# Manufacturing an Africanist Phantasmagoria

## Literature and Knowledge Production in Ferdinand Oyono's *Chemin d'Europe*

**Cilas Kemedjio**
Professor of French and Francophone studies
University of Rochester
cilaskemedjio@rochester.edu

**How to cite this paper:**
Kemedjio, C. (2024). Manufacturing an Africanist Phantasmagoria: Literature and Knowledge Production in Ferdinand Oyono's *Chemin d'Europe*. *Global Africa*, (5), pp. 120-136.
https://doi.org/10.57832/d34x-2298

Received: January 31, 2024
Accepted: February 05, 2024
Published: March 20, 2024



### Abstract

Writing about anticolonial dissidence is a project of reinvention that aims to neutralize the normative and disciplinary dimension inscribed in writing by the victor in order to allow it to become a locus for the possibility of contestation. The process of conversion and appropriation of the conqueror's literature ultimately creates a writing that brings with it a project of amelioration of life conditions. The social mission of literature produced by peoples subjugated by the colonial adventure stems from this project of subverting the literature that was learned in the colonial schools. Ferdinand Oyono, in *Chemin d'Europe* (*Road to Europe*), establishes a milestone of what can be called a pragmatic theory of the mission of *évolués* (a defense of their own class interests). Having failed the baccalauréat and been expelled from his seminary, Barnabas seeks to undertake a European adventure. The present analysis, based on Ferdinand Oyono's *Road to Europe*, explores francophone literature as a space of production for a postcolonial discourse on the creation of Africanism. Africanist fabrication here means the ensemble of circumstances that preside over the fabrication of an Africa as seen through Western eyes. Literary texts are conscious of conditions of birth. The mise en abyme of this critical awareness assumes the shape of a meditation on the colonial school, the setting for the formation of writers. Challenging that Africanist order is part of the broad decolonial project that gives rise to movements of cultural restoration such as the Harlem Renaissance, Haitian indegenism, and Negritude, anticolonialism, and the emergence of an actual African discourse.

### Keywords

Colonial school, Literature and the Production of Knowledge, Africanist fabrication, Ferdinand Oyono, *Chemin d'Europe*, African discourse

# Introduction

The present contribution is an analysis based on Ferdinand Oyono's *Chemin d'Europe* (1980) that sees francophone literature as the privileged locus of production of a postcolonial discourse on the creation of Africanism. Here, Africanist creation refers to the combined circumstances behind the production of an Africa seen through the eyes of the West. Literary texts are conscious of conditions of their emergence. The mise en abyme of this critical consciousness often assumes the shape of a meditation on the colonial school, the formative setting for writers. Lydie Moudiléno recalls for us that the writer is above all the "brillant élève de l'école coloniale/the brilliant pupil of the colonial school." (1997, p. 46) The metanarrative dimension is revealed in the criticism of discourses thought to precede the establishment of colonial knowledge. The novel is part of the epistemological mutation explaining "both the possibility and the pertinence of the African discourse on otherness" (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 80). Indeed, Mudimbe reminds us that the ideology underlying the colonial conquest arises from the saga of the explorers and anthropological theories, discourses that are all based on colonial knowledge. Challenging that knowledge is part of the vast decolonial movement that gives rise to cultural renaissances, anticolonialism, and the emergence of an African discourse that, in *Chemin d'Europe*, revolves around three dimensions that we will investigate in the following pages.

We begin with an analysis of the structural limitations facing the colonized in their search for knowledge within the colonial context. This reflection on the birth of the colonized in the conqueror's writing could also be read as a meditation on the colonial school. For the school is part of the institutional infrastructure in the production of forms of knowledge in modern Africa. The colonial administration is content to offer a rudimentary knowledge that allows the colonized to be maintained in a subaltern position. The *évolués*, a term that designates the beneficiaries of the limited education under French colonization, are above indigenes, but do not aspire, for reasons tied to the organization of colonial society, to be on the same level as Whites. Writing about school is a strategy that mobilized metadiscourses on the conditions that make literature possible. Thinking about the conditions of the birth of literature almost always leads to a reflection on the school, the framework that allows the possibility for access to this knowledge, a knowledge that often begins in moments of intoxication, magic, or hallucination. Writing in the colonial context presupposes the potentiality of violating the rules of the clan as the very condition of its possibility. Transgressing the ancestral order and entering into a pact with the enemies from the North constitutes the original sin in the foundation of francophone literature, at least francophone African literature. The acute awareness of this original sin makes the francophone text a locus for meditation on the value of forms of knowledge that are regarded as damned, but that have become markers of the so-called modern African condition.

In the second part of our analysis, we will explore forces that permit the breaking of the barriers of the structural impedances cited above. Every colonial situation is marked by the conflicting coexistence of colonial administration, traditional society, and the new, hybrid category arising from colonization. The colonial order is based upon a racial minority that maintains its leverage of political power and establishes its legitimacy by force as well as by symbolic domination, while the so-called traditional society, in complete decline, remains culturally and sociologically in the majority. Between those traditions of what novelist Nazi Boni (1962) calls "le crépuscule des temps anciens" 'the dusk of ancient times' and the colonial order, there is a new class of people who have received a limited education through the colonial school: the *évolués*. Face with the double resistance against both the colonial order and the ancestral world, Barnabas counts upon the support of the *évolués*, an intermediary class that comes together to fund his trip to France. These *évolués* fill the void created through the abdication of the two institutions that in colonial society are meant to fulfill this role. In other words, the *évolué*, at both the individual and collective levels, helps the brilliant student become more than a scribe, an interpreter, an aide, or a native informant.

The historical mission of *évolués* designates their role in the formation of a class of intellectuals, future producers of knowledge. A definition of *évolué* reveals that graduates, the group that benefits from an overvaluation of symbolic capital tied to instruction, feel only scorn toward their benefactors. It is from that perspective that I read the social mission such as it is configured in the novel as a critique of the subaltern role of Africans in the production of Africanist knowledge. The knowledge they seek will serve, as stipulated in the mandate from the community of *évolués*, as liberation from colonial oppression. In the last section, the criticism of Africanist phantasmagoria will be read as the project of a decolonized knowledge that is the ultimate reward of all knowledge obtained in a context marked by colonization.

## Thoughts on School: The Production of Literary Knowledge

Africanist production might be seen as a collection of discursive practices that form the blueprint of what V. Y. Mudimbe was to call the invention of Africa. That discourse has two characteristics: "[O]n one hand, it is a heterogenous discourse from the margins of African contexts; on the other hand, its axes as well as its language have been limited by the authority of exteriority" (1988, p. 176). Exoticism dominates discourses on Africa during the seventeenth century, while the establishment of a hierarchy of peoples and civilizations characterizes the Enlightenment, thus yielding the codification of the presumed "primitive savagery" vis-à-vis the prescriptive brilliance of Western knowledge. The nineteenth century is marked by the consolidation of an ideology of conquest that is made manifest in anthropologists' theories that serve as building blocks in colonial domination (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 69). The epistemological mutation that takes place beginning in the 1930s contests the authority of anthropology and its negativity toward African historicity, introducing "the respectability of a possible knowledge of so-called traditional societies" (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 176). This mutation can be witnessed in the emergence of the Negritude movement, the founding of Présence africaine, both the journal and the publishing house, and especially in Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to *L'Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1948. These mutations see their apotheosis in the political project of independence, when "the African scholar succeeds the anthropologist, the 'native' theologian replaces the missionary, and the politician took the place of the colonial commissioner" (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 181). The transposition of forms of oral knowledge into the written medium finds its relevance in the global movement of cultural and political reappropriation. This reappropriation is located in the movements of cultural renaissance (Ngũgĩ, 2009) that repudiate the "processus d'identification ou de néantisation déclenchés" 'process of identification or annihilation that were unleashed' by the invaders from the North (Glissant, 1981, p. 29). The reevaluation of the legacy of orality is part of the reframing of studies on Africa.

