Karin Barber (1997: vii-xix). Far from the passive cinema spectator imagined in certain strands of film theory, Sembene’s ideal audience is one that reflects and (in the best-case scenario acts) upon the questions aired by his work. (Murphy et al. 65)

This ability to discourage any rigid interpretation and inspire a sense of perpetual questioning and reevaluation testifies to the dialogic nature of Sembene's cinema.

One of the deadliest traps for critics when analyzing Sembene's work is neglecting the role of spectatorship, which makes the dialogic approach to West African cinema a necessary means of understanding the filmmakers. It is important to know that the Laval Decree was not a disaster just for African filmmakers, it had a negative impact on African audiences who were left as passive spectators of foreign movies. Worse, they would be represented in the most degrading fashion or, to paraphrase Diawara "as objects of stereotypical images for commercial and anthropological filmmakers". So as Rosen states: "Ultimately then, [in Sembene's films] the spectator is ... conceived as a historical agent, an agent asked to reflect on options for comprehending the history of Africa from his or her own historicized temporality' (1991: 168). (qtd. in Murphy et al. 65)."

My analysis of Sembene cannot emphasize enough the role of the agency of spectators; in fact, without Sembene's audience, there is no Ousmane Sembene. And let us bear in mind the fact that in dialogism, as we already mentioned, any utterance is shaped by the anticipated response of the addressee; when that concept is applied to film, the audience and the filmmaker become part and parcel of the narrative.

The audience gives Sembene's movie its meaning at different stages in the postcolonial journey. The audience of the sixties who just obtained their independence does not react to *Black Girl* the same way the millennial audience does. Diouana's nakedness, outfit, and demeanor are more susceptible to a positive interpretation with the

new audience; and Sembene's narrative allow for that malleability, which makes it an ideal dialogic text.

Agency and the Dialogic in *Black Girl*

Black Girl (1966) is the translation of *La Noire de...*, which has two possible meanings: the black woman of... as in someone's black woman, or the black woman from.... The film stars Mbissine Thérèse Diop as Gomis Diouana, who is the black girl; Anne-Marie Jelinek as Madame, who is Diouana's boss; Robert Fontaine as Monsieur, who is Madame husband; Momar Nar Sène as Diouana's boyfriend and Ibrahima Boy as the boy with the mask. The film shows a young Diouana whose dream is to work for the whites. She becomes even more elated when she realizes that she will go to France with her employers. Once in Antibes, France, she feels betrayed by her boss who makes her do all the household chores like just a servant, which is not what she used to do in Dakar where she was just a nanny. Disillusioned about the idea she had of France and confined within four walls like a prisoner, she ends up taking her own life.

La Noire de is a chronotopic narrative. The narration shifts between Diouana's life in France and flashbacks into her previous life in Dakar. While the plot seems to draw a parallel contrasting the two worlds, namely France and Senegal; the different places that are presented to us seem to tell a separate story, a story that goes beyond the themes of colonialism, racism, and postcolonial identity. As I mentioned in the introduction to Sembene, the surface story will obviously be didactic, since Sembene believes that "art is political". One can clearly see the attack against the cultural hegemony of the West, raising awareness of the danger of uprooting for young Africans who see the West as the Eldorado and the Western neo-colonial tendencies throughout

the film. However, this film epitomizes Sembene emphasis on the chronotopic aspect of filmmaking. The understanding of the dynamics of time and place is what can help the viewer decipher the deeper message, Sembene's dialogic message. In *Interview with Ousmane Sembene*, Sembene states: "As far as I am concerned, I no longer support notions of purity. Purity has become a thing of the past. We have to open up to the diaspora for their and our own sake. I constantly question myself. I am neither looking for a school nor for a solution but asking questions and making others think (Niang et al. 176)."

Here, Sembene's rationale takes us back to Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*; the two authors have purposefully created a space that invites all cultures to negotiate and think of a common future. They have, therefore, created an open-ended and unfinalizable narrative: a dialogic space.

The film starts with the arrival of a large ship in a harbor in France; at this point, the viewer knows that it is France but the extreme long shot that shows the port and the ocean; then the camera shifts to a medium long shot with two men mooring a boat, then to a close-up on the crane and the gangplank. This parallels Diouana who is first shown in a full shot then the camera suddenly cuts to a close-up where we hear her inner voice complain about no one waiting for her on arrival. The same procedure can be observed at the custom service where one can see that the medium long shot of people and the luggage cuts to a close-up on bags and suitcases. From that moment on every aspect of Diana's journey takes the same pattern; whatever starts with the sense of openness ends up shrinking more and more till the death of Diouana. The real tragedy in this movie stems from this shrinking or absence of space as indicated by the close-up on the sign that

says “CHEMIN DE L’HERMITAGE”, which literally means the “THE ROAD TO THE HERMITAGE”; right before the sign, we have several extreme long shots of the beautiful scenery of France as Monsieur tells Diouana. This resorption of the space is felt by all the characters; Madame is losing her mind, even though it is for selfish reasons; Monsieur spends his time either sleeping or drinking; the kids are lonely and always beg Diouana to play with them to no avail.

This play with time and space, which I call a chronotopic narrative, symbolizes a deeper discursive meaning; Sembene challenges Western discourse, a discourse that is cultural, political and economic, a discourse that is destructive for both cultures. The message is clear, Sembene wants to return to the source, which means to dissociate from the Western monologic discourse towards a more inclusive and dialogic space. When one might understand the return to the source as going back to our tradition and folklore, Sembene hopes for a return to a society where each voice is heard, and each voice is challenged.

Let’s not forget that space is just one aspect of the chronotopic narrative, time also does play an important part of the story. The plot shifts back and forth between Diouana’s current situation and flashbacks of her life in Dakar in Dakar. The past suggests a life of freedom and choice, which is an interesting contrast given that, in Dakar, she was living in utter poverty, where most people can’t read or write hence the need of a public writer, a character played by Sembene himself; however, that is the only time Diouana can be seen, in these long shots, happy, smiling, running and laughing. That seems also to be the only time she can disagree and disobey without any consequence.

When she was leaving to look for a job, the camera cuts to a close-up on the public writer (Sembene) who asks in an authoritative tone: “Diouana, où vas-tu?” (“where are you going, Diouana?”); and the camera shifts right back to a medium long shot for her firm and defiant answer: “chercher du travail” (“looking for a job”). The same scenario is repeated when she got the job as a nanny and was running with joy, we can see the same close-up on the unhappy face of the same public writer, while the camera pulls away for a medium long shot of Diouana who is running around in an ecstatic state.

One can see more of this more of Diouana’s defiance and challenge of the monolithic discourse when she is seen in a full shot scene jumping and playing on the monument for the dead in World War II right after she tells her boyfriend that she will go to France, which the latter is not happy with. Let us not forget that this boyfriend is the one who has the picture of Patrice Lumumba, a figure of the African revolution against the colonial power who was assassinated.

We can see that, for Sembene, it is not about France versus Senegal or Westerner versus non-Westerner, but anytime there is a reductive, paternalistic discourse, Sembene reduces it to a close-up; while the free and open discourse is placed in a medium long to long shot. As I mentioned earlier, Sembene's search for a dialogic discourse looks like a return-to-the-source, which it is, but not any form of return, because an unconditional return does not guarantee anything; it has to be a return carefully designed to question and challenge the status-quo where every custom, every tradition and every discourse will be reevaluated. In *Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African film*, Diawara

notices the same pattern in *Borom Sarret*; in the scene where the cart driver hands money to the griot, where the latter uses tradition in his advantage, Diawara states:

The richness of the scene is such that it shows the spectator that a return to tradition, to authenticity, does not always bring about solutions to the problems of Africans such as the cart driver. While criticizing the inhuman westernization of the inhabitants of the Europeanized side of the city, the “Plateau,” *Borom Sarret* questions the unconditional return to tradition. Sembene creates a distance between spectators and the characters in the film which enables the spectators to criticize themselves in their tradition. This cinematic language takes its form and content from the figure of the griot, symbol of the oral tradition which Sembene uses as his point of departure. The difference between this first film by Africa's leading director and Western films resides in Sembene's ability to transform Western cinema's exotic characters like the griot and the cart driver into thematic as well as structural elements for the content and the form of his film language. (Diawara 10)

Diawara's comment above shows that Sembene's narrative style was more mature than one could imagine. After Diouana announces to her mother the news about the job, her mother throws the mask to the ground; the young boy picks it up and about to leave when Diouana takes the mask back; Diouana reclaims it and goes on to gift it to her boss. The mask Diouana's mother throws away and the one Diouana picks up are symbolically two different masks: her mother, representing society at large, the traditional society, has neglected or been forced to abandon their values, and Diouana reclaims it, makes it a new then takes to the West; not as a mere gift, but as a challenge.

The chronotopic narrative that goes on to resorb Diouana's space from the streets of Dakar to the four walls of an apartment in Antibes then to a bathtub goes hand in hand with African oral tradition. Sembene is very familiar with this linear structure which consists of a travel of initiation, a quest that leads the protagonist from the village to the city and a return to the village. In *Black Girl*, however, he disrupts the structure for specific reasons; Diouana leaves Dakar for Antibes, but never comes back. This disruption is Sembene's unique twist that he has used in *Ceddo*, for instance. But why not allow the protagonists to go back to their authentic tradition? The answer is clear, for the same reasons he uses a freeze frame in *Ceddo*: for dialogic purposes; as Diawara puts it in *Popular Culture and Oral Traditions in African film*:

What above all differentiates *Ceddo* from the oral narration in its closure. In the oral tradition, the physical return symbolizes the return to the status quo. The griot is conservative and his story helps to reinforce traditional values. In oral traditions, the story is always closed so as not to leave any ambiguity about interpretations. In *Ceddo*, on the contrary, the return denotes the union between the princess and Ceddoes. Thus the end of the film, a freeze frame, announces the new day pregnant with several possibilities. (Diawara 12)

This multiplicity of possibilities is the epitome of Sembene's dialogic narrative. In *Black Girl*, Diouana never comes back, and for the spectator who is familiar with the linear structure of oral tradition, this absence of closure rings a bell; it initiates the need to investigate and raise questions. As I already mentioned about the dialogic intention, the utterance/question is shaped by the anticipated response of the addressee/audience.

Sembene is well aware of this state of mind in his audience, and that is why he turned Diouana into an open-ended reality.

I mentioned earlier that Diouana's mother throws away the literal mask, which we know represent African tradition; but Diouana picks up the mask and makes it anew; she picks up the mask that is meant to challenge the narrative of the dominant discourse; what I did not mention is that this new mask does not solely challenge the Western discourse, it also challenges the traditional one.

In the last scene, we can see tracking shots coupled with jump-cuts between Monsieur and the young boy with the mask; this scene has commonly been understood as the West being haunted by their past in Africa, since the theme of traditional objects spooking white people is fairly common. However, what spooks Monsieur is the fact that he does not recognize the mask. He had an idea of the mask when Diouana gave it to him, that's why he told his wife that the mask looks authentic, meaning it was what they expected an African souvenir to be; then he placed it alongside other souvenirs. Now in this scene, the mask symbolizes the uncanny, and that's why Sembene always wants it on the face of the young boy who represents the future. The mask is Sembene's postcolonial message; a dialogic message that announces new rules of engagement; a message that constitutes a challenge for all cultures; but a message that is only available by paying close attention to the dynamics of time and space in the film, namely the chronotopic narrative.

Polyphony and Heteroglossia in *La Noire de...*

One of the most brilliant aspects in *Black Girl* is Sembene's ability to gather the different voices and languages with a very limited number of characters. This is possible

thanks to the chronotropic narrative as foundational substructure, which I have already addressed, and the clever use of music as we will see later. Dealing with polyphony and heteroglossia has a special taste in cinema since film allows for a more realistic articulation of these two concepts that are most of the time associated with fiction. Robert Stam refers to this in *Subversive Pleasures* when he states:

The advantage of Bakhtinian categories, I have already implied, is that they almost always apply equally to art and to life. Thus *carnival* refers both to a real-world social practice and to a textual manifestation. *Heteroglossia*, similarly, can designate a social, a linguistic, or a textual reality. *Polyphony* can characterize a poem, a novel, or even an entire culture. (Stam 180)

Sembene is able to give us many perspectives within the Senegalese culture; and that heteroglossic display seems to be more pronounced than the polyphonic one, but let us look, first, at how heteroglossia operates in *La Noire de*. The constellation of the voices of natives – the Senegalese characters – creates a very conflicting environment, a sort of nervous condition. Each character, even the ones that don't speak, represents a position that is almost irreconcilable with everyone else's.

