

The Discursive Construction of the Ivorian Nation in the Period of Ivoirité

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2010

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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Nationalism in Africa has to deal with a conception of the category of nation as a mediator between self and world which is complicated by a number of competing factors. Colonialism and neocolonialism, ethnic, racial and religious considerations, and other supra-national and intra-national factors all vie for the power to variously define the nation or reject it. With a cultural *raison d'être* at the core of any nation's distinctiveness, I study five Ivorian authors' evolving conceptions of the Côte d'Ivoire within their novels—their cultural products—from 1995 to 2006. This time period in the Côte d'Ivoire is one of a civil war and the lead-up to it—a time of extreme tension on the national identity's definition. I argue that works from Amadou Kourouma, Kitia Touré, Amadou Koné, Véronique Tadjo, and Tanella Boni from this period all perform an Ivorian-ness which contrasts in various ways from the state's official doctrine of Ivoirité—a uniquely Ivorian discourse which reinforced a budding agonism in the conception of the nation on the ground and ultimately served to foment the exclusion of the Northern half of the country. Using tools taken by analogy primarily from Jameson's The Political Unconscious, I demonstrate that allegorical readings serve well as a basis from which to make deeper insights and reveal deeper traces of each novel's performance of its own conception of Ivorian-ness. In this way I show that despite its history as an imposed, artificial, and modern category of identity, the cultural agents and producers of the Côte d'Ivoire are invested in nation's potential, not as a temporary step toward more global poles of mediation between self and world, not as an

iv

institution inevitably fraught with internal minorities and divisions, but as a positive unit of solidarity in and of itself.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION – IVOIRITÉ, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ALLEGORY ...	1
2.0	BONI – DELAYED CLARITY VS. THE MEN OF IVOIRITÉ	46
3.0	TADJO – LITERATURE AND THE NATIONAL BINARIES.....	135
4.0	TOURÉ AND KONÉ – CLASS CONFLICT AND NARRATIVE CONTROL	191
5.0	KOUROUMA – IRONY, LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY SUBLIMATED ...	231
6.0	CONCLUSION.....	288
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	294

PREFACE

My earthly praise to people for their connection in the accomplishment of this dissertation's completion is owed to a great many. To the dear friends, respected teachers, interested colleagues whose influence improved my work, I thank you. Special consideration should go to the Department of French and Italian who have bent over backwards with patience for me. And if patience and longsuffering are some key qualities which tend to produce quality in workmanship, then Roberta Hatcher has been mine. A true pedagogue, a true mentor, Roberta has known how to diagnose problems with sensitivity, how to plant seeds for my own thought to develop rather than offering instantaneous corrections, and how to inspire the best out of my arguments even when she didn't agree with them all wholesale. To her I extend my deepest gratitude.

And to my wife, I offer my dedication. There on the metaphorical sidelines as teammate and coach, there in the stands as cheerleader and fan, the heart of my home, the peace of my mind, the love of my humanity, the happiness of my being—this work has been enabled by you more than anyone. Our eternity together will always be sweetened for me by the remembrance of all the freely offered support you gave me during this trying time of academic creation. I give this dissertation to you.

1.0 INTRODUCTION – IVOIRITÉ, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ALLEGORY

The nation as a construct poses a particular problem in Africa, in part because there are several other powerful alternatives as loci of group cohesion and self-identification in strong tension with the nation as a legitimate mediator between self and world. For example, the Ivorian author Véronique Tadjo, has a firm background in some of the key alternatives. Her doctoral work in African American literature highlights the role of race over nation. Her literary contribution to a project on the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide focused her awareness on ethnicity over nation. And her place as writing from the Ivorian diaspora (currently residing in South Africa as she does) underscores a continental tone over a national one in much of her writing. And yet, her latest work Reine Pokou: Concerto pour un sacrifice, from 2004, begins with the following introduction:

La légende d'Abraha Pokou, reine baoulé, m'a été contée pour la première fois quand j'avais autour de dix ans. Je me souviens que l'histoire de cette femme sacrifiant son fils unique pour sauver son peuple avait frappé mon imagination de petite fille vivant à Abidjan. Je me représentais Pokou sous les traits d'une Madone noire.

Plus tard, au lycée, je retrouvai le récit du sacrifice, mais cette fois-ci dans mon livre d'histoire...Abraha Pokou prenait ainsi la stature d'une figure historique, héroïne-amazone conduisant son peuple vers la liberté.

Pokou grandit en moi. Je lui donnai un visage, une vie, des sentiments.

Plusieurs décennies plus tard, la violence et la guerre déferlèrent dans *notre* vie, rendant brusquement le futur incertain. Pokou m'apparut alors sous un jour beaucoup plus funeste, celui d'une reine assoiffée de pouvoir, écoutant des voix occultes et prête à tout pour asseoir son règne. (7, *emphasis mine*)

This text, written in response to a crisis of internal division and civil war in the Côte d'Ivoire, situates itself firmly within the domain of the national here despite the many alternative identitarian loci on which Tadjó is well trained to hang her identity hat. Note that the "notre" refers to the Ivorian *nation*, and not the Baoulé ethnic group associated with the Pokou foundational myth. Note that the re-contextualization of ethnic stories implies a re-thinking of *national* identity. Note how clearly literature, politics, and identity are all bound up together, for Tadjó, with a concern for peace on the *national* level. Tadjó's text sees itself as an intervention into the national identity on the ground in her home country, not, as some postcolonial critics would have it, as a diasporic voice from a "third space" whose writing is merely *about* a third-world nation, but whose intervention is really meant as a corrective to first-world narratives of national belonging¹. I believe that this apparent investment in the concept of nation over

¹ Ibhish finds Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* to be participating in this logic. "One of the principle aims," he summarizes, "of Postcolonial Theory, in fact, is to map out in detail the extent to which...the colonizing and colonized worlds constitute each other politically, economically and, above all, culturally" (221). Imre Szeman also finds that many of the canonically "postcolonial" authors may write about the

ethnicity, race, religion, pan-Africanism, or any other locus of mediation between self and world in African literature deserves careful study and provides a potentially corrective perspective to discussions on the forms and functions of nationalism in Africa.

In this dissertation, I analyze works of five novelists from the Côte d'Ivoire from a specific period of national tension and civil war for the varying ways in which they represent their national identities. Tadjó's example text meets this question of the nation head on, introducing her novel as an exploration of how the national definition changes as the narratives surrounding its founding myths are transmitted and interpreted. The other authors in this study deal with the nation with varying degrees of directness. What they all share, however, is traces of the nation and its tensions in their deep structure. The fundamental literary question I submit the texts to, then, is: what shape, if any, does the nation take in the author's imaginary and how is it textually constructed?

I chose the Côte d'Ivoire for several reasons, not the least of which being that it is an African nation, and the very construct of the nation in Africa is an interesting topic which presents particularities with respect to received Western models. The period of crisis I define adds to the interest of the study, because it provides a dimension of urgent pressure to a literary study of questions concerning how text relates to context, and the concepts of nationalism at play in the imaginaries of these authors, throwing into relief the powerful grip national solidarities can have on the psyche of even those cultural agents who appear, on the surface, to oppose them. Most importantly, and most particularly, though, the Côte d'Ivoire is a powerful case study because of its unique history, especially concerning a state-sponsored doctrine called "Ivoirité"

third world, but live and intend their writings for the first in his 2003 Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation.

which became a part of the discursive field which each of the authors had to navigate in the construction of their imagined nations.

The Côte d'Ivoire stood out in West Africa by contrast as a beacon of political peace and economic prosperity in the first thirty years after Independence in 1960². Under Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the state's policies of continuing close ties to France and official discourse of "Akwaba" ("hospitality" in the Baoulé tongue) produced not only a stable connectedness between otherwise potentially antagonistic ethnic components of the nation, but also ushered in a continuous flow of immigrants eager to take advantage of the economic freedoms that their own states could not guarantee.

However, Houphouët-Boigny, like many dictators aligned with the US, was forced by the IMF at the end of the cold war to make democratic reforms in order to maintain his income stream from foreign aid and foreign loans. Specifically, this translated into the legalization of political parties other than his own, and free elections, which were held in 1990. His re-election by a large majority, partly benefited by the votes of immigrants who he had granted dual citizenship, was quickly followed by his decline in health and political hand-off to a successor groomed for the task: Henri Konan Bédié. It was Bédié, then, who had to face the nation's first serious electoral threat to the only ruling party since Independence, because the new multi-party system had naturally fractured the country along more or less ethnic lines, especially creating a division between North and South, which in and of itself also roughly translated the Christian/Muslim divide. Bédié's response was in sharp contrast to the Akwaba doctrine. In a

² The "Civil War" entry in the Encyclopedia of African History provides a vastly simplified, but adequate overview of a number of post-colonial civil wars along with an impressive bibliography. Buhaug and Rød use an innovative research design to productively complicate the model of these conflicts as "civil wars" rather identifying local determinants independently of state affiliation in their recent (2006) article "Local Determinants of African civil wars". Theological Africanist historian Niels Klasfelt has also put together an interesting multi-disciplinary edited volume of religion's role in conflicts from the area in Religion and African Civil Wars, thereby also providing an alternative to the purely "national" view of these conflicts.

1995 political rally (an election year, and barely a year after the devaluation), Bédié outlined a new national doctrine that he entitled Ivoirité.

On its face, Ivoirité was a continuation of the Akwaba doctrine in that it proclaimed a cultural and political solidarity and strength in the diversity of ethnic groups within the nation's borders. The surface difference, then, was only in its demarcation of otherness in comparison to surrounding nations. The lines were sharpened, and the constitution was amended so that only candidates to the presidency whose parents were both indigenous citizens of the Côte d'Ivoire would be allowed to run³. Since the predominantly Muslim North consisted of many ethnic groups whose territories straddled bordering states, this amendment contributed to the calling into question of the citizenship of anyone with a Northern sounding name⁴. And, true to Ivoirité's dissimulated intention, the only candidate affected by the amendment was Allesane Ouattara, a Northerner whose party had the best chance to beat Bédié. Despite the inclusionary rhetoric, then, Ivoirité became rather the name for exclusion. And from there things only worsened.

The year 1995 saw the other major opposition party band together with the constitutionally excluded one to stage a "boycott actif" which led to riots, tear gas and burned tires in the streets on two key campaign weekends. Bédié was elected with a huge percentage of the vote in which turnout was mandate-threateningly low. He served a scant three years of his

³ The logic of such an amendment is difficult to fathom given that all of the candidates for the election in question were born BEFORE the Côte d'Ivoire's political Independence. It can partly be explained by the fact that Bédié had inherited a large parliamentary majority riding on Houphouët-Boigny's popularity at the 1990 election. It is also important to note that the size of the immigrant community and their ability to participate in voting was identified as a problem before Bédié seized upon it to exclude Ouattara. Laurent Gbagbo, opposition leader at the time, later to become president himself, pushed for this type of amendment as early as 1993. To add further hypocrisy, a journalist looked into Bédié's own parentage and found that his birth mother may have been Ghanaian.

⁴ Again it is fruitful to consult Katja Werthmann's "Wer sind die Dyula? Ethnizität und Bürgerkrieg in der Côte d'Ivoire." since it is hard to overstate just how recently the ambiguity of onomastics congealed into hard and fast categorical differences on the ground implying the difference between rights of citizenship and the lack thereof.

five-year term during which he expanded his Ivoirité doctrine considerably. In this literary study, the most notable and tangible cultural and philosophical manifestation of the doctrine came in the form of a document produced when Bédié convinced a fairly diverse list of professors from the national university, including social scientists, philosophers and literary intellectuals to contribute together to the definition of what the term “Ivoirité” should mean⁵. In 1996 this group, calling themselves the *Cellule Universitaire de Recherche, d'Enseignement et de Diffusion des Idées et Actions Politiques du Président Henri Konan Bédié* or CURDIPHE for short, published a collection of brief articles on the subject entitled: L’ivoirité, ou l’esprit du nouveau contrat social du Président H. K. Bédié. Outlined within its pages, among others, are historical justifications for the cultural integrity and distinctiveness of the Côte d’Ivoire, a philosophical breakdown of the term and its associated meanings, a call for cultural agents to participate in the articulation of specifically Ivorian national symbols, a refutation of the charge of xenophobia, an apologia for the state’s necessary work of identifying citizens and non-citizens, and an impassioned appeal by prize-winning author Jean-Marie Adiaffi for Ivorians to unify against neocolonialism based on values shared in transcendence of ethnicity.

Despite its positive claims to inclusivity, pluralism, tolerance and diversity however, the collection of essays could hardly negate the real economic and political consequences associated with the term Ivoirité, which were perceived on the ground as rather exclusive if not completely xenophobic. For example, in 1998, Bédié revoked *ius solis* and passed a law that only Ivorian citizens can legally hold property. Seeing an economic opportunity in these laws, some “indigenes” forcibly confiscated land held by “foreigners” and several anti-Dioula pogroms were

⁵ The bulk of whom concurrently or shortly after publication served high within the ranks of Bédié’s *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire*.

organized in the Southern part of the country, driving Muslim foreigners and Ivorians with Northern/foreign sounding names and customs to flee to the North in many instances⁶.

A successful Christmas Eve *coup d'état* in 1999 put an end to Bédié's power. New elections were scheduled for the following year, and Laurent Gbagbo declared himself winner of an extremely tight race at that time. Because Gbagbo had been a proponent of the two-Ivorian-parent amendment from the beginning, the constitution in force for the 2000 election had again excluded Allesane Ouattara's party and again a boycott was staged. Gbagbo continued Bédié's Ivoirité policies to a large extent and the North reacted by organizing a number of rebel militias into a large enough coalition force to seize and maintain control over the northern half of the country. Their 2002 coup attempt on Gbagbo failed, but the civil war was engaged and the international community (first the African Union, then the UN Security Council) sent the French troops already on the ground to quell hostilities between the government and the rebels under a blue helmet mandate. Gbagbo has held on to power since that 2000 election, but has been forced to share it as part of concessions to the North in an effort to put an end to armed hostilities which continued on and off through 2004. The country remains split roughly North/South along religious and ethnic lines to this day even though the leader of the Northern "rebels" now serves in the Southern controlled government as Prime Minister, and several other key ministries have been ceded to the rebels.

It should be clear from the history and the official Ivoirité rhetoric caught up in the causes of this civil war just how large the state's and the people's investment in national identity is and how intensely it is being contested during this 1995-2006 period. As of this writing, UN and

⁶ Siendou Konaté takes a compelling look at this history in his 2004 *West Africa Review* article "The Politics of Identity and Violence" while Christian Bouquet takes a closer look at the revocation of property rights for certain "Dioula" in his 2003 *Géopolitique Africaine* article "Être étranger en Côte d'Ivoire: la nébuleuse dioula."

NGO officials are collaborating to enumerate a verified electoral list of Ivorian citizens for elections scheduled for later this year, which is to say that there is such an investment in defining Ivorian and non-Ivorian that even outside parties see a benefit to intervening in the Côte d'Ivoire's internal affairs.

Beyond the particularities of the state's doctrine of Ivoirité, however, the category or concept of Ivorian-ness which the novelists in this study evoke and invoke, whether in a period of relative stability or hotly contested, does not exist merely in a sort of synchronic isolation. Although a variety of ethnic groups had claimed, contested, and crossed territories with the current nation's boundaries for centuries before, the modern nation of the Côte d'Ivoire could only claim existence as such when unified into a single ontological space by the French during the colonial period⁷. This is not to say that all groups within the territory mapped out by the French equally conformed to the unity imposed upon them, but it is important to note that there was an abrupt difference in how groups could self-identify or even cohere as groups at the arrival of the French. It is important because this contrasts with the historical model by which most Western nations came into being. The slow evolution from at least the Enlightenment period by which Western ethnicities slowly developed more and more centralized states which could claim institutional authority over their particular ethnic group and territory—at times co-opting or ignoring smaller, closely related but distinct ethnicities along the way—made for countries such as France and Britain whose status as nations rather than as ethnicities was confirmed as hegemonic within their own territories by at least the late nineteenth century. In many sub-

⁷ This is essentially the point of one of the academic contributors to the official state doctrine of Ivoirité: socio-ethnologist and former Minister of Culture in the Ivorian government, Georges Niangoran-Bouah, writing in the CURDIPHE document I will delve into in this chapter. While I will have reason to take issue with his ideological alignment later, this otherwise well-respected scholar has a simple point difficult to refute here: something changed with the French imposition of borders and the declaration of the Côte d'Ivoire as a single political entity.

Saharan African “nations” however, the evolution of states within ethnic groups was abruptly, radically, and irrevocably altered by the colonial imposition of borders⁸. The great scramble for Africa had been occurring for some decades when Bismarck called a conference in Berlin in 1885 where his European homologues sat down to pre-settle potential conflicts between them by deciding beforehand how to divide up the African map under their respective jurisdictions. The borders thus created were artificial in the extreme to the actual inhabitants of the continent, because the Berlin conference attendees were interested in guaranteeing administrative rights over territories they thought would be beneficial to their own national interests. These new borders, enforced to varying degrees over the next decades, but rarely altered since then, at once lumped pre-existing ethnic groups together willy-nilly—despite previous long-standing affinities or antipathies—and neatly bisected others often without regard for any ethnic group’s own definition of territorial borders. This colonial carving, then, is one of the historical determinants of Ivorian-ness such as it is now.

It would likewise be difficult to understate the importance of ethnicity in the African nation-state⁹. Whether one conceives of an ethnic group as primarily hereditary, primarily cultural, primarily religious, primarily political, or primarily economic in its ability to produce, enforce, and maintain group solidarities and hierarchies, the fact remains that African nation-states in general include a multi-ethnic landscape in which ethnicity is seen to distinguish culturally, linguistically, and traditionally between groups on a more local level than the nation.

⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah powerfully establishes this fact and describes the events of the 1885 Berlin conference in his 1993 In My Father’s House.

⁹ Ethnicity in Africa is another subject too voluminous to thoroughly cite. For this reason I suggest Carola Lentz’s overview from 1995 published in Cahiers des Sciences Humaines, entitled: “‘Tribalism’ and Ethnicity in Africa: A review of four decades of Anglophone research”. For a more francophone perspective, I will also investigate Jean-Loup Amselle’s assertion in his Logiques Métisses that ethnic groups do not define their own membership in the same ways that the colonial will-to-knowledge did, and that therefore a supposition of original diversity is preferable to the assumption of monolithic and insular tribes when dealing in the African context.

On one hand, this hierarchical conception of the relationship between ethnicity and nationality cedes primordality to the local, and grants ethnicity a more central psychic space with which to command solidarity, having a more core claim to tradition, to territory, to cultural identity as it does. On the other hand, this relationship also permits the state to claim jurisdictional authority over the ethnic groups within its territory, and enables a nation-state's members to be, for example, Ivorian and Bété at the same time without either losing its coherence¹⁰.

It is in this more positive vein that nationalism in Africa could become a feeling and a force strong enough to begin contesting the injustice of the colonial condition. The more localized ethnic groups too weak to mount an effective resistance, it was rather on the grounds of national self-determination that Côte d'Ivoire, along with many of France's colonies, won political independence in 1960 having powerfully lobbied, demonstrated, and prepared for it for roughly a decade¹¹.

The newly independent state, however, had its work cut out for it in maintaining national cohesion, and the Côte d'Ivoire was not an exception to the post-colonial rule in this regard. The rule was that under the common threat to its sovereignty, the nation's ethnic groups could put aside their differences and resist a greater foe together. With direct French power waning, though, previous affiliations could begin to re-assert themselves, and especially among those

¹⁰ Appiah describes a similar phenomenon in his 1993 In my Father's House. He describes being both Ashanti and Ghanaian himself. He concedes, however, that not all ethnic groups within Ghana felt equally at home inhabiting the category "Ghanaian", which speaks to the problem of this point: that ethnicity and nationality are in a contest for legitimacy settled with variable success within each African state's borders.

¹¹ While Frederick Cooper, in his 1996 tome Decolonization and African Society provides an important corrective, demonstrating that France's moves to prepare their own neo-colonial power bases as West Africans finally won political independence in 1960 were much more influential than the official histories have confessed, his point is oblique to my more direct engagement with the cultural construct of the nation by its own agents on the ground. Official histories may hide certain determining factors of the shape of the nation-state, but the people conceive of their Independence as having been fought for and won from the French. And Houphouët-Boigny's efforts in labor movements to oppose forced labor, as well as his direct work in the French legislature on the *loi-cadre* removing many inequalities in voting rights, and transferring much more political control to the colonies, are seen as a source of national pride at the time and to this day.

who felt unfairly treated by the new post-colonial regimes. The post-colonial state inherited the infrastructure and institutions of the colonial state¹², which is to say that its purpose was to consolidate power and extract resources for the benefit of the metropole, not necessarily to promote democratic rule and guarantees of civil rights. Since regional favoritism was built in to the colonial state, it is easy to see—even if leaders didn’t also come with their own ethnic biases, and even if power didn’t already tend to corrupt—how the ethnic groups left out of favor by the state could begin to seek escape from the new post-colonial state’s oppression. Further compounding the impending ethnic fractures within nations was the decision of the influential Organization of African Unity’s 1963 charter and founding document holding that post-colonial states would strictly respect colonial borders. In this way, states permanently relegated ethnicity to secondary status, at least juridically, thus leaving ethnic groups with no recourse to affiliated groups across state lines to contest the state’s control. Borders may be porous and ill-defined to this day, but for any ethnic group to seek a change in them would be to take on two state structures at once, if not also the entire international community.

Aware of this potential for internal conflict, post-colonial states went to great lengths to teach their citizens the kind of national solidarity they needed for their own legitimacy. The Côte d’Ivoire was no exception. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the nation’s first president and thirty-year dictator, put in place a massive campaign to reinforce his chosen national motto of Akwaba—the Baoulé word for welcome, for hospitality—which is still in place today. The national anthem refers to the Côte d’Ivoire as the *pays d’hospitalité*. Measures were taken at all

¹² This is a point commonly echoed in post-colonial criticism. I will later review Appiah, Thomas and Miller in this chapter, who each in the works cited make this introductory and unavoidable point, telling the story of this paragraph each in their own way. However, it is important to point out that it is never used as an absolution of post-colonial regimes for their abuses of power, but rather as a necessary historical descriptor for understanding the phenomena of abuses of power.

levels of the military to ensure units could not consolidate along ethnic lines. Many high schools were set up with housing units to support a widely used national program of secondary education in which students were encouraged to study in an ethnic territory other than their own as a way to encourage inter-ethnic solidarity and understanding. Politically as well, Houphouët-Boigny's own cabinet always incorporated a balance, more or less, of ethnically diverse leaders. More than the mere lip-service some other African states offered, these concrete attempts at pluralism in its multi-ethnic democracy form part of the Côte d'Ivoire's particularity, and the length of period of Ivorian stability may have come from the fact that these were actual measures taken¹³. Dominic Thomas, in his study of nation-building in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that national integration was a common meme among new post-colonial states, but that ethnic divisiveness and favoritism were the deeds that mere pluralistic words could not cover¹⁴.

In his alignment with the US-led anti-communist bloc Félix Houphouët-Boigny's Côte d'Ivoire held a relaxed policy on border control right from Independence. Sharing borders with socialist Ghana, Mali, and Burkina Faso, with communist Guinée, and with extremely poor and often troubled Sierra Leone, the Côte d'Ivoire's relative prosperity and freedom acted as a natural magnet for immigrants. Houphouët-Boigny not only encouraged massive immigration to increase the work force during prosperous times to support the Côte d'Ivoire's heavily agricultural export-oriented economy, but also dual citizenship in order to consolidate an already strong base of support among immigrants¹⁵. Although his previously mentioned Akwaba

¹³ Concrete efforts did yield a lasting peace, but it would be naïve to accept Houphouët-Boigny's own rhetoric about his administrative actions entirely at face value. To be sure, these measures were also the very same that helped consolidate and ensure his own power as dictator, whether or not the general perception agreed to his benevolence.

¹⁴ Thomas, Dominic. Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa. Blommington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

¹⁵ Appiah's "Altered States" chapter in his 1992 In My Father's House: Africa in the philosophy of culture is a good source for a brief history of how African economies integrated into the world economy via a limited number of models.

rhetoric and actions genuinely matched in promoting openness to immigrants and an ethnically pluralistic society, he also did not turn away the political help his policies could afford him as they broke down along ethnic lines. Houphouët-Boigny was Baoulé, a monarchic and mostly Christianized ethnic group with generic roots in the Akan group which borders Ghana. Some natural support accrued to him from this affiliation. Mali, Guinée and Burkina Faso, in the North are countries which bisect the mostly Muslim affiliated ethnic groups also present in the Côte d'Ivoire. Houphouët-Boigny's openness to immigrants from these areas helped consolidate support with the North. All together, by the end of the 1990s, these relaxed border policies had resulted in the immigrant community forming between a quarter and a third of the population living within Ivorian borders¹⁶. To encourage immigrants to remain and take a full stake in their new society, the Côte d'Ivoire's laws included both *ius sanguinis* and *ius solis*, as well as relaxed conditions for obtaining full citizenship.

I have previously mentioned several elements of Houphouët-Boigny's answer to the African challenge of post-colonial nation-building. The national pedagogy of Akwaba was to a large extent successful as implemented in the ethnic diversity of his cabinet and the nation's military ranks. The secondary school system ensured that a critical mass of students would have lengthy experiences outside their home ethnic territory, thus hopefully providing for generations of ethnically open minds. Even in the opening years of his presidency as several coup and assassination attempts were foiled¹⁷, Houphouët-Boigny's rhetoric of quick forgiveness and unity in reconciliation were gestures that put weight behind the official doctrine of Akwaba. The

¹⁶ This immigrant history is underscored in an insightful and concise 2005 afrika spectrum article in German from Katja Werthmann entitled: "Wer sind die Dyula? Ethnizität und Bürgerkrieg in der Côte d'Ivoire" which goes into even greater detail exploring how the North of the Côte d'Ivoire and the immigrant communities in the South came to be constructed.

¹⁷ Some sources suggest these plots against him were in fact faked by his own administration as an excuse to imprison his political enemies. I will cite only Amadou Kourouma in this study.

eventual impact of such a large proportion of immigrants, even in a relatively prosperous country, however, could only strain the spirit of the doctrine.

Where resources become scarce enough that groups perceive a threat to their livelihood, a common reaction is to lay the blame on another group with a less anchored stake in the local interchange of the resources in question. Although it would be a mistake to reduce the cause of anti-immigrant sentiment in the Côte d'Ivoire to purely economic reasons, their overall context should not be ignored. And this context has largely to do with French influence.

Besides their military presence, Houphouët-Boigny's active role in promoting French language and the Francophonie, and a substantial contingent of *Coopérant* volunteers in the early 1960s, the French were also intimately intertwined in many of the new nation's industries, and especially its finances. The CFA Franc was in place long before the end of the colonial era, but could not have better served France's neocolonial ends after Independence. In an agreement with the smaller and less diversified economies of its former colonies, France essentially took responsibility for monetary policy away from them by pegging their currency to a fixed rate with the French one. The benefit to the African nations was a stability of currency provided by removing the temptation from African governments to over-print their own money to "solve" the problem of their poverty or their debts. The downside is that for reasons internal to France's own economy, radical devaluations of the African currencies could occur without any real power for appeal. Just such a devaluation in 1994 was part of a general malaise that contributed to riots in Abidjan, in which many immigrant-owned businesses and homes were damaged and looted.

The particularities of Ivorian history and of African history form part of the basic evolving social conditions out of which the creative forces involved in cultural production can

form a text. But beyond these diachronic considerations, the nation as a construct also conforms to variously theorized synchronic constraints on which the literature is extensive and at times contradictory. And while there is much to disagree on when it comes to national identity and its functions, theorists generally take the nation to be a modern construct, a locus of group identity mediating between self and world, and as primarily cultural in nature, operating like a metanarrative, and, in the case of the Côte d'Ivoire and many others, is associated with and shaped with respect to (and at times in opposition to) a state. When I reference the concept in this study it will always intend to capture these elements in its semantic field.

Although my method is flexible enough to allow for a variety of analytic tools as they seem appropriate to the texts in question, part of this dissertation's argument is nonetheless that allegorical readings work well as a starting point to show how these texts perform their own Ivorian-ness, no matter how overt or covert the subject of the nation may seem to be. This assertion comes out of a theoretical engagement primarily with Fredric Jameson whose seminal work in The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act lays out a Marxian mode of critical reading in which, over a number of "horizons" of analysis, narrative's deep structure inevitably contains allegorical representations of Marx's "modes of production." His and my conception of allegory and its expediency in literary criticism represents a departure from a narrower, but influential definition of allegory as a totalizing literary genre in which the text suggests its own hermeneutic as a direct representation of experience. Rather, while conceding the confusion to the aptly named genre, the term allegory, for Jameson and for me, is also the best to describe the structure such a genre indicates: a meta-symbolic system. This latter definition reduces the totalizing effect of the genre, and allows the interpretive strategy it implies

a structure to apply to deep structures of texts or of parts of texts rather than simply over the entire surface of the work.¹⁸

In 1986, in a highly polemical formulation taken from the oft-cited article, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Jameson posits a global economic relationship between the first world and the third world, then asserts its translation into literature:

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.... Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic--necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69, original emphases).

By this assertion, and then by showing that texts contain traces of the social structures in which their authors created them, Jameson's article contributed a necessary corrective to postcolonial criticism at the time—concerned as it was with hybridity and therefore the effect the third world can have on the first—because the effect of his argument grants third world nationalisms a space of their own. Of course, his contribution was met with strident debate with

¹⁸ Studies on Benjamin's work on allegory and de Man's conception of the genre abound. I will cite only two recent engagements (from 2006) which themselves offer both references to primary sources as well as developed thought on the subject. Both engagements tacitly and overtly treat allegory as a genre rather than as a structure common to other genres: Wilkens, Matthew. "Toward a Benjaminian Theory of Dialectical Allegory;" and Fletcher, Angus J.S. "Allegory without Ideas."

essentially two major thrusts. The first and most notable is represented by Aijaz Ahmad whose reply points out how Jameson's thesis seems to require a fairly rigorous and binary opposition between the first and third worlds. Ahmad then astutely demonstrates how heterogeneous both "worlds" really are, and how unfair it is to put the entire third world in the same sack as if to flatten important and valid differences of historical and cultural trajectory between nations. The second thrust takes exception with the term allegory as a viable method of analysis, as demonstrated in the thought of Réda Bensmaïa from a chapter in his 2003 Experimental Nations or The Invention of the Maghreb. Bensmaïa finds allegory to be an oversimplified and *passé* mode of literary analysis that presumes a facile one-to-one mapping of text to context that consequently ignores the ripeness of expressive possibilities in texts. If the critic were to take an allegorical reading as the endpoint of analysis, Bensmaïa's issue with the method would seem well placed. However, in my view, Jameson does not conceive of allegory as solely the province of surface interpretation—even texts not overtly constructed as allegories still contain allegorical elements in their deeper structures—and other more recent readings of Jameson have also come to his defense in other ways. Szeman counters Ahmad to show that Jameson wasn't patronizingly passing a first world aesthetic judgment on the "third world" so much as he was theorizing how the "third world" is textually constructed as such. And McGonegal demonstrates that Jameson wasn't pigeonholing cultural work from the third world so much as he was arguing for a particular reading position in the first world. What it is safe and fruitful to retain from Jameson's polemical formulation is its underlying conception of the cultural product as mediating between the privately psychological and the public socio-political—in other words, where he places literature. Culture can be conceived of as a collection of products and practices which form both the conditions for and the medium by which self-identifications and group

cohesiveness can be performed into existence. A study of the object which such cultural productions are attempting to mediate, therefore, can be made by scrutinizing the mediation itself. In this way, the critical act of examining representations—on or under the surface of a text—reveals the contested semantic space in which national identity must be worked out.

In 1981, five years prior to his more polemic article-length formulation, Jameson had already published a longer form, book-length argument in which his allegorical reading method received a much deeper theoretical foundation—and which caused much less polemic. In his Political Unconscious, Jameson first identifies “Marxist critical insights” as an “ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts” (75). He posits three horizons of interpretation available to the critic in which the text undergoes successive interpretive movements: 1. The horizon of political history regards the text as structured allegorically like a symbolic act; 2. The horizon of social order comprehends the text as allegorically structured like the synchronic expression of an “*ideologeme*”, or unit of meaning in the larger collective discourses of class struggle; and 3. The horizon of dialectal History takes the text as structured like the allegory of an instance of the fraught coexistence of modes of production—a macro-historical node in what Jameson terms “the *ideology of form*, that is, the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production” (emphasis in the original, 76). This structure of method allows the critic a set of concentric levels of analysis which each take into account the unconscious pressures brought to bear upon them from the levels above them. His approach essentially uncovers the illusion of the surface content to reveal the deep structure beneath, which becomes the surface structure for each successive level and bears reinterpretation as such at each new horizon.

Framing literary analysis as requiring the reading of allegories through deepening horizons of interpretation, each a re-evaluation of the previous one as signifying something deeper, allows Jameson to make two important moves. In the first move, he finds both precedent and analogy in the strengths of methodologies now considered outdated, comparing Northrop Frye's symbolic "phases" (the literal/descriptive, the formal, the mythical/archetypal, and the anagogic) with medieval "levels of meaning" (the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical/eschatological). These methodologies are not resurrected wholesale, of course, but are rather re-evaluated for their power for seeking an Althusserian Master Narrative underlying any given text. What Jameson finds useful in Frye and Dante is that their analysis takes the text itself as participating in a progression of higher order phenomena at each successive stage or "phase" of analysis, ranging from the synchronic particularity of the individual psyche to the broadest diachronic forces constraining the collectivity. It is not their self-proclaimed immanence he finds useful, but rather the angle of attack to the problem of interpretation. Jameson writes:

A criticism which asks the question "what does it mean" constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code or "ultimately determining instance." On this view, then, all "interpretation" in the narrow sense demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a given text into an allegory of its particular master code or "transcendental signified" (58, emphasis in original).

Jameson's hesitancy here is significant—he is forced into equivocal language with “something like” allegory, and “forcible or imperceptible transformation...into...allegory”—because it signals a private definition; the establishment of a new term. Allegory is a system of metaphors suggesting a certain relationship between diegetic elements and the extra-diegetic context to which they correspond. What Jameson is obliquely describing then, is not the simplistic practice of identifying an interpretive key for the text, mapping the text to the real world, and then calling the critical work done. Instead, identifying the systematicity of textual metaphors is a first step, cuing more critical questions: if X allegory is the primary reading, what are the limits it imposes? What are the contradictions contained within? What blind spots does the allegory create, attempt to dissimulate? Are they merely incidental, or are they strategic in some way? The critic must move from “what does the text mean?” to “what does the allegory of the text mean?”; and from “what is the allegory here?” to “what does this allegory do?” My own question of how my novelists discursively construct their concept of their nation will take this conception of allegory as a stepping stone to deeper critical questions throughout this study.

Jameson's second move is the classic Marxian assumption, placing an unavoidably politico-economic “ultimately determining instance” at the center underlying all readings on all levels of interpretation. He astutely develops an internally consistent logic by which texts surrender their Marxist meaning through analysis at the three above-mentioned horizons, and by which all phenomena appear explainable, textual and contextual. However, the above quote also leaves room for other Master Narratives, other “transcendental signifieds” which can also have a rigorous internal logic which appears explanatory of text and world from within. It is my argument that Jameson's structure stands quite well upon substitution of the politico-economic for several other comparable organizers of human experience, each of which attempts to explain

cultural production. Race, ethnicity, gender, nation, subjectivity, language, identity, psychoanalysis – if treated with the proper analytical contextualization – could each, it would seem, function quite handily as a substitute on par with the kind of Master Narrative Jameson has theorized for Marxian economics. The various horizons of interpretation Jameson has identified may require separate theoretical consideration and labels more appropriate to the phenomena in question, but the overall *structure* of analysis – that as the critic moves between horizons, the text itself requires re-evaluation as a higher-order system of metaphors – bears out well for at least the aforementioned Master Narratives, if not also for others.

What is common to the analysis in all these cases, is the conception of the individual creative act as a performance at the intersection of conscious and unconscious forces, synchronic systems and diachronic evolutions affecting both these sides of the psyche on the individual level and throughout various levels of collectivity – being neither a mere iteration of the higher-order forces above it, nor an unconstrained anarchy of free-will. As such, the strong reader should always be able to find the Master Narrative in the deep structure of a given novel (as an example of a cultural product) at various horizons of interpretation beyond the literal even while the text's very nature must be comprehended anew as a different sort of object at each horizon.

The nation, a historically and institutionally bound concept of the collective consciousness whose *raison d'être* is cultural, will be the Master Narrative under the scope of this dissertation. However individuals or groups define themselves, whatever the legitimizing institutions of state or kin, whatever the position of majority or minority of the sub-group, the nation has come to occupy that space in the modern psyche of a category which mediates between the individual and the world. And like all mediating phenomena there are pressures of diachronic evolution and synchronic systematicity, and an interplay between individual agency

and socially determined factors, all of which are more or less analogous to those pressures and interplays within the internal logic of any other Master Narrative.

Lacanian subjects, for example, give utterance in language, which is a simultaneously synchronic and diachronic medium, which in turn is overdetermined by ideology¹⁹. In the same way, citizens' national identity—whose historical evolution they are not master of, and whose synchronic configuration is beyond their ken—is also caught up in social forces and international affairs beyond the mere fact of their belonging to a particular state.

Similarly—and more to the point of comparison with Jameson's thought—the Marxian's proletariat works and plays in activities marked by class (a system in synchrony whose markings and contours develop according to definable evolution) which in turn are overdetermined by the current mode of production in effect. And it does so in a way analogous to the manner in which the nation (a formation also with an institutional history and a contemporary configuration) both marks its members and receives its marks as overdetermined by geopolitical forces.

The question which Jameson does not address either in his article or in his book, and which I add for the sake of capturing more complexity, is why the nation necessarily? In other words, why would authors in general, and African authors in specific, be compelled to address the issue of national identity when there are so many other collective identifications available to them? Or perhaps, if it truly isn't about whether the authors themselves believe they are concerned about the nation, why should the critic be required to inscribe the national level of collective identity as the only appropriate site from which to view an articulation of a relationship to the West or "first world"? In the author's mind or in the critic's, why shouldn't

¹⁹ My understanding of Lacan's theory of the psyche as organized like a language and his conception of the subject being retroactively caught up in meaning-producing semiotic chains of signification which are in turn retroactively overdetermined by ideology derives from their exceptionally clear formulation in Slavoj Žižek's The Sublime Object of Ideology.

sub-national or transnational collective identities such as ethnicity, religion, interest groups, or even race be as highly considered as sites worthy of critical or creative elaboration, for the negotiation of identity?

To refer back to the introduction to Reine Pokou quoted at the beginning of this chapter, I have demonstrated that Tadjou concentrates on the nation in contrast with other available kinds of solidarity. Her text is reacting to a recent inflammation of civil war in her home country, and performs itself as a literary intervention into debated national identities on the ground. And while the other novels in this study equally grow out of a social context where these competing models of mediation also exist, not all of them tackle the problem so head on. The writings surrounding any civil war period provide a fertile ground for study of the nation and nationalism in literature because the war itself and the lead-up to it is where the defining lines of internal division contain the most clarity. This moment of tension is when the stakes are highest for those writers wishing to contribute or feeling compelled to react to the debate on how the nation will be constituted. From both sides of the conflict, the question is about identity and interpretation; about the intersection of the power to define with the right to self-determine. What does it *mean* to be an Ivorian? What does it *mean* to reject being an Ivorian while living on territory administered by the Ivorian state? And what are the stakes in struggling for a national identity given postcolonial theory's general dismissal of the nation as a pathological construct?

These questions necessitate engagement with concepts of the state, of the nation, and of the constructed and fundamentally narrative nature of identities. I will have occasion to address the theoretical concepts at play here in the pages that follow, but for now suffice it to justify their logical link to my corpus. The question of the meaning assigned to Ivorian-ness as a cultural and

narrative construct finds rich attempts at possible answers in literary narratives, one function of which is to present alternatives to the narratives offered by lived experience²⁰. Novelistic manifestations of these burning questions of national redefinition in extreme contest during this period therefore form an excellent corpus for investigations into nationalism, or, perhaps more precisely, the cultural shape of the nation. The *raison d'être* of national sovereignty and the justifying rhetoric surrounding secessionist or irredentist movements—appeals to new forms and new boundaries for national sovereignty—cannot escape a cultural dimension at their core²¹. And as a cultural construct, the nation, young as it is in Africa, therefore functions as a Jamesonian Master Narrative, holding such sway over the psyches of the authors in question that all of their texts are rife with indirect traces of it in deeper levels of analysis.

In reference to this concept of nation, I situate myself somewhere in between within a body of theorists broadly and perhaps a bit reductively divided into two fundamental camps: those with a materialist perspective, and those with a more purely cultural conception of the term. Theorists such as Appiah, Mamdani, Amoah, Comaroff, Nairn, Wallerstein, and Balibar are correct to insist upon the institutional nature of the nation and its historical groundedness, and yet view it ultimately as an epiphenomenon explainable as a by-product of broader social and ideological phenomena. On the other hand, Anderson, Thomas, Bhabha, Miller, Renan and Gellner grant wider scope to the cultural aspects of the nation, conceiving of it as a constructed social formation, a narrative in essence, ideological, and therefore susceptible to radical

²⁰ The literature on identity is extensive. The attack on essentialism with respect to identity, and therefore the argument that identity should be considered as a narrative is one of the central tenets of post-structuralism. Perhaps the most thoroughly elaborated treatment of the issue can be found in Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1985). In Postcolonial theory, especially in relation to the question of national identity, Homi Bhabha gathered a number of articles into an edited volume *Nation and Narration* (1990), which, together with his own 1994 *The Location of Culture* (a chapter of which I deal with in this introductory chapter) relies on and articulates this point.

²¹ Culture is underscored by the bulk of theorists on the nation, but I credit Jusdanis in his book *The Necessary Nation* with the concept of culture as *raison d'être*, thereby granting it a central role without relegating political, military, economic, ethnic, religious, or other conditions or institutions to lesser importance.

alteration through cultural intervention. Jusdanis's 2001 The Necessary Nation reconciles these two groups in a way I find the most useful and theoretically satisfying. Conceding conceptual centrality to the cultural camp, Jusdanis sees the nation as a narrative, ideological construction based on a core *raison d'être* of culture, while at the same time granting proper place to the historical and institutional anchoring of the nation which mere discursive intervention has a hard time changing.

Both groups of perspectives still contain many fruitful insights, powerful in their explanatory power, which it behooves the student of national formations to retain. Renan debunks the facile mapping of nationality to ethnography, language, religion, even geography in his oft-cited 1882 formulation "l'existence d'une nation est...un plébiscite de tous les jours," which suggests a common will-to-solidarity that performs itself in the culture of lived practices²². Anderson and Gellner remind theorists of nationalism that the modern conception of nation is roughly concurrent with the popularization of print media and the raising of educational standards among a critical mass of the population. The ramification of these historical factors is respectively for a "meanwhile" time to allow a sense of community to be imagined across wider geographies than actual lived practice could consolidate into a horizontal national solidarity, and for the masses to participate in high culture forms such that a false consciousness of national parity with the elite could form. Miller corrects Gellner for the context of Africa, where colonization made the high culture forms shared by the "nationalists" those of the colonizer, not of the indigenous peoples, such that this high culture borrowing became a conscious tool of

²² As Jean-Loup Amselle in his Logiques métisses rightly notes, however, the historical context of this citation is forgotten almost as often as it is quoted. Renan, writing as a Frenchman, was making an argument for the return of German annexed Alsace-Lorraine to French control on the grounds that the majority there would choose solidarity with the French nation rather than the German one. The implication of remembering such a historical context is that while national unity may well call for a certain kind of day-to-day consent to inclusion, it also implicitly assumes more cultural, linguistic, religious, and economic solidarity than African nations can generally provide.

resistance to the metropole, and not a false consciousness of solidarity. Bhabha's concern is to critique the homogeneity and essentialization of national identity, and so he defines it as a narrative caught between two thrusts: the pedagogical wherein the state continually teaches its citizens the re-evaluations of history and shared narratives which confirm its national solidarity; and the performative wherein the state converts the "scraps, patches and rags of daily life" into the signs of a national way of life. Kelly and Kaplan show that the existence of the UN, as a horizontal body of states, imposes limits and deterrents on nationalist aspirations such that the newly decolonized states of Africa in 1960 emerged into "a new world order already tooled for purposes at best differing from the aims of the anticolonial movements [they sprang from], and at times clearly obstructive of [such aims]" (141). Thomas and Appiah also deepen the context of the nation in Africa, the latter claiming that the weak post-colonial states were ill-equipped to consolidate nationality and render ethnicity politically irrelevant; and the former demonstrating that multi-ethnic states may fail at encouraging national cohesion over ethnic balkanization, but they still enjoy the Weberian monopoly of force, such that they can prevent the nationalist aspirations of any given ethnic minority. Mamdani goes even further, defining African nationalism, as evidenced in the anti-colonial struggles, not merely as the simple acceptance of liberal democratic and pluralistic principles repudiating ethnicity in favor of nation as the Western script would have it, but rather as also "a series of ethnic revolts against so many ethnically organized and centrally reinforced local powers—in other words, a string of ethnic civil wars" (8)²³.

²³ Michael Chege's review of Mamadani's *Citizen and Subject*, in volume I of the *African Studies Quarterly* from 1997, presents a powerful critique that Mamdani flattens important differences between states to make an overly generalized point, but does not invalidate its inclusion here.

Taken together then, the Ivorian nation both conforms and complicates: it is a modern construct in which “pre-modern” modes of identities still compete for political relevancy; it is a mediation between self and world but exists alongside other loci of mediation with which it is in tension; its cultural *raison d’être* is connected to competing models of cultural belonging; and its state, its chief anchoring institution, comes out of a history ill-equipped to provide it with the tools necessary for the horizontality implied in the term nation. With culture at its crux, then, questions of literature’s role in Ivorian nationalism are salient, and require a brief treatment of their history.

The latter portion of Christopher Miller’s chapter in Nationalists and Nomads entitled “Nationalism as Resistance and Resistance to Nationalism in the Literature of Francophone Africa” describes a sort of Chinese finger trap for opponents of the model of the nation-state as Africa’s sole legitimate configuration for sovereignty in a modern and globalized world. Without venturing a guess as to how it might all work itself out, Miller notes how states, which have a stake in claiming a unified cultural authority, succeed at this project both when authors reflect the state version of national unity *and* when they resist it. The very action of resistance is to expand the discursive field surrounding a given “national” literature, thereby establishing national particularities, enriching and deepening the state’s claim of cultural distinction from other states if nothing else than by accretion²⁴. And this phenomenon of cultural distinction has very much been a feature of all modern nationalist projects from whenever one cares to date their

²⁴ Miller makes this point while following Adrien Huannou’s argument that national literatures exist in Africa, despite the youth of the nations, and are a simple matter of the citizenship of the author despite possible transnational affiliations with ethnicity, religion, or race. Guy Ossito Midiohouan vigorously and publicly disagrees with this argument and finds the nation in Africa to be an impediment to other solidarities, and the state to be promoting a false national consciousness which tends to an equally false homogeneity and essentialism. I discuss both Huannou’s and Midiohouan’s positions in the pages that follow, and I find Miller’s summary of the debate to be fair and complete.

beginnings²⁵. Whether willing partisans of the ideological machinery or conscientious objectors; whether ignorant of their participatory role or even in denial of it, authors are involved in cultural production that nationalism either claims or co-opts. It does so because culture draws distinctions of identity between communities that nationalism needs for its self-justification.

Thus literature in general (and the novel in particular, as we will see) plays a vital role in the elaboration of the shape of national solidarity (or lack thereof). It does so in a number of ways. First, following Anderson's generalization about the role of print media in the nationalisms of Western Europe, one can see how literature and non-literary writings both can contribute *en masse* to the forging of a national imaginary based on shared stories, news sources, and language. The content of literature is also an important consideration. Bhabha's insistence that the nation is a narrative, for example, allows literature wide scope in effecting counter-narratives, or rather hybrid narratives, in serving as the privileged site for contestation of dominant discourses²⁶. The endpoint of Bhabha's logic, however, would ultimately lead to the end of borders, so the question of why the nation would be the privileged site for negotiation of identity becomes problematic.

A brief survey of the history of African literature's engagement with nationalism provides sufficient factual basis for the assertion that the nation really is of central concern. Part of Christopher Miller's insightful correction of Gellner's conception of nationalism as a sort of

²⁵ Amoah reviews the literature on the subject and finds that there is considerable disagreement as to whether modern nations in Europe got their first thrusts from the 18th century Enlightenment, or the 16th century Renaissance. He ultimately finds the question moot, since, for him as for Seton-Watson, national consciousness *per se* does not require modernity to exist.

²⁶ The very term "hybrid" has been roundly criticized for many reasons, and has mostly fallen out of vogue in the last decade. It is important, however, to recall that Bhabha's own definition and usage for the term did not include a connotation as simple miscegenation or bastardization, but rather a more rigorous dialectal synthesis of otherwise opposed cultural elements. For a lucid and powerfully withering critique of "hybridity" see Friedman, Jonathan. "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush" *Spaces of Culture*. Ed. Mike and Lash Featherstone, Scott. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishers, 1999.

false consciousness is in service of reading early movements in African literature as nationalist. And in the sense that nationalism in Africa has not been in defense of a pre-existing unity, but rather the right to create one, Miller is quite right to find the Négritude movement, which by other measures would seem racially centered and therefore trans-national, to be every bit as “nationalist” as late anti-colonial and post-Independence literature might later claim to be²⁷.

The Négritude movement began as a group of black students from a variety of locations within the French colonial empire came to Paris for studies. Their meeting produced a literary verve whose thrust was to use the French language, subverting high-culture forms (primarily poetry as it turned out) not only to refuse the colonial doctrinaire ideal of assimilation into French society, but also to forcefully and radically claim a scission of identity with the French. Inasmuch as an awakening to a common racial condition of subalternity in the colonial system can be seen as a nationalistic *prise de conscience*, then even Caribbean authors Léon Damas and Aimé Césaire and the earlier René Maran could participate along with the “properly” African Léopold Senghor in this sort of African “nationalism”. Thematically, Négritude represented itself as a response to colonialism, whose underpinning was inevitably racialized. If the colonizers basically said “we will civilize you blacks”, then the Négritude authors essentially replied “black is [and always already was] beautiful”. The scope and force of the Négritude movement in Africa is hard to understate, because in undermining the tenets of colonialism by taking up a racial *pied d’égalité* as it did, it forged a positive unity that proved part of the *sine qua non* of decolonization. That is not to say that the Négritude movement is without its

²⁷ Miller is following political scientist Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam in this argument, as he critiques analysts who set up European nationalisms to be the norm from which all others deviate or derive. For Ohaegbulam, in his 1977 Nationalism in colonial and post-colonial Africa, nationalism in Africa is a struggle “not in the name of an already-existing unity, but rather for the right to be free politically to try to create one” (10).

problems, and especially among African critics²⁸. Négritude's culturally unifying thrust was necessarily traditionalist and therefore backward-looking in many respects. And if it claimed to answer back to the white colonizer, it paradoxically also re-affirmed his basic categories and therefore helped to enforce his alienating doctrine that only the truly assimilated and civilized black could turn the linguistic and cultural tools of his master upon him in such a way.

Despite this retrospective criticism that one can level at the Négritude movement, it nevertheless provided the literary *élan* which in the 1950s became a growing anti-colonial literary movement. And while debates²⁹ about whether a racially-based continental movement flattened more local cultural specificities or whether these more local "national" specificities simply served and enriched the larger "littérature négro-africaine" were certainly passionate on both sides, the literature itself in sub-Saharan Africa began to develop an increasingly novelistic form for its virtually universal anti-colonialism³⁰. To cite only French-language examples, Guinean Camara Laye, Cameroonians Mongo Béti and Ferdinand Oyono, Senegalese Ousmane Sembène, and Ivorian Bernard Dadié all wrote heavily auto-biographical bildungsroman-style novels in the late 1950s, joined early in the 1960s by Senegalese Cheik Hamidou Kane—all of which provided realist portrayals of the conditions of colonialism and the difficult questions of

²⁸ V.Y. Mudimbe provides such a critique in his 1982 *L'Odeur du Père* where he demonstrates with the Foucauldian notion of discourse, that a move like the one Négritude makes—of using the West against itself—is itself a Western move and is therefore caught up in the West's own logic. Stanislas Adotévi warned earlier that decrying racial inequalities over economic ones would lead Négritude to fail in its project in *Négritude et négrologues*, 1972.

²⁹ Belinda Jack offers a thorough overview of debates organized at Alioune Diop's *Présence Africaine* in the late 1950s in her 1996 book *Négritude and literary criticism: the history and theory of "Negro-African" literature in French*. Although mostly focusing on "national" poetry, the exchange between René Depestre (on turning to the French language to best articulate a Haitian national poetry) and Césaire (who finds such a linguistic defection deplorably inauthentic in a time of Négritude) is fruitful.

³⁰ Servanne Woodward's chapter "French Language Fiction" in Oyekan Owomoyela's 1993 compilation entitled *A History of Twentieth Century African Literatures* describes the debate between notable Cameroonian anti-colonial literary activist Mongo Béti and Négritude's godfather Léopold Senghor over Camara Laye's autobiographical novel *L'Enfant noir*. Béti chided Laye for not going far enough in depicting the oppression of colonialism, but Senghor later recuperated the novel as participating in the anti-colonial struggle in its own way.

identity involved in growing up under such a regime³¹. Together, these novels provided anti-colonialism with a cultural component markedly different from Négritude, because of its prosaic form, even though the themes of racial liberation and a return to and an affirmation of traditional authenticity are similar.

Although a trickle of novels penetrated the following decade's famous period of "silence...on développe³²", it is hard to overstate the effect Independence had on literary production in Africa. Partly as if the continent held its breath to see how political self-determination would play itself out, partly because many of the continent's pre-eminent authors were also intellectuals tapped for the administration of the new regimes—for whatever reason, the continent's pens were generally quelled from roughly 1960 to 1968. By then, the Négritude movement had been all but exhausted, and the collections of poetry in these and subsequent years were consequently considered less attached to such a pan-African project. By contrast, then, the novels that came out in 1968 and in the decade or so beyond³³—many of which were highly critical of the new regimes, documenting their abuses and failures in fiction—formed a more novelistic movement³⁴. The movement was not so self-consciously articulated as was Négritude school, and therefore their grouping and labeling as a movement was done by critics

³¹ Specifically: *L'Enfant noir*, 1953; *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, 1956; *Une Vie de boy*, 1956; *Docker noir*, 1956; *Climbié*, 1956; and *L'Aventure ambiguë*, 1961. These compare in style and substance to similarly auto-biographical bildungsromans from North Africa and the Caribbean from this period. These include: Mouloud Feraoun, *Le Fils du pauvre*, 1950; and Joseph Zobel, *La Rue case-nègres*, 1950.

³² Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Burkinabe historian, is credited with this phrase as an injunction to all able-minded Africans to put aside art and work toward social progress at the beginning of the Independence period. So said economist Thankdika Mkandawire in a 1999 presentation entitled: "African Intellectuals and Nationalism in the Changing Global Context."

³³ For just a few see: Amadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des Indépendances*, 1968; Yambo Ouologuem, *Devoir de Violence*, 1968; Sembène Ousmane, *Xala*, 1974; Sony Labou Tansi, *La Vie et demie*, 1979; Henri Lopès, *Le Pleurer-Rire*, 1982.

³⁴ Sewanou Dabla, in his landmark 1986 *Nouvelles écritures africaines: romanciers de la seconde génération* notes that this novelistic turn was not only in theme, but in form. Partly because of « l'air du temps »—to lump ideological and political reasons as well as the up-swinging French literary current of the *nouveau roman* all together in a single phrase—these novels tended to be much more experimental, or at least distance themselves from the more "Balzacian" generic norms surrounding the novel.

as opposed to by the authors themselves. To this day several unsatisfactory labels have been proposed that attempt to serve as descriptors for the harsh social critique general to the novels (Alain Chévrier called it *littérature de désillusionnement*, the monicker Afropessimism also caught on to some extent), and yet which seem to focus on the negative aspects, rather than the positive potential of such writings. To be sure, poetry and theater also joined in decrying neocolonialism and corruption, but especially in the Côte d'Ivoire, anthologists Amadou Koné, Gérard Lezou and Joseph Mlanhorho agree that the novel had become the most important genre by the late 1960s³⁵.

