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**West African Representations of World War II:
Rewriting Thiaroye**

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**West African Representations of World War II:
Rewriting Thiaroye**

by

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To those whose voice remains unheard

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West African Representations of World War II: Rewriting Thiaroye

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This study is concerned with the artistic rewriting, in French and by writers and filmmakers of West African origins, of the massacre of Thiaroye (Senegal), the 1944 mutiny of African soldiers severely repressed by the French army. The corpus is formed by the following works: a poem, “Tyaroye” (1944), by Senegalese poet and president Léopold Sédar Senghor, another poem by Guinean artist Fodeba Keita, “Aube africaine” (1949), a play, *Thiaroye terre rouge* (1981), by Senegalese writer and journalist Boubacar Boris Diop, a novel, *Morts pour la France* (1983),

by Malian author Doumbi-Fakoly, a movie, *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), by Senegalese director Sembene Ousmane, a short animated movie, *L'Ami y'a bon* (2004) by French filmmaker of Algerian origins Rachid Bouchareb, and a play by professor and writer Cheikh Faty Faye, *Aube de sang* (2005).

The main purpose of this study is to constitute and characterize *a history of these artistic representations*. I argue that these works, produced either before the accession of African countries to independence in the 1940s, or twenty to twenty-five years afterwards in the 1980s, or quite recently, in the so-called era of “globalization,” belong to three main trends or stages, according to the socio-political role they assume: insertion of Thiaroye in the collective memories of France and West Africa, for Senghor and Keita, use of the events to criticize and resist (neo-)colonialism, for Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly and Sembene Ousmane, and rereading of the past in the hope of building a society based on forgiveness and better understanding among peoples, for Bouchareb and Faye. The socio-political function endorsed by each work is put forward thanks to the close examination of its artistic techniques and the reconstitution of its specific context of production.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

From November 26 to December 1, 2007, the inhabitants of Dakar celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the creation, under Napoleon III, of the military corps of the “*Tirailleurs sénégalais*.” The festival included many cultural manifestations: an exhibition *La Force Noire: de 1857 aux Indépendances* (*The Black Force: from 1857 to the Independence*) hosted in the French Institute “Léopold Senghor” of Dakar; a screening of fiction movies such as *Indigènes* (*Days of Glory*, 2006) by Rachid Bouchareb; screening of documentaries such as *Histoire oubliée* (*Forgotten History*, 1985) by Eric Deroo; as well as round-table conferences discussing works by historians, journalists, and/or writers such as novelist Marc Dugain, author of *La Chambre des officiers* (*The Officers’ Ward*, 1999), journalist and researcher Eric Deroo, co-author with lieutenant colonel Antoine Champeaux, of *La Force noire: Gloires et infortunes d’une légende coloniale* (*Black Force: Glory and Misfortune of a Colonial Legend*, 2006), and playwright and history professor Cheikh Faty Faye, author of *Aube de sang* (*Dawn of Blood*, 2005)—a play that will be studied in chapter 3. By mixing various cultural (movies, plays, novels, etc.) and historical documents, and combining Senegalese with French ap-

proaches, the festival aimed at “exploring a side of history shared by France and Senegal.”¹ One hopes that the festival enhanced the crucial fact that this “shared” history was originally, and has always been mainly, a history imposed by force. In any case, maybe because it remained a-political (to the extent that no official political involvement had been scheduled), this event was more consensual and less controversial than the visit paid and the speech given by French president Nicolas Sarkozy at the University of Dakar, a few months earlier, in July 2007.

1.1 French and African Points of View on Colonization and on Thiaroye

The French president’s speech shocked by its racist tone. The speech, actually written by Henri Guaino, had indeed racist inflections when it mentioned the features that supposedly depict the “African man” (“l’homme africain”) who “has not entered history enough. The African peasant, who for thousands of years, has lived with the seasons, whose ideal in life is to be in harmony with nature, knows only the eternal recommencement of time punctuated by the endless repetition of the same gestures and words.”² The speech provoked a collective protest from French and African journalists, philosophers and writers. As soon as August 3, African writers,

¹“explore[r] un pan de l’histoire commune entre la France et le Sénégal,” quoted from an article from the on-line version of the Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil*: http://www.lesoleil.sn/article.php3?id_article=31117, consulted on 14 January 2008.

²“Le drame de l’Afrique, c’est que l’homme africain n’est pas assez entré dans l’histoire. Le paysan africain, qui depuis des millénaires, vit avec les saisons, dont l’idéal de vie est d’être en harmonie avec la nature, ne connaît que l’éternel recommencement du temps rythmé par la répétition sans fin des mêmes gestes et des mêmes paroles.” Sarkozy’s speech is available on the Internet at the following address: http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/2007/juillet/allocution_a_l_universite_de_dakar.79184.html, consulted on 14 January 2008.

including Boubacar Boris Diop, one of the authors considered in this study, wrote an open letter to the president insisting on how insulted they felt by his speech, and condemning the “ignorance,” “cynism,” and “contempt”³ underlying his words.

Denouncing the racist foundation of Sarkozy’s intervention, French journalist and director of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Jean Daniel, also pointed out that Sarkozy’s speech was nevertheless difficult to grasp to the extent that “never a French president had gone so far in the criticism of colonization.”⁴ Sarkozy indeed acknowledged that colonization was a “crime against humanity.”⁵ Yet, this acknowledgement was not followed by an expected request for forgiveness. Sarkozy instead insisted on the “benefits of colonization”⁶ as well as on the non-responsibility of the colonizers regarding the current state of affairs in Africa.⁷

All these facts lead to the conclusion expressed by French professor of genetics, Thomas Heams: “In a staggering speech delivered in Dakar, Nicolas Sarkozy

³“Do we have to interpret it as ignorance, as cynism, or as contempt?” “Devons-nous l’interpréter comme ignorance, comme cynisme, comme mépris?” The complete letter is available at the following Internet address: <http://www.liberation.fr/rebonds/271587.FR.php>, consulted on 14 January 2008.

⁴“jamais un président français n’avait été aussi loin dans la critique de la colonisation.” Jean Daniel is quoted in an article by journalist Thomas Hofnung. The article, dating from 9 October 2007 is available at this Internet address: <http://www.liberation.fr/actualite/politiques/283555.FR.php>, consulted on 14 January 2008.

⁵“Et ce crime ne fut pas seulement un crime contre les Africains, ce fut un crime contre l’Homme, un crime contre l’humanité.”

⁶“The colonizers took, but I want to say with respect that he also gave. He built bridges, roads, hospitals, dispensaries, schools. He made fertile unbroken lands, he gave his pain, his work, his knowledge. I want to say it here, all the settlers were not thieves, all the settlers were not exploiters,” “Le colonisateur a pris mais je veux dire avec respect qu’il a aussi donné. Il a construit des ponts, des routes, des hôpitaux, des dispensaires, des écoles. Il a rendu fécondes des terres vierges, il a donné sa peine, son travail, son savoir. Je veux le dire ici, tous les colons n’étaient pas des voleurs, tous les colons n’étaient pas des exploiters.”

⁷“Colonization is not responsible for all the current difficulties of Africa. It is not responsible for the bloody wars that Africans wage amongst themselves. It is not responsible for the genocide. It is not responsible for dictators. . . .” “La colonisation n’est pas responsable de toutes les difficultés actuelles de l’Afrique. Elle n’est pas responsable des guerres sanglantes que se font les Africains entre eux. Elle n’est pas responsable des génocides. Elle n’est pas responsable des dictateurs. . . .”

who dares all, and this is how he is recognized, unveiled the substance of a thought which, if words have any meaning, has been the most racist official French word for a long time.”⁸ France’s official position toward colonization demonstrates the uneasiness of its politicians to face the atrocities of a recent past. In fact, it seems that, the French president has recently been more obsessed with another set of past atrocities, the ones committed under the Vichy government. The recent proposal (March 2008) by Sarkozy, to make children (of 10-11 years old) responsible for the memory of a deported Jewish child, tends to prove this concern, although the measure is of a controversial nature.⁹ Concerning both colonization and deportation, French authorities either are not interested or do not provide an adequate response. No less was expected from a president who, in the speech that followed his election, stated that he wanted “to be done with repentance, which is a form of self-hatred, and competition of memories that feeds the hatred of others.”¹⁰ Instead of courageously facing the colonial past, recognizing the mistakes, and asking for forgiveness, the French president prefers to remain in a state of denial, in order to preserve France’s reputation.