Before analyzing the different characterizations, we need to understand the context in which these characters evolve. Senegal just got his independence from France; and even though that independence was given peacefully, there had been protests from the youth for that independence. The religious leaders, also, had used Islamic education to fight against colonial power and colonial education. That atmosphere created in Senegal a revolutionary mentality among the youth that made Marxism very appealing. The educated population, also, had inherited the philosophy of the Negritude movement,

and had already developed a certain ideal and imaginary of blackness and Africanity. And generally speaking, the majority of the population held dear their traditional heritage and Muslim identity. We can see how this whole social background unfolds in *La Noire de* to create a challenging environment for everyone.

I will naturally start with the character of Diouana; from the beginning of the film till the end, she poses a problem for the viewer who is familiar with Senegalese culture and history. Diouana, as a character, seems very floaty and out of place everywhere she goes. Sembene shows us a young woman who is too bold for her generation. When Diouana wanted a job, she just woke up and set out to look for it against the will of most people around her; and not knowing where to go, she turns to the administrative building day after hoping that it could be the ideal place to get hired. We also see a young woman full of hope and confidence; while all the other women jump towards Madame to be chosen, she remains calm and waiting. This strength of will and belief in herself and her ideals mirrors her behavior once in France; she is adamant about wearing her fancy clothes and high heels even though she is in a state of servitude, which, at first, might look silly and naive, but that outfit represents her ideal of a black girl in France with all her tradition with a little touch of modernity.

Diouana is clearly not the 1960s young traditional woman of Senegal; she is ahead of her generation on so many levels. It was not common for a young lady to travel abroad on her own, at least not a lady from Diouana's background. Now what is even more shocking is Diouana's freedom and agency when it comes to her sexuality. If we look at the historical context in which she is evolving, one will realize that the traditional Senegalese society would not allow Diouana's sense of ownership of her sexuality. The

Senegalese society like many other traditional ones would monitor a woman's sexuality; on the morrow of a woman's honeymoon, which is the wedding night, it was expected for the women to present the mother-in-law with the couple's bed sheet stained with the woman's blood as proof of her virginity. Even though this practice is no longer common among educated women, it is still practiced in many traditional places around the country, even in Dakar.

Diouana seems to not care about being a virgin and she lives her life as she pleases; but when her boyfriend tries to touch her breast during a photoshoot, she defends herself from that unbecoming behavior. Sembene's message for empowering women is quite clear in the characterization of Diouana, and the same feminist message resonates throughout his career as a filmmaker. Moreover, stripping a woman to underwear on camera was unimaginable in the 1960s and even today; nevertheless, Sembene shows a full shot of an almost naked Diouana as she is getting ready for the day in the morning and she is getting ready for bed in the evening, which also shows the monotony of her life.

One more element that is fraught with a feminist ideology is Diouana's interaction with the mask. Since I have already mentioned the meaning of the mask, I will focus here on the singularity of her handling of the mask compared to the rest of the characters. I have already mentioned that the mask symbolizes Sembene's postcolonial message; but we see that all the characters – except Diouana and the young boy with whom the mask is associated – have at some point neglected the mask. When Diouana is leaving to go look for a job, one can see the public writer order the young boy to throw away the mask; and when Diouana comes back after getting the job, her mother took the mask and throw it

away; but, as always, either the Diouana or the boy ends up picking it up again. Now I am mentioning this because we cannot ignore the literal meaning of the mask as a symbol of African culture and art; therefore, we can see a Diouana who also invested in promoting culture in general. At a time when women are far from being a driving force of literary movement, Sembene's characterization constitutes a radical departure from tradition.

The other native characters are more straightforward and less complex in terms of identity and message. Let us take, for example, Diouana's boyfriend; a young educated man who does not share the same passion for France as Diouana does, and like many young educated people of his time, he has sympathy for revolutionary figures and Marxism in general as one can see him in the medium close shot standing next to the picture of Patrice Lumumba whose fight for the freedom of his country and his brutal assassination has inspired a lot of the African youth. Now what is even more relevant to my topic is his unwillingness to dialogue. The way Sembene represents Diouana's boyfriend is the stark absence of response; whenever she brings up any idea that he is not comfortable with, he either responds with a question or simply remains silent.

Diouana expects answers from him but never gets them and let us not forget that he is the educated one and Diouana is not. When she asks him: "do you believe it is more beautiful in France?" he responds: "I don't know, I have never visited France"; and when she tells him about going, all he said is "to do what?" and that is the end of the conversation for him. In fact, it is in the voice off of Diouana that we hear possible answers: "he is upset, he will say: it's a domestic aid". However, when Diouana is

supposedly disrespecting the monument for the dead in the Second World War, he becomes garrulous and makes sure she steps down from the monument.

The same can be said with other characters in the rank of the natives. The public writer, with the few words we hear from him, always seems angry and suspicious towards Diouana's involvement with the whites, and his disagreement is clear from body language to close-ups on his face that allows the viewer to have a clear understanding of his position. Sembene gives a quick glimpse into the political class, which is depicted, based on their outfit and demeanor, as corrupt, selfish and out of touch with the reality of the people. The stature of the three people and their parlance seem to be a representation of Senghor, Mamadou Dia and Lamine Gueye. Obviously, Sembene never misses to take a shot at African politicians by showing their corruption and impotence.

And it gets worse from there because other characters such as Diouana's mother – who is supposed to be a representation of tradition – and the appearing characters, mostly around the public writer, are voiceless; only by means of close-ups does one sense their apathy. All the native characters other than Diouana seem to share this loud absence of voice and lack of response in the dialogue.

As for the French characters, Sembene presents the stark problem of the uniformity of discourse. Around the lunch table at the invitation of Monsieur and Madame, Sembene gathers them to give the viewer a closer look at the existential problem the uniformity of discourse represents. The message one receives from this gathering is clear: paternalism, selfishness and exploitation. Even though Madame chooses to treat her friends to Senegalese cuisine in order to impress them and to flaunt her beautiful life in Senegal – while she actually suffers from depression in her own country

– Sembene uses the image of the guests gluttonously devouring the dish to symbolize the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized where the former selfishly stands to exploit the latter. Along those lines, we also see how they inquire about the stability of African countries for their own safety, even though it is the West that tends to cause that instability. One can hear one of the guests talk about the stability of Senegal thanks to Senghor who, ironically, has always been regarded as a French pawn.

The other aspect that is closely connected to literature and film is the question of authenticity and exoticism. One of the guests gets up to kiss Diouana and says: “I have never kissed a negro lady”; another one says: “a true African dish prepared by the maid”; and a third one states: “since their independence, the blacks have lost their naturalness”. This propensity of Westerners to find the authentic African culture is one of the fundamental problems postcolonial scholars have to deal with; and African cinema, particularly, has suffered immensely from that authenticity myth.

Now this heteroglossic representation of both Western and African cultures seem to put everyone at odds with Sembene’s dialogic message except for the main character Diouana whose malleability makes it almost impossible for the inexperienced viewer to figure her out. Sembene’s message is clearly fraught with a sense of revisionism, a revisionism that consists of a rejection of official versions of African history and a reinterpretation and reconstruction of that history. In *Official History, Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembene*, Mbye Cham states:

While the contemporary African filmmaker repeats the historical moves of his Négritude predecessor, he does so with a different set of ideologies and

orientations, a different conception of history and tradition, and under a different set of social, political, and cultural circumstances. Given these differences, what emerges in recent African films is a radical revision and representation of the African past in ways which not only purge it of imposed European and other foreign remembrances, but which also foreground the relevance of the new reconstructed histories to the present challenges of post-colonial African societies. (Cham 21)

It is important to clarify that Sembene's endeavor to "enter into a battle for history and around history" and his rejections of "official versions of the past" does not result in replacing history with a "more authentic one" as Mbye Cham suggests – at least not in *La Noire de* – but it is designed to create a space ready to welcome new ways, a space where the challenges of cultures and history never ends, a dialogic space. Sembene wants a generation that is not only ready but confident to engage in the postcolonial world; and that cannot be done with preconceived notions about Africa that either come from Western skewed representation of African history or from traditional beliefs that are irrelevant to our postcolonial environment.

What this analysis of the heteroglossic narrative has done is to allow us to have a bird's eye view of the polyphonic structure of the film; all the voices and the non-voices (Diouana's mother for instance) have allowed for a accurate representation of our postcolonial condition and challenges. The presence of those voices is crucial, but it is in their interaction that meaning can be found. Sembene uses two techniques to ring a bell in the viewer's conscience: first, he uses mere character oppositions or conflicts such as arguments, yelling, harshness of tones, and in the case of Diouana and Madame, a

physical altercation. Second, he uses music, switching from the African instrument of Xalam to a Western piano.

For the conflict, I will use a few examples that stand out in the film, most of them will not need to be mentioned since I have directly or indirectly dealt with them earlier in the chronotopic narrative or in my analysis of the heteroglossic structure. Let us take as example the opposition between Diouana and Madame; the longer they stay together, the worse their relationship gets. The first cause of conflict is over Diouana's outfit; Madame reminds her after three weeks that she is not at a party. I have already mentioned that this outfit represents an ideal for Diouana, a symbiosis of tradition and the modern, and Madame perceives that as a threat to the ideal of domination she proposes.

This crucial element defines the rest of their relationship. Another defining moment would be when the two are fighting over the mask; Madame wants to keep an exotic souvenir on the wall, but Diouana wants back her new identity as I already mentioned that she has made the mask anew. A similar opposition would be the last scene of the movie with the young boy and Monsieur that I already dealt with. As for the music, Sembene makes it simple to figure out; anytime the scene is about Diouana or anything related to African culture or environment, one can hear the sound of the Xalam, which is a traditional stringed musical instrument from West Africa; and whenever there is a scene that focuses on France or French characters the music switches to the piano.

This polyphonic world created by Sembene, again, confirms his radical postcolonial message that is meant to shock and challenge both the dominant and the peripheral cultures. Those who are eager to find an African cinematic style could for sure put their finger on this aspect of Sembene's film.

From Short story to Short film: Voltaïque, La Noire De...

Sembene's *La Noire de* was first published as part of a collection of short stories entitled *Voltaïque*. Contrasting the short story with the film makes one truly appreciate the “dialogic imagination” at work in the film. Part of the third movement in early francophone African literature known as disenchantment – the literary expression of disillusionment and disappointment after independence, *Voltaïque* is a collection of thirteen short stories organized in three major themes: first, the role of women in society; here Sembene expresses his feministic sentiment. Second, there is the theme of injustice and abuse of power. And the third theme deals with African identity and racism, which include the questions immigration, exploitation etc. as portrayed in stories such as *Lettres de France*, *Nostalgie* and *La Noire de*.

Regarding *La Noire de*, the plot in the short story is pretty much the same as in the movie; Diouana, a young woman from the southern region of Senegal called Casamance, finds a job as a maid with a French family. In Senegal, she is actually a babysitter for the family and is expecting to do the same in France. But once in France she realizes that she was tricked; she finds herself locked in an apartment all day long doing all the household chores day in and day out just like a slave. All her dreams of discovering the beauty of France vanished into thin air. Disillusioned and disappointed, she ends up committing suicide.

Now, in contrast with the film, it seems almost impossible to do an analysis of this short story without laying emphasis on the questions of neocolonialism and alienation. All the key elements that make the film a dialogic discourse are absent: polyphony, heteroglossia and the chronotope are not integral parts in this version of the

story. What are the key changes between the two narratives that can have a considerable impact on the interpretation of the story?

The first major difference is the narrative style; in the film, the spectator has a close connection with Diouana; the voice over communicates all the different feelings that she goes through, compared to the third voice narration that confers all the discursive authority to the narrator. Sembene does use direct speech considerably in the short story, but this effect does not compare to the fullness of life Diouana has in the film.

The reason why the polyphonic and heteroglossic aspect of this story suffers the most is that it is not just Diouana's voice that is hushed in the short story, but it is all the other voices which, in the film create a sense of conflict and open-endedness, are simply nonexistent. For instance, in the film, Diouana is at the epicenter of different voices of society. Her character is in conflict with her boyfriend's and the public writer's who are portrayed as Marxists; she is also in conflict with Madame who does not value the statue which is a symbol of traditional society; the same goes with the Senegalese society at large as she is shown trampling a sacred monument. There are also other epicenters that are in an indirect conflict with Diouana, namely the traditional women who are silent and the group of white men invited by Madame who talk about Africa as a consumable object. In the film, the position of Diouana against these epicenters is to challenge those discourses.