This novelistic engagement with corruption, and with the revelation that the high hopes of the anti-colonial struggles for self-determination and political independence were not to be realized as soon as had been expected, necessarily dealt in the specificities of the authors' experiences with post-colonial states. On the other hand, the sad commonality among African states of frequent coups d'état, of corruption and of continued oppression for the masses could give even the most specifically national novel an air of applicability throughout Africa. So it is no surprise, then, that in the 1970s and early 1980s as there began to be a critical mass of literary works sufficient in many countries to corral into anthologies, a renewed debate on the subject of national literature emerged. Concurrently, French scholars and editors were beginning to look upon the Négritude movement as belonging to the past generation, and also upon the question of whether Caribbean literature in particular belonged in the same category of "négro-africaine" with more properly African literature, or whether the nation had now been solidly established as

³⁵ Anthologie de la littérature ivoirienne, 1983.

that locus of collective identity which could group the beyond-local-but-below-global³⁶. I have already alluded to Beninese critic Adrien Huannou's position that mere citizenship is sufficient to establish the state's claim on any given author's works, and that the specifically national context is the unavoidable well-spring of a given author's imaginary no matter how trans-national such an author may claim it is. Such a position was materially bolstered in this period of anthologies by a number of colloquia and special scholarly journal series dealing with the national literatures, most of which had been sponsored by French organizations. Huannou's compatriot Guy Ossito Midiohouan struck a contrary note, arguing that nations in Africa were in fact fictional constructs imposed by colonialism, and that as such, a critical approach that accepts them without taking stock of their ideologically constructed nature therefore obstructs other kinds of affinities and solidarities. Between these two Beninese critics, Miller and Thomas agree, there ought to be a way for critics to study the expanding national corpuses while maintaining proper critical focus on the ideological position the literary works must engage with respect to the state of their provenance. Thomas in particular is instructive as he takes novels from Congo, Brazzaville published from the 1970s to recent times, and demonstrates how each shaped and was shaped by the state's nation-building project variously aligning with or providing correctives to the official nationalistic party line.

The 1983 Koné, Lezou, Mlanhoru anthology, entitled Anthologie de la littérature ivoirienne, is interesting in particular for the way in which its project differs from my own. Spending a scant three pages on an introduction to outline the need, method and organization of their compilation, these professors overtly state that their project is not to analyze "la conscience

³⁶ The point should be stressed that the French had different interests in promoting the division into nationalities than did the Africans involved in the debate. Midiohouan, whose arguments on the matter are discussed in the pages that follow, drives home this point in connection with his resistance to nationalism as a false consciousness.

nationale ivoirienne,” but rather to “constater qu’une littérature nationale est en train de naître,” and then to “situer son originalité” before finally “informer chacun de la richesse de notre jeune littérature” (12-13). A generation past Independence, these anthologists are clearly engaged in a project of legitimization, taking the nation as a given and proceeding to compile and provide basic thematic guidance through a subset of works whose authors are claimed by the Ivorian state as its own. My study, a generation beyond that, takes the nation not as a given, but rather as a construction; not demonstrating the originality of something just coming into existence, but rather interrogating what is there to reveal the “conscience nationale” underlying the literary object; not informing about the richness thereof, but rather asking about the shape of the contested space the nation occupies in the texts and how it comes to be performed.

In a move to define the national particularity within the African literary sphere and in a concurrent move away from movements or schools of poetry to a less overtly organized, yet nonetheless coherent conglomeration of narrative fiction, the Côte d’Ivoire was not the least among African nations. Anthologie de la littérature ivoirienne in 1983 along with a 1986 series of special editions on Ivorian literature in the French government sponsored Notre Librairie cemented the affirmations of a national particularity for the Côte d’Ivoire. And while this claim to national particularity, bolstered as it was by the sheer mass of publication, should be critically tempered by Midiohouan’s injunction to remember just how ideologically invested such a claim is—running parallel as it does to the state’s own nation-building project—the critic would also have been remiss by this time not to at least ask the question of whether there were national particularities evident in the mass’s content³⁷. And if it could be said by this period that a

³⁷ This is essentially the gesture made by early critics of African literature Roger Chemain and Arlette Chemain-Dégranges in their 1979 Panorama critique de la littérature congolaise. Before getting into the thick of Congolese literature to date, the two justify their limitation to the Congolese nation by citing it as having a large enough body

national literature was in fact in effect, part of its particularity consisted in its production of novels. Jean-François Kola's recent work on the history of Ivorian literature goes as far as to give the novel the place of "*porte-flambeau*" in this nation.

Such a comparative importance accorded to the novel may not be unique to the Côte d'Ivoire, but it is nonetheless unsurprising given the socio-economic climate of the country, especially in comparison with its nearest neighbors, that the nation would produce comparatively more novels which, in the West, is a narrative form often associated with a certain moment of capitalistic development³⁸. Because of an immediate cold-war choice of alignment with capitalistic forces at Independence, and because Guinée, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Ghana had all opted for more socialist if not communist regimes, the economic development and growth of the middle class in Côte d'Ivoire produced a much larger and more robust bourgeoisie. More economic productivity translated into more revenues to a government which, despite all its failings, did manage to convert promises into real basic and secondary education opportunities for a larger proportion of its younger citizens, thereby amassing higher literacy rates earlier than many of its neighbors. Trade and prosperity, the stable political climate promoted by a long-lived and comparatively benevolent dictator, along with a French military base which helped to properly intimidate potentially hostile foreign forces, also contributed to the Côte d'Ivoire becoming a virtual oasis of peace from the 1960s through the early 1990s³⁹. Together these

of literature, with an identifiable continuity, and evidence of a common cultural and historical experience within the body. For these two, it is only once a certain critical mass is reached that it makes sense to ask questions of national particularity. This argument refuses to engage with Appiah's more content-based enjoiner in In My Father's House that African novels from the late 1960s were "no longer committed to the nation" because the critical mass argument doesn't require agreement with an author's own anti-establishment opinions and projects in order for it to see commonalities organized around national entities.

³⁸ The Marxist critics strongly make this point. I'll cite Fredric Jameson in his 1982 The Political Unconscious and György Lukács's 1916 Theory of the Novel.

³⁹ These factors are also attested as part of the context with bearing on the Bédié doctrine of Ivoirité that I will treat more fully later in the chapter. Siddhartha Mitter alludes to these facts in her more journalistic treatment of the

factors have culminated, from 1956 to the year 2000, in a small nation of 13 million, in the publication of 96 novels. The fact that the publishing house *Nouvelles Éditions Africaines* (which has now become *Nouvelles Éditions Ivoiriennes*) established and continues their presence in Abidjan even at a time when much of the rest of the continent's literary production stems from Europe, speaks volumes to the literary opportunities that the business-world sees in the country.

Some of the more noteworthy include the Côte d'Ivoire's first novel, Bernard Dadié's 1956 Climbié, an anti-colonial autobiographical bildungsroman. Aké Loba won the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire for his 1960 Kocoumbo, l'étudiant noir in which another roughly autobiographical plot takes a young Ivorian to France to encounter difficulties in receiving an education. In 1966 Charles Nokan published Violent était le vent, in which a very similar plot acquires a more political, more revolutionary dimension, and a heterogeneity of form that caused later anthologists no small amount of consternation (Koné et al. eventually classified it as a play, not a novel). The turning point in African literature in general, and in Ivorian literature in specific occurs with Amadou Kourouma's 1968 Les Soleils des Indépendances. My study will concentrate more fully on this novel in a later chapter, but suffice it to say for now that Kourouma's innovative use of a "malinkified" French and his highly overt themes of criticism of the newly independent regime marked this work as inaugurating a new wave of politically engaged novels. Many of these, such as Jean-Marie Adiaffi's 1980 Carte d'Identité are set during colonial times, others, such as Amadou Koné's 1980 Les Frasques d'Ébinto continue in the autobiographical tradition, but Bruno Gnaoulé-Oupoh finds that they all concentrate on

history of the Côte d'Ivoire's conflicts in a 2003 article in Transition entitled "Ebony and Ivoirité: War and Peace in the Ivory Coast". Sociologist Francis Akindès does a more academic treatment of the subject in a 2003 article written for African Sociological Review entitled "Côte d'Ivoire: Sociopolitical crises, 'Ivoirité', and the Course of History". And for a more in depth treatment, political scientist Elen Jolivet writes a thesis entitled Ivoirité: De la conceptualization à la manipulation de l'identité ivoirienne for the *Institut d'Études Politiques* at the *Université de Rennes* in 2003.

current problems and issues in their specifically Ivorian society. This is not to say, of course, that they have no application beyond Ivorian borders, but rather that the immediate concerns of the authors and their texts arise from their more immediate Ivorian context.

In this brief overview of Ivorian literary history the French language and French literary history has been the proverbial elephant in the room. As mentioned in passing in the discussion of the Négritude movement, a black *prise de conscience* had to pass through high culture forms, necessarily in French, in order to operate their anti-colonialism. The choice of this Western language to communicate African and black consciousness, the appeal to literary forms with a Western history in order to reclaim the right to authentic African-ness or blackness is an ambiguous gesture at best. These ambiguities continue to haunt all French-language literary production in Africa, even as their valence continues to evolve beyond the Négritude movement. Discussion and debate on these ambiguities are abundant, but there are two basic notes one should make about the particular situation of Ivorian literary production with respect to language and literary tradition. First, as opposed to many of France's post-colonies, the Côte d'Ivoire has chosen to maintain French as its sole *lingua franca*. French is the only official language and there are no national curricula for any of the sixty available ethnic languages. Communication in French is therefore always already coded as either a national or international gesture, as opposed to a local or ethnic one. Secondly, French-language corpuses form the basis for education in the Côte d'Ivoire, which means that exposure to literature and literary traditions has historically come primarily through the French canon. More localized forms of literature and orature are abundant in the Côte d'Ivoire, each maintaining their own history, but written models come

overwhelmingly from the French tradition⁴⁰. This is not to say that Ivorian literature can only conform to some sort of French mold, but that the language and literary tradition do form an inextricable part of the social fabric through which the creative processes of Ivorian authors pass in their literary production.

It is this mixing of local and French traditions into which these cultural products insert themselves which complicates all questions of genre beyond the most overarching categories. Labels like “novel” and “poem” may still seem to broadly apply, but “naturalist novel” and “magical realist novel” invite comparisons which would be fruitful, and yet which fall mostly outside my purview except to briefly note that other kinds of studies can yet be done. For this reason I have largely avoided some otherwise very important questions about literary form and how it feeds into the very possibility of raising questions both of nation and of allegory as well. On the other hand, I do pause to note when, for example, Tadjó moves from a travel narrative in one work to myth in another. In the former, the genre of the text suggests a relationship with the reader such that expectations of temporality and geography retain a referentiality of a nature quite different from that of the myth genre. By contrast, the myth genre also suggests a much different interpretive mode than travel narratives generally call for. Of course, at all times the authors are not merely conforming to generic norms, but are rather playing off available models and testing constraints, such as they may be. And genre is ultimately important to allegorically oriented aspects of this study in the sense that the various literary genres invoked at each example in this study weigh on the depth at which one must seek for a first allegorical reading.

⁴⁰ The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) has had an office in Abidjan since at least the 1980s and has done wonderful work primarily enabling the translation of the New Testament into as many native languages as possible. Since none of the sixty native Ivorian languages had any writing system to speak of when they arrived, SIL linguists worked with local linguists to elaborate writing systems based on the Latin alphabet for a good number of them in order to carry out their mission. Despite the existence of these new writing systems, however, their use is not widespread, and publication in native Ivorian languages remains rare.

Within an African context, then, negotiating a conceptual space between indigenous traditions and Western languages, creating cultural objects out of the cloth of imaginations dyed with social colors and generic “rules”, the authors in this study produce both material for and interventions into the debate over Ivorian-ness. This field of this debate is already inhabited by Ivoirité as a state doctrine and as a lived reality on the ground, and Ivoirité therefore forms an integral part of the context with which the authors I will study have had to deal. The 2002-2004 civil war with its aftermath continuing a few years beyond, and the 1995 official declaration of Ivoirité as a primary factor in its causes brought maximum tension on the shape of the nation. As such, I have chosen to deal with a collection of novels published from the time-frame of 1995-2006, that I call the Ivoirité period. To be sure, Ivoirité is not a dead debate, nor did it spring from nothingness without context, as I’ve demonstrated, but the period I’ve chosen nonetheless represents that of the heart of the tensions.

From within this Ivoirité period, I have chosen five authors for whom the question of national identity is of great importance, and even if their works don’t all engage the issue overtly, I have included all their novels from the time period so as to study an evolution in their thought, if present. In two cases I will study novels from before the Ivoirité period for comparison, and for the richness they add to the debate over Ivoirité currently. Besides all of these authors having won prizes and international recognition, they also have in common that their texts shape a definition of Ivorian-ness in contradistinction from Ivoirité, often leveling open and heavy critiques at the state. Two women, three men, two Southern Agni, three Northern Dioula, two living in the Côte d’Ivoire at the time of publication, three at least temporarily expatriated, a cinematographer, an accountant, and three literature professors—the diversity of this group of writers nevertheless produces remarkable similarity in the framing of the nation. They perform

an Ivorian-ness—sometimes on the surface, sometimes only under deeper horizons of analysis—fraught with unresolved questions about how religion, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, gender, and neocolonial pressures, but they still imagine one in which the nation as a construct does not preclude solidarity if not harmony.

Before introducing the texts themselves, however, a final consideration should be opened so as to render its clarity, which is that while all of these unresolved questions seem to be elements of roughly equal weight bearing on national identity, and while each are necessarily inflected by all the others as they compose an author's conception of Ivorian-ness, gender stands out in my choice of texts, in my treatment of the texts, and in the texts themselves. I am heavily indebted to Judith Butler for her notion of the performative nature of gender, since I see a parallel to its application in nationalism, and, in fact, wherever signs can be found⁴¹. I owe a debt also to Partha Chatterjee for his insight that nationalism is necessarily a gendered phenomenon⁴². The female authors I have chosen, however, see their own writing as gendered, but distinguish themselves in ways I will discuss specifically in their respective chapters from the French or Western traditions of feminism. And, obversely, the male writers I have chosen also mark their texts in various ways by gender, each inscribing national meaning into the roles they write for female characters, and onto the roles they imagine for Ivorian-ness. But beyond the gender studies readings they each deserve in another study, gender has a central place in any discussion of nation because of the cultural *raison d'être* at nation's core. The archetypes, traditions, and day-to-day practices available in the cultural inventory of the Ivorian diachrony, the power relations, the systematicity of binaries, of chains of signification produced in the

⁴¹ Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

⁴² Chatterjee, Partha. The Nation and its Fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Ivorian cultural synchrony, all point up gender as a key organizing principle in the various conceptions of nation I will elucidate here.

I begin with Tanella Boni. Her 2005 novel Matins de couvre-feu is a direct engagement with the civil war and an investigation of its roots. Although her 2006 Les Nègres n'iront jamais au paradis is set during a UN and French imposed cease-fire period, it also deals in plot and theme with historical conditions contributing to the current shape of the Côte d'Ivoire. And the question of national identity is also overt in Boni's writing from well before the thick of the war. In 1995 she had already published Les Baigneurs du lac rose in which a half-mythical half-historical figure from Côte d'Ivoire's national pre-colonial past forms a point of inquiry and comparison upon which approaches to political transformations are measured. These three novels together form a continuity of thought that evolves in connection with the socio-political context surrounding their publication in ways that progressively reveal internal and external forces shaping the national identity. To be sure, Boni, as a multi-disciplinary author, has also manifest evolutions in her thought through poetry during this period, publishing three collections which also intervene in the debate over Ivorian identity. And while analysis of these poems can reveal elements of Boni's thought that would be difficult to convey in novels, I have chosen to exclude them on the basis that it would alter the nature of the study too much and require analytical tools beyond the scope of this project to fully include them.

Véronique Tadjo is the next author I will study. Also an artist of published talent in many media (paint, collage, children's literature, and poetry), her novels tend not only to bear the marks of many artistic disciplines within, but are also sometimes quite difficult to classify by genre. Her 2004 Reine Pokou: Concerto pour un sacrifice is no exception. The scant ninety pages put it in the range of the novella, but since the bulk of them consist of the same story retold

with important variations in details and consequences, one might be tempted to classify it rather as a collection of short stories. Its introduction and conclusion, however, and the fact that the stories are all not only related, but re-tell the same basic event, make the narrative a whole such that thinking about it as an experimental novel makes its inclusion in my study most feasible. It belongs there not primarily for its formal classification anyway, but rather for its content: the story re-told is that of the largest Ivorian ethnic group's foundation myth—one that the state-sponsored history textbooks label as a foundation myth belonging to the entire nation by extension. The differing details yield multiple interpretations with varying ramifications for the myth's present-day usage, so that Tadjó's playful variations on a theme are not mere play, but rather serious investigations into literature's potential impact in the debate about national identity. It is not surprising then, that even before the Ivoirité period, Tadjó explored representations of her nation in her 1990 allegorical novel Le Royaume aveugle. This work may stand outside my chosen period, but since it deals so intimately with the binary division that came to fruition during the time of Ivoirité, it warrants deep analysis—not only for understanding the development of Tadjó's thought, but because it can be read as near prescient.

In between these novels, Tadjó also wrote Champs de bataille et d'amour in 1999, and L'Ombre d'Imana in 2000, both written during periods of extended living outside the Côte d'Ivoire. Champs is a novel not apparently dealing with Ivoirité directly, but engaging themes that help frame the questions involved in a national identity. And Imana is another work of difficult classification, reading more like a travelogue with testimonials embellished as little as possible by the fiction writer's pen recording them, and treating deeply and exclusively the horrors of the Rwandan genocide. In this work, Tadjó leaves a significant note in an introductory chapter describing how she hopes her project of writing Rwanda will be of benefit

in lessening the divisions tearing at her own home country, which note is sufficient warrant to include the book in my study.

In my third chapter, I will treat Kitia Touré's 1995 Destins parallèles and Amadou Koné's 1999 Les Coupeurs de têtes. Touré, who has since forsaken literary production in favor of cinematic production, gives this study its first example of what might have been labeled naturalism had it come from a French pen a hundred years earlier. With an element of magical realism mixed in, it concentrates on the economic underbelly of national identity and politics in a direct way that none of the other novels of this period do, thereby adding a valuable realist dimension to my study. Koné also treats the Ivorian identity as constrained by divisions of class, but he employs a strategy of placing the central Ivorian conflict in the moral realm, rather than in ethnicity or geography, thus providing not only an interesting counter-point, but also an enriching dialog concerning what elements can constitute a properly pluralistic society.

My final chapter, then, deals with the Ivorian literary giant Amadou Kourouma. Given the wide range of scholarship concentrating on his first chef d'oeuvre Les Soleils des Indépendances, published in Canada in 1968, one would already be remiss in excluding it from a study of Ivorian literature. It has come to be seen as a sort of watershed novel in terms of style and of theme, both in Ivorian literature, and in the broader category of African literature as well. And even though it is the furthest novel outside the Ivoirité period, by decades even, the critical debates surrounding it—classifying it alternately as an African, an Ivorian, and/or a Malinké novel—plant it so squarely in the cross-hairs of the very questions of national identity which I am investigating that I find its inclusion in my study necessary and well justified. Jumping forward chronologically to his Ivoirité period novels then leaves out his 1990 Monnè, outrages et défis, but does so advisedly for several reasons. First, this novel is more concerned with colonial

hardships than with current post-colonial questions of national identity. Of course, one might recuperate it by arguing for an allegorical reading in which colonial struggles represent or reflect post-colonial ones, but since one could undertake such a study with any given novel set in the colonial era this would not be a valid argument for its inclusion beyond my established period. As previously mentioned, some Ivoirité period novels from my chosen authors are analyzed not for their overt dealings with the subject, but rather because leaving them out would break up the Ivoirité-period development of the author's positions with respect to the nation. If included, however, Monnè, outrages et défis would also represent the sole inclusion of a novel from outside the Ivoirité period studied uniquely for continuity with the author's thought. This, then, leaves Kourouma's 1998 En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages, and the adventures of Birahima the child soldier as found in the prize-winning 2000 Allah n'est pas obligé, and the posthumous and incomplete novel Quand on refuse, on dit non from 2004 within the bounds of the Ivoirité period. The latter two form a coherent whole, if unfinished, as they trace the movements of an Ivorian child through the violence of late 1990s Sierra Leone, and Liberia in the first novel, then back to the Côte d'Ivoire in the second. Kourouma's use of the simplistic youthful voice to capture what Birahima calls "*la guerre tribale*" points to the stress that more anchored ethnic sites of identity continue to place on modern nation-states in West Africa, and the latter's inability to hold together because of such stress. En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages is also the story of violence caused by the newly independent states, but is set in a barely allegorically disguised Togo, Kourouma's longtime place of exile. Despite its application as a whole to another African nation, there is an extended episode in which the Togolese dictator visits the Côte d'Ivoire to learn some tips and pointers on how to effectively repress his political rivals from an ostensible Houphouët-Boigny. On the surface as well as in the depths of this

episode, a clear thesis on Ivorian identity is discernable in the novel, thus adding weight beyond its publication date to its inclusion in my corpus⁴³.

In this study of the relationship between text and context, then, this corpus both highlights the tensions and limits within the Ivorian national identity, and serves as a lens from which to extrapolate the salient fraught constructions of Ivorian-ness offered by the authors in question. The future of the model of the nation-state is unclear in Africa, but the struggle for the power to define it is sure to be around for some time. This contest is not solely a political one: It is also cultural. And as such, the dominant mode of literary artistic forms—the novel, in the Côte d’Ivoire—represents a fertile field from which to reap an understanding of the space in which Ivorian-ness defines itself with and/or against the state’s official Ivoirité.

⁴³ The Côte d’Ivoire is host to a unique literary phenomenon commonly called “Littérature à l’eau de rose” which flourishes during the Ivoirité period. It consists of mainly short, formulaic novels, many with romantic themes reminiscent of Harlequin titles, which are clearly marketed to a youthful readership. This phenomenon would make an excellent corpus of inquiry in a study about representations of Ivorian national identity in popular culture.

2.0 BONI – DELAYED CLARITY VS. THE MEN OF IVOIRITÉ

As mentioned in my introductory chapter, Tanella Suzanne Boni's 2005 novel Matins de couvre-feu tackles head-on the conditions of the civil war, but it represents only an ongoing intervention into Ivorian identity and the socio-political conditions from which it springs. Taking her novels in chronological order, beginning with the first from the Ivoirité period (1995 Les Baigneurs du lac rose), reveals an evolution of thought that keeps up as these socio-political conditions change. In the pages that follow, I will show that there is a progression to the central themes Boni treats in her novels as they move from Ivoirité as a nascent ideology in the Baigneurs of peacetime 1995, to Ivoirité as the root cause of a civil war in the Matins of wartime 2005, and on to Ivoirité as a means to neocolonial ends in the Nègres of ceasefire 2006. The progression begins with Baigneurs which takes on the representations of a figure—part historical, part mythical—from Côte d'Ivoire's pre-colonial past in order to test its nationalistic purchase in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire. In her next novel, Boni treats her next female protagonist's own family history during colonial times—seen from the perspective of her mother, a silenced victim of patriarchal traditions—as a way to confront the inevitable issue of ethnic diversity which forms an impediment to national unity. Boni's latest move in the progression, in Nègres, is for another female protagonist to seek out women's voices to elucidate the role of a French *coopérant* in the Côte d'Ivoire's recent post-independence history.

The similar projects of acknowledging the past's conditioning of the present, and the similar strategies of dealing with male figures of national importance through female testimonies bind these works together as a single evolving block of social commentary. The progression of their focus to an ever more recent past reflects Boni's increasing concern with the present, and that Boni frames the critical formative periods containing the keys to the correct analysis of contemporary national events in the more and more recent past. Boni's choice of formative periods to highlight also places the relationship with France—against which the Ivorian nation has had to define itself according to the different conditions on the ground in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods—at the heart of the block of novels, each dealing more and more overtly with France's role in the shape of Ivoirité and of the Côte d'Ivoire.

Boni's works have won awards and been picked up by French publishers, but have, as yet received precious little critical engagement. As of this writing, the search parameters "Tanella Boni" turn up only ten hits in the MLA International Bibliography, two of which are scholarly articles written by Boni herself. Of the remaining eight, five deal exclusively with her poetry, and two with her novel Une Vie de crabe from outside the Ivoirité period and therefore beyond the purview of this study. Her work is nevertheless dense and rich, and I have no doubt will inspire many an article as more and more scholars discover her depth.

A study of her works would be incomplete without a biographical situation of Tanella Boni as an author. Tanella Boni was born into a solidly bourgeois Agni family in the burgeoning commercial capital of Abidjan in 1954⁴⁴. Her country's political independence under Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1960 came as she was beginning her primary schooling in the northern regions of the Côte d'Ivoire near Korhogo on the Dioula-dominated savannah where she

⁴⁴ The Agni are the second major Ivorian ethnicity from the greater Akan group from which the Ghanaian Ashanti also spring. Agni and Baoulé tribes are considered ethnographic cousins.

remained until high-school age when she returned to Abidjan. Her post-secondary education in Toulouse and Paris resulted in a doctorate in Philosophy in 1979, with a thesis on the feminism or absence thereof in texts from ancient Greece, five years after which she published her first collection of poems during her third year as Chair of the Philosophy Department at the *Université d'Abidjan*. Besides the care she provided for her new family, including two children, from there her studies and writings continued, and she obtained a second doctorate, this time from the Sorbonne, in *Lettres* in 1987, three years after which her first novel, Une vie de crabe was published, which was followed in the next two years by two children's books. Her academic and literary responsibilities and engagements prolifically multiplied from there, and she published numerous articles, 3 novellas, another work of children's fiction, five more poetry collections, and the three novels under this study's purview all between 1995 and 2005, while concurrently serving in academic appointments and with community organizations (notably as Présidente de l'Association des Ecrivains de Côte d'Ivoire from 1991 to 1997).

The Côte d'Ivoire, as the root of her experience, anchors Boni's work even as she explores concepts more general to Africa: identity, immigration, state violence, corruption, tradition, and the role of women in these questions especially. Her novels engage Ivoirian situations as emblematic of Africa and at the same time specific to the Côte d'Ivoire. Having grown up under the relatively prosperous Houphouët-Boigny doctrine of Akwaba, having experienced life in the North as well as in the South, being born into bourgeois Baoulé privilege, and having spent years as part of the visible minority community in France, it is from a vast base of varied life experiences that Boni draws upon to nourish her ample prose and her anti-Ivoirité messages.

The reader will recall from the introductory chapter that the term Ivoirité was coined in a September 1995 political rally by Henri Konan Bédié during his first electoral bid for the presidency to which he had previously been appointed at the death of longtime dictator Félix Houphouët-Boigny. To avoid anachronism when dealing with Boni's first "Ivoirité period" text, Les Baigneurs du lac rose (1995), which was being written before the term itself gained its initial currency, one must take care to contextualize the concept. Ivoirité arose in the political climate of the Côte d'Ivoire's first true multi-party elections which were hotly contested and ethnically charged. Debates about the legitimacy of the various candidates hinged less on political platforms than on the groups they were seen as able or not to effectively represent, creating an ethnically polarized environment into which Ivoirité posed as a solution. Ivoirité also sprang from the socio-economic realities of a massive immigrant presence (fully one quarter of the country's population is said to be immigrant), and the malaise surrounding the recent (1994) devaluation of the Franc CFA. The election, the devaluation, and the growing anti-immigrant angst, then, provided historical realities forming the general conditions from which Ivoirité sprang, and as such were in the forefront of the minds of social commentators well before Bédié's pronouncement of the term itself. As a construct, then, the term Ivoirité was less inventing a new condition as it was merely taking advantage of the conjuncture of historical, political, social, and economic circumstances on the ground. These circumstances forming also the extra-literary context from which Baigneurs sprang, it is appropriate to interpret the commentary therein as a response to the concept which was later named Ivoirité.

Throughout the three Boni novels, in fact, only in the latter, and only once therein do we have any mention whatsoever of the term Ivoirité. This is not to conclude that her engagement with the concept is somehow ancillary, however: all of her works deal centrally with politics,

divisions internal to the nation, and the narrative, discursive and historical forces structuring the nation from the inside and the outside—dealings which address the very heart of the conditions to which Ivoirité imposes itself as one official response. As the conditions made the term's coining possible and its currency ever more pervasive—as the seeds of Ivoirité began to germinate, take root, grow and provide fruit—so the commentary reacting to them in Boni's novels shifted in response.

Written before Bédié's coining of the term Ivoirité, but all the same caught up in its culminating conditions, Boni's second novel, but first during this study's defined Ivoirité period, Les Baigneurs du lac rose, unifies a complicated story of love, a philosophical evaluation of the valence of different methods of political intervention, and a warning on the genuine danger for the innocents, especially the women, caught up in struggles for power. She accomplishes this unity by coordinating plot events around a female journalist's quest for knowledge on the legend of a specifically Ivorian figure of anti-colonial resistance from the late nineteenth century named Samori, the Conqueror. The history books hold Samori Touré as a worthy opponent to the French—an able emperor-figure whose hard-line stance on Islamicizing his conquests consolidated a considerable force which ultimately proved inferior to that of the French who, in the period of the 1890s were driving ever further inland so their Berlin Conference claim on the territory would not be disputed⁴⁵. Other versions of the story, if not sanctioned in the literature, persist in orality, however, and Lénie, the novel's protagonist, concentrates on the back story, the between-the-lines of official accounts, the echoes in oral histories, and the “*on dit*” of unofficial anecdotes in order to get at the “*petite histoire*” of Samori, in all its brutal verity. His essence

⁴⁵ The Sorbonne's African historian, Yves Person, is the authority of reference here. His account in the voluminous Cambridge History of Africa persists as the seminal reference on Samori Touré.

proves comprehensible only via the informed imagination, and in the case of certain elements, only via a female imagination. Interestingly with respect to a nascent Ivoirité, or to the coalescence of its conditions, Boni's intervention in the social debate over the definition of "Ivorian" mimics the narrative structure of Lénie's reconstruction of Samori's *petite histoire* therefore a lengthy investigation of that narrative structure and its strategy cannot be avoided.

Boni begins her novel with the announcement of its central character as a puzzle to reconstruct, and a symbol from yesterday still pertinent today. This Samori, a hero figure from the 1890s and the time of the scramble for Africa had become quasi-mythical despite his separation from living memory by a scant generation. The passion of the female protagonist, for reconstructing varied official versions and more anecdotal, mythologized versions of Samori the Conqueror into a more intimate narrative of his inner being, imagined in part as it may need to be, leads her to contact with three men each of whose knowledge of Samori provides a different counter-point to her own. As the contact between these interlocutors is developed, details about Samori coalesce and concurrently, the diegetically contemporary plot thickens as the true history of the men's involvement with Samori becomes more and more apparent. As it turns out, for these men, the Conqueror was more than a myth, more than a national hero: he represented a model of political resistance, a way for the present-day nation to unite against French neocolonialism.

What I will argue, then, is that this inscription of a national question constitutes a response to the conditions surrounding the beginnings of Ivoirité as an official discourse, and that Boni's response, like the slow coalescing of details in the plot, like Lénie's reconstruction of Samori's *petite histoire*, is a non-straightforward narrative. It is only by not aiming too directly

at an engagement with the concept, that she is best able to answer its assumptions and assertions about the nature of political self-identification and categorization.

By contrast, the CURDIPHE document outlining Henri Konan Bédié's vision of Ivoirité was a head-on engagement. The writers ostensibly intended to produce a unity around certain similarities within the diversity found inside the country's borders, but Ivoirité's assertion as a new term in political discourse collided with a historical juncture that favored conversion of the term into a weapon of exclusion on the ground. This conversion was not unforeseen, and when combined with Bédié's ultimately successful move to alter the constitution to disqualify his prime political opponent on the grounds that Ivoirité demanded the candidate be Ivorian by the blood of both parents, the ostensibly unifying face of the ideology found itself quickly bankrupt. Presciently, before the promotion of Ivoirité as a state doctrine, Boni, in Baigneurs, had already demonstrated an acute awareness of the distance that can assert itself to opposite political ends between a *parole* or even an *histoire* and its mass application, thus anticipating this reverse usage of Ivoirité as an exclusionary wedge rather than as its ostensibly intended unifying force. For this reason, it is useful to begin with an examination of Boni's relationship with language as a vehicle for narration.

Baigneurs is focused quite forcefully on the *parole* as a vehicle both of political and aesthetic messages, as content and as form married together and submitted to convention in the expression of narration—*histoires* and *petites histoires*—and as a necessary but insufficient condition for political action. From the opening paragraphs of the novel, the reader is confronted with an establishment of setting and main characters that constantly delays clarity and thus constantly invites re-evaluation.

C'était une histoire qui n'avait pas de fin. Comme l'amour. Lénie et Yété, vivaient chaque minute de leur vie comme une fête de réjouissances. Une parole centenaire les liait si fort, encore plus fort. Leur héros d'hier et d'aujourd'hui s'appelait Samori le Conquérant. Ils le voyaient déambuler entre les rayons des bibliothèques. Ils écoutaient sa parole dans la tradition orale. Ils le croisaient dans la rue. Ils lui racontaient leur vie comme à un vieil ami. Puis ils reconstituaient le puzzle de la figure du Conquérant et confiaient leurs joies et leurs peines, celle de tout un Continent...Un beau jour le hasard les glissa dans les bras l'un de l'autre, afin que leur histoire quitte la réalité du mauvais roman que la vie nous raconte à l'infini. Afin que Samori, sur son cheval blanc, sorti de mille versions du même conte, se souvienne du partage de l'Afrique en mille morceaux. Cette histoire en pointillé, comme l'amour. (11)

The demonstrative *ce* as the first word of the prologue is emblematic in this sense: its semantic content is null, serving only a deictic, place-holding function, sending the reader on a hunt to discover what exactly *it* is referring to. What (hi)story had no end? Without antecedent, it is impossible to say until one remits the sentence's meaning and reference to a sort of stasis in memory, and reads on in the hopes that the reference will sort itself out later, that the author planted a post-cedent to correspond with the empty *ce* as a stylistic option, rather than employing the more normative antecedent. The next sentence (*Comme l'amour*) isn't one at all, lacking a verb as it does, but rather constitutes a qualification on the nature of the (hi)story we're now more curious to get the reference of. Apparently, this story is like the universally understood narrative of love, at least in its endless quality. But then the next sentence (beginning "Lénie et

Yêté...”), far from resolving the problem of what story is being referred to, appears to take a tangent: with no apparent logical link between an endless story like love and the stark statement that two people, in all likelihood a male and a female, lived a happy life, readers must supply the link from their own imagination or experience that love is associated with happiness, and therefore that Lénie and Yêté must be in love in an endless way akin to the endlessness of the (hi)story whose reference is rapidly gaining distance from its evocation in the first word of the prologue. Boni, by leaving out key links between ideas and sentences carefully leads the reader into a position of complicity in the construction of meaning. Assuming a cooperative interlocutor in this literary dialogue, Boni is able to rely on Grice’s maxims of communication to oblige the reader to infer meaning where it is left out. With the “Lénie et Yêté...” sentence in isolation not explicitly connected to the *amour* of the previous sentence (fragment), it is up to the reader to supply the inference that Lénie and Yêté are main characters, and are in love (which the context authorizes because, after all, love is what *happens* between a man and a woman). This however, does not resolve the issue of what story this novel is announcing as its main object, since Lénie and Yêté’s love is only *like* the story we’re concerned with. Their bond of love is identified, in the next sentence (beginning “Une parole centenaire...”) as a verbal one, but the aim of the sentence is to describe Lénie and Yêté, not the story the *parole* represents. It is not until the fifth sentence (beginning “Leur héros d’hier...”) that enough clues are amassed, and that a name is specifically dropped so that the reader can confidently reflect back onto the narrative’s first word and identify *ce* as the (hi)story of Samori.

At this extremely close level of textual analysis, flouting norms of communicative clarity engages the reader in an active position of co-constructor of meaning, but the principle also

works beyond the syntactic, on into larger units of the narrative's organizational structure as well. The cited opening paragraphs start the novel off in an untitled, non-numbered chapter without epigraph, as if constituting the chapter zero of the work. The diegetic content of this chapter zero is the reunion of Lénie and Yété, two lovers whose lives had been united by a common interest in the stories of Samori. Functionally it announces that the figure of Samori will provide the centrifugal force for the novel, and hints at the setting of a salty lake with red sands not far from the Senegalese capital, the "lac rose" of Yété's exile. But far from simply introducing the next chapter and providing a transition, the text confronts the reader, at chapter one, with abrupt breaks on various levels of analysis. This chapter one, with a title and a number—markers of an organizational ensemble that chapter zero stands apart from—begins with an epigraph from an Edouard Glissant novel—a textual device apt for inciting the reader to imagine a relevance from beyond the author's text even if they aren't familiar with the work from Glissant's early nationalistic period. Knowledge of Glissant's text is not necessary, but can enrich the delayed clarity effect by formatting the informed reader's expectations. The title of the Glissant text, la Lézarde, offers a parallel from which to glean foreshadows in Boni's novel. It refers to a river whose zig-zagging course figuratively flows from ignorance to knowledge in Glissant's text—a journey similar to that taken by Lénie with respect to Samori, to storytelling, and with respect to the novel's political message. But even without such inside knowledge, the formal break that the epigraph represents enforces a new beginning rather than a contiguity of content with chapter zero.

Enlarging the sphere of analysis even further, the break in the normative narrative's expected continuity between the two opening chapters becomes all the more striking on the level of the chapter's setting: Lénie appears right away, but not at the lake and not with Yété. It's not

until the second page of that chapter one, that Yêté's name and memory are invoked so that the reader must form the hypothesis that the setting is now in the future. As it turns out, this hypothesis is false, and the setting of chapter one is actually a flashback from the point of Lénie and Yêté's reunion in chapter zero's Senegal. Chapter one, as one reads on, makes a flashback of its own to the time of their first meeting at a lake in Baoulé country in Côte d'Ivoire. The reader is justified in holding onto the hypothesis of chapter one's setting in the future, however, until the last few chapters of the entire novel, when it finally becomes clear that Lénie has uncovered the secret of Yêté's Senegalese exile and had only just rejoined him there in chapter zero. This sort of temporal misdirection is not an attempt to befuddle, since each setting has its own integrity and there is an overarching logic that welds them together, such that a classification of the novel as classically postmodern with a shattered plot-line and disjointed temporal unity would require some extra work to prove. Rather, it would seem more natural to characterize the timeline as complex, but integral—with each jump appearing well motivated within the plot—and as participating in an overall systematic strategy of delaying clarity, as was seen on the syntactic level in the first few sentences of the novel, as a way to involve the reader in the co-construction of the novel's meaning.

A related point should be made about the setting of Lénie's flashback to the time of her first meeting Yêté in chapter one with respect to Boni's relationship to language and narration: that is the non-referentiality of the setting. If delayed clarity is the *modus operandi*, then misdirections with clues and eventual resolutions are the expected *ordre du jour*. However, in identifying the actual Ivorian town of Marabadiassa as the place of first meeting of Yêté and Lénie, and then describing the town as near an enchanted lake, as lying between the equally

actual Ivorian cities of Séguéla and Tortiya, and as requiring a stop in Katiola on the way from south to north, one would be quite right to question why Boni seems to be inscribing not only misdirection, but geographical impossibilities into her text. In the Côte d'Ivoire of reference, there is no lake near the non-fictional Marabadiassa (although a river runs nearby), it is to the east of both Séguéla and Tortiya (and thus could not be between them), and it is well to the south of Katiola. The names of the places are real, but the beginning places of the legendary love of Lénie and Yété themselves are unreal, surreal, imaginary. There is no reason to suspect that the other settings⁴⁶ in the novel are not fully referential representations of the real places they name⁴⁷, so one is justified in asking why Boni would make such a move. To the uninformed reader, this non-referentiality would simply be mistaken as fact, but the informed reader's experience is enriched by seeing an added point-making parallel, given Boni's use of delayed clarity on other levels of analysis. Marabadiassa retains its realism only in the same sense that Lénie finds the mythologized accounts about Samori's intimate (his)story more compelling than the perhaps more accurate, but non-living official ones. The essence of *parole* pertinent to the true understanding of Samori depends less on factual accuracy than on the resonant passion captured in the telling of an intimate detail about him in the same way that the connection between real-life geographical locations and their imagined descriptions are less important to accuracy in the love between Yété and Lénie than the feeling available in the imagery of that love's beginning place. The imaginary nature of these settings thus enhancing both the story

⁴⁶ Although others do stretch geographical verisimilitude. Fred's trajectory from Paris to Abidjan in a plane follows a path well outside of a direct line, for example. I'll discuss some other relevant examples later in the analysis.

⁴⁷ Kortenaar's enlightening article "Fictive States" outlines some of the common practices of African authors naming pseudonymous or anonymous states in their fictions. For Kortenaar, these naming practices are not merely generating postmodern heterotopias by "mutilating familiar maps" in order to subvert ontological claims of priority. Instead, their focus is often not so much imaginary as "fictive", which is Kortenaar's proposed term to capture that their function is to highlight problems in real life—to present an alternate, but plausible reality rather than question reality in general.

itself and the point it makes about storytelling, there are two parallels to be drawn: the first, as already mentioned, is between the telling of Lénie's *petite histoire* and that of Samori; the second being between the reader's requirement to engage imaginatively in co-construction of the story with the narrator via delayed clarity and that of the fictional nature of elements of the story which also compel the informed reader to engage in imagination in order to arrive at an understanding. In both cases, Boni's choice in inscribing such mis-directions in the text essentially does the work of further enforcing complicity with the informed reader in deriving a narrative from a guided imagination. This forms part of Boni's social intervention into defining the national identity because it is precisely this process of incorporating myth, imagination, and minority voices as correctives—which the initiated⁴⁸ reader can find fictive or accurate—to the prevailing official definition which can reveal truths that strict referentiality can't.

This delayed clarity model of the relationship between narration and language is given further traction on the larger scale level of plot. Lénie's quest for the truth on Samori starts with Yété's exile, and later puts her in contact with twin brothers, César and Fred Ogun. The plotline of her quest comes into its climax as a mysterious mounted man dressed in character comes to Abidjan claiming to be the second coming of Samori. The entire mystery of Samori the Second's appearance in Abidjan is heavily foreshadowed. The foreshadowing comes first in a visit from César, who shows up unannounced at Lénie's newspaper offices to invite her for a meal, ostensibly to inquire about an article necessary for his research on Samori, but really to find out if she was the Samori admirer he suspected she was, and that he had been looking for.

⁴⁸ It should be noted that these discussion of the initiation or non-initiation of a reader will claim central importance in later evolutions of Boni's thought on national identity in her latest novel Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis which I will analyze later in this chapter.

In the sub-chapter immediately following his introduction, the narration follows César, rather than Lénie as has been the pattern, and drops hints about César worrying about what might happen if Fred Ogun were to return to Abidjan. It is revealed that the major difference between the brothers is that one wants to go beyond study of Samori's life, to actually live in Samori's skin: "il avait cette folle envie de se mettre dans la peau du personnage qu'il vénérât" (69). Later, Lénie records her thoughts and activities on a research trip to Paris where she meets with Fred Ogun who shares with her that he has a love for horses and even owns one and is planning to bring it to Africa with him. The reader is then treated to information Lénie doesn't get for another few sub-chapters: about Fred's plane ride home to the Côte d'Ivoire with his horse, about his purchase of a saber (a necessary part of the Samori costume), and about a man named Samori riding into Abidjan from the north a week later. Without actually identifying Fred as Samori II, associations are made so that the reader has little doubt who Samori II is before the character Lénie becomes aware of the fact. This foreshadowing might conceivably be misconstrued as a standard writer's technique for creating suspense, but since there's no sense of danger involved for Lénie whether or not she uncovers the true identity of Samori II, the delay of Lénie's learning must be performing some other function.

As we have seen on tighter levels of analysis, this delayed clarity effectively draws the reader into a certain kind of complicity with the text. The reader's position of knowledge, closer to the degree of omniscience of the narrator than that of Lénie, produces the strange effect of sharpening empathy with Lénie. The knowledge differential puts the reader in the position of holding the key to a mystery before it's fully developed, of being out of order with the main character, of possessing the facts or the conclusion of a story whose unfolding has yet to occur.

Since the conclusion is already in hand in a non-suspenseful way, the text suggests a focus on Lénie's *process of discovering* the truth the reader already knows. The text thus invites the reader to hold the ultimate truth of Fred's alter ego as a simple fact ancillary to the affective details which much more constitute his essence than the simple naming of his identity can. In other words, the reader's position of knowing that Fred is Samori II is analogous to "knowing" the "official" story just as Lénie already knows the official (hi)story of the original Samori. Boni's prose, then, places the reader in the position of reading the demonstration of the main character's own theses about truth in narrative. Much more truth about Samori II can be gleaned from watching Lénie *discover* what one already knows than can be found in the naked fact that Fred is Samori II. The text's emphasis, rather than bringing out Samori's core essence, shows instead that such simple statements of fact (like "Fred is Samori II", like the official capital-H History that "Samori was a resistor of colonization") dismiss the very essence they purport to elucidate—dismisses the mystery of it all, of what that identity implies. It's a way to oblige the reader to re-evaluate the very epistemology of ontology, as well as the value of linearity in storytelling, and by extension the state's official nation-building narrative about the national identity.

In this light, the novel's device of delaying clarity on so many discursive levels not only challenges the reader to glean diegetical truth in less straightforward ways, it also flouts generic and historiographical norms as well, and all in strategic keeping with the novel's stated content: *l'histoire*, yes, but more pointedly *la petite histoire*, "l'histoire en pointillé. Comme l'amour" (11).

Consider together the following musings of Lénie as she describes her own project to her lost love Yêté in a monologue that never reaches him:

Montre-moi la voie, toi qui depuis toujours as su t'enrouler dans le fleuve de la parole. J'apprends juste à aligner un mot à la suite d'un autre. Je cherche le chemin de ma propre parole. Et j'ai besoin d'air et de lumière...Laisse-moi noter toutes ces folies qui me passent par la tête. Mes impressions de voyage. Mes sautes d'humeur, mes colères, mes joies. Réaliser enfin ma seule passion depuis toujours : écrire la petite histoire du Conquérant...

Le héros était tombé, par malheur, dans un beau filet parce que la jambe invincible a toujours un talon vulnérable. Il avait connu la déportation et les affres de l'exil. Tout cela, je le sais, est de l'histoire officielle. Et le mystère reste entier. Je vais donc m'amuser à reconstituer en secret la petite histoire du Conquérant. Imaginer quelques bribes de sa vie privée...(73).

An impressionistic imagination is clearly the necessary link between the silences of the official history and the "*petite histoire*"⁴⁹ Lénie is concerned with reconstituting. This "*petite histoire*" is an exercise of "*folie*", of "*sautes d'humeur*", of imagination. And yet, since the official history only leaves the essential mystery wholly intact, it becomes that kind of fiction that presents deeper truths than the attested facts can transmit. The reference here to

⁴⁹ I would be remiss not to notice the similarity between François Lyotard's "petit récit" and Boni's "petite histoire". Both are about the proliferation of details and testimonies over and against official doctrinaire discourses. However, the thrust of these terms differs widely. Boni is concerned with the truth that voices outside the establishment can provide whereas Lyotard is describing the rise of a talent pool such that grand narratives give way to more personalized ones. In other words, Lyotard is describing the phenomenon of French postmodernism that has already taken place and Boni is seeking to undo the grand narratives precisely because for her they remain unavoidable.

impressionism, and earlier to pointillism suggests narrative techniques parallel in function and form to the artistic portraiture they connote: a sort of anti-realistic gesture intended to capture an essence by focusing more on the subject's imagined affective impact than on technical accuracy of representation. Again re-stating her goal and methods, Lénie reaffirms the superior verity of imagination:

Parler en toute quiétude de la vie imaginaire et véridique de Samori, telle est la mission que je m'assigne pendant sept jours. Que me restera-t-il donc à découvrir hors des paroles ayant circulé de saison en saison, d'un pays à l'autre, par le vent, par le soleil, par la mémoire de la terre et des lieux, par les arbres et les collines centenaires qui ont tout vu, qui ont tout appris qui ont aidé à la diffusion de la légende à la consolidation du mythe...

Que me restera-t-il à découvrir ici dans ces livres qui ne me parlent pas, qui me boudent et se taisent, ces livres qui racontent les mémoires d'étrangers à casques et fusils venus tenter l'aventure dans ces pays lointains, paysages fantômes, ces pays étranges et inquiétants qu'il fallait pacifier à tout prix comme ils disent ?

Il me reste à déchiffrer les mots de la page blanche jaunie par le temps. Il me reste le loisir de rêver entre les lignes de l'histoire officielle, aux versions innombrables, aux chapitres contradictoires. Il me reste la passion de poursuivre une énigme fabriquée comme une machine et un jouet tout à la fois par une lubie de journaliste...Par moi !

Saisir le détail mémorable, le grain de sel qui nous permettra de rire de nous-mêmes, de *nos* farces monstrueuses. De tenir le coup face à la récupération politique de *nos* grands mythes...(87, emphasis mine)

Lénie's informed imagination in telling the story of Samori is nourished not only by reading between the lines in official documents, but by reading other, less customarily linguistic signs—the wind, the sun, the earth, trees, hills—anything that saw or transmitted the story at any time. When the correct code is shared, these also can communicate a message about Samori, which must then be worked into the imagination's pointillistic impression. Her goal in the present being to counter the political appropriation⁵⁰ of the Samori myth cycle by imagining the memorable details about it that will allow, Ivoirians, Africans, the “us” in “*nos farces monstrueuses*” to laugh at what cruel and bloody kind of conquering “hero” “we” allowed to gain purchase—even to become part of “our” mythologized founding—so that “we” can avoid the same bloody farce at the hands of the power-hungry in “our” time.

This gesture of holding out the violence of the past so that it becomes a spectacle for a sort of cathartic consumption in the present is essentially an aestheticizing one. And the message in relation to the national “nous”, then, is that even in the violence of “nos grands mythes”—of the foundation stories of resistance to the French which resistance now forms part of the Ivorian national character—there is a solidarity in the face of threat that welded the nation into something that is being threatened by the political recuperations of the day. These political recuperations, in the lead-up to the Ivoirité period, were divisive and Boni is suggesting here that such divisiveness can best be resisted when the stories are understood as stories about “us”, not

⁵⁰ Mann provides a footnote in his article on the political recuperation of French monuments to tirailleurs in which he claims Malians in Bamako connect statues to the current leader's efforts to consolidate power by invoking Samori. The French label the statues as monuments to honor the “volunteers” from WWI, but the people call them “Samori's warriors” as if they represented anti-colonial resistance from three decades prior to the tirailleurs. This is to point out that re-appropriation of cultural artifacts can run both directions—the popular can co-opt the official, just as vice versa. That Samori's kingdom stretched beyond the current national borders of the Côte d'Ivoire and therefore that Samori can be claimed by Malians as one of their own does not diminish the perception Ivoirians can have that Samori rather belongs to their national history.

about how “we” are different from “them”. I will further address Boni’s 1995 offering of aesthetics as a solution to the co-opting of history and myth by official discourses in the pages that follow.

For now, it is instructive also to note another parallel metaphor for Lénie’s (and Boni’s) subversion of linearity in the reconstruction of a (hi)story:

J’ai appris, très tôt et tu le sais, que la parole est une chaîne reliant les membres d’une même famille, les amis, les ennemis. Elle circule toujours des voix les plus autorisées à celles qui n’ont pas le droit de se manifester. Mais, dans ma tête, les choses fonctionnent autrement. La chaîne devient un puzzle ou la carte du métro parisien avec ses correspondances, ses interférences, ses mauvais contacts, ses brouilles, ses parasites, ses fausses notes, ses ratés comme des rendez-vous manqués. (92)

In contrast to the Cartesian logic and linear causality of a chain, Lénie and Boni propose the model of a subway map—a network of nodes—as a better representation of how a *parole* functions. Stories and histories can then be presented with a set of transfer points to tangential (hi)story lines, with areas of interference between them, with side-stories piggy-backing, with contradictions, with non sequiturs and with characters completely missing the train. Although certainly not the only model available for the task, this one has the subversive potential to challenge official discourses, in the full Foucauldian sense of the word, because it can take into account elements of the context that official versions must deny or deaden in order to produce their effect. And Boni’s own prose closely matches this nodular model, with a variety of writing perspectives (an omniscient narrator for the most part, but with long stretches of a personal

journal, epistolary exchanges, brief anecdotes in italics)⁵¹, and with a complicated timeline and plot elements that must be grafted onto the larger narrative.

Following the metro map model, under the impressionistic principle of delayed clarity as a vehicle for engaging the imagination in the co-construction of such a map, Boni practices and preaches in parallel. But what is the valence in involving the reader in the project of resisting the status quo in the precise way the content of the novel explicitly does? In a way, the magic of *Baigneurs* is that it demonstrates how incomplete the official versions of Samori's (hi)story are, and how an informed imagination is indispensable in cobbling together details about him, and specifically intimate details from the perspective of the women whose lives he touched (mostly negatively!)—those witnesses whose stories are never authorized for official use. So what discourses does it contest, and with what thrust? Does it relate to the economics of the devaluation, to the ethnically polarized electioneering, to the anti-immigrant malaise that were all part of the conditions from which Ivoirité arose as a state doctrine?

If feminist texts are those which subvert discursive orders maintained under patriarchy, then the very fact that Lénie is primarily involved in a quest to discredit the official history of Samori in the same way that she liked to “crever des bulles de savon les jours de lessive” (49), classifies this novel's mode as properly feminist. Subversion of discursive order in novels and poetry is not new to Tanella Boni. In Boni's earlier works, and specifically in her first novel Une vie de crabe, critical note has been made of her propensity for mixing genres as a feminist

⁵¹ Uetto Békrou finds much of significance in this conglomeration of literary genres found in other works of Boni, not under the purview of this study. I will address her arguments squarely in the pages that follow.

practice. Viviane Uetto-Békrou notes that *Une vie de crabe* involves the generic miscegenation of at least “le journal intime, le poème, des coupures d’extraits de journal, et des chants” and argues that such a mixing is a feminist refusal to submit to the standard codes of narrative unity—a way to contest the patriarchal order (20). But Uetto-Békrou is herself concerned with undermining standardized categories in her own way, and therefore sees Boni’s earlier novel not as solely and merely feminist, but as both feminist and *hybrid*; that is to say *postcolonial*, and therefore contesting Western discourses—Western feminism included—while retaining a centrally feminist quality. The three later novels, all under this study’s purview, fall in line nicely with this characterization due to their conglomerations of forms, their focus on a strong, independent female protagonist, and the centrality with which their content comes to the reader through women’s perspectives. As it is in the recovery of Samori’s *petite histoire*, Boni demonstrates in all her texts what she claims outright in the voice of her protagonist’s interlocutor and fellow secret-sharer in her most recent novel: “le vrai secret se trouve dans nos vies de femmes” (126). It is these perspectives that masculine Discourse refuses to include. It is these points of view that Western Discourse declines to incorporate. It is these perspectives that History can’t account for, the difference of which the State, in its discourses of National unity must circumscribe in order to erect and maintain its masculine articulations of internal identity and external difference even though such articulations seem on the surface to grant homogeneous citizenship rights with a blind eye to gender⁵². It is these voices that Lénie specifically seeks to incorporate into the *petite histoire* of Samori that she is reconstructing. Lénie takes the occasion

⁵² Deniz Kandiyoti argues in “Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation” that since traditional ethnic and religious identities are patriarchal, and since these discourses underlie that of national identity, then the latter must also be fundamentally patriarchal. This is especially evident when a women’s rights-granting secular nationalism fails, as happened historically in much of the Muslim world, leaving behind an ethnic or religious regime quick to strip away women’s rights under the guise of the protection of the culture’s central image: the woman.

in three separate instances throughout the novel to retell an important episode in the life of Samori not included in the official accounts. But rather than supporting her novel-opening description of Samori as a “hero” figure, each of the three episodes instead recounts the grisly details of massacres and the sexual violence perpetrated upon women and virginal adolescent girls. This insistence on the negative consequences of power on women and children constitutes a discursive resistance to the more masculine-aligned official histories and political uses of the legend.

Boni’s feminism works in and through the same logic that makes her construct the text with delays in clarity. As Lénie conducts her research in Paris, for example, she is able to get almost nothing about Samori from Fred Ogun, who had written a doctoral dissertation on the subject, and who was supposed to be her major source for information on “the Conqueror”. Lénie is able to speak with Fred’s sister Diane about Fred’s research, however. Diane’s knowledge is not archival, as is Fred’s, and does not stem from research for a dissertation as his does. Nor does it even come from any manifest interest in the hero-figure. Rather, in Lénie’s words, “[Diane] a appris à connaître le personnage à travers des bribes de mots que Fred Ogun glissait *entre deux conversations anodines*” (106, italics mine). She and Lénie wonder together about the feel of Samori’s chest, seeing it naked in an old photo together, and commiserate on the idea that Fred’s doctoral dissertation on Samori would certainly not have included such a detail. In other words, their knowledge of Samori was marked as female, and their perspective could bring out details invisible to the eyes of the official history as well as to political recuperations of it. These details, imagined as they were, were not privileged as to accuracy *per se*, but rather as a necessary corrective to complete the official history, to tell what it occluded in

the telling. Lénie reports Diane's reaction thus: "elle avait l'air de me dire que j'inventais des détails qui avaient échappé à la perspicacité de son frère...Mais elle savait que les plus belles inventions sont celles qui disent la vérité sans détour...Elle m'autorisait donc à continuer mon histoire..." (108).

Lénie's method of an informed imagination completing the official record, then, constitutes a diegetical parallel to Boni's practice of delayed clarity, catching the reader in a rhetorical net of linguistically constrained cooperative imagination, and at the same time a critical undoing of male-dominated discourses. The crimes of the conquering powers being those perpetrated by the patriarchal order, Lénie's insistence on the *petite histoire* is the voice of the testimony of the subaltern that calls such an order into question, for: "Seule la fumée de la *petite histoire* persiste et signe les grands crimes" (182)⁵³. Thus form and content both contesting established orders via subversion of norms, Boni's novel participates in a postcolonial sort of *écriture féminine*. On the other hand, however, Boni does not share Cixous's concentration on the Lacanian Symbolic as the site of male domination and subordination of women, her feminism, as she herself has stated in an interview with Uetto-Békrou, is not necessarily in strict opposition to the male order, but rather addresses the relationship *between* men and women:

⁵³ The term "subaltern" can hardly be employed without calling up Gayatri Spivak's use of the term in her seminal questioning article "Can the subaltern speak?". Deconstructing authorized testimonies on the Hindu practice of spousal self-immolation, Spivak finds that feminism may not be served even in British attempts to "save" women from these ritual suicides on the grounds that "speaking for" them also takes away their own voice. I use the term here contrastively. Boni's faith is that even in an enforced silence, a trace is left—the "fumée" that persists.