For African people, colonization is not relegated to the past. It is very well alive and remembered in their daily lives, even if sometimes this past can be bother-

⁸“Dans une allocution sidérante prononcée à Dakar, Nicolas Sarkozy qui ose tout, et c’est à cela qu’on le reconnaît, a dévoilé le fond d’une pensée qui, si les mots ont un sens, est la parole officielle française la plus raciste depuis longtemps”; the article written by Heams is available at the following Internet address: <http://www.liberation.fr/rebonds/270247.FR.php>, consulted on 14 January 2008.

⁹The controversy turns mainly around the psychological impact on children, the fact that the atrocities under Vichy did not only concern the Jews, and the fact that France should therefore develop measures that would include reparations toward other victimized communities, such as the Algerians victims of torture during the Algerian War of Liberation.

¹⁰“Je veux en finir avec la repentance qui est une forme de haine de soi, et la concurrence des mémoires qui nourrit la haine des autres.” The speech is available at the following Internet address: <http://www.liberation.fr/actualite/politiques/elections2007/252080.FR.php>, consulted on 18 March 2008.

some. Indeed, the celebration of the anniversary of the *tirailleurs* also reminds one of the implication of Africans themselves in the misery of colonization. As it will be discussed in the first chapter, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* corps, recruited among the indigenous populations, was formed and developed to help with the maintenance and extension of the French colonial empire. They were called by Senegalese poet and president Léopold Sédar Senghor, the “bulldogs of the empire.” To a certain extent then, the history of the *tirailleurs* is a history that could make the people of West Africa uncomfortable. Yet they have the merit to face it, as the festival has proven.

Significantly, the festival ended on 1 December 2007, the sixty-third anniversary of the massacre of Thiaroye, a symbolical event for West African people. Thiaroye is indeed significant in many respects. Because it was an *uprising* of the *tirailleurs*, who so far had been obedient soldiers at the service of the expansion of the French Empire, Thiaroye symbolizes the deep spirit of resistance against colonization that eventually “contaminated” the ones who collaborated with the enemy. It is certainly no coincidence that the festival’s tribute to the *tirailleurs* celebrated as well an event that is considered to be the foundation of many African liberation movements and African independence. On the other hand, let us not forget that Thiaroye was a failure: it was severely repressed by the French army and the African soldiers who carried out the orders. As such, Thiaroye can also be seen as an event revealing the implication of Africans themselves in the misery of (neo-)colonization.

From the French military perspective, Thiaroye was a mistake that needed to be erased or at least covered up. Although some French historians and journalists have mentioned and analyzed Thiaroye as an episode that reveals one of the darkest sides of French colonial history, the French cultural discourse remains silent on

this particular event, reinforcing the oblivion promoted by the French political discourse. Except for the animation movie, *L'Ami y'a bon* (2004), by French director of Algerian origins, Rachid Bouchareb, the massacre of Thiaroye has not been, totally or even partially, the topic of any French artistic representations, as if this past event had completely been removed from France's collective memory.

On the contrary, over the past sixty years, West African people have not forgotten what happened in Thiaroye. In Bamako, Mali, Alpha Omar Konaré, former president of Mali, inaugurated a stele, in December 2001, dedicated to the dead of Thiaroye (Onana 124). Although there is no monument erected to the memory of the victims in Senegal, on the premises of the event,¹¹ the memories of it are nevertheless transmitted from one generation to another among the inhabitants of Dakar. Traces of the events are found in popular culture. An example is the popular saying "I do not see you in Mbao" ("Je ne te vois pas à Mbao"). Mbao was actually a small village close to Thiaroye where the survivors of the massacre fled and found refuge. "I do not see you in Mbao" implies that "you are not a survivor," and therefore means "you are in trouble."¹²

Artists as well have represented the massacre. In Dakar, for instance, there exists a mural, entitled *Thiaroye 44*, commemorating the massacre.¹³ In 1999, musician Mansour Seck composed a song in Wolof, the main language spoken in Senegal, dedicated to the massacre. During the past sixty years, seven artistic renderings of Thiaroye were created using the French language: a poem, "Tyaroye," by

¹¹This absence is controversial. For some critics and scholars, it reveals the blatant neo-colonial link between Senegal and France, as if it was impossible for the Senegalese government to publicly condemn France's past exactions.

¹²Special thanks to Oussenou Sy, an inhabitant of Dakar, for his testimony about these facts related to the collective memory of Thiaroye.

¹³A picture of it is accessible on this Internet website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thiaroye_Massacre, consulted on 11 June 2008.

Senegalese poet-president Léopold Sédar Senghor written in 1944, a few days after the events happened; a narrative poem along with a sung performance, *Aube africaine (African Dawn)* created around 1949 by Guinean artist Fodeba Keita; a play, *Thiaroye, terre rouge (Thiaroye, Red Ground)* by Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop, published in 1981; a novel, *Morts pour la France (Dead for France)*, written in 1983 by author of Malian origins Doumbi-Fakoly; a movie, *Camp de Thiaroye (Camp of Thiaroye)* by Senegalese filmmaker Sembene Ousmane, released in 1987; an animation movie, *L'Ami y'a bon (Friend is good)* (2004) by French-Algerian director Rachid Bouchareb; and finally, a play, *Aube de sang (Dawn of Blood)*, published in 2005, by Senegalese author Cheikh Faty Faye.

All these artistic documents on Thiaroye participate in the “*collective memory*” of West African people. The concept of “collective memory,” created by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs,¹⁴ is useful here to the extent that the above-mentioned authors, by duty of memory, have transformed testimonies of survivors, dying because of their old age, into memories of a people, for whom Thiaroye assumes a certain role of cohesion.

My study focuses exclusively on documents written in French by authors of African origins. Because these documents are produced by artists of African origins, they are part of an African collective memory. Yet, because of the language,

¹⁴As Paul Ricoeur points out in his article “Histoire et mémoire,” the transition made by Halbwachs from individual to collective memory is based on three main facts: one does not remember alone, but with the help of others’ memory; individual memory borrows from others’ memories, making them its own; most individual memories need the support of collective narratives of public events. Ricoeur, however, goes beyond Halbwachs in the sense that he considers that the relationship between individual and collective memory is not analogical, but direct: “it is in a direct and not analogical sense that we ascribe memories and projects to communities of all sorts. That is why I propose the hypothesis of a mutual constitution, at the crossroads of two subjectivities, private and collective” (“c’est en un sens direct et non analogique que nous attribuons à des communautés de toutes sortes mémoire et projet. C’est pourquoi je propose l’hypothèse d’une constitution mutuelle, croisée, de deux subjectivités, privée et collective”; 19-20).

they *also* target a French audience and intend to (re-)anchor Thiaroye in France's collective memory. For French people, these works take on an informative role that the official discourses do not provide. They contribute to a more complete and complex representation of the past that confronts the hegemonic discourse of ignorance. They also help the French audience to understand a situation from a standpoint with which they might not be acquainted, presenting another facet of the reality of colonization.

1.2 Significance and Purposes of the study

This study is concerned with the multiple artistic (re-)writing, in French and by artists of African origins, of a historical event, the massacre of Thiaroye. The main purpose is to constitute and characterize *a history of these artistic representations*. A glance at the list of documents indicates that the production of works on Thiaroye is not continuous—there are gaps—and that they were produced either before the accession of African countries to independence, in the 1940s (for Senghor and Keita), or twenty to twenty-five years afterwards, in the 1980s (for Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly and Ousmane), or quite recently, in the so-called new era of “globalization,” in the 2000s (for Bouchareb and Faye). I argue that this chronological classification corresponds, respectively, to three main trends or stages in this history of representations: insertion of Thiaroye in the collective memories of France and West Africa (for Senghor and Keita), use of the event to criticize and resist (neo-)colonialism (for Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly and Sembene Ousmane), and rereading of the past in the hope of building a society based on forgiveness and better understanding among peoples (for Bouchareb and Faye).

In order to achieve my goal, I analyze closely the intertwining between the

content (the literary interpretation of the historical event) and the form (artistic features enhancing the content). I demonstrate how certain techniques are used to illustrate specific meanings. Then, I focus on the way these representations articulate with each other, creating, between themselves, a dialogue that sheds light on their meaning and significance.

This internal analysis, concentrating mainly on the works and their intertextual interactions, is complemented by an external perspective, which consists of reconstructing the socio-historical context of production of each document. The study aims to understand how the authors make the past dialogue with their present or, in other words, how the contemporary situations in which they lived is enlightened by their understanding and vision of the past.