However, in the short story, Diouana is nothing other than the author's object of anti-neo colonial discourse. The narrator unequivocally directs the reader into perceiving the inhumaneness and lack of consideration of the former colonial power towards Africans by using strong terminologies such as "négresse" (negress), "la bonne" (the

maid) – instead of Diouana as Madame would call her when they were in Senegal – and “les indigènes” (indigenous people).

The character of Diouana, as we know her in the film, is feisty and courageous; she is the person who, without formal education, dares follow her dream of exploring the West against everyone else’s will. She is the one who fights her French boss in order to reclaim the mask that everyone, including her own society, rejects and undervalues.

That Diouana, in *Voltaïque*, does nothing other than express her disappointment and disillusionment. For example, after Madame takes her from house to house to cook for other people, then tells her to do a better job next time even though the guests devoured the dish; the narrator tells us:

Elle réintégra sa cuisine. Ses réflexions se portèrent sur la gentillesse de Madame jadis. Elle abominait cette gentillesse. Madame était bonne, d’une bonté intéressée. Sa gentillesse n’avait d’autre raison que de la ficeler, l’enchaîner, pour mieux la faire suer. Elle exérait tout; avant, à Dakar, elle accommodait les restes de Monsieur et Madame, pour les porter à la rue Escarfait, et s’enorgueillissait de travailler chez de “Grands Blancs.” Maintenant leur repas l’écoeurait, tant elle était seule. Ces ressentiments corrompaient ses relations avec ses maîtres. Elle demeurait sur ses positions, les autres sur les leurs. Ils n’échangeaient plus de paroles que d’ordre professionnel. (Sembène 169)

[She went back to the kitchen. She kept pondering over how kind Madame used to be. She hated that kindness. Madame was good only for opportunistic reasons. Her kindness was for the sole purpose of tricking Diouana, to shackle her in order to better exploit her. Diouana despised everything; while before, in Dakar, she

used to take Monsieur and Madame's leftover food to her place in Escarfait street, and she would pride herself on working for "Important White people". Now she despised their food because of her loneliness. Those resentments altered her relationship with her masters. She maintained her position, they did the same.

They wouldn't exchange words except for work related reasons.] (My translation)

One of the most important elements in the dialogic analysis of *La Noire de* is the chronotopic narrative; as I stated earlier, it is technically a discourse on its own, separate from the text. In the short story, this chronotopic presentation falls short; the resorption process of Diouana's space, which the viewer perceived throughout the film, and which triggers a claustrophobic reaction in the audience's subconscious is absent in the short story. Even though the sign that says " Road to the Hermitage " is mentioned in this story, it can only be seen as a symbol of Diouana's prison like life in France, but it does not implicate any discursive rejection of rigid and monolithic narratives: Diouana in the film represent the willingness to challenge but also engage with western culture, she longs for everything that comes from the French culture. She asks for the people of France, the boutiques etc. and her main complaint is that she is locked up inside and that is not how she envisioned her life in France.

In *Voltaïque*, because of the message being centered around exploitation and raising awareness about all the dangers related to neo-colonialism, Diouana is portrayed within the context of Modernity's pervasive capitalist culture. As Kwame Anthony Appiah states in *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern*: "Modernity has turned every element of the real into a sign, and the sign reads "for sale"; this is true even in the domains like religion where instrumental reason would recognize that the market has at

best an ambiguous place (Appiah 145).” In the film, Diouana cries when she is given her pay, but her emotions in that moment are open to several interpretations; however, in the short story, she seems to attach a price to her labor: “La Belle France, où est-elle? Toutes ces questions lui revenaient en tête. Je suis cuisinière, bonne d’enfants, femme de chambre, je lave et repasse, et n’ai que trois mille francs C.F.A par mois. Je travaille pour six. Pourquoi donc suis-je ici (Sembène 171)?” [“The Beautiful France, where is it? All those thoughts were going through her head. I am a cook, a babysitter, a maid, I wash and iron the laundry, and I get paid only three thousand C.F.A per month. I actually work for six people. What’s the purpose of being here?”] (My translation)

And when it is time to leave, Diouana is accompanied by a group of women; each one of them asking for material things until the drunkard, Tive Corrèa, because of their unreasonable requests, yells at them saying “in France, money is not picked up off the ground” (173-74). For this reason, the mask does not have a place in the short story. Being the most important symbol in the film, the mask, as I mentioned earlier, is Sembene’s postcolonial message; and that message, the dialogic one, is nowhere to be found in *Voltaïque*.

Conclusion

Ousmane Sembene remains the most misunderstood filmmaker in African cinematic history; the honor of being called the father of African cinema did the disservice of causing critics to want to place him in that first generation of social realist filmmakers. It is unfortunate that critics across the board, one way or another, classify Sembene’s film as “Western-inspired modernism”, a classic Third World Cinema production. Even David Murphy and Patrick Williams, in *Postcolonial African Cinema*,

somehow share this classic view on Sembene's film. They divide his film career into three distinct stages: in the first period that ranges from 1962 to 1970 with *Borom Sarret* (1962), *Niaye* (1964) and *Black Girl* (1966), they describe his work as "highly influenced by Italian neo-realism". They describe that period as a sort of cinéma engagé. They see the second period between 1971 to 1976 as the most creative one with the three films, *Emitai* (1971), *Xala* (1974) and *Ceddo* (1976). This praise this period as innovative and distanced from the social realist nature of his previous work. As for the third period, they see it as fall back into the tendencies of the first period with films such as *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), *Guelwaar* (1992), *Faat Kiné* (2000) and *Moolaadé* (2004). Even though Murphy and Williams praise Sembene's skillfully constructed narratives, their analysis does confirm the reductive labels of realism and modernism that have been attached to Sembene's cinema.

Now I need to be clear about my defense of Sembene's legacy; is there a print of social realism in films? Absolutely, yes. His career, training and militant lifestyle all point out to a cinéma engagé as Sembene himself would agree. Valérie Orlando emphasizes this fact while quoting Sembene, in *Voices of African Filmmakers: Contemporary Issues in Francophone West African Filmmaking*:

Sembene, speaking in June 2005 to academics and scholars during a session of the NEH African Cinema Institute, emphatically stated that "ce qui est important est le contenu des films. . .c'est le plus important" [what is important is the content of films. . .it's the most important] and the filmmaker must consider him/herself as an artist who always makes sure that the "conscience du groupe" [consciousness of the group] is at the forefront of his/her film. Film, in the Sembènian sense, acts

as the voice of the people; a tool to challenge authority: “Les dirigeants politiques ont peur [de nous]” [the politicians are afraid of us]. Sembène's most recent film, *Mooladé* (2004), is a telling example of the social-realist film/text that strives to challenge political authority, corruption, and exploitation. It also is an instructive lesson to the masses who cannot readily access alternative views through printed media. (Orlando 448)

So, my contention is not whether Sembene's film is social realist or not, but the fact that his work has been myopically diagnosed by critics who took away from his films the most crucial aspect of francophone African cinema: its dialogic nature. I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that francophone African film is free and open-ended; that freedom has been erased in the critiques of Sembene's films. As I have explained so far in this chapter, the only way to get a full picture of Sembene's work is to place it where it belongs: in its dialogic environment; and it means that not only will critics have to take into account the meaning of the films but also the role of the audience, African oral tradition, colonialism and Western education; because in dialogism, as I have already explained, any utterance, any question is shaped by the potential answer of the addressee, and Sembene was well aware of his audience's need and environment; he was aware of our postcolonial condition. That's why his films are never an attack towards a group against another, it is always an attack against everyone, a challenge to all as Orlando states in her previously mentioned paper: “African cinema is both an art form and a medium through which Africa transmits its own world view, while also critiquing itself (Orlando 460).” Therefore, one cannot and should not look for any form of structuralist modernist tendency in Sembene's cinematographic work.

CHAPTER 4
TOUKI BOUKI OR THE CARNIVALIZATION OF FRANCOPHONE
AFRICAN FILM

The director

In his endeavor to subvert established norms and his tendency to experiment new ideas, Mambéty epitomizes the carnivalization of francophone West African cinema. My choice of *Touki Bouki*, in particular, is motivated by the fact that it fits the notion of carnivalization in two ways: first, the film creates an environment where all ranks and hierarchies are leveled out. Second, the film shows a crowning and decrowning scene as I will discuss later, which, according to Bakhtin, is crucial to a carnival.

Since my analysis of West African cinema draws a lot from the critics and scholars' treatment of African film in general, analyzing D. D. Mambéty, in this chapter, will considerably be marked by his comparison to Ousmane Sembene. Not only do critics love to emphasize the great difference between their philosophies and cinematic narrative styles, but they also love to paint Mambéty as the filmmaker who loves film for film's sake, compared to Sembene who is always depicted as having engaged into cinema for militant purposes. In *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten directors*, this is how Murphy and Williams introduces Mambéty:

If we examine the work of the first generation of sub-Saharan African filmmakers as a whole, [Mambéty's] films certainly stand out for their rejection of the

dominant, 'prosaic' social realism of his colleagues, in favour of more 'poetic', indirect and highly experimental style...Whereas his compatriot Sembene became interested in cinema (and literature) via his ideological concerns, Mambéty seems to have experimented with artistic expression from early in his life. (Murphy et al. 91)

This profile of Mambéty is quite accurate; to paraphrase Murphy, Mambéty was known for his love of art and self-expression – as Nar Sène mentions in his memoir on Mambéty – and he was very passionate about film. As a teenager he was a member of Dakar film club and he had “a successful period of stage acting with the troupe of the Daniel Sorano National Theatre in Dakar” before venturing towards filmmaking at the age of twenty-one with no means at all. These are well known facts in Senegal that made Mambéty a captivating figure, at least among people who care a bit about African cinema. The less known facts about the prince of Colobane, as Ukadike reminds us in *The Hyena's Last Laugh*, is that he was basically a Jack of all trades; he was a poet, director, actor, orator and much more.

However, even though I do agree that Mambéty's work is experimental and avant-gardist, which some critics seem to object to, I will contend that Mambéty and Sembene are more alike than critics like to portray them. The problem is that in order to grasp that fundamental similarity, one has to analyze Mambéty's work through dialogic lenses just as I have done with Sembene's film. During his interview with Frank Ukadike, Mambéty states: “A film is a kind of meeting; there is giving and receiving. Now that I have made it, *Hyènes* belongs as much to the viewer as to me. You must have the

freedom and confidence to understand and critique what you see (Ukadike and Mambety 143).”

I am thrilled to know that these are Mambéty’s words ad verbatim, because there is no better definition of dialogism than this statement. The interviewer, however, Frank Ukadike, might not be very familiar with the concept of dialogism; he senses something interesting in Mambéty’s work and decides to name it dialectic, which is, in fact, the opposite of what he is trying to identify. While describing Mambéty’s masterpiece, *Touki Bouki*, in the introduction to the interview, Ukadike states: “But it is less the narrative than its mode of presentation that carries the burden of meaning. Mambéty mixes elements of several storytelling techniques to create phantasmal images of postcolonial African society’s myriad failings. His presentation invites the viewer to understand these images in dialectical terms (Ukadike and Mambety 139).” Since I have, in chapter one, extensively dealt with the difference between dialectics and dialogic according to Bakhtin, we will see later in the analysis of *Touki Bouki* that what Ukadike calls “dialectical terms” are, in fact, dialogical ones.

Now what can be acknowledged as a major difference between Mambéty and Sembene is the former’s lack of interest in politics; whether one can debate the realistic nature of that stance or not, politics is just incidental in Mambéty’s film as he states in his interview: “I don’t want to tell stories. I only want to create, to give pleasure. As soon as I begin to make a picture, the creativity and the images come from imagination, from somewhere, which I call accident. Otherwise it is dilettantism. If my films have a political motivation, that is not my basic preoccupation (Ukadike and Mambety 153).”