Je serai capable de défendre ce que j'appelle la cause des femmes. Et pour moi, défendre la cause des femmes, c'est la défendre dans le cadre de ce que j'appelle les rapports hommes-femmes. Encore une fois, pour moi, je ne prends pas la femme comme une entité unique. Elle a moins de problèmes, si l'homme lui-même y comprend quelque chose. Donc, il faut passer quelque part par la parole qui s'adresse à l'homme. (134)

This less agonistic feminism concerned less with one side than with the intersection of the feminine-masculine dyad is illustrated as one notes the development of Lénie's capacity to tell a story in contrast with that of the men in her life. According to the diegetic chronology, Lénie begins by making much ado of her lack of being able to really tell a story properly. Aside from the citation mentioned earlier about Lénie just learning how to "aligner un mot à la suite d'un autre" (73), she also claims: "je n'ai jamais appris les *méandres de la parole*" (93, italics mine). This sentiment is set in contrast to Yété's ease of storytelling, since Lénie addresses him as being the one: "qui depuis toujours as su t'enrouler dans le fleuve de la parole" (73). Eventually, by pulling together the impressionistic elements imagined from her contact with "un regard, une poignée de main, un document, un discours politique, une vieille photo...", Lénie learns to tell the tale with the force it takes to enact a change in her audience, a political change powerful enough to become a threat to the powers that be. In a chiasmic sort of contrast, Yété, who did have the "don de la parole" at the beginning, develops rather a silence, and ends the novel expressing himself either through graphic art or through silent touch, rather than in oral change-inducing text. For Fred Ogun, also, there is a sort of devolution in his ability to tell a story. The reader's contact with Fred begins with Fred as the master of all knowledge pertaining to Samori, as the expert witness, able to tell details and stories at length on the subject. So

integrated is his knowledge that he is able to take upon himself the very persona of his hero, and make public appearances which command attention—his words attracting all within the sound of his voice. And yet, at the very point in his appearance as Samori II that a certain Muslim community agrees to hear him out in a formal “palabre” setting, and is most prepared to accept the changes his story would imply, his rhetoric fails him:

Puis l’homme se tut. Cette fois-ci, il avait eu maille à partir avec les mots. Les mots le trahissaient. Il ne savait plus qui il était ni d’où il venait. Les mots lui apprenaient qu’il avait mal joué le jeu, qu’il n’atteignait pas encore la cheville vénérable du Conquérant dans la peau neuve duquel il vivait depuis peu. Il avait perdu le parler juste de la langue, le sens du chemin de la parole laquelle avait ses stations, ses carrefours, ses relais incontournables. Il voulait aller droit au but. Et il lui semblait avoir raté la cible. Ici, le droit chemin ne semblait pas être le plus adéquat. Ses paroles s’étaient envolées dans la nuit naissante. Ses paroles s’étaient évanouies avant qu’elles n’atteignent les tympons rebelles à toute idée nouvelle qui ignore les haltes autorisées, les passages à niveaux, les frontières naturelles devant lesquelles il convenait de s’incliner, avant que la chaîne des mots ne reparte de plus belle, véhiculée par un ancien ou un intermédiaire désigné à cet effet.

Les mots glissaient au travers de sa langue. Les mots chutaient, s’ouvraient et se répandaient à ses pieds comme des calebasses. Ses mains n’avaient aucun moyen de les maintenir debout...Le prophète n’avait pas l’accent du pays. Il avait à faire un effort inouï pour rattraper le lapsus qui le livrait nu, pieds et mains liés devant ce tribunal formé

d'hommes aguerris à milles formes de discours. Il ne savait plus sur quel registre jouer.
(159-160)

This moment of the loss of verbal ability constitutes a climax for the Samori II plot. It's the point at which doubt strikes a fatal blow to the morale of the hero figure who is thence doomed to the status of a *fou*, of a mere distraction, in the eyes of the people he's trying to motivate. But it's not a loss of verbal capacity *per se* that Samori II suffers, rather, it's the loss of "*l'accent du pays*", of the "*méandres de la parole*" that make a story an effective agent of memory and/or change: "le sens [de]...ses stations, ses carrefours, ses relais incontournables". His crime is that he wanted to go too quickly to the heart of the message, in a word: to speak Western. Fred Ogun's western education and extended period of residency in France constitute a symbolic break in the same way that Yété, whose direct speech attempting to instigate revolution earned him an exile in Senegal, suffered a physical removal from his audience. By representing the male characters' discursive failure, and Lénie's discursive triumph in these ways, Boni accomplishes a double stroke. She sets the latter model up as the more effective and also demonstrates it in the form of delayed clarity, of guided imagination, thus engaging Western and masculine dominated discourses at the same time in a postcolonial feminist way.

To connect this anti-masculine, anti-Western discursive resistance to the rhetoric of Ivoirité, nascent at the time of the novel's publication, it will be useful to remember Partha Chatterjee's insightful distinction between domains within postcolonial nations. For Chatterjee, one way for postcolonial nations to justify keeping the institutions and practices of the colonial West as they forge a new national future after political independence is to attempt to

psychologically divide a central, “spiritual” core to their national being from an external “material” domain. The spiritual, concerning perhaps religion, ethnicity, culture, is that national essence which colonialism could never touch, whereas the material is that upon which a clear and unquestionable “superiority” can be easily conceded to the West—in the realms of the scientific method, or liberal democratic political institutions, for example. This material versus spiritual distinction may seem to be taking a page from Senghor’s Négritude movement, but escapes its self-defeating essentializing logic through forward-looking adaptation to the modern condition rather than by advocating a backward-looking return to tradition, as Négritude would have it. Part of the postcolonial thrust of the discursive stance Boni takes up in focusing on the *petite histoire* rather than History *tout court*, then, is that it reserves a value to the essence of the Samori story that Western, masculine History cannot comprehend, let alone represent. Samori’s story becomes emblematic for other nationalistic rhetorical strategies. Writing his *petite histoire*, whose value would be marginalized as purely aesthetic by the state, is akin to placing some part of an African or Ivorian Truth in the spiritual domain of the national imaginary which the more obviously Western, falsely diversity-loving rhetoric of Ivoirité—from the material domain—can neither fathom nor extinguish. Writing the novel with delayed clarity and a focus on the *petite histoire* demonstrates the inherent lack of cohesion in the state’s stated desires for national unification, thereby constituting a critique of the postcolonial state as inheritor of the Western, masculine institutional machinery for discursive power. Lénie winds up every bit as much in exile as her male co-admirers of Samori, which might suggest a limit to contesting the state, but her concentration on the *petite histoire* allows her to keep Samori’s memory and essence alive in ways the more materialist males can’t, by removing it to the spiritual domain.

It is here that one might pause to consider some of the scenes and images that are inscribed in the novel, and yet which seem to function outside this logic of delayed clarity, or rather that seem of passing interest, but which nevertheless contribute to the strategy in a more central way than a passive first reading might reveal—Boni’s own *méandres de la parole*.

The novel’s second chapter (Chapter 1) sets Lénie in Marabadiassa and passes quickly over a scene and a reflection on some women making traditional pottery there before whisking the reader on to the more pertinent storyline of how Lénie meets Yêté for the first time and their romance commences. These women, although ancillary to the plots and sub-plots concerning Yêté and Samori, are nonetheless emblematic and a necessary element to introduce Lénie’s model of women’s writing. The pottery these women produce is a special kind, imbued with millennial secrets and a form of writing anterior to the first waves of European languages brought to Ivorian shores. Through a highly ritualized process, these women give “form and meaning” to the material formed from the mixing of earth and water, and thereby “bring into the world” useful tools, and also texts; vessels for various materials, and also writings, which are vessels for various messages. And only women are allowed to participate in this ritual. Just as Lénie does with female-marked stories and perspectives about Samori, here “Lénie avait glané des paroles vives près des femmes” (19).

The next two plot elements that seem at first of passing importance constitute “loose ends” that never get tied up. Lénie and Yêté conceive just prior to Yêté’s mysterious and silent flight into exile, and Lénie has a daughter in due time. The daughter, whose name we never learn, never seems to figure into Lénie’s obsession with Samori, or with even Yêté, even though

she is the fruit of their love. She is neither reported as accompanying Lénie to Paris, nor, surprisingly, as Lénie rejoins Yété at the Lac Rose at the end of the plot's chronological trajectory, the reader is left without any reason not to assume that the daughter was left behind in Abidjan forever. In the scant scenes where she appears, her role is that of an affectionate child having intimate conversations with her parent, but these conversations are "composées de plus de questions que de réponses" in a way that suggests a different kind of discourse than can be had between the other, less intimately involved characters and especially not with men (151). With regards to the daughter, one might note that Boni's exclusion of her from Lénie's story mirrors both the way in which women's and children's stories don't figure in the official histories of Samori, and the way in which Boni demonstrates that their inclusion brings about more complete perspectives on national, social and historical truths: it is the daughter, not Lénie, who observes that a man who claims to be a famous 200 year-old probably has something to hide, and who thus sparks Lénie to finally confront and unmask Samori II as Fred Ogun.

Also occluded from the story are the precise causes of the death of Fred and César's sister Diane, whose life in Paris, removed from Fred Ogun's political actions in Abidjan, should have guaranteed her some modicum of safety from the reach of the Ivorian state when the latter felt threatened by Fred's subversive discourse. Diane is assassinated at a subway stop in Paris at the hands of the Ivorian administration's goons, but the only clue we're given as to why the assassination was ordered is that the powers that be killed her as a proxy for her brother, César (who they leave alive in Abidjan), for the senseless mere fact of belonging to a family of unrepentant dissidents like Fred. Diane's relationship with Yété is also unrevealed and mysterious. She has enough of a closeness of friendship with Yété to send him regular

correspondence, to agree to carry out important meetings and keep important secrets for him, and to be curious about the physical appearance of the “elect of his heart”. Yet all this must be gleaned from letters between the two forwarded on to Lénie by Clara, black Cuban divorcee of Fred to whom the letters fell as closest living relative after Diane’s assassination. It is through these letters that Lénie discovers not only Yêté’s current whereabouts, but also that his love for Lénie is undimmed.

This complicated nesting of plot details within layers of narrative provenance (Lénie indirectly “eavesdrops” on letters forwarded to her by Clara who indirectly knows Lénie might be interested in their contents; the letters and Lénie’s reactions to them reported to the reader indirectly by a narrator) parallels Lénie’s and Boni’s previously mentioned central concern for the “*méandres de la parole*” in the reconstruction of an important tale. Such a device becomes all the more interesting when one considers Lénie’s divagations on Clara, who she never met, but who she knew was married to Fred because of Fred’s penchant for symbolic identification with revolutionary causes (he was interested in a Cuban woman specifically because she signified “Castro” to him, one of Fred’s heroes at the time). Lénie describes:

Clara dont l’image éphémère galopait encore dans l’esprit de Lénie comme la chanson de la voix minoritaire. Celle qui se moque des grandes théories révolutionnaires dont la vérité se perd nuit et jour, dans les *méandres du pouvoir* (190, emphasis mine).

This is the only time in the novel such a formulation is used, but since the novel’s thrust is to capture truth via minority voices through an attention to the *méandres de la parole*, this opposition with a *méandres de pouvoir* is quite striking in its polarizing force. Just as *parole* has

its *méandres* so does power, but in an antithetical way. Proper use of the former critiques the latter, demonstrates its abuses, its false totalities, whereas the latter calls up all the negatives of the modern African state – the deflection of power’s appropriate uses through corruption and bureaucracy, as well as the concealment of power’s paths of violence. Put another way: Lénie’s critique here sympathizes with “truths”, which can now only be revealed through *méandres de la parole*, but which have been lost through the failure of socialist states to provide the freedoms and equalities promised at their inception—lost because of abusive *méandres du pouvoir*.

Another scene which seems stylistically out of place concerns Fred Ogun and his occult powers. As Lénie and César finish their opening conversation in a café in Abidjan, the narrator follows César for a couple of sub-chapters. César, we are told, remembers a time when shape-shifting assassins are sent by a cousin from their village to terminate Fred Ogun for having disrespected the family somehow before his sojourn in France. In a brief anecdote more reminiscent of a magical realist novel than the more serious plot elements surrounding it, we are told how with all the windows closed one morning, Fred becomes aware that the sound of a mosquito which could not have entered his apartment by any normal method was actually a poison-filled *génie* who was sent by mystical means to destroy him. Fred’s prowess at squashing the bug before it could harm him sends a magical shock wave back to the wizardly perpetrators who had flown from the Côte d’Ivoire on a supernatural bamboo airplane. These *féticheurs*, aside from underestimating the efficacy of Fred’s mother’s protections in saving Fred from malevolent occult powers, had also fatally mistimed their attack because they were ignorant of daylight savings and the change in time zone they had crossed. This temporal ignorance is telling in two ways, since it highlights a key difference between Western linear modernity and

the way traditional Africans conceive of the world, and also because it is presented as a non-magical part of this anecdote even though it's completely imaginary: the Côte d'Ivoire and France share the same time zone, and although the Côte d'Ivoire does not observe daylight savings, the difference in time is never more than one hour, not the two mentioned in this episode. As with the imaginary physical setting of Marabadiassa mentioned previously, the temporality here flouts norms of accuracy, for, if the magical element asks us to suspend judgment, it is precisely on the points of unnatural phenomenon that it asks us to suspend it—everything else, temporality included in this case, must remain solidly believable and accurate for the magic to escape its logic.

Here again, factual accuracy is less important to understanding the essence of Fred's intimate and troubled relationship with his home country and his family and his traditions than is the reader's acceptance of the essence of that relationship. Although the anecdote's thrust is easily understood without strict attention to such details, the story of Fred being both in synch and out of synch with Africa in various ways is enhanced when the time differential gets stretched, as traditional griotic exaggeration might do. On the other hand, although the detail of temporal distortion does not alter the overall diegetic thrust of the anecdote, the informed reader can find in this detail an exaggeration that strengthens the overall *strategic* point about the telling of stories—about the *méandres de la parole*: the *petite histoire* is important, and even the informed reader must engage the imaginative faculty, even to the point of disregarding factual inaccuracies, to get to the more pure truth to be found in such imagined things.

The final episode ancillary to the novel's plot which nevertheless merits attention is the brazenly allegorical scene just before Lénie finally corners and confronts Samori II where there

is a fork in the road leading across the Ébrié Lagoon over one of two bridges named for major figures in the history of the Côte d'Ivoire: Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Charles de Gaulle. Without even needing to delve into the depths of how those two personalities compare and contrast—since allegorical analogies don't necessarily have to hold at all levels of analysis—their basic opposition is that of an African and a Frenchman. Beyond the fact that the man and his horse choose the African way, over the bridge named for Côte d'Ivoire's first president after independence, “sans y penser, parce qu'ils étaient bien obligés, connaissant moins bien la seconde voie”(173), this short segment is significant for two reasons. First, the narrator lets us in on the thoughts of the horse (the very names of the bridges make the horse “*tressaillir*”, and the horse “*se rappelait encore*” de Gaulle's name better than his younger “*maître et ami*”), which adds to the delayed clarity principle by obliging the reader to suspend disbelief again on a non-realistic textual element.

But perhaps more surprisingly, the allegory is significant because it doesn't really go anywhere with the opposition it sets up. There are no great ramifications of this choice over any other, and the discussion of it seems disconnected from the narrative developments around it, facts which blunt the force of what such an obvious allegory is representing. Once again, however, if one keeps in mind Boni's insistence on the importance of *méandres de la parole*, the allegory can reclaim a different force when perceived as a deliberate narrative misdirection. The emphasis on the trembling that the names cause and the stress made on the choice both man and animal must make in making a way for themselves are lures in the same way that the dichotomy between African and Western, traditional and modern, rely also on false or misleading distinctions. Whichever road Samori II takes, it will be his last day on earth and his message will fail to effect the change he's promoting.

In fact, it is in this chapter that we discover how the audience is reacting to him. The women listen intently, but not to rally and coalesce into a political opposition to the powers that be, rather as a welcome distraction—something different, a momentary diversion that will help them continue their drudgery later. The men listen with a tin ear, already acquainted as they are with the gods and prophets of this world, too cynical to allow themselves to be moved by Samori, the Second or the first. In a way, the narrow narrative misdirection under analysis right now mirrors Boni's larger strategic point that the words themselves are less important than the essence of the story, that the preaching's effect is not in its syntax, semantics, or even in its pragmatics, but rather in the healthy distraction it provides which make going back to the "*charmes de la vie*" bearable, more fruitful. And that in the final analysis, it is these *charmes de la vie* that constitute the veritable political statement, the veritable site of resistance to the nascent discourse of Ivoirité: let such discussions entertain you, and then get on with the work in your life.

Having gone through Boni's own *méandres de la parole*, having noted the feminist thrust of her systematic strategy of delayed clarity, having established that Boni discursively renders the reader complicit in re-evaluating signs, and in admitting more signs into the repertoire of things interpretable, I am now prepared to remark upon her concept of the nation and the state tied to it. Her engagement with the shape of the nation can be seen in a way roughly analogous to her engagement with feminism: just as the women's voices and perspectives are what the official *histoires* all lack and all need to be complete, so the nation, as the state would define it, acts as a discourse—the *parole guerrière*—systematically occluding minority perspectives which are what she must strategically bring in for an effective resistance to it.

In Baigneurs, the state's presence acts like the other *méandres de la parole*, seeming negligible throughout most of the novel until, all of a sudden, Fred and Diane are killed. The very secrecy and suddenness with which both events are treated invite the reader to hypothesize a deeper pervasiveness of state violence than the rest of the text implies on the surface. Since Yété had left without a word in the opening chapters, it is only as readers learn of his involvement with César and Fred as trying to operate a political revolution against the nation-state (in favor of a Pan-African movement) that they can re-evaluate his hasty departure from Lénie's arms as a politically motivated flight into exile rather than as the purely personal abandonment that Boni has led the reader to feel up to that point. Only Lénie, out of the set of characters obsessed with Samori's memory, is relatively free from danger despite her easily targetable profession of journalist. The narrator notes Lénie's attitude about Samori's story after the assassinations in Abidjan and Paris are all said and done, after her decision to go re-find Yété:

Elle avait cherché à comprendre l'histoire de la conquête. Au fond, toutes les histoires politiques commencent et se terminent toujours de la même manière, par l'apprentissage de la parole guerrière. Lénie avait envie de s'évader de ce cercle par la porte de l'anecdote, mais là aussi la conquête avait posé ses pièges qui risquaient d'être tout aussi meurtriers.

C'était une histoire d'amour et de haine qui n'avait pas de fin... Elle avait si bien observé ce jeu, elle avait tellement entendu des avatars de paroles guerrières qu'elle s'était armée pour la seule bataille qui en vaille vraiment la peine. Elle noterait dans son

carnet : *voler, non pas conquérir, une poussière de la terre où bat ton cœur.* (202, emphasis original)

With this realization—that conquest, power, politics, the state, were all a *piège* of the *parole guerrière*—Lénie curiously uses the verb *voler* to describe the antidote to *conquérir*, the key to her re-acquisition of Yêté. Stealing being an act of dishonesty where property is taken away from its rightful owner, it is hard to imagine how this might be superior to a conquest whose method of acquisition involves more violent confrontation, but still involves taking what doesn't belong to the conqueror. But the battle here, the stolen property here, is a territory of the heart, where poetic tropes have placed theft as the essence of how love begins. Territory, theft, and love, then, being bound up in a logic of pointillist narration, as the only battle worth fighting for, Boni's position of opposition to official or state discourses is parallel to her position of opposition to official discourses on the other subjects mentioned (Samori, feminism, the West). The African state's territorial claim on the nation, after all, is more like conquest, and Boni's intervention amounts to affirming the nation as a place where a certain kind of fraternal love between citizens and for a land called home exists—a notion not necessarily coterminous with the state's territory.

Boni's choice of setting in the Côte d'Ivoire places her characters in a particular relationship with realities on the ground, and especially with the historical context of the Houphouët-Boigny regime's simultaneous openness to immigration and resistance to movements

promoting a more liberal, open-borders kind of pan-Africanism⁵⁴. The figure of Samori was intended, by the three main men in the novel, as a better model for such a political unity than Nkrumah or Nyéréré, or as a better and more recent conqueror than Shaka Zulu, likewise mythologized, yet still in living memory. But Lénie describes all of the “grandes théories révolutionnaires”, all of these models, as losing their truth in the application because of their necessary involvement in relations of power.

And yet even in its failure to produce the revolutionary force desired, the myth of Samori *does* linger, his *petite histoire* *does* engage Lénie as the novel’s central concern. Is one licensed by Boni’s *modus operandi* to re-interpret the centrality of Samori as one giant *méandre de la parole* in Boni’s larger message on the nation?

The reason César, Fred, and Yété rejected the other African models was because: “nous...on s’est rendu compte qu’on était tous plus ou moins de sang mêlé” (170). This idea of mixed ethnicities may be a fact in many African nations, but carries a particularly Ivorian weight given the Houphouët-Boigny motto of Akwaba and the inaccuracies perpetuated in the anthropological and historical accounts told in its service of how nearly all of the Ivorian tribes came in waves of immigration—a strategic description intended to dilute the claims of any one ethnicity to some primal chthonic authority. César’s words point to a specifically Ivorian “*nous*” which cannot access an ethnic or racial purity, and thereby cannot establish unity along the same

⁵⁴ Katya Werthmann is convinced that the first multi-party election challenging Houphouët-Boigny in 1990 was won on the strength of the Dioula vote. Houphouët-Boigny had granted dual-citizenship to migrant Burkinabé workers for decades, many of whom squatted, and became *de facto* and common-law owners of the land they tended. Bayart, Geschiere, and Nyamnjoh concur, stressing that even before the multi-party system was imposed by the IMF at the end of the Cold War, Houphouët-Boigny was legitimizing his single-party rule partly through the granting of voting rights en masse to non-citizens. On the other hand, aligned as he was with the West in the Cold War, there was always an interest in maintaining national borders (especially vis-à-vis communist Guinée) and resistance to some of the more leftist sorts of pan-Africanism, such as promoted by N’Krumah, especially strong at the beginning of his rule.

logic as the Nkrumah, Nyéréré or Shaka Zulu models would suggest. It is an inclusive “*nous*” which César longs to return to: “Un parent d’ici, l’autre de là-bas, ou les deux étrangers vivant ici, chez eux, tu entends ? Révolu tout ça et c’est dommage” (170). But the passion for the *petite histoire* of Samori is not for any generic Ivorian, but rather for one of a specifically northern, Muslim-inflected “*nous*”. Samori represents the part of the Côte d’Ivoire that the concept of Ivoirité—barely nascent at the time of this novel’s publication—had the effect of excluding.

The critic should keep in mind that Lénie’s express goal in retelling Samori is “*pour en rire*”. She wishes, in effect, to collectively laugh the violence of it all out of the nation’s system, thereby facing it, putting it properly in the past, and moving forward toward national unity and peace. In the end then, after factoring in Samori as a *méandre de la parole*, it is the love story—it’s the reunion with Yêté—that is the true heart of Boni’s message. Her final page has Fred’s medallion, sign of the Conqueror, put under glass as a needed souvenir, but rendered void of political content, purely aestheticized—myth; literature; art. The nation, then, appears to be that which lives “*l’histoire quotidienne de l’Afrique*” (214). It is that which can tell the story and enjoy it for the story that it is. It is that depoliticized entity which can live a love story despite the terror of a pervasive threat of state violence.

I will explore later how this aestheticization evolves throughout Boni’s more recent novels into increasingly direct political engagement as the discourse of Ivoirité on the ground becomes stronger and its consequences become more bloody and ubiquitous. Before arriving there, however, it is important to note that if the private, aesthetic, apolitical love story is thus the antidote to the message of the political discourse of her time, Boni’s own aesthetic intervention into the political contains some limitations and caveats within its own logic, as well as presents

some interesting paradoxes with respect to Jameson and to an external mass-market publishing phenomenon unique in Africa, in many respects, to the Côte d'Ivoire.

First, never mind that the choice of aesthetics over politics is itself a political act, this novel's message echoes a current of popular literature all but exclusive to the Côte d'Ivoire, commonly called the *littérature à l'eau de rose* (to which this novel's title is quite likely a nod: *Le Baigneurs du lac rose*). The fruit of a more robust publishing sector than in many other parts of Africa, this phenomenon of mass-marketed, mostly romantic novels aimed at a female teen-aged audience has been successfully maintained for the last twenty or so years, sustained by the disposable income of the relatively larger middle class in the country and a business model allowing the country's relatively larger mass of well-educated, under-employed pool of potential authors to get their start writing stories that would appeal in this vein.

At its heart an escapist genre, this *littérature à l'eau de rose* represents a tangible manifestation of Boni's message of aesthetics over politics. At the same time, however, precisely because it is primarily escapist, the sub-genre represents the limits of aesthetics to the exclusion of politics, of the private over the public: its plots are stereotypical, its focus is petty individual intrigues, and ultimately, it distracts with stories of emotional fiction from a concentration on more pressing and urgent real matters. Even prize-winning *littérature à l'eau de rose* authoress Régina Yaou, although stressing its positive influence as contributing to a healthier overall environment for writers, publishers, and public, also admitted that its political non-engagement has encapsulated the entire sub-genre in a sort of static market⁵⁵. As a literary phenomenon, then, couched in and unique to the context of a relatively peaceful and prosperous

⁵⁵ In an unpublished March 2007 address to the ALA Conference.

Côte d'Ivoire, one might note first how such an apolitical stance is made possible for those whose ease of living can afford to ignore politics, and secondly note how easily, when that peace and prosperity evaporates, Boni's apolitical message gets progressively converted to ever more direct engagement in her later novels.

Apparently political stances notwithstanding, Jameson powerfully argues, in his Political Unconscious, that strong readers (of even this *littérature à l'eau de rose*) can always find interpretive markers in fiction that point to a message on the political context from whence the text sprang, the markers systematically forming an allegorical reading. For Jameson, the overarching political context of world capitalism imposes, especially on third world texts, a certain relationship with the West such that in non-Western fiction there is always already inscribed an allegorical resistance to the West, no matter how "private" or "expressive" the text itself purports to be⁵⁶. In one sense the summary could be made that Jameson's commitment to Marxism makes him search for the material and the economic as over-determining the cultural. But his logic is such that any "master narrative" could easily stand in for the economic one he proposes as the key to allegorical readings. By substituting a "national" master narrative as the lens from which to view allegories in the text, Baigneurs lends itself to be read, as a comment on the state's lacunae in its own discourse on national identity. Under such theoretical weight, Boni's surface project of poetics over politics bends to the practice of a *méandre de la parole*, and her message retains all the more a political quality, as if in spite of itself. Boni can hardly

⁵⁶ The site of that resistance is inescapably *national*, a term Jameson himself does not specify or problematize. In reading Jameson, sympathetically, however, one might suspend judgment on his uncritical use of the term in favor of understanding the rest of the argument. If the modern notion of the nation-state can be stipulated, for argument's sake, then on the main the rest of the argument relies not so much on rigor in the definition of "nation" as it does on a certain generalization of the relationship between such nations and the West, or, in Jameson's own formulation, the capitalist first world.

avoid demonstrating textually the failures of Fred's too straightforward, Western resistance to neocolonial powers as part of the national make-up, no matter the love story at the heart of the novel. She can scarcely circumvent inscribing the North's exclusion in concentrating on Samori as a figure in the national imaginary, no matter her avoidance of the apparatus of divisive ethnic verbiage. Boni, clothed in aesthetics, is very much invested, even at this early stage of Ivoirité, in a quintessentially political counter-Ivoirité message of tolerance and national pluralism.

Boni's second novel from within the Ivoirité period is only allegorical in that the place names are pseudonymous. In all other respects, its surface tackles the issue of national identity head on. And yet, the methodology of delayed clarity from the previous novel still serves and is still suggested by the text itself as a strategy to implicate the reader in seeing something deeper than this surface.

If Boni's novel from the beginning of the Ivoirité period is about the *parole* and its *méandres*, her novel from the thick of the civil war is about silence. Her use of *méandres de la parole* in Baigneurs is to better expose the truths that discourses of power must keep silent, and she continues to employ the technique in the much more urgent, much more overtly and oppressively violent Matins de couvre-feu. The contrast between how those *méandres de la parole* get used between the two novels matches the contrast between the 1995 Bédié speech inaugurating Ivoirité, tapping into divisive feelings on the ground, and the fruition of Ivoirité's divisiveness during the civil war which was ongoing at the time of Matin's publication in 2004.

The political and military climate in the Côte d'Ivoire of 2004 was like that of a tinderbox. Bédié's ouster in the 1999 Christmas coup had failed to produce a government seen as legitimate, since the election had not included Alassane Ouattara and his RDR party

(Rassemblement Des Républicains) which was perceived as representing the predominantly Muslim North. The North perceived this as the same exclusion operated by Bédié under the aegis of Ivoirité 5 years earlier. Laurent Gbagbo's Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) assumed power, and survived two coup attempts before losing the North to rebels with whom he eventually shared power under pressure from the international and African diplomatic communities. The power sharing arrangement, however, did not come without a civil war carrying on in bloody spurts between Sep 2002 and early 2005 during which time the notable Yopougon massacre took place⁵⁷. A mass grave was discovered at a worksite in Yopougon, Abidjan's largest suburb, in which more than 50 bodies of Dioula victims had been heaped, on display as a warning. The blame, dodged personally by Gbagbo, went nonetheless to his forces and caused several retaliatory massacres in Northern controlled territory after trials set the presumed guilty parties free for lack of evidence. This background is essential, since Boni dramatizes and analyzes the Yopougon massacre along with other injustices in Matins.

Matins is the story of another female protagonist who, during an undeserved nine-month house arrest, learns from varied sources the truth about her family history, her country's history, and the roots of the divisions and violence plaguing it. The pregnancy-length period is put to use by this nameless arrestee growing memories, and developing them in an effort to make sense of the brutality, of how the country got this way. She first goes through the stories of contemporary sufferers touched by the brutality of the *Police Parallèle* during this time of

⁵⁷ For a general overview, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_war_in_C%C3%B4te_d'Ivoire. Although Wikipedia is notorious for allowing edits by any party, there are two reasons this source may in fact be the most reliable on this subject. First, the crowdsourced nature of the article has ensured the inclusion of the varied points of view of the interested parties themselves (as opposed to only those of self-described "objective" sources), and has led to an overall balance and synthesis of disputed facts over period of intense debate. Second, edits on this topic are locked by a team of moderators whose editorial decisions, as evaluated by this scholar, have proven balanced and accurate.

curfew and war. To find the order in her origins and to avoid the anguish of insomnia, the *Narratrice* next moves to her parents' story, centering on the silence and pain and resistance of women as emblemized by her mother. With her roots now firmly established in her memory, she moves on to her own involvement with a crooked member of the *Ange* administration named Timothée, who she regrettably took as a lover before discovering how deep his ties were to the *Police Parallèle*. In the same section, the narrator has a visit from Énée, her brother, whose coming presents the opportunity to talk about his story: that of a radical professor turned taxi driver turned prisoner of the *Anges*. She then transcribes his journal written over the weeks of his incarceration, revealing a meeting with a long lost half-brother, who had likewise incurred the disfavor of the regime.

While very much continuing her practice of delayed clarity, of the *méandres de la parole*, Boni provides much less meta-discussion of it in this novel. The narrator remains highly self-reflexive, but instead of explaining her mode of narration, rather prefers to focus her meta-level ink on the function of memory and on labels. *Matins* is shot through with explanations on ethnic identity, on membership in the ruling elite, and on the impossibility of naming oppressive powers despite the necessity of giving them their proper names in order to overcome them. The antithetically also unnamed *Narratrice* also proves self-conscious of her role as a writer, constantly revisiting and re-writing her reasons for writing along with the goals she hopes it produces. This constant reflection on her project—self-reflection, the act of remembering—provides a rhetorical counterpoint to the propagandistic names and projects of forgetfulness and revisionism that the official ruling parties use, abuse, and impose. After her Dédicace and Avertissement, Boni begins her text thusly:

J'ai vécu le début de ce fait divers. *J'ai du mal* à raconter comment cela s'est passé. J'ai retenu quelques flashes qui traversent encore ma mémoire. *J'essaie de faire un effort* pour me rappeler. *Je ne sais si je vais y arriver.* Depuis des heures que je suis enfermée dans cette maison, *les mots me manquent* comme si l'air des rues de Zambaville nous aidait à vivre les événements les plus tragiques. *J'espère que je ne deviendrai pas amnésique* au fil du temps qui me paraît bien long. Neuf mois, comme si on m'obligeait à être enceinte d'un enfant indésirable dont je porterais la grossesse tel un véritable calvaire... (13, emphasis mine)

Aside from noting that the first sentence, as with the last novel, contains a determiner for which the reader must wait for an accumulation of other clues to ascertain its deictic referent—the strategy of delayed clarity again played out on the syntactic level—one can also note in the semantics, as I have italicized, the hesitation and doubt with which the *Narratrice* enters her project of remembering. One is confronted with the sense of chaos to which she must bring order in her mind, with the sense that the act of narration, the fixing of memory in language, for her, has become that which brings disorderly memories into coherence and comprehensibility. And one is confronted with the urgency of such narrative remembering in the course of *individual* resistance to the crushing weight of state oppression. This individual resistance of the unnamed authoress diegetically in play itself runs counter to the very *public* remembering *for others* that the text actually performs as the work of real-life author Tanella Boni.

As an act of public resistance describing an individual one, it should not be surprising that some formal elements of the text match its content in order to sharpen the message. For

example, of the three Boni novels under this study's purview, this is the only one in which pseudonyms are used for the settings. Even without the novel's back cover explicitly identifying the Côte d'Ivoire as the Zamba within the fiction, the ongoing events in the author's home country make a reading of *Matins* as from an unspecified African nation difficult at best. And yet, the *Narratrice* cannot name the country in question as the Côte d'Ivoire in the same way that the people cannot name their oppressors (who choose to call themselves *Anges* instead), and in the same way that *Mère*, in the chapters on *Narratrice*'s parents, is bound by tradition not to call *Père* by his name. And the obsession of Kanga Ba, a death certificate clerk who becomes one of the *Ange*'s victims, to name the otherwise undocumented deceased of the war during his spare time earns him a state-imposed surname to replace his real one also: *l'Anarchiste*.

The reconstitution of the storyline in which Boni again makes her reader complicit is a task not easily completed in this novel. Rather than laying out clearly in a chronological order how events overtook Kanga Ba and Théodore, the other victim, for example, Boni couches their stories in a sort of historiographical meta-narrative centering on the *Narratrice* and how she came to *discover* the stories of each. But unlike *Baigneurs* where the *méandres de la parole* reveal an *ideological* connection in the twists that bind Samori II with Fred, César, Yété, and Lénie, in *Matins* the tangled connections between characters are pointedly *familial* and *ethnic*. Théodore, the film-maker is the adoptive father of Médiana, Kanga Ba's daughter, and is also the host of Ida, sister-in-law to the *Narratrice* and therefore, wife of Énée, half-brother to Charles Laclé, all of whom are identified by their ethnic totem, the *Lézard*. Given the increasingly ethnicized character of divisions in the civil war, it is not surprising that Boni's fictional representations of the realities on the ground would include an engagement with ethnicity,

especially given Boni's previously mentioned insistence on tolerance as an attribute and an attitude necessary for national unity. However it is worth thinking through just how Boni deals with ethnicity in the face of ethnic divisions and the violence that grows out of such divisions.

Part of the difficulty in remembering or retelling the causes of the curfew period, given the author's and *Narratrice's* loathness to feed division, comes from the fact the ethnicity is an inescapable component of such causes. As Comaroff and Comaroff have insightfully theorized from their broad historical perspective on ethnography, ethnicity has almost universally been the basically reactionary self-definition of a group whose identity is primarily articulated in negative terms: the group must define away what it is *not* in order to distinguish itself from a threatening neighbor. For an author, then, concerned with promoting tolerance as an antidote to the very threats that cause such distinctions to become divisions, it is conceivably unpalatable to be dragged in, as it were, to such an oppositional, antagonistic posture as is imposed as soon as one begins to identify ethnic affiliations. As much as one may wish to bring up essentialized ethnic divisions uniquely in view of presenting a possible solution beyond them, admitting their purchase on the ground only reinforces their reality. For its critics, this is the very trap the discourse of Négritude had fallen into, where the positive re-affirmation of inherent value in a black consciousness only reinforced the very distinction between black and white that it was trying to erase the significance of. But even in her attempt to skirt such binary logic, the *Narratrice* cannot avoid the primarily ethnic history from pre-colonial and colonial periods as an unavoidable source of the divisions leading to civil war.

In *Narratrice's* ruminations on her mother's story, she makes a key remark in this regard:

Ces détails *doivent être dits* pour l'histoire et pour comprendre ce qui nous arrive aujourd'hui. Ces détails *doivent être rappelés* ; ceux de l'époque de mère ne vivaient pas au paradis, bien au contraire. Leur monde était bien divisé comme le disait souvent sa mère à elle. Les gens s'entretuaient mais étaient capables d'amour et d'amitié....C'était un monde divisé mais solidaire. *Il faut pouvoir y comprendre quelque chose.* (111, emphasis mine)

The urgency of remembering is again insistent in this passage, and the contents of the memory are that ethnic divisions did exist, but, when given their due reflection and proper perspective, these divisions have to be interpreted as being fundamentally different in nature than the ethnic divisions of today's Zamba of the *couvre-feu*. Thus, the surface differences must give way to a deeper, though less apparent, analysis and understanding of commonality.

Later during his prison time, Narratrice's brother Énée cogitates on the past's bearing on national unity, on a previous age's unity despite difference, in these words:

Lézards et Fauves de l'époque des ancêtres, vous avez cru que la fraternité entre espèces différentes existait vraiment car tout le monde appartient au genre *mortel*. (250, emphasis in the original)

For Énée, the deeper commonality, the mortality, the humanity, trumped ethnicity before colonization. Énée's opinion is revealed also as he recounts the opening of his conversations with Charles Laclé, a mulatto he doesn't realize until later is his own half-brother:

Il marqua une pause car il avait l'impression de se livrer trop vite. Et, je ne sais pourquoi, il avait déjà remarqué le lézard en bois qui ne me quittait jamais, posé près de la boîte de vitesse.

— Il représente quelque chose pour vous ce lézard ?

— C'est le symbole de ma famille. L'animal auquel nous nous identifions.

— Mon père aussi en avait un. Je l'ai retrouvé dans les affaires de ma mère... Et vous êtes de quelle région, vous ?

— Je ne saurais vous répondre car c'est la première question que tout le monde pose ici, quand on rencontre quelqu'un dans la rue, comme si cela avait vraiment beaucoup d'importance...(270)

Intellectually, emotionally, the intentions of Énée to dismiss the importance of one's ethnicity (as signaled by one's region of origin) in favor of a tolerance that should reign, are contradicted by his mention of the question of ethnicity as first and foremost in the questions among strangers, as well as in his own practice of broadcasting and maintaining the primacy of his ethnic affiliation by carrying around and openly displaying an ethnically marked icon that “ne me quittait jamais” (270). Ethnicity *is* important to Boni, but not because it enforces divisions—the divisions created by consequence of ethnic affiliations can be overcome by tolerance, by communication between cultures, by an acceptance of common mortality, humanity—but rather

because it is *also* a locus of *positive* affiliation, of cultural unity. After listening to Énée's recounting of his family failure (his divorce with Ida, for lack of communication), and his subsequent imprisonment (elaborated later in his prison diaries), the *Narratrice* makes a general comment on the conditions leading to the *couvre-feu* that she is now, after much effort at remembering, in a better position to understand:

D'après ceux qui fréquentent les lieux de prières et s'y connaissent en sciences religieuses, il n'existe pas d'Ange plus sourds et plus aveugles que ceux qui, par la force des choses, ont hérité de la richesse des Pharaons [regime of Houphouët-Boigny] et des Dieux fondateurs [the colonial French] en vue de gouverner notre cher pays. Ils vivent loin des préceptes des religions révélées et, comble de malheur, loin des forêts des ancêtres dont le sommeil agité se peuple désormais de toutes sortes de cauchemars. Ils forcent pourtant le petit peuple à revenir à la mémoire des forêts et des terres des ancêtres et oublient d'emprunter le chemin des valeurs ancestrales qui auraient pu sauver tout le monde des affres de la vie quotidienne. (238)

The problem with ethnicity in our time, then, is not the dividing into groups *per se* that it causes within a nation, but rather the *forced* revisiting of traditions that no longer hold the key to national unity. The *Anges* that enforce difference on a cultural level, apply a more insidious force of political division simultaneously. It is the intersection of *power* and ethnic pride that defines the *esclave* or *fils d'esclave* that the *Ange* in authority can feel justified in rounding up and massacring, that can require all to go back to their roots, which are, at best, sterile in providing solutions to contemporary divisions.

Boni's confrontation with the thorny problem of ethnicity's involvement at the core of collective identifications and inter-group conflicts is far from unique to the Côte d'Ivoire. Her reflection on the cultural interruption of the colonial period as an impasse making the solution of a return to tradition untenable if not impossible is also not new to debates in African literature and postcolonial theory. Cheik Amidou Kane, in his 1961 masterpiece *bildungsroman* L'Aventure ambiguë tells the tale of a village's difficult decision to allow a promising heir's education in French schools during the colonial period, the elders understanding that the consequences would lead to the irreparable loss of some critical parts of their traditions⁵⁸. V.Y. Mudimbe, in his 1988 The Invention of Africa makes a similar lament as he identifies the colonial period as a radical break with a traditional trajectory of cultural evolution such that re-establishing African roots is no longer possible—the eggs are broken, the omelet has been made.

If the impossibility of a return to ethnic purity as a means to assure independent national progress in Africa is so common a meme even in earlier Ivorian literature, it serves curiosity to ask why the question has so much urgency in Boni's imaginary. Has the Côte d'Ivoire simply lived in a long-enough established peace, forestalling so successfully the moment of truth in facing the ethnic tensions that have always been latent in their constituted nation so that only now, in this period of Ivoirité and civil war must the ethnic roots of the conflict be exposed and fully acknowledged? Or why is it that the proponents of Ivoirité seem to press on a nationalistic analogy to the thrust of the much older (1930s) race based call to return to traditions referred to

⁵⁸ In Kane's context of 1961 Senegal, the historical current has the focus of the possibility of true African independence in all domains, the political one being recently won. In Boni's 2004 Côte d'Ivoire, there is no longer the pressing pan-African program optimistically re-valORIZING tradition or advocating a return to it. It is important to keep this substantial difference of outlook in mind at this juncture as we review what similarities they do share.

as *Négritude* that has been so discredited as an ineffective reply to the colonial imposition of discursive categories, when history has demonstrated its ineffectiveness? Does the state “forcing” the “little people” to undergo specifically ethnic categorization inevitably lead to political divisions and violence akin to the specifically ethnic breakdowns of democracy that much of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa has endured? If so, why did the bulk of those breakdowns occur a generation earlier than that of the Côte d’Ivoire? Was it the single party rule of a long-lived and genuinely benevolently received dictator (who was nonetheless neither without his critics nor without his repressive side)? Was it a difference in the closeness of the French involvement in the country’s post-independence and neo-colonial development? Let us keep these questions in mind as we delve deeper into the text.

Narratrice’s stated purpose in fixing memories in language in order to resist the silence imposed by the *Anges*, is given purchase in form and in content along several axes. From a feminist perspective, *Matins* very much continues the genre-mixing hybrid and postcolonial sort of *écriture féminine* Uetto-Békrou had identified in *Une Vie de crabe*, and certainly the emphasis on a female protagonist remembering the suffering of her mother enduring the silences imposed by her father justifies all the more firmly the novel’s categorization as feminist. *Narratrice* admits as much in framing her reason for writing as a modern adaptation of a traditional role, which adaptation breaks the hold tradition enforces upon women:

Mes aïeules avaient pour tout instrument typiquement féminin un mortier et un pilon, objets à tout faire, ustensiles de cuisine ou armes de défense. Maintenant il faut s'adapter au monde qui nous écrase et brise nos bras et nos jambes qui n'étaient pas déjà libres, enchaînés qu'ils étaient aux lois des familles et des clans...Je suis en train de transformer le pilon à tout faire en crayon à papier capable de laisser des traces...Garder le silence et tracer des mots. Consigner les faits et les gestes de ceux qui nous aiment ou nous détestent. Laisser des traces de notre passage sur la terre, un amas de mots ou un bébé afin de ne pas mourir idiote. (19)

The linguistic fact of literature being a creative set of significant, yet silent traces turns the pen into *Narratrice's* only remaining weapon in the fight against the curfew-imposing *Anges*. And what follows in this frame of the silence of her writing is the story of a woman forced to wait for her husband to truly communicate with her, which he never does, always selfishly, tyrannically withholding his presence (through long absences serving France as a *tirailleur*) and his fidelity (he becomes a brazen gigolo)—withholding himself; his word. *Mère*, as she is respectfully referred to, began her teenage years with a reputation for outspokenness—an anti-traditional quality to be sure—to the point where the male powers that be authorize her at one point to give her frank opinion on the suitor chosen for her. So out of place is this invitation for a woman to speak out in a council of men that she finds herself unable to reply except by public laughter which gives way later to private tears. From there her fate is sealed and she earns the title “*La bonne femme*” for having stayed *silently* faithful to her man in spite of his many travels and other improprieties.

Although the aim of the narrative is to demonstrate a feminist solidarity with female suffering at the hands of male domination, and although we do learn some detail about *Mère* and her endurance in the face of patriarchal oppression in the chapters after her marriage occurs, what is striking is that these chapters' textual practice runs counter to their stated intent: they focus much more time and ink to the story of *tirailleur* Cuistot, *Mère's* husband, than they do on *Mère* herself. The story of *Mère* winds up subordinated to the patriarchal narrative in the same way that *Mère* herself is silenced by her husband Cuistot. This seeming contradiction between message and practice can be resolved, however when remembering Boni's *modus operandi* of *méandres de la parole*. By overtly framing the mode of her discourse as feminist, and then by demonstrating the impossibility of telling the story from *Mère's* perspective, the reader is all the more effectively drawn in to solidarity with the victim of patriarchy whose silence begins at marriage, whose story can only be told second-hand, and whose unwillingness to speak came from her initiation into womanhood of which the first law is silence. In *Mère's* own words about her initiation ritual:

Il n'est pas nécessaire que j'enfreigne la première loi [of womanhood: silence] à ce sujet, disait-elle. Permets que je passe ces choses sous silence car ton imagination fera le reste ! (87)

Mère does confide secrets to her daughter, so her daughter does have the basis for a narrative, but in demonstrating the silence about *Mère*, *Narratrice* concurrently engages the reader's imagination on the actual depth of the suffering imposed.

It is these silences, and the reverse of their coin, the interlocutor's imagination, that form the connection between ethnicity and family, between the political and the personal issues *Narratrice* chooses to address, between Matins de couvre-feu and its nationalistic allegorical reading. Just as a lack of silence between ethnicities is a prerequisite to national unity, so lack of silence between parents would have made for a more equitable relationship of power in the family. The private family history, then, becomes a useful tool for demonstrating the same core dysfunction that the nation and its ethnic groups experience on a grander scale. Beyond the roots and into the contemporary, the divorce between Ida and *Narratrice's* brother, Énée, also results from lack of communication between man and woman, husband and wife, but this time Ida, as the woman of a new more emancipated generation, has options. In an analogous way, minus the violence, this divorce caused by silence mimics the nation's split, the breakdown of communication being both the root and the consequence both of familial dysfunction and of inter-ethnic civil war. Caught in this analogy, Énée's role is instructive as a male, leftist professor having given up the prestige of collusion with the university for a more solidarity-promoting position as a taxi driver on the level of the street and the people: He is at once both oppressor (as male, husband) and victim (as prisoner of the *Anges*, as an agent subversive to their order). Énée's summation of the civil war's causes and his own marital dissolution bolster Boni's case about the detrimental effects of silence:

[Ma femme, Ida] est partie et ma seule joie, aujourd'hui, c'est cette voiture mine de rien, tout à fait banale, le seul lieu où des gens me parlent et où je peux leur parler. Car la parole est en danger. Les humains ne se parlent plus depuis longtemps. (213)

Silence thus being central, it is interesting that Boni positions her family and ethnic group as being in opposition to the *Anges*, and yet *not* of the “*race d’esclaves*” that the *Anges* are fighting with. Even those connected to this family of *Lézards* illegitimately, as Charles Laclé the mulatto half-brother, become enemies of the state for refusing to participate in its oppressive policies. What is interesting is less that Boni has devised a family of resisters, but rather that despite ample rhetoric promoting tolerance, peaceful coexistence and communication by demonstrating the consequences of their opposites, she maintains a remarkable *practical* silence on the Dioula, the Northerners, the “*filles d’esclaves*” with whom the failure to communicate is the cause of the *couvre-feu*: there is no specifically Dioula character, no representation of Northern positions—only silence. The novel is written very much and very exclusively from a Southern perspective. But, as with the feminist thrust of this novel, Boni’s inscription of a seeming contradiction between message and practice can be recuperated as a way to draw attention to the problem, to illustrate what is problematic about it, to condemn the exclusionary practices of the *Anges* by demonstrating their discursive limits.

This way of writing the problem of the broken Côte d’Ivoire as needing to include the North, and yet not including it, all the better puts the lie to the “inclusive” potential of the official *Ivoirité* discourse. Had Boni said it outright, its truth-force would have been blunted, and she would have fallen to the level of the discourse she is writing against. It is only in the distinction between literature and official discourse that the truth of the latter’s oppressive nature can be highlighted. Says the “radical”, enlightened, Cartesian, professor-turned-taximan Énée after weeks in prison for not paying a bribe in time to get home before curfew:

Je commence à croire aux contes. Nos ancêtres avaient raison. Il n'y a que les mensonges des contes qui soient vrais. Tout le reste est calcul et verbiage. Aujourd'hui les contes ont été enterrés au profit d'une vérité toute nue qui ne fait plus rêver personne. Le peuple ne croit plus quand on lui chante, sur tous les tons, qu'il sera heureux demain quand aujourd'hui, il n'arrête pas de trimer. Le peuple perd patience quand son univers de rêve a foutu le camp avec le peu de mensonges qui lui reste encore, celui légué par ses parents. Ce sont ces points de repère qu'aucune révolution ou reconstruction, même envoyée sur terre par des Anges, ne saurait détruire sans conséquences irréparables. (273)

Here again, we are confronted with the cultural discontinuity imposed by colonialism, as Énée not only valorizes the truths that can be found in fiction, but he also laments the loss of tradition and its stories from a prior generation. The only alternative left, the *calcul* and *verbiage*, is not compelling, is unbelievable, and has irreparable consequences since it attempts to incite to revolution, to reconstruction, to the destruction of the culture's landmarks, fictional though they may be, which represent the truth and the core values that guide the people in their time of duress. The thrust of Boni's comment on the value of literature, then, seems to align with Énée's—the double point that: one, the direct, logical rhetoric of the politicians is incapable of producing belief in the truths that transcend divisions, and therefore that Ivoirité produces division, the opposite of its stated intent; and secondly that one of the root causes of the current divisions and silences is cultural, literary—the lack of stories whose role is to couch the truth of common mortality and traditional morality in fictions, which truth tends toward hope of national unity despite the reality of ethnic diversity. The *parole* which was in danger, the stories that have been buried have left behind only a deadly, divisive silence—an impossibility of naming.

In connection with Boni's first comment on the failures of Ivoirité as propaganda, Dominic Thomas's insights on the postcolonial nation in Africa are both instructive and applicable to the Ivorian situation. Thomas observes that the postcolonial state inevitably inherited both the colonial state boundaries and the colonial state institutions. Since colonialism imposed structures that favored some regions over others depending on how well they served as resources for the French, in this case, the inheritance bequeathed to the postcolonial state inevitably contained within itself the structures of regional, and therefore ethnic favoritism. Thomas's analysis corroborates Mamdani's central point in Citizen and Subject in which the commonality to all colonial rule in Africa was that it aimed at reinforcing distinctions between ethnicities as a way to enforce and justify the two-tiered set of rights and privileges the colonizers were at the top of. Although more focused on refuting prior anthropological assumptions about the ancientness and static nature of ethnic groups, especially and specifically those in the northern Côte d'Ivoire, Jean-Loup Amselle also contributes solidity to the notion that not all ethnicities thought of themselves as cohesive ethnic groups until colonial rule obliged them to take up certain positions of solidarity vis-à-vis the French and each other. Now in the era of independence, according to Thomas, aware of ethnicity as a potential cause of internal jealousies and conflicts, postcolonial states almost universally campaigned with a heavily pluralistic rhetoric for "national integration", but the structures remaining the same, favoritism in deed, if not in word, led to civil wars along ethnic lines in many of France's former colonies within a generation of the departure of the temporarily unifying external threat that was France. Thus Ivoirité's stated intent of unification, of national integration, was doomed because emanating from colonial structures practicing favoritism despite their pluralistic rhetoric. The

directness of the appeal to plurality is what is shown to be inadequate, here in Boni's fiction, but the reasons for it are only implied: the historical fact of colonialism has broken the link to a past so that self-definition of groups has now become an impossibility, and ethnic tension in the present a near fatality.

The content of Boni's fiction provides the feminist and tolerance-promoting thrusts of her novel's message with sufficient amplitude on their own, but textually, formally, this silence and its repercussions are also brought home in the very linguistic building blocks of that diegesis. On a narratological level of analysis it is notable how difficult it is to discover what really happened, for example, to Kanga Ba, the Anarchist. Boni opens the thick of her text—the section on the Anarchist—spending two full pages slowly revealing by degrees that her reading of a state-run newspaper led her to believe that a mysterious “envahisseur abattu dans un champs de fleurs” was the Kanga Ba who had taken her to see the mass grave evidence of the “Yopougon” massacre the day before. Narratrice tells us that she understood that he had been “battu à sang et laissé pour mort” a full page before allowing the reader to understand that this conclusion had only been arrived at after reading *between the lines* of the newspaper's account, after applying her own informed imagination to the silence of the official discourse. Four chapters later, after mixing in the story of how Narratrice's sister-in-law was introduced to Kanga Ba's daughter in Greece, how that daughter had been adopted by sister-in-law's hosts, Théodore and his wife, who had been involved in subversive activities in Zamba and who Kanga Ba thus trusted to take care of his daughter since he knew he'd probably be caught, we finally get the story of why Kanga Ba would deserve death at the hands of head of the *Police Parallèle* (for exposing the massacre). If the foregoing sentence seems tangled, it is to illustrate the degree to

which Boni's text itself tangles storylines and family lines in ways that both highlight the shock of the oppression in the demise of the innocents, and point up the kind of reading necessary to overcome the diegetical state's imposition of silence. In a word, Boni enforces a reading between the lines: by delaying clarity for a page, or for four chapters. She obliges the reader to supply with an increasingly informed imagination that which silence has obscured, thereby making the reader complicit in the representation of the horrors ultimately caused by such silences. The surprise in family relations (Kanga Ba being a distant relative of *Narratrice*, Charles Laclé being her half-brother) are surprising revelations, and the tangled storylines between the characters are tangled precisely because if they were told in a straightforward way, the text would have to operate differently, the reader could proceed with a certain knowledge, rather than under the imagination-inducing doubt that delayed clarity promotes. Told this way, it is *re-evaluation*, and not evaluation which is the textually triggered mode of interpretation. Kanga Ba himself relates the following about what the first post-independence regime, the *Pharaons*, failed to do:

Les Pharaons, dirigeants de Zamba pendant longtemps, n'y voyaient que du feu [dans l'histoire violente précoloniale de leur pays]! Ils s'attelaient à construire le pays divisé et meurtri par les Blancs, mais ils oublièrent de réparer les fils cassés de l'histoire ancienne. Celle de toutes ces atrocités qui nous collaient à la peau depuis des siècles. Celle des guerres innombrables qui séparaient des familles dignes de ce nom et essaïmaient les fils comme esclaves aux quatre coins d'une terre qu'ils ne connaissaient pas. (67)

The tangles, the delayed clarity bring out the silence, the division, and the civil war as the indirect result of colonialism, and as the direct result of the first rulers of the independent Zamba not repairing the broken cultural/historical strings of pre-colonial ethnic identity. With the *Anges*, as cited previously, now forcing the people to a perverted form of belated return to their ancestral identities, keeping the names and totems while forgetting the path of their *values*, the civil war, the curfew, has flourished. But the *Pharaons* could have forestalled these current divisions had they paid more attention to dealing with the true history of the violence of the *pre-colonial* divisions, rather than just the colonially imposed divisions that they *did* address. It is only through a re-evaluation of the past that the present can be understood and the violence thereof properly faced. The delayed clarity, then, the *méandres de la parole* which worked so well to invite the reader's complicity serves as well in Baigneurs as a technique to promote a message of aestheticization as it does in Matins as a technique to confront its impossibility.