I also explore the articulation of this cultural discourse with, on the one hand, history, the scientific discourse on the past and, on the other hand, with the official or political position regarding past events. “Does the cultural discourse on Thiaroye oppose or agree with the political one?”¹⁵ “does it correspond to, or resist, the historical interpretation of the events?” are questions tackled in this study and whose responses depend on the authors’ critical intentions and socio-political agenda. Since Thiaroye is an event that belongs to a common history between France and West Africa (Senegal in particular), these issues are raised toward both French and Senegalese official and historical discourses.

¹⁵Cultural discourses can, but do not necessarily, oppose official discourses. In her study on French postcolonial movies, Caroline Eades underscores that these films “constitute an important factor of resistance against official denial and silence” (“constitue[nt] un facteur important de résistance au déni et silence officiels”; *Le Cinéma* 12). However, in another study devoted to French movies on WWI, she notes that these films go in the same direction as the official position by “operat[ing] a national cohesion” (“opèr[ant] un travail de cohésion nationale”; “La Première Guerre mondiale” 14).

1.3 Description of Chapters

A brief description of each of the four chapters follows.

1.3.1 Chapter 1: Historical Background and Renderings of Thiaroye

This chapter provides the historical background necessary to set up the framework of the literary and artistic analyzes deployed in the following chapters. After a brief presentation of the French colonial empire, the *code de l'indigénat*, the formation of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and the empire during WWII, I describe the mutiny/massacre of Thiaroye, on the basis of various historical accounts made by historians, sociologists, journalists, both from Western and African origins.

1.3.2 Chapter 2: Representations of Thiaroye in Colonial Times: “Tyaroye” by Léopold Sédar Senghor and “Aube africaine” by Fodeba Keita

The first two renderings of Thiaroye, “Tyaroye” by Léopold Sédar Senghor and “Aube africaine” by Fodeba Keita, happen to be two poems. They display textual characteristics that parallel their authors’ radically different views on the events.

At the time Senghor wrote his poem, in 1944, he wished that France would be willing to grant full citizenship to the overseas populations of her empire on the basis that they actively participated in the war effort. In the context of the aftermath of Vichy, where the prevailing discourse was the one promoting Resistance, Senghor had to present the *tirailleurs* as resistant heroes. It was quite a feat to achieve, considering that the infantrymen of Thiaroye were definitely rebels to French authority. He nevertheless achieved his goal by choosing poetry over narra-

tive. Poetry allowed Senghor to evoke the events, by blurring their circumstances, instead of describing them. The *tirailleurs* of Thiaroye were transformed into victims and Thiaroye became the prototype of sacrifice, necessary for the advent of a new civilization, the famous “*civilisation de l’universel*,” rooted in the concept of Negritude. Senghor succeeded in rooting Thiaroye into the collective memory of France.

In 1958, when the African colonies (except Algeria) were asked by referendum to give their opinion about the political status they wanted to gain, Guinea was the only country to opt for immediate independence from France. In doing so, Guinean president Sékou Touré wanted to prevent any French neo-colonial intrusion into the Guinean State’s affairs. Guinean artist Fodeba Keita shared the president’s political views to the point that in 1961 he became the Minister of National Defense. In many ways, his narrative poem, “Aube africaine,” first published in 1949, illustrates his political opinions. Keita sees in Thiaroye the events that triggered the the liberation of Africa from its colonial ties. By using the narrative mode of story telling, by conceiving the written text as part of a performance with music and dance, and by referring to Mande history, Keita’s poem transforms Thiaroye into an event belonging exclusively to African legends and tradition.

1.3.3 Chapitre 3: Representations of Thiaroye in the Post-Independence Era: *Thiaroye terre rouge* by Boubacar Boris Diop, *Morts pour la France* by Doumbi-Fakoly and *Camp de Thiaroye* by Sembene Ousmane

The three representations of Thiaroye in this period, a play by Boubacar Boris Diop, *Thiaroye Terre Rouge*, a novel by Doumbi-Fakoly *Morts pour la France* and

a movie by Sembene Ousmane *Camp de Thiaroye*, obviously evaluate the post-independence situation in the light of the uprising. Going back to Thiaroye is a way for the authors to denounce neo-colonialist ties that France maintained with their now independent countries, and that their own countries agreed on maintaining with France.

Twenty years after independence, the play by Diop, *Thiaroye Terre Rouge* (1981), more obviously than the poem by Senghor, denounces the French colonizers. Yet, it is also a reflection on betrayal and in particular, on treason by people belonging to the same community. The play is an African self-criticism in which the playwright, without necessarily providing responses, raises the painful issue of Africans' own involvement in the misery of (neo-)colonialism.

In *Morts pour la France* (1983) by Doumbi-Fakoly, Thiaroye is a key episode to understand the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism. The significance of Thiaroye is emphasized in the novel by several narrative techniques such as the creation of characters, or the growing intervention of the narrator. The novel echoes the author's belief that European colonizers are the root of a corrupted and dying Africa that needs to liberate itself from (neo-)colonial forces by relying on its own power, anchored in its prestigious past.

For Sembene Ousmane, the invasion of the African continent took many forms, and among others, "islamization" and the European colonization. In *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), Thiaroye is set up as another example of the African capacity of resistance against invaders. This rendering of Thiaroye encourages Africans to resist any hegemonic political discourse characterized by the dissimulation or oblivion of historical events proving the oppressors' barbarism. For Sembene Ousmane, whose movie refers to various cultural documents (music, cinema, literature; European and African; popular and intellectual, etc.), art is the supreme means of

resistance.

1.3.4 Chapter 4: Representations of Thiaroye in a New Era: *L'Ami y'a bon* by Rachid Bouchareb and *Aube de sang* by Cheikh Faty Faye

The last chapter examines the animation movie, *L'Ami y'a bon*, by Rachid Bouchareb, and the play, *Aube de sang*, by Cheikh Faty Faye and emphasizes both authors' desire to make their respective country enter a new era of understanding of the past.

The short animation movie by Rachid Bouchareb was made in 2004, at a time, the sixtieth anniversary of Thiaroye, when the director felt it necessary to remind the French population that the 2nd or 3rd generations of immigrants should share the same rights as any French citizen. Deploying a "rhetoric of childhood," Bouchareb underscores in his movie both the spirit of sacrifice of the African soldiers and the culpability of the French army in order to make the audience understand how crucial it is for France to accept in her bosom the descendants of soldiers who fought for her and then received no compensation, but an unfair punishment to a just uprising. Time has come to make up for past mistakes.

The play by Faye, *Aube de sang* (2005), is an attempt to understand less the infantrymen's uprising than the French repression. The infantrymen are indeed concerned with the Whites' psyche and wish to explore and grasp the incentives behind their behaviors. In so doing, the African characters set the example of the way to overcome a legitimate rage for the profit of a better understanding between peoples. The play presents the African vision of the world as a source of inspiration for the future, as Senghor always believed in.

1.3.5 Conclusion

The conclusion characterizes the main trends of the history of the artistic representations of Thiaroye: anchoring in collective memories of France and West Africa, resistance to (neo-) colonialism, and forgiveness.

Chapter 2

Historical Background and Renderings of Thiaroye

This chapter provides the historical background necessary to set up the framework of the literary and artistic analyzes deployed in the following chapters. The sections discuss, respectively, the development of the French colonial empire, the legal status of *indigénat* that France imposed on the overseas populations, the creation and history of the military corps of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the role of the colonies during WWII, and finally the historical accounts concerning the mutiny of Thiaroye.

2.1 A Brief Survey of The French Colonial Empire

Except for the territories over which France ruled in the Middle Ages—as a consequence of the Crusades—, the French colonial Empire really started in the 17th-century in the territories of the New World.¹

¹This section of the chapter was made up by gathering information from: Pluchon and Bouche, *Histoire de la colonisation française* and Thobie and Meyer, *Histoire de la France coloniale*. Com-

The first colonial settlement in the Americas was Port Royal in Acadia—now, Nova Scotia—in 1605. A few years later, in 1608, Samuel de Champlain founded Québec, which soon became the capital of the fur-trading colony of New France. Compared to Britain, France was little interested in colonies to expand her population. The overseas territories primarily served a mercantile purpose. While the French continued to expand their colonial empire in North America, founding Louisiana in 1699, they were also eager to develop their possessions in the West Indies: along the South American coast—today’s Guiana (1624), in Guadeloupe and Martinique (1635) and in Santo Domingo—today’s Haiti (1664). There, the sugar cane plantations relied on slavery, dependent on the African slave trade.