Abiola F. Irele (2000), in his introduction to the English translation of *L'Étrange destin de Wangrin* by Amadou Hampaté Bâ, deems that the author's famous formula ("En Afrique, un vieillard qui meurt est une bibliothèque qui brûle" 'Whenever an elder dies, a library burns down') serves as an emergency call that "indicates a sense of calamity at the prospect of the disappearance of the values of oral tradition in our present situation of intense social and political change" (Irele, p. iii). With the collapse of the sociopolitical context in which the values of orality carry their full meaning, the fixation upon the written word becomes the only viable alternative to perpetuate the spoken library. Hampaté Bâ's contribution in the transfer of oral traditions into the register of the written word was to be key:

> Indeed his contribution to knowledge in this area has been nothing less than influential and his achievements distinguished. It is enough to cite his monumental reconstruction of the oral tradition of the Pular empire of Macina to indicate the honoured place which his work now occupies in African historiography (Irele, p. iv).

The originality of this monumental work truly derives from its scholarly orientation, but especially its creative dimension (Irele, p. iv). In other words, Hampaté Bâ inscribes the project of preserving and updating the knowledge borne through orality within a literary modality. *L'Étrange destin de*

*Wangrin* illustrates this project of transposing the legacy of the spoken into the written. The text foregrounds a metadiscourse on the conditions of the origins of this writing—redemptive of oral traditions—that is learned at the colonial school.

Mounirou Diallo (2017) suggests that the conflict of cultures begins at the moment of negation of African civilization. However, resistance against the campaigns for conversion to Christianity disconcerts the missionaries. The indifference to the message of Christianity reveals the existence of a mythological hinterland (Glissant, 1981; Kemedjio, 2003). As the missionaries become aware of this resistance, they begin to doubt the validity of the postulation of Africa as a wasteland of civilization. There thus follows an epistemological rupture that prompts the moment of cultural recognition. We therefore participate in the mobilization of scientific discourses whose function is to pierce the heart of darkness, to borrow from the title of Joseph Conrad's novel. The conceptualization of African thought, deemed primitive according to intellectual classifications then in standard use, is dependent on Western science. The knowledge production project that follows this moment of recognition is part of an "idéologie de la représentation" 'ideology of representation' (Diallo, 2017, p. 28), the establishment of Africanist discourse whose existence requires the condition of muteness of peoples who are the object of the knowledge. This ideology of representation could be read as a variation on what Mudimbe calls "the invention of Africa."

From the moment that philosophy "ignore royalement la concrétude" 'totally ignores the concrete' (Diallo, 2017, p. 42), literature offers a platform that allows the philosopher to conceptualize, that is, to philosophize. Shining the spotlight on the "dramatization process of abstract ideas" turns the novel into the "theater of African philosophy" (Diallo, 2017, p. 57). Because the novel is a product of the imaginary, it is important to resist any interpretation that would present it as the space for the manifestation of the materiality of the confrontations between civilizations. A novel is fiction, and the concreteness of fiction resides in the imaginary. Nevertheless, we are in agreement with Diallo that literature takes part in the production of kinds of knowledge about Africa. Olga Hel-Bongo adopts this perspective when she proposes reading Mudimbe's novelistic œuvre as an echo of his intellectual reflections upon the anxieties of identity, the representation of Africa through the "regard fragmentaire des ethnologues" 'fragmented gaze of ethnologists' and the contradictions of Western social sciences in Africa (Hel-Bongo, 2019, p. 17). Hel-Bongo's study invites us to read the francophone novel as a locus for the manifestation of an "literary history that authors transform into the history of writing" (Hel-Bongo, 2019, p. 20). Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o confesses that "[i]t was fiction that first gave us a theory of the colonial situation" (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 15). That testimony confirms the hypothesis that literature is a space for the revelation of knowledge:

> Fiction as theory? Can we in fact think of fiction, the novel, as writing theory? We have to go back to the original meaning of theory in Greek, theoria, meaning a view and a contemplation. View assumes a viewer, a ground on which to stand, and what is viewed from that standpoint. A view is also a framework for organizing what is seen and a thinking about viewed. Fiction is the original poor theory. (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 15)

The expression "poor theory"—the theory produced by the poor and not the theory that is poor—goes back, in this case, to a minimalist theory, one stripped of any argot and invented as a tactic for survival. Artisans of the imaginary, through conceptualization, place themselves in the continuity of foundational myths and legends, tales that human beings invented to explain or understand their environment. Myths of origin thus are the basis of theory. Barbara Christian's (1987) argument originates in the same perspective. She maintains that literary theory, as canonized in the halls of academia, could be read as a variation on the hegemony of Western knowledge. In an earlier work, I likened this hegemonic temptation to a curse of theory (Kemedjio, 1999). Confronted with this temptation of the West to produce a normative discourse that saturates the whole of the academic galaxy, the sole form of resistance is to be found in literary creation: "I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (Christian, 1987, p. 52). Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi echoes the malaise that appears in Christian's proposal. In fact, meditation on theory seems to proceed from an awareness of the inadequacy of the conceptual framework sanctioned by the university to account for the

experience or cultural productions of the Black world. She argues that "the most theoretical argument that I will make (…) is that the novels I am analyzing are the theoretical texts". The theoretical foundation that waters "fictionalized theory or theorized fiction" derives from the heritage that "preceded the fictional texts" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p. 20). Ngũgĩ's referencing to founding myths as the inaugural stages of theorizing and Nfah-Abbenyi's invocation of the orality that preceded the fictional texts written in the Europhone medium gesture to a counter-narrative that affirms what Mudimbe earlier calls "the respectability of a possible knowledge of so-called traditional societies."

We are proposing that oral heritage figures into the intertextual antecedence of the written text. The approach taken by Diallo and Hel-Bongo informs our analysis, namely, reading literature as a site for the production of knowledge. To see literature in this dimension supposes a reflection on the framework par excellence of the production of this form of thinking, the colonial school. Roger Toumson comes to the conclusion that "school pronounces a divorce between the integration of the subjects into their environment and the French language." (Toumson, 1989, p. 54) Dispossession linked to the process of education explains why the writer will be first and foremost focused on protesting against colonial injustices. His or her enunciation aims to "rip from the void where oppression has been maintained for so long, to bear witness to its true presence in the world, its own worldview, its true experience of History" (Toumson, 1989, p. 23). Literature embodies an ambiguous adventure because it can only be conceived as an apprenticeship under the thumb of the colonial library. It must, however, enact a transgression of this archive in order to be able to articulate a postcolonial library. Afro-Caribbean literature becomes the space for interrogation of the logics of domination, and more specifically for a critical examination of the school, concentrated on the diffusion of the symbolic, cultural, and political domination at the heart of colonial ideology: "Every literary Afro-Caribbean text, "sensing the history of their schooling," is a meditation upon its source of its appearance. Written about the school, it is offered as a text opposing the school and literature (in the popular meaning)" (Toumson, 1989, p. 38). Joseph Zobel, Maryse Condé, and Fatou Diome, in *Rue cases-nègres* (1974), *Cœur à rire et à pleurer*, *contes vrais de mon enfance* (1998), and *La Préférence nationale* (2001), respectively, dramatize this entry into literature by means of a detour through a meditation upon the roads to school.

## Knowledge Outside the Norms

Mudimbe reminds us that the creation of Présence africaine in 1947 might be read as a challenge to the imperialist project that drove Western civilization at the time. Its founder, Alioune Diop, "still remembers his history classes when he had to recite as many did before him that his Gallic ancestors had blond hair" (Mudimbe, 1992, p. xvii). Hassan José, the protagonist of *Rue cases-nègres* by Joseph Zobel, seems to have been subjected to the same litany of civilization. He notes that the novels that made up the program spoke only of "those people with blonde hair, blue eyes, pink cheeks" (Zobel, 1980, p. 135) whereas he himself knew only the suffering negritude of "men, women and children, all the more or less black. Now, certainly that was not the stuff novels were made of, since I had never read any of that color." (Zobel, 1980, p. 135). Skipping school was the only what to discover "works that were not part of the syllabus and pertaining to the lives of black people—those in the West Indies and in America, their history and the stories surrounding them." (Zobel, 1980, p. 171) Knowledge of Negritude is thus, so to speak, clandestine, acquired through a kind of burglary.