As a final transitional note, if silence—that which has been occluded from the narrative—has been the focus of Boni's *méandres de la parole* in Matins on feminist themes (the impossibility of naming a husband), on ethnic themes (the impossibility of naming the cause of the civil war), on themes of state oppression (the impossibility of naming the *Anges*, the war), and even on themes of literature (the impossibility of naming the *Narratrice!*), then there is one more Ivorian elephant in the room, so to speak, in a story about Côte d'Ivoire's civil war: the direct involvement of the French in the curfew period has no diegetical trace. Mention is made of the interruption of history that was colonialism, and the story of Cuistot and his son Charles Laclé demonstrates French involvement in pre-independence Côte d'Ivoire, but France's *neocolonial* presence, and real-life work behind-the-scenes both for and against the Gbagbo

regime seems glaring in its absence from this depiction of Zamba. It might be possible to argue that this also is a strategic silence, but if so it is certainly not on the same mode: the questions of ethnic identity, culture, and traditions are germane to every focus in the novel, so that it is natural to wonder why the one main ethnic group singled out and excluded from the discourse of Ivoirité also doesn't appear to have a role in Matins, whereas the novel seems to inscribe a purely African genealogy for the *Anges* as power brokers and oppressors, independent of any French control. As such it seems less surprising, then, that a scant year later, under only slightly waning conditions of civil unrest, Boni squarely targets the complicated relationship between the Côte d'Ivoire and France in her latest novel: Les Nègres n'iront jamais au paradis.

The critic's work is never merely to discover messages in texts, but also to respond to the question of why the author chose to couch the messages the way they do⁵⁹. Given this mandate, the task of the critic is perhaps more difficult in Boni's first two Ivoirité period novels since she spends so much ink inscribing her own self-awareness of how to discover hidden meanings—the *méandres de la parole* from *Baigneurs*, and the focus on memory and labels from *Matins*—that the critic is obliged to address these on their face before deciding whether or not to take them entirely at face value. It is through following Boni's *méandres de la parole* and then comparing them with her own textual practice that one can find the heart and limitation of aesthetics as a response to Ivoirité in Baigneurs. It is through reading for what cannot be named and then comparing it with Boni's textual practice in Matins that one settles both on ethnicity as the root

⁵⁹ Of course there may be messages the author never intended embedded within a text, but it should be non polemical that mere discovery of these should not be the end of the critic's work, and that the question of why the text itself may have meaning beyond the author's intended scope is still germane.

of the Ivorian civil war and on the incompleteness of ethnicity as a determiner of the divisions there.

The critic's work in Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis must be different, because Boni does not render so overt the keys to her own work's interpretation as she had in the previous two novels. And not only is this novel the least self-conscious of its own interpretive possibilities, but it is also arguably her most allegorical.

The multiple allegories a strong reader can discover in Nègres are only straightforward and reductive at the level of the most basic, surface interpretation. But, as Jameson, and Frye, and Dante Alighieri before him all theorized, there are at least four levels of interpretation when dealing with a text⁶⁰. The first being literal, it then follows that the other three are in some way all figurative, all allegorical to some degree. Far from advocating a reductive one-to-one mapping of meaning to form, thereby leaving the critic's work done at the mere identification of the interpretive key, these theorists posit that the presence of these levels of allegory rather inspire closer inspection once the surface allegory—that second level of interpretation—is perceived⁶¹. The critical questions, once an allegory is perceived, then, become: first, what work is this allegory doing?; and secondly, as an antidote to possible interpretive blind spots, what are we missing by looking at this allegorically?

⁶⁰ Jameson discusses the ramifications of the different labels for these interpretive “levels” between Dante and Frye in The Political Unconscious, but it's less important what the names of the levels are than the central theoretical move common to them, which is that when one moves beyond the facile collapsing of signifier into signified that the surface level of allegory accomplishes, you can apply that allegory to a number of larger, more overarching concerns within the real world. For Dante, the “moral” level of interpretation of Scripture found an allegory apt for application to the individual on a psychological plane in a text that was already an apt allegory for something else. For Frye, the “Mythical or Archetypal Phase” maps a previously determined allegorical interpretation onto a use for the description of the underlying desires of a society. Jameson's own purpose is to show that a strong reader can find an allegory of Marxist economic determinacy in any text. My own argument is that deeper levels of allegory can be applied to Ivorian nationalism.

⁶¹ This is the principle objection of Réda Bensmaïa whose compelling work on Tahar Djahout's L'Invention du désert in his 2003 Experimental Nations or, the Invention of the Maghreb goes to great lengths demonstrating how allegorical readings miss important expressive content in the novel apparently without realizing how aptly his own reading could be considered one of these higher order allegories itself.

Before investigating the allegorical content of Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis, an extremely schematic overview of the major plot elements will provide anchors for analysis. In this, her latest novel, published in 2005, Boni casts another female protagonist with another quest for discovery of the truth about an enigmatic figure, that of French Amédée-Jonas Dieusérail, or Dieu for short. Dieu is a publisher of third world literature who begins his autobiography by co-opting the biographical text that the anonymous *Narratrice* had written about him. *Narratrice* treats the reader to Boni's customary historiographical account, this time of how she came to know Dieu and came into possession of his personal journal. Between a discussion on a plane and the journal, he reveals the central secret and sin of his life, the rape of Sali, an 11 year-old student of his in Korhogo some 40 years prior. We learn of how he came to be a *Coopérant* in the early days of independence, and how his guilt variously ruined and shaped his life, leading to his entry into the Priesthood, his exit from it, his marriage to a former nun, his work as a professor, his work in an Ivorian ministry, and his ultimate end as a publisher celebrated for his humanism, yet hypocritically participating in abject profiteering and the further systematic marginalization of the very authors he's celebrated for giving their chance. Not trusting the story thus far to be unbiased, *Narratrice* then leads an investigation of her own, gleaning from female informers the other side of Dieu's tale. It turns out that Sali had come to be known as Lady Benz, a rich and successful self-educated business woman whose pre-teen sexual trauma and subsequent youthful pregnancy had not been the beginning of her woes at the hands of men, and yet who had seized upon opportunities through a set of arranged and failed marriages to take her fate out of men's control. With both sides of the biography now told, *Narratrice* then retells a series of dream sequences in which Dieu becomes a truly collaborative figure, actively

participating with Sali in the growth of his daughter from behind the scenes. The dream of mutual collaboration for the benefit of the offspring notwithstanding, the last chapter and the epilogue, now wakeful, discuss a racially hypocritical Paris which takes pride in trumpeting the French nationality of those blacks who bring sporting glory to the nation, and yet willfully ignores their brethren, the poor black *sans papiers* who endure appallingly dangerous living conditions and other forms of racial discrimination.

Even if one were to un-problematically consider Dieu as representing France and Lady Benz a straightforward independence era Côte d'Ivoire, the reductive allegory here would still be quite rich. Dieu would assume the role of father: involved simultaneously in benevolent and nefarious ways (he gives African writers their chance but he's part of a system that maintains the marginalization of African authors), both for public and for private reasons (he's lauded as a paragon of enlightened tolerance and liberal charity but he also can't get his original sin with Sali out of his head). This paternalistic characterization captures much of the essence of French neo-colonial passive force and of the psychology that allows for Western complicity in structures of power that continue to oppress the third world while genuinely espousing more egalitarian intentions on the surface. Sali would then represent the victim of Dieu, who nevertheless adored their offspring (the Independent Côte d'Ivoire), and was young and desirable enough to be married off by her family according to tradition. Her first marriage to a schoolteacher (a figure of modernity) gives her a chance to be around the books that will educate her in the ways of the West. This marriage proves fruitless however, because of his sterility (the common themes of a clash between modernism and tradition thus getting their play), leaving Sali open for another marriage. This time her family arranges to marry her to a *sous-préfet* (a figure of the new

structures of state administration) in whose house she learned the workings of power. Her financial prosperity coming as a result of the knowledge gained from these two unions, Sali has long since forgiven Dieu, and her current collaboration with him in ensuring Wendy's well-being (that of the contemporary generation's Côte d'Ivoire) is now not only consensual, but mutually desirable. Read as purveying this allegorical message, this passage in the voice of Lady Benz on the secret of her riches seems to run contrary to Boni's previously documented opposition to French neo-colonialism:

Il m'a volé la meilleure partie de ma jeunesse mais je lui ai pardonné depuis longtemps. Chaque fois qu'il débarque par ici ou dans un pays voisin, il ne manque pas de passer me voir. Je me demande si le remords ne continue pas de le tirailler malgré tout. Mais ça, ce n'est pas mon problème. Moi je l'aime bien, au fond. Peut-être un peu plus, j'ai beaucoup d'affection pour lui, même si la nature a oublié de lui donner un beau corps, une belle gueule. Il a tout de même un bon cœur. Cela te surprend n'est-ce pas ? Tu sais, tu ne peux jamais savoir où est le bien et où le mal. C'est parce qu'il m'a violé un jour dans ma prime jeunesse que nous avons consolidé nos liens, des liens contre nature, qui ne devraient pas exister, compte tenu des circonstances. Tu vois, Dieu est le seul homme qui m'appelle et me parle, même quand il est au bout du monde, mille fois par semaine. Ce n'est pas beau ça ? (168)

For Lady Benz, self-aware of how surprising her attitude might seem, once forgiveness can be reached, even the unnatural and forceful bonds between her and Dieu can have positive effects, to the point where she can develop an affection for him, perhaps stopping short of love,

but at least such that she can perceive a certain beauty in his continued desire for involvement with her. It would be hard to imagine a more apt metaphor for the psychology of a certain class of a certain generation of Ivorians who continue to benefit from neo-colonial relations and enjoy, both literally and figuratively, the ongoing favored status France maintains with the Côte d'Ivoire—and this despite the original ravages of colonialism allegorized in the rape.

This level of allegorical analysis, however, neither exhausts the interpretive possibilities of the text as it pertains to the Ivorian national identity, nor does it explain how some of them contradict or complicate the allegorical message. For example, it is in a dream that *Narratrice* provides a romanticized “solution” whereby Dieu and Sali have a perfect harmony worked out in which Dieu has been providing for their child all along. This harmony belies the parasitic nature of the symbiosis. And the fact that *Narratrice* even announces it as a dream, as completely surreal, is a signal that the real-life relationship is not so. The dreamed chapters are couched in a section entitled “Aux frontières du Paradis”, implying, when matched with the novel’s title, that *nègres* can be allowed right up to, but never actually inside Paradise. These dreams highlight what some Ivorians might like to believe about French involvement, but in the end, not only are they only oneiric, but such beliefs are also undermined by the last chapter and the epilogue where a reality of barely subadjacent racism underlies the seemingly tolerant and diverse Parisian landscape. *Narratrice*, on a trip to Paris, overhears a couple of black people discussing the manner in which the French co-opt as their own those token blacks who are deemed successful, and simultaneously discard the rest as not belonging. One of the interlocutors cites Ladjji Doucouré, recent gold medal winner at an international sporting event, as an example of a Black being touted as French in the press:

Tu vois bien qu'une médaille d'or vaut de l'or et tous les honneurs. Et Doucouré est français même s'il peut être comme on dit chez moi, mon frère même père même mère ! Un Doucouré ne vaut pas un autre Doucouré. L'un mérite tous les honneurs de son pays, il n'en a pas d'autres. L'autre est un SDF [sans domicile fixe], le monde est comme ça, tu n'y peux rien, mon frère. (198)

The racial component of the France-Côte d'Ivoire relationship is only clear, in keeping with the now familiar Bonian strategy of delayed clarity, in these last two chapters, but is hinted at from before the narrative even begins. The very first lexical item in the novel's title is *nègres*, which triggers the racial meaning by default unless clues to the more metaphorical sense (of "servant" or more specifically "ghostwriter") are present, which in the isolated title they are not. It is not until page twenty that the possibility is even opened up to the reader that there might be a non-racial sense intended in the phrase "les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis". From that page until that last few chapters, in a classically Bonian *méandre de la parole*, the meaning of the term *nègre* never varies from the servile sense. So much so that Wendy is never even named as mulatto—that Dieu's rape of Sali is lamented as a terrible abuse of male authority, age authority, mentor's authority, and even Western authority, but never racial "authority". However, it is abundantly noted that Dieu's second love, and first wife, Laurence, is White and French. By thus excluding discussion of race from the essence of Dieu's narrative as well as from that of Sali, but by re-inserting it in the discussion of Laurence, Boni accomplishes an emphasis by practical silence that points to race as one of the key elements underlying Franco-Ivorian

relations. It would be hard to identify this silence as meaningful without the prior identification of the text as allegorizing the relationship between France and the Côte d'Ivoire.

In another pre-diegetic evidence, the first of the two epigraphs also hints at the racial core of the narrative in citing a French translation of the 1995 Ben Okri novel Astonishing the Gods in which the main character, an African, sets out on a journey to discover his identity, and from which the following quote is somehow applied to Boni's own text:

Ce fut dans les livres qu'il apprit d'abord quelque chose sur l'invisibilité. Il rechercha les siens et lui-même dans tous les livres d'histoire qu'il lut et découvrit, au plus grand étonnement de son âge, qu'il n'existait pas. Il en fut tellement troublé qu'il décida, dès qu'il serait assez âgé, de quitter ce pays pour trouver les gens qui existaient, et voir à quoi ils ressemblent. (9)

Although it might be possible to maintain a strict distinction between the Africans who have no recorded history in the tomes of the West in the Okri novel and the Blacks living in France who don't seem to have a recognized existence in Boni's narrative, the conflation of the two dichotomies (African/Western, Black/European) produces no different analytical results: in both cases it is the Black African whose existence, whose humanity is never fully acknowledged by the White French.

The other direct invocation of race in the novel comes in an aside to an aside, when *Narratrice* begins to settle in with Iris, the seller of secrets, to ask about Dieu's life from a woman's perspective. Instead of a direct response, Iris begins by describing her neighbor's

situation, pregnant by one of three possible United Nations peacekeepers, each of a different color, and then makes this comment on race:

Il n'y avait pas de Blancs parmi les hommes qu'elle a rencontrés. De toute façon, le blanc n'est pas une couleur, c'est chose commune, comme le noir. Le blanc et le noir sont inséparables, interchangeableables, comme le bien et le mal. Le premier initié que tu croises, en ville ou dans la brousse, te le dira. C'est bien pour cette raison que, quand ils collent à la peau des humains, le blanc et le noir se font tant de vacheries, l'un plus que l'autre et l'autre attend le moment propice pour lui rendre la monnaie. C'est pour ça que nous avons le cœur plein d'amertume aujourd'hui. Nous n'avons pas trouvé les moyens de la vengeance...(124)

Couched as it is in a *mise en abîme* of asides from a minor character related by the *Narratrice* and ultimately co-opted by Dieu, this theory of black and white non-colors being the obverse and the reverse of the same racial coin in a way analogous to good and evil (which Lady Benz cautions us on another subject is not easy to discern) emphasizes colonial racism as one root cause of the bitterness which in turn is dividing the nation ethnically—but then leaves us wondering on which level of narration, if at all, the author's own voice should be discerned. In any event, and no matter Boni's actual opinion on the matter, it is notable that Iris has seen fit to comment on this topic *first* in response to questions about Dieu's secrets because it falls into an anecdote about her pregnant neighbor and how her child might provide a solution to the civil war, which solution is revealed in the same way that the truth about Dieu's secrets must be learned.

...[La voisine] s'inquiète de savoir de quelle couleur sera son bébé ! Elle veut savoir si son bébé sera de nationalité internationale, comme *la force impartiale*, comme chaque soldat de l'ONU. Voilà le nouveau malheur qu'ils nous apportent, ceux-là... On flanque à nos côtés des gens qui ne nous aiment pas, qui ne nous ont jamais aimés. Ils n'ont que du mépris pour nous et je me demande ce qu'ils font ici ! Ils croient que les négresses sont leurs vaches ou leurs esclaves. Quand on se déteste, on se tape dessus. Et, quand il s'agit d'un *casque bleu* dont la couleur ne nous rassure pas, on ne peut pas le dire tout haut. Eux aussi, ils ne disent rien. Certains parmi eux, les plus dangereux, ne parlent aucune de nos langues. Même pas notre langue nationale, *le français populaire d'Abidjan* ! Ils sont incapables d'avouer, en plein jour, qu'ils ne nous aiment pas. C'est contraire à la loi. Et puisqu'ils nous surveillent de près, il paraît que ça fait des dégâts. Des parties de jambes en l'air qu'on n'a jamais vues sur la terre de nos ancêtres ! Les enfants qui arrivent seront, j'en suis sûre, ceux de la paix...

-- Les enfants de la paix ?

-- Oui. Car ils auront réussi à réconcilier des ennemis jurés et des couleurs intermédiaires. Tu y aurais pensé, toi, à cette solution à la guerre ?

...

La vie est dure et dure, comme je te le dis. Et le vrai secret se trouve dans nos vies de femmes. Comment nous souffrons de ces nouvelles douleurs ajoutées aux anciennes...Parfois, le comble du malheur vient de nos propres petits frères étudiants ou chômeurs diplômés, qui déversent le trop plein de leur colère dans la mare de nos reins ou dans la barque de notre dos...certaines d'entre nous acceptent cette situation à cause

de leurs hommes qui, comme d'habitude, sont des oiseaux de mauvais augure...C'est un hibou...Alors tu préfères accepter les conneries d'un petit minable qui se croit le roi du monde. Cela te permet d'attendre en silence et d'affronter l'ombre maléfique du hibou qui te tue à chaque apparition.

Voilà pourquoi ma voisine a eu raison d'aller voir ailleurs. Malgré toutes les questions qu'elle se pose, son cœur déborde de bonheur à l'idée d'avoir ce bébé, encore un, le septième. Tous de père différents... Et elle va l'élever seule ce bébé, parce qu'elle l'a fait toute seule, de père invisible. (124-126, emphasis original)

While, on the surface, not logically connected at all to the question of Dieu's secrets, this anecdote nevertheless highlights some problems that the French and internationally imposed "peace" pose for women and children. The blame for inter-ethnic, and inter-gender violence, then, lies in the racial angst felt by the men adding modern sufferings to the traditionally imposed pain and silence of women. And the ironic "solution" to the war is the hybridization of the new generation—fathers invisible—giving proof that mixture is possible, producing children of peace, despite perceived boundaries between peoples. The key to it all, and to this anecdote's relevance to Dieu, is that the true secret—of inter-ethnic civil war, of inter-racial oppression and inequalities, of the wrong of the abuse of patriarchal authority, of state authority—lies in the lives of women. By bringing up the civil war as the first thing an Ivorian woman informant tells when asked about secrets of private French citizen Dieu, Boni inscribes a *méandre de la parole*, reinforcing the centrality of this seemingly ancillary anecdote around the idea that the causes of the conflict lie ultimately in the racism of French neo-colonialism. By extension, then, Boni

finds France's relation to her home country to be a constraining factor in the determination of national identity, which interpretation only a deeper investigation of an allegory could reveal.

There is only one other extended instance of overt discussion of the war and its causes and consequences in the novel: a conversation between Lady Benz and her long estranged husband César, former *sous-préfet* with whom she maintains amicable relations. Coming from the North, his identity had become suspect at his retirement home in the Southern city of Abidjan to the point where even his friends didn't fully trust him anymore during this time of intense mistrust of the North. Seeing his fellow Northern Korhogo former bride again, he lets down his guard a little and relates the following:

– Il ne faut pas confondre les causes et les effets encore moins les moyens et les fins de la crise idiote que nous traversons, dit-il.

L'ivoirité fait partie des moyens. C'est une bombe n'est-ce pas ? Une mine capable d'exploser à tout moment et de plonger le pays dans un chaos qui perdure. Les faits en parlent mieux que les mots... Souviens-toi de ceux qui l'ont fabriquée, dans ce laboratoire bien connu de l'Université nationale. Ils n'ont pas caché leurs intentions. Mais le petit peuple n'y a vu que du feu, peut-être du feu de paille pour amuser la galerie, peut-être divertir les jeunes et les enfants.

-- [Lady Benz interrupts :] Divertir, dis-tu ? Et si personne n'y a cru ? Les gens, depuis longtemps, sont trop occupés à gérer la vie immédiate celle qui se vit sans lendemain, dans l'urgence...

-- Divertir pas se divertir, je ne crois pas qu'il y ait d'autre mot plus juste pour raconter l'histoire du chaos. Mais le résultat est là. Les jeunes, un beau jour, en ont eu marre d'être traités comme des jouets, des pantins, tu vois, ils ont décidé de porter flamme là où ils l'entendent, peut-être jusqu'en enfer...

...

-- Tu veux dire que toutes les armes sont bonnes à prendre pour régler les problèmes immédiats ?

-- Si tu veux. Il suffit de savoir appâter les foules, de préférence. Car les individus sont plus durs à cuir. Les foules sont beaucoup plus souples, plus malléables. Miser sur les foules, inventer la langue de la harangue, c'est une arme infailible. Former des tribuns. Le résultat, le voici... Tu comprends ? Est-ce que tu construis un pays avec un troupeau de fauves qui cassent tout parce qu'ils n'ont rien d'autre dans le ventre que la faim ? (164, emphasis original)

Ivoirité was a bomb, a means to the ostensible end of national unity, of the easing of ethnic tensions. But its explosion became a spectacle, a flashpoint of identity politics in which crowds, mobs, youth, were manipulated to violently act out the identitarian exclusions which so enthralled them, reprisals against the threat they perceived as responsible for the lack of food in their bellies. César's point is that the whole crisis is an idiotic diversion from the real problem, which, by implication, is not the internal inter-ethnic strife, but rather the one imposed from the outside, the French neo-colonial problem. Ivoirité is a means to the end of the state's consolidation of power, and an effect caused ultimately by neo-colonial conditions. Neither

César, nor Boni spell out overtly just what those conditions are, but by implication the effect is clearly the civil war: “le résultat, le voici... Tu comprends?” (165).

César’s and *Narratrice*’s implications are well founded in theory and in history. In The Necessary Nation, Jسدانيس agrees with Comaroff and Comaroff that ethnicity is primarily defined in negative terms. Its sociological function is to distinguish the set of core values, beliefs, customs, traits, etc. that set a group under threat from another apart. These core distinctions being at root cultural, Jسدانيس then defines a nation as an ethnicity which has acquired political institutions⁶². In the case of the Côte d’Ivoire, as in all of formerly French Africa, the culture producing the institutions which became the Ivorian state was not, after all, Ivorian, but French—producing a state whose institutions are not tooled for expression of any unified cultural will among the indigenes on the ground. This originary derivation of the Ivorian state from the French one has implications for the possibility and expression of national identity⁶³. Combining these implications, then, with Amselle’s insights on the Sénoufo and Dioula Northerners as forming discrete ethnicities only in reaction to the French colonial presence on the ground in the late 1800s, and the regional favoritism that excluded them from the same privileges associated with the coastal, more thoroughly Christianized South, this ethnic divide—sharpened as it was by the effect of the discourse of Ivoirité—does have its basis in externally (French) imposed conditions. Boni’s intervention into the national identity, then, is

⁶² This is not to argue that political institutions in and of themselves constitute nationality, nor that cultural definitions are the be all and end all of nation-states, but rather that the *raison d’être* of nations is at bottom, inescapably cultural.

⁶³ The Côte d’Ivoire has declined, in contrast with most of its fellow African states, to entertain any of its 60 native languages as official, and although it has no jurisdiction to enforce compliance beyond its territories has nonetheless legislated that its name should not be translated out of the French. These facts point to a collusion with France on a linguistic level, and add weight to the close military, economic, and diplomatic ties the Côte d’Ivoire has maintained with France as already noted in the introductory chapter.

ever more clearly coming to point to the external constraining forces involved, suggesting that Ivoirité is at bottom more a consequence of France's continuing power to define from the outside than any single internal force.

The central issue of race forming the latent dynamic of Franco-Ivorian relations, it is also a telling feature of the novel's overall form that *Narratrice* inserts Dieu's story in his own words first, that she moves next to the counter-narrative from the African women who know his secrets (but silence from Laurence!), then that the oneiric content is added all before the whole package is submitted to a French publisher of third-world texts who then essentially co-opts the entirety as an auto-biography. In this order the diegetic timeline is complex, constituting a *méandre de la parole* common to all three novels in which the truth about the central subjects are better captured via a roundabout chronology. Structurally, the *mise en abîme* of a story deriving from multiple embedded levels of testimony and ultimately encapsulated by an old French man's prologue claiming the entire narration as his own, lends strength to the race-based message about neo-colonial France co-opting anything black of value, and ignoring the rest.

But there is another aspect of this relationship available in an analysis of Boni's strategy of delayed clarity. The enigmatic chapter of a dream *Narratrice* has over the Sahara on a flight from Abidjan to Paris seems out of place both temporally and functionally in terms of the plot. In the dream, Maryse, sister and business partner of Iris (the one who silently smokes the fish by Iris's side), visits *Narratrice* to foreshadow her own death by fire in a Paris apartment building. The dream shocks *Narratrice* into wakefulness when Maryse's presence can no longer be felt. Maryse had appeared in a spooky metro station, where people are anonymous in the crowd, to

define her immigrant existence in France as crossing a *Gblanta*: a sort of *nulle part* between here and there, Africa and Europe, where human dignity has no place, where acceptance of a common humanity is nullified, “là où tu ne peux plus respirer, n’est-ce pas, quand tu refuses de marcher dans la même direction que tout le monde” (179). If the perspectives of Dieu and of the African women in his life combine to tell the story of a gender-inflected, race-inflected abuse of power resulting in a broken African nation, then the Ivorian immigrant community becomes an easily overlooked third term in the equation⁶⁴. Belonging to nowhere, to *Gblanta*, the immigrants are a part of the nation that can be forgotten because exiled, and yet are not welcomed into a new home and so are forgotten also by their hosts⁶⁵.

This foreshadowing dream is so closely tied with the novel’s ending, with the fire, and with Maryse’s death, that the intervening chapters—unconnected as they are to the Maryse dream—gain the status of a long *méandre de la parole* to be looked into. Immediately following the dream, there is a chapter of commentary on Iris who has immigrated to Paris. Her character has been so altered by Dieu’s invisibility—or rather refusal to see her—that this former seller of secrets, adept at talking while working, neither has a job, nor a thing to say anymore. The two chapters following that constitute a second dream in which Dieu expresses devotion to Sali and they make a reconciliation of sorts in support of their mutual offspring, despite the unpleasantness of the conditions of her conception. It is in the re-evaluation requisite in a *méandre de la parole*, however, that the contrast between the realities of immigrant life in France spoken of in the first dream and the forgiveness and genuine love in the romanticized fiction of

⁶⁴ According to the official statistics, which may only be capturing a fraction of the real numbers, the annual inflow of Ivorian immigrants to France almost doubled from pre-hostilities 2001 to mid-war 2004. My source is: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/countrydata/data.cfm>

⁶⁵ This *Gblanta* concept provides a contrast, rather than a comparison to Homi Bhabha’s notion of a productive “hybrid” “third space” which is privileged for its position to critique the West because Boni’s notion is rather a zone of silence and negation of critical subject positions.

the second dream becomes stark, and that the message of the Maryse dream about the immigrants' reality aligns with the previously discussed racial core of France's involvement in the Côte d'Ivoire, and constraining influence on Ivorian national identity. In other words, it is in the re-evaluation of the established first-level, reductive allegory (that Dieu is France and Sali is the Côte d'Ivoire) that the discovery can be made of Boni's insistence on France's constraining and racialized influence on Ivorian identity.

As in Boni's other novels, there is a healthy amount of ink spent on philosophical discussion analyzing the characters' involvement in larger debates in Nègres. If Lénie was concerned with how to narrate the petite histoire of Samori in Baigneurs, and the *Narratrice* in Matins was focused on memory as a necessary path to understanding the civil war, then there are two meta-discussions of interest in Nègres: one, between Narratrice and Iris on secrets; and two, with Dieu on his motivations for writing his own memoirs.

In Boni's customary historiographical fashion, before we are treated to Dieu's secrets, the *Narratrice* tells us first how she came about such information, then has a discussion on secrets in general with the woman who sells them to her (for the lowest denomination of Ivorian coin!). In Iris's words:

Les secrets existent pour nourrir la parole racontée. Pour la rendre vivante et actuelle. Pas pour regarder le passé et s'installer à l'ombre des fromagers et baobabs. Si nos parents ne nous avaient rien dit des intrigues du monde, de la colonisation, des nombreuses histoires de nos villages, aujourd'hui, nous serions des ignorantes. Qui

aurait pu nous aimer ? Et tu saurais d'où tu viens, toi ? Et tu saurais où tu mets les pieds ?

Clearly not all secrets have a beneficial effect on the holder, but even the painful ones, like the secrets of how the people of the Côte d'Ivoire were treated under colonialism, must be told and passed on, the roots of socially cohesive categorizations, of self-identifications influencing the present "parole racontée". Secrets are thus an integral part of identities, and although anchors to the past, should not keep one imprisoned there, functioning rather as guides to the present showing "où tu mets les pieds". However, there is a certain initiation necessary for the transmission of the kind of secret that can anchor people in their belonging to a given collectivity. Iris comments first in this exchange with *Narratrice*:

--...le vrai secret ne se garde pas, c'est lui qui te garde en vie si tu y tiens vraiment.

-- Je vois. Tout secret est fait pour être confié, comme tu le fais, aux personnes qui sont capables de le comprendre et de le transmettre.

--Tu as bien compris ce que je veux dire. Un secret est un secret. Il ne se répète pas. Il se comprend...

Puis elle donna force détails sur l'entretien du secret par la parole. Je me demandais si j'avais capté le sens de son raisonnement qui ne manquait pas de subtilité. Pendant ce temps, assise sur son tabouret, elle s'essuyait les mains après avoir découpé le poisson qu'une cliente attendait. Elle avait cette manie de parler, de raconter des histoires pendant qu'elle était en plein boulot. Certaines clientes qui ne s'intéressaient à

rien d'autre qu'au poisson venaient et repartaient avec quelques bribes de mots entendus sans jamais saisir le sens de l'histoire.

In a way, it's self-serving that a seller of secrets would have the opinion that secrets were made to be shared, albeit only with initiates, since the effect of such a philosophy not only holds the sharer up as judge, but soothes the conscience. In preparing to divulge Dieu's secrets thus, Iris both foreshadows the centrality of Dieu's sin with Sali in Dieu's own existence and motivations, but also provides a contrast to the very public way in which Dieu himself has chosen to air his dirty laundry. One might well wonder what value it has, then, for Dieu to have co-opted the entire novel as his own. Is he thereby bringing Iris's more felicitous mode of secret-sharing down to his level of publicity, or is he thereby ennobling his own secret-sharing? In any case, those secrets which are understood by confidence, not by repetition, shared between Iris and *Narratrice* during the course of day-to-day market activities without non-initiates knowing any the wiser, are the stories of the women in Dieu's life, in accordance with Iris's comment on her neighbor that "le vrai secret se trouve dans nos vies de femmes" (125). If we are licensed by Boni's *méandres de la parole*, then, to find the point of silence for a message central to the novel's, this *méandre* would focus on the one female character *without* a voice of her own: Dieu's French wife Laurence.

Laurence was a nun working in a convent-school when Dieu arrived as a priest-teacher. Before long the both of them forsook their vows and married, and she took up work as an anthropologist—an occupation in which non-initiates make it their work to reveal to the academy and to the public the secrets held as essential to the self-understanding of the groups they study. Laurence's chosen profession, then, is in opposition to the kind of secret-sharing Iris and

Narratrice engage in, and her personal project deepens further the opposition. Laurence is not just studying Ivorian tribal villages, she is attempting to demonstrate through the analysis of synchronic systems, that the ancientness of many of a given ethnicity's most essential traditions is itself a myth, and can be traced to a much more shallow diachronic source.

Elle parcourait tous les villages à découvrir où il y avait des manières de vivre et de penser pas si anciennes. Il n'était pas sûr que la vie des ancêtres eût été encore conservée dans des paroles ou des bibliothèques vivantes. Elle savait que c'était là un leurre. Elle observait comme ce monde dit traditionnel se transformait à vue d'œil, créait ses propres codes incompréhensibles aux oreilles et selon les théories de ceux qui les lisaient avec des œillères, des grilles obsolètes. (99)

But when Dieu funneled his own Ivorian philosophy students into cooperating with her project in their own villages, the result was felicitous:

...les étudiants allaient dans des villages qu'ils connaissaient bien. Ils interrogeaient leurs proches. Ils observaient la vie quotidienne, les codes de transmission de la parole, les rituels, les fêtes, les mariages. Ainsi, ils redécouvrirent des manières de vivre qu'ils oubliaient depuis leur venue au monde, dont ils se désintéressaient, angoissés qu'ils étaient par leur avenir. Quand ils revenaient à l'université, ils avaient l'impression d'être plus heureux. Je les voyais plus ouverts, plus souriants. (100)

The phenomenon of the native informants' positive change in attitude may be attributable to the rediscovery of ways of living that they had long forgotten, but only when remembering the important element that these were initiates to whom the secrets of tradition belonged in the first place. We don't know how such research ultimately affected Laurence, the non-initiate in this equation, by contrast, but we do know that Dieu's first "ennemie adorée", Laurence, with whom he had once shared a common and living *parole*, fell into silence soon after this university program. Dieu had been drifting away into sexual infidelities and concurrently transforming himself into a *nègre de service* in the cogs of power at a government ministry at this time, so the immediate source of their growing apart stemmed of course from this. But it should also not be lost on the critic that the trajectories of the effects of secret sharing are diametrically opposed between the initiated students becoming more open by the act, and the couple Dieu-Laurence drifting apart into silence. The fact that neither she nor he are initiates and yet are sharing these secrets may account at least in part for the lack of positive effect in their own relationship when the same secrets had such a happy outcome for their initiated students.

Laurence's project forms an interesting study in comparison and contrast to *Narratrice's* own. Just as Laurence is studying traditions in order to dispel the myth of their ancientness, *Narratrice* identifies her occupation as a "chasse aux idées reçues" (20). The manner in which *Narratrice* proceeds is to interrogate primary sources, and then cross-reference with counter testimonies, just as one can safely presume Laurence does, as would any well-trained anthropologist. On the other hand, Laurence is dealing to non-initiates whereas *Narratrice* not only retains her manuscript for Dieu's eyes only (sent in a private email—it is Dieu himself that decides to publish her writing as is), but has only dealt with initiates throughout her writing.

This question of consulting only initiates both illuminates and calls up the question of why *Narratrice* wouldn't consult with the most initiated informer on Dieu possible, the only one he actually married: Laurence. Here, the allegorical nature of the text once again licenses the critic to look for meanings that apply to the broader subject of Franco-Ivorian relations within the private stories of the plot. Whether it's the principle of turnabout is fair play (the formerly silenced colonized refusing to give the colonizers a voice) or the idea that a Western female voice doesn't carry the same weight of truth that an Ivorian female voice does (since, as we've established, "le vrai secret se trouve dans nos vies de femmes," 125), the result of silencing Laurence is to point up an essential distinction of initiation between French and Ivorian informers on the relationship between the two countries. And in both cases it represents the echo of the rectifying kind of discourse Mudimbe advocated for in The Invention of Africa, in which African knowledge, rather than being filtered and distorted by the objectifying anthropological gaze, should be arrived at by making Africans both the subject and the object of inquiry. The postcolonial gesture of excluding Laurence's truth on Dieu, then, can be seen less as a neglect to appropriate the Western perspective as it is a political choice of epistemological methods. But in any case, it is the identification of the text as primarily an allegory on Franco-Ivoirian relations that enables the critic to look at the meaning behind this apparent lacuna on Laurence.

A closer look at Dieu's project is also significant. He has a densely enigmatic dialog with his imagined reader at the opening of the novel in which he analyzes his own motivations for writing. After explaining that the accidental demise of his dog had set his barely adolescent mind to an obsessive fear of death which in turn was only assuaged by travel literature from Africa into which he inserted himself as a character and escaped into the exotic, Dieu observes

that his more present pressing need to write came not from these childhood psychological disturbances, but rather from external forces he called *pómmou*, a transliteration of an African word meaning roughly: things or stuff or *fétiches*. The chapter describing the *pómmou* moves from one vague definition to another describing the correct pronunciation in detail, but never settling on a satisfactory definition. They seem to be agents of force, obliging Dieu to do things against his will, and yet not entirely malevolent. Whatever their definition, they function as his conscience, driving him into early retirement from his lucrative but exploitative work as a publisher of third world texts, and coercing him into writing his autobiography so as to publicly atone for his “sins”. His explanation runs thusly:

Les *pómmou* peuvent te sauver, ô lecteur, si tu en prends conscience, de cet état de Civilisation, ta seconde nature, ton état d’âme. Et ils sont en train de me sauver, puisque, grâce à eux, je vais bientôt prendre ma retraite. (54)

This reference to Rousseau’s famous description of culture as a second nature, combined with Dieu’s attitude on the capitalized concept of “Civilisation, mot qui me flanque le tournis quand j’y pense, parce qu’il se croit tout permis,” grants the reader a window into the psychology of Dieu, whose very name implies the pride and power that comes with Western culture, relegating, in a way, its very supports to marginal status in the name of its own “higher” values (54). These *pómmou*, therefore, are magical like a *fétiche*, in the sense that they can save one from one’s own nature, one’s own cultural guilt. This saving, however, comes at a price:

Les *pómmou* ne font ni grossir ni maigrir ; ils te prennent en otage, te cuisinent et te parlent ta vie durant, c'est tout.

Je ne peux plus leur échapper, cela se voit ; je marche avec eux, comme eux, je ris de leur rire indolore et resplendissant, ce rire qui te donne un coup de fouet quand le stress matinal te gagne au saut du lit. Alors tu ris, sans raison, habité par des *pómmou*, des choses, des bêtes, peut-être tes propres affaires, des sans-nom qu'il faut apprendre à connaître, à comprendre.

Mais je pleure aussi de leurs pleurs sinistres et inénarrables. C'est à ce moment-là que les *pómmou* se présentent à moi sous la forme de maux. Et de mots vivants, vois-tu ?
(54)

These conscience piquing and most importantly *speaking pómmou* have become tyrannical for Dieu, dictating his every move, making him laugh for no reason, and cry from pain. The “vois-tu?” at the end suggests a word play is intended here beyond the surface meaning: the equation of the identically pronounced *maux* and *mots*, both given by the *pómmou* to Dieu. He must write the words of his ills or suffer the anguish. The *méandre de la parole* on this subject sends us back to the silence at the other end of his words, as conscience-driven as they might claim to be: the reason Narratrice had to obtain the “*vrai secret*” about Dieu from the women in his life was that their stories, their suffering at his hand is precisely what he cannot narrate. Even if the heart of his motivation is his own guilt, the expression and explanation of that guilt is insufficient to redress the damage of his sin, and the story ultimately ends up being about the guilt itself—about his suffering, not his victims’.

Just before Dieu explains his *pómmou*, he confides that his fascination with death was preceded by one with fire in which he often played at catching the flames in his family fireplace with his hands:

Elles me glissaient entre les doigts...Ainsi je sus, tout en jouant, que je ne pouvais pas tout prendre et tout avoir de mes propres mains. Il y avait des choses comme les flammes, pourtant si rassurantes, que je ne pourrais jamais garder pour moi seul. Cela me rendait triste. (48)

Here again foreshadowing the fiery deaths of the neglected African immigrants in Paris, Boni inscribes the core of the France-Côte d'Ivoire relationship in this imagery, complementary to the novel's central allegory, as fundamentally marked by a sort of passive French racism that is saddened not to be able to hold on to its former colony. Racism because it matches Dieu's chronologically later confession from his co-opting introductory script as he receives Narratrice's email containing her attached manuscript:

Hier donc, assis devant mon ordinateur, je craignais un virus venant de là-bas ou de nulle part. On ne sait jamais avec ces Nègres qu'on ne peut connaître vraiment...(13)

The only example in the novel of the capitalized racial epithet, this off-hand comment, trailing into ellipses as it does, reveals the truth that Dieu, France, has never really believed in an exchange of equals, believing instead in incommensurability—that one could never truly become acquainted with, could never really know those of a certain race. Here, the novel could hardly

agree more with Christopher Miller's assessment in Blank Darkness of France's relations with what it perceived as its racially marked radical Other, granting itself defining power and retaining the signifier of all things African for a null signified, to be filled in by whatever desire for the exotic it will impose. The African, in Miller's appraisal of the French imaginary, is never really known on its own terms no matter how genuinely benevolent its efforts for the preservation of cultures and cultural diversity might seem on the surface.

The theory of multiple deeper levels of allegorical interpretation applying to a larger concern beyond the text has enabled finding consistent meanings for what the novel is saying as well as for why it chooses to put the message the way it does—has enabled seeking out spaces where the text is silent and recuperating even the lacunae as part and parcel of the overall message. This coherence in the reading, however, still leaves the critic with the question of what is missed by focusing on allegory. To be sure, the feminism inherent in the text could be more amply fleshed out in another kind of study. And it is also truly limiting to a discussion of relations of power to reduce the text's critique to an exploration of France's latent neocolonial racism, because the interpretation has to select its interpretive keys from within the text's field to the exclusion of other details which might be perfectly salient for another kind of reading. On the other hand, this critique could be made of any interpretive project, not only allegorical ones—any and all interpretations must simultaneously include some elements of the text and exclude others. And in an investigation of Ivorian national identity from texts within the Ivoirité period, a certain choice of interpretive perspective is inherently implied. This in no way diminishes interpretive work that could be accomplished in other ways, while at the same time it

affirms that getting at the text's take on the question of national identity without acknowledging allegory would be missing a vital, central method that the text itself suggests.

On the other hand, one would be quite right to also point out how Boni's central emphasis on race relations and on neocolonial determination of Ivorian identity in this novel is itself suspect and self-limiting on many levels. The critic is not obliged to take her at her word, except to acknowledge that such is her own testimony and opinion. The gesture of reducing any nation's identity to constraints from externally imposed forces is risky in that it necessarily diminishes the role of internal factors and the agency of leaders and citizens in making and breaking the molds in which national identity is forged. The move to identify the perception of melatonin levels as a determinant in power relations further compounds the presumption of inescapability from externally imposed categories. To be sure, France and French attitudes toward race and former colonies do have structural consequences which are difficult for Ivorians to escape, but it would be equally as unjust to over-generalize racism as a French national trait as it would be to depict Ivorians as irrevocably subaltern to it. And perhaps even more powerfully, the focus on race tends to dampen curiosity and openness to other, more productive modes of analysis since phenotype is not within the realm of things human beings yet have the power to change, and it manifestly has no bearing whatsoever on merit or ability.

In the end, then, it is perhaps liberating to draw a more generous final conclusion about the direction of Boni's focus on race relations in this novel. Although a central observation to the text, as I have demonstrated, the focus on race is only an impasse in Boni's narrative within certain specific domains. Of course, the dream content suggests that a felicitous co-existence would require too great a suspension of memory for all but the most economically interested parties. But with the exception of the despicable abuse of Sali's pre-pubescent innocence, all of

the negative impact of contact with the subconsciously racist French is geographically located in France itself. This spatial setting apart suggests that despite the French power to categorize, a purely Ivorian self-definition—described from within purely African categories—is still a felicitous possibility. And Boni's insistence on the difference in secret sharing between initiates and non-initiates provides further support for such a reading. No matter what discursive power the French may still hold in the post- or neo- colony, there will exist an initiatory process by which the secrets of the core of Ivorian identity will be exclusively revealed.

Boni's Ivoirité period narrative interventions may well have come from a national university professor whose livelihood depends in large part upon the state, and whose credibility in debates that the state also has a stake in should rightly be suspect, but they nonetheless run counter to the official Ivoirité discourse. In writing about ignoring propagandistic narratives in favor of aesthetic catharsis in Baigneurs, Boni resists the over-emphasis of political rhetoric—in effect encouraging readers not to take nascent Ivoirité seriously enough to make it change their lives. In promoting tolerance in the face of ethnically based divisions and violence in Matins, she squarely condemns the exclusionary consequences of Ivoirité's application. And in demonstrating France's latent racism in Nègres, Boni at the same time promotes a disregard for their power to impose identities (including through a state under neocolonial thrall) and a renewed national unity because of a common threat from the outside. Her discursive method of delayed clarity, her *méandres de la parole*, her advancement of the value of initiation before secret sharing, her practice of investigating truth through sources left under-acknowledged by the dominant discourse, all combine in Boni's practice to encourage a reading position in which extra-textual truths must be learned in the same way that diegetical ones are. The end-product of

these themes and encouraged reading positions is a vantage-point from which Ivorian national identity is of central concern, is lacking without the North, has roots in historical and current relations with France, and is formed in opposition to the state's own rhetoric on the subject. And, in the final analysis, could anything be more allegorical of the Côte d'Ivoire at each publication's juncture than its description as a nation ethnically divided, constrained by France, and caught in violence born of its inability to properly aestheticize political rhetoric?

3.0 TADJO – LITERATURE AND THE NATIONAL BINARIES

This dissertation's first chapter opened with an early reference to Tadjó's most recent 2004 La Reine Pokou: Concerto pour un sacrifice to show that despite her background and history with various poles of identity (ethnicity, race, pan-Africanism), the national pole remains central in her writing and thought. On one hand, in direct and overt reaction to the civil war raging at the time of her text's writing, it is no surprise that the tensions over the definition of the Ivorian nation would lead Tadjó's imaginary to discussion of that definition—it is, after all, the salient topic in her home country. On the other hand, however, even Tadjó's previous texts are rife with engagements with the national identity, ranging from the subjacent and figurative to the more and more overtly direct. In fact, Tadjó's texts form a sort of evolutionary chain in this regard. Her Ivoirité period narratives in particular perform an Ivorian-ness based on binary oppositions which both describe the nation, and form the heart of Tadjó's increasingly strident warnings against national division, and argument for national unity. Even before the Ivoirité period, her 1990 Le Royaume aveugle provides such a prescient allegorical treatment of the divisions that later flowered on the ground that its inclusion in the present study cannot be avoided. Forming an intervention into the contested definition of the Ivorian nation, these texts all refer to impassible binary logics, all promote unity in the face of difference, all decry lack of communication between individuals and groups, and all point to a hope in future generations for the ultimate resolution of the current day's impasses and silences. And each of these narratives

dealing with allegorical representations in various ways makes them interesting material from which second-order observations can be made on the nature of the discursive construct of the Ivorian nation depicted therein.

It serves the study of the texts to begin with a sense of their author's history and reception. In a prior chapter, I referred to Tanella Boni as the Côte d'Ivoire's pre-eminent female author, but such a claim can only be made with some qualifications. Véronique Tadjo may well receive more attention than Boni in the media and among scholarly circles. This may be attributed to many factors, the principle one being her presence in Anglophone publications, since some of her major works have been translated in English, and since she has participated in a number of cross-language colloquia. The literature on Tadjo falls into three major categories, in fact. There are a number of interviews with the author herself available, there are a number of articles and sections of book chapters dealing with her poetry or children's writings, and there are mentions of her work in general as forming a major contribution to the growing corpus of women authors from Africa. Although the first category can afford valuable insights into the author's own reported self-analysis, literary critics are licensed to suspend full belief in such, and rely on the texts themselves to suggest lines of inquiry beyond what such interviews may offer. And even though poetry and children's literature can also provide insights into the development of the author's thought, the tools for analyzing these genres are sufficiently different from those used in this study, that space will prevent it. And despite the fact that scholars have included Tadjo's prose works in various ways, it has almost universally been in a relatively summary fashion, and in treatment of a larger domain rather than given full in-depth textual analysis as I do here. For example Odile Cazenave's broad interest in African feminism compares Tadjo's treatment of settings for female characters and representations of familial arrangements from the

1986 À Vol d'oiseau and the 1999 Champs de bataille et d'amour to other African and diasporic female authors such as Werewere Liking and Calixtha Bayala. The comparative approach favoring breadth over depth, Cazenave is not wrong to find that Tadjó's feminism is more likely to include urban settings from lower classes than the African feminist writers of the previous generation, but there is additional conclusions one can draw from a closer study of Tadjó's works as well. Sonia Lee, in an admittedly brief article, also finds Tadjó's L'Ombre d'Imana to be a compelling example of a movement of female writers to produce essayistic literature as part of an overall gesture of contesting traditionally male roles and modes of memory-keeping, but her argument does not need to deal deeply either with form or with content in order to accurately track the current trend.

Tadjó currently writes and teaches literature in South Africa, and has taught in London after her education in Paris and time in the US. As the daughter of an Ivorian father and a French mother, and as wife to a diplomat, her travels have contributed to her experience in many parts of the West and in Africa outside of her native Ivory Coast⁶⁶. These experiences and opportunities not only afford her a point of comparison from which bridging communication gaps between French-speaking Africa and English speaking-Africa seems more imaginable than others may be able to address (certainly Boni doesn't to any great extent), but also combine with her various talents as a children's fiction writer, and multiple media artist to produce a penchant for varied perspectives that Tadjó never fails to inscribe in her novels. Varied though they are, it is nonetheless the points of articulation of difference that capture my attention and which offer me a way into the texts, an invitation to analysis. I will ask then, in the pages that follow, if the

⁶⁶ Tadjó's father is Agni, an ethnic group considered related, historically, culturally, and linguistically by a link to the Akan group, to the Baoulé, as well as to the Ashanti peoples of Ghana.

binary oppositions inscribed in various ways into Tadjó's novels can be understood through the frame of an intervention into the contested shape of the specifically Ivorian national identity.

Binary oppositions are the stuff of which Tadjó's pre-Ivoirité period allegorical novel Le Royaume aveugle is composed. Their use depicts realities shared in many African countries, and forms the binds and impasses which Tadjó's allegory attempts to inscribe, through literature, the pathway out of.

In broad strokes, Tadjó's 1990 Le Royaume aveugle chronicles the fall of an empire following a crippling natural disaster to allow for a new conquering regime to reign and oppress. The incoming overlords are all blind, which trait, besides their lack of human compassion, is otherwise their only distinguishing feature. Tadjó's fiction first draws the reader into a sympathetic relationship with the rebellious daughter of the blind oppressive new king and through her own search for meaning and direction in an otherwise solitary and pre-mapped-out existence, she discovers the poverty and yet nobility of the oppressed original inhabitants of the city around her, called only les Autres. Predictably, next comes the meeting between this daughter, Akissi, and a particularly noble sighted soul named Karim. And when the joining of their two separate bodies turns to a sharing of words—thoughts on the state of the kingdom and the suffering around them—Akissi shares her solitude and Karim tells of his dream of hope, of a free society, and recounts the poetry of its birth after the kingdom's burning. They decide that she will run away to wait for him in his village in the North, where she is adopted by his mother as her own daughter for a time and is taught the ways and traditions of the sighted—their dances, their rituals, and the Mask, source of all life, whose power derives from the pain of a woman. Meanwhile, Karim, in his service as king's secretary, is too well placed not to participate in a

revolt for the liberation of his people, and is arrested for his role in a failed plot. Upon news of a coup, Akissi decides to return to the city, where she, along with Karim's village and others they convince along the way, brings all the occult preparations, ritual purifications, prophecies and traditional blessings she can to bear against the king. Akissi, now having gained her sight, has a particular role in the revolution: freeing Karim by using her influence as the king's daughter. She fails in her efforts to reconcile her father with her lover, and Karim also fails in the sense that he begins to doubt the convictions that brought him into rebellion against the Blind rulers. The only certainty remaining to him—his love for Akissi—plants his seed in her bosom, but his imprisonment ultimately forces their separation. The revolution "succeeds" despite the personal failures of Akissi and Karim, but it succeeds only in the sense that a small group becomes the new Blind ones. The novel ends in an epilogue with a tone of hope: at the very moment Karim dies ignominiously, Akissi gives birth to twins—a boy and a girl...

Even in this extremely schematic treatment of the novel's content several key binary oppositions should be obvious: the sighted and the Blind, the oppressed and the oppressor, the male and the female, the love story and the revolution, the magical and the real. Each of these, under the analytical microscope, yield rich and complex interplays and inter-dependencies which, teased out, reveal various conceptions the text can offer on the world. My work as analyst will focus on this teasing out as the chapter unfolds. However, the very fact that the text inscribes such binaries points to an overall insight: that something about the world imagined in these pages cannot avoid division into agonistic elements.

The aggregate effect of such binaries is to produce a near-prescient look at some of the real-life divisions that continue to frustrate the unity of the Côte d'Ivoire to this day. And while strict one-to-one mapping of diegetic characters and events to real Ivorians and Ivorian situations

is not licensed by the text, the novel taken as a whole nevertheless retains a modicum of allegorical flavor owing to this surfeit of binaries in its composition.

Tadjo was careful in her setting to limit her specification of geographical and ethnographic features in such a way that almost all sub-Saharan readers can easily recognize their own home country being depicted. Her use of a North/South binary does seem to loosely correspond to the Côte d'Ivoire's ethnic-religious fault lines, but could as easily capture a good number of West African states or be parsed as symbolic for whatever major geographic division any current African country is split by. And although the relative prosperity of the Côte d'Ivoire with respect to the other nations did tend to produce a highly polarized class structure—with very few rich, a very small middle class, and overwhelming numbers of the penniless—many a West African nation could be accurately described thus also. The net surface conclusion one might draw, then, is that this novel does not contribute to a debate over the question of Ivoirité per se. On the other hand, the fact that the Côte d'Ivoire did fracture over North-South lines, and that as a result of the same kinds of agonistic forces at work in the novel, may be less grounds to dismiss the text as a non-intervention, and more grounds to posit a social imaginary or a set of oppositional forces common to all of West Africa which, in Tadjo's logic, must overcome its polarities for a peaceful society to be born. In this sense, the text does, in fact, speak to the shape of the nation-state of the Côte d'Ivoire, just not exclusively.

The main binary, of course, is that of the sighted and the Blind. The Aveugles are marked from the beginning as different. They come from a foreign land, have military might, and dwell only in the opulent urban center. The previous population, having been reduced from their prior status as a powerful empire, now gets forced into shanty towns and becomes known by contrast as the Autres, despite their claim of indigenoussness. Besides their literal blindness,

one of the central common characteristics of the Aveugles is their attitude towards power and wealth, which is that they believe that their stranglehold on the former should guarantee them all the latter. They live with insouciance in almost complete ignorance of the squalor and yet also vibrancy of the culture in the shanty, from which their servants all hail, existing just outside their walled community.

Textually, Aveugles are also differentiated from Autres by their use of symbols. The bat is held up as a mascot by the Aveugles, as a creature which “maîtrise le ciel malgré ses yeux aveugles” (13). This reading of the bat is actively promoted by the Aveugles, but other aspects of its symbolism are also not lost on Karim, representative of the Autres, who randomly finds a dead bat one day on the palace steps and notes:

...ce fut la couleur de son poil soyeux qui m’émerveilla le plus et aussi ses griffes à l’extrémité des ailes : cette union de douceur et de violence, de beauté et de frayeur (60).

This realization of the negative aspects of the bat’s symbolism prompts a shift in Karim’s thought from symbolic bat to those it haunts—the people—whose only privilege is to be able to see the decadence of the palace court in contrast with the chaos and misery which surround it.

This iconic representation of the parasitic upper classes points to the economic underpinnings of the divisions between the two groups, which subtext is further solidified by other textual binary constructions. For example, Karim’s sight of the dead bat inspires thoughts for the privations of his people, but even the empire from which the now poor proletariat sprang was itself divided in the beginning. It was only in its death throes, devastated as it was by a

series of earthquakes, that the empire spent a few days in which all its social strata were leveled. First, after the destruction:

...tout à coup, les esclaves commencèrent à creuser. Eux seuls avaient encore la force de réagir... Il n'y avait plus ni chefs ni nobles. Il n'y avait plus d'esclaves. Les hommes avaient perdu leur vanité, leurs hiérarchies, leur injustice.

La mort leur avait donné une leçon d'humilité. Elle leur avait montré sa force inégalable en avalant qui elle voulait.

Plus d'organisation – Plus d'empire – Simplement des hommes et des femmes tels qu'ils étaient au commencement des temps. (11)

In the waste to which nature laid the riches of the first empire, an egalitarian society had a few days in which to consolidate, among the remaining population, a feeling of togetherness in misery, in humility, in humanity.

Akissi's re-education under the adoptive guidance of her lover's mother also underscores economics as a key interpretive element in the navigation of Tadjó's inscribed binaries. The mission Karim confers upon his mother is "apprend-lui à voir", as if the very physical blindness the Aveugles suffer from is really only a figurative ignorance, consequence of a choice which can be unmade through a willingness to learn (71). Somewhere between this teach-ability on the part of Akissi, Karim's mother's influence, and the magical intervention of the village's Masque, Akissi becomes the sole Aveugle to actually gain her sight. Remarkably, this transformation is not only diegetically literal but carries force figuratively as well. Akissi regaining her sight is at

the same time her initiation as a full member of the oppressed people and her induction into a revolutionary cause.

With her position and her new loyalties, her role is clear: she must convince the king to let her lover go. And while she is ultimately able to broker an arrangement to offer Karim, which he nevertheless can't accept, it's the moment when Akissi, only character able to reverse her position in the binary, is finally able to view her father for the first time with sighted eyes which functions as the novel's turning point:

Mais pour la fille du roi, la réalité apparut, ce jour-là, dans toute son horreur. La saleté, la puanteur des lieux lui firent tourner la tête. Elle dut rassembler ses forces pour continuer à avancer...

Lorsqu'elle ouvrit la porte de la chambre royale, Akissi posa les yeux sur son père, pour la première fois de sa vie. Elle eut un coup au cœur.