The question one might ask is why did Mambéty show no interest in the political aspect of cinema? Because, for him, the destiny of African cinema itself as a mode of creation is more important than any particular message. His goal is clear, to create an African film language that consists of a perpetual reinvention of cinema. He states:

One has to choose between engaging in stylistic research or the mere recording of facts. I feel that a filmmaker must go beyond the recording of facts. Moreover, I believe that Africans, in particular, must reinvent cinema. It will be a difficult task because our viewing audience is used to a specific film language, but a choice has to be made: either one is very popular and one talks to people in a simple and plain manner, or else one searches for an African film language that would exclude chattering and focus more on how to make use of visuals and sounds. (qtd in Ukadike and Mambety 141)

And as for the reinventing of cinema, Mambéty states: “because I know that cinema must be reinvented, reinvented each time, and whoever ventures into cinema also has a share in its reinvention (Ukadike and Mambety 147).”

This is what I would call the great divide between Sembene and Mambéty. The former never felt the need to reinvent cinema since he was the inventor of African cinema in the first place, but also the message per se was more of a priority for him. However, what is interesting in this case, that made me state that they were more alike even with this great divide, is that even though their original motivations are not the same, the outcome of their film has been a perpetual reinvention of African cinema. Since this section is meant for Mambéty’s masterpiece *Touki Bouki*, I will focus on this aspect of

the creation of a new language and perpetual reinvention of cinema as a uniquely dialogic device.

***Touki Bouki* (The Journey of the Hyena)**

Touki Bouki tells the story of Mory and Anta, a young couple who meet in Dakar and who dreams of emigrating to Paris in order to escape from alienating life in Senegal. Mory is cowherd, as it is suggested in the beginning of the story; and Anta is a student from Dakar University. Throughout the movie, Mory is seen riding an unusual motorcycle mounted with a bull-horned skull, he and Anta devise various schemes to raise money for their trip including fraud, theft, prostitution and so on. Eventually, they trick a lot of money and a large amount of fancy clothing out of a wealthy homosexual, which allows them to buy the tickets. When time comes to leave, Anta boards the ship at the port of Dakar while Mory is suddenly seized by a strong feeling to stay as he runs away frantically to find his bull-horned motorcycle only to find out that it has been crashed by the tarzan-like French stranger who took it. Anta, disappointed, sails away to France while Mory, hat on the ground, walks away from his wrecked motorcycle, disconsolately staring at his bull-horned skull.

Touki Bouki is seen by the majority of critics as the first African avant-garde film, which should not be surprising given all the elements I just mentioned about D. D. Mambéty. Now being an avant-garde film in Mambéty's generation will call for a special type of approach even though the whole analysis will be done through dialogic lenses. So, while for Sembene's *La Noire de* I felt the need to do a mise-en-scene analysis, in *Touki Bouki* my analysis is going to be a more semiotic one since Mambéty focuses more on visuals and sounds as a way of expressing his freedom as an artist. I have previously

expressed the need to look at African filmic tradition as a free tradition, and Mambéty epitomizes that freedom when he states: “As I said to the children before, in order to make a film, you must only close eyes and see the images. Open Your eyes, and the film is there (Ukadike and Mambety 151).”

Analyzing *Touki Bouki* through dialogic lenses will always remain a challenge for a number of reasons; critics across the board have associated Mambéty’s work with certain filmic traditions and literary movements, unwittingly turning Mambéty from a poetic-magic filmmaker to a fixed and monolithic author. Among the most common associations are French New wave directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, Italian Neo-realists such as Visconti and Pasolini; and as Richard Porton says about *Touki Bouki*: “The film’s playful deployment of kinetic, associative editing, accompanied by a frequently poetic disjunction of sound and image, confirms that Mambéty was as inspired by Sergei Eisenstein and avant-garde traditions as he was by post–New Wave road movies (Porton).” This situation has created a sort of codenames in the sense that whenever *Touki Bouki* is mentioned, there will be an automatic association with films such as *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) and *Breathless* (1960) by Godard, *400 Blows* (1959) by Truffaut, *Badlands* (1973) by Terrence Malick and even *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967).

I am, however, going to analyze *Touki Bouki* in the context of West Africa, as an African film directed by an African filmmaker who believes that film originated in Africa as he states in the interview with Ukadike: “it is good for the future of cinema that Africa exists. Cinema was born in Africa. The instruments, yes, are European, but the creative necessity and rationale exist in our oral tradition (Ukadike and Mambety 151).”; and it is

that principle that dictated my choice of dialogism as a theoretical framework, for its freedom and open endedness creates a natural liaison with African cinema.

An African Carnival

I have mentioned earlier that my analysis of *Touki Bouki* is going to be more a semiotic one than a mise-en-scene analysis. This has a lot to do with Mambéty's heavy reliance on symbolic images accompanied by an unsettling use of music and sound. Analyzing Mambéty's unorthodox film through dialogic lenses will open a very clear path, which is the carnivalization of African cinema. And as Robert Stam puts it:

The mere prolific foregrounding of carnival itself, it should be pointed out, does not of itself make a film "carnavalesque." The Franco-Brazilian production *Black Orpheus*, for example, registers the phenomenal surface of carnival—dance, rhythm, music, color, laughter—but does so ultimately in the service of a stereotypical and Eurocentric vision...More interesting than the visual display of carnival is the use of carnivalesque strategies. (Stam 138)

I have already mentioned, in the introduction, Bakhtin's four categories of the carnival sense of the world, and I will show here how they are articulated in *Touki Bouki*. One of the categories is the idolization of Eccentricity and eccentric behaviors; not only does Mambéty introduce us to eccentric characters, but he deliberately turns the whole narrative into a rebellious and transgressive space that shocks the audience, whether the latter is Western or African. This restlessness and eccentricity is perceived immediately in the opening sequence of the film where both the traditional viewer and the modern or Western one find themselves thrown out of their comfort zone. As Murphy brilliantly

analyzes the opening scene of the film in *Africans Filming Africans: Questioning Theories of an Authentic African Cinema*:

In a static, medium-distance shot, we see a small boy riding on an ox's back, slowly advancing across the open savannah towards the camera. On the soundtrack, we hear what seems to be a 'traditional' African tune, played on a wind instrument. The spectator is led to expect a tale of rural Africa, perhaps even a tale of a simple, African past. However, as boy and beast move into the foreground, the sound of an engine revving up begins to vie with and eventually to dominate the sound of the music. The image then cuts to a shot of Mory, the male hero of the story, riding along on his motorbike. Filmed from the position of a pillion passenger over Mory's shoulder, the shot conveys a sense of speed and exhilaration far removed from the peace and calm of the preceding rural imagery. Time and location are fragmented as the spectator is shaken out of his/her original expectations and thrust into a tale of modern Africa, complete with motorbikes, motorways and machinery. (Murphy 243)

If this part shocks the traditional viewer out of his expectations, the final scene constitutes the parallel moment where the modern viewer is surprised by Mory's complete disregard for the bike, which has been his only real possession and mode of transportation, while focusing, instead, on the bull-horned skull.

There are a few characters that Mambéty uses more than others to personify the eccentricity and transgressive nature of this story. Anta, for instance, is not the typical Senegalese of the 1970s; her demeanor, the way she speaks, her outfit and hairstyle are the complete opposite of what is known and expected from a woman of her generation.

When the gay character is reporting the theft to the police, he mentions how unkempt and strange Anta's hair looks. Also, Mambéty contrasts her look to that of the other women in a very stereotypical fashion. We can see at the water fountain scene how shifts from a medium close shot of a young girl's breast, dressed in traditional garments, to a close-up on the girl's undulating buttocks. That gait and undulation of the buttocks is called "Riic" in Wolof, which denotes voluptuousness; and Senegalese people tend to regard as a trait that sets them apart from Western women whose inability to "Riic" makes them stiff, manlike and therefore less sensual. So, Anta's look is considered not feminine and, in fact, foreign. Mory's body is also treated the same way; when the same gay character is reporting to the police, he describes him as looking like a hippie with overgrown hair.

Just like Diouana's nakedness and sexual conduct represents a detestable behavior for a 1960s audience, Anta's masculine body type, way of speaking and gait is looked down upon by a 1970s Senegalese audience, which Mambéty exploits well by contrasting her to the women at well with close-ups on their curves, breast and gracious gait.

In the depiction of Mory and Anta's bodies, there are, however, cryptic oral culture realities; Mory is associated with the earth while Anta is associated with water, and the combination of these two have a deep symbolic meaning in West African culture. In *Aural Narrative Planes in Djibril Diop Mambéty's films*, Vlad Dima gives us an interesting interpretation of the union between water and earth as it pertains to Mory and Anta:

... if we were to separate the two characters according to cardinal symbols, Anta's symbol would be water (this complicates her character even more, given that she is also portrayed as masculine), and Mory's would be earth. Thus, we actually

have a gender role reversal: water penetrates the gaps in the shore, so it is Anta who “enters” Mory. In a later scene, we see them both on the beach, Mory covered in sand, even his face, while farther from him, Anta is unsuccessfully trying to maintain her balance, as if not in her element. The power and fluidity of the water medium opposes the stability of the land, of the earth, and in the sex scene there is a constant movement between water and land. Not surprisingly, the final decision in the film—Mory’s decision to stay put while Anta gets on the boat for France—also separates the two according to their respective elements. (Dima 47)

While Dima’s interpretation is pertinent in the description of the two characters symbolic representation, it clearly lacks understanding of the mystical realities in West Africa without which one cannot fully grasp the symbolism of the union between the two characters. In West African beliefs, particularly in Senegal, a union between a man and a woman is one of the crucial moments in life that require a careful mystical investigation. If the person is still attached to his pagan roots, they will consult a fortune-teller before entering the union; for those who care about doing things according to the principles of Islam, they will do what is known as “Istikhara”, which is a special prayer for guidance; but both are about predicting the future. Now one sign that predicts an excellent union is when the fortune-telling reveals the presence of water and earth; that would constitute a green light for the union since the mixture of water and earth brings about crops and life in general. If the fortune-telling, for instance, reveals the presence of fire and water, the union will not be approved because one of the members’ spirit i.e. the one with the water sign will be detrimental to the one with the fire sign the same way water puts out fire.

So, while Dima sees a separation that is predictable, there is, in fact, a discursive unity. The union of Mory and Anta, is, in fact, a positive union; It symbolizes the future that Mambéty sees as necessary for the postcolonial cultures, which is the necessity for both the discourse that reclaims traditional values—as Mory holds onto the bull-horned skull—and the one that appeals to the modern—as Anta sets out for France—to engage in a productive union like water and earth. What makes this message cryptic is the disruption of known structure in African films. The viewer who is used to African linear narratives will be thrown off by the ending in *Touki Bouki*; in the linear structure, to put it in a simple way, there is a journey, an arrival and a return; this type of structure borrowed from oral tradition is common to African filmmakers from Sembene all the way till the late eighties. In *Touki Bouki*, there is neither arrival nor return, and anyone who knows Mambéty a bit will know that it is purely intentional. As Murphy puts it:

Touki Bouki is quite a remarkable film. Its somewhat conventional story of a young Senegalese couple who long to escape to a better in Paris is represented in a highly innovative and original fashion: the willful disruption of narrative codes, the fragmented and circular nature of the narrative, the use of narrative digression, all mark the film down as the work of a highly imaginative young director, pushing film to its limits. (Murphy et al. 97)

Now Mory and Anta are not the only eccentric characters. Let us take, for example, the gay character; in 1973, when the movie came out, homosexuality was taboo subject. The Senegalese society wasn't mature at all about the issue. The Wolof word for homosexual is “goor jigèen”, which literally means “man-woman”, referring to a man who acts like a woman. So, when most Senegalese used that word, they meant a very

effeminate man; but Mambéty uses this character not only to emphasize the eccentricity of gay behavior in traditional Seneglaese society, but to also insist on homosexuality as an integral part of our society.

One last example of an eccentric character would be the griot lady; Mambéty uses her to attack the opportunistic nature of the griots who will sing a person's praise when that person is wealthy and will put you down once you are not able to give them money. She is also seen in a medium close shot and a close-up skinning a sheep, which, in Senegalese culture is not a woman's job. The slaughtering and skinning of animals is reserved for men. So here, Mambéty is not reversing gender roles in Senegalese culture but he is blurring the lines between them.

Another carnivalesque category at play in *Touki Bouki* is Profanation; whereby all notions of the sacred and cultural norms are brought down to earth and debased. In fact, Mambéty's intentional disruption of narrative codes also extends to an assault on some conventions established by other filmmakers, mainly Ousmane Sembene. In *The Money Order*, Sembene uses a postman who talks a lot, delivers messages and offers solutions to social problems; Mambéty, also, uses a postman, but this time, he makes him wander aimlessly around the city while seeming physically and mentally unfit for the job. The lady that sells the vegetables expresses how disturbed she is at the sight of the postman because she has never received any letter from her son who lives in France. Even though one might interpret it as Mambéty's attack on written traditions, the hint at Sembene's postman is too obvious.