Zobel endures the colonial library, transgresses it, and so invents a postcolonial library that inspires Maryse Condé, who discovers what Fanon calls "l'expérience vécue du Noir" "the lived experience of the Black Man" in preparing for a class report at the Lycée Fénelon in Paris, and in doing so she discovers the universe of the plantation: "In one go I was saddled with slavery, the slave trade, colonial oppression, the exploitation of man by man, and color prejudice' (Condé, 2001, p. 109). It is important to underscore here the willingness of the Communist professor who invited Condé to report on the Antilles, a topic that was not part of the program. Christiane Taubira confesses to having discovered slavery, the capital moment of suffering in the history of Black peoples, almost by accident in a library and not in the readings that made up her school syllabi: "I was eighteen and I had been on my exalted quest for identity, reading everywhere, in the bookstore, in the library,

grazing through essays to novels, reviews to militant newspapers, from archives to tracts . . . when I stumbled upon this history." (Taubira, 2012, p. 400) Ngũgĩ for his part says that his "world was not reflected in any of the centuries into which the study of English has been periodized; it was certainly not the subject of the selected writers and literary texts" (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 10). Antillean and African novels– "something we could only encounter outside of the formal English classroom at home or abroad" (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 23)—allowed him to make up for that deficit in representation that consecrated the invisibility of colonized peoples in educational programs. Thus, the colonial school proves to be a veritable Citadel in which knowledge about the lives of the students remained forbidden. The literature echoes this disjuncture between the students and their school. It records intergenerational traces, articulated through an intertextual network, that build one upon the other to establish a genealogy of the postcolonial library.

In "La Noire de . . .," Sembène Ousmane (1962) introduces Diouana who confesses that she cannot read or write. Illiteracy essentially makes her a slave to his abusive employers. Meanwhile, Fatou Diome, in *La Préférence nationale*, presents characters who read, write, and master Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* (Kemedjio, 2021). Salie, the writer-character in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, confesses that her pen, "like an archeologist's pickaxe, unearths the dead and discovers remains, tracing on my heart the contours of the earth that witnessed my birth and departure." (Diome, 2006, pp. 159-160). We are suggesting here that reading this archeological production is a return to the genealogy of francophone letters. Tracing the outlines of the world that gave birth to the writer signals a return to the paths that established and give meaning to her practice of writing. Salie, as a novelist, starts from the tradition inaugurated by pioneers who themselves were indebted to the heritage of orality and to the text that was memorized in the colonial school. Her text focuses the reader's attention on the conditions of the writer's formation. The intertextual meshings recall the school library. Readings showcase the diversity that enriches the francophone imaginary: from Descartes to Mariama Bâ to Montesquieu, Victor Hugo, Molière, Balzac, Marx, Dostoyevsky, Hemingway, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Simone de Beauvoir, and even Marguerite Yourcenar: "I owe him school. I owe him education. I owe him, in short, my *ambiguous adventure*.' (Diome, 2006, p. 42) The "little schoolgirl" will become a writer because of having received as her inheritance a literary Negritude influenced by the rich archive of French literature: "In my room, Baudelaire held flowers, but I knew he wished me evil. Aimé Césaire proposed a return to the native land. Appolinaire was there, in his majesty; he has seen *solar throat slashed*, which nevertheless remained.' (Diome, 2001, p. 45).

*Soleil cou coupé* is a collection of poems by Césaire that reprises the last verse of "Zone," one of Apollinaire's poems in his collection *Alcools*. *Une Saison au Congo*, Césaire's play about the tragedy of Patrice Emery Lumumba, echoes Arthur Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer*, while Maryse Condé's *Saison à Rihata* (1981) continues this intertextual chain. Condé signals her intellectual debt to the founder of Negritude all the while enriching her meditations upon the disillusions of African independences by relying on Mandinka epics that formed that basis of *Ségou* (1984), her historical novel that joins the imaginary and historical thought. Condé gives full credit to the types of knowledge coming out of the thousands of years of African civilization that have been restored through Negritude. Recovery of the cultural and memorial patrimony carried by orality constitutes a transgression of instruction received in the colonial school, the capital of the negation of the civilization of colonized peoples. This approach also allows for the limitation of any destabilization introduced by that school that appears in literature as a site for the fermentation of intoxicating knowledge.

## Intoxicating Knowledge

In *Chemin d'Europe*, Barnabas speaks of the transfiguration of his father when he completes his certificate of primary and elementary studies, "the highest certificate available to the natives of my country, the seminary represented the forbidden paradise of Knowledge to which one could gain access with the Trojan horse of a religious vocation." (Oyono, 1989, p. 19). His father attributes his success to a miracle by the Blessed Virgin, with the graduate becoming the object of a cult because "at that time the number of illiterates was so great in our part of the country that they flocked ceaselessly to our house, looking at me, touching me" (1989, p. 19). This miracle goes far back in

time. In the eighteenth century, the rarity of schooling among the Black population caused Père Labat to say that Blacks likened writing to magical practices: "There are an infinite number of things they cannot understand, among which how we are able to make our thoughts understood through writing. They say that you have to be a sorcerer in order to make paper talk" (cited in Toumson, 1989, p. 41). In *Ségou*, les murailles de terre, Condé offers a version of this burst of exhilaration through the trajectory of Tiékoro Traoré in his discovery of Arabic calligraphy. Tiékoro is intrigued by "what the man was doing. In his right hand he was holding a thin piece of wood with a pointed end. He dipped it into a small pot and then drew some tiny patterns on a white surface (Condé, 1987, p. 20). He likens the act of writing to 'magic." (Condé, 1987, p. 20). The fascination with writing leads to Islam and to exile: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet!' The words intoxicated him. He had but one desire—to leave Segu and to go to Jenne, or better still to Timbuktu and entered Sankore University." (Condé, 1987, p. 21). Turning to the world of writing and to the Muslim religion transports the young Bambara into a state of intoxication. Of course, the gunboats of colonial France will defeat the Muslim conquerors. The destruction of the earthen walls of Ségou will inaugurate a new chapter in Africa's political history. Nevertheless, the same rash enthusiasm accompanies the first encounters with the colonial school. Hamidou Kane pens this new page of history that witnesses the confrontation between two invaders, members of the brotherhood of the conquering writing.

In *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961), Samba Diallo confesses to long remaining bewitched by the charm of the French language. The student's jubilation upon discovering the alphabet is the moment of his birth through writing: "When I learned to fit them together to form words, to fit the words together to give birth to speech, my happiness knew no further limit' (Kane, 1963, p. 159). The enchantment of the student who finally learns to write reveals the pleasure brought by the act of writing. In *Nationalists and Nomads*, Christopher Miller suggests that the encounter between Africans and French in *Mirages de Paris*, a novel by Ousmane Socé, occurs in terms of hallucination, mirage, anesthesia, and phantasm. Like any child of the colonial school who is fascinated by the mysteries of the book, Fara is filled with a freneticism in reading: "French colonial school has led to addictions and hallucinations. The narrative discourse speaks the language of antidrug propaganda, with the metropole and its cultural products described as substances that are too powerful to resist" (Miller, 1988, p. 61). Mildred Mortimer, in analyzing the cultural conflicts that punctuate the paths of characters in the francophone novel in the years 1950-1960, concludes that the Black child evolving from the stage of fascination, upon the realization of the violence of the new world, announces a disenchantment that is characteristic of the end of childhood. Mortimer, just like Miller, makes use of the register of seduction to describe the encounter between the West and the colonized: "In this hallucination, Western materialism and technology draw Third World people from their shadows to searing light. In their worship of the new gods of materialism, they lose their sense of identity" (Mortimer, 1990, p. 62). The legitimacy of intellectuals in the colonial context derives from this necessity of deconstructing the colonial mirage. The relationship to language, the medium of production of the new types of knowledge, seems to proceed from fascination, transfiguration, and stupefaction. The stage of amazement comes with the discovery of language, the new religion, as well as the colonial school. In other words, it becomes imperative to *unlearn* the overarching link to language in order to create serene conditions for the production of knowledge. Intoxicating knowledge is likewise a cursed knowledge, with the original sin having been the pact made with the clan's enemies.