C'était un homme fini. (121)

Her new polar opposite perspective enables her to see that the binary itself had flipped. The Aveugles still had the power and the means, but their decadence is revealed as "saleté" and "puanteur", and their king is symbolically spent—a drooling, wrinkled shell of a man—not the powerful, virile paragon her blind eyes had imagined. Sole "Aveugle" witness to the true nature of the Aveugles, Akissi nevertheless conveys her father's offer to Karim, and is also not surprised when Karim cannot accept the public repentance the king would require of him.

It is at this point that Karim's symbolic force becomes sufficient for the people to revolt in his name, demanding his release, and taking live rounds as they are fired into the crowd. It is

at this point that the overthrow of the Aveugles is guaranteed, as well as the necessity of the ignominious martyrdom of Karim. And it is at this point that Akissi conceives the twins, one male, one female, both of royal Aveugle and noble Autre blood, and together harbingers of a future generation's power to break the otherwise unending cycle of violence and injustice brought upon by vast economic inequalities.

Akissi's trajectory from Aveugle to Autre can only be accomplished via a parallel trajectory from life in a decadent urban culture to life in a rich rural culture. The quintessential representatives of each are respectively king Ato the IV and Karim's mother. But there is another division within the Autres, which also divides along the same geographical distinction: that of the rural Masque and the urban prophète-fou. The Masque, avatar of the village sorcerer, center of the village belief system is the magical force that can remove the blindness from Akissi's eyes. Akissi learns of the Masque second hand, and all knowledge of him and contact with him is kept to a mystic and reverential register in the author's language, which, in itself, is in keeping with the strict code governing silence and speech about or in the presence of the Masque. The urban prophète, then, even though imbued with similar respect and comparably paranormal powers of prediction, provides a parallel contrast not only in his setting but also because of the manner of his operation: impromptu, unceremonious, and hyper-verbal. I bring these binaries up not just to add further weight to my thesis that such oppositions form the raw material of the text, but because West Africa—and the Côte d'Ivoire is no exception—conforms to a conceptual mapping of cultural space (identity and roles) onto geographical space (urban vs. village). Although not unique to Tadjó in the slightest, it is nevertheless significant to note here to what degree Tadjó's text has rhetorically defined this diegetic nation as being not only divided

between ethnic groups, but that the cultural roles available to the authentic autochthonous group are assigned by geography. This point has implications not only for the shape of the nation imagined, but also for the shape of resistance to the state purporting to lead or rule it as the case may be.

I also bring up the urban *prophète-fou* and the village *Masque* because they stand somewhat outside the temporal and logical rules established for the main characters, and, since they are both members of the oppressed ethnicity, because they also have no corresponding others among the ruling ethnicity, Aveugle culture having neither *Masque* figure nor *prophète-fou*. This constitutes the novel's only example of a binary between something and nothing, and opens two non-mutually exclusive interpretations: 1. that only the oppressed ethnicity is authentic in that it maintains a traditional culture with working links to the magical, 2. that the distinction the text is inviting readers to draw is less between ethnicities (the dominant ethnic group having analogs neither for the *Masque* nor for the *prophète-fou* as a binary based on parallel ethnicities would predict) as it is between the structures of power upholding the relative positions of the ethnicities involved. The Aveugles have the force of political, military and economic clout, and therefore have no need to maintain traditions which would base their power more in belief and mysticism—faith and magic being the only powers the Autres have left available to them. It is telling, then, that *Masque* is able to convert *Akissi* from Aveugle but powerful to Autre but solidary—her quest to learn about the Autres was motivated by a personal curiosity and a disgust with her own roots, but after her conversion, her motivation to return to the king was as an emissary in selfless service of all the Autres. It is perhaps even more telling, also, that it is not *Karim* himself who is able to foment a revolution, but rather the *prophète-fou*.

In a chapter entitled “La descente aux enfers,” Akissi hears the fou address the boiling urban crowd, angry at the imprisonment of Karim, as if the words are for her ears only:

Il faut durer. Il faut résister. Il faut renverser les rôles et créer des vies nouvelles.
Ne me parlez pas d’utopie ! Ne me parlez pas de rêve ! Ne me parlez pas de chimères !
Nous cherchons tous un équilibre dans ce monde hostile...

Écoutez ! Le malheur nous frappera encore et les rebondissements de l’histoire
seront nombreux, mais nous finirons par emprisonner l’injustice ! Il nous faut le courage
! Il nous faut le refus !

Levez-vous !

Séchez vos larmes, séchez vos larmes !

Avancez, vous qui portez le courage !

Approchez, vous qui domptez la vie !

Venez, vous qui avez des nerfs d’acier !

Il nous faut

Des guerriers de l’espoir ! (117)

The result is an immediate revolt followed by a repression so swift that witnesses can’t remember whether it was shots fired first or stones thrown first. And the violence predictably begets more violence but finally ends with the oppressed Autres effectively reversing roles with the Aveugles. So effectively, in fact, that the Autres end the novel piercing their seeing eyes with blades to consummate their arrival at the cultural height of the Aveugles, now able to operate at the same level of corruption as their predecessors. The warriors of hope become the

agents of just another “rebondissement” of history, and all due to the ineffable rantings of a fou respected and listened to because of his “langue déliée”.

Partout où il allait, on disait qu’il était fou, on disait qu’il était sage, on disait que sa langue déliée savait d’innombrables poèmes, des chansons, des proverbes et bien d’autres choses encore, et que lui seul avait la manière de les dire et de les chanter avec une telle passion. Sa voix avait un son continu qui plaisait aux oreilles et donnait envie d’en entendre davantage. (42)

This griotic figure, master of all forms of oral literature, harkens us back to the author’s chosen epigraphs, and the interpretive stance they invite from the beginning when considered as part of the text themselves. Separated by back-to-back pages, Tadjó first cites canonical French author Gide from his satirical novel Paludes in which an aspiring young writer accomplishes little while participating in the late 19th Century literary salons. Gide’s hero appears to sing the praises of the writer whose imagination can capture the deepest of emotions in words:

“...Toutes les angoisses d’une poitrinaire dans une chambre trop petite, d’un mineur qui veut remonter vers le jour, et du pêcheur de perles qui sent peser sur lui tout le poids des sombres ondes de la mer ! Toute l’oppression de Plaute ou de Samson tournant la meule, de Sisyphe roulant le rocher ; tout l’étouffement d’un peuple en esclavage – entre autres peines celles-là toutes, je les ai toutes connues.”

From such a provenance, it’s hard to tell if Tadjó is indexing the irony of Gide’s original, thereby undermining the epigraph’s apparent éloge of the writer’s power and role, or if she is

instead divorcing Gide's text from its context for placement in her own text as a serious endorsement of her position as author. Each case in the gidian citation refers to a being of exception reduced to suffering, the overall message being that the writer's role is to comprehend all from the heights to the depths, and by extension, that the writers task, and literature's role is therefore to communicate the truth of the "peines". The epigraphs on the flipside of the Gide page are both of non-canonical provenance and corroborate this interpretation:

“ Si l’histoire que je raconte est vraie, ils ont dit vrai. Si elle n’est pas vraie, je n’ai pas menti, ils ont menti. ” Parole Akan.

“ Ici, il n’y a plus d’espoir, il ne reste que la colère. ” Parole peinte sur les murs de Calcutta.

Taken all together, these epigraphs prepare readers to accept the storyteller as a being of exception whose role is the transmission of an unpleasant truth, and it is precisely on this distinction between literary and non-literary agents that Tadjou articulates a position of privileged clarity which gets taken up in later writings. For the present novel, the binary constitution of textual elements must therefore include the cultural producer and the cultural participants as heads and tails of the same coin. By extension of the analogies, the Masque and the prophète-fou both accomplish the critical speech-acts of conversion necessary for cultural change to commence: Akissi converts from Aveugle to Autre, and the urban masses convert from victims to revolutionaries—all through the application of a literary influence. True, the initial results of the revolution appear to foretell a never-ending reversal of thesis and antithesis, such that violence and repression continue cyclically, but the hope embodied in Akissi's bi-ethnic twins

points to a generation which will be able to ultimately synthesize the dialectic and escape the cycle. And it is this hope that the writer and diegetic writer figures ultimately provide. Tadjó's Le royaume aveugle encourages a belief in the power of new generations to provide solutions to suffering beyond the binding binaries of which her nation and other African nations are composed.

Reversals and exits from binary logics also form the building blocks from which Tadjó constructs her next novel in our purview: Champs de bataille et d'amour. Published in 1999—four years after Bédié's official espousing of Ivoirité as state doctrine, year leading up to his ouster in a coup d'état—this novel's binaries center less around ethnicity and cultural identity, and much more around race as it pertains to cultural identity. Detailing her thought processes for interviewer Éloïse Brezault in 2005, Tadjó details an awareness of her choice in subject matter of a mixed race couple with agonistic provenance as well as an awareness of the play to which she submits the binaries:

Cette femme [blanche] qui vient d'un village - et je l'ai fais exprès pour montrer que les Blancs ne vivent pas tous dans des villes ! C'est Eloka [l'Africain] qui vient de la ville ! – [elle] épouse les maux de l'Afrique ! (4)

Again, the analyst not being obliged to take the author's meta-discussion of her own work at face value, it is nonetheless worthwhile to note that binaries are in play as much in this novel as they were in Le Royaume aveugle, and that they take an interesting turn exactly where Tadjó points out herself in this interview. Champs de bataille et d'amour is the story of Eloka

and Aimée, he being an urban African intellectual, and she being a rural French housewife. At the end of her father's slow death due to illness, Aimée receives a visiting Eloka who immediately brings her back to his home where they marry. Eloka and Aimée quickly form so intimate a relationship of trust and sharing that Eloka discovers one night that he no longer desires her sexually, she having become like a sister to him. This produces a profound crisis of identity in Eloka, such that he leaves behind his life as a university intellectual and travels back to his home village where he has a brief and immediately regretted affair with a more "traditional" village woman. Aimée has struggles of her own adjusting to urban life and applies herself to philanthropic causes as a means to regenerating meaning in her otherwise lonely and directionless existence, lost in the mass of less fortunate humanity of the city as she is. Learning of Eloka's infidelity does not drive her away from him, however, and she sacrifices bits of herself to allow him to overcome his guilt, her love being stronger than his broken promises, but eventually she comes to realize that despite her love for him, there is a gulf of solitude that separates them. Given the opportunity to cheat in turn, Aimée rather boldly chooses not to indulge the advances of a potential new lover, but instead contents herself with reciprocating the feelings of lust without their consummation. The novel ends with each of the two protagonists reflecting on their respective solitude and yet also on their hope for bridging it, and then in a final chapter their thoughts dissolve into the realization of a common fear, a common goal in overcoming it, and in the narrator's verbal imagery of a sunrise after a cleansing rainfall, the slow tracking of the hot sun throughout the day, fisherman in partnership with the calm sea, bird flight consolidating the serenity of the moment and a red sunset—in other words a peaceful, natural harmony beyond the interior struggles of humanity.

The very title of this novel not only suggests an antagonistic framework for the plot and characters, but also a discussion of the frameworks themselves—Champs de bataille et d’amour pointing up the contention possible in stories of love, and also the fields themselves within which such struggles are played out. As such, an in depth look at the binaries composing the text again proves an interesting point of ingress into the interpretations the text licenses. And despite the fact that Champs de bataille et d’amour, like its predecessor, doesn’t make overt reference to the Côte d’Ivoire as the African nation of its imagining, there is both much to suggest that textual elements correspond to components of national composition, and much to point forward to future novels as more and more insistent interventions into the debate about the meaning of Ivoirité.

On all levels of content, this novel is an expressive examination of the tension between the incommensurability of subjective experience and the sharing of human existence in a loving relationship. Even the schematic plot summary above shows characters searching for completion in one another and failing ultimately yet retaining hope for a certain possibility of approaching the ideal of a true sharing and fulfillment. And yet, the analyst can find certain structures conveying this content which can reveal the text’s attention to larger political questions in much the way Jameson prescribes when he asserts that that African texts:

...even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic--necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (69, original emphases).

While the above quote may be controversial on many levels, and while one is not obliged to agree on the form the political dimension of texts may take, or even with Jameson's assertion that such an analysis can always be undertaken, this particular novel falls in line quite nicely. For example, similar to the way Boni's Les baigneurs du lac rose mixes a love story with a political comment, the very fact that Tadjó can conceive of a plot about love and the struggles of male-female relationships in an African setting where it is hard to avoid discussion of rampant poverty and oppressive political conditions is in and of itself a political statement. First, the love stories' refusal to engage politics overtly suggests an underlying lack of faith in political engagement. And without taking this latter point away entirely, when looking through the narrower lens of its comment on the Côte d'Ivoire, Tadjó's capacity to imagine a story about relationships also underscores the relative peace and prosperity to be found there—the nation thereby imagined as providing a setting of a peace sufficient for love stories to be told. Of course, by the title, there is a dichotomy established and wherein love is explicitly paired with battles, with both occurring over fields—ambiguous loci for the cultivation and growth of peaceable things as well as for the rough-shod trampling of violence and armed conflict.

Beyond these macro-allegorical readings there is also plenty of material for a more detailed discussion of analogies between the novel's content and extra-textual referents. Tadjó's choice to involve a racial component in the articulation of her two main characters makes Franco-Ivorian relations an obvious place to draw comparisons. However, the careful reversal of tropes Tadjó operates—the female in this set of analogies representing France by her race, but preferring a rural, anti-metropolitan culture—makes an allegorical reading of Champs de bataille et d'amour both impossible in the strict sense of establishing one to one correspondences

between fictional elements and non-fictional referents, and at the same time interesting in that the points upon which strict analogies break down are also significant to the framing of her imagined Côte d'Ivoire.

For example, the Côte d'Ivoire can be distinguished from many of France's former colonies by the closeness of relationship it held with France post-Independence. The Côte d'Ivoire as a state made heavy use of Coopérants early in independence compared to Burkina Faso or the Congo. It promoted la Francophonie as stridently as did Senghor's Senegal, but did Senegal one better by passing legislation barring the translation of the country's name out of the French, and by refusing to establish nationwide curricula in any of its 60 native languages. Abidjan, the Côte d'Ivoire's economic capital, has earned well its moniker: the Paris of Africa. The marriage of black and white characters, especially troubled as it is along dimensions of culture and communication, lends itself to analogy with this close relationship between France and the Côte d'Ivoire. However, in order for the power relations between the binaries to flow in the correct direction the analogous characters would have to be a white metropolitan man married to a rural black woman. Can Tadjó's reversal of some of these binaries be read as a feminist gesture within the Franco-Ivorian analogy suggested by the marriage? Although Tadjó herself expresses concern about being too easily co-opted by Western feminism, Ken Harrow, in analysis of Tadjó's À Vol d'oiseau—a novel written too early to fall under my study's purview—demonstrates an applicability of Western feminist thought to African texts by female authors. His insightful 2002 study Less Than One and Double finds that when adequately adjusted for cultural and historical specificities, the French psychoanalytic and semiotic strains of feminist tradition—as found in the thought of Julia Kristéva and Luce Irigaray, heavily inflected as their thought was by Jacques Lacan, be it in opposition to his theories of the

relationship between the subject and language—can shed light on Tadjó, Boni, and others. Particularly in relation to Tadjó, he finds that:

If Butler's political frame [captured in the thought that "new possibilities for gender...contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms" (145)] seems slightly out of kilter with African priorities at times, still her analysis permits us to approach the important issues for African feminism, and for African women's writing, in ways that seem vital and productive...often turning [the tools of theoretical analysis themselves] back against the theorist when seen in their "other" light (309).

Harrow thus justifies attention to Butler on binaries and continues to analyze Tadjó's prose as breaking down both the binaries of which she imagines her particularly African society as being composed of, and the theory of opposing binaries itself as strategically employed in the West. It is therefore these very reversals and their breaking-points which make for fruitful analytical objects.

The other major breaking point of any analogy between the text's presentation of Eloka and Aimée and the real-life relations between Côte d'Ivoire and France consists in the gender-inflected reactions of each character to the impossibility of making each other happy, or even truly understanding each other's subjective experience. Eloka, as the African male in the equation, does not flatly represent the Côte d'Ivoire so much as he corresponds to the element within that nation's society, or of any other African nation's society, which experiences that sort of self-alienation which comes from being immersed in the hegemonic French language and

culture. His troubles begin in chapter one, when his sexual relations with France-figure Aimée come into question:

Plus il la contemplait, plus il se rendait compte que les gens disaient vrai : ils se ressemblaient [lui et Aimée]. Cela le troublait profondément, lui donnait l'impression de se regarder dans un miroir.

Une nuit, il prit peur de cette ressemblance et voulut lui faire l'amour comme au tout début de leur vie commune. Mais il n'y parvint pas.

Il fondit en larmes et pleura avec elle. Il pleura sans elle. Il pleura plusieurs fois. Toute la tristesse de son corps. Mais à la fin de ses pleurs, il sut qu'il avait maintenant une sœur.

Sa sœur bien-aimée. À tout jamais sa sœur. (20)

Despite their obvious and visible racial differences, others diagnose such a close resemblance of ideas, attitudes, and cultural values that, for Eloka, the likeness begins to border on the physical. He sees himself as if in a mirror when looking at Aimée, and this resemblance alienates him from himself—his own cultural identity—so deeply that it drains all *eros* from his love for Aimée, leaving behind only a filial kind of love. And in parallel with this impotence caused by the self-alienation produced through too intimate contact with his racial and cultural other, Eloka also comes to a turning point in his intellectual life as university professor.

Il se sentait vidé par toutes ces années d'enseignement. La lente dégradation de son idéal. Il avait compris qu'il n'était maître de rien, à part de ses doutes...Mais les

toilettes de l'université sentaient mauvais, dégageaient une odeur d'urine si forte que cela l'incommodait dans son travail. Comme si ses convictions se décomposaient dans la puanteur alentour. Cette odeur qui lui rappelait qu'il avait échoué dans son métier et qu'il avait trahi les étudiants tout en se trahissant lui-même. (45)

All these identity crises lead Eloka to eventually attempt a re-attachment with his traditional roots. But here, in his home village, is where the alienation is felt most poignantly:

Il se sentait ligoté par tout ce que les autres attendaient de lui. Chaque jour, ils exigeaient plus. Il fallait qu'il soit des leurs tout en sachant les sortir de l'engourdissement dans lequel ils s'étaient laissés prendre.

Mais en vérité, lui aussi leur demandait beaucoup : être totalement accepté. Quel que soit l'endroit où il irait et le temps qu'il mettrait à revenir, il voulait être certain qu'il serait bien accueilli. Savoir qu'ils lui garderaient toujours une place. (105)

Eloka, as the urbanized African in the equation, travels back to the village to re-connect with his roots, but discovers not only that authenticity is irrecoverable because he has become so similar to Aimée, the France-figure, that only illicit relationships can result from his contact with "traditional" women, but also, as this citation more explicitly states, that his ethnic ties are no longer those of kinship, but rather mutual dependency. His burdensome obligation is to live up to expectations placed on him because of his relative material success, but he has become such an outsider because of this very success that his own demand that they accept him as one of theirs proves more onerous than his own obligations. Eloka, therefore cannot flatly represent the

Côte d'Ivoire or any other African nation, but his relationship with his own cultural in-group does coincide with the common trope of alienation in African narratives since colonization⁶⁷. Eloka, then, can be read as representing the subset of Africans dealing with an existential solitude—of whom it can be said, like Eloka, “[il] savait qu’il portait en lui, avec lui, l’exil”. In his emblematic reading, Eloka’s alienation is brought on by his relationship with a figure of the West through a failed attempt to re-establish cultural authenticity and through the traditionally masculine roles of protection and providing. This reading affords the critic an analogous way of reading the African nation as fraught with the alienation resulting from its contact with the West—as unable to return to authenticity and yet as bound to certain traditional roles by the desire to retain a traditional identity (156). And the reading of Eloka as figure for the West-contaminated African is confirmed as Eloka discovers that Aimée has underlined portions of a book she had been reading which corresponded with his own understanding of his position in society:

Un livre ouvert attira son attention. Il le prit et lut les passages qu’elle avait soulignés au crayon.

“ Les intellectuels aspirent à se substituer à des élites défailantes afin de réorganiser la société par le haut. ”

“ ...Les intellectuels se veulent au-dessus de la bourgeoisie et du prolétariat. ”

⁶⁷ The colonial resistance period bildungsromans from Africa and the Caribbean alike concentrate heavily on this subject. Camara Laye’s L’Enfant noir, Cheik Amidou Kane’s L’Aventure ambiguë, Mouloud Feraoun’s Fils du pauvre, and Joseph Zobel’s Rue case-nègres all discuss the alienation felt by a new generation of African children growing up with Western educations. Aimé Césaire’s famous book-length poem Cahier d’un retour au pays natal centers on the alienation from one’s own culture resulting from a position of marginality both nationally with respect to France and racially with respect to whites. Aminata Sow-Fall writes possibilities for reconnection occasioned by alienation in Douceurs du bercail, and alienation in the diaspora is evident in C’est le soleil qui m’a brûlée by Calixthe Bayala, to cite female authors who deal also with gender-based forms of alienation.

“ ...L’intelligentsia en vient à se représenter à la manière des leaders populistes comme un trait d’union entre l’État et la société, puis entre le peuple et l’État. ” (136)

Eloka has become an intellectual, a member of a class of elite who apply top-down pressure on society by placing themselves above the working classes, yet below the ruling class so as to justify critiques of the rulers. He, along with the group he represents seeks absolution for his elite-hood by presenting himself as the hyphen between the state and the populace, in opposition to the former with whom he nevertheless shares cultural affinities, and in solidarity with the latter from whom he is nevertheless culturally distinct.

In a similar way, Aimée’s more feminized reaction to the solitude between herself and Eloka simultaneously provides both a suggestive break in the easy analogy of Eloka to Africa and Aimée to France and also an insight into Tadjou’s conception of the Ivorian nation, typified by the Côte d’Ivoire. In contrast to Eloka, who reaches inward and perceives his solitude from Aimée as a crisis of self, Aimée immediately reaches outward to solve the same solitude. Her more rural upbringing compounds her alienation from Eloka since her urban surroundings leave her solitary in an additional way—alone among many as she is, she fears one day that “elle se laisserait engloutir par la foule” and that “elle était en train de se perdre dans cette ville, de se noyer lentement” (29). Her instinctive response is to find ways to connect with the faceless crowd, to get involved in charitable efforts, to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of others—in a word: to nurture.

Elle voulait un enfant.

Car elle était à présent convaincue qu'il lui fallait concevoir. Le plus tôt possible. Cela faisait trop longtemps qu'ils attendaient. Elle avait peur de laisser son corps s'abîmer, de ne plus pouvoir donner sa force.

Et elle était certaine qu'une naissance bannirait la tristesse, briserait l'engrenage des jours et ferait d'Eloka, un homme entier. (143)

More than the mere ticking of some interior or self-absorbed biological clock, the context of the omniscient narrator's musings on Aimée's desire for a child couch it rather in a discourse on giving, on sacrifice, on donating her strength, on completing Eloka rather than completing herself. And although the sadness and the boredom of everyday life with Eloka are felt by Aimée, it is less her personal reaction she hopes to banish here, as it is the impasse in the relationship with him. As in Le royaume aveugle, Tadjou writes a hope for overcoming an impasse contained in a new generation, but here in Champs de bataille et d'amour, the hope is different in three significant ways. First it does not spring from the representative of the culturally indigenous, but rather from the France-figure, the desire in this case originating from the outsider. Secondly, just as the new generation is never actually brought into being in this novel, the realization of Aimée's and France's hopes for a true connection with the African counterpart in their respective realms must lie elsewhere. Finally, the nature of the impasse and the direction Aimée is seeking rest along different arcs. Akissi of Le royaume aveugle aims for an end to cyclical revolution owing to self-reproducing economic inequities, whereas Aimée's concern here is to undo a deadlocked lack of communication, to succeed in the completion of herself through completing Eloka, African cultural figure. The false hope of France-figure Aimée, then, is that reproduction will produce a hybridity able to both satisfy France's own

repressed need for self-sacrifice in the face of the sadness that the impossibility of true dialog produces and Africa's alienation at having interiorized the hegemonic culture to the point that Eloka himself is not the one seeking traditional wholeness of manhood through procreation. In this way, in all of these contrasts, despite an overt attempt to complicate received French-African binaries, Tadjou cannot avoid inscribing elements of French influence over its former colonies into her novel.

Aimée also deals with an adulterous situation in an instructive way which is different than that sought after by Eloka. The passage deserves citation at length:

Elle avait des images d'elle-même qui ne correspondaient plus à rien et c'était un peu à travers lui qu'elle espérait se reconnaître. Il était le frère qui ne l'avait pas délaissée, l'amant qui ne l'avait jamais méprisée, l'ami qui lui était resté fidèle.

Aussi, quand un autre homme lui offrit un amour aux couleurs différentes, une étreinte incroyablement douce dont la saveur la prit de plein fouet, elle se détacha de lui et dit tout simplement : " Je te désire, est-ce que cela ne suffit pas ? "...

" Moi aussi, je sens le même ravissement monter en moi et les mots que tu prononces, les gestes que tu fais, ne font que le rendre plus profond. Mais je suis une lâche, continua-t-elle en baissant les yeux. J'ai lu les livres, j'ai (162) été au cinéma, j'ai écouté les nouvelles et j'ai vu que la vie était pleine d'histoires qui tournaient mal. Ne me demande pas de comprendre ta passion mieux que tu ne le fais toi-même. Tu dois réapprendre à allumer le feu de ton existence, aimer sans quémander. Te dévêtir sans crainte.

Je ne répondrai pas à ton appel. Et j'essaierai d'oublier que je suis comme toi, exactement comme toi. ”

Alors l'homme comprit qu'il l'avait perdue avant même de l'avoir conquise.

Aimée voulait garder l'amour, l'amadouer, l'apprivoiser afin qu'il lui donne tous ses fruits. Elle voulait en faire un hommage à la liberté, un radeau sur les flots tumultueux du temps. Elle voulait l'offrir à Eloka. (161)

This passage serves to contrast Eloka's more active adultery and subsequent shame since Aimée, by her own sense of morality, is guilty of no evil act, and is satisfied with the feeling of forbidden lust in and of itself without having to act on it. Though entertaining the desire, Aimée virtuously rebuffs the potential lover in favor of the emotional victory of dominating such feelings in order to offer the sacrifice of this love of different colors to her husband, to affirm her liberty by choosing not to exercise it, to savor the products of a true love ripened through the mastery of it. Interestingly, Aimée's own voice, which Tadjou makes rare throughout the novel in favor of the more thought-exposing omniscient narrator, is rife with the language of communication, language and literature. Addressing and rebuffing her other love interest, Aimée speaks of “*les mots que tu prononces*” as if it's the form of their sound and not the content of their message which she finds appealing. She has *read* the *books*, been to the *movies*, heard the *news*, and seen that life is full of *stories*—stories which end badly. She recognizes that the nameless and ill-fated suitor has a passion for her which he himself cannot adequately *communicate*, and which she will never fully *understand* either. She decides, in the end, not to accept his *interpellation*. This vocabulary of linguistics and literature—words, pronouncing, reading, books, film, news, stories, understanding, and not responding to a call—all betray a

preoccupation with culture bound up in the frustration of her love with Eloka, which she nevertheless clings to. Here also, since France staying faithful to the Côte d'Ivoire is not the expected trope following the analogy Aimée = France, the allegory does not hold on the surface. And yet, at this very point of breakdown in the allegory, the impossibility of not inscribing the rhetoric of language and literature in the story of Aimée's willful choice to remain faithful with Eloka points up the centrality of language and culture as key defining tension, not only in their relationship, but in the African space in which they dwell.

As a final note on this novel, it is important to observe that the form Tadjó chooses also contains significance and also participates in the elucidation of a point of view on the composition of the Ivorian nation. First, much the same could be said about Tadjó's Africanized version of *écriture féminine* that was noted about Boni's prose in a prior chapter. Tadjó uses an omniscient narrator who focuses on a single character's voice and thoughts for the length of the chapter, with exceptions for ritual placement of prose-poetry, the first-person voice of a Rwandan refugee, and a few chapters where the focus on Aimée or Eloka blends into a single "they". The chapters themselves are sometimes constructed as continuations of the plot lines of the previous chapter, and at other times mark logical discontinuities where new settings, characters, and perspectives slowly come into focus over a few paragraphs. Following Uetto-Békrou, this mixing of genres and experimental-novel feel is associated with a feminist kind of writing which subverts and resists the patriarchal order of the word which more standard narrative unity in content and form would require, but it is also hybrid and postcolonial in that it also resists and subverts Western norms of feminism. It should not be forgotten that the free sequencing of multiple genres within a unified work can be read as much one way as the other:

the French repertoire is expanded via the addition of “new”/“other” oral forms as much as this African orality subverts the French literary norms. Tadjó herself is quite conscious of this miscegenation built intentionally into the process of writing her novels as she explains to Stephen Gray in an interview concerning Le royaume aveugle (which nevertheless applies in every point to the current novel in question as well):

People say it is like the nouveau roman, very discontinuous, or consists of the prose-poems going back to Baudelaire and Max Jacob and all that sort of thing, but also it goes back to oral literature, which always used a mélange of genres, freely switching from one mode to the other. (2003, 146)

The formal hybridity of the text, then, baked into the very generic norms which the novel both flouts and yet still loosely conforms to, applies quite brilliantly to our question of the shape of the nation underlying the novel’s imaginings. The hybridity of the Côte d’Ivoire of 1999 could scarcely find a more apt analog than a novel formed out of such. Although applicable to the postcolonial condition in general, the neither purely African nor purely Western literary work of mixed genre in question here is hybrid in the same way that the culture of the Côte d’Ivoire, as institutionalized in state and other societal structures, as lived everyday through the use of language and through other meaningful interchanges, is neither purely traditional anymore nor purely modern. Published in Abidjan in the year of the Christmas-day coup against Bédié (1999), this hybrid aspect of the novel also points to a particular stance on the debate over the definition of Ivoirité. Since Ivoirité’s effect is to emphasize differences of degree in national belonging, a novel of formal hybridity dealing with content on impasses of communication reads

as a warning against divisions and reads as a promotion of inclusion. This claim I make especially in light of the closing chapter's *mise en garde*—where the narrator moves from an already rare focus on Eloka and Aimée as forming the single unit “they” to the sole example of “them” forming a “we”:

Ils avaient peur de ce qui était écrit sur les murs de la ville, dans les rues, dans le pays entier : nous nous faisons du mal. Nous nous dévorons. Nous profanons nos autels. Nous courons tous une course solitaire. (173)

The entire country having now become the clear antecedent of the first-person plural pronoun, the warning of Tadjó against national dissolution becomes the equally clear subtext of the entire novel. A warning to “us”, Ivorians, alienating “ourselves” from “our” culture, “our” altars, “our” solidarity is equivalent to the solitary incommensurability that Eloka and Aimée feel, as well as equivalent to self-inflicted pain and even potentially anthropophagous violence. In Tadjó's mind, Ivoirité leads down that path.

As a transition between Champs de bataille et d'amour and L'Ombre d'Imana, Tadjó's next major narrative project not intended for children's eyes, it is instructive to examine the extended episode in the former where Aimée meets, learns the story of, and feels unable to truly comprehend a Rwandan refugee. Tadjó spends several chapters framing Aimée's reaction to the Rwandan woman, as well as telling the latter's story in her own voice—a narrative tactic she employs rarely over the entire novel, preferring the omniscient narrator instead. Aimée begins the stretch of chapters asking Eloka to help her get over images that haunt her because she could

not help, and feels like she left the Rwandaise abandoned. The haunting stayed because the Rwandaise told her story in everyday words, but the silences between them were “habité par le vertige...peuplés de corps défigurés, de cadavres en putréfaction” (70). And the effect of words and inhabited silences are surprising to Aimée:

Je croyais pouvoir l’écouter comme on écoute la vérité des autres, la réalité lointaine des souffrances étrangères. Mais sa voix a percé mon âme, laissé des trous dans mon cœur... Je croyais simplement écouter ses cauchemars et voilà qu’elle s’est emparée d’un morceau de ma vie. Tu comprends ? Je voulais juste entendre ce qu’elle avait à dire, rien de plus. Mais je suis maintenant prise au piège d’une vérité qui me broie. (70-71)

Aimée’s reaction to the Rwandan refugee makes her want to cut her own flesh and watch the blood run down just to lighten the weight of her own existence. It makes her reflect on how disconnected and even treasonous she’d been, never fully committing to anything, always keeping as many options open as possible, always looking to cover her retreat. And it makes her want to escape the images of horror and suffering in her mind by reading other newspapers, other books. But once the images are burned in, they stick, and “tout ce qu’elle découvrait [dans les autres livres] ressemblait à des fragments de souffrance ” (77). And as much as these remorseful reactions of trauma as if by proxy, or by solidarity, are apt to describe some aspects of the French response to the genocide—in keeping with the analysis of Aimée as France-figure—it is ultimately in Aimée’s thoughts that we find the heart of the thought Tadjò opens her next work with, in which it becomes a warning from an African to Africans. The comparison of Aimée’s

final analysis on the effect of Rwanda to Tadjó's introductory words in L'Ombre d'Imana is instructive:

[Malgré les histoires de courage extraordinaire après les massacres] les graines de la solitude restent plantées dans la terre et envahissent les jardins d'herbes folles, d'herbes poison, d'herbes malodorantes...les graines de la solitude prennent racine dans les fissures des murs. (Champs, 78)

Cela faisait longtemps que je rêvais d'aller au Rwanda. Non, "rêver" n'est pas le mot. Cela faisait longtemps que je voulais exorciser le Rwanda...Je ne voulais pas que le Rwanda reste un cauchemar éternel, une peur primaire... Je parlais avec une hypothèse : ce qui s'était passé nous concernait tous. Ce n'était pas uniquement l'affaire d'un peuple dans le cœur noir de l'Afrique. Oublier le Rwanda après le bruit et la fureur signifiait devenir borgne, aphone, handicapée. C'était marcher dans l'obscurité, en tendant les bras pour ne pas entrer en collision avec le futur. (Ombre, 13)

In both cases, the Rwandan genocide has an effect beyond Rwanda, something that demands a change, a response, leaves a hole in the heart, threatens the future if not dealt with. The essential difference is that for Aimée the emphasis falls on the repeated "solitude", whereas for the Tadjó of L'Ombre d'Imana, it is rather a point of unification, concerning us all. It is the "nous" in the latter passage which captivates because of its ambiguity. Without a clarified referent, the text equally licenses a "we", the black race, a "we", the African peoples, a "we",

humankind—and whoever “we” are taken to be, it is all of us who should be concerned by the events of Rwanda, by the meanings in the silences of its retelling.

L’Ombre d’Imana is Tadjó’s most commented work⁶⁸. A travel narrative consisting of multiple testimonials on Rwandan events fictionalized to varying degrees, it is no wonder it has caught the attention of genocide scholars and literary critics alike. Concentrating its content so exclusively on the Rwandan context, this narrative has little it can directly bring to a study of specifically Ivorian nationality such as this, and yet this “nous [concerne] tous” phrase licenses a reading of the entire work as containing lessons for the prevention of such dramatically divisive violence elsewhere, and especially in Tadjó’s home country. In her own words, on its applicability elsewhere, published after five years of Ivoirité and within months of the Côte d’Ivoire dealing with its only successful *coup d’état* since independence, Tadjó says:

⁶⁸ Many studies dealing with the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath reference L’Ombre d’Imana. A non-exhaustive list includes dissertations, book chapters and periodical articles, of which the following: Marczewski, Amy S. "Remembering Together: Francophone African Literature's Re-Imagining of the Rwandan Genocide." Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences 68.11 (May 2008): 4705-4705.; Chiwengo, Ngwarsungu. "When Wounds and Corpses Fail to Speak: Narratives of Violence and Rape in Congo (DRC)." Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 28.1 (2008): 78-92.; Griffin, Jenelle. "Responding to the Shadows: Reimagining Subjectivity in Tadjó's L'Ombre d'Imana." Women in French Studies 16 (2008): 113-126.; Ní Loingsigh, Aedín. "Lying to Tell the Truth: Fiction and the Rwandan Genocide in Véronique Tadjó's L'Ombre d'Imana." Postcolonial Violence, Culture and Identity in Francophone Africa and the Antilles. 83-102. Oxford, England: Peter Lang, 2007.; Semujanga, Josias. "Le Témoignage de l'itsembabwoko par la fiction: L'Ombre d'Imana." Présence Francophone: Revue Internationale de Langue et de Littérature 69 (2007): 106-134.; Lee, Sonia. "The Emergence of the Essayistic Voice in Francophone African Women Writers: Véronique Tadjó's L'Ombre d'Imana." The Modern Essay in French: Movement, Instability, Performance. 77-86. Oxford, England: Peter Lang, 2005.; Bazié, Isaac. "Au seuil du chaos: Devoir de mémoire, indicible et piège du devoir dire." Présence Francophone: Revue Internationale de Langue et de Littérature 63 (2004): 29.; Cazenave, Odile. "Writing the Rwandan Genocide: African Literature and the Duty of Memory." Reconstructing Societies in the Aftermath of War: Memory, Identity, and Reconciliation. 70-84. Boca Raton, FL: Bordighera, 2004.; McNee, Lisa. "Their Voices Cry Out from the Earth: The Rwandan Genocide in the West African Imagination." The Creative Circle: Artist, Critic, and Translator in African Literature. 165-186. Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2003.; and Lebon, Cécile. "Véronique Tadjó: Voyages en tous genres littéraires." Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud 146 (Dec. 2001): 50-52.

Oui, je suis allée au Rwanda mais le Rwanda est aussi chez moi...Et j'ai peur quand j'entends parler chez moi d'appartenance, de non-appartenance. Diviser. Façonner des étrangers. Inventer l'idée du rejet. Comment l'identité ethnique s'apprend-elle ? D'où surgit cette peur de l'Autre qui entraîne la violence ? (49)

Again in this passage the “chez moi” is ambiguous. At the time, Tadjó was a resident of South Africa where questions of division and exclusionary rhetoric were also a huge part of the collective consciousness. However, to the extent the “chez moi” could also be considered her country of provenance—for which the case is actually stronger, the debates surrounding Ivoirité being much more current and intense at the time of publication—L'Ombre d'Imana should also be read as the cautionary tale of a Rwanda parallel to the Côte d'Ivoire in the most salient potentially violent essentials. Specifically, it is the divisive rhetoric, the identity politics taken to the extreme, which threatens to reproduce Rwanda in the Côte d'Ivoire, the communication of inclusionary and exclusionary distinctions between peoples living in a shared geographical space. Not the rejection of an ethnic group per se, but rather the very idea of ethnic identity forming the basis for exclusion, the fear of the Other, links the two countries in a way L'Ombre d'Imana, as a whole, seeks to address.

Tadjó's real life relationships with African authors across the continent afforded her an invitation to spend two months in Rwanda along with nine other writers from varying African countries under the auspices of the 1998 Fest' Africa project entitled “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire”⁶⁹. The goal of the project was for each writer to live in the freshly scarred country (the genocides having been perpetrated a scant four years prior), and to produce texts based on

⁶⁹ There are a variety of studies of different aspects of this fairly unique literary collection. Those concentrating on Tadjó's contribution include Griffin, Lee and Marczewski.

the testimonies they absorbed during that time, but not as journalists or historians, but rather as writers. Tadjó's resulting text, *L'Ombre d'Imana*, is divided into six chapters many of which contain a multiplicity of genres. It is structured with a more lengthy travelogue-styled chapter at either end of the four middle chapters. The travelogue sections are complex in their choice of style, perspective, and subject matter, but are generally unified by the ostensible voice of Tadjó herself both documenting her travels and giving an account of people she met in Rwanda, five years after the genocide, in fragments of stories, each with some connection to the Rwandan tragedy, each derived from testimonials. The four middle chapters, however, contain no dates, no place names, no journalistic style, and rather constitute a block of non-testimonial story fragments—or at least stories for which the trace of testimony has been effaced. In all of the chapters, these vignettes are admittedly fictionalized, and yet based on true stories, and Tadjó's choice of fragments covers a wide range of associations with the events, from Tutsi widows to Hutu executioners, from Hutu moderates forced to participate to Rwandan expatriates who missed the actual events but whose lives were still touched by them⁷⁰.

For the purposes of this study, because of Tadjó's fear of a second Rwanda potentially surfacing in the Côte d'Ivoire, it is sufficient to note that their general lesson—the text as a whole—is meant to apply to the Côte d'Ivoire, on the strength of the above quote alone. This overarching applicability therefore obviates the need for close reading of the individual

⁷⁰ From the previously cited Brezault interview I repeat the question and Tadjó's response:

Q. En racontant le génocide rwandais, B.B. Diop a choisi de rester au plus près de la réalité, de recueillir des témoignages. Monémbo va dans le sens contraire en prenant le parti pris du roman et de l'imaginaire. Comment vous situez-vous par rapport à ces deux écrivains ? Accordez-vous beaucoup de place à l'imaginaire ou avez-vous préféré, comme B.B. Diop, rester au plus près de la réalité ?

R. J'ai fait les deux... (Rires) La construction de mon dernier livre est celle d'un carnet de voyage. Mais elle est entrecoupée de choses fictionnelles. Ce sont des nouvelles qui sont du domaine de la fiction pure alors que dans le carnet de voyage, on suit un trajet. J'ai voulu aborder le thème sous différents angles. Je ne voulais pas l'aborder simplement du côté de la fiction car j'avais envie de dire tellement de choses ! C'est donc une manière de montrer différentes facettes...

vignettes. However, two of these do offer some interesting extra material to bolster the idea that all of Tadjó's narratives come from an imaginary in which the question of the nation somehow unavoidably figures.

First, the sole example of straight citation in her text, Tadjó quotes Hutu propaganda piece “Les dix commandements des Bahutus” in its entirety. She sandwiches it between the first-person vignette of a student whose peer group has been devastated in various ways by the events, and who sees a return to the political corruption and economic stagnation of the past and a third-person account of a place where Hutus about to be surrounded near the end of the genocide period fought with each other, then of Hutu refugees fleeing in fear of reprisals as if to highlight the cyclical nature of violence. Placing it here, amid stories of cyclical phenomena, and marking the legalistic and manifesto-like list of interdictions off stylistically as separate from the narratives surrounding it, Tadjó rhetorically underscores that rhetoric which should be excluded if violent divisiveness is to be avoided. Published at a time when the official discourse of Ivoirité had already produced a coup and, in the face of projected elections, was threatening to fracture the increasingly polarized electorate along ethnic and religious lines, L'Ombre d'Imana thus recognizes the potential of propaganda, and discourse in general to tragically exacerbate difference to the point of violence—a lesson directly applicable to the Côte d'Ivoire of the time. My introductory chapter detailed an Ivorian document which, although not pretending to the religious and legal registers, nevertheless sprung from the same propagandistic impulse as these ten commandments. Entitled L'Ivoirité, ou l'esprit du nouveau contrat social du Président H. K. Bédié, this collection of very short articles attempted to provide “scientific”, “historical” and “philosophical” support of various conceptions of the newly minted political buzzword : Ivoirité. As an official rhetoric, this collection of essays from various otherwise well respected members

of the intelligentsia is full of careful and cogent argument on the virtues of the diversity within the nation and of exhortations toward the kind of tolerant attitude that would tend to promote peace. But its sponsor was a partisan arm of the state and the very name under which the group was published (*Cellule Universitaire de Recherche, d'Enseignement et de Diffusion des Idées et Actions Politiques du Président Henri Konan Bédié* or CURDIPHE for short) was so starkly one-sided that the document's contents could hardly be taken at face value. The very fact that professors had aligned with the current power-holder in such an open and supportive way only underscored what the Ivorian population had perceived in the term *Ivoirité*—that it promoted neither tolerance nor diversity, but rather division and exclusion. It is this folk comprehension of the term and the movement supporting it which Tadjó's inclusion of this chapter aligns against—divisive and exclusionary propaganda is that which should be excluded from official rhetoric, or else a genocide may eventually result.

Secondly, in the non-testimonial chapters, one stands out for its trauma not having stemmed from the genocide. The chapter is broken into three sections which differ by voice. In the first section, Anastase, brother of Anastasie tells of his feelings of emptiness and loss at the news that his sister had been killed. The second takes the voice of Anastasie and completes the picture of the tragedy at the heart of her being: she had suffered an incestuous rape at his hands, and describes the imprisonment she felt in her own defiled body, now inhabited only by Evil, while puzzling over the absoluteness of her brother's lack of comprehension of the damage he'd done as she reads letters from him asking her forgiveness. In the final section we learn that in her flight from him, she had sought out the mortal danger of resisting one of the Hutu militias before the UN forces arrived, and that her second death, the official one, had finally occurred in the defense of Tutsis. The curious inclusion of a non-genocide-period rape among tales of

suffering otherwise so pointedly and directly stemming from the Rwandan tragedy points to an interpretation of this particular episode as metaphorical, or at least as having applicability beyond the Rwandan borders. And the fact that the violence of the rape which forms the core of Anastasie's separation from herself, from her kindred, is incestuous, only redoubles the darkness of the crime. That a member of the same family—who, by virtue of that kinship, should cultivate closeness, love, rapport—could be the author of such suffering, such division, is all the deeper, all the more unforgiveable, all the more deadly for the body and spirit of the victim. Anastasie's own words reacting to her brother's requests for her to forgive him, or at least to break her silence and respond to his apologies, are telling:

Comment osait-il écrire ces lignes, penser qu'ensemble, ils pouvaient encore avoir quelque chose en commun ? Elle avait la gorge serrée et la sensation d'avoir été frappée au visage. Elle avait peur. Allait-elle pouvoir sortir de ce labyrinthe ? Allait-elle pouvoir se retrouver ? “ Ne comprend-il pas tout le mal qu'il m'a fait ? Ne sait-il pas qu'il m'a détruite ? ” (76)

While the devastation and intensity of anguish of Anastasie is difficult to understate on a personal level, the question of why this particular story, imagined this particular way, is included in tales of Rwandan suffering finds at least one satisfying answer in an allegorical reading.

Earlier in the travel portion of the narrative, Tadjó explains pre-colonial Rwanda in terms of cultural kinship:

La même foi en un dieu suprême, Imana.

Un roi unique, le mwami, mi-homme, mi-dieu.

Les mêmes coutumes. La même langue, le kinyarwanda.

Les éléments fondamentaux : Dieu, le roi, la femme, la vache.

Et aussi, la nature et les guerriers. Puissance de la reine mère.

Having thus framed the ethnic groups in Rwanda as belonging to a single cultural unit with commonalities of a higher order, the nation post-Independence contained the potential for such a familial sort of unity. With the family analogous to the nation, then, this rape could hardly be more apt a representation of the violence of the massacres. The siblings representing the two major ethnic groups in Rwanda, Anastase's violent incest becomes emblematic for the unforgivable act of genocide, the fruits of which are an eternal separation and the impossibility of reconciliation. It is this system of metaphors which is directly applicable as a warning to the Ivorian nation in the sense that the thing to be avoided in the national family is the pitting against each other of its ethnic siblings.

The Côte d'Ivoire stopped short of genocide, and Tadjó's metaphor of the nation as a family with ethnic groups as siblings would not retain resonance with the Ivorian historical context if it were extended as far as the incestuous rape by which she depicts the Rwandan massacres. And yet the divisive impulse, terminating in such a bloodbath—such an extremely heinous familial betrayal in the figurative formulation—is something Tadjó sees, at least in embryonic form, in the Côte d'Ivoire. The inclusion of the Rwandan woman episode in Champs de bataille et d'amour shows that Tadjó's Côte d'Ivoire has something to learn from the hole in the heart resulting from the Rwandan tragedy. And her extended treatment of the Rwandan

stories in L'Ombre d'Imana points to an applicability of lessons and warnings to the Côte d'Ivoire as well. It should come as no surprise, then, that after the 1999 coup and 2000 contested elections, the full flare-up of civil war in 2002 should provoke, at least to some degree, Tadjó's creative treatment of the Ivorian nation head-on in her 2004 novella-length work Reine Pokou: Concerto pour un sacrifice. In a brief introduction, Tadjó uses an autobiographical narrator in an essayistic voice to frame what follows as a direct intervention into Ivorian identity, or rather as a cautionary exploration of the effects of the re-interpretation or re-writing of cultural roots and their narratives. The citation from my introductory chapter merits repetition and more detailed analysis:

La légende d'Abraha Pokou, reine baoulé, m'a été contée pour la première fois quand j'avais autour de dix ans. Je me souviens que l'histoire de cette femme sacrifiant son fils unique pour sauver son peuple avait frappé mon imagination de petite fille vivant à Abidjan. Je me représentais Pokou sous les traits d'une Madone noire.

Plus tard, au lycée, je retrouvai le récit du sacrifice, mais cette fois-ci dans mon livre d'histoire...Abraha Pokou prenait ainsi la stature d'une figure historique, héroïne-amazone conduisant son peuple vers la liberté.

Pokou grandit en moi. Je lui donnai un visage, une vie, des sentiments.

Plusieurs décennies plus tard, la violence et la guerre déferlèrent dans *notre* vie, rendant brusquement le futur incertain. Pokou m'apparut alors sous un jour beaucoup plus funeste, celui d'une reine assoiffée de pouvoir, écoutant des voix occultes et prête à tout pour asseoir son règne. (7, *emphasis mine*)

Tadjo's retrospective here serves to introduce five separate re-writings of the foundational myth of the Baoulé people, each as containing interpretive ramifications bearing on the specifically Ivorian civil war. Before I discuss the content being introduced, however, this introduction proves interesting to my study on several larger levels. First, Tadjo is not only demonstrating how the same story told in different contexts can cause radical re-interpretation, but is at the same time using this principle of re-contextualization as a justification for the re-invention of the narrative itself. This is an important distinction since the agency for re-interpretation according to changing context resides in the receiver of the text, whereas the locus of control for the re-imagining of myth resides more with the author—the operations are therefore not necessarily equivalent. Also, corollary to this first observation, Tadjo's literary project reverses the received chronological direction of the relation of culture and history to identity since a fixed story changing meaning by historical context implies a backward look to tradition to help define moments in the present whereas changing the story to match the context entails instead re-defining the past itself as licensed by the concerns of the present.

In any case, the most striking part of this introduction is the collectivity it imagines. The italicized "notre" refers to the Ivorian *nation*, and not merely the Baoulé ethnic group associated with the Pokou foundational myth. And the re-imagining of this otherwise quintessentially ethnic story therefore implies a re-thinking of *national* identity. And although Tadjo is writing from the Ivorian diaspora in the strictest sense, this re-thinking is not that of some "third space" where the writing is merely *about* a third-world nation, and where the intervention is really

meant as a corrective to first-world narratives of national belonging⁷¹. Rather, Tadjo binds literature, politics, and identity all together with a concern for peace on the *national* level in an intervention into the national identity on the ground in her home country. Tadjo clearly invests in the concept of nation over ethnicity, race, religion, pan-Africanism, or any other locus of mediation between self and world in her literature.

The framework of each of the Pokou myth's retellings remains basically the same. Queen Pokou, is called upon to sacrifice her only child, to otherwise implacable river spirits so that her people can cross to safety in their flight from the murderous menace of their pursuers. Tadjo spends her first chapter, entitled "Le temps de la légende" recounting the base legend where Pokou is depicted as a woman of exception, rebellious and audacious in her dealings with the patriarchal power structure of her tribe. Despite her tribe's matrilineal organization, it is the men who generally exercise power in the public arena. Pokou's outspoken decisiveness, then, leaves her partly ostracized despite her nobility of birth, and yet respected enough to lead when extraordinary circumstances exhaust the ideas of the men. The arrival of Whites, and especially their guns, has made opportunities for new balances of power to be struck, so when Pokou's megalomaniacal uncle accedes to the throne and decides to eliminate competing lines, Pokou's only offspring, fruit of divine intervention from a womb previously considered barren, is in mortal danger. Pokou organizes an exodus for those who cannot support or would be also threatened by Pokou's uncle, and flees with an army in hot pursuit. Stopped at an un-crossable

⁷¹ Ibhish finds Edward Said's Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture to be participating in this logic. "One of the principle aims," he summarizes, "of Postcolonial Theory, in fact, is to map out in detail the extent to which...the colonizing and colonized worlds constitute each other politically, economically and, above all, culturally" (221). Imre Szeman also finds that many of the canonically "postcolonial" authors may write about the third world, but live and intend their writings for the first in his 2003 Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation.

point at the river Comoé, the fleeing band turns to the shaman for wisdom, and to Pokou for leadership: the former reads the river as demanding a noble child as payment for crossing, the latter obliges by offering her own. As a result, a miraculous means of crossing the river opens up, and the newly broken-off tribe takes a new name: “Ba-ou-li”, meaning “the child is dead”, to forever commemorate Pokou’s courageous and heart-wrenching sacrifice.

There are over sixty ethnic groups in the Côte d’Ivoire, each with their own origin narrative, but the origin of the most populous group, (which also happens to be the tribe of longtime president and dictator Félix Houphouët-Boigny) the Baoulé, is given high enough priority in the curricula that schoolchildren inevitably learn it—thereby inscribing it as somehow more centrally Ivorian than that of other groups. To be sure the myth is always labeled as a Baoulé narrative, but Baoulé as a category itself is always already parsed as prototypically Ivorian. This point is bolstered by the author’s own commentary in an interview with Kanaté Dahouda in 2007 where she said: “Tout le monde en Côte d’Ivoire connaît [la légende d’Abraha Pokou]. Elle fait partie de notre patrimoine culturel, de notre imaginaire” (181)⁷².

Since Pokou is the tribal founder—of the Southern Baoulé tribe in specific, but the entire Ivorian nation by extension—each change in her myth changes her valence for the self-definition of groups whose heritage depend on her memory, and each permutation in detail thus allegorizes a different component of those self-definitions. But there is also an analogy from the union of such a plurality of foundational myths to the political union, despite challenges, of a multicultural nation to be found in the very idea of parallel retellings—the very form of Tadjó’s text tends to problematize the preference of any one foundational myth over any other, which

⁷² Dahouda, Kanaté. “‘Rendre hommage à la vie’: Entretien avec Véronique Tadjó, écrivaine ivoirienne.” Nouvelles Etudes Francophones 22.2 (Autumn 2007): 179-186.

problematization itself symbolically captures every ethnicity's claim of indigeneness within the nation of the Côte d'Ivoire.

After this opening chapter lays out the base from which all variations deviate, Tadjó bundles five sub-chapters, each separated by a page break and headed by an Adinkra symbol⁷³, under the title “Le temps du questionnement”. The first four sub-chapters generally begin with probing “what if...” questions which modify the original legend, and the last, entitled “Les paroles du poète” offers some concluding analysis and commentary. It is instructive to compare all five variations, so I will offer a brief plot summary before analysis. These varying scenarios are explicitly engaged in allegorical restructurings of the national definition, and even though it is their ensemble which makes Tadjó’s aggregated argument that it is re-thinking the traditions themselves which should be re-evaluated so as to avoid those narrative configurations which

⁷³ Adinkra symbols are small pictographs commonly stamped onto clothing of all kinds in the Ashanti dominated regions of Ghana. The symbols are not merely decorative, but convey meaning as well. In another worthy study Tadjó’s choice of these Adinkra symbols as artistic headers for chapters and sub-chapters could be analyzed for their aesthetics and poetics. In this study, I will limit myself to stating that the relationship of the symbols’ meanings to the chapter they head is significant and interesting in its own right. The list is as follows:

Chapter 1: Le Temps de la légende – Adinkra Symbol Odenkyem (The Crocodile - He lives in water, yet lives by breathing air.)

Chapter 2: Le Temps du questionnement – no symbol

Sub-chapter 1A : Abraha Pokou, reine déchue - Adinkra symbol Nyin Kym (The course of life is full of twistings, ups and downs, and zigzags.)

Sub-chapter 1B: No title - Adinkra symbol Obakofoo (One person does not rule a nation)

Sub-Chapter 2: La traversée de l’atlantique – ambiguous Adinkra symbol which could be either Sankofa (return and get it – learn from the past) or a mixed symbol with Akoma (the heart – patience and tolerance)

Sub-Chapter 3: La reine sauvée des eaux – ambiguous Adinkra symbol, probably a variation of Adinkra Hene (sign of the king – greatness, charisma, leadership, wise counsel)

Sub-Chapter 4: Dans les griffes du pouvoir - Adinkra symbol Gye Nyame (Sauf Dieu - This great Panorama of Creation dates back to time immemorial. No one has seen its beginning and no one will see its end Except God.)

Sub-Chapter 5: Les paroles du poète - Adinkra symbol Sepow (knife used in executions - This is thrust through the victim's cheeks to prevent his invoking a curse on the king.)

Chapter 3: Le Temps de l’enfant-oiseau - Adinkra symbol Osram Ne Nsoromma (Moon and Star - The North Star has a deep love for marriage. She is always in the sky waiting for the return of the moon, her husband. – harmony in marriage)

The identifications and meanings of these symbols were taken mostly from www.adinkra.org. St. Lawrence University also has a fairly thorough overview of the phenomenon at:

http://www.stlawu.edu/gallery/education/f/09textiles/adinkra_symbols.pdf

tend to promote conflict and division, each individual re-writing nevertheless serves up its own allegorical lessons and imagines the Ivorian nation differently.