France’s greed for colonial expansion was not exclusively focused on the New World. As early as 1624, France established trading posts along the West African coast. Later, colonies were created in India as well as in the Indian Ocean on the Île Bourbon—today’s Réunion—in 1664, in Île de France—today’s Mauritius—in 1718, and the Seychelles archipelago in 1756.

In the mid-18th century, a series of colonial conflicts opposed France and Great Britain, which would lead to France’s almost complete loss of what might be called her “first colonial Empire.”

The second wave of French colonial expansion began with the invasion of Algeria and the conquest of Algiers in 1830, under Louis-Philippe. Algeria was one of the few colonies populated by Europeans (“*colonies de peuplement*”), which would explain, later, why the French were so reluctant to give the Algerians their independence: they thought (and some still do) of Algeria as part of French territory.

In the 1860s, Napoleon III unsuccessfully attempted to establish a protectorate-type of regime in Mexico, but succeeded in establishing control in Cochin-China—

plete references can be found in the final bibliography.

the southernmost part of modern Vietnam—and a protectorate over Cambodia.

After the advent of the Third Republic, most of France's later colonies were acquired. In Asia, the French took over Tonkin and Annam in 1884-1885, which formed French Indochina together with Cochin-China and Cambodia. Laos was added in 1887 and Kwang-Chou-Wan in 1900. From 1849 to 1946, Shanghai became a French concession.

France also extended her colonial empire in North Africa: Tunisia became a protectorate in 1881 and Morocco in 1911. France gradually developed her control over West, Central and East Africa: by the turn of the century, her empire in Africa stretched out from Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast, Benin and Niger to Djibouti, including Chad, Central African Republic and Republic of Congo.

At the beginning of the 20th century, France had colonized the South Pacific, in particular New Caledonia and the islands making up French Polynesia.

The last major colonial gains by the French were acquired after World War I, when they obtained mandates over Syria and Lebanon—the former Turkish territories of the Ottoman Empire—and received the German colonies of Togo and Cameroon.

2.2 The *Code de l'Indigénat*

France imposed the *Code de l'indigénat* on the populations of her colonized territory.² This status in effect discriminated against the native populations since, although ruled by France and therefore French subjects, they did not *ipso facto* enjoy French citizenship. The *indigénat* regime was first implemented in Algeria. At the

²More information on the legal status of *indigénat* can be found in: Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un Français?* Complete reference in final bibliography.

onset, this status was even considered a favor granted to the vanquished since they were not constrained to respect secular French laws and could continue to follow Koranic laws (that allowed polygamy, for instance). To become French citizens, Muslim natives had to give up their obedience to Koranic laws and swear allegiance to the laws of the Republic.

The Third Republic made some attempts to facilitate the access of some natives of Algeria to French citizenship. For instance, in 1870 the *Décret Crémieux* conferred citizenship upon the 35,000 Jews of Algeria: it was considered a political measure of de-colonization by way of assimilation. On the other hand, the *décret* had a discriminatory nature since it segregated the native populations according to their religious beliefs: Jews vs Muslims. The *décret* was abrogated by the Vichy regime in 1940, transforming the Algerian Jews into stateless people until 1943. In 1889, the possibility was offered to the “foreigners” living in Algeria—of Spanish, Italian, etc. descent—to become French. The colonists resisted giving this right to the Muslim population, mainly for demographic reasons. The *jus soli* (“*droit du sol*,” “right of the soil”) was applied everywhere on the French territory, including Algeria, but did not apply to the Muslim population.

1889 is also the date that saw the *Code de l'indigénat* generalized to the entirety of the French imperial territory, except for the protectorates (Tunisia and Morocco, for instance). In Senegal, only people born in the four *communes*—Dakar, Rufesque, Saint-Louis and Gorée—were given French citizenship, which created a discriminatory status between inhabitants of West Africa. According to the *Encyclopedia of African History*: “Africans born in the Four Communes were considered French ‘citizens,’ distinct from the African ‘subjects’ who made up the vast majority of the population [of Senegal]” (1334). In effect, in the four *communes*, most of the African population were “*originaires*,” a term referring to people born in the

communes, but who lived under African or Islamic law. Only the few Africans from the four communes who were able to pursue higher education and willing to conform to French law could become “*Évolué*” (“Evolved”) and nominally acquire full French citizenship.

After WWI, some reforms were once again attempted in Algeria to facilitate the natives’ access to French citizenship, but the colonists continued to strongly oppose them. The *indigénat* regime was gradually dismantled after WWII.

2.3 The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*

Etymologically speaking, the French word “*tirailleur*,” dating from 1740, means “the one who fires in every direction.”³ The word applied first to soldiers, on temporary assignment, who were supposed to shoot at the enemy as much as possible.⁴ Then it applied to infantrymen from the overseas territories, under the command of French officers.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais*⁵ is a military corps created in 1857 by Louis Faidherbe. The *tirailleurs* did not, of course, all come from Senegal, but from different regions in Africa; the adjective “Senegalese” most certainly refers to the fact that Faidherbe was then the Governor of Senegal (Mouralis 161). The corps was created to compensate for the lack of troops that the colonial expansion needed. Faidherbe had the idea to resort to locals, who were either purchased slaves, prisoners of war, or volunteers. For colonial powers, the advantages of recruiting locally were nu-

³Definition found in: Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*. For a complete reference, see final bibliography

⁴“Soldat détaché pour tirer à volonté sur l’ennemi.”

⁵This section was mainly made up by gathering information from: Duval, *L’Épopée des tirailleurs sénégalais* and Deroo and Champeaux, *La Force noire*. Complete references in final bibliography.

merous: the troops were familiar with the territory and the customs, immune from local diseases, and most importantly could be used to create or intensify tensions against local tribes. Faidherbe's undertaking was in accordance with the saying "divide and conquer."

The *tirailleurs* actively participated in the two worldwide conflicts. France used its colonies as a pool of men to fight on the enemy front. However, West Africans' enrollment was usually far from voluntary. The historian Myron Echenberg states: "Africans went to considerable lengths to thwart French efforts to conscript the annual levies of men that averaged over 10,000 per annum during the inter-war years and ten times that figure during both World Wars" ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 112).

Scholar David Murphy notes that the *tirailleurs* are:

inherently ambiguous figures, for they can be viewed both as the agents of French colonialism—France's African Empire was largely built by French officers leading local recruits—and also as its victims, especially in relation to First and Second World Wars, in which the *tirailleurs* gave their lives for the metropolitan 'homeland,' only to rediscover their status as mere colonial subjects once the war was over. (57-58)

The figure of "agents of French colonialism" stuck to the *tirailleurs* perhaps even more after WWII was over. They were then recruited to repress the popular movements of liberation that arose first in Indochina, right after WWII, and then in Algeria, in 1954.

As we shall see, the mutiny of Thiaroye is certainly not the first colonized's uprising and colonial massacre,⁶ but it is the first one undertaken by members of

⁶Journalist Yves Bénot (64-68) refers to the massacre of Rabat-Fès in January-February 1944 as being the first one.

an army corps that was traditionally associated with the protection and expansion of the colonial empire. Thiaroye is highly significant in that it sounded the death knell of the French empire: if even the defenders of the empire rebelled against it, the empire must have been dying.

In 1959 (November 26) and in 1960, while West African countries obtained their independence, France adopted a measure of “crystallization” (“*crystallisation*”) affecting former *tirailleurs*’ pensions and allowances, which were then frozen. They were transformed into annual allowances based on rates prevailing at the date of independence of each country. For instance, a retired military, who spent fifteen years in the army, received, if French, 2 800 francs, whereas he received 673 francs if he was from Guinea and just 400 if he was from Tunisia or Morocco. The 1959 law also prevented any payment to widows. France continued to treat its “native” fighters despicably: considering them as cannon fodder during the conflicts, France then refused to acknowledge what she owed to her colonies, once they accessed independence.

In 2001,⁷ the *Conseil d’État* forced the government to end this practice. The distinction between veterans, since based on nationality, was found discriminatory and contrary to article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The *Conseil d’État* stated that compensation should be paid retroactively. It affected 80,000 ex-servicemen of 23 different nationalities.