## The Pact Against Nature: Devaluation of Traditional Forms of Knowledge

Toumson reminded us in an earlier passage that to think about schooling amounts also to consider the conditions for the production of literature. The Afro-Caribbean writer undertakes a critical examination of the logic of domination effected by the school system and the literature that it teaches. Literature takes the form of an indictment that exposes the "the obsessional grievance: loss of self' (1989, p. 38). Among the first generations of African writers, the loss of self described above by Mortimer takes on the appearance of an original sin that installs a guilty conscience

inside the future writer. The boy has grown up with the lantern fed by firewood punctuated by the mother's words emerging at night and carrying the voices of the ancestors and the legends of the clans. School, however, removes the boy from this legacy: "The child of the Beti," writes Mpoyi-Buatu, "acted foolishly [a fait des bêtises]: he made the decision to leave the community, he took the path of the missionaries, he went to the school of the enemy" (Mpoyi-Buatu, 2003, p. 224)[1]. According to Arlette Chemain, the resurgence of the sin committed against his mother at the time of his departure implants in Banda, the protagonist of Eza Boto's *Ville cruelle*, a guilty conscience: "the hero's unhappiness with himself finds an outlet in his unhappiness with the schools he attends." (1998, p. 24). In its first manifestation, then, school can be seen as a betrayal.

Toundi leaves the village at the very time he was meant to learn the secrets of his clan's culture : "They say in the village that I was the cause of my father's death I ran away to a white priest on the day before initiation when I should have met the famous serpent who watches over all the men of my race' (Oyono, 1966, p. 9). His death, a consequence of his desertion of clan culture, becomes the condition itself for birth into the world of writing: "I opened the packet. Inside there were two worn exercice books, a toothbrush, a stub of pencil and a large native comb made of ivory' (1966, p. 5). Acquiring colonial knowledge occurs to the detriment of the ritualized knowledge of the clan, which have been discredited, if not erased from the catalog of approved knowledge, because they are seen as non-knowledge. The repudiation of traditions is crystallized in a devaluation of the paternal image. Toundi becomes a writer by rejecting his father, who emerges in the tale as a domestic tyrant. Tiékoro, once converted to Islam, considers his father as "un *barbare* doublé d'un *ignorant* buveur d'alcool" (Condé, 1984, p. 30; emphasis added) 'a barbarian and ignorant drinker of *dolo*' (Condé, 1987, p. 22; emphasis in the original). He will become the "first martyr of Islam in Segu." (Condé, 1989, p. 101) The devotion to Islam that costs him his life begins with his quest for writing.

The devaluation of the paternal figure that we see with Toundi and Tiékoro is also found with Barnabas who undertakes a journey in the hinterland to secure the financial resources that are necessary for his trip abroad:

> To obtain the aid of the tribe, we thus went to solicit the support of Fimsten Vavap, *an illiterate, lascivious old man* who could nevertheless transform himself into a formidable preacher. Thought to be the last *living descendent in the long line of great ancestors*, he benefited from their legendary renown, purged of all stains and transform by *the scintillating diamonds lens of their posthumous glory*, from which people drew sustenance… (1989, p. 57; emphasis added).

Barnabas presents Vavap as an ignorant and pleasure-loving old man. His moral flaw—enjoying young, barely pubescent girls—emphasizes and intensifies his scandalous ignorance, his illiteracy in the new order brought about by the colonial dispensation. Strengthened by his symbolic status conferred through his schooling, Barnabas declares the custodian of the line of great ancestors to be illiterate. Vavap is, however, the guardian of a system of knowledge that establishes its legitimacy upon the posthumous glory of the ancestors. Barnabas's repudiation of Vavap replicates that of his father, who represents an object of shame: "By depicting the old man as a grotesque buffoon, he tries to avenge the shame he continues to feel at the thought of being related to such a person" (Bjornson, 1993, p. 83). Disqualifying the lineage of great ancestors could be seen as a reproduction or in fact an endorsement of the original sin. Original sin, in this precise case, is the hanging and the profanation of the primordial ancestor by the German invaders.

The itinerary leading Barnabas and his mother to their homeland carries the scars of the violence of colonial adventures: "Vavap's father had been paraded along this route by the Germans who placed a rope around his neck before deciding to hang him from an umbrella tree, from which they forbade Vavap, under pain of death, to take down the corpse. Vultures, hawks, eagles, and crows feasted upon it until a storm dispersed his bones through the surrounding forest' (1989, p. 58). The countryside's desolation registers the memory of violence that, in the logic of conquest, dismisses funeral rites

1 Alexandre Biyidi Awala is the author's name. He published his first novel under the pseudonym Eza Boto before adopting Mongo Beti for the rest of his career. Mongo Beti literally means the child of the Betis. (the cultural or ethnic group to which the author belongs and that is found in the South of Cameroon).

(Kemedjio, 2006). The anticipated trip to France figures, in the eyes of the ancestors, as a caution of this original transgression. Vavap castigates Barnabas as part of "this curse-ridden generation' (1980, p. 59) who, by breaking the "the pact between the Tribe and Nature' (1989, p. 590), introduces a disorder of ontological proportions. The defection of the "irréductibles de l'africanité pure et dure" 'fundamentalists of the African traditional order of things' (Beti, 2005) deprives Barnabas of his clan's support.

Latin remains his ultimate path to salvation: "Your Latin is still a valuable asset; you already know enough to become somebody here" (1989, p. 62). Barnabas's mother advises him to sprinkle his fellowship application with a spiced-up Latin: "Why don't you to the Government—you who know how to write French so well—and ask them to send you to France? You could even include a bit of Latin to impress them' (1989, pp. 54-55). Despite the Latin, M. Dansette blocks the scholarship that would have opened up the road to France. The colonial administrator proposes the "the Trade school run by Monsieur…' (1989, p. 95) as an alternative for the dreamed trip to France. Barnabas rightly reminds him that he has "the chance of becoming one of the first natives from this country to make… to continue on to the bachot, and that's the Good Lord's truth, Monsieur, because you know as well as I do, Monsieur, that it is only since last war, the recently concluded one of forty-five, that we too have been authorized to sit for the baccalaur…' (1989, p. 95). On that precise point, the novelist's imaginary seems to be inspired by historical facts. The framework law of 1946 creates the French union and recognizes the right to citizenship for all residents of the colonies. This means, at least theoretically, that the colonial regime has ended, invalidating its "suppression of the indigenous penal code and conscription (forced labor), the suppression of the colonial educational system and the introduction of the French system" (Mudimbe, 1992, p. 4). The colonized could henceforth dream of surpassing the status of *évolués,* that is, going further in their studies. Barnabas's trajectory, like that of so many other characters in the francophone African novel of the time, foregrounds the significance of that historical moment. His ambition is stymied by the disconcerted collusion between the colonial order and the ancestral order, therefore blocking his access to advanced studies. This accidental complicity means that the two institutions that in the colonial context can finance his schooling are quite hostile to higher education. The survival of colonial domination depends in part on the exclusion of the colonized from spheres of knowledge production. Against the double hostility of the ancestral hinterland and the colonial authority, it is precisely a community of *évolués* who mobilize to support Barnabas's French adventure. He has the mandate to return in order to avenge the *évolués* of the humiliations that they suffered under the colonial regime.