He also enters into dialogue with the symbol used by Sembene in *La Noire de*, a film that also involves a desire to travel to France. The mask, in *La Noire de*, is the most

important symbol; it is, in fact, the purveyor of Sembene's postcolonial message. In *Touki Bouki*, Mambéty treats it as the most useless thing in Africa. Towards the end of the film, Mambéty shows a Western couple sharing their thoughts on Senegal, and at some point, the guy tries to explain to the lady how pointless it is to stay in Senegal by saying: "why should we spend our money here, to buy masks?" Not only does he attack the symbol of the mask here, but he contrasts this scene to the one in *La Noire de* where a group of French people at Madame's house discussing how wonderful Senegal is compared to other African countries.

This form of profanation that involves cinematic norms is not solely directed to African cinema or Sembene for that matter, he also attacks Western familiar structures. One can see in the film that Mory's bike is stolen by a savage, a character that seems to represent Tarzan, but, this time, the savage is white.

Mambéty, like Sembene, tends to qualify the dominant religions in Africa as examples of foreign influence while reminding the audience of the primacy of traditional belief systems. Islam and particularly Sufism is an integral part of the social fabric of West African cultures. Senegal has a population of more than ninety five percent Muslims, and religious brotherhoods have a stronghold on political and social spheres. However, in the beginning scenes of the movie when we are being introduced to Anta, Mambéty decides to muffle the sound of the Islamic prayer by different other noises: the cries of a baby, the barking of a dog, the sounds of cars, the sound of an ambulance. Also, while the viewer cannot see the man praying, one can see that no one else is praying. This debasement of the most important ritual in Islam can be contrasted with the symbolism of

the Kanaga mask: the Dogon double crossed bar with arms and legs that appears on the back of Mory's motorcycle.

I already mentioned the positive nature of the union of Mory and Anta as symbolized by the combination of water and earth; during one of the sex scenes, the camera cuts to a close-up on Anta's hand holding onto the Kanaga as she is brought to a climax—which is symbolized by a big wave falling on the rocks. It is as if Anta's true desire and passion can rely on and rest on the Kanaga mask, which is worn, in the Dogon culture, during rituals called Dama to transport the souls of the dead away from the village to their final destination, which is supposed to bring peace to the deceased and their descendants.

So, Anta's peace and satisfaction can neither rely on the journey to France—she already seems disappointed onboard the ship—nor on the Islamic prayer, but on the traditional Dogon symbol that seems to carry a better omen. Mambéty, in this film, does not forget one aspect of profanation: the grotesque, which is meant to celebrate the earthly and body-based in a very anti-puritan fashion. In the scene where Mory and Anta are playing on the beach, Mory told Anta that he needs to go answer the call of nature, but he puts it in the most uncouth way possible. In *Subversive pleasures*, Robert Stam states:

The Bakhtinian view of the body is antihierarchical, furthermore, even in an intracorporal sense. Bakhtin's leveling undoes binarisms and overturns hierarchies. He celebrates, for example, the inner body of the bowels, the intestines, and the blood as well as the outer body of "apertures and convexities,"

with its “various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breast, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.” (Stam 159)

Another key category in the carnivalesque narrative, which is dear to Mambéty, is the free and familiar contact among people. The population in Mambéty’s films tend to be homogeneous; unless it is absolutely necessary to dress a character in a unique outfit like the postman, Mambéty prefers to present his characters without hinting at any form of superiority. Anytime there is a gathering in *Touki Bouki*, there is a sense of uniformity between the characters. Even Anta, whose outfit is different from all other women for discursive reasons—to look masculine—is dressed cheap enough to blend within the decor. One can see, as well, that Mory and Anta constitute a perfect match even though they come from different backgrounds: Anta, no matter how poor her family might be, is a college student while Mory is a cowherd, probably not educated; because in the Bakhtinian Free and familiar contact among people, the unlikeliest people tend to gather and share the same space.

This is a tendency one will not see in Sembene’s movies; for practical reasons, Sembene dresses his characters in order for his audience to identify them at first glance. The corrupt politicians, for instance, are dressed up in Western clothes and speak French with a phony accent. But in *Touki Bouki*, the viewer is under the impression that people at every gathering are on the same level and look the same, and the scenes always start with an establishing shot to emphasize that homogeneity. Mambéty uses this carnivalesque technique in different films:

So, costume is not an ornament, it is the reflection of a situation. In *Hyènes*, the people of Colobane would not have been able to enact a collective murder if they

had each kept their individual clothing. If the mayor had dressed like a mayor, if the professor had dressed like a professor, then they would have felt individual responsibility. (Ukadike and Mambety 148)

In *Touki Bouki*, the impression is the same. In all the wide shots with a crowd - whether it is the parade, the wrestling game, the card gamble and so on – the viewer is under the impression that everybody is the same; outfits are roughly the same for different genders and age groups. As for the case of Mory and Anta dressing up for the parade, it is for the specific purpose of staging a crowning and decrowning which is an integral part of the carnival.

The last category, Carnivalistic *mésaillance*, is closely related to the one I have just dealt with; thanks to the free and familiar environment, opposites, elements that would otherwise be separated are united. Since I have already mentioned the unlikely union between the two protagonists, I will move on to Mory's motorbike; it is, on surface level, a symbol of the union between tradition and modernity, and that combination is suggested right at the beginning of the film where the sound of the herd of cows suddenly turns into the noise of the bike; a bike that is mounted with a bull-horned skull.

There is, however, a deeper meaning, which is the struggle involved in the union between tradition and modernity. And the struggle comes from the incapacity to associate tradition and modernity; no one, in the film, cares for the bike except a savage who happens to be white. In the scene where Anta is arguing with lady who doesn't want to pay for the vegetables, the seller, who is her mother, yells at her saying: "keep hanging out with Mory who has no dignity, no job with his ragged clothes...Always stumbling around on his bike with a bull-horned skull looking like a 'Tamkharit' bull..." The lady

associates the skull with a ‘Tamkharit’ bull; ‘Tamkharit is the Wolof word for the end of the Muslim year celebration where groups of people pitch in money to share a cow for the famous Senegalese couscous dinner; A ‘Tamkharit’ bull is a bull that is doomed to die. So, the bike seems to carry and represent what the other characters struggle to accept or understand. Mambéty portrays here the difficulty and nervousness of our postcolonial condition. As Fatou Kine Sene, Chair of the Senegalese Cinema Critics Association, states: “Touki Bouki is also a metaphor for Africa, especially in the abattoir scene where the animal symbolizes Africa’s struggle to escape the butchers’ grasp (qtd in Mambu).”

Now let us move to the primary act of carnival, which is the mock crowning and decrowning of a carnival king. Even though the carnivalization of a film, as I already mentioned, does not necessarily involve an actual carnival, Mambéty goes the extra length to materialize an actual crowning and decrowning of the protagonists. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin states:

The primary carnivalistic act is the *mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king*. This ritual is encountered in one form or another in all festivities of the carnival type...in a less elaborated form, all other festivities of this type, right down to festival banquets with their election of short-lived kings and queens of the festival. Under this ritual act of decrowning a king lies the very core of the carnival sense of the world — *the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal*. Carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time. Thus might one express the basic concept of carnival. But we emphasize again: this is not an abstract thought but a living sense of the world, expressed in the concretely sensuous forms (either experienced or play-acted) of the ritual act.

Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position...And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth. (Bakhtin 124-25)

The most amazing aspect by far, in *Touki Bouki*, is Mambéty's ability to articulate Bakhtin's carnival sense of the world within the context of oral tradition. Now let us see how every core element of the carnival is articulated in this West African context.

Starting with the crowning and decrowning aspect; we see that after stealing clothes and money from the gay person, Mory and Anta are taken into dreamlike parade throughout the streets of Dakar, just like a new elected president; however, the non-diegetic sound comes from a purely traditional wrestling game. One can hear the drum beating and the voice of a wrestler praising his own achievements (*bàkk*): naming people he defeated and how he did it. In modern Senegal, the wrestling game and all the performances that go with it are, in fact, a reenactment of a precolonial royal ceremony in which the wrestler is supposed to be a reminiscence of former kings. The scene goes on with a procession that involves the presidential guard with their horses, which is the only branch of the army that still has the pre-colonial traditional outfits; the camera pans across the presidential palace, then we see through the stationary camera the presidential guards playing the music to welcome the leader.

The next scene shows a more traditional ceremony with drums and praise songs where the griot lady who used to curse Mory and promised to kill him is now praising

him and dancing for him while Mory and Anta are sitting on chairs with crown-like hats. As for the decrowning, we see twice an overhead shot of Mory taking the hat/crown off and putting on the ground beside himself; the first one takes place at the scene of the motorbike crash where he inconsolably holds onto the bull-horned skull, and the second one is when he is sitting at the steps still inconsolable, and the hat still on the ground. In fact, Bakhtin talks about a mock crowning; not only is Mory crowning a mock one and short-lived as in Medieval carnivals, but it is also dream-like and purely imaginary.

The next core element in the carnival is the sense of *death and renewal*, a “festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time.” the slaughterhouse scene at the very beginning where the close-up on the cow’s throat being slit is very disturbing; but even though the image of a cattle herd as metaphor for human condition is nothing new in cinema, its articulation in African cinema carries a different meaning, and that meaning consolidates Bakhtin’s carnivalesque notion of death and renewal that rejects any form of absolutizing of norms. A cow, in Senegalese culture, is the animal to be sacrificed whenever there is a funeral in a community. Throughout the film, it has become clear that Mory’s life has been connected to that of the animals. From the first scene, where one can see the transition from Mory riding the bull as a child to him riding the motorbike, to one of the last scenes where he is frantically running after refusing to board the ship symbolized by another scared cow being slaughtered at the slaughterhouse. So, the sacrifice of cows symbolizes Mory’s death.

Now how about his rebirth? *Touki Bouki* focuses on bulls and cows from beginning to end, and as I already mentioned, those are the animals to be sacrificed whenever there is death in a Senegalese community. However, in the scene following the

attack on Mory by a group of students, the hysteric griot lady tells Anta that Mory has committed suicide in the ocean. Right after she says so, the camera cuts to a close-up on an animal being slaughtered; this time not a cow, but a lamb. In the Senegalese culture, whenever there is a newborn, a lamb has to be sacrificed; this sacrificial lamb metaphor finds its roots in all Abrahamic traditions, but in the context of Senegal, it is inherited from Islam.

So right after the lamb is sacrificed, Anta finds Mory, like a newborn, naked by the ocean and she proceeds to have sexual intercourse with him as if to give him life again; and as I mentioned earlier, Anta representing Water gives life to Mory who represents the earth. This scene is interesting in the sense that the viewer assumes Mory is dead till they see him lying next to Anta at the end of the scene. When Anta comes running down the steps to find Mory, the camera zooms in on the ravens flying in the sky; we hear first the ravens cawing followed by the echoing of the devilish laughter of the griot lady who announced earlier that Mory was dead. And it goes without saying that the symbol of the raven as announcer of death is common to almost all cultures.

After this whole imagery of death, the camera cuts to a close-up on the lifeless sacrificial lamb as the blood is flowing on the floor followed by a full shot of Anta holding onto the rocks in an interesting position: she sticks her buttocks out, stretching her hands upward while staring at the ground as if she was feeling the pangs of childbirth. This scene becomes more meaningful with the non-diegetic sound of a person gasping and of what sounds like a cow mooing in pain as if it is giving birth.

The next sequence shows Anta looking down in a low-angle medium shot; here, the viewer does not know whether she is staring at the dead body of Mory or at the

sacrificed lamb; but suddenly, in her dominant position, she strips herself naked and lowers herself slowly to the ground till she disappears from the camera. At this point, the viewer can guess the sexual intercourse, but nothing indicates the presence of Mory. Anta's moaning and groaning, and the movement of her hand on the Kanaga mask indicating her intense pleasure and finally reaching a climax as symbolized by the waves hitting the rocks, could also conjure up the idea of a woman giving birth. This whole scene is also very mystical, and one should bear in mind that Senegal a fundamentally Sufi country, which is very noticeable in Mambéty's work.