Since then, the successive French governments have tried to tackle the issue, which concerns about 2 billion euros. In 2003, the Raffarin government decided that the war pensions should be indexed not on those of French veterans, but on the cost of living of the country where the ex-servicemen live. In September 2006, fol-

⁷Information on that matter was found on the following Jean-Pierre Husson’s pedagogical website: http://www.crdp-reims.fr/memoire/enseigner/soldats_indigenes/menu.htm, consulted on 19 June 2008.

lowing the release of Rachid Bouchareb's movie *Indigènes*, depicting the participation of Maghrebi soldiers in WWII, the minister in charge of the veterans, Hamioui Mekachera, stated that the former servicemen should enjoy, like their fellow French veterans, not only parity in purchasing power, but parity in euros. The measure was ratified on September 27. "However," stated scholar Jean-Pierre Husson, "these adjustment measures only concern fighters' pensions and disability pensions, leaving aside the whole issue of . . . catching up with the 'shortfall' caused since 1959 by the crystallization of pensions."⁸ Given the huge amount of money involved in the "decrystallization," one understands, for the government, the interest in waiting as much as possible: the infantrymen are not eternal.

2.4 The Empire during World War II

The French colonial empire began its dismantling during WWII when various parts of the overseas territories were occupied by foreign powers: Japan in Indochina, Britain in Syria, Lebanon, and Madagascar, the United States and Britain in Morocco and Algeria, and Germany in Tunisia. The overseas territories played a major role in WWII: they supplied food and/or troops.

When Germany declared war on France, soldiers from the colonies were recruited to defend the French territory. Of the eighty divisions defending the French border in 1939, seven were African and three colonial (Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts* 88). Once France surrendered, a few, lucky, African soldiers, were able to join the resistance network in France. The majority of them, however, were held in prisoner-of-war (P.O.W.) camps. After a few months in German camps, many of

⁸"Cependant, ces mesures d'ajustement concernèrent les seules retraites des combattants et les pensions d'invalidité, laissant entier le problème . . . du rattrapage du 'manque gagner' provoqué depuis 1959 par la cristallisation des pensions" (3).

them were transferred to the *front-stalags*—forced labor camps in the occupied zone in France—where they worked in mines or weapons factories, work for which they were paid in conformity with the stipulations of the Geneva convention.

During the Vichy period, most of the colonies, sooner or later, disavowed the *Etat français* (“French State”) and turned to de Gaulle. The governor of Chad, Félix Eboué, is known to be the first governor of Africa, in 1940, to support the general, which crucially influenced the rallying of the other colonies (Roche 44). Senegal was under Vichy ruler, Boisson, until 1943, when he was substituted by Pierre Cournarie.⁹ Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana joined the Free French Forces in 1943.

The *indigènes* (“native populations”), from Africa and the Caribbean, actively participated in resistance actions. They also enrolled in the Free French Forces and participated in major military operations to liberate the European and the French territories from the Germans. Between 1943 and 1945, 100,000 Africans were recruited. They fought during the Italian campaign of 1943 and landed in Normandy and in Provence in August 1944, helping the Allied forces rescue Paris. The 20,000 Africans who took part in the Allied landing on the French Riviera formed 20% of de Lattre’s army (Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts* 88). “Without Africa,” states the historian Bernard Mouralis, “there would never have been a Free France”¹⁰ (33). Overall, France recruited 200,000 Africans during WWII, of which roughly 12% died for “the homeland” (Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts* 88).

⁹Ousmane’s movie *Emitai* sarcastically evokes this change of regime: for the local populations, nothing really changed; they continued to be rationed and exploited in the sole purpose of providing supplies for the troops. For a more detailed historical account, see Roche (45).

¹⁰“Sans l’Afrique, il n’y aurait jamais eu la France libre.”

2.5 The Massacre of Thiaroye

In this section, I first discuss the various sources of information that I used to provide the most accurate account possible of the events that occurred in Thiaroye. Then a detailed chronology as well as relevant issues regarding the events are presented.

2.5.1 The Sources

In his article, “Tragedy at Thiaroye,” the historian Myron Echenberg evokes the various and “significant problems of documentation” (126, endnote number 3) regarding the events of Thiaroye, among which the fact that the French military Justice Archives are to be closed to the public for 100 years after the trial of the involved infantrymen. Accounts on Thiaroye are, for the most part, based on the archives of the Colonial Administration of West Africa and on interviews of survivors and witnesses of the events.

The sources that I could find to constitute a complete rendering of the mutiny and massacre of Thiaroye are, in chronological order, the above-mentioned article “Tragedy at Thiaroye” (1978) by McGill University professor, Myron Echenberg; one paragraph about “Troubles in sub-Saharan Africa” (“Agitations en Afrique noire”) in *Histoire de la France coloniale* (1990) under the direction of the French historian Jacques Thobie; another paragraph concerning the “1944-1945 Troubles in West and Equatorial French Africa” (“Les troubles de 1944-1945 en A.O.F. et en A.É. F.”) in *Histoire de la colonisation française II* (1991) by the French historian Denise Bouche; two paragraphs in French investigative journalist Yves Bénot’s book, *Massacres coloniaux* (1994); an article dating from 2002 by French sociology professor Armelle Mabon; a chapter entitled “The End of the War and the Scandal

of Thiaroye” (“La fin de la guerre et le scandale de Thiaroye”) from Cameroonian investigative journalist Charles Onana’s book, *La France et ses tirailleurs* (2003); finally, a chapter in *La Force noire* (2006) by the French historian Eric Deroo and lieutenant-colonel of marine infantry, Antoine Champeaux.

It is relevant to note that, although Thobie and Bouche speak, respectively, of Thiaroye as a “dramatic incident” (“incident dramatique” 389) or in terms of “drama” (“drame” 453), none of these two historians seeks to seriously explain the mutiny. For Bouche it is due to a generalized “lack of discipline” (“indiscipline”). Moreover, the violent reaction of the French authorities is downplayed, and even “understandable,” since the author upholds, as if to balance the African soldiers’ complaints, that “in France, scarcity was common and misery, immense”¹¹ (Bouche 453). For Thobie, the rebellion was just an “incident,” and not an event announcing the dismantling of the empire: it “just proved nothing except some officers’ lack of self-control”¹² (Thobie 389). In these two accounts, the mutiny of Thiaroye is considered as a minor event in the history of colonialism.

Echenberg’s account is certainly the historical account of reference, attempting to bring to the fore the soldier’s motives in triggering a mutiny and the colonial army’s reasons to repress it so severely. Echenberg sees in Thiaroye less a mutiny than a workers’ revolt. The article is indeed published in a collective book entitled *African Labor History*. Nevertheless, Echenberg’s account is the most balanced of all accounts. It obviously takes the side of the African soldiers¹³ while still trying to understand the French standpoint. This is a stand that Bénot, Mabon and Onana

¹¹“En France, la pénurie était générale, la misère immense.”

¹²“Que le commandement local ait fait ouvrir le feu sur des tirailleurs . . . ne prouvait rien, sinon le manque de sang-froid de quelques officiers.”

¹³“The African soldiers’ response to the shabby treatment they received from French officials from the moment of their liberation until the outbreak at Thiaroye must be understood” (Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye” 119).

do not take and which is harmful to their accounts. However, in my opinion, the behavior is more understandable for investigative journalists (Bénot and Onana) than it is for a sociology professor (Mabon). Deroo and Champeaux's account tries also to be balanced, although what is troubling and bothersome about it (and the whole book) is the tacit and quite cynical underlying assumption that the colonial period was shared by West Africa and France *by mutual agreement*.

2.5.2 The Succession of Events that Led to the Mutiny and the Massacre Itself

August 25, 1944: the Allies and the Free French Forces (F.F.F.) headed by de Gaulle liberated Paris from the German occupation. The F.F.F. that paraded that day were made up of fighters of French citizenship but also of soldiers coming from France's colonies. The latter were not too many in the rows though. During the summer of 1944 de Gaulle, supposedly as a sign of recognition, discharged West African soldiers and sent them back home. This measure is not interpreted as an act of benevolence by everyone. The historians Echenberg (*Colonial Conscripts*) and Mouralis suggest that de Gaulle strategically replaced the African soldiers by young French recruits of the 1943 class and by members of the Resistance:

During the summer of 1944, de Gaulle took measures to decrease the number of African soldiers in the units that . . . were engaged in combats for the liberation of the French territory. A lot of soldiers were demobilized and repatriated, sometimes after staying for a long time in transit camps because of difficulties to communicate with Africa. This 'whitening' of the Free French Forces troops responded to a twofold concern: to give back to the metropolis the role that should always

have been its own and to integrate, into the regular forces, the Resistance that the provisional government wanted to control as rapidly as possible.¹⁴ (Mouralis 225-6)

The African soldiers lost their legitimate place in the French army and had to wait for their repatriation to Africa. Despite their desire to be reunited with their families, one can also understand their disappointment and frustration at not being included in the ceremonies of welcome and triumph, as their French brothers in arms had.