## The Historical Mission of the *Evolué*

In *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* by Congolese writer Henri Lopes, the story's narrator gains access to the school reserved for Europeans in the colony thanks to his mother's French nationality. His camarades Yangui and Alhadji attend the colonial school, which is reserved for indigenes. Being an indigene in a colony means assuming what we might call, for lack of a more appropriate expression, the burden of the colonized: "We have to know twice as much as the Whites to make ourselves respected." (1997, p. 158) The burden of the colonized is to prove that they belong in the school, which is an abridged version of Western civilization that in the colony takes the place of civilization purely and simply: "When I get all of that stuffed into my head, said Yangué brandishing his *Mamadou and Bineta*, I could get my certificate of studies, then the sixth-grade entrance exam. Then, I could become a civil servant and an *évolué.*' Acquiring the status of *évolué* alleviates what is characterized above as the burden of the colonized: "Whites will no longer insult us, won't kick us around anymore, and will respect us." (1997, p. 159) To become an *évolué* means to ward off the curse that is the fate of indigenes.

The Code of the Indigene creates a social stratification that ranges from citizens enjoying full rights and privileges to indigenes relegated to the hell of forced labor and constituting the immense majority of the population. Between these two social groups is the *évolué* emerges as "the individual who submitted voluntarily to the constraints of the monetary economy." (Beti & Tobner, p. 132)

According to Mongo Beti, Louis-Paul Aujoulat[2], the architect of the establishment of authoritarian francophone political regimes subjugated to French domination, relies on "that class of Africans that were called *évolués*, men who attended school up through certificate of primary studies, rarely, up to an undergraduate degree, its equivalent in French lycées beginning at the end of the late 1940s)" (Beti, 2005, p. 285). The rudimentary nature of their instruction leaves the *évolués* uncultivated, in the most basic sense of this word. Nevertheless, to the lack of culture is added "obsession with force, love of money and enjoyment of material goods, scorn for any morality." (Beti, 2005, p. 289) Barnabas sees himself as a "poor, without relatives or friends, and ridiculed for my dreams, (…) Hydra of chimeras, a monster of optimism in a country where man had been dehumanized by the appetite for power and profit and by the cult of selfishness.' (1980, p. 62). He positions himself as a graduate who resists the temptation of the *évolué*, namely, the appetite for profit and power. He relies upon the knowledge acquired during his tenure in the seminary to defend the prestige of the educated against the compromises that *évolués* make in order to realize their social ambitions.

The arguments deployed by Henri Lopes, Mongo Beti, and Ferdinand Oyono gesture to what we can read as a scorn held by intellectuals—or least the more educated in the colonial situation—whose capital is above all symbolic, toward the materialistic and potentially compromising motivations that rule the actions of *évolués*. The submission to what Mongo Beti calls, in the passage above, the constraints of the monetary economy justify the contempt we alluded to for *évolués*. It nevertheless constitutes the economic basis that allows *évolués* to finance the studies of "jeunes nègres quartier-latiniseurs, agrégationnaires et doctoriseurs" 'young negroes at the Latin Quarter, *agrégationnaires* and doctoral students of the time' (Beti, 1978, p. 13). For example, Oyono benefited from the integration of his parents' generation into the colonial economy. Indeed he was "the son of the secretary-interpreter of the colony and as such received training in the best schools, eventually including the Sorbonne before undertaking a career as a diplomat" (Parascandola, 2009, online reference). The trajectory of Barnabas and many characters of the Francophone novel thus appears to echo the critical role performed by the *évolués* in the emergence of a class of knowledge producers.

The travelers accompanying Barnabas on the bus heading for the capital are members of the class of *évolués* to which Oyono's father belongs. They see in him the Messiah who will deliver the country from the colonial yoke:

> The woman (…) extricated herself from her seat, rushed over to me, and in a full view of everyone pressed a thousand-franc note into my hand ; then, standing back to get a better view of me, she peppered my face with a volley of brackish saliva that had been discolored by the quid of tobacco swelling in her scarified cheek (it was her way of blessing me), then she cried : " Go ahead, my child, go to their country, become a Commandant, a Commissa (translator's note : a police chief), marry one of their women ; that'll change a lot of things for us in this country." (1989, p. 89)

The initiative taken by Barnabas's mother met with mistrust from the community of Elders, but that of the passenger in the transport vehicle is more enthusiastic:

> "Ah, this is the happiest day of my life," exclaimed my neighbor, the male nurse, who removed his *kepi*, groped about inside of his jacket, and extracted two-thousand-franc notes. "God be with you!" he continued, pointing to the Greek with the tip of his chin (…) In tones of mystical illumination, my neighbor thundered, "Come back and save us like Moses saved the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt (1989, p. 89; emphasis in the original).

Oyono offers a catalogue of the miseries of colonization in *Une Vie de boy* (1956a) and *Le Vieux nègre et la médaille* (1956b). Barnabas thus has as his mandate the deliverance of the community from the weight of humiliations endured under colonization: "Come say your goodbye to this son of your

2 Louis-Paul Aujoulat (August 28, 1910 – December 1, 1973), was a doctor who was notably one of the founders of the Ad-Lucem Foundation (a chain of dispensaries which serve until today in Cameroon). Aujoulat was a deputy of Cameroon after the Second World War and Secretary of State for Health in the French government. Mongo Beti and the Cameroonian opposition attribute to him the authorship of the regime which took over the governance of Cameroon after the departure of the French.

country, this child whom God has chosen to go study to the white man's country, from where he'll come back to save us, to save Africa!" (1989, p. 90). The theme of the redemption of the colonized through education recurs as a leitmotif in the novels of the first generation of francophone writers.

Uncle Mamadou in *L'Enfant noir*, Assouan Koffi in *Climbié*, and the Knight in *L'Aventure ambiguë* hold the role of assistants in the colonial administration and can be compared to the passengers in the bus who place their hope in Barnabas. The Golden Age of the French school in Sub-Saharan Africa between the two wars witnesses the birth of African writers such as Mongo Beti, Hamidou Kane, and Bernard Dadié. The "the rush of Africans toward a colonial education' (Gadjigo, 1990, p. 60) is motivated by the awareness of the necessity for education in the colonial setting: "Il faut savoir lire et écrire pour être quelqu'un… Non, le temps de l'ignorance est terminé" 'You need to know how to read and right to be somebody . . . No, the time for ignorance is over,' (Dadié, p. 110) claims the uncle of Climbié in that eponymous novel. Climbié must absolutely acquire his certificate of primary studies in order to help his mother. The wish of Samba Diallo's father is to see him contribute to the edification of the future, "not as a stranger come from distant regions, but as an artisan responsible for the destinies of the citadel" (Kane, 1963, p. 80). The *évolués* invest Barnabas, the future graduate, with a mission to redeem the colonized. The *évolués* who bring their financial support to the future graduate of French universities locate respectability in the framework of emancipation. Barnabas then reformulates this mission by privileging the dismantlement of colonial discourse as the crucial, imperative condition for freedom from the colonial yoke. It is within this logic that he decides to lift the veil of the masking of what binds together Africanist discourse.