The following scene shows Mory alive, naked like a newborn, which presages Mory's nakedness at the beginning of the parade in their stolen car as I discussed earlier. The complexity and cultural density of this scene has made me wonder whether it is possible for a Western critic to fully grasp the content of Mambéty's film; as Murphy and Williams state about *Touki Bouki*:

The film consistently veers away from narrative realism into a series of fantasy or dreamlike sequences, and the fragmented narrative structure obliges the spectator to question his or her understanding of events. The film's heady mix of Western youth culture - rock music, motorbikes and sex - and 'traditional' Senegalese culture - the slaughter of animals, the evocation of a spiritual, mystical dimension to African life - reveal the cultural ambiguities and tensions that make Mambéty's filmmaking so powerful. (Murphy et al. 92)

Now the question one might ask is why would Mambéty subscribe to this idea of death and renewal and the sense of all-annihilating and all-renewing? The answer is clear, Mambéty nurtures ambivalence towards norms and he idolizes change for the sake of

change; that's why Mory's journey starts from riding a bull to riding a motorbike, and from dreaming of emigrating to France to refusing to leave his land. Even though Anta is the dominant spirit who symbolically gives life to Mory, her ways are not guaranteed to be erected as authoritative. In the scene on the beach, Mory, whose character is associated with earth, is covered in sand while, who throughout the film is associated with the water that is supposed to penetrate Mory seems incapable of finding her balance on the sand, which also mirror her subsequent disappointment as Mory refuses to board the ship.

Nothing can be absolute, definitive or monolithic as suggested by the ending of the movie in which we can see flashbacks of the scene where Mory is lying naked next to Anta after their sexual intercourse and of the first scene of the movie with the camera zooming in on the young boy riding the cow. Both of these scenes connote new beginnings. The former, as I just discussed, symbolizes a rebirth while the latter denotes a transition from traditional culture into the postcolonial environment. This deep carnivalesque urge to deride and subvert the norms is part and parcel of Mambéty's filmmaking, and going back to Murphy and Williams:

For Mambéty, cinema itself seems to be a transgressive space in which social and cultural norms can be questioned: it is the space in which the contemporary griot can assume, inform and entrance his audience. This vision of transgression and rebelliousness is primarily a comic one. Unlike Sembene, radical heroes, Mambéty's rebels are not loaded with any specific moral or political message. Their rebellion is designed to puncture pomposity, arrogance and authority, more than to draw attention to the ills of society: the 'rebellion' of Badou Boy, Mory

and Anta takes the form of a burlesque caper, complete with comic chases, pratfalls and cases of mistaken identity. (Murphy et al. 101-02)

Conclusion

D. D. Mambéty died in 1998 at the height of his fame; and even though by the 1990s most critics have given up on the obsession to find the true nature of African cinema, Mambéty could be regarded as the filmmaker that defines the new West African cinematic language. While his work, just like Sembene's, is fundamentally dialogic, his resolve to annihilate all hierarchies and norms has made his films, and in particular *Touki Bouki*, a perfect platform for a carnivalesque narrative. This carnivalization of his film is what separates Mambéty from all other filmmakers. One can see that all the Bakhtinian categories of the carnival sense of the world are present in *Touki Bouki*: the Familiar and free interaction between people, Eccentricity, Carnivalistic *mésaillance*, Profanation and most importantly the mock crowning and decrowning of a carnival king.

What is amazing in *Touki Bouki* is not the presence of the carnival as presented by Bakhtin, but how it effortlessly fits within the oral tradition context. This chemistry has been made possible thanks to Mambéty's high reliance on oral tradition imagery. In his interview with Ukadike, he states: "Oral tradition is a tradition of images. What is said is stronger than what is written; the word addresses itself to the imagination, not the ear. Imagination creates the image, and the image creates cinema, so we are in direct lineage as cinema's parents (Ukadike and Mambety 151)."

This belief in the inherent nature of oral tradition to be conducive to a cinematic narrative does not impede at all Mambéty's adamant critique of all traditions and norms including the oral ones. Understanding the dialogic intention and the role of the

carnivalization of African cinema in Mambéty's film will make clear the need to dispel all the different categorizations done by critics. Even scholars like Murphy and Williams could not resist but categorize Mambéty's films as a modernist production, positing that modernism is not as monolithic as suggested by scholars like Bhabha and Young, and that "Mambéty's work reflects both the utopian and the dystopian nature of modernity."

In their conclusion, they state:

None the less, as the films of Djibril Diop Mambéty illustrate, the cinematic exploration of what it means to be human in postcolonial Africa might just help us to break out of the endless terminological debates about the modern, the postmodern and the postcolonial, and act as a useful and necessary step in exploring a common sense of humanity and elaborating a new humanism for the twenty-first century. (Murphy et al. 109)

While I will reject their categorization of Mambéty's film as a modernist work due to the fact that their definition and understanding of modernism is subjective; I am comfortable with their conclusion in that it aligns itself with the dialogic intention. Even though Mambéty's work is politically and culturally ambiguous, his message is meant to be universal, and that universal endeavor is what makes it dialogic. In *The Hyena's Last Laugh*, when asked about the presence of an Asian bodyguard in *Hyènes*, he states:

The point is not that she is Asian. The point is that everyone in Colobane-everyone everywhere-lives within a system of power that embraces the West, Africa, and the land of the rising sun. There is a scene where this woman comes in and reads: she reads of the vanity of life, the vanity of vengeance; that is totally universal. My goal was to make a continental film, one that crosses boundaries.

To make *Hyènes* even more continental, we borrowed elephants from the Masai of Kenya, hyenas from Uganda, and people from Senegal. And to make it global, we borrowed somebody from Japan, and carnival scenes from the annual Carnival of Humanity of the French Communist Party in Paris. All of these are intended to open the horizons, to make the film universal. The film depicts a human drama. My task was to identify the enemy of humankind: money, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. I think my target is clear. (Ukadike and Mambety 144)

In fact, his target is very clear: the creation of a cinematic language that is universal. And as I stated in the introduction to this analysis of Mambéty, his universal endeavor—which is the dialogic intention, no matter how unique and rebellious the style might be, is what makes his film very similar to Ousmane Sembene’s.

Comparative analysis of the Two Films

When Frederic Jameson stated that “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel (Jameson 69)”, it was shocking to many critics that he started with “All”; however, his “grossly oversimplified” statement is symptomatic of the general tendency of dominant cultures to categorize peripheral cultures based on their own standards or on preconceived notions. African cinema has taken the lion’s share in this categorization. That situation has a lot to do with the relatively young age African cinema, and with the familiarity of Western critics with a long tradition of Western filmmaking. In the context

of West African francophone film, things are even more out of control given that France has had a stranglehold on the production of francophone African cinema since its inception.

The films of Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambéty constitute the antidote to that monolithic representation of African cinema and of Africans in general. These two filmmakers have turned African cinema into an exceptional film culture by allowing a deeply cultural representation to carry a universal message. This universal scope has been made possible by embracing a truly dialogical mode of communication and representation: while Sembene involves his audience in a structural way by creating a heteroglossic environment which is made familiar to the viewer by the chronotopic structure, Mambéty invites his audience through carnivalesque means where there are no spectators but, instead, everyone becomes a participant.

Sembene's chronotopic structure allows the spectator to see beyond the social-realist message a need for a return to the source; this return is not a mere nostalgic journey, but an opportunity to reject official versions of history whether they are African or Western. This will to shock and challenge cultures has led to a disruption of cinematographic traditions that have been imposed on passive audiences; and in *La Noire de*, he even challenges the oral tradition linear structure by not allowing a physical return of the protagonist for the purpose of eliminating any form of status quo. Sembene's narrative style is designed to create a sense of conflict and tension that is meant to trigger a new way of thinking.

Mambéty's style being more rebellious towards traditions and norms addresses the political message in an oblique way while focusing on culture which turns the journey

of his characters into ambiguous adventures. The experimental nature of Mambéty's films has made critics associate his work with the French New Wave directors while *Touki Bouki* has been hailed as the first Avant-garde African film.

Now my reason for choosing these two filmmakers and these two films was threefold. First, I felt the need to revisit West African Francophone cinema given the cacophonous voices of critics and scholars whose failure to objectively analyze African cinema stems more from their obsession for an authentic African film than from normal biases that affect any outsider. In fact, I am not against Western critics, for their insight and scholarship have been crucial in my analysis of African cinema; and I agree with David Murphy when he states that Christopher Miller's belief "that there is an *authentic* African point of view to which the Western critic should vainly aspire, is vitally flawed (246)." Murphy even quoted from Villemén Mikhail Bakhtin's argument about the importance of the outsider's point of view:

Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place and time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his/her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding ... We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign. (qtd. in Murphy 246)

However, unlike Murphy, most Western critics seem to not recognize enough their cultural specificities and biases when looking at African cinema. So my goal is to go back to the origins with the purpose of unlearning while using my cultural edge in order to decipher the message of the founding fathers of West African cinema; as we say in Wolof: “if you do not know where you are heading toward, go back where you came from.”

Second, I felt the need to reconcile Sembene and Mambéty. Because it is exciting to do so, critics tend to place the two directors at the antipode of each other; while such a representation might be valid from an aesthetic, stylistic and even philosophical perspective, it has, unfortunately, derailed students of African cinema from understanding these two authors’ postcolonial message, which is a humanistic and dialogic message. Like Frantz Fanon, these two share the belief that the work of the intellectual is to liberate both the colonizer and the colonized, and in doing so everything has to start anew.

Third, analyzing *La Noire de* and *Touki Bouki*, the two most cryptic and most misunderstood films, has allowed me to address the most imminent questions that surround the scholarship on francophone West African film. Understanding the impact of these two films in the tradition of filmmaking in West Africa will not only allow any researcher to have a good grasp of these two enigmatic directors, but it is also a condition sine qua non for a good understanding of their subsequent films and of the malleability that characterizes francophone West African cinema.

CONCLUSION

OUR POSTCOLONY

POSTCOLONIALITY IS THE condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: of 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 an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa. (Ashcroft et al. 119)

I have chosen this devastating observation by Kwame A. Appiah not for its direct mention of postcolonial African scholars - given that my current work centers around African writers, filmmakers and critics - but for its emphasis on the current mood and state of affairs in the postcolonial environment (it has to be made clear that my use of the term 'postcolonial', obviously, is not a mere historical and political delineation of the moment following colonization; but a mode of representation and analysis of cultural, social and political discourse, which has led to the creation of postcolonial studies in academia.)

Given that the debate about the nature and relevance of postcolonialism has reached a dead end – scholars never agreed on the nature, scope or even definition of postcolonialism, and panels have been formed about its death – one might wonder why I

bring this issue in my concluding chapter. My answer is twofold: first, I am not planning on adding confusion to the already dizzying debate about postcolonialism for the simple reason that this chapter, being a conclusion, is not meant to start or end the debate; but rather, to open a perspective on postcolonial discourse. Notwithstanding, I should now make it clear that my stance on postcolonialism is very affiliated to Appiah's definition in that I see postcolonial discourse as a "space-clearing gesture" that is more geared towards the universal than postmodernism does.

I will quote at length, from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, this short paragraph in *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern* by Appiah in which he differentiates the two notions:

Postrealist writing: postnativist politics; a *transnational* rather than a *national* solidarity. And pessimism: a kind of *postoptimism* to balance the earlier enthusiasm for *The Suns of Independence*. Postcoloniality is after all this: and its *post*, like postmodernism's, is 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, 'la gloire pour l'homme'. And on that ground it is not an ally for Western postmodernism but an agonist: from which I believe postmodernism may have something to learn. (Ashcroft et al. 123)

The second reason can be found in the title of this chapter: our postcolony – what postcoloniality means to us (West African French speakers). I have undertaken the curious task of unveiling the "dialogic imagination" in early West African fiction and cinema, and such an endeavor has resulted in the realization that postcoloniality, in

francophone West Africa, has had its own identity and has taken a specific course. This realization becomes even more intriguing once we are cognizant, in the field of postcolonial studies, of the dominance of English-speaking countries over French speaking ones. Mamadou Diouf states in the *Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory?*:

The debates and controversies around post-colonial and globalization studies are strongly determined by the geographic, epistemological, and ideological locations of participating scholars as well as by the scholars' qualification to engage with politics and to speak with authority about Africa. The irony of the present situation is that the greater number of interventions, including the most hostile ones, come from scholars in Western institutions (United States and Canadian, in particular). With a few exceptions, francophone scholars and institutions are not especially active in the debate. In Africa, postcolonial studies speak English, not French. (Yaeger 639-40)

But before analyzing what postcolonial means for this francophone part of the world, let us first take a closer look at the pitfalls of postcolonial discourse and why it is so susceptible to criticism. Appiah's attack, directed towards postcolonial scholars, is not an isolated event. The direction postcolonial theory has taken has always caused suspicions among intellectuals across the board who fear that postcoloniality will be derailed and turned into another Western master narrative. And even though I hate to use terminologies such as "center" and "periphery", it is not uncommon to hear scholars from both the center and the periphery characterize post-colonial texts as an appendix of western literature; and such a critique is usually directed to the tropes used by post-

colonial lead authors and to the theoretical approach to postcolonial texts, an approach that is, often times, reminiscent of the poststructuralist/postmodern traditions.