The first re-writing occurs over two sub-chapters, each with its own Adinkra symbol, but only the first with a title: “Abraha Pokou, reine déchue.” In this version, the story doesn’t end with the saving of the people, but rather continues to show how the difficult choice of sacrificing her own flesh and blood cripples Pokou as a leader and as a woman. She becomes so hysterical, in the full etymological sense of the word, that she pulls out her own hair, bloodies her skin with scratches from her own nails, rips off her *pagne*, revealing her “*nudité aveuglante*,” and finally plunges into the river after her son. Neither Pokou nor her son perish, however. She swims in the river, finds him, and continues to the sea where she undergoes a magical metamorphosis, grows a fish tail, and exchanges her earthly kingdom for the title of queen of the oceans. Her full joining with the ocean is captured in the phrase “*Le ventre de la mer est un vaste utérus*,” closing the first part of the chapter. The second part of the story tells the effect the newly minted goddess has on men and on women. Able to seduce both, Pokou’s possession leaves men impotent in the arms of other women, and leaves women filled with an inconsolable nostalgia. The sacrificed child also transforms and takes on the role of an immortal—son of love and of sacrifice he has now become the messenger between the world of the living and the world beyond the mortal one.

This first re-writing neither alters the circumstances of the exodus nor dwells on the ramifications of the sacrifice on the new tribe itself, but rather asks the essential question: why is a mother’s love not strong enough to stop war or forestall sacrificial death? Concentrating on Pokou’s rejection of the promise of power and her surrender to emotions in favor of saving her

son points up a double image: one of a leadership rightly troubled by its own abuse of power, consumed by the difficulty of the choices; and one of the everymother suffering the private loss of offspring, powerless in the face of larger, more public events to prevent their children from being caught up in the destruction caused by the powers that be. In both cases, these components of the Ivorian nation (the leaders and the mothers) find in Pokou a representative who then sublimates into a Mami Wata, deified and converted into a feminist figure of sexual control and motherly love⁷⁴. This transformation accompanies the choice of family over political power, but then points up the distortions the people suffer when they also succumb to attractive opportunities without counting the cost of the losses their choices imply. This is the heart of demi-goddess Pokou's effect on the people who required her son's sacrifice:

Ainsi, elle prit possession d'eux : l'esprit par les yeux, le corps par le sexe.

Ces hommes devenaient incapables d'aimer. Aucune femme ne savait assouvir leur soif, récompenser leurs envies, accomplir leurs rêves. Ils avaient perdu l'essentiel de leur vie – un bonheur absolu... La séduction de la déesse était entière, sans limites. Personne ne pouvait lui résister. Les femmes dont elle s'approchait succombaient également à son extraordinaire beauté, étourdies par sa présence parfaite. Et quand, après les avoir connues, elle disparaissait pour toujours, ses compagnes, éperdues de chagrin, étaient prises d'une nostalgie immense, inconsolable. Elles cessaient toute activité pour

⁷⁴ Tadjó is the author of the 1993 children's book Mami Wata et le Monstre which won the Unicef award for that year and was voted one of the 100 most important African works of the 20th century and has been translated into upwards of 10 languages. Tadjó's familiarity with the figure is incontestable, and her serious insertion of its reference here calls up the intertext, reminding us that she has re-written myths before. the Mami Wata figure is the object of various forms of worship in many different African, Caribbean and Asian traditions. In general she is depicted as a mermaid with the power to seduce and to curse with incurable illness. One credible source on the phenomenon is H. J. Drewal in his paper "Interpretation, Invention and Re-presentation in the Worship of Mami Wata" as published in the Journal of Folklore Research, Vol. 25, Nos. 1-2, 1988.

se mettre à sa recherche, marchant d'un pas déterminé, courant ici et là, jusqu'à s'écrouler de fatigue. On les retrouvait le plus souvent seules, dénudées et recroquevillées sur le sol.

Ces femmes-là, ces hommes-là ne faisaient plus partie du peuple. Âmes en peine, écrasées par le secret. (49-50)

The men and women who allow themselves to be seduced not only lose the essence of their life—their happiness—but also inevitably their membership in the nation. They stop all other activities to pursue Pokou, just as the Baoulé did on the banks of the Comoé as they watched their queen and her son float away, praying:

*Mère splendide,
Pourquoi caches-tu ta beauté
Sous les flots ?
Ramène la paix dans nos cœurs.
Donne-nous un peu d'espoir.
Fais revenir le bonheur
En nous accordant ton pardon. (48)*

This revision clearly functions as a warning, as a plea for peace, as an imagining of the Ivorian space as one in which the women especially suffer loss, and where the sense of community is only destroyed by the sacrifice of sons for the machinations of power.

Tadjo's second re-writing imagines Pokou instead refusing to make the necessary sacrifice. Her people are captured by the pursuing army and Pokou and her son are sold into slavery as a punishment worse than death. They struggle and labor in a new land indifferent to their prayers, far from their sacred forest. She bears another son, a mulatto, and she raises them both with knowledge of her language and culture, and with the temperament to refuse submission. They sing and take up arms against the masters and are both hung, but they succeed in inspiring a fabled maroon colony as their legacy of rebellion.

Here, rather than counting the cost of the sacrifice as did the previous re-writing, Tadjo explores instead what would happen if Pokou had refused any sacrifice at all. This is the case that connects the nation to its diaspora from the time of the slave trade. The slaves themselves are aware that they no longer participate in the definition of the nation they are forced to leave:

Les esclaves, nus sous le regard des étrangers, savaient que leur passé avait disparu. La mer les encerclait. Leur terre s'éloignait. (58)

But the inclusion of their story, the education of the sons in their own language and culture, and Pokou's connection, however indirect, with a maroon rebellion all point to Tadjo's vision of the nation defining itself as also containing the collective memory of slaves. As such, Tadjo inscribes some other dimensions into her conception of Ivorian-ness by corollary: first, the Côte d'Ivoire is racially constituted as a black nation which can include mixed races, but which excludes the white as foreign; second, the lesson of Pokou's sons is that their culture and language differentiates from without and unifies from within, forming an identity strong enough to refuse the submission that slavery requires of it. Just as Pokou refused to sacrifice her own

child, so Ivorians should refuse sacrifices of their own kind, their shared race and cultures being sufficient for unity, especially when pitted against the combination of greed and power that white neocolonial societies from the outside may well represent.

In the third re-imagining, Pokou again suffers an extreme emotional instability at the offering up of her son, but this time it comes in the form of a despondency and an inability to act henceforth. The oracles traveling with her quickly explain that the spirit of her son haunts her and they begin to make the decisions for her while simultaneously seeing to her occult and emotional needs. The people settle safely, but are led by their queen Pokou in name only.

This time is the first derivation not to begin with the narrator's meta-literary questions. Tadjo simply picks the story from the first chapter up where it leaves off: at the moment of sacrifice. Here, the emotional drain of her act makes Pokou unable to lead

Dès lors, Pokou s'abandonna à la volonté des autres, se laissant porter, conduite vers le destin qu'ils lui avaient façonné. Un destin cousu de peine. (65)

The priests quickly note the emotional instability of Pokou, and, like regents, move both to palliate Pokou's condition and to pose themselves as her mediators with the public, able to interpret her will and explain her motivations as well as guide her decisions while maintaining the delicate balance of respect and usurpation necessary to lead the people without them losing confidence in their leader. As her despondency degenerates into resentful neurosis and Pokou begins demanding that her people keep up with her self-destructive pace without complaint (who now had more reason to complain than her, after all?), the priests decide upon action. Convinced the spirit of her son haunts her, they fabricate a statuette imbued with the correct magic to

represent her son which takes his psychological space in her injured consciousness and the people can advance to their new home without further interference from their queen. Interestingly, this is the only version where the new tribe is able to find a peaceable colonization space and it is the first where full and continuous deference to the occult powers along the way (not only at the river, but at the forest, and at the ground of the final destination) bears the fruit of providing full escape and fertile territory for growth. Here the presence of other tribes occupying the Baoulé's new territory is telling in its silence as no mention is made of them whereas the tribe attends fully to the spirits of the natural forces also occupying the space. Rendering the magical elements symbolic, then, this version allegorizes the Côte d'Ivoire as a place where internal harmony can be achieved despite traumatic sacrifices, and where external peace among its neighbors can also exist through a certain fidelity to traditions of respect for the powers that be as well as through a certain humility in leadership.

Finally, the fourth iteration of the Pokou myth introduces a new character. Rather than the previous nameless Ashanti warrior, the new father of the child is a handsome travelling Dioula merchant whose Muslim faith clashes with Ashanti animism in the critical moments. It is this Karim who suggests the route for the exodus, and it is he who is blamed when it seems to end in an impassible river. It is he who resists when the traditional shamans demand the sacrifice of Pokou's son, who, in this version, is old enough to walk and speak in fully thought-out sentences. Karim objects to the sacrifice on the grounds that only Allah should have the power over life and death, but Pokou overrules him with the words:

“Fais très attention, malgré ce qui nous lie, je ne te permettrai jamais de défier nos traditions. Ma gratitude envers toi s’arrête là. Éloigne-toi, je n’ai de comptes à rendre qu’à mon peuple ! ” (78)

Pokou not only sacrifices their son to the river Djinn, but also has Karim’s hands bound and throat slit. She spends the rest of her days in solitude, without the companionship of man or child, but with her despotic powers still intact and consolidated.

This final variation not only contains the most extended revision of the conditions prior to exodus, but is also the only one to build a fundamental difference of religious belief into the heart of the plot’s climax. The child is no longer of pure animist Ashanti blood, but contains his father’s Islamic Dioula DNA, and as such represents a core contradiction in the very essence of Ivorian identity. Saved for last, the tension between the Northern monotheist and the Southern animist traditions is also highlighted by a more overtly ambitious and tyrannical depiction of Pokou herself. Here is the only mention of the ethnic tensions which so centrally occupied the thought of Tadjou in the Rwandan matter of the previous two novels, and here is the only version where the religious justification for the sacrifice parses as defense of ethnic identity. Where in the other versions various aspects of the Ivorian nation are represented by Pokou herself, or by her situation, this version embodies the Côte d’Ivoire in the sacrificial offering itself. The North/South, Muslim/non-Muslim divides clearly given form by Pokou’s child, his sacrifice is essentially that of the nation itself, an allegory of the loss of control of the North which the South suffered as a result of the civil war when the rebel North took military control of everything from Bouaké to the Burkina border. But it is more than just a figure of the territory and the ethnic tensions which concerns Tadjou here, but also the sacrifice of morality for power. That Karim

would argue for the child's life in religious terms Pokou could not admit testifies as much to an incompatibility of reasoning between the religions as it does to the unwillingness the powerful ethnic group has to concede moral authority on cultural grounds. Tadjou, in this version, not only imagines a nation divided by ethnicity and religion, but in the very act, affirms the centrality of culture in the national identity, as much in tension as it may be.

The final sub-chapter in the "Temps du questionnement," entitled "Paroles du poète," complements the prologue and the questions at the beginning of many of the re-writings by offering even more meta-literary discussion and by proposing a multiplication of angles of re-imagining and re-interpretation. It is in this sub-chapter that the entire gesture of re-imagining myths gets analyzed by the very author of those re-cast legends, the "poet", and is framed as a question of symbols—is any component of this story not open to re-interpretation?

La légende, dit le poète, a aussi la dimension du mythe. Le fleuve était-il bien un fleuve ? L'armée ennemie n'était-elle pas en quelque sorte ce raz-de-marée dans lequel Pokou et ses partisans allaient se noyer. Les soldats du roi prêts à se déverser sur eux, à les broyer et à leur faire éclater les poumons étaient-ils cette lame de fond qui allait les engloutir ?

Tout est possible dans la légende, la belle parole fabriquée pour apaiser le peuple, lui redonner confiance en l'avenir.

Et l'enfant ? Était-ce véritablement un enfant ? Ne symbolisait-il pas plutôt ce que le peuple avait de plus cher et qu'il fallait céder, abandonner pour ouvrir un passage entre les rangs de cette puissante armée ? ...

Il est aussi possible que l'enfant sacrifié n'ait pas été le fils de Pokou, mais l'un de ses petits neveux.

Et s'il s'était agi en fait d'un enfant d'esclave ?

Le destin du peuple en aurait-il été changé ? (82-83)

This “ poète ” from the sub-chapter's title, referred to in third person, explains that the very voyage, the very obstacles, the very sacrificial object, the very means of escape given as standards in all variations of the legend—those elements which are not given as figurative—are all also possibly subjects of a process of symbolization. The effect of calling into question the literality of every point, therefore, is to point up both the extreme malleability of the story, and the necessity of taking great care in its re-telling and interpretation. In the end, there is a message at the heart of the Pokou story which can be useful to a divided nation, but it remains locked or subject to facile and false manipulations unless explicated by an insider, an initiate. The poet's words are as follows:

Ce sacrifice dont la nature nous échappe est un secret gardé encore par la légende.

Les anciens sont là pour nous aider à défricher le champ de la mémoire. Les initiés en connaissent toute l'étendue. Mais c'est toujours à contrecœur qu'ils dévoilent les mystères. Tant d'entre eux sont morts en les emportant, fermant ainsi les portes du passé.

Aujourd'hui, la légende a perdu sa force magique pour n'être plus que d'une beauté froide et creuse. Certes, les paroles restent plaisantes, mais elles sont aussi devenues dangereuses, tournant dans l'air ici et là, sans savoir où se poser. Elles sont

tranchantes. Elles pénètrent dans la tête des écoliers récitant, sans bien la comprendre, l'histoire de cette mère qui a sacrifié son fils.

Enfant dans la guerre. Demain, enfant-soldat. (83)

Tadjo makes her first mention here of initiates, of experts both in the understanding and the re-telling of the story, of a group of cultural guardians having passed through a process of testing and apprenticeship who now possess both the know-how and the authority to transmit the true meanings of the traditions already shared. In a move reminiscent of Boni's war-period treatment of the importance of initiated storytellers and interpreters in Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis, the "poet" here laments the lack of national unity resulting from the loss of cultural competence, the loss of truth, the loss of its mouthpieces.

Le mythe est sorti trop tôt de sa cachette. On l'a déshabillé à la hâte. On l'a défiguré, dénaturé, nous laissant à jamais pauvres d'un savoir tellement plus riche. (85)

Tadjo is not only arguing that the re-interpreted messages themselves within literature have the power to define the nation, but also that the initiated producers of such cultural artifacts have nationally transformative potential, be it for good or for ill. Interestingly conspicuous, again, is Tadjo's use of the inclusive "we" here, the national "we" whose definition is affected by literature and its interpretation.

This conception of narrative's role, this trust in the transformative power of cultural agency opens up a choice Tadjo does not admit directly in her meta-literary musings: that of the abuse of discursive power. Her conception makes room for receivers of the myth who mistake

their own identity by misinterpreting the legend, and for initiates who are able to tell the truth of the story's message, but it also logically allows for those initiates who intentionally misrepresent the narrative, who actively promote the personal destruction and the societal division entailed in the distortion of national identity as derived from such an otherwise culturally unifying force as shared narratives. Not all promotion of literature as transformative is truthful or innocent, but as with the pre-Ivoirité Royaume aveugle, as with the early-Ivoirité Champs de bataille et d'amour, as with the post-coup L'Ombre d'Imana, so in this latest work, Tadjou inscribes a hope for a brighter future as the reader nears the closing pages. A transporting block of text alternating between poem and prose-poem, stylistically set off from the Pokou-focused narrative of the rest of the novel, the final chapter demonstrates allegorical faith in the ability of new generations to triumph over divisive rhetoric and restore national unity. Through intense imagery, Tadjou portrays a child-bird soaring over a bleak population afraid and suffering, hearing the sound of arms over that of human voices, smelling the odor of hatred and fear, and yet possessing the surprising power of renewal. She then set up the counter-image of the black snake of death, destruction, and corruption in the heart of man, cause of all the suffering, unresponsive to traditional means of protection "amulettes, paroles rituelles et signes magiques"—all types of symbols. The snake easily represents Ivoirité, then—a rhetoric designed to divide, an abuse of symbolic strength. With a laugh of triumph, l'enfant-oiseau is able to kill the beast, heavy and poisonous though he may prove, thereby symbolizing the power of literature to make peace, to unify, to undo destructive disunities, "le futur toujours avec lui / Alors que les autres en sont encore / Aux balbultiments de leur existence..."(90).

Tadjo's texts testify of her belief in the transformative power of literature, narrative, culture, communication—in optimism for Africa in general, and the Côte d'Ivoire in specific. And despite stark warnings and bleak descriptions of impassible agonistic binaries, her prose during this period ends in the triumph of a figure of new generations, where peace and harmony become possible. Her use of the national "we", at times as if inadvertently, proves her continuing and constant desire for her works to contribute to the definition of a harmonious "Ivorian-ness" that Ivoirité cannot properly imagine, at the peril of divisive violence. Her interventions become more overt and direct as tensions on the ground become more pronounced, but even her pre-Ivoirité period work reveals a deep underlying conception of the nation as a construct central to Ivorian identity in specific, and to African identity in general.

4.0 TOURÉ AND KONÉ – CLASS CONFLICT AND NARRATIVE CONTROL

In this dissertation's opening chapter I justified a theoretical extension of the reading method Jameson outlines in his seminal work The Political Unconscious that bears repetition at the opening of this chapter. Jameson is persuaded that "Marxist critical insights" are the "ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts" (75). He then elaborates and justifies a rigorous practice of criticism in which these Marxist critical insights are brought out of a text. The practice moves the text through three "horizons" of analysis, each of which take the primarily allegorical interpretation of the prior horizon as their starting point, revealing ever deeper connections and structures of Marxist meaning as he goes.

But the reason he can organize a coherent critical method around Marxist thought is because it functions like an "ultimate determining instance," or Master Narrative—a metanarrative, a "transcendental signified", a simultaneously synchronic and diachronic formation with the power to explain cultural behavior from the most particularistic individual to the widest social constraint, and all in such a way that other metanarratives appear to be sheer epiphenomena. This formulation of his critical practice allows me to postulate the nation as a locus of cultural production on par with Jameson's Marxist critical insights, and to borrow his entire structure analysis with this new perspective in central position instead. The nation, after all, is a construct which attempts to mediate between self and world, and like all mediating phenomena there are pressures of diachronic evolution and synchronic systematicity, and an

interplay between individual agency and socially determined factors, all of which are more or less analogous to those pressures and interplays within the internal logic of any other Master Narrative.

I follow Jameson in conceiving of the individual creative act, then, as a performance at the intersection of conscious and unconscious forces, synchronic systems and diachronic evolutions affecting both these sides of the psyche on the individual level and throughout various levels of collectivity – being neither a mere iteration of the higher-order forces above it, nor an unconstrained anarchy of free-will. And I am therefore licensed to apply the structure of his method—seeking out the traces of the higher orders of collective consciousness within the cultural artifacts produced through concentric levels of interpretation, each taking the text’s interpretation as the basis for the next level of abstraction’s analysis. Conceived in this way, Tadjou and Boni’s indirect engagements with debates of the definition of the Ivorian national identity combine with their more direct interventions to contribute to a common discourse which serves to broaden the corpus from which some future national consciousness will be shaped. And Touré’s and Koné’s direct engagements with materialist explanations for the social conditions of the country also, at another horizon of interpretation, become readable as indirect interventions performing aspects of the national identity.

It is for this reason that I undertake a study of Kitia Touré’s and Amadou Koné’s early Ivoirité-period novels together. Although both are male authors, and both hail from the North, their works are also interesting as an ensemble because their content deals so overtly with the Ivorian nation as overdetermined by economic forces. Each in their own way, Koné and Touré bring class conflict out of the allegorical and into the literal on the surface of their texts in a way that Boni, Tadjou, and Kourouma don’t. What I will show then, is that using Jameson’s structure

of analysis with the nation standing in as the Master Narrative these two authors imagine an Ivorian nation determined by economics. The other authors dealing more centrally with ethnicity, and neocolonial relations, Touré's and Koné's insistence on the centrality of materialist conditions determining the national identity therefore calls for their consideration together. I will contend that Touré's text performs an Ivorian-ness in which identity is determined by a gender and race inflected social reality of class divisions. And I will also show how Koné's Ivorian imaginary, also producing an Ivorian-ness in which the determinism of class is resistable, calls for the re-evaluation of class roles because of an insistence that appearance is not reality, and thereby qualifies as anti-Ivoirité. Both of these novelists are also interesting for what they refuse to deal with—their obfuscation of ethnicity as an identifier in a Côte d'Ivoire where ethnic divisions are such a central part of the tension in the national identity is itself a positively interventionist political stance.

Cinematographer and short-story writer Kitia Touré won the prestigious Anoma award for outstanding literature from Africa in 1996 for his 1995 novel Destins parallèles⁷⁵. Despite the accolades at the time, this first novel in this chapter's study has seen no critical work to date. Hailing from the country's northern, Islam-affiliated half as he does, Touré's North-inflected influences are obvious in the content and onomastics of his prose. His Western training and craft as a visual artist are also evident in its content and structure: his novel is printed with no chapter divisions, but rather with asterisk lines marking changes of "scene" instead, for example. It tells the pseudo-biographical story of a sociology student whose cynicism and frustration with both "the system" and himself lead him to a chance encounter at a bar with a convincing drunkard

⁷⁵ The best Touré bibliography I have found is on the web:
<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=personne&no=7902>

who sets this student off on the sociological experiment of his lifetime – a quest to understand belief in a new Black Jesus. Rumors of this *Jésus noir* place him as the pre-eminent political force in the North and worship of him constitutes somewhat of a sociological mystery. The drunkard summarizes the puzzle best:

Vous deviez de votre vraie tâche, qui est d'étudier les phénomènes sociaux de notre époque [tels que la prolifération de mouvements religieux en Afrique], leur genèse et leurs conséquences, de corriger l'histoire présente et de laisser des traces, des témoignages pour les générations futures. Au lieu de t'interroger pour savoir si ta grand-mère portait l'enfant au dos ou au ventre, il faudrait peut-être essayer d'expliquer pourquoi les gens qui ont toute leur raison et qui sont démunis viennent claquer les quelques sous qu'ils glanent ici et là, dans des endroits aussi infects que cette baraque afin de se lasser et d'oublier les injustices de ce monde [en faveur d'une religion qui en parle d'un autre pour ces sous-là]...Tu pourrais expliquer aussi pourquoi cette négraille suit les yeux fermés, les promesses mirobolantes des nouveaux prophètes qui promettent le ciel, à défaut de pouvoir résoudre les problèmes des pauvres diables ici-bas...Ce que je ne comprends pas et que tu dois expliquer, c'est pourquoi sachant que ces prophètes et leur monothéisme prometteur et rénové aux couleurs locales sont des imposteurs, pourquoi je les suis quand même avec tous mes pairs. Comment tu veux que celui qui ne trouve pas à manger, celui qui voit mourir sa femme de maladie parce que ne pouvant pas payer la facture du pharmacien, celui qui dort dans la boue, dans les taudis à même le sol, celui qui se fait tanner le cuir par le premier policier venu, celui qui doit tenir sa bouche

fermée éternellement, celui qui vit dans l'obscurité perpétuelle, comment veux-tu que celui-là ne cherche pas le salut ailleurs, même s'il n'y croit pas ? (36)

The student, named Ki-Ca, which a pronunciation footnote on the first page makes clear is to be spoken the same way as the author's given name (Kitia, or Ki tʃa, as the IPA would have it), thus inherits the sociological challenge of determining the particularly African paradox of resurgence of religious behavior despite a concurrent diminution in the ability to believe in such. It is this phenomenon which grants the *Jésus noir* a large enough following to become a political threat to the powers that be—preaching a mode of communal living not sanctioned by the state. The protagonist's cause mirrors that of the novel's, repeated from the drunkard's same injunction:

Vous deviez de votre vraie tâche, qui est d'étudier les phénomènes sociaux de notre époque [tels que la prolifération de mouvements religieux en Afrique], leur genèse et leurs conséquences, de corriger l'histoire présente et de laisser des traces, des témoignages pour les générations futures (36).

The novel takes up this drunkard's challenge, as does Ki-Ca, completing a textual sort of thought experiment testing the results of various social conditions upon the main character, exploring variations through the results of Ki-Ca's quest. Ki-Ca seeks out this prophet, who also happens to be a champion of the poor. Arriving at the black Jesus's "school", Ki-Ca finds an isolationist sort of commune where individual ownership has been banished and where the prophet and mystic in question explains the need for hope, even false hope, for the survival of

the poor before granting Ki-Ca a vision comprising the rest of the novel's plot. Ki-Ca is magically able to observe two separate versions of how his own life would have played out differently: one as a street kid, the other as an ambitious arriviste with a Western education. The former, who I dub young Ki-Ca, is poor, but with a natural intelligence which he eventually uses to organize his fellow street-urchins into a union of market porters which eventually galvanizes the indigent electorate to oust a corrupt incumbent mayor. The latter, who I will call old Ki-Ca, uses the White-sounding name of his spouse, his French education, a lucky break political connection, and his highly unethical and manipulative wits to finagle a position of authority in a state ministry where public funds could be used for skirt-chasing, wining and dining, and a run at the mayorship to oust a corrupt incumbent by using the new and popular phenomenon of a kids' union to galvanize the massive voting bloc of the poor to guarantee his election. The blinding ambition and intractably intrinsic corruption of the elder Ki-Ca lead him to break his political promises almost immediately upon seizing power, and he decides to mow down the shanty-town where the unionized children live. Chaos and revolution ensue, young Ki-Ca is injured, old Ki-Ca's scandalous improprieties are exposed, and observer Ki-Ca feels compelled to intervene, which causes the magic of the vision to collapse into an ambiguous ending where the *Jésus noir* leaves his mantle to observer Ki-Ca who has now become a man who knows his own destiny, and is therefore able to continue this *Jésus*'s teaching of truth and justice.

Already, based on this summary treatment of the plot's outline, there is an obvious Marxist surface reading of the novel as social commentary. Touré appears to be playing out a classic tale of the haves and the have-nots, exposing the corruption and greed of the former, and the righteous indignation of the latter as their plight, combined with real injustices, transforms into chaotic violence. The economic underpinnings of the tensions between classes are

constantly reinforced throughout the novel both in its overt content – with scenes where characters discuss the plight of the poor and the corruption of leaders who fail to fulfill their responsibilities – and in its style, which approaches naturalism in places with its long sympathetic descriptions of the abject situation of the masses, and its equally in-depth exploration of the immorality and decadence of the upper class, its matter-of-fact crassness about sex among the poor, and even the plot's basic premise of the determinism of social conditions upon the destinies of three otherwise genetically and spiritually identical characters.⁷⁶

On one level a valuable exposé of how the consequences of too large an economic divide can play out, the novel, on another level, also functions as the performance of Ivorian-ness in connection with the nation as an underlying Master narrative. The very dialectal nature of the plot, as well as the preponderance of binaries composing the work, suggest an imaginary which conceives of its material as intrinsically divided. Whether it be the poor shanty-town residents versus the corrupt leadership class, whether it be the black Jesus to correspond with Black suffering versus the Biblical one which Jésus noir's followers need saving from, whether it be the remote rural Northern setting of the prophet versus the un-named lagoon-side metropolis (ostensibly Abidjan) where the Ki-Cas all play out their destiny, the muscle of the masses of market-crawling children versus the organizing intellect of the young Ki-Ca, or even the gendered power differential between old Ki-Ca and his wife and many mistresses – the lopsidedness of the dominance of one side of the binary, once an awareness of the history of the Côte d'Ivoire is known, is hard not to characterize as analogous to the divisions blossoming in the nation at the time of the novel's publication, especially as viewed from the perspective of a Northerner. In other words, the message that economic disparities and injustices are divisions

⁷⁶ Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953) provides an interesting discussion of naturalism's distinctiveness, especially in contrast with realism.

which lead to rioting, unrest, and the overthrow of the leadership class can also be read as the trace of a message that other kinds of divisions can be just as caught up in disparities and injustices to the point of explosive violence. Once the key of nation is assumed as an underlying feature of the creative landscape from which the novel was imagined, elements of the surface interpretation become subject to re-evaluation as also already elements of an allegory of a higher order – the existence of binaries of domination and subalternity becomes a property of Touré's experience of the Côte d'Ivoire as a nation.

Touré's perception and inscription of an agonistic Côte d'Ivoire is significant since, in the very same year of publication, Southerner Bédié's re-election strategy held a notion of Ivoirité at its core which, while ostensibly promoting a sort of multiculturalism, was nevertheless experienced by many Northerners as resulting in exclusion rather than the promised inclusion. More than a mere application of Marxist theory to the Ivorian context, then, this novel can also be read as contesting the nascent state doctrine of Ivoirité, presciently casting the nation as a place for potentially explosive conflict years before a civil war grew out of the sentiments of incommensurability.

The identitarian divisions on the ground are not depicted in the novel as overtly ethnic, in fact, ethnicity is conspicuously absent throughout Touré's novel. However, ethnicity's very absence suggests its importance as an organizer of divisions since traces of it cannot be avoided, such as the given names of the main characters and the setting of the black Jesus as belonging to the rural North—both geographic tells revealing ethnic affiliation to those in the know. On the other hand, in parallel to the novel's plot where injustices are borne with a stewing passivity until the masses' dwellings are attacked, it is rarely without the underpinnings of economic interests that differences between ethnic groups move beyond tensions and into confrontations. It is

therefore a necessary part of this reading of Destins parallèles as a reflection of national tensions between ethnic groups to return to Jameson who would note that the class struggle underlies all these tensions as well.

What is overt and, in fact, central to the novel's very vocabulary, is the issue of race, which also breaks down into a binary of unequal power structures. Observer Ki-Ca's bar-stool sociologist, an insalubrious character who re-surfaces in the vision of the parallel destinies later, first piques observer Ki-Ca's interest in the *Jésus noir* in the following terms:

-- Sûr que j'y crois. Tu sais les Blancs ont fait beaucoup de tort aux Noirs. Vois leur civilisation, à quoi elle nous résout ? On est en minorité chez nous, dans notre pays. Et la vraie minorité par le nombre de têtes de pipe devient majoritaire grâce aux richesses. Aidés dans leurs exploitations par quelques parvenus de notre couleur. Ce Jésus noir s'est fait le défenseur des pauvres, le vrai défenseur des Noirs. Il dit que Dieu a jugé que les Blancs ont mal interprété Jésus ! Voilà pourquoi Dieu l'a fait revenir dans une peau noire pour punir la race blanche de ne pas avoir aimé et respecté le genre humain. (34)

This explanation of the need for a Black Jesus on the surface sets the binary White-Black in motion, and implies that a historical antipathy between the two, Blacks having been on the suffering end, forms the societal conditions which sub-Saharan Africans must rise through by hope and sacrifice.

The Côte d'Ivoire being a sub-set of sub-Saharan African countries, this quote would stand as evidence of racial underpinnings to the nation by itself. But the other major inclusions

of race-based language are also interesting because they mark one of the parallel Ki-Cas as able to transcend the handicaps society and history have placed upon his race, whereas the others remain trapped in its logic. The elder Ki-Ca specifically chooses his Martinican bride as his trophy-wife because her name, Lucie de la Roche Pouponne, which is French-sounding enough to open doors for him that would have remained closed had her name sounded authentically Black. His thoughts, revealed to us by a first-person narrator, are rife with cynicism as he prepares his re-entry into his home country for the first time after his completed doctorate, “Madame” in tow:

La femme blanche, on l’a tous quelque part en Afrique. C’est dans le sang. Plus d’un siècle de refoulement, d’envie cachée, de spoliation font de la Blanche, le trésor caché. Avoir la femme blanche et blonde de surcroît c’est le sommet des fins, la joie qui en découle dépasse celle du verrat qui après trois jours de rut réussit à posséder la truie en chaleur. Posséder la femme blanche, c’est se libérer d’un complexe, celui de penser qu’on est inférieur par la couleur de la peau. L’esclave qui mange à la table du maître est plus affranchi que celui que le maître a mis dehors sous prétexte de lui rendre la liberté.

Les bonnes âmes noires, épousent les femmes blanches pour se libérer du mythe de cette race. Mythe qu’on vit et qu’on sent...On épouse une femme blanche pour avoir une promotion sociale. [Au travail] sa peau lui tient lieu de qualification...Mais la femme blanche...éloigne le couple de la société. Parce que déjà par sa peau les gens ont peur de l’approcher, de lui adresser la parole. Ce qui la met elle, sur la défensive. Mais moi pour résoudre ce problème et mettre tout le monde d’accord, j’ai trouvé l’astuce.

Il est juste que la femme blanche se reconnait par la peau. Mais on peut retrouver la Blanche dans n'importe quelle femme. La Blanche, c'est une conduite, une manière d'être, de parler, de fumer, d'avoir un nom qui sonne gaulois. Pour le reste il suffit de penser que sa peau est blanche pour trouver n'importe quelle femme presque blonde. Chacun crée sa propre nuit. Il suffit de fermer très fort les yeux en pleine journée.

Cette découverte, je ne l'ai pas faite seul. C'était encore à la Sorbonne. Lors d'un cours de roman où une Antillaise noire jugeait l'Afrique. La discussion avait monté. Et une Martiniquaise, pardon ! une Française, avait donné son exemple. Lors d'une tournée en Afrique elle avait été déçue par les Africains. Elle qui pensait trouver en Afrique des sœurs, ses racines, elle s'était vue rejeter et traiter vilainement de Blanche. Et comment ? (80-82)

Thus race, problematically defined as a marking of attitude and practice beyond mere skin color, is the basic organizing unit of societal promotion, as well as of wealth opportunities in the Côte d'Ivoire of Touré's imagining. I'll discuss in detail the particular valence of the white sounding name later and the Antillean connection with respect to race, but for now, suffice it to note that it's in the thoughts of the novel's un-sympathetic character (old Ki-Ca) that the reader is exposed to such a philosophy. Racial tension is both the motivator for old Ki-Ca's ambition (to prove his victory over his perceived racial inferiority) and the vehicle for his greed and ambition. However, buying into the logic of Black inferiority and reinforcing it, as old-Ki-Ca does through his corruption and the ultimate failure of all his enterprises, is obviously not the solution Touré himself would propose, because he also writes a starkly contrasting attitude into the character of the young Ki-Ca. In the rioting that ensues from the decision of newly elected

mayor, old Ki-Ca, to raze the shanties of the penniless masses from whence his largest voting bloc sprung, young Ki-Ca stumbles onto a protected enclave of White university professors taking the day off because it may be dangerous for them to be seen outside of their walled community amidst all the chaos. Young Ki-Ca meets a young Guadeloupian girl and immediately forms a friendship, discovering something by her precociously sexual advances that his naiveté had never allowed him to conceive of before: that the children of the privileged and the white with whom she associates—from whom she gets her social conditioning—are also prone to vices he had previously thought could only come from poverty. In response to her offers, young Ki-Ca's thoughts run from surprise to astonishment:

Je croyais qu'il n'y avait que nous enfants de la débauche, vivant dans la promiscuité avec les grands et n'ayant ni éducation, ni distraction, qui cherchions le plaisir prématuré du sexe. (347)

The surprise of the naive mind about similarities in the propensity for promiscuity reveals suppositions about the social constructedness of attitudes about sex, even as children. But it also speaks to the racially marked divide bearing upon the social conditions of the nation, as well as their chicken-and-egg relationship with the economic divide both on the surface, and underlying the text's take on the national society in question. It's the white that are rich, and yet licentious, and if white is as white does, as the passage on "la Blanche" suggests, old Ki-Ca surely qualifies as white in his behaviors and attitudes towards sex and money. And although young Ki-Ca also has precocious sexual relations with his female fellow (black and impoverished) street urchin Lucienne, it's the attitude toward sex which differentiates, because young Ki-Ca refuses

temptation with the Guadeloupian, who is animated solely by boredom, in favor of fidelity to Lucienne. His bewilderment at the discovery of similarly promiscuous behaviors between the White rich and the Black poor demonstrates a reverence for the ideal of monogamous sexual relations even if his upbringing among promiscuous people did not inculcate him with it by societal convention. Thus, in Touré's imaginary, although sexual behaviors may appear to match, attitudes toward sexuality are coded for divisions between races and classes in the same way that the shared social space of the nation is marked by different attitudes between races and classes. And the fact that young Ki-Ca, the sympathetic character, is the one able to escape the conditioning of both his class and his race with respect to promiscuity—to derive a moral compass from conditions where models of such are absent—speaks to Touré's proposed solution: ethics, justice, and equality.

Lack of ethics, injustice, and inequality with respect to race and class are conditions present in the world outside the text as well as the diegetic world, but they also apply analogously to the category of gender in Touré's novel. The long citation above on the Black man's need to possess the White woman already hints at the domination of old Ki-Ca over his female analog. Old Ki-Ca is a philanderer from the beginning. From the reader's first encounter with his thoughts on the plane from France, it is clear his wife is merely an object to him, a means to an ambitious end. Interestingly, as soon as his position is established in governmental service, his fiscal corruption amplifies at the same rate as his lusts. First it's a company car and lies about needing it to attend late "meetings", next it's taking old sexual partners out to fine dining on the public dime, and before the reader knows it, old Ki-Ca is juggling several mistresses at once, and looking to provide for them all to have an exorbitantly high standard of

living from an extravagant discretionary fund under the operating budget of his ministry. Lucie, his wife, remembers a time when they seemed to be truly in love, but old Ki-Ca is a dyed-in-the-wool utilitarian, often stating pure altruistic motives when his true driving forces are neither pure nor selfless. An integral part of his appetite for consumption, the women in old Ki-Ca's sexual orbit, however, are not all portrayed as victims, nor are they passive. True, Lucie de la Roche Pouponne is duped at first, but soon becomes suspicious, and eventually becomes part of old Ki-Ca's descent into scandal, refusing to keep the affairs secret, publicly picking a fight with one mistress after having followed her husband to her university housing where the tryst was to begin. The mistress old Ki-Ca is seeing, is in fact a cousin arranged to be his future wife by his family back in the village, wife and family traditions he had rejected by taking his "French" bride. Cousin Migayo is educated and available to other men, but chooses to hitch her wagon to Ki-Ca for the money and lifestyle he can provide even though she knows he has no intention of either divorcing his wife for her, or of entering into a polygamous relationship with her. His lusts running wild, old Ki-Ca nevertheless cannot shake the memory of the one partner he wasn't good enough for in his college days, but now is established and credentialed enough to woo: Yvonne. Yvonne is at home with her sexuality, making herself available to a variety of partners for pleasure as well as for advantage, but she remains aloof from old Ki-Ca out of a refusal to be used. It is in Yvonne's voice that readers are treated to the sharpest critiques of old Ki-Ca's corruption. Having known him as an anti-corruption activist in his younger days, Yvonne is uniquely able to point out to old Ki-Ca the depth of his self-betrayal.

-- Ah bon ! tu vas prendre l'argent que l'État donne pour la scolarisation de nos enfants, pour entretenir des maîtresses. Tu sais pourquoi je n'ai pas réussi mes études

moi... Maintenant que tu viens de t'introduire dans le cercle des hommes qui ont le pouvoir, tu te dresses avec eux pour berner, soudoyer et exploiter le peuple à des fins personnels.

And his response is equally revealing in terms of its surface content and the assumptions it makes about the organization of society Touré describes:

-- Le pouvoir est comme un cercle de sorcières, il faut être sorcière pour y rentrer et quand on y entre, il faut être anthropophage comme les autres, et avec les autres, au risque de se faire manger comme un dissident.

The traces of a nation-state shot through with power institutions where consumption of the supposedly democratic equals is a requirement have surfaced here in an exchange where old Ki-Ca is both consuming the taxpayers through his misuse of public funds, and attempting to sexually consume a former partner for the satisfaction of his selfish lusts. In other words, there is an analogy between the gendered inflection of old Ki-Ca's corruption and the corruption at the leadership of the nation's structures of power. This tie back to the definition of the nation finds its antipode in young Ki-Ca's attitudes towards women, specifically in his fidelity to Lucienne out of respect for their mutual equality and commitment, as previously mentioned in the episode with the young lascivious Guadeloupian.

And yet despite his sexual and administrative dominance, in a paradoxical Weberian sort of way, it turns out to be old Ki-Ca who is the dependent one. Despite his selfish and corrupt desires to consume, the women in his life each either hold their own or even reverse the tables

and use him for their own purposes. And all contribute to his ultimate undoing, both on the surface, and in the structure of the national allegory. Old Ki-Ca needs the “Française” as his wife to overcome his personal race-based inferiority complex, he needs the traditionally arranged cousin, Migayo, as his mistress as a vehicle for the status of having young, university-aged women on his arm, and he needs his former lover Yvonne in the most personal way: if she can still refuse him despite how much more successful and “worthy” he’s become, then he will feel like a failure, like the betrayal of his own conscience was in vain. In an analogous way, Touré is leaving impressions, traces of the nation as being divided by classes with unequal power, but in which the upper are ultimately dependent upon the lower for their status vis-à-vis race, tradition, and personal psychological validation—to match the functions of the three Ki-Ca women. Old Ki-Ca has the ambition to become mayor from the first few pages of the reader’s meeting him, but he cannot accede to his calling without the individual blessing of the three aforementioned women. He reveals to each privately the secret he claims (untruthfully, of course) never to have mentioned to anyone: that he wants to run for mayor—which is to say that his trust is placed ultimately in his own exploitees. His ambitions are no secret at all, but his need for permission from these sources also underscores the analogy to the nature of the political reality in the Côte d’Ivoire, that the Southern ruling party rules with the consent of the North, that the rich minority ruling class dominates by tacit consent of the indigent masses, and that White or Western cultural attitudes hold hegemonic sway by the implicit assent of the Black. And by analogy in the more specifically Ivorian context, in the nascent period of Ivoirité of this text’s publication, the Côte d’Ivoire maintains integrity by consent of the Northerners, whose exclusion from the political process would destabilize the Republic.

The allegorical reading becomes even richer on another horizon of interpretation, considering the Côte d'Ivoire as caught culturally between competing—even “parallel”—cultural affiliations. Old Ki-Ca needs the status of a “French” wife and the stamp of traditional approval represented by his cousin and polygamous betrothal prospect Migayo in the same way that the nation is caught culturally between France and indigenous traditions. Inscribed down to the onomastics, Touré consistently chooses French names for African female characters except for Migayo whose function is to provide the appearance of attachment to African tradition. And onomastics is a good place to study how even inside the allegory, complicating traces of higher order phenomena can be found: old Ki-Ca's relation to women bears analogy to the positioning of Ivorian cultural identity, but what does it mean when one notes that the underclass male proper nouns in young Ki-Ca's circles are all of African consonance? Here again at this horizon of interpretation, the first order analogy bears extra richness on another level—Touré is inscribing a class inflection into the very question of cultural identity he's allegorizing. Thus the Ivorian-ness performed here varies in connection to the tension between indigenous culture and Western culture by class.

As a final note on the novel's content and allegorical light shed on the nation, it is instructive to review the roles Touré assigns to the three Antillean characters in the novel and the references made to the Caribbean. We have already dealt with young Ki-Ca's Guadeloupian friend by whose premature lasciviousness Touré taught that the values behind practices are bound up in a class-based logic, not solely a racial one. But it took the special position of a character of racial similarity, yet cultural “whiteness”—of French nationality, but not stereotypically “French color”—for protagonist and role-model young Ki-Ca to begin to see

beyond the binary rich/poor that his vision had previously been trapped in. This effect could have been obtained by a number of methods, and yet Touré chose to bring this out of an encounter with a French Antillean.

The case of old Ki-Ca's wife being Antillean of necessity also says something about Touré's model of the class and race binaries in the Côte d'Ivoire. Madame Ki-Ca, formerly de la Roche Pouponne, is at first represented as old Ki-Ca's ideal Black "white" woman with bourgeois tastes, and a *noblesse oblige* attitude about Africa. Her phenotype cannot overcome her culture which, along with her accent, gives her away every time as a foreigner, despite her black appearance. At first, as with the Antillaise in old Ki-Ca's Sorbonne classroom, Lucie is disappointed in the Africans in whom she had hoped to find her lost roots and racial kinship, instead finding she is treated like she's white because of her practices. And yet, as well as having the strength to confront old Ki-Ca about his cheating, it is also she who is sensitive enough to the innocent intelligence of young Ki-Ca that she brings him into her home as a potential adoptee. It is through Lucie's ability to see the positive in young Ki-Ca through his haggard veneer, that old Ki-Ca is able to meet the vehicle both of his success and of his eventual downfall: a leader of the masses, his younger namesake. What is instructive here is that it takes a character of a particular kind to reveal the path beyond the binary; to catalyze the major turning points in the plot.

The other major turning point character is a Martinican voodoo priest called upon both for his skill at obtaining his will from the occult powers he claims to communicate with, as well as for his familial relationship with old Ki-Ca's wife, being the uncle of Lucie. Ki-Ca has the uncle flown over on tax-payer funds to invoke the aid of "le grand Ogun et les autres dieux d'Afrique" because he knows his own marabouts and sorcerers too well: they often guarantee the

same results to completely opposed rivals so much that “on ne peut plus faire confiance aux talismans” (273). Only such an outsider would have the perspective and the power both to remain an insider in terms of being able to call upon the African gods, and to correctly predict the destinies and risks involved in old Ki-Ca’s bid for the mayorship. Only this Voodoo magician can call upon powers exotic enough not to be in competition with the already-spoken-for forces of the native marabouts. And only this social observer from the DOM-TOM is aloof enough to properly diagnose the ills of old Ki-Ca and his class even while preparing to help him. As old Ki-Ca—either in complete self-delusion or in an abject lie—professes a calling to help the poor, the uncle responds:

Tes sentiments sont nobles et ta volonté farouche de devenir le guide des laissés-pour-compte de cette ville, est louable mais ton ambition de devenir une lumière va avec le risque de te perdre. Ton plus grand désir est d’être un grand de ce pays. Ce désir qui te hante annule la volonté d’aider ton peuple. Ce peuple a besoin d’un consolateur, d’un espoir pour supporter la vie. Et ce besoin est primordial...Il faut aider pour aider, non *aider pour le prestige d’une nation*. La nation sans ces milliers d’hommes qui hument l’air pour sentir l’arôme des bombances des autres avec leurs enfants qui se gavent le ventre de terre, *sans tous ces hommes sans ambition, la nation n’existerait pas*. (279-280, emphasis mine)

In this prophecy, commentary, and counsel we see the revelation of a national imaginary in which divisions by class coincide with divisions by ambitions, by motivations. And it takes this position of a racially and culturally similar occult consultant to foreground not only the

answer to observer Ki-Ca's original sociological question about the need for irrational hope in the face of suffering and oppression, but also core assumptions about the conditions of existence of the nation. Touré could easily have chosen a shaman from among the several Ivorian ethnicities renowned for theirs, or from any of a number of African nations storied for their sorcerers to illustrate the same point. But because he chose an Antillean, and because the function of the other Antilleans lines up, the reader is licensed to read extra meaning into the choice of voice for the sentiment that national unity somehow requires ambition-less masses and a minority ambitious leadership class, the service of the latter being necessary for the betterment of the former. The objectivity of the outsider, the blessing of the animist—pervasiveness of this type of religion marking the point of cultural similarity between the African and the Caribbean, despite whatever other practices may tend to ostracize an Antillean as merely French by comportment—is the only voice possible which could correct old Ki-Ca: “Il faut aider pour aider, non aider pour le prestige d’une nation”. In other words, the Martinican counsels that the while the nation may be composed of masses of apathetic poor, the national leadership’s guidance must stem from a pure desire to bring individuals out of poverty, not from a selfish desire for self-aggrandizement or praise among the international community. But such counsel can only be in response to the underlying assumption of the nation as being always already framed by the international. To formulate it another way, the concerns of the class who would aspire to control of the state are less for domestic benefit and more as a way to shake off a personal inferiority complex rooted in its perception of its own geopolitical position of influence. Jusdanis identifies this sentiment as one of the main motors of nationalism, of the galvanization of political will to unify for the purpose of “catching up”. But while Jusdanis’s nationalistic impulse describes domestic improvement as motivated by international comparisons, old Ki-Ca’s

impulse is instead for personal improvement at the expense of the domestic as motivated by international comparison. In this way, old Ki-Ca's crime has become not only to betray the indigent masses, but to undermine the very unifying force which could allow them to escape their relative poverty. And again, were the revelation of this nation as being constrained by international relations to come from an Ivorian voice, or even a French voice, the objectivity and the thrust of the underlying conception of that nation could not have been the same. If the voice had been Ivorian, one would expect internal identifiers (read: ethnicity) to have been more on the surface. If the voice had been French, the historical backdrop of colonization could not have been sublimated into a raced-based discourse as it is. Colonization and ethnicity should categorically fit nicely into a novel in which the conception of the nation is so otherwise thoroughly composed of binaries. Thus, Touré has performed an Ivorian-ness in which the traces of colonial history and ethnicity are either subliminal or so ordinary as not to merit overt representation, but also in which the social reality of class divisions and their gendered and racialized inflections prevail as determiners of identity.

Before turning to the next novel in this study, there are two major notes to be made on the stylistic level which solidify the reading of the novel as representing the nation. First, prior mention was made of the similarity between naturalist novels of the kind Zola wrote, and Touré's depictions of promiscuity and bluntness about sex, his detail in exposing the harshness of the poor's living conditions, and his overall framing of observer Ki-Ca's experience as objective. *Jésus noir* goes so far as to reformulate a naturalist author's credo of the use of fiction to bring to light the underlying social conditions for certain phenomena as he addresses observer Ki-Ca directly in preface to a magical, fictional representation of his possible other lives:

Tu sais, gentil fils qui veux savoir, tout homme a un destin vaste qui doit s'accomplir malgré lui. Pourtant ce destin se corrige dans son développement, avec les données de la société et de la nature dans laquelle il vit.

Social determinism rife throughout the novel as it is, it is also instructive to note where Touré departs from a naturalist norm. Despite its overtly materialist message, Destins parallèles is shot through with the magical and the paranormal as if to show, in content as well as in style that the imaginary from whence it springs does not participate in the same historical trajectory that can produce the more purely “rational” exposition of sociological laws of cause and effect that a Western naturalist novel would aim to produce. Flaunting the model in the very act of raising it, Touré puts his plot's express goal, in the above quote, in the mouth of a religious leader capable of magical intervention and the granting of visions—a sort of anti-materialist materialist. The quasi-naturalist style thus itself becomes meaning-bearing at the least as a statement that the belief in the occult itself forms part of the social conditions which constrain materialist cause and effect in the Côte d'Ivoire. And at the same time, Touré is also demonstrating the limits of such a French generic label as naturalism, as a statement that despite Abidjan's oft-given subtitle as the Paris of Africa, France did not merely imprint its culture upon its former colony—that the nation remains distinct and cannot be reduce to Western categories or models.

Finally, it is also significant that the novel follows a diegetically self-contained chronology which remains linear throughout except for two consecutive out-of-place chapters/scenes. Over the course of the narrative, observer Ki-Ca meets his drunkard, becomes curious about the question of the Black Jesus, travels north to meet him, receives a vision in

which his young and old selves, under opposite social conditions, play out their destinies in roughly alternating chapters with no break in the timeline. Yet, as one “scene” ends on observer Ki-Ca staying the night in a village near the prophet’s complex, the next scene breaks and jumps forward to the setting and perspective of young Ki-Ca for a single out-of-order scene, before jumping into old Ki-Ca’s thoughts on the plane as he returns with his Martinican wife from studies in France in a second out-of-order scene, and then returning the reader to the village, the magical river barrier, and the actual “spell” of the *Jésus noir* granting observer Ki-Ca his vision. It is easy to imagine these scenes as a screenwriter’s device for introducing new characters with parallel timelines, keeping the audience’s interest by breaking the main plot up early to establish the importance of and contrasts between the sub-plots. But given the binaries in the content of the text, it is not too much of a leap to suspect another reading: one in which this single jog in the linearity of storytelling is purposeful—the parallel destiny vision actually did begin before it was set off by its ostensible cause. Read in this way, calling into question cause and effect as it does, the text’s structure comes more in line with the text’s content, signifying by way of analogy that other phenomena, such as the divisions produced by a discourse of Ivoirité, which seem to be effects governed by certain causes, may have roots in other causes, not yet fully understood, or beyond the text’s purview. At the very least, it points up the same sort of anti-Cartesian impulse observed in the novel’s not-quite-naturalist mode. And even more, when considering what content is expressed in these off-set scenes—the solution of both young and old Ki-Ca; the thesis and antithesis; the core binaries of syndicalism and solidarity versus corruption and greed—the structure suggests the analogy that the root causes of the Ivoirité-based tensions of 1995 Côte d’Ivoire antedate the tensions themselves.

Touré's novel ostensibly sets out to demonstrate through fiction how varying social conditions produce predictable "destinies", and by subjecting the text to a review of the traces of the nation it contains, ends up demonstrating a certain conception of the Ivorian identity as determined by gendered and racialized inflections of primarily economic determinants. It performs an Ivorian-ness that undermines official rhetorics in its form and in its content. And in these particulars, it functions much the way Koné's text does—calling for re-evaluation and transcendence of divisions via resistance of official corruption.

Ahmadou Koné was a longtime professor of Ivorian literature at the University of Abidjan/Cocody before his move to the US to continue a teaching career at Georgetown University. While working at the national university, Koné co-authored a national anthology of Ivorian literature in the 1980s, and is also the sole author of dozens of plays, novels and texts of other genres as well. His work as an anthologist places him in a unique position among the authors chosen for this study because it demonstrates an overt investment in the nation as a theoretical construct in ways the others only do indirectly. Serving the state's interest via such a central contribution to establishing a corpus of distinctly Ivorian literature, the 1983 anthology provides an easy adaptation when its central idea is coopted by a decade later by the Ivoirité doctrine because the anthology's function is almost identical already: it assembles texts into a unified body citing Ivorian literary diversity and richness from within while concurrently distinguishing the body from outside national literature. But Koné is not a mere servant of the state, nor is his writing pro-Ivoirité. For him to promote national unity however, is not incompatible with the sharp criticisms he levels at the state in his fiction. In a preface to the first of Koné's two volume "Blakoro" series (from 1980, Traites: Sous le pouvoir des Blakoros, and

from 1982, Courses: Sous le pouvoir des Blakoros), Jésus Kouassi Yoboué summarizes Koné's prose well as "l'autopsie d'une société dégénérée dans laquelle la corruption a été érigée en institution" (1). In these two works, Koné decries the difficulties which the ruling "Blakoros", the uncircumcised, inflict upon the peasant masses whose adherence to traditional values of honesty, hard work, and respect is continually subverted by the Blakoros' selfishness and adherence to the "nouveaux mythes" of the West. His 1997 Les Coupeurs de têtes revitalizes this basic division of classes along the lines of values, and develops it differently, updated for a Côte d'Ivoire where Ivoirité is fully articulated, with new characters and a plot unconnected to the 1980s duology except for its setting in their city Blakorodougou (an economic capital analogous to Abidjan).

Les Coupeurs de têtes is the story of protagonist Kassi's return to a pseudonymous Côte d'Ivoire, and his slow, naïve discovery of a plot involving individuals at the highest levels of government to sell plots of land multiple times. At first passive to the point of apathy, Kassi makes a promise to his deceased friend's mother to find out the truth about her son's death: was it suicide or murder; was he a cog in the corruption, or did he get himself killed opposing it. As he learns of a plot which his friend refused to cooperate with, Kassi's reason for passivity is revealed. Apparently his years in France had been mostly wasted: after earning a low-level degree in architecture, Kassi had fallen on difficult times, had squandered what little money he had left on horse races, and had not lived up to his family's expectation to succeed in the Metropole, and to send them back much needed support. Worse, his failures in France led his wife, a traditionally arranged devotee who he never really loved, yet who loved him, to commit suicide after he discovered that she had been prostituting herself to support his gambling habit. With all this failure on his mind, Kassi nevertheless finds the courage to stand up when the

scandal's nouveau bourgeois kingpin threatens him. His bravado costs him another friend, and he learns, in the end, that his own act of courage was really only a brilliant master stroke in the chess game of power. The scandal had been part of the game all along, and was allowed to continue precisely so that a pawn like Kassi could expose the bourgeois perpetrator, and return power to the aristocracy—the Independence-era oligarchy—who only needed an excuse to consolidate it.

Marxian dynamics are not only rife, but fore-grounded in this novel where the characters themselves notice the boundaries marking classes, and where the plot leads to an uprising of the masses. With all the rumors of lost heads floating among the public, a headless woman's body on the steps of the bank is the last straw. The crowd rampages through the bank, demanding her head back as well as their money back, taken from them by the corruption of their leadership class. Although on the literal level, this appears quite similar in content to the depiction of Ivorian divisions in Destins parallèles, Koné innovates by granting more space to a middle class. This converts the conflict at the novel's apex into something less like Touré's purely proletarian pandemonium, and allows for more much more opacity in the lines of force, and more complexity of cause and effect as well as of perspective. Koné is also more concerned with discursive power—the authority to narrate—allowing the plot to unfold like a detective novel so that each element which produces its part of the revolution in the end has its own narrative and vies for the right to claim its own as the definitively truthful version once all is said and done. The climactic conflict itself is set off from the rest of the text by its hesitancy to establish an authoritative narrative:

Certains prétendent que c'est ainsi que tout commença. Mais qui connaîtra la vérité sur l'origine des incidents qui secouèrent le pays et qui pour beaucoup de personne équivalurent à une fin de monde ?...Une autre version raconte [que les choses se sont passées autrement]...Faut-il accorder crédit à ce que La-Vérité-Journal-du-Parti-Unique-d'Avant-Garde écrivit par la suite ? (177, emphasis mine)

Note that the repetition of various expressions of doubts prefacing each new version are not equivalent (the latter, for example, is clearly ironic given the title of the newspaper carrying the “story”), but that their aggregate is to call for comparison and judgment on the part of the reader—to prepare the interpreters for their job of discerning truth, of distilling the common essence of the disparate testimonies, of determining which narratives can be believed.