## The Deconstruction of the "Ancient Veil of Phantasmagoria"

The old curtain of phantasmagoria is the heart of the production of an Africa tailor-made for consumption by tourists who love exoticism. Such a phantasmagorical production signifies a spectacle so extraordinary that it appears unreal. The novel suggests that anthropologists, the producers of the phantasmagoria—are recruited among "whites who were enamored of an imaginary Africa they apparently had come to explore only so they could lock it up in picture albums destined for the imaginations of those adventure-starved, arm-chair travelers who abound in bourgeois Europe.' (1989, p. 65) From the beginning we have whites who are infatuated by a make-believe Africa. That postulation calls into question the mode of exploration that sees itself as a quest for knowledge. In fact, the dreamed-about Africa risks supplanting the real Africa. The unreality of the category of phantasm competes both with a rigorous scientific approach and with the Africa that is. The search for a made-up Africa seeks to satisfy the "imaginations of those adventure-starved, arm-chair travelers who abound in bourgeois Europe." The exotic guidebook drives these conquerors of knowledge in search of "the unique and the inexpressible" in these lands regarded as virgin territory. Thus, everything seems to enchant them, whether it's a monkey, a naked woman, or even idiots: "[I]ls étaient là aux aguets, à la recherche des rites, prompts à dévisser le capuchon de leur stylo, à pister le sauvage, le bon sauvage de leur enfance vierge des stigmates du temps: 'le Bamboula!' et à écrire un livre" (Oyono, 1980, p. 93) 'They were constantly on the alert, perpetually in quest of rituals, always ready to remove the tops from their pens, to track down the savage, the real savage of their youthful fantasies, the 'Bamboula'[3] who had remained unmarked by the passage of time, and to write a book'. (1989, pp. 65-66)

Earlier, we noted in Zobel's work the stage of the absence of colonized peoples in the annals of knowledge. After that civilizational negation, Mounirou Diallo (2017), following Mudimbe (1988), evokes the stage of recognition that unleashes a quest for the primitive. The mechanics of fabricating this knowledge suppose a recruitment of native informants. It is within that logic that Barnabas becomes the "Guide attitré de l'Hôtel de France" (p. 92), 'official guide at the Hotel de France' (1989, p. 66) armed with "cartes topographiques du pays, à travers lequel j'avais mission de piloter tous

3 Translator's note: "Originally a primitive African drum and the dance that was performed to the beating of it, the word 'Bamboula' acquired pejorative connotations in French (c.f. "nigger"), in part through conflation with 'bamboche' (a large puppet or stunted, deformed individual) (1989, p. 66).

ces africanistes que nous charriaient l'Europe et l'Amérique" (p. 100) 'the topographical maps of the surrounding countryside, through which I had the mission of piloting all those Africanists who had been ferried to our shores by Europe and America.' (1989, pp. 69-70):

> And in a mercenary sort of way, I became their local guardian angel, who enabled them to photograph or film a pygmy, a monkey swinging from its branch, a boa swollen by its painful digestion, a hippopotamus lumbering away from the river bank, an indigenous marriage in which the rhythm of the balafon—so many scenes that are "tremendous," "remarkable," and "sensational"! (1989, p. 66)

The emotional charge detected in the choice of words ("tremendous!" and "remarkable!" as well as "sensational!") echoes the intoxication of the actors in this nameless colonial exposition:

> My fellow tribesmen also improvised a ritual for us whenever my explorers were willing to pay the 'matabish,' usually the price of several demijohns of red wine or palm wine, with which the unemployed, starveling actors drank themselves into a stupor before feverishly staging their production as the spectators smiled at the thought of the next film festival, where they were going to overwhelm the jury and snatch from them the Grand Prize that would consecrate them Africanists. (1989, p. 66)

To complete the scene, this knowledge anchored in the quest for strong sensations and intoxicated actors, astonishes the jury. The members of the jury sanctifying the Africanists are certainly enthralled by the special effects that render the staging worthy of film festivals. The performance truly becomes a farce when we realize that the petrified jury is judging a staging executed by actors who are drugged by alcohol.

Richard Bjornson, in his reading of the novels of Oyono, focuses attention on the nature of the characters who embrace the assimilationist dream to cover their Blackness by white masks (Bjornson, 1993, p. 76). Barnabas embraces this survival strategy by cultural alienation. As in making use of his Latin, he completely exploits his identity as an assimilated African, even if the results prove rather deceptive. Commenting on Toundi's trajectory, Bjornson remarks how the latter's naivety prevents him from detecting the "fraud that has been perpetrated upon them by Europeans who held the false promise of friendship with Africans" (Bjornson, 1993, p. 78). Oyono's first two novels reveal the humanity of Africans seduced by the worthless promises of the colonial system that places them in a status of subhumans. While remaining cognizant of Bjornson's reading, it is important to emphasize that Barnabas recovers his lucidity. He speaks of the book as the foundation of the friendship that links him to the anthropologists: "Mais comment résister, ne pas rendre hommage à leur savoir, à leur science brillant de mille connaissances sur *ma barbarie patiemment scrutée* à travers les livres qui étaient la pierre de touche de cette amitié qu'ils me témoignaient?" (1993, p. 100; emphasis added) / "But how could I resist, how could I not pay homage to their knowledge, their brilliant learning with its thousands of facts about my barbarism, which has been patiently scrutinized in countless books and which had become the touchstone of the friendship they bore me?" (1980, p. 70). In fact, the book on which this friendship is based recalls the writing that inaugurated the colonial misunderstanding: the colonial treaty. Basing a friendship upon a book also means seeing the possibility of a future deception. It seems to us that once he is in France, Barnabas discovers this fraudulent set-up in which he played a role, no matter how small.

In the course of the Africanist setting, Barnabas fills a subaltern function: "In return for a small salary, he dutifully feigns childlike simplicity as he provides Cimetierre with opportunities to photograph 'authentic' exotica, and he praises the Frenchman's fanciful interpretations of African culture" (Bjornson, 1993, p. 85). Yet we know that after receiving his degree, "the highest certificate available to the natives of my country," he enters the seminary thanks to his father's devotion to the Catholic church. That entry into "the forbidden paradise of Knowledge to which one could gain access with the Trojan horse of a religious vocation" permits us to deconstruct the montage of the Africanist circus. Recovered lucidity is now seen by the distancing he introduces between his past, as guide attitré de l'Hôtel de France, and the narrative voice that critiques the Africanist montage. Africanist cinema leads to the establishment of academic reputations. The Africanists' reputation ("rien que des Académies ambulantes, des sommités intellectuelles dont l'honnêteté, la probité,

l'abnégation définitivement consacrées" 'Nothing but walking Encyclopedias, intellectual giants whose honesty, integrity, and duly consecrated sense of self-sacrifice' (1989, p. 70) is based on the sacrifices which the latter consented in their march toward knowledge. They brave the weather and tropical diseases, "burning with a desire to tap the original source of inspiration at its roots, they set out to discover the pygmy or the black savage under the solemn pretext of contributing to Science and Knowledge" (1989, p. 70). The last part of this statement thus exemplifies a misgiving of all scientific pretension. Science and Knowledge are merely pretexts to validate "the ancient veil of phantasmagoria."

The entry on Ferdinand Oyono in the Encyclopedia *Britannica* (2004) informs the reader that in the 1950s, "while writing his first two books, Oyono worked in Paris as an actor on stage and on television." The text establishes a correlation between this experience on stage and the construction of characters in novels: "In mocking the foibles of the self-deluded colonial masters as well as the simple villagers, Oyono often painted hilarious portraits, putting his early experience as an actor in theatrical farce to good use." (2004, online reference). The text refers to his first two novels. His third novel reproduces the same grotesque grasp of characters. Barnabas's father emerges as a true caricature of the indigene, drinking in the illusions distilled by missionaries—even down to the very dregs. Anthropologists form the second category of characters to suffer the novelist's biting irony. The author's background in dramatic arts is clearly seen in his interpretation of the anthropologist's undertaking as a theatrical performance, or even better, as a session at a film shoot. The Africanist montage is a dramatization of the daily life of the colonized. The banal details of the natural countryside (a boa digesting his prey) or of daily life (scenes from a marriage) are transformed into a spectacle in the anthropological staging. The transformation of the ordinary life of the colonized people into a spectacle recalls human zoos, a phenomenon that gave rise to the exhibition of so-called primitive peoples at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.[4] *Faire son cinema* (to put on a show) in French speaks to noisy and spectacular showings meant to draw attention. Africanist film strikes the jury with stupor, and their petrification perhaps reminds us that Africanists have indeed put on a show. Cinema is a spectacle. Spectacle obeys the laws of staging geared to "those adventure-starved, arm-chair travelers who abound in bourgeois Europe." The spectacle cannot claim to pass for a scientific enterprise.