Neil Lazarus, in his book entitled *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, addresses the question of representativeness of the postcolony with regard to the restricted corpus of works in post-colonial studies, which has resulted in the creation of a canon. And that canon, in his understanding, is none other than Salman Rushdie:

whose novels – especially, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, and *The Satanic Verses* are endlessly, not to say catechistically, cited in the critical literature as testifying to the instability and indeterminacy of social identity, the volatility and perspectivalism of truth, the narratorial constructedness of history, the ineluctable subjectivism of memory and experience, the violence implicit in the universalist discourse of the nation, the corresponding need to centre analysis on the notions of migrancy, hybridity, diaspora, 'in-betweenness', 'translation', and 'blasphemy' (as anti-hegemonic forms of transgression), and so on. (Lazarus 22)

This criticism or should I call it suspicion towards the Western influence on postcolonialism is shared by almost all scholars of the field; and this concern is primarily due to what they perceive to be too close a connection between postcolonialism and postmodernism. And the fact that the core intellectuals of postcolonial theory are indebted to the major names of poststructuralist discourse does not help alleviate those doubts. We know that Edward Said is inspired by Michel Foucault's work; Gayatri Spivak is the one who translated Derrida's *Of Grammatology*; Homi Bhabha is deeply indebted to the work of Jacques Lacan and Derrida. Therefore, one can confidently state that the scholars who introduced French poststructuralism to the English-speaking world

are the same ones who designed and defined postcolonial theory; and the debate that is generated by the obvious influence of French poststructuralists on postcolonialism is what Gikandi refers to as “an anxiety of influence”.

So, any theoretical confusion that arises within postcolonial discourse is deemed an “epistemological failure” which de facto is attributed to its so-called over-reliance on postmodern discursive traditions. These concerns and accusations are very serious given that most of the critiques, taken at face value, delegitimize the relevance of postcolonial discourse to the condition of the Third World. In *Poststructuralism and Postcolonial discourse*, Simon Gikandi mentions lead critics in postcolonial studies such as Ahmad, Dirlik, Bartolovich and Lazarus who share the same concern of relevance of postcolonial discourse to empire:

For such critics of postcolonial theory, its primary failure – its inability to account for the history and process of decolonization – arises from its close affinity to poststructural theory. If poststructuralism is seen as the source of the political or epistemological failure of postcolonial discourse, it is because it came to privilege the act of reading over politics, or, in Ahmad’s terms, posited cultural hybridity “against the categories of nation and nationalism,” or even situated culture and “the literary/aesthetic realm” at “a great remove from the economy.” (Lazarus 97-98)

Now even though this view of postcolonial discourse being another playground for phony émigré scholars who, living in the West, and out of touch with the realities of the empire, want to sell us a French poststructuralism disguised in English language might be the most visible critique, it is not the only major dead-end; for other scholars,

beyond the epistemological nature of the pitfalls of postcolonial discourse, there is also a conceptual problem. I mentioned earlier that my use of the term postcolonial had nothing to do with a historical and political delineation, but a mode of representation and analysis of cultural, social and political discourse; however, that does not seem to be satisfactory for most scholars who find it almost impossible to grasp the scope of postcolonial discourse.

This situation, of course, is a challenge for any scholar of the field in that it is almost impossible to hint at any form of chronology when dealing with postcolonialism. One can tolerate or pretend to understand the peculiarity of postcolonial discourse not being solely about the period after colonization; but then the question that poses itself is who is postcolonial? The answer here seems impossible since every nation has been colonized. Are China, Persia (Iran), England, Scotland, the United States etc., all postcolonial like African and Latin American nations? We know that such a paradigm would be ridiculous and unacceptable for any scholar; but in postcolonial studies, these questions seem to be left unanswered.

In *When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the limit*, Stuart Hall underlines the fact that leading critics in the field such as Ella Shohat, Anne McClintock and Arif Dirlik all agree on the impossibility to grasp the scope of postcolonial discourse. Paraphrasing Shohat, Hall states:

She criticizes the 'postcolonial' for its theoretical and political ambiguity – its 'dizzying multiplicity of positionalities', its 'a-historical and universalizing displacements' and its 'depoliticizing implications' (Shohat, 1992). The post-colonial, she argues, is politically ambivalent because it blurs the clear-cut

distinctions between colonisers and colonised hitherto associated with the paradigms of ‘colonialism’, ‘neo-colonialism’ and ‘Third Worldism’ which it aims to supplant. It dissolves the politics of resistance because it ‘posits no clear domination and calls for no clear opposition.’ Like the other ‘posts’ with which it is aligned, it collapses different histories, temporalities and racial formations into the same universalising category. This is a critique shared by Anne McClintock, another of the original scholars working in this field, who criticises the concept for its linearity and its ‘entranced suspension of history’ (McClintock, 1992). For both critics, the concept is used to mark the final closure of a historical epoch, as if colonialism and its effects are definitively over. ‘Post’, for Shohat, means past: definitively terminated, closed. But this too, for Shohat, is part of its ambiguity since it does not make clear whether this periodisation is intended to be epistemological or chronological. Does ‘post-colonial’ mark the ruptural point between two epistemes in intellectual history or does it refer to ‘the strict chronologies of history tout court’? (Shohat, 1992: 101)? (Hall 242-43)

I will conclude by saying that for many critics, including the most prominent ones, there is an epistemological impasse in postcolonial discourse. It seems that the part of postcolonialism that is associated with poststructuralism has turned the field into an unassessable entity which makes postcolonial theory accessible to almost all fields of study; this situation, however, is not a desirable trait in literature and social studies as Robert Young puts: “Postcolonialism offers a politics rather than a coherent methodology. Indeed...strictly speaking there is no such thing as postcolonial theory as

such—rather there are shared political perceptions and agenda [*sic*] which employ an eclectic range of theories in their service (qtd. in Chibber 3).”

It would be misleading, however, to lay bare the pitfalls of postcolonial discourse without emphasizing the fact that not every scholar and critic agrees with its dismissal as a western influenced theory dominated by western trained and western based scholars. For many, not only is the issue of influence irrelevant, but it is also inaccurate. Such an observation is quite plausible given the fact that, in the globalized world we live in, no society has remained impenetrable from cultural influence; and the fact that all societies that are involved in postcolonial discourse – both First and Third World nations – have been in contact with each other for generations. In this regard, assuming that postcolonial theory is necessarily an appendix to poststructuralism (postmodernism) becomes very questionable. Again, In *Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse*, Simon Gikandi brings Robert Young's bold theory about the relations between postcolonial discourse and poststructuralism:

On the other side of this debate are critics like Robert Young who argue that the European identity of poststructural theory conceals its fundamental connection to “Third-World” debates on decolonization and its aftermath. Young’s argument, first articulated in *White Mythologies* (1990), is that the historical roots of poststructuralism are to be found not in the crisis of European culture associated with the student revolts in 1968, but in the Algerian struggle against colonialism ten years earlier. In *Postcolonialism: An Historical Intro*, Young goes as far as to present postcolonial theory as an extension of anticolonial movements in the “Third World,” arguing that poststructuralism developed as an anti-Western

strategy “directed against the hierarchical cultural and racial assumptions of European thought”: “though structuralism and poststructuralism were taken up and developed in Europe both were indeed alien, and fundamentally anti-western in strategy. Postcolonial thought has combined the radical heritage of such theory with further ideas and perspectives from tricontinental writers, together with other writers who have emigrated from decolonized tricontinental countries to the west” (2001: 67–68). (Lazarus 99)

Young’s remarks echo the arguments of many other scholars who place postcolonial discourse within the greater context of colonial modernity; and in this regard, poststructuralism and postcolonial discourse are not in a relation of source versus appendix, but they come from the same roots. In fact, if postcolonial discourse, as I believe, is a response to colonial modernity, Young’s remark can suggest that the postcolonial condition is what influences poststructuralism. So, the claim that postcolonial theory represents a detachment between the cultural experiences and the material ones is not a shared vision. For Homi Bhabha, postcolonial discourse, in this globalized world, constitutes the best weapon for the Third World against Western master narratives; and by master narratives I have in mind, inter alia, Western liberal humanism, modernism. In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, Neil Lazarus quotes, at length, one of the most famous passages in *The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha; I will also quote the passage in that it constitutes the best defense of postcolonialism and postcolonial studies:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the

modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geographical divisions of East and West, north and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the “rationalizations” of modernity. To bend Jürgen Habermas to our purposes, we could also argue that the postcolonial project, at the most general theoretical level, seeks to explore those pathologies – “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie” – that no longer simply “cluster around class antagonism, [but] break up into widely scattered historical contingencies” ... The postcolonial perspective ... departs from the traditions of the sociology of underdevelopment or “dependency” theory. As a mode of analysis, it attempts to revise those nationalist or “nativist” pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres. (1994: 171-173). (Lazarus 3)

Now, where does francophone West Africa fit in this debate, and what’s in it for it? How does the dialogical imagination that is identified in its early narratives – in fiction and cinema – affect its postcolonial discourse? The answer to these questions is

refreshingly twofold: first, it will be of great importance to explain the rationale for the title of my concluding chapter: our postcolony. It is clear that English speaking authors mostly within European and North American institutions dominate the conversation around postcolonial studies, and they take the lion's share in my theoretical analysis of the postcolonial environment; however, our postcolony here refers to the West African postcolonial discourse: what its object is and what makes it different. In doing so, it will be necessary to bring into the conversation the limited number of postcolonial theorists who are thinking francophone Africa, and West Africa in particular. I would like, in this regard, to put into conversation two renowned figures: Achille Membe and Souleymane Bachir Diagne – the former is more admired and translated in the English-speaking world, while the latter is more revered in francophone West Africa.

The reason for this choice is clear; their work is in line with my central claim that francophone West African postcolonial discourse, thanks to its dialogic nature, has had a distinct trajectory that has preserved its reputation from the accusations that postcolonial theory is a mere extension of French poststructuralist theory created by privileged emigré scholars, and which, assumedly, makes it irrelevant to the realities of the postcolony. These two thinkers point out the malleability of the postcolonial subject, which, in my analysis, creates an infinite range of possibilities when it comes to thinking the postcolony. In *Provisional Notes on the Postcolony* for instance, Achille Membe coins the phrase “homo ludens”, to describe the postcolonial subject:

the postcolony is made up not of one single 'public space' but of several, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts: hence the postcolonial 'subject'

has had to learn to bargain in this conceptual marketplace. 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. (Membe 4-5)

What we see here is an attempt to extricate the postcolonial subjects from the overgeneralized and oversimplified characterizations that have made it easy to regard them as simple entities of the Third World who are defined by their traumatic colonial and neocolonial experience.