This way of inscribing competition for the right to define the meaning of events works both as an analogy to the contemporary contest over the term and functions of Ivoirité, and as a discursive means for Koné to open up the confusion of the allegorical elements worked into the developmental trajectories of the characters. Each character in Les Coupeurs de têtes is typecast, which is not to say rigid or cliché, but rather that they lend themselves to all the stereotypes of their roles, while leaving room for surprise in their choices and changes. Kassi is the broken man whose time in France makes his own home country seem foreign to him upon his return. It is because of Kassi's fresh, even naive eyes that the reader can feel the slowly unfurling weight of discovery and the shock of what other characters take for granted. His friend, Kloh Issiaka, murdered early in the novel, is the low-level functionary who finds it increasingly difficult to stay honest with corruption above him, and who finds it increasingly necessary to take a stand in exposing the criminals within the state apparatus—reason for which he is killed. Kassi and Kloh

had gone to grade school with a childhood friend from a well-placed family named Pita, who has now become a doctor like his father before him, and who never ceases to impress upon the other two his modernism, his lack of need to concern himself with money, and his elevated social status compared to theirs. His attractive, educated and adulterous fiancée, Kamissa Agathe, takes great pains to appear to be the consumer society embodied. She revels in being called up from her place among the commoners to now be able to plan the country's most ostentatious nuptials, and also prides herself in the openness of her relationship with Pita, both of whom have such modern ideas about sex, that they have no problem whatsoever allowing their partner to sleep with whomever their flesh desires. Simanga, happily infertile first wife of Kloh represents the other kind of arriviste, uneducated and traditional, but ambitious, using her beauty to secure her place with her solid provider meal-ticket husband, complicit in the selfish and petty, yet ambitious intrigues of the family back in the village and happy to escape them into the anonymity of the city as soon as her husband dies. Old man Salifou the working man scrimps and saves for twenty years working overtime at the boulangerie, but when he goes to get the official title for the land he purchased, he is told he has bought a fake lot. As honest as he is indigent, he feeds the corruption, convinced that if he just greases one more palm, a door will open up for him to finally build a house for his family. Traoré, the marabout, is consulted by Kloh, as well as by the high and mighty. His magical arts, infallible, were once a respected vehicle for the guarantee of successes beneficial to all. They have now become petty, a means of enrichment for their purveyor, who is revealed in the end if not as a charlatan, at least as a con man of the highest order. Traoré's services come at another cost also, for the sacrifices his kind require become more and more horrifying as the greed of the purchasers of his services expands. Djidji Alexandre is the Inquisitor, hand-picked bourgeois auditor-general for the President's new

reform and anti-corruption task force. It is he who uses the position of the best possible cover (who would audit the highest auditing authority?) to head the fake lots scam, sending men to cut off heads to satisfy Traoré, having Kloh killed and having the evidence in his house torched as he discovers Kloh's plan to blow the whistle on him. And finally, Gloria, honest, naïve early teen-aged student turned prostitute who is spoiled too young by sugar-daddy money and whose only ambition is now to one day be taken to the luxurious "Jardin des délices" for which bedchamber only the richest of johns can afford the hourly rate. It is Gloria whose headless body lying in the street becomes the proverbial straw breaking the back of the camel of the masses who explode in anger and almost aimless violence—lashing out as much against their new-bourgeois leaders as against the random lamps in the bank which somehow represented them. It takes a concerted calming effort from the aristocratic class, the President himself, to tame the mobs, sprinkling bills to the crowds as he goes, thereby co-opting the potential revolution, consolidating his own power, and sweeping away the democratic threat of the arrivistes in favor of a continuing "democratic" sort of monarchy by a different name.

Even from this rather schematic sketch of characters and major plot elements associated with them, it should be obvious that Koné has at least made a gesture to create a single character for each of several sociological types he sees as composing Ivorian society. On the surface then, a neat allegory of one-to-one mappings opens up: the aristocracy will remain in power, the bourgeois will remain source of corruption, and the peoples' uprisings will continue to be re-directed to the purposes of the powerful at the expense of the various underclasses as long as money remains the central motivator of the middle classes. On this first horizon of interpretation Koné's text appears without optimism until one recalls the other character, Abou, present by his absence, who never completely surfaces into the diegesis except in oblique references. Just as

his direct dialog and foreground actions are absent from the text, Abou himself lives diegetically underground. Readers are slowly led to believe Abou is behind Kloh's investigations, has published influential political tracts, forms part of a resistance which opposes not only leaders who abuse their power, but also the mystifications with which they attempt to cover their sins. For this role, Abou and in the end Kassi also, must sacrifice their safety, perhaps risking their very lives, but it is they who can eventually, in Koné's representation, bring about the accountability necessary for freedom and democracy.

Within this horizon's allegory, however, there are also traces of the way the nation is conceived which go beyond this surface sociological mapping. Already, the question of the power of interpretation, the control over narrative is a theme which indicates possible avenues for contestation of official versions. In an echo of how Ivoirité gets variously parsed as sometimes multicultural, sometimes exclusionary, Koné's problematization of epistemological satisfaction in determining the meaning of the novel's closing chaotic events reveals the sharp disconnect between official doctrines and the value they're given on the ground.

Also, revealingly, Koné's use of the naïve protagonist, and quasi-detective novel style perform the work of initiation for the reader in such a way as to show that each concentric circle of initiation has discursive power that those in outer rings cannot always fathom but are caught up in nonetheless. For example, it's not until Kassi has a confrontation with the Inquisitor, Djidji Alexandre, that he discovers that Djidji had sent spies to fill out a complete dossier on him even during Kassi's time in France. Fanta Ba, the richest woman in the neighborhood, is also in an outer circle of initiation with respect to Traoré. She cannot see that Traoré's interest in her is solely for her money until she marries him and he runs off with all of his new, very-much-his-

elder bride's generous fortune. Finally, like a chess player who doesn't realize he's actually only a pawn in a larger game, it's not until Djidji himself is denounced and sacrificed by the President that he realizes that his entire position as auditor was conceived only as a place for a convenient scapegoat should the need ever arise. In each of these cases, this structure of discursive power channeled through initiates is less overt, but makes the same fundamental claims about the structures underlying Ivorian society as does Boni in Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis where it took a woman's quest to find all the unauthorized versions of the life and crimes of a *coopérant* for his official story to have any effective resistance at all. Kassi's friend Kloh has been clipping articles and amassing evidence against Djidji Alexandre, for which he is killed, but he had been doing it in concert with an activist friend in hiding named Abou. Abou is able to print pamphlets outside the country, and distribute them through the grassroots which called for a return to the democratic principle of accountability of leaders. Abou's role is necessarily covert throughout the novel, but his impact is large as part of the force which convinces the masses to rise up and demand Djidji Alexandre's political head for having caused the loss of so many actual heads. This strategy proves ultimately ineffective diegetically, but the fact that Kamissa, and Kassi can discuss various interpretations after the fact point to Koné's faith in continuing to struggle for the discursive power to narrate, at least as a tendency toward political accountability. And this is also forms a significant analogy in the make-up of the nation, where a state's authorized narrative about the nation meets competing narratives about it on the ground.

Reading the base allegory into another horizon of interpretation, the formal aspects of the way Koné reveals transformations in his characters becomes significant. Koné surprises his readers with unexpected character developments throughout the novel.

Traoré's trajectory is the most ambiguous. It is not until the novel's final chapters that Traoré, magical consultant to the honest Kloh, is all but definitively fingered as the very marabout calling for human sacrifices, selling blessings of the gods and spirits to the rich and powerful in exchange for the heads he needs for the ultimate alchemistic spell: converting human skulls into pure gold. Respected as a diviner of mystical forces tasked with helping the living succeed in their projects, Traoré's role is sympathetic when he helps Kloh Issiaka with magical protection from the powerful men Kloh seeks to expose. But when this longtime confirmed bachelor suddenly marries rather than attend Kloh's funeral, then barely finishes out his honeymoon before absconding with his new spouse's entire and sizeable fortune, Traoré is revealed as little more than an amoral mercenary willing to convert any and all loyalties into currency because, in his own words "Il n'y a rien de mieux que l'argent" (127). The "little lie, big lie" principle obliging a retroactive re-evaluation of what Traoré's character represents, Koné carefully prepares the reader to suspect nefariousness by degrees. At first, there's an anecdote where Traoré explains to Djidji Alexandre how to make pure gold from human skulls, a special concoction, and a termite mound – Traoré can make money easily but it requires a specific skull: that of Djidji's own son. The ostensible purpose of the explanation is to show how deep the evil of Djidji runs—Traoré is surprised to find that Djidji is willing to make the sacrifice, and quickly backs away, claiming he only deals with gods, not devils. But the ironic tone with which he speaks of human sacrifice to Djidji must be retroactively questioned when it turns out that someone really has deposited human skulls filled with rotting potions on an enormous termite mound. Only during the revolt, when there really is this termite mound of skulls, is the reader forced to go back and re-interpret the ironic register itself as being playful: the shameful truth that can be told with impunity when the teller is sure not to be believed because it's stranger than

the fiction they are inclined to assume. Koné even marks the passage in Kassi's voice with the textual formula he uses to code plot elements that Kassi must re-attend to later in his demystification initiation: "Traoré parlait comme ses cauris et le sens de ses paroles m'échappait" (137).

By this character's trajectory, Koné seems to be suggesting wariness of supernatural counselors to whom too great and too many secrets are entrusted. And when considering the deeper reading where control of narratives about the nation forms the contested space of the nation itself, Traoré's development also suggests an analogy with politicians and functionaries whose place of trust within the state can provide tempting opportunities to turn from service to fraud. The reader, through Koné's careful preparation, and Kassi through his continuing re-acclimation to his home country, both require their respective form of initiation to arrive at this interpretation.

The transformation of Gloria's character forms another example of Koné's manner of retroactive meaning construction. She is originally depicted as amoral and materialistic—a prostitute who gave up even so precious a thing as her education for her sugar daddy's money. Gloria begins to have pangs of conscience for how she has betrayed her upbringing at the hands of a loving, but indigent father. He had brought her up right, and because of this when he falls sick and require costly medical treatment, Gloria, out of shame, cannot bring herself to reveal the source of her income. Her return to Islam and exit from the oldest profession is decapitated along with her body at the plot's climax. Gloria is the analog of Touré's young Ki-Ca in this respect: full of hope, promise, and innocence, they both represent the extreme of how given social conditions can corrupt entire destinies. And although Gloria's character remains worthy

of empathy throughout, it is the surprise of her return to her religious values that makes her sacrifice—which galvanizes the masses to revolt against their leadership—all the more poignant.

The trajectory of Salifou, of unimpeachable integrity, forms a counterpoint to Gloria's. Both are utterly determined by their social conditions, but Salifou from the opposite angle. His work ethic and lifelong service to his family, the gifts he offers to Kloh and other officials as marks of respect in submission to their authority, all point to a man of pure honesty. His inability to correctly suspect that he is the victim of those authority figures is a trait of his class. But when Djidji's men falsely accuse Kloh of being the obstacle to Salifou's family home, Salifou succumbs to the corruption and becomes complicit in Kloh's death. Kloh has little patience for him from the beginning, believing Salifou to be a rube who deserves to lose his money for failing to recognize the shell game of the corrupt officials for what it is. On the other hand, his naiveté is a function of his social conditions also, and it is not the magnitude of his respect for authority that it criticized so much as its misguided direction. In any case, the depths of the Koné's message of the class-based influence of corruption would have less power coming from any other character.

Kassi himself is part of this system of surprising character developments. Depicted from the beginning as a *vaurien* who had squandered his time in France as well as whatever money he had acquired there, Kassi's long time away from home, spent in laziness and shame, has brought him back with apathy for the social conditions of his homeland. Even the shocking tales of decapitators roaming the streets freely barely phases Kassi, who narrates to the readers: "la narration des interminables épisodes de l'histoire extravagante des têtes coupées m'avait laissé indifférent et sceptique," (12). Kassi signals to the reader frequently throughout explanations of the details of corruption, that he doesn't understand the way things are operating, and that he

doesn't really care that much anyway. His passivity goes so far as to push him to sleep in an attractive prostitute's bed and not take advantage of her offer of free sex, and then a few chapters later, allow his barely dead best friend's wife to have her way with him to get the "comfort" she falsely "needs". And yet, returning to his home village to attend Kloh's funeral, Kassi promises Kloh's aging mother that he will find out the truth about Kloh who was being falsely accused post mortem of having committed suicide out of guilt for his part in the fake lots scam. This return to his roots and reconnection with an elder somehow sanctifies the promise in such a way that Kassi's passive attitude toward personal responsibility makes an abrupt one-eighty. He still doesn't understand everything, but at least finds purpose in the one task at hand. And when his investigations into Kloh's death finally bump him up against Djidji Alexandre himself, it is revealed that Kassi had been a critic of the government, an activist even, the whole time he was away in France. In that moment, Kassi finds the courage in his sole act of personal responsibility to resist Djidji's strong-arm tactics, and refuses to enter into the corrupt combination with him, standing up to Djidji in these words:

[Djidji, pour m'impressionner qu'il savait tout sur moi, me raconta] comment j'avais animé les assemblées générales du mouvement des étudiants et comment j'invectivais les hommes politiques au pouvoir dans mon pays.

-- Vous n'avez même pas l'excuse d'avoir été poussé par de vraies convictions idéologiques. Vous ne faisiez cela que pour oublier, fuir votre vie misérable.

-- Que pouvez-vous savoir de mes convictions ? Et vous, occupez-vous votre fonction et ce bureau démentiel par conviction idéologique ? Vos espions peuvent vous renseigner sur certains faits. Ni eux ni vous ne pouvez connaître mes convictions. (168)

It is the word *convictions*, repeated so frequently in this passage, which reveals Koné's recipe for an avoidance of conflict in the Côte d'Ivoire. Not only is Kassi discovering the very existence of his own convictions for the first time in this passage, but he is practicing the novel's key and central act of re-interpretation of narrative. Essentially he has listened to the official version of his time in France—that he felt like such a failure, that lashing out against the injustices of a regime far away back in his own country was the only release—and decided to correct them with an active, resisting, responsible narrative of his own. It is after this confrontation that Kassi's will is solidified to come forward with Kloh's true story as victim of an assassination, with Djidji's true story as author of a murderous conspiracy of corruption. It is at this confrontation that he finally decides to squarely face the core shame of his own story as a negligent ex-pat, guilty of cutting himself off from home and family, tradition and responsibility, his sins of omission and commission ultimately causing the suicide of his own wife. The resolve to ask forgiveness of his mother-in-law for his part in the death of his wife comes only at the cost of assuming the burden of that guilt, facing it, and re-contextualizing the past as something no longer to wallow in, but to rise above.

Speaking truth to power in the above quote, fully assuming his past in a transformative moment, Kassi demonstrates on multiple levels Koné's convictions on how official narratives can be contested. And although on the surface, the antidote of personal responsibility applies to the general problem of corruption, the subtext in the context of the Ivoirité of the times makes the exclusive, divisive effect of Ivoirité one specific deep-structure problem addressed. The North/South division, even ethnic distinctions are almost entirely absent from the surface of the text, but in this way Les Coupeurs de têtes can still be read as a message to Northerners and

Southerners alike that they can refuse the corruption and inevitably ensuing violence of the brewing exclusion of the doctrine of Ivoirité by taking responsibility for their own political past and future.

The most surprising character transformation, however, is undoubtedly that of Kamissa Agathe, whose reputation for ostentation and an insatiable appetite for men made her the perfect companion for the aristocratic and highly modernized Doctor Pita. Seemingly a classic arriviste, Kamissa has succeeded in elevating her station through marital engagement, and has emulated all the habits of consumption that characterize her newfound class to an exaggerated degree. And this is why, in the novel's epilogue, both Kassi and the reader, now properly initiated through their own re-evaluations and transformations, are surprised to find her not only to be the voice of truth about Kloh, Gloria, and Salifou—the three representatives of the poor classes—but that her eyes were tearful as she refuted the official narrative on these three.

Tu ne comprends pas que je pleure. J'aimais Issiaka. C'est le seul homme que j'ai vraiment aimé. J'ai voulu lutter avec lui. Je n'ai pas été assez vigilante. (185)

Her emotion is genuine, and stems from a personal sense of loss for a man she truly loved, and also, more importantly, because his death meant she would no longer be able to struggle for justice and an end to corruption along with him. It isn't until the novel's last page that Kassi can review his opinion of Kamissa and re-evaluate her role and its possibilities and how it reflected on him, thus inviting the reader to re-visit her allegorical role also:

J'avais finalement compris que chez Kamissa Agathe il y avait l'apparence et l'être, le spectacle destiné à tromper les autres et la réalité à laquelle elle croyait. Probablement avait-elle aussi compris qu'il en était de même pour moi, que moi aussi, d'une certaine façon je cachais mon jeu. (186)

The distinction between appearance and reality finally becomes the overt key for the re-interpretation of the pat and flat primary surface allegory reading. It has now become retroactively complicated: appearance and reality differ for all of the characters as well as for all the categories they represent allegorically. Pita especially: the aristocrat pretends to be so beyond traditional values and mores that he openly shares his wife with anyone who pleases her, but in the end it's actually because he's impotent and cannot physically satisfy her. Koné is not the first African to draw an analogy between the upper classes' incapacity to effect real change on the continent and failures of intimacy. Ousmane Sembène's famous print and film allegory Xala depicts a middle class wholesaler whose riches and appetites have grown to the point of wanting to take a third wife (of course much younger than the other two), and discovering to his horror, that his aging member has lost its virility on the very night of his wedding's consummation. Koné's innovation, however, is where he places the curse of uselessness: not on the entrepreneurial class, but on the aristocracy: the small group of great families out of whose hands power will never fall. Kamissa has lots of sex, but not with her fiancé for whom she has only pity. Her true love rather attaches only to a rebellious few with whom she wishes to align her personal struggle for social justice.

The mere re-evaluation of Kamissa's character as hiding her true sympathies takes away none of her concretely irresponsible bourgeois consumerist practices—she will have to assume

these in her own way, just as Kassi had to assume his own guilt. And once characters and readers have received the necessary initiation, the question of how genuine is Kassi's and Kamissa's "jeu" if they hide it so well, or how effective their contributions are if they are so covert, is left to them to decide. However, the tears, Kassi's realization that she has beliefs that her actions don't bear out, and his own willingness to be sacrificed for the cause of exposing the corruption of the powerful all point to some sympathy Koné would create between these characters and the reader at the end of the novel. These character development trajectories, then, provide traces of Koné's vision of Ivorian society, where neither Ivoirité nor resistance to it are what they seem on the surface, and where re-interpretation not just of official narratives, but of societal roles is a requirement for the solidarity of the nation.

As with the Touré novel, there is an element of the Ivorian national landscape conspicuously missing from the thematics of Koné's representation: ethnicity. And although Koné's text is not shot through with binary constructions as is Touré's, they both nevertheless choose to leave ethnic identifiers so far in the background as to render them irrelevant to the narratives at hand. And yet, in an era of Ivoirité, this act is in and of itself a political one. Both authors have attachments to Northern ethnic groups and so would have an interest in resisting exclusionary rhetoric by universalizing, thereby rendering equal by refusal to acknowledge the dividing line, but each go about the problem differently. For Touré, a look to the North as the only place a black Jesus could reside forms a tacit recognition of the legitimacy of the North-South divisions, with the solution coming from what the South would consider the outside. Koné, on the other hand, simply denies any relevance of ethnicity to the possibility of solidarity, instead focusing his analogies on the social categories he depicts in the characters and their transformations. Onomastic and other linguistic traces remain, of course, but are treated in such

a neutral fashion as to suggest Koné conceives of ethnic differences as merely cultural, and not substantially political. Koné's novel also differs in that it avoids the topics of race and colonialism. The ability Kassi had to agitate against the home administration while in France, and the ability of the government to spy on him there, rather than reminding or focusing on breaks with history, continued oppression, and other tropes of colonial fault, even these traces are more aptly read as evidence that Koné considers the corruption of the "grandes familles" an internal problem.

Stylistically there is one more note to be made about both novels: they both employ a first-person narrative exclusively. And although this sample size is too small for a full theory to be elaborated, it can nevertheless be read as significant that voices from the North would choose the relative urgency of voice and strength of identification with a reader that first-person narration can provide, during the time of national polarization. Because the South is already safely "Ivorian", much less pressure would be felt by authors to bake the questions and problems of binary division into their prose as these two have. Contesting official narratives in order to maintain the peace of unity is a more pressing concern for the Northerners whose Ivoirité is beginning to be called into question at the time of publication of these works.

In form and in content, then, Jamesonian systems of the traces of nation are found in Touré and Koné, as well as in the other authors in this study. These two both relying on a heavy class conflict theme demonstrates the interconnection of economics with other modes of division, and control of the interpretation of narrative is the key to resisting the divisions official rhetorics can cause.

5.0 KOUROUMA – IRONY, LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY SUBLIMATED

If chronology, reception, and weight of critical treatment were my criteria for order of chapters, this chapter on Amadou Kourouma would have gone first. Although not the first or most prolific Ivorian author by any stretch, Kourouma nevertheless produced a masterpiece, Les Soleils des Indépendances, at a critical crossroads in African history which has come to mark the beginning of a literary period and has occasioned critical engagements from a variety of perspectives. It is widely read in the Côte d'Ivoire and across Africa as well as in Francophone-themed classrooms in the West. And despite the fact that critics have come at the text from a variety of approaches – ethnographic, linguistic, literary – it remains a common judgment among them that Les Soleils des Indépendances is a seminally important work.

Although his training is not primarily literary, but rather mathematical, and his breadwinning caused a lengthy writing hiatus, Kourouma created four subsequent novels, three of which fall within our Ivoirité period. I will tackle each chronologically, skipping only the non-Ivoirité period novel, but only after I justify somewhat the need to take his first novel into the purview of this study.

Kourouma's first novel, published in 1968, is one of a very few literary offerings published in all of French-speaking Africa between the time France granted political independence to its former colonies in 1960 and its publication date. Many members of the

literate and educated class on the continent had been pressed into the service of the fledgling states and had little time or energy to devote to writing. And although Kourouma himself worked rather in the private sector, the hope of the period called for writers to take at least a time of observation before delving into literary depictions of the failure of hope's promises in Africa. In the context of the cold war, France had been portraying itself as a third way, and concurrent developments in Quebec and the Caribbean made the beginnings of a French-speaking alignment, la Francophonie, seem, in a complicated way, to carry along with it some advantages for each member country. In a conference intended to celebrate this new Francophonie, then, a group of Québécois editors chose Kourouma's manuscript as a prize-winning showcase piece for creative works in French from beyond France's borders. Needless to say the political motivation for Quebecers to highlight an African novel runs askew from the motivations and messages of the novel itself and also of the novelist in many ways. Kourouma's first novel, applauded in Québec, sharply critical of both the Ivorian and Guinean governments of the day in its content, and coming first after a significant pause in the African continent's literary production, Les Soleils des Indépendances became a quick and large success, and has received more critical attention than all of the other novels in this dissertation put together. And even with so schematic a description of the context of the times (which I will develop further as it becomes relevant to the content I will discuss), it is already possible to get a sense of how a work of such importance should not be skipped in a study on Ivorian nationalism in narrative, even before it is clear how well the novel's content spells out an engagement with the concept of Ivoirité which wasn't even formulated until a full generation later.

To be sure, the novel's content deals intimately with what it means to be Ivorian, and it does so through the depiction of another period of extreme tension about the national definition,

but because of the nature of this moment, that of the immediate aftermath of the Independence wave of 1960 when all of French-speaking Africa was abuzz with excited hope for the success of the new autonomy, the tension itself held a more universal character on the continent than do many of the other works in this study. Jacques Chévrier went so far as to point to this novel, along with Yambo Ouologuem's Le Devoir de violence, as the inaugural works of a new period of novelistic fervor, which he called "la littérature du désenchantement". However universal its appeal in other African countries, Les Soleils des Indépendances nevertheless lays the groundwork for understanding many of the issues Ivoirité is arising from and still attempting to deal with thirty years later. However, since a body of critical work has operated on this text, I will present a schematic plot summary for familiarity's sake and then address issues in previous scholarship before delving into the shape Kourouma constructs for the nation in this novel.

Les Soleils des Indépendances opens with the famous death of a major Malinké figure in the capital. The narrator briefly explains Malinké beliefs about the passage of souls to their final resting place before introducing the novel's main character, Fama Doumbouya, last legitimate heir to the Doumbouya dynasty of the Malinké, who expects to be honored because of his attendance honoring the deceased. Instead, his own tardiness, a lack of respect for protocol among the younger generation (for whom cultural practices carry ever less weight), and the effrontery of the disrespectful *griot* assigned to introduce Fama, reveal Fama as a rather petulant glorified beggar, a vulture living off the donations given at occasions of death such as this. Fama continually curses the times, blaming the *Soleils des Indépendances*, or Independence period, for all the *bâtardise* he sees in the world around him.

His thoughts and the narrative turn to Salimata, his wife, whose story occupies the next few chapters. In them, she is the victim of a botched clitorrectomy and a rape in the same day,

and despite the trauma leading her to violently reject later suitors and husbands, she falls for Fama for his smile and kind words, in contrast to all other males treating her as property. Her triumph in marriage soon turns to despair however, as we learn that Fama is sterile, and not only must be financially supported through Salimata's humiliating commerce, but also may be bringing home a second wife.

The narrator then drops Salimata's viewpoint for the remainder of the novel, instead following Fama back to his home village and former seat of power, which happens to be across the border inside the territory of the Socialist Republic of Nikinai (ostensibly Guinée). With his usurper cousin now dead, Fama assumes the throne, and exercises his rights to marry the deceased's younger wife. Back in the home village, Fama meets with his trusted royal advisors, Diamourou, muslim griot, and Balla, infidel shaman, who not only advise, but speak for him and financially support him. Together the three are summoned to a meeting of the village elders where it must be decided how to share power in the era of independence between the Communist Party Committee—where even members of the traditional slave caste may become leaders—and the traditional monarchy.

With Fama "honored" as the figurehead and all real power going to the official Party representative, Fama decides to go back to the capital with his new wife and continue his life with Salimata, all the while afraid of how she'll undoubtedly react to a younger woman having sex with her husband in their home. His fears are well founded as, despite her initial devout acquiescence to the fact and to Fama's Islamic rights, Salimata is driven ever more crazy by the sound of the two of them on their *natte*, and eventually she and the new wife explode into violent outbursts. Fama, *excédé*, rather than mastering his house and resolving the conflict, rather than offering the separate rooms or homes Islamic law calls for, instead escapes the violence of his

own home into a renewed political fervor. With insurrection in the air, the first challenges to the new political powers that be, Fama goes about in his new capacity as king of the Doumbouya trying to obtain audiences with ministers. When several of his house calls turn out to be to suspected coup organizers, Fama also is scooped up by the police and whisked off to a prison with deplorable conditions. After a time, he is brought out for a kangaroo court, tried and convicted of not reporting his dream of a coup d'état to the proper authorities, the penalty for which is twenty years of prison. The day after his sentencing, however, he is dressed in new clothing, cleaned up, and sent out onto a stage where the President himself, in all his magnanimity, gives a long speech about fraternity and forgiveness, then publicly pardons the gaggle of political prisoners behind him, Fama included, promising them power, position, and purse in exchange for their forgiveness for the harsh treatment they had received in prison at his hand. Fama refuses the gift, wanting only to return home. But the very definition of "home" changes en route, as he learns that during his prison stay, both wives abandoned him.

With nowhere left, Fama decides to return to Togobala, Doumbouya capital, for the remainder of his days, but because of the political upheavals, the border with Nikinai has been closed. Not willing to submit to this one last indecency of the post-colonial powers, Fama takes an opportunity to skirt the border patrol, climb down from the bridge separating the two border stations, and attempt a crossing on foot, believing that the sacred crocodiles would never harm the last Doumbouya heir. He is wrong, and perishes in an ambulance a short distance from Togobala, and the narrator loops the readers back to the first words on the death of a Malinké from the novel's opening lines.

With this schematic plot summary complete, I will engage the critical treatments that have been made of the novel, which run the gamut from the narrowly lexico-syntactic to the broader cultural, mostly with a concentration on Kourouma's language which is the overriding theme that the bulk of Kourouma scholarship shares as forming part of the keys of signification in the work. Amadou Koné, literary scholar as well as author studied in a previous chapter, puts it thusly: "The most often studied aspect of Kourouma's work is undoubtedly, and naturally, his language" (110). What is interesting in Koné's phrase is the word "naturally", which (rightly) suggests that language draws attention to itself in the novel in such a way that it draws analysts to it quite naturally, and which also connotes that it is natural for language to be a problem for any African writer. Koné goes on to frame his own intervention into the linguistic practice of Kourouma over the body of the latter's works as belonging to three separate problematics: the choice of code itself; choices of code-switching; and the literary framework of narration in which context the code is employed.

In the case of the choice of linguistic medium, Koné notes that, as with many African authors, the difficulties of the politics of the choice of French as the language of publication are constantly reinforced throughout the novel. However, Kourouma is not content to leave his lament of the loss of "legitimacy" in culture and government to the content of his work, but infuses his very style with the message as well. The novel's celebrated opening sentence speaks volumes in this regard.

Il y avait une semaine qu'avait fini dans la capitale Koné Ibrahima, de race malinké, ou *disons-le en malinké* : il n'avait pas soutenu un petit rhume... (9, emphasis mine)

Koné and Christopher Miller, among others, have noted the fact that even though the narrator invites the readers to read along with him in the Malinké language, what follows is perhaps Malinké in content, but the medium of the message is, in fact, still persistently quite French. Captured in this turn of phrase, for Koné, is a reflection of the imposition of the colonial language, a regrettable loss, proof of what Kourouma means when he says in a later interview with Moncef Badday:

Je l'[le livre] ai pensé en malinké et écrit en français, en prenant la liberté que j'estime naturelle avec ma langue.[...] J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain. (7)

In microcosm, then, this impossibility of self-expression in one's own language is part and parcel of the alienation to oneself that colonialism has succeeded in imposing, to follow the thought of Koné. Miller agrees in large part, adding only the nuance that Kourouma's work should be read as participating in an anti-Francophone project (even though recuperated by quintessentially francophonist Québécois and later French maisons d'édition), as an exercise in deforming the French language (for example, in this passage, by using a transitive plus-que-parfait structure with *finir* as a euphemism for *mourir*, and the clause structure reversed with the subject coming after the verb—these two traits of usage ring foreign to the purist French ear) in cultural revolt against the hegemonic force France continues to exercise over Africa, at least symbolically, through its language.

I will return to this opening sentence in my own analysis as I present its implications for the definition of the Ivorian nation later, but for now it can already be noted that while these valid points have been brought up, each insightful and useful in their own right for the purposes to which they are put in their respective contexts, both Koné and Miller create semantic slippage when they write of Kourouma's use of French. In some places they refer to language as a holistic and more or less monolithic system of codes, and in others their use of the term seems to allow for variability of forms. Both Koné and Miller are partisans of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view of language, explained in Decolonizing the Mind, as a vehicle for culture such that each language (holistic and more or less monolithic system of codes: French, English, Malinké, Gikuyu) maps one-to-one with a given culture. The money quote from the Ngugi book spells it out:

Language as communication and culture are the products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. (15-16)

While it is true that each language evolves through its practice, which is caught up in the concurrent practice of culture, and even though it is roughly fair to state that communication of any kind can be culturally significant, the implications of such a theory are overly rigid: the inference is that systems of codes are biased, and match perfectly the culture with which they are associated and no other. Diachronically there can be no dispute that languages develop words, expressions, turns of phrase, styles, even syntax and morphology that can point to particularities

in the cultures they evolve along with. But languages obey natural synchronic constraints that cultures are not necessarily bound to, and besides the fact that some language communities are large enough to encompass a wide multiculturalism, such a mapping of one culture to one language entails serious reduction (essentializing and flattening into a falsely monolithic norm) of the cultures in question, which may have acute internal debates and differences.

Koné and Miller both find wonderful examples of thoughts and concepts which are Malinké in nature, and yet which are clothed in a French which is twisted sufficiently from a grammarian's standard for it to register as foreign in the native French speaker's mind. And while it is true that something is lost in the translation from Malinké thought to French script, it is not so much *what* is lost that is significant in Les Soleils des Indépendances, but rather the fact that whatever is lost, Kourouma is *still succeeding* in communicating it in some form of French. He may overuse the inversion of subject and verb in dependent clauses (such as in "Il y avait une semaine qu'avait fini Kone Ibrahim") as he is wont to do because his thoughts are clothed first in Malinké where such structures are more natural, but the syntactical rules of French do allow for such inversions—it is marked but not ungrammatical. In like manner, Kourouma's abuse of the verb *finir* is easy to characterize as foreign sounding, but does not disobey any French rules of grammaticality: *finir* with the auxiliary *être* is used intransitively to mean *mourir*, and even though the "wrong" auxiliary appears to be used to call up this sense of the verb, it is common stylistic practice to use transitive verbs intransitively when the goal is to leave it up to the interlocutor to divine or infer the missing direct object (He had finished. But what had he finished? Oh, his life). What I am illustrating here is not some prejudicial assertion that French, as some superior "world language" is supple enough to integrate Malinké whereas Malinké, by contrast, must be some kind of backwater dialect unfit for use in communicating the technical

and intricate concepts that French can handle, and therefore only useful for some purity of localized ethnic cultural flavor. Rather, my point is that both critics and even the author himself may be convinced of an inequality between languages which is based less on the synchronic properties of the languages themselves, and more on the value their own assumptions place on the usefulness of the languages in question. And the question of utility implies ones of audience and of project: to whom is Malinkified French a useful means of expression? And for what is it useful? The abuse of the French lexicon and syntax operated by Kourouma can be read positively: not as merely the failure to be able to fully express his Malinké identity in French, but rather as the success of demonstration by analogy how Malinké identity has been irretrievably altered by its contact with French. The value of this “alteration” of French can and should be the object of great debate, but concerns this study less than the fact that the alteration produces systematic analogies in the form of the novel, the very medium of its communication to its readers reinforces on every page the hybrid nature of the postcolonial Côte d’Ivoire, not merely as a matter of the author’s stylistic choices, but down to the minute choices of word, phrase, expression, syntax, and narrative voice.

In point of fact, both Miller and Koné read the above opening line, taking the statement “disons-le en malinké” at face value as an announcement that the following will be in the African language, so that what follows in French breaks their expectations, being a translation rather than a transliteration. But it is even more in keeping with the sarcastic spirit of the novel, which I will explain in the pages that follow, to note that it is the announcement itself which should be considered suspect—that “il n’avait pas soutenu un petit rhume” is in fact Malinké in exactly all the ways that remain important any more after the colonial encounter—which is to say that only the proverb, the turn of phrase, the cultural traces remain when stripped of their former

legitimacy and of the authority of their own language and the political power and organization attendant to Malinké society's own conception of social order. If Kourouma really had made a transliteration of a Malinké phrase, even if translated in a footnote, the play of ambiguity he would have between the in-group Malinké and the *possibly* out-group French readership would henceforth be resolved and unremarkable. All of what had been legitimately Malinké becomes subordinated to French, Western democratic universalist ideals and the communication of the Malinké spirit must also conform to the universalizing modes of linguistic expression from which perspective the Malinké identity is a narrow fact of local geography and culture, and no longer a marker of belonging to a sovereign entity.

To return to the opening phrase and restate the nuance I'm attempting to bring, Miller and Koné both believe that by saying "disons-le", the narrator is including the reader in the Malinké in-group, and that the novel that follows addresses Malinké readers, engaging them in ways Western readers can only appreciate obliquely. And while it may be true that a reader with the same ethnic and cultural background could conceivably identify elements in the text that an outsider would remain ignorant of, it is nonetheless true that Kourouma's playfully sarcastic tone throughout the novel licenses the reading of this opener as also sarcastic in nature. By following his "disons-le" with a Malinké phrase translated into French, Kourouma is carefully introducing the ways in which he will draw even the Western reader into his implied "nous", providing initiation at times, and at other times leaving clues so that the reader can correctly infer what no Malinké should ever have to explain to another, but always remaining ambiguously aloof as to whether or not the reader actually belongs. In other words, by assuming Kourouma is failing to communicate his Malinkéness because of the necessity of translating his thoughts into French, Miller and Koné forget two things: 1. that Kourouma himself is completely and thoroughly

bilingual, having a perfect mastery of the French language, and is therefore making choices when deviating from what he knows is the norm; and 2. that in the broadest possible sense, all creative thought expressed in language has already undergone a process of translation, and has therefore lost something already, such that even Malinké is inadequate to fully express the Malinké mind, such as it is. Thus, while it brings added meaning for the in-group for linguist Ngalasso to catalogue and categorize the Malinké-marked passages, the novel's comment on the status of that in-group and the out-groups against which the in-group distinguishes itself is given short-shrift in his article. And thus, while it brings depth and nuance to note slippages in the narrative voice suggesting a false dialogism between the Malinké and French languages and identities, as does Miller, it is nevertheless necessary to add that the falsity itself is ambiguous, which analogically reflects the nature of the new identities in place post-Independence. In short, Kourouma's novelistic practice demonstrates a conception of the Côte d'Ivoire as hybrid in a way that neither his characters nor his narrator can admit.

I will now review how the question of Ivorian identity evident in Kourouma's prose is engaged not only in the surface expressive content, but also in underlying structures and forms. From the opening lines, Fama and the narrator deplore the inescapable condition of *bâtardise*, contrasted with a Malinké purity still at least partly possible even during the colonial period, stifling the post-Independence generation. But even as Fama and the narrator deplore Fama's mixed condition, what they demonstrate at every turn is the miscegenation at the heart of the very "purity" they lament the loss of. Take for example the narrator's explanations of what happens at the death of a Malinké soul, which immediately follows the famous first lines announcing but then not producing a translation. First the narrator explains that the Malinké soul

possesses powers of travel and communication after death to return to its birth village, give news of its body's passing, then go back to where the body died to attend its interment. Aware that not everyone in the readership would believe such things, the narrator continues:

Vous paraissez sceptique ! Eh bien, moi, je vous le jure, et j'ajoute : si le défunt était *de caste forgeron*, si l'on n'était pas dans l'ère des Indépendances (les soleils des Indépendances, disent les Malinkés), je vous le jure, on n'aurait jamais osé l'inhumer dans une terre lointaine et étrangère. Un ancien *de la caste forgeron* serait descendu du pays avec une petite canne, il aurait tapé le corps avec sa canne, l'ombre aurait réintégré les restes, le défunt se serait levé. On aurait remis la canne au défunt qui aurait emboîté le pas à l'ancien, et ensemble ils auraient marché des jours et des nuits. *Mais attention !* sans que le défunt revive ! La vie est au pouvoir d'Allah seul ! Et sans manger, ni boire, ni parler, ni même dormir, le défunt aurait suivi, aurait marché jusqu'au village où le vieux *forgeron* aurait repris la canne et aurait tapé une deuxième fois. Restes et ombre se seraient à nouveau séparés et c'eût été au village natal même qu'auraient été entreprises les multiples obsèques trop compliquées d'un Malinké *de caste forgeron*. (9, emphasis mine)

Here we have the narrator directly addressing his readership/audience in a conversational tone ("eh bien"), doubling down on supernatural "facts" that may seem implausible to the reader. The metaphysical beliefs here point to a conception of a spirit separated from a body at death, which returns to an ethnographic homeland as do all Malinké. A quick correction is necessary, for the narrator is aware that those in his readership familiar with Muslim beliefs concerning the

nature of the soul and its behavior at death will need some justification for that which will seem, to them, to be contradictory to Islam. The power over life and death is imputed to Allah alone, therefore the Malinké tradition which would have a spirit re-enter and re-animate a body can do so without offending Muslim sensibilities only if one stipulates that this re-animation is a supernatural property of the Malinké nature, and does not constitute “life” per se. In other words, the Malinké, which are later cast as devout Muslims, are a group defined by a mixed set of beliefs—Muslim and Malinké—which have found a sort of cultural harmony through rationalization. The integration of the animist and Islamic traditions in the Malinké culture is neither complete nor even very tidy as exemplified in the characters of Fama’s two advisors. Balla, the *cafre* is venerated for his shamanistic craft, for his skill at the hunt and at the tall tale as well as for his unmatched occult powers. And yet, simultaneously, he is spurned by the community for his systematic lack of respect for Islam, which everyone else considers part of their cultural essence. Diamourou, the griot, is a devout Muslim and spars frequently with Balla over religious matters, providing counter-point to Balla, and symbolic weight to an already mixed Malinké identity.

The other item of interest in the discursive construction of an Ivorian identity in this passage is the function the narrator performs as he frames his discussion of Malinké beliefs. By addressing the readers directly and claiming to perceive their skepticism, the narrator appears to be defining his audience: those who would be skeptical about supernatural Malinké beliefs; Westerners, for example, famous for their disbelief, or non-tribesmen who might believe different things about the after-life. In any case, addressing the skepticism of such a group, one would expect the content immediately following to provide evidence, or explanation of the phenomena in question. This is not the case, as Kourouma’s narrator simply ploughs on into an

even less believable anecdote—the repetition of confirmatory markers (“je vous le jure”) in his language demonstrating that the narrator is aware that readers will have a hard time believing this story too. In operation here is a form of irony in the very footings the narrator takes up, which, by implication, define the expected audience, if the narrator can be imagined as an interlocutor. The places where the expectation of an explanation is flouted and where the narrator doubles down on what he flags as already less than easily believable therefore constitute linguistic clues defining the “nous”, of the “disons-le en malinké” referenced above, as a group with mixed attitudes toward non-scientific evidence, and toward the persuasiveness of traditional forms of argumentation. With this choice of rhetorical form, then, Kourouma creates an ambiguity of readership. First, to the Malinké in-group, the second explanation would seem ironically superfluous—a griotic panache serving to consolidate the group identity as that group which the outside can never really understand. But to the out-group non-Malinké reader, the second explanation would function more like an initiation—a sharing of secret knowledge about the essence of Malinké beliefs (behavior of soul after death, hereditary division of labor into castes, primacy of homeland, imbrication of Islamic and animist traditions—a full ethnographic overview in a single paragraph), marked with ritual-like repeated phrases (*de caste forgeron*) and a pedagogical tone (*Mais attention!*). If Kourouma’s narrator had given one simple explanation of Malinké beliefs, rather than declaring “et j’ajoute,” the reading would have been straightforward and unremarkable, as the ironic solidarity promoting gesture would have been flattened out to the merely didactic or to the merely diegetic. In this sense, Kourouma is revealing a field of national identity where ethnicity is involved, but poses only ambiguous barriers to other forms of belonging.

In the same way, Kourouma uses his narrator's griotic talent to retell the myth of the Doumbouya dynasty's origins not once, but twice. In the first version, a village chief, aware of a prophecy detailing the visit of a great Muslim marabout he should convince to stay, is constrained by animistic tradition to push him on. The chief's influence wanes because of this act, and Souleymane, the marabout, prospers, becoming the Doumbouya progenitor. The narrator then recounts a second version where the chief is constrained by a different force, the desire to sleep off a drunken stupor. What the narrator explains is common between the two is the result that the new village of the Doumbouya founder prospered. But the reader is left with strikingly opposite connotations about specifically ethnic identity. The first story paints the aboriginal Bambara as honorable and understandable in their mild-as-possible rejection of Souleymane, but the second accuses the Bambara of alcoholism, laziness, and stupidity for choosing sleep over the prosperity and expansion of knowledge and influence that Souleymane was prophesied to provide. The ramifications are neither explained nor marked as particularly important, but their opposition in attitudes about the importance of prophecy sets up the central prophecy with which Fama has to deal, that the Doumbouya line will come to an end in a time Fama can't help but surmise is his own. Had he stopped at the respectful first version, the narrator's analogy to the multicultural Houphouet-Boigny doctrine of *fraternité* between ethnic groups would have been complete and obvious. The telling of the second version, however, opens up a space of interpretation for an ambiguity toward that doctrine: a space where ethnic differences are meaningful and real, and yet are merely cultural in their force. The in-group Malinké could wink and nod about how well the second version captures the culturally distinct indigenous Bambara (who also would get the joke, but may be justifiably angry that it comes at their expense), but the out-group non-Malinké/non-Bambara would find the different versions

irrelevant to the outcome. Here again, Kourouma's very manner of presenting his text forms analogies with the nation, which is also a space where ethnicity has meaning, but no political force. And, most interestingly, the narrator introduces both foundation myths as requiring interpretation:

Fama commença de penser à l'histoire de la dynastie pour interpréter les choses, faire l'exégèse des dires afin de trouver sa propre destinée. (97)

Fama's inclusion of both versions is an integral part of the exercise of exegesis, for it is not the truth value of either which is important, but rather the fact that there are two potentially contradictory and yet equally authoritative narratives explaining the very foundation of the dynasty whose end Les Soleils des Indépendances chronicles. The analogy with a Côte d'Ivoire defined by contradictory and yet equally authoritative narratives is stark.

It is in the same vein that one can read the Salimata chapters. Les Soleils des Indépendances is organized into three parts, each containing several chapters, which correspond roughly to a single setting. The first tells of postcolonial conditions in the capital in the Independence period, the second reveals more of the Malinké traditions as Fama returns home to his village, and the third centers around the political events upon Fama's re-entry into the capital, and into the political arena. In this first part, the narrator reserves two entire chapters for Salimata and her misadventures. Hailed as a boldly feminist gesture from a male author, these two chapters have been studied for their contribution as isolated literary fragments, but have not

been read as necessarily integral to the novel as a whole⁷⁷. Certainly it is hard to understate the importance of these chapters in such a seminal work for their power to force re-evaluation of the traditional roles of women in African society as elsewhere. But none of that is lost in also reading Salimata as a figure of the Malinké identity with a feminine inflection.

Salimata is cast as a perfect Malinké woman: beautiful, devout Muslim yet faithful follower of shamanistic counsels, generous, loyal, and desirous of motherhood as a fulfillment of her being. And yet, her initiation into womanhood traumatically fails. Socialized into submissive acceptance of clitorrectomy as the gateway to womanhood, Salimata's refusal to cooperate, her screams during the operation in defiance of an imposed silence, and her nubile beauty attract the intervention of the village sorcerer into her initiation. Still in pain from the wound, Salimata is attacked by a force she cannot identify except by smell which leaves that tender area in even more blinding pain. The shaman, who smells suspiciously like her attacker, arrives quickly on the scene after the attack to pronounce Salimata haunted by an evil and jealous spirit who must have performed the rape. Over the next few years, Salimata's beauty attracts other smelly suitors whose rights of marriage are never fully consummated because of Salimata's reaction, screaming in terror as if the man's approach was a reiteration of the original trauma. Eventually one husband gives her the ultimatum to consent to sex or be killed, and she avoids both by fleeing to another village, where she meets a young and handsome Fama who admires her beauty, whose attraction she shares, with whom sex is never coercive. Only, after childless years of marriage with Fama, her delight turns to despair and to the testing of every marabout's prescription for fertility she can obtain. When it is revealed to her by another lustful diviner that

⁷⁷ Christopher Miller's chapter "*Les Soleils des Indépendances* and Francophone Dialogue" in his landmark 1990 study Theories of Africans: Francophone literature and anthropology in Africa provides an extremely rigorous reading of the novel, and yet succumbs to this treatment of Salimata.

it is Fama, and not her who is sterile, she still refuses the marabout's advances and clings all the more to her seedless husband, whose rent and expenses she now pays through her meager millet porridge commerce. Thoughts of Allah blessing her with a child bring her to make an offering to all takers at a busy market one morning. Cripples, beggars, and a small army of such encircle Salimata, take all her porridge, steal her money, jostle her, fondle her, and leave her *pagne* untied and open, revealing her shame and leaving her bruised with no single attacker to blame. The narrator publishes her thoughts of warnings she had previously received:

La grande générosité au marché appelle la méchanceté, le désordre et le pillage. Parce que les nécessiteux et les truands sont trop voraces et trop nombreux... Ah ! l'ingratitude des nécessiteux nègres ! Leur misère n'était que la colère d'Allah provoquée et méritée. Salimata continuera à faire l'aumône mais seulement aux vrais nécessiteux, jamais plus aux truands, paresseux de chiens errants ! (63)

Thus, despite keeping all the traditions and obeying all the standard patriarchal hierarchies, Salimata still spends her life as a victim, from the end of childhood to the beginning of Fama's incarceration, in all the most personal, shame-inducing ways. A more apt analogy of the loss of respect for the Malinké identity decried by Fama and the narrator could hardly be found. But through the lens of Salimata's character, the fault for her traumas is not the new political realities, but rather institutions of the Malinké culture in and of themselves. Salimata, as an emblematic woman, is passed as property from dead husband to his brother in marriage. Her rape at the hands of the shaman never comes to light because of his position of authority and the play he is able to make on the traditional beliefs of those who would otherwise be his accusers,

enables him to hide his sins, escaping justice fraudulently but completely. And her millet porridge *mise à nue* is not imputed to the illegitimacy of the times, as it would be in the eyes of Fama, but rather is imputed to racial, societal, religious motivations—elements of a culture which, put together, have created an attitude of ingratitude even for gifts freely offered, a voracity which turns violently on the giver when the means of satisfaction are depleted, a malicious envy expecting handouts and credit rather than humbly accepting them.

The Salimata chapters' contrast with Fama's constant complaint in the rest of the novel that *bâtardise* is the condition of the times illustrates several key points of how Kourouma conceives of the society of the narrative, each on a separate level of analysis. First, the public/private distinction with which much of feminist theory is concerned find a parallel both in the characters in question, and in the cultures from which such characters can spring. Second, and more importantly for this study, the fact of needing to insert a female perspective into the story of Fama's lament at the loss of cultural purity makes Les Soleils des Indépendances a mixed narrative in precisely the same way the Ivorian society depicted is mixed: gender-inflected perspectives coming together with varying degrees of contradiction and harmony.

This point is driven home all the more when considering the rest of Salimata's story, and when considering the fact that after the two chapters chronicling her suffering at the hands of tradition and males, the rest of her story cannot be told through her own perspective. Fama's return to the conjugal home with a second wife, passed down to him as an inheritance from his deceased cousin, tells of a new degree of suffering at the hands of men and traditions for Salimata, but it is told from Fama's point of view. As he is incarcerated, the narrative forgets her for a time in favor of detailing the political happenings, but then, not through Fama or through the narrator, but through a third person interlocutor, Kourouma reveals that Salimata has left

Fama, thinking him dead, to live with the sorcerer who had revealed Fama's sterility to her (and whom she had injured escaping from his advances). In the end, Fama's attitude toward Salimata's rejection is generous and revealing:

Salimata non plus ne voulait pas de lui. Oui ! Salimata, la seule personne qu'il aurait souhaité revoir, ne voudrait plus de lui. Ce qui avait arrêté Salimata ces derniers temps n'était ni l'amour, ni le caractère sacré du mariage, ni les longs souvenirs communs. Ce qui avait retenu Salimata prisonnière dans l'union était l'impossibilité pour elle de vivre avec un autre. Pour la première fois donc de sa vie, Salimata supportait un autre homme. Peut-être l'aimait-elle. Peut-être allait-elle avoir un enfant. Peut-être était-elle heureuse. Fama le souhaitait. (184)

Despite all his repeated rhetoric about *bâtardise* and despite all his curses for the loss of "legitimacy" in the times of the *Soleils des Indépendances*, Fama's final wish for Salimata is that she find happiness in union with any man, no matter the latter's illegitimacy—this wish being one of the few moments not marked as ironic in the entire novel. After being magnanimously released from prison and offered money and high political station by the President as a peace offering, Fama's only remaining "legitimate" move, independent move, was to refuse, to answer silence to "friends" who would benefit by Fama's acceptance of a new position of authority, and to return to Togobala to live out the remainder of his days. And yet, at the apex of these final acts of rebellious legitimacy, Fama's exclamation on the bridge in defiance of the new powers controlling the borders which divide his own rightful land includes only two statements of

position and role: that of royalty and that of matrimony. Taunting the border guards of illegitimate powers, Fama exclaims:

-- Regardez Doumbouya, le prince du Horodougou ! Regardez le mari légitime de Salimata ! Admirez-moi, fils de chiens, fils des Indépendances ! (190)

We don't have the rest of Salimata's story, but Fama's good wishes leave us to assume that when her suffering from subjection to *passé* orders of legitimacy (Fama!) reached the breaking point, she found her happiness, her freedom to associate with another. And yet, even after she had abandoned him, the legitimacy of their marriage merits such weight in Fama's world-view that it becomes one of two institutions he can cite and proudly exclaim as emblematic of that which should remain, which the *bâtardise* has destroyed. This is Fama's first use, in the novel's final pages, of the legitimacy of his marriage to his first spouse as somehow central to his already well established purist Malinké identity. Thus, the critic is licensed to read extra significance in the very institution, to find sense in a more symbolic meaning for Salimata as a character. And if she can be said to represent the Malinké traditions on a gender-inflected par with Fama, then Fama's death, last of his line, represents the end of the political relevance of ethnicity in the same way that Salimata's abandonment of her legitimate marriage in favor of the happiness denied her by the very traditions, institutions and belief structures which she so purely upholds also represents the end of a certain kind of Malinké, which will now be free to adapt to the cultural miscegenation the Independence period can only offer. With this reading in place, it is now possible to re-integrate the prior Salimata chapters, not only as a valid feminist gesture,

but as part and parcel of Kourouma's conception of the Ivorian society as postcolonial conditions have changed it.

The narrator's ambiguous "nous", the various versions of the Doumbouya foundation legend, the Salimata chapters—all of these at once double and mixed segments of the text—may well make for a concept of ethnicity "constantly referred to and explained," as Miller would have it, such that *Les Soleils des Indépendances* becomes a "complex project of literary anthropology" at one horizon of interpretation (204). But on another level, these textual components, both mixed and double in content and in form demonstrate something else: the story of a royal Malinké who can no longer behave like one. In this sense, on this horizon of interpretation, Les Soleils des Indépendances becomes less an *exposé* of ethnic identity as it is a chronicle of the end of ethnicity's political relevance. The narrator defines the functions of Malinké identity and their adaptations under given conditions:

Le négoce et la guerre, c'est avec ou sur les deux que la race malinké comme un homme entendait, marchait, voyait, respirait, les deux étaient à la fois ses deux pieds, ses deux yeux, ses oreilles et ses reins. La colonisation a banni et tué la guerre mais favorisé le négoce, les Indépendances ont cassé le négoce et la guerre ne venait pas. Et l'espèce malinké, les tribus, la terre, la civilisation se meurent, percluses, sourdes et aveugles... et stériles. (22)

For all Malinké, then, a loss of identity has occurred – an adaptable loss of ability to make war occurred as colonization imposed a French sort of "pax romana", but the crippling loss of commercial viability as statist and socialist excesses employed cooperatives, stifling free

enterprise in the Independence era, left no more roles for Malinké to play in society. But the quintessential Malinké that Fama is supposed to be, even in his home territory, has already lost these central Malinké identifying roles: he arrives after the kill like a vulture rather than like a warrior, *totème Panthère*, and instead of the proud merchant, he has become a societal parasite, living on charitable honorariums. Fama's sterility (which he wrongly imputes to his wife), presages the end of his line just as the colonial rape of African resources crippled his trade, and just as the political posturing prior to Independence guaranteed an end to his influence even in the new political system for whose establishment he contributed the support of a warrior—a system in which only those sufficiently culturally diluted by knowledge of the foreigner's language have place among the rulers. And, height of symbolic *bâtardise*, even *before* the Independence era, Fama's place as legitimate ruler of Malinké had been usurped by a well-connected cousin, not of the direct Doumbouya line. In other words, the surface complaint of Fama—that he lives under conditions of impurity—is ironic, and hides the more germane demonstration that Malinké purity itself is fictional—or rather, that the truly pure essence of Malinké identity lies neither in tradition, nor in some “legitimacy” of authority, but instead in adaptability. Fama's final words before the sacred crocodile—which normally wouldn't dare touch a legitimate Prince of the Horodougou—eats him, support another layer of allegory, and deserve revisiting in greater context. After receiving the undignified explanation that the border is closed, especially to him, with no papers, whose name appears on the list of former political prisoners no longer allowed to leave the country, Fama sees an opportunity, Fama darts around the Eburnian border guard far enough onto a bridge to see that no one can catch him if he slips down a column into the crocodile-infested gully below, and exclaims:

-- Regardez Doumbouya, le prince du Horodougou ! Regardez le mari légitime de Salimata ! Admirez-moi, fils de chiens, fils des Indépendances ! (190)

The replies, however, are double. One of the new authorities exercises his, and barks an order to Fama: “Halte-là!” The other of the new *bâtards illégitimes* does not address Fama at all, but rather the guards on both sides: “Il est fou! Ne tirez pas! Je l’attraperai” (190).

On the surface, Fama’s words are in the plural imperative, commanding, as a legitimate ruler would be wont to do, but commanding only passive action: *regardez, admirez*. The sons of illegitimacy, of course, don’t see what they have been commanded to see. The guards of Nikinai see an old man making a break through a closed border, and the guards of the Côte des Ébènes see a *fou*⁷⁸. His words appear without content to both sides, functioning only as calls for attention, and are ultimately discarded as the mere ramblings of a crazy man. The response addressed to Fama reaffirms the supremacy of the guards’ own authority, thereby cutting down any claim Fama might have, and the response to the other guards similarly undermines Fama’s claims of legitimacy by not even addressing them directly, by moving on as if they are to be disregarded.