The pool of stereotypes acts as an ideological matrix to guide the steps of lovers of exoticism. The performance turns the Africanist montage into a staging, that is, a fabrication of a reality born of the imagination of the directors and executed by drunken actors. Such at least is the essence of the reading that Barnabas gives. And it is important that the deconstruction of this Africanist montage occurs once Barnabas, the former Guide attitré de l'Hôtel de France, is in France. France represents the strategic site of knowledge he accesses thanks to the support of *évolués*. He questions the gaze that denies his presence as a subject: "It was not without an amused anxiety that I asked myself which category of human being I might well represent, as if I could be anything other than that good-natured, continually smiling native whom they saw through the ancient veil of phantasmagoria that had fallen over my country…" (1989, p. 70). The amused uneasiness is a rhetorical strategy that upends the hierarchy established by the processes of production of Africanist knowledge. In this hierarchy, indigenes and their culture are considered to be transparent before the Africanist gaze that authoritatively assigns them the identity of a barbarian. This amused uneasiness gestures to the fact that Barnabas returns the gaze and invites us to no longer take Africanist film at face value, but to make us concentrate on the defective methodology of the "the ancient veil of phantasmagoria that had fallen over my country". Barnabas raises that old curtain, invites us behind the cameras to become witnesses of the artificiality of the montage. The reader witnesses the drugged actors at the center of a grotesque staging that fails to hide the strings of the montage. The native actors

4 Kirshensblatt-Gimblett analyzes the transformation of the existence of social strata who were discriminated against into a tourist object to satisfy the voyeurism of the rich (Barbara Kirshensblatt-Gimblett. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Culture*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). The exposition of African and Blacks is at the heart of the work edited by Bernth Lindfors, *Africans on Stage. Studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

become the sacrificial lambs that Aimé Césaire invited to come "out of alien days"[5] of the Africanist phantasmagoria. Repudiating this montage paves the route to the building of an African order of discourse.

## The Postcolonial Order of Discourse

Barnabas's critical gaze is an upending that establishes the order of postcolonial discourse. The barbarians who are subjected to the violence of the gaze of the conquering science nevertheless return a critical gaze onto the fabrication of this Africanist phantasmagoria. The Blacks who are the good children, the funny ones, mark their entrance into the forbidden city of knowledge by becoming aware of their existence as a subject. The birth of this subjectivity is doubled by an iconoclastic gaze, that is, one that is able to produce an understanding of the individual and his or her environment. The ethical dimension of this epistemological revolution is found in this birth into the world, a radical formulation of a humanity that has been suspended by the colonial parenthesis. And we find it significant that this bursting upon the scene of subjectivity, a movement that is part of "l'élan des peuples néantisés qui opposent aujourd'hui à l'universel de la transparence, imposé par l'Occident, une multiplicité sourde du Divers" 'the impetus of the annihilated peoples who today oppose the universalizing transparency imposed by the West, with the muted multiplicity of the Diverse' (Glissant, 1981, pp. 12-13) is symptomatic of the historic mission of the generation to which Oyono belonged. As testimony, there is the example of his confrere Mongo Beti, who also takes aim at the same "Ancient Veil of Phantasmagoria." *L'Histoire du fou* comes more than three decades after *Chemin d'Europe*. Nevertheless, both writers focus upon the same historical period.

Mongo Beti, in *L'Histoire du fou*, sets the stage for a chronicler who has returned from Europe, after a long time abroad. He has even partially lost his familiarity with his native tongue, and experiences difficulties communicating with the patriarch, the depositary of the clan's foundational mythology. The narrator's frustration in having unlearned his clan's customs betrays a malaise: "It is certainly unfortunate that examining manifestations of a passion of such importance to an entire people's soul should prove so tedious that it exposes one to the possibility of being unable to uncover the motivations behind the players' feelings, consequently giving one the sensations of being in presence of sleepwalkers" (Beti, 2001, p. 57) Whereas Barnabas caricatures the patriarch Fimsten Vavap, the last "living descendent in the long line of great ancestors" as an "illiterate," Beti's narrator admits that he finds himself in the position of being a cultural illiterate. Here, we are now far from the summary disqualification of the ancestral order that emerges from *Chemin d'Europe*. This confession also prefigures a transformation. The narrator-protagonist abandons the gaze of the "voyageurs abreuvés des images et des récits que fabriquent et diffusent les professionnels occidentaux de l'exotisme" (Beti, 1994, p. 16) 'tourists primed on images and tales fabricated and publicized by western professionals of exotica.' (Beti, 2001, p. 9) Here again, it worth calling the attention of the reader on the fixation of both Oyono and Beti on the exotic trope. The narrator explains his alienation by having been too close to the Parisian Third-Worldists:

> I too (do I dare admit it?) unconsciously subscribed to this vision of the tragedy of African societies. In fact, the theme of acculturation, which had become fashionable in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and its surroundings, had already generated, among the enlightened partisans of dogma, a multitude of divergent, contradictory, intersecting, parallel, and complementary theses, whose proliferation left ordinary consumers of novelty like myself both dissatisfied and yet impregnated with their *phantasmagoria*. (Beti, 2001, p. 9; emphasis added)

We could read this critique as an echo of the scorn shown by the chronicler of *Ville cruelle* with respect to the discourse of explorers, geographers, and journalists. When pressed on this point, Mongo Beti clarifies his thought in the following terms:

5 "my people/when/out of the alien days/on reknotted shoulders will you sprout a head really your own/and your own word/ the notice dispatched to the traitors/to the masters/the restituted bread the washed earth/when will you cease to be the dark toy/at the carnival of others/or in another field/the obsolete scarecrow?" (Césaire 1983 p. 349)

> What I aim at especially in the pages of my book (Beti, 1994, pp. 16-18) to which you refer are the French anthropologists, journalists, Africanists, Third-Wordists who, following in Sartre's stride, believed they could speak peremptorily of things they knew very little about, and especially about Africa, which was in fact for them the occasion for a composition, games in short. What I denounce is their combined ignorance, their dogmatism, the prestige that they benefit from, and the devastating consequences of all that on the consciousness of the French from 1960 to around 1980. Those people were moved by good intentions, but their influence was disastrous for French policy in Africa. In a way, they were at the source of the good conscience that led to situations like Rwanda—and less dramatically, Cameroon. (personal correspondence with Mongo Beti, December 28, 1994)

Mongo Beti uncovers not only the devastating impact the discourse of the Third-Worldists and Africanists of the Latin Quarter, but also reflects on the compromised gaze of the chronicler. It is significant that the word "phantasmagory" used by Oyono in *Chemin d'Europe* (1960) returns in *L'Histoire du fou* (1994). The two writers, separated by more than three decades, make use of this same term to criticize the order of Africanist discourse as it is deployed in the microcosm of Parisian intellectuals. The deconstruction of the Africanist phantasmagory is seen as a necessary step in the validation of an order of African discourse.