Furthermore, in the writing of these two Francophone postcolonial thinkers, the postcolony becomes the place where the notion of center and periphery dissolved into a dialogic space. This enterprise might seem too bold and utopic, but boldness and utopia are irrelevant in this case in that the idea of the postcolony has been the main project of early francophone fiction writers and filmmakers as I have tried to prove in the preceding chapters. In his more recent work *L'Afrique Qui Vient* [The Coming Africa], which is part of a collection published by Alain Mabanckou in *Penser et écrire l'Afrique aujourd'hui* [*Thinking and Writing Africa Today*], Membe states:

Puisqu'il n'y a guère d'histoire de l'Afrique qui ne soit en même temps une histoire du monde tout comme il n'y a guère d'histoire du monde qui ne soit en même temps une histoire d'Africains ou de leurs descendants, ce projet a toujours été planétaire. Tel était le cas hier, tel est le cas aujourd'hui...Qu'on le veuille ou non, il n'existe plus de scène périphérique. Pour accompagner la naissance de cette nouvelle histoire mondiale – planétaire mais décentrée –, l'Afrique a besoin de s'écrire elle-même. (Mabanckou 23)

[Since there can be no history of Africa that is not at the same time a history of the world nor can there be a history of the world that is not at the same time a history of Africans or their descendants, this project has always been universal. Such was the case before, such is the case now... Whether one likes it or not, there is no periphery any longer. To be part of this new world order—universal but de-centered—Africa needs to write its own history.] (My translation)

Membe is true to his universal project by simply rejecting the notion of periphery. But I argue that our early authors not only envisioned a postcolony devoid of the binary opposition center versus periphery, but they intended it to be the new center: a place where universal humanistic ideas prosper.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne, in *Penser de langue à langue* [Thinking from language to language] articulates the dismantling of the binary center versus periphery with a greater emphasis on language, he states:

L'espace colonial, par définition, n'est pas un espace de réciprocité. Il ne l'est pas en général et pour ce qui concerne les langues en particulier. Une langue impériale s'y pose comme étant le logos incarné et les idiomes locaux y ont à peine un statut de langue. Or le propos de Senghor constituait de facto, peut-être même au-delà de la revendication explicitement formulée, d'une part à établir un comparaison (c'est-à-dire une équivalence) entre langue impériale et langue indigène, d'autre part à proclamer la valeur de l'humain qui aura appris à être bilingue, c'est-à-dire à cultiver la capacité de se décentrer, de voir les choses de plus d'une perspective, à partir de plus d'une langue. (Mabanckou 73)

[The colonial space, by definition, is not a space of reciprocity. It is not reciprocal in general and particularly not when it comes to languages. A colonial language stands out as the word incarnate while local languages are barely regarded as languages. However, Senghor's vision was, on the one hand, to equate the colonial language with native languages and on the other hand to glorify the human who will learn to be bilingual, the one who will develop the capacity to decenter themselves, to see things through multiple perspectives and from more than one language.] (My translation)

Diagne like N'Gugui and many other African scholars see translation and the reciprocity of languages as a condition sine qua non for a global, humanist, and post nativist future.

Second, the authors and filmmakers I have been analyzing in the previous chapters, namely Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Ousmane Sembene and Djibril Diop Mambéty, provide us with a very sanitary postcolonial discourse since their work constitute the only message that is immune to the major criticisms of postcolonialism. Such an immunity is a result of two factors: first, the accusation of being a privileged émigré scholar based in a western ivy league institution, geographically distanced from the postcolony, does not apply to them. Second, their work cannot be accused of being too closely tied to western theories, which is the major critique of postcolonial discourse. As Gikandi puts it:

both sides in this debate [those who believe that postcolonial theory's affinity to poststructural theory is the cause of its failure and those who believe that postcolonial theory is a powerful weapon for decolonized nations] are united by

their recognition that postcolonial discourse emerged within the larger institutions of European, especially French, theory after structuralism. In this respect, a postcolonial discourse is unthinkable without poststructuralist theory. (Lazarus 98)

I have mentioned earlier how indebted our leading postcolonial theorists, namely Said, Bhabha and Spivak, are to the French structuralists; that is not the case for these West African authors, for, their work is deeply rooted in oral tradition even though for the case of Mambéty, the many connections that critics seek in the French New Wave, Italian or Russian cinema is nothing but an attempt to figure out his subversive and unconventional filmmaking.

Ousmane Sembene, for instance, even though he had a personal taste for Marxism like most authors of his generation, was influenced by the condition of African people; as I previously mentioned, he travelled throughout West Africa and further south to assess the condition of the masses. This made him come to the realization that literature written in French for a population unable to read it was counterproductive, which made him shift from writing novels to filmmaking. He was a true traditionalist who was immersed in his Sereer culture so much so that he was made a cult servant for a Sereer religious tradition.

Djibril Diop Mambéty was also very rooted in his tradition; his sole inspiration is his childhood and his notorious neighborhood of Colobane and its people, everything else is pure imagination: “After I unveil this very pessimistic picture of human beings and society in their nakedness, in *Hyènes*, I wanted to build up the image of the common people. Why should I magnify the ordinary person after this debauch of defects? The

whole society of Colobane is made up of ordinary people. I do not want to remain forever pessimistic (Ukadike and Mambety 148-49).”

As for Cheikh Hamidou Kane, his semi-autobiographical novel gives us enough information about the tradition he comes from; his Koranic education and the Sufi upbringing under the religious leader of his ethnic group, as he portrays it in *L'Aventure ambiguë*, is what shaped his philosophy of life even after discovering Western philosophers.

Amadou Hampâté Bâ is the most famous traditionalist author in West Africa for his work as historian and ethnologist for African literature and cultural heritage. Talking about influence, Bâ took time away from his administrative duties to go stay with his spiritual leader Tierno Bokar about whom he wrote *Vie et enseignement de Tierno Bokar: Le sage de Bandiagara (A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar)* (1957). His conviction for the necessity of an oral tradition education is best expressed in the famous reformulation of his statement pronounced at UNESCO in 1960: "whenever an old man dies, it is as though a library were burning down."

Now what are the implications of this aspect of early West African literature, with authors who not only have not been influenced by poststructuralism or affected by the major criticisms of postcolonial discourse, but instead have had an epistemological approach that is purely dialogic? The implications will be of immeasurable value for two reasons: first, I have specifically chosen to analyze the work of these authors for their historical relevance and their proven ability to create and define literary traditions in francophone West Africa. Second, since I personally do not intend to define postcolonialism to avoid falling into controversy, their work and aesthetics will allow us

to have an idea of how postcolonial discourse is articulated within francophone West Africa: what constitutes the postcolonial condition to them? And what response do they deem appropriate?

Postcolonial discourse, based on the work of early West African fiction writers and filmmakers, is nothing more than the empire's response to colonial modernity – to repeat my oversimplified definition of colonial modernity, it is simply the articulation of the western notion of modernity within the colonial context. And their response to colonial modernity is visibly a reformed humanism, an African humanism. It is my belief in this early francophone West African tradition of postcolonial narratives that made me subscribe to Appiah's understanding of postcolonialism, which I mentioned earlier: a "postrealist", "postnativist", "humanist" and "transnational" rejection of western master narratives "in the name of the ethical universal," and for the glory of mankind. Even though it is well known that humanism is a term that postcolonial scholars tend to avoid for its association with all the negative traditions against which postcolonial discourse stand to challenge.

This specific understanding of the postcolonial condition is what resonates in the previous two chapters; each work I have analyzed is a representation of the condition of the subaltern, but at same time, the authors are yearning for the universal. In *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, it is clear that Wangrin's life purpose has been to create an ideal of man who incarnates the traditional and the modern, Wangrin does so by challenging both cultures. Wangrin's story also reveals the author's concern for the human condition; at the end of the story, the protagonist turned into a destitute philosopher who is willing to answer the questions of his people, and all three questions are related to life and the

human condition: “what is life in this world?”, “what is Man?” and “what is wealth?” In *L’Aventure ambiguë*, Kane creates an environment that is designed to shock both traditional and western cultures out of their rigid ways; one can clearly see how the author is grappling with the urgency of a dialogue between cultures with an optimistic outlook, each society seem to bear the seeds of what seems to be an opening to the world. The death of the protagonist is portrayed not as an end but as a beginning.

As for the films, the postcolonial experience is even more relatable thanks to the presence of physical characters. In *La Noire de*, Sembene makes sure that every culture is challenged at its core. His social realist tendencies do not translate into praising his own culture against the dominant one; he portrays the conjunctures of his society by laying bare the condition of the people then targets the elements that enable that condition, whether they come from traditional society or western. And lastly, Djibril Diop Mambéty’s *Touki Bouki* has proven to be the epitome of the glorification of a reformed humanism, which Mambéty was able to make relevant to our postcolonial condition by showing both “the utopian and the dystopian” side of it as Murphy puts it:

Essentially, Mambéty’s work reflects both the utopian and the dystopian nature of modernity. Utopianism has been central to Western modernity, for its rationality offers a potential cure for all of society’s ills, past, present and future. On the other hand, capitalist modernity in the West has also produced rapid change, uncertainty and certain dystopian despondency at the breakdown of previous communal values. (Murphy et al. 104)

Now, it has to be made clear that this francophone West African postcolonial discourse can only be identified by analyzing these authors through dialogic lenses.

Analyzing these works through any other means will defeat the purpose of their authors. These authors do not represent an empire merely “writing back”, but an empire that has destroyed the walls that used to separate center and periphery, First World and Third World. Dialogism has proven to be crucial in early West African fiction and cinema because of its open ended and malleable nature.

If postcolonial discourse in the English- speaking world has suffered greatly from criticisms pertaining to its lack of representativeness and relevance in the postcolony, it is because it has over relied on limited and limiting theories that are informed by the very object they reject, I am referring here to the relation structuralism/poststructuralism. Dialogism, however, which Bakhtin describes as “the relation between the utterance and other utterances”, and as I already explained in the film section, it suggests that any utterance, therefore, is defined and revolves around the anticipated response of the addressee. This form of dialogue – given that dialogue itself is known to all cultures – allows for a more liberated and free analysis of the literary productions that emerge from the postcolony. But, why so?

The dialogic approach of these West African authors has made their work safe from western master narratives and subsequently more relevant to the postcolonial condition; however, the notion of a postcolonial discourse that goes beyond and of a reformed humanism are not inventions of these fiction writers and filmmakers. In *The Wretched of The Earth*, for instance, Frantz Fanon defines the true meaning of the liberation struggle for the colonized:

This struggle, which aims at fundamental redistribution of relations between men, cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people’s culture. After the

struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized. This new humanity for itself and for others, inevitably defines a new humanism. This new humanism is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle. (Fanon 178)

As for the notion of going beyond, I have already mentioned Appiah's definition of postcolonial discourse in the beginning of this chapter; but he is not the only one. Homi Bhabha also, as Gikandi analyzes it "wanted to go a step further and argue that his theoretical project was intended to locate this critique of humanism and sign in a specific referential and institutional moment, the moment of cultural difference whose genealogy was to be found in the culture of colonialism (Lazarus 118)."

So, what makes this francophone West African colonial discourse unique? The answer seems very consistent among the authors I have analyzed: they have made the postcolony the focal point of their preoccupations by combining the cultural experiences to the material ones. And since this West African postcolonial space is not rife with poststructuralist theorists, the discourse of these authors is not limited to "the literary/aesthetic realm" as Aijaz Ahmad would say; for they are neither defined by a sense of dislocation nor are they migrants trying to locate their culture within the metropole.

I have mentioned earlier the ability of these authors to influence and define literary traditions; one can see that the dialogic intention that can be underlined in the works of these four authors in the 60s and 70s has persisted in later generation writers and filmmakers. In fact, all literary productions from that generation on through the twenty-first century are marked by that sense of new humanism, transculturalism and

dialogic intention. One might even argue whether such an influence has been carried to the English-speaking parts of West Africa.

Now, focusing on West African postcolonial discourse and how it is more focused on the postcolonial space does not discredit the work of the leading theorists in the field. When I chose to do a dialogic analysis of early West African fiction and cinema, it was not to discard other theories, but it is because I believe in the universalism and unique potential of the dialogic intention; and dialogism in and of itself cannot allow any form of exclusion or dogmatism. The question one might ask then is what will become of the notion of postcolonial?

To follow the same dialogic principle, I have applied to the francophone West African postcolonial discourse, I will say that we will have to allow postcolonial discourse the same freedom we have allowed all literary movements throughout history. If we take the example of enlightenment, there were in fact many enlightenments: a German enlightenment, a French one, an English one etc.; therefore, in the same way, there will be a need to recategorize postcolonial discourse. There is, on the one hand, a postcolonial theory that speaks English, and which is marked by a sense of dislocation due to the fact that it is dominated by émigré scholars living in the West who produce a discourse totally displaced from empire; and this postcolonial theory, as most critics define it, is an extension of poststructuralist theory.

There is, on the other hand, a West African postcolonial discourse that speaks French, and whose proponents were able to reclaim tradition, reconstruct national culture, and recover popular consciousness without jeopardizing the universal and the dialogic. Even though what unites these two different categories is their reaction against colonial

modernity, the authors of the latter discourse – the early francophone West African novelists and filmmakers I have analyzed – are the closest one could possibly have to the subaltern who can actually speak.

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