The 1280 *tirailleurs sénégalais* who ended up stationed in Thiaroye were “the first contingent to be repatriated of some 10,000 African prisoners held in German camps from the collapse of France in June 1940, until the Liberation in the summer and fall of 1944” (Echenberg, “Tragedy in Thiaroye” 109). They were first sent to transit camps on French territory, where they logically expected to benefit from the same treatment as their French comrades: the reimbursement of their back pay, war allowances, and demobilization bonuses by the French authorities. The money they earned as prisoners of war in Germany also needed to be exchanged in francs.

4 and 11 November, 1944: in the camps of Loudéac and Morlaix, the soldiers’ discontent grew when they realized that the exchange rate suggested by the French army was very low and that the promise of a later regularization was more than uncertain. Some fights broke out, suppressed by the *gendarmerie*. As motives for their unhappiness, Mabon also points to the unacceptable living conditions in

¹⁴“Au cours de l’été 1944, de Gaulle prit des mesures pour diminuer le nombre des Africains dans les unités qui . . . étaient engagés (*sic*) dans les combats pour la libération du territoire français. De nombreux soldats furent ainsi démobilisés et rapatriés, non sans être parfois longtemps dans des camps de transit en raison des difficultés de communication avec l’Afrique. Ce ‘blanchissement’ des troupes des Forces Françaises Libres répondait au double souci de redonner à la métropole le rôle qui aurait toujours dû être le sien et d’intégrer dans les forces régulières les maquis que le Gouvernement provisoire souhaitait contrôler le plus rapidement possible.”

which the soldiers were confined: “a report dated from September 16 said that colonial prisoners of war . . . live in deplorable sanitary conditions, and are poorly fed and poorly dressed”¹⁵ (87). Echenberg adds: “This shabby treatment in France was a severe disappointment to those soldiers who had anticipated heroes’ welcomes. They found instead that they had exchanged stalags for French military camps” (“Tragedy at Thiaroye” 114).

21 November, 1944: the *tirailleurs* arrived in the transit camp of Thiaroye, located on the outskirts of Dakar.

26 November, 1944: “Hostility on money matters and especially toward the manner in which French colonial officials were treating them nearly spilled over into violence . . . as the French began to convert the soldiers’ money into West French African currency” (Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116).

Because the situation became uneasy, the military officer in charge made the decision to dispatch some 500 men toward Bamako. General Dagnan came to the camp to ensure the smooth departure of the 500 soldiers. “So angry had the men become that they went as far as to capture General Dagnan and hold him prisoner for a few hours. On his promise that the men would receive their money within three days, he was released” (Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116). According to Mabon (90), the soldiers’ claims were not taken seriously by Dagnan, who considered them as “an excuse for insubordination” (“un prétexte à l’insubordination” 90).

Echenberg describes the unfolding of the events as follows:

The French had no intention of letting events deteriorate further. . . . the
Commanding General for French West Africa, General de Boisbois-

¹⁵“Un rapport datant du 16 septembre indique que les prisonniers de guerre coloniaux . . . vivent dans des conditions sanitaires déplorables, sont mal nourris et mal habillés.”

sel, ordered reinforcements of troops and police sent down from Saint-Louis; these additional forces surrounded the camp of Thiaroye on November 30, the day the French had now decided upon for dispatching the 500 men to Bamako. For some reason, the dispatching was postponed ... to the next day, December 1, 1944. The French effort to ship out these men that morning was the signal for the mutiny to begin. The soldiers began jostling their officers, most of whom were ... officers with little experience or rapport with their men. After the call to order failed, a first salvo was fired in the air. The men ran to their barracks to get their weapons. Now the order was to shoot to kill ... (“Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116).

December 1, 1944: the French army opened fire on stationed West African soldiers. The infantrymen were actually shot by fellow African soldiers from 1st and 7th Senegalese Riflemen Regiments and by 6th colonial artillery regiment with the support of the *gendarmerie* (Onana 120).

February 1945: the trial of the mutineers took place, defended by Lamine Guèye. Despite the fact that he “pleaded for clemency on the basis of their outstanding records, ... all 34 were convicted” (Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116).

March 1945: the military tribunal condemned the mutineers to “sentences ranging from one to ten years in prison, with fines of 10,000 francs” (Echenberg, “Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116).

June 1947: French President Vincent Auriol granted amnesty. However, “the Thiaroye case ended without any compensation for the victims, without recognition, without rehabilitation or repair”¹⁶ (Onana 126).

¹⁶“Le dossier Thiaroye se terminait sans indemnités pour les victimes, sans reconnaissance, sans réhabilitation et sans réparation.”

July 1998: an association was created to rehabilitate the victims of Thiaroye.

2.5.3 The Figures

The number of dead, wounded, and condemned for rebellion varies: Bénot (77) suggests between 25 and 60 or more deceased. Thobie et al. (389) as well as Bouche (453) speak of 35 dead whereas Mouralis (47) of 24 dead and 34 soldiers put in detention. The number of wounded approximates 35 (Bouche 453). As for Mabon (90), she speaks of 24 killed, 11 dead as a result of injuries, 35 wounded, and 45 imprisoned mutineers. According to Echenberg, 34 *tirailleurs* were convicted. His account on this is actually very detailed:

Sixteen men received what might be called light sentences of three years or less. Among this group, one man died in prison, another thirteen completed their sentences, and the remaining two were relieved of approximately one year of prison by the amnesty of November 1946 [*sic*]. In the group having longer sentences, five men received the maximum of ten years, and the remaining thirteen an average of five years. Of this group, four were to die in prison before the amnesty of 1946 [*sic*] freed the remaining fourteen” (“Tragedy at Thiaroye” 116-17).

Onana (119) underscores that figures vary with the different reports and the persons responsible for them. He regrets that, so far (his book has since been published in 2003), no inquiry has been undertaken by an independent committee, that could shed new light on the events.

2.5.4 The French Viewpoint

Despite the legitimacy of the African soldiers' demands, the authorities responded with such violence that it looked like a "preventive repression" ("répression préventive"; Bénot 77). The army feared a more global "black uprising" and wanted to make of the African soldiers an "object lesson" (Vaillant 173). The postwar French military authorities intended to show that they would remain firm towards demands that came from soldiers that supposedly "had, for a long while, lost the habit of military supervision"¹⁷ (Bouche 453) and that "by arrogance, vanity or jealousy (demanded) a status identical to the French one"¹⁸ (a French officer reporting on the massacre, quoted in Onana 130). Obviously, the French military authorities were not ready to cope with the demands for *égalité* stemming from colonial subjects, even though these same subjects had defended French territory and fought, along with French soldiers, against the Nazis and their racist ideology.

2.5.5 The African Viewpoint

In West Africa and within the African community of Europe and people who supported it, "news of the disaster spread like wildfire. . . Thiaroye represented a brutal act of repression against soldiers whose only crime was to claim money that was rightfully theirs" (Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye" 121). It was clear that the deployment of such a disproportionate violence reflected a profound racist hatred that proved that whatever the African soldiers had done for France, they would never be considered as equal to White people and deserving of the same rights.¹⁹

¹⁷"depuis longtemps déshabitués de tout encadrement militaire"

¹⁸"par orgueil, vanité ou jalousie (ont demandé) un statut identique à celui des Français."

¹⁹The archives (letters, reports, etc.) that Onana quotes in his book blatantly reveal the French officers' racism and xenophobia.

The metropolitan press hushed up the massacre and according to Bénot's opinion, de Gaulle himself covered it up (77-78). In France, only Senghor and the socialist deputy from Senegal Lamine Gueye talked about the massacre, trying to reach the French audience: Senghor, in July 1945, in the article, "Défense de l'Afrique noire," published in *Esprit*, and Lamine Gueye in front of the French constituent assembly in March 1946. Both worked, successfully, to obtain in 1947 the presidential pardon for, and the liberation of, the condemned mutineers—those who were not dead. In his article, Senghor stated: "right from the Liberation, because of an inconceivable racial discrimination, inequality regarding the colonial stipends was restored . . . In response, *force*—it is a euphemism—was employed against black soldiers . . ." ²⁰ (Senghor, "Défense" 239; emphasis is Senghor's).