Even the narration takes a turn at this point: for the first time in the text, the narrator’s frequent interjections, addressing his characters, is revealed as something more than merely a storyteller’s crowd-pleasing rhetorical flourish—he actually dialogs with Fama, receiving Fama’s final earthly words. In and out of consciousness in his death throes, Fama’s grip on

⁷⁸ A reading can be made in which the guard imputing insanity is claiming Fama is a *fou* without believing it himself, only saying so in order to save the life of the respected elder. However, whether he believes Fama is crazy or not is immaterial to the fact that his words call for action as if it were unequivocally true that Fama had, in fact, lost his grip.

reality slips into some kind of oneiric or otherworldly state, where the narrator explains, with a familiar *tutoiement*:

N'as-tu rien entendu, Fama ? Tu vas à Togobala, Togobala du Horodougou. Ah ! voilà les jours espérés ! La bâtardise balayée, la chefferie revenue, le Horodougou t'appartient, ton cortège de prince te suit, t'emporte, ne vois-tu pas ? Ton cortège est doré.

-- Non, je ne le veux pas doré.

Donc argenté. (194)

Only in a vision at death's door can Fama return to a pure Togobala, where the *chefferie* is still respected, even down to the colors. Only at the gateway to the next life can the narrator enter the diegetic space he had kept apart from, and allow two-way communication between storyteller and character. But the facts in the vision are subject to change on a whim; the gold turns to silver instantly according to the fancy of the monarch which, in the diegetic reality, was in the middle of suffering the ultimate consequences of that very fancy having no force at all, or rather being stopped by force. The vision continues as consciousness revives in fits and starts: now Fama is riding a regal steed, but his triumphal dream cortège vanishes, and as he attempts to round it up on his white charger, the horse detects an impassible gulf and refuses to proceed. On the back of a force that can take him no further, the lone remaining legitimate heir of the Doumbouya expires, both his diegetic reality and his dreams confirming the impossibility of his return home.

And yet, the purity of Fama's Malinké essence, does arrive home, in a way—commingled with the spirits of his ancestors, to be reborn in the body of a new Malinké child one day. And in the same way, the national deep-structure allegory in Kourouma may be proposing what Partha Chatterjee almost thirty years later described as a distinction between the material and the spiritual—that although drained of its political organizational power, the Malinké identity is, and will remain, a cultural phenomenon, a pole of identification, even in and through the postcolonial bastardization of tradition's purity. The relevance of ethnicity is not dead, but has sublimated into the abstract, has changed domains, moving from political to cultural. Of course, culture plays into politics, in the broadest sense, but in a multicultural democratic state, ethnicity cannot be allowed as a criterion for candidacy.

And, perhaps ironically, it is on this point that what Kourouma's novel demonstrates rejoins quite handily the general thrust of the Houphouët-Boigny doctrine of *fraternité*. If ethnicity is always already mixed, if it is always already bastardized with contradictory institutions, if it always already causes suffering among those who, like Salimata, are too respectful of Allah and of traditions not to cling to the roles to which ethnicity binds them, then perhaps living together really does require certain concessions: a certain magnanimity, a certain acceptance of the *bâtardise* of the postcolonial condition, a certain forgiveness for wrongs of the past, a certain willingness to open the in-group, a certain sublimation of ethnicity to cultural identity thereby relinquishing tyrannical authority to a responsible, representative, democratic authority. To be sure, Kourouma's detail in the episodes of Fama's incarceration, show trial, and release is a biting critique of the hypocrisy of Houphouët-Boigny, but Kourouma was castigating his President not for the ideals he preached, but rather for the failure of Houphouët-Boigny to live up to them, and for the motives behind his ostensible big-heartedness.

And it should also be clear, while acknowledging this fraternal ideal between Ivorian ethnic groups, that Les Soleils des Indépendances could not have been written with any Malinké but Fama, legitimate descendant of a long dynastic lineage, as its main character. As the narrator signaled in the beginning, Malinké society divides its labor in hereditary fashion, so that the son of a slave would be a slave, and so that it would be insulting for Fama, the king, to have to take orders from one. The *chefferie* benefits the *chef* most of all, but the son of the slave as well as the vast majority of the remaining non-royal masses stand to gain in power and freedom from the Independence period. For all that this novel potently critiques throughout, at this moment, between 1960 and 1968, Kourouma's national imaginary was a place where only one class could seriously bewail the new structures of power as not dependent on ethnic identity for their legitimacy: the former ruling class. Fama's position is excellent for exposing hypocrisy and abuses, even for presaging the falsity of hopes in democracy under what would shortly become entrenched dictatorships—*pays de fraternité*, of *Akwaba*, the Côte d'Ivoire included. But Kourouma's conception of the Côte d'Ivoire is distinct from Fama's, as demonstrated by the textual evidence. The Fama of ethnic purity is sterile. He fails to cross the illegitimate border set up on his own territory. He dies at the teeth of his own sacred crocodiles. He admits failure to complete Salimata. Even his last words amount to an order, not about something substantial for the benefit of his people, but about an aesthetic detail for the enhancement of his own sense of glory. All of this confirms Kourouma's conception of a Côte d'Ivoire more positively democratic, more tolerantly pluralistic than the one Fama can imagine.

It is this hopeful space of a multicultural democratic nation which Kourouma, but for its leaders, imagines for the Côte d'Ivoire, and for Africa in general. It is also this hopeful space

which, nearly thirty years later, many of which spent in self-imposed exile, Kourouma contrasts to the realities of the fully entrenched dictatorships he describes in his later novels.

After a long stretch of years away from full-time writing, Kourouma returned to his pen to publish Monnè, outrages et défis in 1990 which was celebrated with the Grand Prix de l'Afrique Noire. Although this novel might offer interesting readings pertaining to the novelist's conception of the Ivorian nation, there are also good reasons to exclude it from this study. First, its content deals with a pre-colonial setting through a monolithically ethnic lens, and although the stakes involved in writing about such a setting at the end of the Cold War period are worthy of study in and of themselves, by 1990 the Côte d'Ivoire as a nation-state is established, under little duress, and still under the reign of unifying dictator Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Published too early for the Ivoirité period to polarize literary reflections on the nation, Monnè, outrages et défis also does not inaugurate a new literary movement in the way Les Soleils des Indépendances comes at the perfect moment to do.

After 1990, Kourouma makes some forays into theatre and youth literature, before writing his next major novel which does fall into the Ivoirité period. En Attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages, published in 1998, stands in stark contrast to Les Soleils des Indépendances as a much more overt allegory. From the outset the discourse of the novel is framed as the oral performance of a hunter's purification ritual, complete with *griots* and respondents, heroes to praise, and hyperbolic paranormal exploits to recount—and just as the real names to which characters refer are hidden by fictional ones, so the hunters in the traditional ceremony all wear their masks. Within its allegorical structure, En Attendant takes a newly installed dictator on a voyage to initiate him into the ways of the other members of this elite club. The initiation

journey begins with a chapter on a dictator from the *Côte des Ébènes* who so transparently represents Félix Houphouët-Boigny as to render null all pretense of allegory's oft assumed function of authorial plausible deniability. Since the allegorical nature of the episode is so overt, and the characters so transparent as representatives of real-life figures of power around Africa, it serves this study best to concentrate on the Ivorian chapter. This should only be done, however, while keeping in mind that the overall structure of one visit per country, one dictator per country, supports by analogy what Coates highlights as the "thematic of [Kourouma's] entire body of fiction": Kourouma's own formulation (written later in Quand on refuse on dit non) that "l'histoire de la Côte d'Ivoire se confound avec l'histoire personnelle de Houphouët-Boigny" (Coates, 124). Read with this in mind, close reading of the character of the dictator is already code for a reading of Ivorian society as Kourouma conceives it.

Koyaga's dictatorship lessons come through a traditional hunter's purification ritual, but as Lassi convincingly notes, the function of this ritual, now textualized, is not the purification of the dictator at all, but rather the catharsis of the audience. Kourouma therefore teaches the reader through a cathartic sarcasm how the Cold War froze dictators in power, and how there's no such thing as a benevolent one. The presentation of the Houphouët-Boigny figure and his subsequent counsels to the new dictator-initiate demonstrate Kourouma's conception of the state and its position in the global hierarchy of the times, and the analyst can also glean, from the surface and deeper, traces of his understanding of the nation as well. And while the episode on Houphouët-Boigny bearing on the Côte d'Ivoire reveals much about the shape of the nation in Kourouma's conception, it also reveals his awareness of how conditions there have evolved from his conception of the nation thirty years earlier in Les Soleils des Indépendances. This also provides the critic with a contrast from which his next two novels will spring.

First, on the surface, the novel's narrator successively employs and repeats a revolving door of evocative references to the Houphouët-Boigny character who wears a European-style suit with his traditional hat: Tiékoroni, l'homme au chapeau mou, le rusé petit vieillard, Béliér de Fasso, Sage de l'Afrique⁷⁹. Kourouma's irony first compares to the man in white, Nkoutigui, an ostensible Sékou Touré, and then lays out several examples of how despite apparent differences, their rule amounted to the same thing: oppression. The list of examples is telling, as is its first item:

L'homme en blanc fut un pieux et pratiquant musulman qui transforma son pays en république islamique ; Tiékoroni un catholique qui bâtit dans les terres ancestrales de son village natal le plus somptueux lieu de culte catholique hors de Rome. Cette opposition dans les croyances religieuses n'était que purement formelle.

Ils étaient tous les deux foncièrement animistes. *Ajoute le répondeur.* (172, emphasis mine)

For both, in the narrator's mind, a cynical dichotomy exists between formal, outer, public practice and interior, private, ones, along with their motivating beliefs. This dichotomy of costume and religion is apt not only for a description of the extra-diegetic leaders referenced here, but for the Côte d'Ivoire itself: the North aligning religiously with the Muslim Guinean dictator, the South with the Christian Ivorian one, and neither side sincere, practicing piety according to formal constraints only. And aside from the fact that bringing up the question of the religious pole of identity first in a description of their essential similarities and differences

⁷⁹ For the in-group capable of parsing Malinké onomastics, this very name exudes sarcasm: it's a diminutive form meaning roughly "little old man"

underscores the importance of religion in the self-definition of the Ivorian peoples, this comparison also demonstrates that, despite their underlying deep similarities these two do, in fact, mark themselves—and by extension their people do—as essentially different from each other. In microcosm, then, this paragraph demonstrates what Kourouma is attempting to decry: essentialized outer divisions. This very kind of tolerant gesture becomes all the more significant when considering the year of publication (1998). It is in this year that new legislative codifications of Ivoirité were passed, the Bédie leadership able to push through a revocation of *ius solis* and of immigrant property-holding rights. All of these had the effect of excluding Northerners specifically and resulted, a scant year later, in the opening of hostilities to unseat Bédié.

The narrator's next point of distinction between the two dictators is their geopolitical leanings, and the adherence to Cold-war era ideologies their respective positions imply. Although the Touré figure went socialist and the Houphouët-Boigny figure went capitalist, this made no difference in their political organization, according to the narrator:

Qu'est-ce qui, en définitive, distinguait les deux pères de la nation, présidents de partis uniques ? Ce qui différenciait et séparait les deux dictateurs était la foi. Pas la foi religieuse (nous avons dit qu'en dépit d'apparences ils étaient tous les deux féticheurs), mais la foi en la parole et en l'homme, au Nègre en particulier. L'homme en blanc croyait aux paroles, aux hommes, et au Nègre. Et gérer l'indépendance pour Nkoutigui signifiait remplacer, à tous les niveaux, tout Blanc (technicien ou pas) par n'importe quel Nègre.

Le rusé et aristocrate Tiékoroni ne croyait pas aux paroles, à l'homme et surtout pas au Nègre. Et gérer une république indépendante africaine pour lui consistait à confier les responsabilités aux Blancs, tenir le Nègre en laisse pour donner des coups de temps en temps aux compatriotes qui levaient la tête.

Ah ! Tiécoura. Sais-tu qui, en définitive, eut raison et gagna ? C'est Tiékoroni, le rusé petit vieux au chapeau mou. Dans la vie, quand tu as à choisir entre deux hommes, rallie toujours celui qui ne croit pas à l'homme, celui qui n'a pas de foi. Tous les affamés de la République des Monts, tous les affamés de l'Afrique de l'Ouest se dirigent vers la République des Ébènes de Tiékoroni, terre de paix et d'accueil des réfugiés.

On ne vit aucun homme de la République des Ébènes voulant rallier la République des Monts, le pays de la dignité du Nègre. *Complète le répondeur.* (172, *emphasis mine*)

With religious differences hiding deeper seated solidarities, and ideological disagreement yielding similarities in power wielding, the central point of divergence of the two, in the narrator's mind, is a racially rationalized degree of acceptance of neocolonialism. The Touré figure, whose pro-Négritude position is later demonstrated as utterly self-serving and insincere, at least makes public statements of faith in his own race! The critique Kourouma levels at the Ivorian dictator, and Kourouma's apparent sympathy for this aspect of Guinea's otherwise brutal communist dictator (whom he later castigates as a mass murderer) is clearest at this point in the narrative. Also clear, is Kourouma's conception of the Côte d'Ivoire as a place where too much French involvement is allowed—promoted even—to the detriment of the natural citizens because

of their leader's lack of faith in the Negro. With this griotic flourish, the narrator surprises his audience by declaring the dictator for whom he does not have sympathy to be the winner—and this on two grounds: that lack of faith (in mankind, in the Negro) is a general indicator of success in life; and that the evidence of people moving into the Côte d'Ivoire, but not out of it shows which philosophy is more persuasive to the general masses. But to the initiates—which includes the readers who are, so to speak, along for the ride in this literary initiation voyage—the narrator's abrupt turn to conceding victory to Tiékoroni's lack of faith is ironic: the facts he cites are true, but what he is really ashamed of is that capitalism aligned with racist neocolonialism has proved less oppressive than the ideology he feels has the moral benefit of not requiring an alienation from one's racial identity—the masses voting with their feet and immigrating to the Côte d'Ivoire in droves. Kourouma, in critiquing both sides, reveals his own position caught in a double irony: one should be pro-racial solidarity, but not hypocritically as was Sékou Touré; one should expect economic freedom, but not hypocritically as did Houphouët-Boigny, in granting too much space to neo-colonial entanglements. The Côte d'Ivoire, then, along with its leader, emerges as the place where the West and its culture have become more attractive than the “authentic” African ones, and where cultural compromise and prostitution of racial dignity is required in exchange for relative ease of living.

Interestingly, Kourouma begins his list of articles of faith that Houphouët-Boigny fails on, with an item that doesn't seem to fit. The narrator cites Houphouët-Boigny's lack of faith in man, the Negro, and *la parole*—man and the Negro fit together as category and sub-category, but faith in *la parole* is set apart, and is not explained at length like the others. It is this unexplained reference to language, or more precisely, the contractual bond language can create between philosophy and comportment, between promise and fulfillment, which points to the main critique

Kourouma levels at the Ivorian dictator: that he believes, and says one thing, but doesn't behave in accordance with it.

As the narrator gives the panegyric of the dictator, and then the dictator's counsels on four pitfalls for every good dictator to avoid, he outlines four issues of trust, two of which are specifically linguistic. He explains how to justify breaking the trust of the people by making his person the object of state needs, so as to confound any boundaries between his purse and public coffers. He rationalizes preemptively locking up friends and family so no close person has means of betrayal as the necessity of not trusting trusted people at face value. And, concerning language in its relation to trust and freedom, he teaches Koyaga:

La seconde méchante grosse bête qui menaçait un chef d'État novice, dit-il—et même tout homme politique en début de carrière--, était d'instituer une distinction entre vérité et mensonge. La vérité n'est très souvent qu'une seconde manière de redire un mensonge, ajouta-t-il. Un président de la République et président fondateur de parti unique—et Koyaga forcément sera le président fondateur d'un parti unique—ne s'alourdissait pas, ne s'embarrassait pas du respect d'un tel distinguo. Il dit ou fait propager les paroles qui lui permettent d'atteindre une cause, un objectif. D'ailleurs il est rare—aussi rare qu'un poil sur le séant d'un chimpanzé—qu'un citoyen d'une République africaine indépendante se lèvent pour dire les blasphèmes qui constituent l'inverse de ce que soutient son chef d'État. (197)

With the ironic structure of Tiékoroni's entire character already in place, the reading of this paragraph becomes straightforward, if hyperbolic: Houphouët-Boigny took a utilitarian view

of the truth, and there was no freedom of speech when it came to criticism of the President's views. Words were to be seen as tools, not as vehicles for truth, or contracts with the people. However, as the final "méchante grosse bête" is delineated, Tiékoroni's true ideological sympathies finally come clear. The last thing for a good dictator to avoid is a wrong choice in geopolitical affiliation, from which there is no release. He puts it thusly:

Dans la guerre froide qui régissait l'univers, le choix d'un camp était essentiel, un acte risqué, aussi risqué que prendre une femme pour épouse. Lui, totem caïman, l'homme au chapeau mou, n'avait pas eu à exercer sa préférence. L'histoire lui avait imposé le camp du libéralisme, le meilleur choix. Et cela d'une curieuse façon.

Jeune au moment de son entrée en politique, il cru comme tout adolescent à des balivernes comme la dignité de l'homme noir, la solidarité entre les peuples, entre les colonisés et le communisme, le droit des peuples à disposer d'eux-mêmes, la lutte contre le colonialisme, etc. Il cria ces stupidités à des compatriotes soumis aux travaux forcés, à l'exploitation et souffrant de la faim, du mépris et du racisme. Ceux-ci naturellement se révoltèrent et mirent son pays alors colonie à feu et sang. On sait ce qui advint. (203)

What came of it was Independence, and dictatorship. But what is interesting here isn't the outcome of his choice, it's that he claims the choice was imposed upon him from the outside, and that if he were to follow his heart, it would lead him naturally to the same ideological faith as animated the Sékou Touré figure: communism. In other words, his own word in promising economic freedom to his people was insincere, and the narrator's critique of Houphouët-Boigny seems tempered somewhat by an imputation of good intentions: the reader is told that

Houphouët-Boigny tried but understandably failed to live up to his ideals, and therefore had to lie about them. Again, this passage drips with irony—*balivernes* and *stupidités* in evidence—and calls instead for a reading in which Houphouët-Boigny's ideological affiliation is only ever a strategic choice for personal gain, and never made on any real convictions⁸⁰. Ironic though it may be, however, this passage of ironically charitable attitude towards Houphouët-Boigny's failings still bespeaks the author's understanding of the nation as a space of naturally left-leaning inclination which has been swindled by its self-serving leader into alignment with the capitalist world. The person of the dictator, described thus as a "sac de contradictions", containing in himself extremes of generosity and cruelty, virtue and vice, manages, on another level, to capture the double nature we have already seen in Kourouma which aptly characterizes the nation, this time under Ivoirité: unified but divided, Muslim and Christian but animist, capitalist by hegemonic coercion but socialist by inclination. And it is the word, that basic unit of both promises and oral literature, which captures these contradictions.

This concentration on Félix Houphouët-Boigny's broken word and self-contradictory nature also calls up the very diegetic context from which such a reading springs. As previously mentioned, the *donsomana* genre which captures the global structure of the novel is conceived as a performance of orature—a collaborative recounting of the subject's exploits mainly by a single griot, but with frequent and role-defined interventions either by the parties being lauded, or by the authorized respondents according to their function in the performance. Through plot and character alone, the Côte d'Ivoire is put in the position of a nation exploited and unjustly ruled, but there is also an interesting point underscoring this reading inscribed into the form of the

⁸⁰ Frederick Cooper shows how Houphouët-Boigny's hypocrisy was aided and abetted by the French positioning just prior to decolonization. Houphouët-Boigny arose as a labor leader, and since labor movements were the most serious threat to French interests in Africa, France shifted to promote Houphouët-Boigny as a national leader instead, who would then have to deal with labor movements as his own threat. He obliged.

chapter on *l'homme au chapeau mou*—it contains no attendee interjections. Word, and absence of word both capturing significance pertaining to the nation, Kourouma's inscription of silence here is analogous to the silence allotted to dissenting voices, and especially those Northerners whose very lack in the rite (lack of rights!) is being transcribed⁸¹.

The final two of Kourouma's novels I will read together. Quand on refuse on dit non of 2004 was conceived of as a sequel to Prix Renaudot-winning Allah n'est pas obligé published in 2000, and follows in theme, style, chronology and characters. Although a major thematic difference exists, there is enough continuity to warrant a reading together. And there is also the fact that the later work was unfinished, established as a text by a Frenchman, and published posthumously with only a rough outline of the novel's final chapters and plot resolution included. Despite the problems of the purity of transmission of Kourouma's text to his readers that the later work can pose, it nonetheless leaves plenty of material for tracing Kourouma's conception of the Ivorian nation. Checking it against the established text with which I've paired it removes at least some of the danger of distortion by mediation one might otherwise be quite right to suspect.

The novels both tell the story of a young child soldier in his own words as he travels throughout West Africa during times of major armed conflict. The first novel covers conflicts of the 1990s in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the latter deals directly with the Ivorian struggle of the early 2000. Because these novels both deal overtly with questions of the national character, a

⁸¹ Borgomano observes that Kourouma's writing of the oral form of the *donsomana* (the hunter's purification ritual) into a novel is a way to subvert both genres, to which I add that such a mix and double subversion is also analogical of Kourouma's position and project in the discursive battle over the national identity of the Côte d'Ivoire.

Jamesonian analytical model will benefit our study, opening deep structure levels of analysis undetectable should one remain at the surface literal level of the text.

In Allah n'est pas obligé, the young Birahima introduces himself as a p'tit nègre, not because he is young (though he is), nor because he is black (though he is), but because he can't speak French correctly. He walks the reader through four separate dictionaries in his possession and explains the utility of each for the different types of audience he envisages for his narrative and then spends the first of six chapters explaining his character, the loss of his mother, and the need for him to travel to Liberia which kicks off a series of travels and misadventures with the various fighting factions of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars of the 1990s. In this first chapter, his mother suffers from a badly ulcerated clitorrectomy which renders her unable to walk. This handicap causes her more emotional anguish than physical, though, even though her only means of locomotion is to scoot on her rump with one leg up in the air, because she can't even match the speed of Birahima as a toddler when he ignorantly crawls toward some hot coals and burns himself. She eventually dies and ten to twelve year-old Birahima is about to be sent to be cared for by his aunt, but she leaves before the handoff can take place, in fear for her life in mortal danger because of her violent husband. The next chapters take Birahima on a long voyage, accompanied by a con artist féticheur named Yacouba who wants to go to Liberia to sell his magical wares—where the bullets fly is where he can best sell his anti-bullet grigris. Birahima gets pressed into service with one Liberian and Sierra Leonean faction after another, detailing in text not only the politics and history of the major figures and their *modus operandi*, but also the hasty eulogies for the children who die by his side along the way. Geopolitics mixes with geomancy on practically every page as Birahima spills what he learns about the nature of ethnic wars and various perversions of democracy, explaining it all in off-color language so as to

bring out the rawness of each ordeal. At each stop along the way, there is an offensive which just happens to push Birahima's aunt out of where she is just before our hero's arrival. As the final chapter closes, the openness of the different fighting factions to mercenaries from neighboring states closes, and Birahima is thrilled to hear that his aunt has been rounded up into the same Malinké refugee camp as he is. Sadly, she arrived in the camp sick, and does not survive, but Docteur Mamadou, Birahima's rich and educated cousin, is also looking for her, and finds Birahima to take him back home to their village, three years older as he is. It is on the last page that the reader discovers that Mamadou had been Birahima's interlocutor the entire time, each chapter representing a day's worth of narration from the child to the Doctor.

Quand on refuse on dit non picks up, diegetically, six months after Allah n'est pas obligé leaves off. Birahima, now between thirteen and fifteen years old, is infatuated with Fanta, an educated young Dioula like Birahima (Malinké and Dioula are synonymous in the Southern Côte d'Ivoire, although Northerners make some distinctions between different kinds of Dioula). Both of them get caught up in the event of Daloa, Southern Ivorian city in the heart of Christian Bété territory, where a group of violent Bété took the word Ivoirité to extremes, gathering in mobs, and forcing Dioulas off what the Bété considered their rightful land in bloody pogroms. Fanta is happy to have Birahima's company for two reasons: because he knows his way around an automatic assault rifle and can protect them in their flight to the North; and also because he is an eager ear for her tales of the history of how this ethnic violence came to exist in the Côte d'Ivoire. Fanta goes back before the slave trade and develops the roots of the conflict through the centuries all while Birahima plots to make her his wife once he can scrounge together enough money to support them with his dream of owning and operating a *gbaka* (mamy wagon). The ending of the story was not completed during Kourouma's lifetime except in outline form, where

Fanta's Dioula family refuse Birahima his desired marriage to Fanta on the grounds that he is a Gbagbo supporter—someone they see as responsible for the anti-Dioula mob violence, but who he sees as being a truly anti-Houphouëtiste voice during the dictator's reign.

The plot is structured like a classic traveler's tale, the quest for the mother's replacement in the first novel, and the quest for the *gbaka* in order to marry Fanta in the second, operating as narrative devices to drive the need for a new episode for each new geographical setting. Its structure has also been noted to fall in line with the literary trope of the descent into chaos narrative but with the postmodern twist that the object of the (failed) quest being one for belonging. To state that the object of the quest is belonging is fair, but glosses over the specific kinds of belonging at play here, and obscures, as remarks Hall with Affoué-Kouassi concurring, the maternal center of Birahima's lack in the first novel, and I would add the equally familial and grounded longing for a spouse in the second. The significance of the object of Birahima's quest is hard to overstate, because the novel is not merely postmodern in the sense that the lack of groundedness is a result of postcolonial conditions in which various forms of belonging (national, ethnic, religious, racial) are not only still available but are still vying for primacy in the self-definitions of groups and individuals.

What is striking about these narratives, then, is Kourouma's shift of perspective: no longer the Fama demonstrating an ethnically centered but already *bâtardisé* Malinké identity; no longer the Houphouët-Boigny demonstrably like his people torn between his ideal socialism and his own practice of capitalism; now the point of view is purely, naively, openly a demonstration of the Northern viewpoint. To be sure, Birahima describes himself as Malinké every bit as much as Fama does, but for the youthful eyes of the younger Malinké hero, ethnicity is an essentialized aspect of identity worth killing over—as the “*guerre tribales*” he is forced to participate in across

West Africa show—but the facts of life on the ground thirty years after Fama's lament over the loss of legitimacy have subordinated it to the subtext of national identity. The quest for belonging is familial, ethnic, and spiritual precisely because the question of nationality is already settled and its meaning unproblematic. The Malinké may straddle the borders as a people, as a cultural monolith, but when they are sent home at the end of *Allah n'est pas obligé*, it is home to Guinée, to Côte d'Ivoire and to Burkina Faso. The contrast between the status of the Malinké soldiers and child-soldiers at the beginning of the novel and that of the end of the novel demonstrates a persistent similarity. In the beginning Birahima explains that in one camp where he was employed, the majority of the child-soldiers needed to change their names to match a certain ethnic group's onomastics, but because he was Malinké, he didn't have to change his:

Les Malinkés ou Mandingos sont bien reçus partout parce qu'ils sont tous des combinards fieffés. Ils sont de tous les camps, ils bouffent à toutes les sauces. (88)

The acceptance of the Malinké recognizes at the same time a certain consistency of group identity (they are identifiable as Malinké) which consists in their willingness to fight as mercenaries for any cause, which is ironically praised as a virtue. As political and military pressure on the ground forces the stakeholders in the various conflicts to become suspicious of those in the conflict whose only stake is profit, the tone changes:

Tous les Africains, indigènes, noirs sauvages de ces deux pays, plus les noirs américains racistes du Liberia, plus les noirs créols de Sierra Leone s'étaient ligués tous contre les Malinkés, les Mandingos. Ils voulaient les foutre dehors du Liberia et de

Sierra Leone. Ils allaient les foutre dehors d'où qu'ils viennent : de la Guinée, de la Côte d'Ivoire ou du Liberia. Ils voulaient les foutre dehors ou les massacrer tous par racisme (208)

What is interesting from the standpoint of national identity here is that in both quotes the Malinké ethnicity as an identifier is secondary to other markers of identity. In the first, it is the faction you're fighting for that matters, but since all factions are fighting for a cause limited by national interests, nation trumps ethnicity. In the case of the second, territory names are not mapped out by ethnic markers, Malinké are to be sorted by their nationality for return "home". To be sure, ethnicities differentiate between each other, each considering itself distinct by essence from all the others, and especially those which share territorial and linguistic proximity. So important are these distinctions, in fact, that the language used to describe them puts them on a par with the obvious visible differences, but are really based solely in historical and religious ones. Early in Allah n'est pas obligé, Birahima explains the essential differences between the two ethnic groups occupying his geographical group-identity space:

Dans notre pays, le Horodougou, il y a deux sortes de *raças*, les Bambaras et les Malinkés... Nous sommes des Malinkés, des Dioulas, des musulmans. Les Malinkés sont des étrangers ; ils sont venus de la vallée du Niger depuis longtemps et longtemps. Les Malinké sont des gens bien *qui ont écouté les paroles d'Allah*. Ils prient cinq fois par jour ; ils ne boivent pas le vin de palme et ne mangent pas le cochon ni les gibiers égorgés par un cafre féticheur comme Balla. Dans d'autres villages, les habitants sont des Bambaras, des adorateurs, des cafres, *des incroyants*, des féticheurs, des sauvages,

des sorciers. Les Bambaras sont parfois aussi appelés Lobis, Sénoufos, Kabiès, etc....
Les Bambaras sont les vrais *autochtones*, les vrais anciens propriétaires de la terre. (2, emphasis mine)

As the italics show, Birahima's description labels the two not merely different peoples, but rather different races. And yet, the list of practices which differentiate the cultures to go along with these "races" are not visible in the skin, but are rather questions of belief, of tradition, of the history of practiced beliefs: the one group listening to Allah and consequently reciting frequent prayers and washings, and abstaining from alcohol, pork, and the quarry of idolaters; the other group being described only in derogatory terms, from Birahima's polarized perspective, as savages, idolaters, infidels, and *féticheurs*.

Kourouma's new acquiescence to the powers that be—or more precisely, to state-imposed group identities—does not preclude sharp criticism of state and opposition leaders, but continues and even rises further toward the surface in Quand on refuse on dit non. Birahima's guide to Ivorian history goes into great detail about the ethnic composition of modern-day Côte d'Ivoire and how it came to be that way. From major ethnic groups settling in over the centuries to the Côte d'Ivoire as a beacon of economic prosperity among so many socializing West African nations during the Cold War, to Allasane Ouattara's questionable status as a presidential candidate, Fanta, the amateur historian, presents it all as belonging to a logic of immigration and exploitation leading to Ivoirité and stemming from a lack in the collective psyche resulting from

colonialism and exacerbated by Houphouët-Boigny's neocolonialist rule⁸². Fanta's words on the matter are much simpler, of course:

Ces résistances héroïques du peuple ivoirien [des Gouros, des Attiés, des Baoulés avant 1914, et des Dioulas de Bobo, des Gbantiés de Boundiali dans les années trente] ne sont pas reconnues par la Côte-d'Ivoire officielle. Houphouët, le premier président de la Côte-d'Ivoire avait une conception curieuse de l'histoire des peuples. De s'entendre avec le colonisateur, il a effacé la résistance à la colonisation. Il a parlé des vainqueurs et a oublié les vaincus. Il a laissé les vaincus dans l'ombre de l'oubli.

C'est pourquoi aucune rue des villes ivoiriennes ne porte le nom des résistants ivoiriens à la colonisation. En revanche, elles affichent les noms des administrateurs coloniaux les plus cruels et racistes. La Côte-d'Ivoire met entre parenthèses les souffrances et les actes héroïques des Ivoiriens pendant la pénétration et la conquête coloniale du pays. C'est pourquoi les Ivoiriens vont chercher leur appartenance à la patrie dans l'ivoirité. L'ivoirité, c'est être ivoirien avant d'autres. Ce n'est pas avoir versé son sang pour la patrie... (59)

In Fanta's voice, Kourouma thus explains how Ivoirité differs from nationalism, from a form of patriotism. Instead of a willingness to sacrifice something of oneself for one's collectivity, this sentiment is instead a pathological almost Freudian "return of the repressed"

⁸² This dissertation's first chapter details the machinations of Ivoirité policies surrounding the 1995 election of Bédié, who had managed to push a constitutional amendment through before poll-time which denied candidacy to anyone who could not claim two Ivorian parents. This law excluded one and only one candidate: Allasane Ouattara, a Northerner, populaire among the Dioula, and Bédié's only true electoral threat at the time.

where rather than self-sacrifice, competition for rights and limited resources leads to willingness to sacrifice the other, or the other's rights—to be more Ivorian than another.

Three other important things should also be noted about this passage. First, Fanta describes Ivoirité as a competition over who is more Ivorian, which makes sense as a critique only from the Northern perspective. Immigrants poured in to the Côte d'Ivoire from all sides, and Southerners may have had analogous reasons to be suspicious of immigrants from neighboring states and ethnicities along border states from the East and West just as much as of those from the North, but those reasons never panned out into nationwide dividing lines as the North-South division did. The consequence of the ethnic geography at play here, then, pans out so that Southerners would never question the Ivoirité of fellow Southerners the way they would a person with a name “à consonnance nordique,” whose obviously Northern affiliation by onomastics, would mark the person as ambiguously Ivorian, rather than automatically Ivorian.

Secondly, there is a stark confusion between the surface content and the deep-structure demonstration in this passage. Despite the listing of individual ethnic groups who each resisted the French in their own way, the very fact of resisting a monolithic outside force put them all in the same camp, such that the very articles and adjectives explain their solidarity rather than their distinctions. It is the heroic instances of resistance “*du peuple ivoirien*” that Kourouma is forced to write. The resisters are “ivoirien”, and the lack of official recognition for their resistance has not fragmented them into Balkanized ethnic rivals, but has rather consolidated their desire for a common identity to cling to: an Ivoirité. However ironically Kourouma or his character may intend it by bringing it up as a root cause of inter-ethnic violence, they cannot avoid the fact that a new entity came into existence which forever changed the possibilities for self-definition, for

group cohesion, for the navigation of identity categories between self, other, and world at the birth of the Ivorian nation as a colony, with its borders established and maintained to this day.

Finally, a redress to the effacement of Ivorian resistance to colonization is a possible reading of the single Kourouma novel which doesn't fit this study's purview: the 1990 Monnè, outrages, et défis. Presenting itself as a history of a fictional kingdom (which is nevertheless quite obviously the Côte d'Ivoire), this novel walks its readers from the time of Samori Touré and his anti-French resistance, through the colonial period and to the eve of Independence. Concentrating as it does on supplying at least some narrative of opposition to the French, its main function fills precisely the need Fanta diagnoses. Although full analysis of this text cannot enter into consideration here, it is nonetheless important for my own argument to at least note that Monnè, outrages, et défis serves to reconstruct a national history, thereby promoting an inter-ethnic solidarity of the kind Kourouma still imagines as possible at the end of Quand on refuse on dit non.

Interestingly, with Fanta moving quickly from colonialism to Ivoirité in a single paragraph, introducing a fine point from psychoanalytic theory and applying it across an entire national society as she does, Kourouma marks the text, next, with an abrupt halt, and a rare moment of thought for Birahima:

Moi, j'étais en train de réfléchir à tout ce que Fanta sortait de sa tête remplie de choses merveilleuses. C'était trop pour moi qui l'écoutais et l'enregistrais. C'était trop pour ma tête de petit oiseau. Mon école n'est pas allée loin, je ne pouvais pas tout comprendre tout de suite. (60)

Birahima, here, acts as a sort of Everychild and cites his own lack of education for failure to grasp the nature of the current problems of Ivoirité and their causes in colonialism. But the very fact of using a simplistic character to claim that only the educated could possibly understand all this is itself a way for Kourouma to emphasize it—to wink and nod to the reader who gets it too. What Birahima can't seem to grasp, but Fanta and the readership do, is how national belonging has become a fundamental category of Ivorian existence for both sides. That from the North's perspective, this curious civil war is not the logical extension of a separatist movement, but rather a fight to remain included in the political entity of the Côte d'Ivoire.

Even from the schematic plot summary, the analogies buried in the allegory can now be seen more clearly. Fanta, perfect Muslim girl, daughter of a doctor, educated, gifted and beautiful young woman of the North, loves Birahima like a brother. Birahima, on the other hand, penniless former child-soldier, and Malinké supporter of Gbagbo goes on a futile quest to earn Fanta's hand, but cannot pass the parental hurdle when his political opinions are made known. Birahima naively supports Gbagbo because Gbagbo's socialist leanings led him to oppose Houphouët-Boigny even before multiple parties were allowed in the political process as well as throughout the Cold War. But since Gbagbo is seen as the head of the brain-trust that fomented the revocation of *jus solis* and its attendant violence, he is persona non grata for all self-respecting Dioula. The impossibility of marriage, then, becomes code not for an impasse between North and South, but between political affiliations, which in and of themselves are code for the monopolization of the concept of Ivoirité by Southern ethnic groups—Northerners not being able to accept a Southern philosophy.

With the coup d'état and attendant events of Christmas 1999 much more settled at the writing of Quand on refuse on dit non, it is not unexpected that Kourouma's tone in dealing

squarely with his home country would differ slightly from that of a treatment of larger regional conflicts under his purview in *Allah n'est pas obligé*, which, although every bit as disturbing, simply don't hit home in the same way, quite literally. However, Kourouma does start and end the earlier novel on Ivorian territory, and Birahima is an Ivorian child, the quest for a maternal figure coming in the wake of the loss of his own. Given the importance of these events as *phénomènes déclencheurs*, and given the national undercurrent inscribed elsewhere, as I have analyzed it, a reading of the mother and aunt as symbolic figures dealing with the nation is warranted. Of course, with the woman as a common trope for the nation it would be tempting to read Birahima's quest chapters as analogous to the impossibility for the Malinké to connect with the nation, which dies (in a coup) of a sickness (of Ivoirité) before the familial union can take place. But as applicable as such an allegory may seem to the Ivorian situation from a Northern perspective, Birahima himself seems to find a way to fit in and establish an identity and a role for himself no matter what ethnic or national realities exist on the ground for him. It is only when noting the difference in style between the expository "quest for the aunt" chapters and the descriptive, character-establishing episodes with the mother—arguably the deepest of the novel's characters—that she and her condition become key in the allegory's interpretation.

On the diegetic level, Birahima's mother, called Bafitini only once, and then respectfully referred to as *Maman* throughout the novel, is at the center of confluence of opposing forces and identities. At the boundary between girl and woman lies an excision, in the Malinké tradition, and her excision was done poorly and caused an eventually fatal hemorrhage. At this point of entry into adult society the forces of the physical world meet those of the spiritual world, in the Malinké understanding, such that Birahima's young mother was purportedly chosen by the *génies* to die and cross over. Although distinguishing themselves from the Bambara by

adherence to Muslim practices, the Malinké—in all other ways linguistically, geographically, and culturally identical to the Bambara—entrusted a Bambara sorceress infidel to perform the botched clitorrectomy and she claimed that it was her magical intervention which saved young Bafitini from the forest spirit's evil intentions. The witch had taken pity on such a beautiful creature, and asked for recompense only that Bafitini consent to marry her son, but Bafitini's family could hardly accept such payment since the religious difference made them incompatible spouses and peoples, different races altogether. Thus spurned, the sorceress refuses to apply her healing power to Bafitini's now festering wound, and eventually "Maman" is reduced to scooting about on her buttocks with one leg in the air for all her ambulatory needs. She attempts to have it cared for through white medicine, but the Muslim nurse warns her that the doctor's best solution is amputation of the infected leg. The nurse elaborates that this kind of illness is nothing white science can deal with, thereby putting Bafitini's character at the center of another set of oppositions—racial and technological.

With all these binaries baked into the experience of the single being with whom Birahima has an emotional connection, the only memory he shares with the reader about her becomes pregnant with significance. Still a toddler, Birahima is entranced by burning embers of which he is not yet aware of the danger, being too young. His motion to investigate them triggers Bafitini's maternal radar, but with her handicap, her move to intercept him does not succeed:

Je courais, tournais à quatre pattes, elle me poursuivait. J'allais plus vite qu'elle.

Elle me poursuivait, sa jambe droite en l'air, elle allait sur les fesses, par à-coups, en s'appuyant sur les bras. Je suis allé trop vite, trop loin, je ne voulais pas me faire

rattraper. J'ai foncé, j'ai bousculé dans la braise ardente. La braise ardente a fait son travail, elle a grillé mon bras. (14)

Bafitini realizes at this event just how painfully her handicap is preventing her from fulfilling her natural role as mother, and Birahima, with scant regard for his own physical pain, interiorizes at this juncture, to what degree he hurts his mother emotionally. Kourouma's meaning is illustrated well: the focal point of contradictions that the Malinké culture has become is handicapped, no longer able to fulfill its natural role, hobbling along and unable to protect the rising generations from the dangers that surround them. Even as he takes a Northern perspective on the war for inclusion, Kourouma recognizes that traditional forms of belonging are insufficient to his own side's continued survival. Bafitini is no longer the pure Salimata from Les Soleils des Indépendances, clinging to traditional roles until freed by Fama's incarceration, but rather represents the next generation for whom tradition was never fully formed and pure in the first place, and whose loss spells symbolic anarchy for the young Birahima and his generation.

Another way Kourouma illustrates his take on national belonging throughout these two novels is his constant play with discursive footings and framings, his acute awareness of audience, and his deft shifting of register and lexicon in juggling the various elements of his perceived readership. Birahima famously accesses four separate dictionaries so as to "translate" his story's terms according to which group would have a problem with them. Although a gesture of inclusion on the part of the protagonist, the places where he chooses to appeal to the lexicographer's authority reveals much more about how Birahima divides the world, and—since

the tone, as with all Kourouma's works, is ironic—consequently Kourouma's critique of the divisions, than it does bring the world together in an equal readership. An entire study could be done on the use of Birahima's four dictionaries alone—they sometimes serve merely as comic relief devices to break up the seriousness of an episode, they sometimes astutely expose euphemisms via oversimplification, and they sometimes genuinely mark the framing of a change in perceived audience—but for the purposes of this study suffice it to mention only a few points.

First, the overall ironic tone of the novels leads the reader to suspect that the use of a dictionary for clarifying is not doing the work of clarifying at all, but rather functions as a marker of boundaries. From a man whose own stated project at the beginning of his literary career in Les Soleils des Indépendances has been to “Malinkify French”, these two novels appear on the surface to surrender this project in favor of a desire for translatability, but due to the irony, end up reinforcing the differences between groups as defined by culture and language. Just to give a few examples, all taken from Allah n'est pas obligé:

L'école ne vaut pas le pet de la grand-mère parce que, même avec la licence de l'université, on n'est pas fichu d'être infirmier ou instituteur dans une des républiques bananières corrompues de l'Afrique francophone (République bananière signifie apparemment démocratique, en fait régie par des intérêts privés, la corruption.) (9)

Il faut expliquer parce que mon blablabla est à lire par toutes sortes de gens : des toubabs (toubab signifie blanc) colons, les noirs indigènes sauvages d'Afrique et des francophones de tout gabarit (gabarit signifie genre). Le Larousse et le Petit Robert me permettent de chercher, de vérifier et d'expliquer les gros mots du français de France aux

noirs nègres indigènes d'Afrique. L'Inventaire des particularités lexicales du français d'Afrique explique les gros mots africains aux toubabs français de France. Le dictionnaire Harrap's explique les gros mots pidgin à tout francophone qui ne comprend rien de rien au pidgin. (11)

Les enfants-soldats étaient en colère, rouge de colère. (On doit pas dire pour des nègres rouges de colère. Les nègres ne deviennent jamais rouges : ils se renfrognent.) (56)

[La sœur de Samuel Doe, qui avait comploté contre les Afro-Américains au pouvoir au Liberia] se défendait, au moment du complot des natives contre les Afro-Américains. (Se défendre, pour une fille, c'est aller d'un point à un autre, c'est se prostituer) (108)

La CDEAO a demandé au Nigéria de faire application de l'ingérence humanitaire au Liberia. (Ingérence humanitaire, c'est le droit qu'on donne à des États d'envoyer des soldats dans un autre État pour aller tuer des pauvres innocents chez eux, dans leur propre pays, dans leur propre village, dans leur propre case, sur leur propre natte) (131)

La deuxième chose dans le quartier d'en haut, c'étaient les prisons. Les prisons n'étaient pas de véritables prisons. C'était un centre de rééducation. (Dans le Petit Robert, rééducation signifie action de rééduquer, c'est-à-dire la rééducation. Walahé ! Parfois le Petit Robert aussi se fout du monde.) (71)

There are a number of points to discuss based on these examples, the first of which is that while Birahima may have separate readerships in mind, from their own perspectives, the only ones whose culture demands appeals to lexicographical authority is the Western one. There are two dictionaries explicitly targeted for the French readership (one for African French-French, one pidgin English-French), but even the French-French dictionaries, ostensibly for explaining educated French to less educated Africans, do what oral traditions would more appropriately handle through circumlocution. The need for an authority to settle lexical disagreements, to establish neutrality of the medium of communication, and to enforce semantic and orthographic uniformity is culturally marked Western. In light of the fact that literate audiences themselves would have means at their own disposal for deciphering Birahima's French-language terminology, Kourouma's gesture here is playfully pandering to the European audience's cultural preoccupation with linguistic authority and purity even while claiming parity in his concern for *toubabs* and *p'tit nègres* alike to understand his *blablabla*.

And I use the term "playful" advisedly, since any translations could have been done using a glossary or footnotes. The reason for Kourouma to integrate them, marked only with parentheses, into the text seems clear: his focus is not, as his character claims, a desire to communicate in a way all can understand, but is rather on the nature of translation itself, on the problems linguistic barriers themselves can pose. Kourouma's irony licenses a reading of the appeals to a dictionary as a critique of translatability: of language and of cultures. And in fact, as several of the above examples show, what Birahima claims, through his use of parentheses, as unassailably documented fact, is sometimes explanation of his own concoction anyway. In which dictionary would he find that *se défendre* is a synonym for *se prostituer*, or that the

definition of *ingérence humanitaire* is the right of the international community to send soldiers to kill nationals in their own countries, in their most intimate of private places? Birahima even pokes fun at the authority of the dictionaries themselves when he finds that the sacrosanct Petit Robert repeats a form of the word to define in its definition (a lexicographical no-no, to be sure), thereby thumbing its proverbial nose at the Francophone world. The frequent appeals to a dictionary are more properly read as a means to demonstrate that the French language is culturally biased (as perhaps all languages are), and is often used to obfuscate unpleasant realities.

Finally, despite his surface concern for the other's ease of comprehension, Birahima's underlying effect is to serve as a triangulation of his own identity. Birahima frames his basic description in the opening lines of the novel as linguistic, not physical or racial when he identifies himself thusly:

Et un...M'appelle Birahima. Suis p'tit nègre. Pas parce que je suis black et gosse. Non ! Mes suis p'tit nègre parce que je parle mal le français. C'é comme ça. Même si on est grand, même vieux, même arabe, chinois, blanc, russe, même américain ; si on parle mal le français, on dit on parle p'tit nègre, on est p'tit nègre quand-même. Ça, c'est la loi du français de tous les jours qui veut ça.

Again, Kourouma's irony serves to distance Birahima's words from Kourouma's own critique of the French language: that it is, in fact, racially biased in the law of its very lexicon (a point driven home when the phrase "rouge de colère" comes before "se refroger" to the mind of Birahima). But even more basic, and more important, is the fact that Birahima chooses his first

descriptor as a linguistic one. Each appeal to a dictionary thereby becomes more significant as a marker of his own perception of his own place in society. And it also makes the traces of the untranslatable in the text significant as limits to Birahima's self-reported inclusiveness. Birahima's tale is laced on nearly every page with specifically Malinké expletives. He learns none from the Liberians, nor the Sierra Leoneans, and although he curses with equal aplomb in French, he feels no need to gloss them. Often, ostensibly to avoid repetition, Birahima sometimes chooses not to gloss the words *faforo*, *gnamokodé*, and *Walahé*, but when he does gloss them, there is wide variation in their reported translations. By their very nature, expletives are notoriously difficult to translate—they are words whose function is to convey emotive force, but they retain very little lexical content—so slippage might be expected. But in a deeper sense the language itself reveals in this point what the content of the novel demonstrates in another way: that the Malinké identity has an untranslatable essence, a spiritual or emotion core that immersion into any other language or culture cannot immediately destroy (proper nouns are also unglossed throughout the novels), but which in all other ways has become assimilable—the language to French, the ethnic identity to the national, Ivorian one.

Coming full circle to the topic of Kourouma's language has now enabled some concluding remarks on the evolution of his conception of the Ivorian nation as demonstrated in his novels' practices. His movement appears to follow a trajectory of decreasing concern for cultural purity and distinctiveness, or at least for institutional recognition of such. In Les Soleils des Indépendances, the historical juncture allowed for a lament of the category of nation replacing ethnicity's authority in a way that novels a generation later are no longer interested in pursuing. Even the double binds of hypocrisy in which the nation appears mired on analysis of

En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages, are no longer so centrally in play a few scant years later, at the end of the Bédié government and the beginning of the civil war. Now, in these last two novels, the nation is the *de facto* organizer of identity, with ethnicity sublimating to the purely cultural, the purely spiritual. And even though dividing lines necessarily form along lines of ethnic difference, the fact that Allah n'est pas obligé and especially Quand on refuse, on dit non can be read as appeals to inclusion in the Ivorian category reveals the underlying supremacy of the national in Kourouma's thought.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The tensions on the ground over what shape the nation will take in the Côte d'Ivoire are far from settled. And it is perhaps, in the final analysis, the very existence of this specific recipe of tensions which constitutes the purest Ivorian-ness anyway. This writing happens to coincide closely with the fiftieth anniversary of Côte d'Ivoire's independence. Celebrations were festive, but carried the shadow of the nation's uncertain future within them. Laurent Gbagbo, the country's current President, took the occasion to announce elections for later in the year—a promise he's made and broken twice in the last three years. The move served to underscore the precariousness of the recent past. One emblematic reporter entitled his story on the event "En quête d'unité." The authors of this study all seem to bear out in various ways the central idea contained in such a headline: that national unity is a quest, a journey of faith. These authors' conscious or subconscious belief in its possibility underlies all of their work no matter the complications they acknowledge in their writings.

Boni's novels, each engaging male figures of importance in the political history of the nation from women's perspectives, perform a national identity which official versions are consistently incomplete to fully circumscribe. Her female protagonists all engage in a search for the voices subdued by history, and all depict a Cote d'Ivoire which can still resist the forces which attempt to overdetermine its destiny. In Les Baigneurs du lac rose it was official state doctrines which a proper context of aestheticization could provide the solution to. In Matins de

couvre-feu, ethnic divisions were to be redressed through proper re-connection with pre-colonial history. And in Les nègres n'iront jamais au paradis, proper initiation refocuses unity to face the imposition of neo-colonial categories. Boni's latent messages on the shape of nationalism and underlying anti-Ivoirité stance, become evident upon a re-evaluation of their surface allegorical content.

Along the same lines, Tadjó's Ivorian-ness is revealed only when questions are asked beyond the simple surface allegory her texts present. Le royaume aveugle begins a series of narratives whose textual composition is so thoroughly of various binary oppositions as to suggest an analogy of agonism and an impasse of communication at the core of the national identity she performs. L'Ombre d'Imana maps its anti-Ivoirité intervention as a warning against ethnic divisions through allegorical episodes applicable to her home country's situation. And her Reine Pokou, on the surface overtly playing with the re-evaluation of myths and the re-examining of their ramifications for today's conflicts yields an imaginary in which Ivorian is still possibly coterminous with unified.

Touré and Koné write texts broadly allegorical of the conflict of classes, which, re-analyzed for traces of national identity, produce an Ivorian-ness where ethnicity is not an essential identifier, and where class determinism can be resisted. Destins parallèles textually demonstrates a national identity overdetermined by materialist economics, but one in which race and gender are also key. And in Les Coupeurs de têtes Koné also shows how economics is also the heart of Ivorian society's groupings, and then adds a notion of mysticism wherein the being of Ivorian-ness may not match its appearance.

Finally, Kourouma begins with Les Soleils des Indépendances in which he demonstrates an Ivorian identity which is caught in extreme tension between opposing legitimacies, which,

upon further analysis, are revealed as already mixed. He moves to an Ivorian-ness which is a “sac de contradictions” because the influence of a dictator in En Attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages. And his unfinished duology (comprised of Allah n’est pas obligé and Quand on refuse on dit non) establish an Ivorian-ness in which ethnicity can still be a cause for identitarian divisions and violence, but where it has been drained of its political force, ceding discursive authority to the nation such that ethnic divisions become a perversion of the ideal of national unity, and no longer an equally valid model of mediation between self and world.

Taken together, my readings of these novels, then, form the beginnings of a response to what shape the national imaginary holds in the Côte d’Ivoire. It is fraught, it is inflected by gender, race, ethnicity, class, and the idea of France, and it is formed in reference to the state and the ways in which the state would determine its contours. This beginning is innovative on the grounds of the scarcity of scholarship on the bulk of the authors I deal with, and also for the degree to which I allow the texts to articulate their own importance. This is not to suggest complete freedom from theoretical considerations, but rather that my study departs from otherwise fruitful norms of postcolonial studies by its insistence on underlying allegorical structures and on a positive role for nationalism. The form of the nation outlined by these authors is constrained by the diachronic and synchronic forces surrounding the gender, race, ethnicity, class, geopolitics and the state, as mentioned, but it is primarily a narrative—a cultural construct—which, even in the contesting, performs itself into existence through utterance, through representation, through literature. And far from finally being able to theorize a definitive set of themes and variations within the literature of the Ivoirité period, I have nonetheless learned that a synthesis of the national imaginary is always in the process of becoming. In this sense, my

project departs from the anthological taxonomic impulse, and instead offers textually licensed deep structures.

As the study progressed, I have found the need to re-affirm the special use to which I and Jameson put the term “allegory”, for although a few of these novels can be accurately described as belonging to the genre of allegory, it is rather allegory understood as a structure, as a system of connected symbols that enables readings which draw out from the text its conceptualization of nation. It appears, in every one of the cases here, that Jameson was correct to assert a national allegory present in these “third world” texts, even if his totalizing Marxian logic motivates his assertion from a perspective which considers the nation as a limit, as a mere epiphenomenon. I have been tempted, at times, to evacuate Jameson from my thought, to see if the readings I have produced would change. But I have continually come back to the fact that my readings, even though they could be conceived entirely without him, continue to provide evidence in support of his assertion, suggesting credence ought to be given to his most orthodox of Marxist reasonings. By hypothesizing that his interpretive method holds *structurally* with Marxist theory substituted *out* as the organizing master signifier, and then by demonstrating that his assertion of the presence of national allegory still applies, what I have effectively arrived at is evidence both that it is his methodological structure itself, and not the Marxian motivations which underlie them, that retains applicability and that the nation does effectively function as a master signifier organizing human experience. In a word, my ancillary purpose in testing Jameson’s national allegory assertion is borne out and, in fact, argues for enlarging the scope of the assertion itself, perhaps even to first world texts.

The positive force for solidarity, the cultural framework for the justification of institutions which can guarantee individual liberties, the galvanizing reason behind productive

international competition, nationalism can be the proverbial baby that gets thrown out with bath when it is mischaracterized as malevolently homogenizing or as a frustrating impediment to transnationalism.

But this study does not settle all the questions it raises, and it also calls for yet others to be posed. Does the Côte d'Ivoire represent a special case because of how Ivoirité warped the discursive field, or would a similar study find similar results in corpuses from other African nations? Since many sub-Saharan African nations share common cultural, racial and colonial contexts, are there differences in modes of nationalism? The shape of the national imaginary would, of course, differ from state to state, but is there a classification of states which would tend to produce different limits to that shape? Would a leap to poetry as the textual basis of the study provide the same conclusions? Would it alter the allegorical nature of the deep structures? And what of the diaspora? And engagement with these questions will surely form part of elements of my inquiry as I continue my line of thought in other publishable ventures.

In sum, I have argued and demonstrated throughout how these texts' performance is accessible through the analytic practice of taking allegorical readings as a starting point. And while this constitutes my theoretical or methodological contribution, I see this work as participating in the broader discussion on African nations as well. With Tadjó, Boni, Touré, Kourouma, and to a lesser extent Koné, I support the notion that peace and prosperity within a country are not solely the province of the state. Each of these authors pointed to culture, to narrative, to stories shared, and myths re-evaluated—to literature writ large—are forces for tolerance. In powerful ways, all of the authors in this study stood up to the state's official doctrine of Ivoirité, critiqued the leaders in power, and demonstrated the dangers and the consequences of accepting the state's conception of what it means to be Ivorian. The solidarity

promoting narratives of these authors points to a certain underlying nationalism in their imaginary—a kind that would allow for negotiation of ethnic identity, religious affiliation, interest groups, etc. within a national space, and yet which would not preclude more international kinds of solidarities as well. This kind of positive nationalism deserves continued attention in African literary criticism, in postcolonial theory, and in the humanities in general.

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