## Conclusion

The novel serves as an archive of the scholarly library, a crystallization of the essentially exclusive domination of the colonial library. Writing presupposes an apprenticeship in this library, which solidifies the colonial Metropolis as the locus of the origin of knowledges. To write in a colonized context is at the same time to parade a subjection to this colonial library, but also to experience the process of its repudiation, or at least its deconstruction. Writing means unlearning the effects of this colonial library in order to arrive at a decolonized library, or at least to set the milestones for such a project. *Evolués*, dazzled by the incandescent lights of the knowledge acquired at the colonial school and of which they really have only a rudimentary understanding, are convinced that it will serve the cause of their emancipation. The graduates, who have surpassed the stage of the hallucinatory contemplation, theorize another use of knowledge in the colonial context. Writing determines the modalities of imperial normalizations: the cult of the written document (colonial treatises, sites of deceptions, misunderstandings, and imperials ruses), the fetishism of the literate (assimilé, *évolué*, or graduate) and the repression of orality and the sociopolitical system that renders it possible, despite its cultural and sociological importance. The misunderstanding between Barnabas and the tutelary guardian of the line of great ancestors is a variation on the deaf war between Africa and itself. Writing has helped to make the peoples of orality assume guilt for their deficiency in writing and therefore in civilization and knowledge. They are forever made guilty, in turn, by this role. They are cursed by their pact with the clan's enemies. Yet despite this curse, the *évolués* elect the intellectuals as missionaries of progress for them by means of a demand that takes the shape of what we have characterized as their historical mission. The formulation of this demand comes up against—and this is what we have suggested through the definition of the *évolué* by intellectuals—the symbolic protectionism, in other words, the intellectuals' consciousness of their status in colonial society. In the end, opposition to colonialism constitutes a terrain for the reconciliation of future intellectuals and *évolués*.

## Bibliography


Apollinaire, G. (1913). *Alcools*. Gallimard.

Beti, M. (1954). *Ville cruelle* (sous le pseudonyme d'Eza Boto). Présence africaine.

Beti, M. (1956). *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. Robert Laffont.

Beti, M. (1978, mars-avril). De la violence de l'impérialisme au chaos rampant. *Peuples noirs-Peuples africains*, 2, 11-30.

Beti, M. (1994). *L'Histoire du fou*. Julliard.

Beti, M. (1994). Correspondence with author. December 1994.

Beti, M. (2001). *The Story of the Madman*. Translated by Elisabeth Darnel. The University of Virginia Press.

Beti, M. (2005). *Mongo Beti à Yaoundé, 1991-2001. Textes réunis et présentés par Philippe Bissek*. Éd. des Peuples noirs.

Beti, M., & Tobner, O. (1989). *Dictionnaire de la négritude*. L'Harmattan.

Bjornson, R. (1993). *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity: Cameroon Writing and the National Experience*. Indiana University Press.

Boni, N. (1962). *Le Crépuscule des temps anciens*. Présence africaine.

Britanica Academic. (2024). Ferdinand Léopold Oyono. In *Britanica Academic*. https://academic-eb-com.ezp.lib.rochester.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Ferdinand-Léopold-Oyono/57854. Accessed 24 January 2024.

Césaire, A. (1966). *Une Saison au Congo*. Editions du Seuil.

Césaire, A (1994). *La Poésie*. Édition établie par Daniel Maximin et Gilles Carpentier. Éditions du Seuil.

Chemain, A. (1998). "Ville cruelle : situation œdipienne, mère castrante." In S. Arnold, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Mongo Beti* (pp. 15-40). Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Christian, B. (1987). The Race for Theory. *Cultural Critique*, *6*, 51-63. https://doi.org/10.2307/1354255.

Condé, M. (1981). *Une Saison à Rihata*. Robert Laffont.

Condé, M. (1984). *Ségou, les murailles de terre*. Robert Laffont.

Condé, M. (1989). *La Terre en miettes*. Translated in English by Linda Coverdale. Viking Press

Condé, M. (1998). *Le Cœur à rire et à pleurer, contes vrais de mon enfance*. Robert Laffont.

Dadié, B. B. (1956). *Climbié*. Seghers.

Diallo, M. (2017). *Le Concept et le roman. Philosopher avec la littérature en Afrique noire*. Hermann.

Diome, F. (2001). *La préférence nationale*. Présence africaine.

Diome, F. (2003). *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Éditions Anne Carrière.

Diome, F. (2006). *The Belly of the Atlantic*. Translated by Lulu Norman and Ros Schwartz. Serpent Tail.

Eshelman, C. & Smith. A (1983). *Aimé Césaire : The Collected Poetry*. The University of California Press.

Gadjigo, S. (1990). École blanche, Afrique noire. L'Harmattan.

Glissant, É. (1981). *Le Discours antillais*. Éditions du Seuil.

Hel-Bongo, O. (2019). *Romans francophones et essai. Mudimbe, Chamoiseau, Khatibi*. Honoré Champion.

Irele, F. A. (2000). Introduction. In A. H. Bâ, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*. Indiana University Press.

Kane, C. H. (1961). *L'Aventure ambiguë*. Julliard.

Kane, C. H. (1963). *Ambiguous Adventure*. Translated from the French by Katherine Woods. Heinemann.

Kemedjio, C. (1999). *De la négritude à la créolité. Édouard Glissant, Maryse Condé et la malédiction de la théorie.* Lit Verlag.

Kemedjio, C. (2003). L'arrière-pays contre la violence coloniale. *Études littéraires*, *35*(1), 41-54. https://doi.org/10.7202/008632ar.

Kemedjio, C. (2006). "Faire taire les silences du corps noir." *Présence francophone : Revue internationale de langue et de littérature, 66*(1), *pp. 12-36.*

Kemedjio, C. (2021). "Migration, Literary Imagination, and Mirages in the Francophone Text: Paths to Anthropological Mutilation." In G. Olankule, ed., *A Companion to African Literatures* (pp. 333-349). Wiley-Blackwell.

Kirshensblatt-Gimblett, B. (1998). *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Culture*. University of California Press.

Laye, C. (1953). *L'Enfant noir*. Plon.

Lindfords, B. (ed) (2000). *Africans on Stage. Studies in Ethnological Show Business*. Indiana University Press.

Lopes, H. (1997). *Le Lys et le Flamboyant*. Éditions du Seuil.

Miller, C. L. (1988). *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.

Mpoyi-Buatu, T. (2003). "Un contour/tribun non conformiste." In A. Kom, ed., *Remember Mongo Beti* (pp. 215-225). Bayreuth African Studies 67.

Mortimer, M. (1990). *Journeys Through the French African Novel*. Heinemann & James Currey.

Moudileno, L. (1997). *L'Écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature*. Karthala.

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press.

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1992). *The Surreptitious Speech.* Présence africaine *and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987*. The University of Chicago Press.

Nfah-Abbenyi, J. M. (1997). *Gender in African Women's Writing. Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*. Indiana University Press.

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2009). *Something New and Torn. An African Renaissance*. Civitas Books.

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2012). *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. Columbia University Press.

Oyono, F. (1956a). *Une Vie de boy*. Julliard.

Oyono. F. (1966). *Houseboy*. Translated from the French by John Reed, Waveland Press.

Oyono, F. (1956b). *Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille*. Julliard.

Oyono, F. (1980). *Chemin d'Europe*. Édition Club Afrique Loisirs.

Oyono, F. (1989). *Road to Europe*. Translated by Richard Bjornson. Three Continents Press.

Parascandola, L. J. (2009). "What Are We Blackmen Who Are Called French?': The Dilemma of Identity in Oyono's *Une vie de boy* and Sembène's *La noire de..." Comparative Literature Studies*, *46*(2), 2009, 360-378. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25659720

Rimbaud, A. (1987). *Une Saison en enfer*. José Corti.

Sembène, O. (1962). *Voltaïque, La Noire de... nouvelles*. Présence africaine.

Senghor, L. S. (1948). *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*. PUF.

Taubira, C. (2012). *Mes météores. Combats politiques au long cours*. Flammarion.

Toumson, R. (1989). *La Transgression des couleurs : littérature et langage des Antilles (XVIII^e^, XIX^e^, XX^e^ siècles). Tome 1*. Éditions caribéennes.

Zobel, J. (1974). *La rue Cases-Nègres* (1950). Présence africaine.

Zobel, J. (1980). *Black Shack Alley*. Translated by Keith Q. Warner. Three Continents.

Translated from the French by Ruthmarie H. Mitsch.