2.6 Conclusion: Thiaroye's Symbolic Meanings

As I argued in the introduction, Thiaroye is a highly symbolic event in various accounts. As a mutiny, Thiaroye is an event that disambiguates the status of the infantrymen. The "watchdogs" of the Empire ended up rebelling against it. Not only did they rebel, they rebelled for *legitimate* reasons. And if these reasons were monetary at the onset, they were finally, as underlines Echenberg, "only a part of a generalized demand for equal treatment for equal sacrifices" ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 119).

Thiaroye also symbolizes treason. First, on the part of the French officers who pretended to listen to the soldiers' claims. Second, on that of the African soldiers, under the command of the French colonial army, who repressed the mutiny

²⁰"Dès la libération, par une inconcevable discrimination raciale, on rétablissait l'inégalité dans les soldes coloniaux . . . En réponse, on employa contre eux ['les Négro-Africains'] *la force*—c'est un euphémisme . . ."

instead of participating in the uprising. Thiaroye is thus also a blatant scar on the face of African peoples. It reveals how colonial ties render both colonizer and colonized perverse.

Finally, Thiaroye represents the profound ideological fracture between, on the one hand, those who firmly believed that the colonized populations deserved the same rights as any French citizen and, on the other, those who, as firmly as the others, continued to think that the colonized people belonged to an inferior “race”—to use the contemporary terminology. The event embodies the ideological paradox that France experienced at the time: on the one hand, the condemnation of racism as the Nazis had conceived it and on the other hand, the difficulty to imagine and to put into practice the republican ideals of equality for all.

Chapter 3

Representations of Thiaroye in Colonial Times: “Tyaroye” by Léopold Sédar Senghor and “Aube africaine” by Fodeba Keita

This chapter is devoted to the first two renderings of the massacre of Thiaroye. Published in 1948, Senghor’s “Tyaroye” was in fact written, according to the inscription on the poem itself, in December 1944, a few days or weeks after the events. Keita’s “Aube africaine” was published in 1949 but, since it is a *performed* poem, it was most probably well known by the public before the publication. The textual and contextual analysis in this chapter demonstrates how each author captured and interpreted the event in ways corresponding to their drastically different goals. I argue that for Senghor, the final purpose was to insert the event in the collective memory of France, whereas for Keita, it was necessary to make Thiaroye a significant event

in the collective memory of Africa.

3.1 Léopold Sédar Senghor's Thiaroye: the Prototype of Sacrifice

Of all the authors of the corpus, Léopold Sédar Senghor is probably the one who acquired the greatest fame. His international reputation is established not only in poetry, but also in politics. In 1983, the French Academy opened its doors to him, welcoming poetic works including *Chants d'ombre* (*Shadow Songs*, 1945), *Hosties noires* (*Black Hosts*, 1948), *Éthiopiennes* (1956), *Nocturnes* (1961), *Lettres d'hivernage* (*Letters in the Season of Hivernage*; 1972), and *Élégies majeures* (*Major Elegies*, 1979). The publication in 2007 of his complete works of poetry by the CNRS contributes to his integration into the pantheon of French authors. Senghor also had an impressive political career. After leading Senegal to independence, he was its president for twenty years (1960-1980). His political legacy has generated much criticism, but also much praise. Among his harsh critics, stands Doumbi-Fakoly, for example. For him, Senghor's politics in Senegal proved its deep cultural alienation ("Nicolas Sarkozy" 9), since he ruled the country with the help of French advisors. However, Senghor is also the one who is, as claimed by his biographer Janet Vaillant, "largely responsible for what has been called 'the Senegalese exception' in an Africa torn by autocratic policies and civil conflicts"¹ (*Vie de Léopold Sédar Senghor* 20). To better understand Senghor's political position, one must certainly take into account his poetical vision of the world, itself rooted in the philosophy of Africans' condition, namely the concept of Negritude.

¹"Il est largement responsable de ce que l'on a appelé 'l'exception sénégalaise' dans une Afrique déchirée par les politiques autocratiques et les conflits civils."

The concept was created and developed in the 1930s, in the circle of African intellectuals living in Paris, and in particular with the poet Aimé Césaire, from Martinique, and the poet Léon-Gontran Damas, from French Guiana. Initially, the Negritude movement aimed to promote African characteristics and values in order to oppose them to the imposition of French and Western culture in the colonies. Yet, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne upholds, searching for a “Negro” essence led Senghor to deeply believe in the virtue of “*métissage*”:

After all, he [Senghor] is the philosopher of *métissage*, at least as much as of Negritude. And when he praises the *métis*, he does not see them as derived beings, as the sheer effect of the meeting between already constituted essences but as the first, primal affirmation of the freedom to create which is culture itself. For Senghor, indeed, any truly alive culture is *métisse* and the *métis* is a creator of culture. . . (50).

Reconciliation was certainly the main priority for Senghor, in poetry as in politics, at a personal as well as a social level. Having “reconciliation” and “*métissage*” in mind will prove to be useful to understand the poetic and political issues at stake in the poem “Tyaroye.”

3.1.1 Contextualizing the poem “Tyaroye”

“Tyaroye”² belongs to the second collection of poems by Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Hosties noires*. Written between 1936 and 1945—the poems are often dated and except for the first one, appear in a chronological order—, the collection was only

²Only Senghor spells out the name of the village that way. Although I have not found out yet any specific reason for this choice, I have respected the author’s transcription.

published in 1948. Senghor's first collection of poems, *Chants d'ombre*, was published a few years earlier in 1945. Although poems from both collections were probably written during the same period of time, scholars have noticed a radical difference of tone between the two collections. For Janice Spleth, for instance, "*Hosties noires* constitutes a departure from the characteristically personal poetry of *Chants d'ombre*" (Léopold Sédar Senghor 72) whereas the poems from *Hosties noires* are very often referred to as "the most committed and the most politically inspired of all his poems [Senghor's]" (Ojo 52). Okechukwu Mezu (quoted in Pageard 290) suggests that the delay in the publication of *Hosties noires* is certainly due to some changes, politically oriented, that Senghor introduced in the draft. In fact, Senghor wanted to accomplish the very delicate task of criticizing France, and the Western world in general, "not out of hatred, but out of love, like a mother pointing out with firmness and if necessary chastisement, the mistakes of her beloved child" (Mezu 30). Senghor achieved this feat, finding most of the time the appropriate words to maintain the equilibrium.³ Evidence of this mastery clearly appears in the poem "Tyaroye."

Hosties noires is definitely a transitory book. The period of composition, writing and corrections included, corresponds in Senghor's life to the passage from an intellectual awareness, embodied in the concept of Negritude that he contributed to develop in the 1930s, to more pragmatical and concrete ways to act in the world with his entering in a political career in 1945 when, along with Lamine Guèye, he was elected deputy at the French constituent assembly. This was really a time of excitement and hope for the overseas deputies. Among the various proposals suggested by the provisional government of the immediate afterwar (universal suffrage,

³Sometimes, however, some lines can seem, at least to our 21st-c. ears, as somewhat out-of-date or in a way, quite naive, like the ones in "Prière de paix" ("Prayer for Peace"), when he prays the Lord that France be placed "at the Father's/right hand" ("à la droite du Père"; 70).

free education, social and economic measures, etc.) was an intent to extend the “political, social and economic rights. . . to native and colonial populations” (Vaillant 195). Unfortunately, in October 1946, when the second draft of the constitution was accepted by referendum, many of the liberal attempts to change the political status of the colonies failed under the pressure of the conservative “colonial lobby” (Vaillant 208). However, when Senghor was writing *Hosties noires*, he envisioned not an independent Senegal, but “a French Union based on equality and free consent” (Vaillant 206) and dreamt of a France that would be willing to grant citizenship to the native populations of its overseas territories on the basis that they actively participated in the war effort. Of course, when *Hosties noires* was published, his expectations had mostly been shattered. Yet, this never prevented him from firmly believing in the necessity of maintaining cordial diplomatic relations with France.

Hosties noires was partly⁴ oriented toward a French intellectual audience, whom Senghor wanted to convince of the worthiness of his political ideas. Needless to say, this goal was difficult to achieve in 1948, in the aftermath of the liberation, when the main, even the exclusive, discourse that prevailed was the one that promoted the Resistance network. Marc Michel, in “*Hosties noires* entre mémoire et reconnaissance,” has precisely argued that Senghor, in a very subtle way, set up the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as figures of the Resistance in order to insert them into the collective memory of the French people. To achieve this goal, Senghor resorted to the topic of sacrifice. Senghor wanted to inform French citizens that African soldiers fought along with the French, to preserve the French territory. As such, they deserved to be treated as heroes and to benefit from certain rights. It would have been outrageous not to offer them their share of the cake whenever the authorities

⁴Given its difficulty, one can argue that Senghor’s poetry mainly reached/s intellectuals, African or Western.

decided to reward the fighters. For Senghor, no matter the circumstances, the infantrymen had always been the “black watchdogs of the Empire”⁵ and as such, they deserved to be acknowledged and rewarded by France. The translation in English renders the French “*dogues noirs de l’Empire*” (*Hosties noires* 84) in which the term “*dogues*” refers, more explicitly and powerfully than in English, to mastiffs or bulldogs, animals known for loyally defending their master’s property with ferocity.

The very title of the collection, *Hosties noires*, provides information about Senghor’s incentives. “*Hosties*” refers to the consecrated bread of the Eucharist. According to the Christian liturgy, the host symbolizes Christ’s body and its absorption is a sacrament, i.e. a rite that helps believers receive divine grace. Senghor’s reference to the host, besides being one sign among many others of the Catholic overtones of the collection, indicates a process of positive transformation. Black soldiers are “black victims in a white war, but their sacrifice is viewed as being meaningful, and for the good not only of France but of mankind” (Mezu 29). *Hosties noires* praises the contribution of African soldiers, from French colonies, but from the U.S. as well—“Aux soldats négro-américains” (“To the Black American Troops”) is the title of a poem—, to Western wars, in particular WWI and WWII. The poet pays tribute to the men who sacrificed themselves in many different ways: combats, imprisonment, injuries, suffering, and death. “Africa, became black host,”⁶ writes Senghor in the poem entitled “Au Gouverneur Eboué” (“Governor Eboué”). For Senghor, the sacrifice of Black soldiers was meaningful in that it contributed to the advent of another world that would not be based on the opposition of Black and White races, but on their collaboration on the basis of the White people’s acknowledgement of the value and contribution of Black civilization. As

⁵Unless otherwise noticed, I use the translation by Melvin Dixon. See final bibliography for a complete reference

⁶“L’Afrique s’est faite/hostie noire”

Janice Spleth puts it: “the future he [Senghor] envisions is one where Africa’s role will be vastly different, where men will be equal, and where values of Negritude will counterbalance the faults of the materialistic, technological civilization of the West” (*Léopold Sédar Senghor* 73). The title of the collection itself suggests the fusion of opposite colors, black and white (the host is white), via the implicit red color of the blood of the sacrificial ritual.

In *Hosties noires*, Senghor is the representative of the community of soldiers of African origins who participated in Western conflicts. His role as spokesman is legitimate in many ways. He himself experienced the life of a soldier in the colonial infantry, between 1939 and June 1940, and the life of a P.O.W. in different camps in France (Romilly, Troyes, Amiens, Poitiers and Bordeaux), between June 1940 and 1942 (Ojo 52; Roche 41). Senghor can thus speak as a victim, but also as a witness, direct or indirect. He is a direct witness when his poems evoke the lives of people with whom he was acquainted: Taga de Mbaye Dyob, for instance, a friend whom Senghor celebrates in an eponymous poem. He is an indirect or a secondary witness when his poetry refers to people of whom he just heard, for example the soldier who committed suicide in the poem entitled “Désespoir d’un volontaire libre” (“The Enlisted Man’s Despair”).

As legitimate as his role of spokesman can be, Senghor does not speak on behalf of the entire community of soldiers of African origins. By promoting the reconciliation between colonized and colonizers, Senghor takes a stand radically opposed, for instance, to French Guianian poet, Léon-Gontran Damas’, to whom the first poem of *Hosties noires* is nevertheless dedicated. Damas not only promoted rebellion against French authorities, but denounced his own peers as being in the pay of the empire. In the poem entitled “Et cætera,” first published in 1937 in the collection *Pigments*, Damas writes:

To former Senegalese servicemen/to future Senegalese servicemen/to
everything that Senegal can deliver/of Senegalese servicemen, future
former/of what has it got to do with you future former/of mercenaries
future former/of retired/of brass hat/of decorated/of ruined/of severely
injured/of mutilated/of burned to a cinder/of gangrenous/of broken faces/
of cut arms/of intoxicated/and so on and so forth/et cætera future or for-
mer/I/I say Shit to them/And other things as well...⁷

The tone of this poem, dedicated to the Senegalese infantrymen, reveals Damas' bitterness regarding African soldiers who stood up for the French colonial authorities. Once himself a fighter, Damas nevertheless decided to be insensitive to the ideological manipulation, the indoctrination, of which the African infantrymen might have been the victims.

The African intellectual community should not be imagined as a coherent whole deprived of any tensions. The authors considered in the course of the study precisely represent the tensions that exist not only between Africans and Europeans, but also within African and European communities, and even within a single person. Senghor himself conveys in his poetry opposite emotions that torment him. Yet, Senghor was always driven by a superior desire of conciliation, for which sometimes he was and continues to be harshly criticized: in Diop's play for instance, Senghor's attitude is interpreted as hypocritical.

Considering the overall tone of *Hosties noires*, dedicated to the praise of Black soldiers' heroism, the poem "Tyaroye" may, at first read, sound out of tune

⁷"Aux Anciens Combattants Sénégalais/Aux futurs Combattants Sénégalais/A tout ce que le Sénégal peut accoucher/De Combattants sénégalais futurs anciens/De quoi-je-me-mêle futurs anciens/De mercenaires futurs anciens/De pensionnés/De galonnés/De décorés/De déçavés/De grands blessés/De mutilés/De calcinés/De gangrénés/De gueules cassées/De bras coupés/D'intoxiqués/Et patati et patata/Et caetera futurs anciens/Moi/Je leur dis merde/Et d'autres choses encore..."

since Senghor praised in it soldiers who, after all, were, from a French perspective, not heroes at all, but instead mutineers, i.e. rebels to French authority. Yet, Senghor managed to transform the infantrymen of Thiaroye into the heroes of a just cause, removing all hesitation and ambiguity regarding the status of the *tirailleurs* as “watchdogs of the Empire.” He succeeded in doing so by choosing the form of poetry and hence by evoking, instead of describing, the events that took place.

3.1.2 Evoking Thiaroye

“Tyaroye”⁸ is one of the poems in the collection whose place and date of composition figure at the end: “Paris, December 1944.” Senghor wrote the poem, and wanted his readers to know that he did so, in the course of the month that followed the massacre, which occurred during the dawn of December 1. The inscription of the date is significant at different levels. First, the date confers to the poem the dimension of a commemorative stele that intends to inscribe the massacre in the shared history of France—the poem is written in Paris—and Senegal—the poem bears the name of the Senegalese village nearby the place where the events occurred. Second, the date functions as an index of Senghor’s state of mind: he writes *in the grip of the event*. To the pain of what happened, is added another one, the pain of writing itself. According to Daniel Leuwens, Senghor’s pace of writing consisted of three moments: inspiration, rough draft and correction. To the second moment is associated a certain suffering: “The second time is more problematical; it is the time of the first draft qualified as ‘painful’ . . .”⁹ (Leuwens 180). Therefore, by writing down the date at the end of “Tyaroye,” the poet implicitly signified to his readers

⁸The poem is reproduced in the appendix, in French and English.

⁹“Le second temps est, lui, plus problématique; c’est celui du premier jet qualifié de ‘douloureux’ . . .”

that his distress was twice as much: he is *painfully* writing *in the pain* of the event, which will certainly show through in the poem.

Except for the place and date, Senghor mentioned no other relevant details in the poem. For readers not already familiar with what happened, like a general French audience for instance, it is impossible to grasp, from the poem only, that Thiaroye is synonymous with rebellion. Strictly speaking, there is no representation of the massacre. On the contrary, it looks like Senghor wrote the poem *as if* the events were already known to readers, *as if* they already belonged to the universal knowledge held in dictionaries and encyclopædias. Senghor presupposed that what happened in Thiaroye was and will always be common knowledge. In a way, in doing so, he hopes that the events will always be part of a collective memory, present in people's minds.

Moreover, by avoiding a detailed description of the events and by blurring the circumstances, Senghor erects them into a "prototype," i.e. not a specific event but a category of events, with common characteristics and to which other events can belong. According to poetician Marc Dominicy ("Prolégomènes" and "Description"), the evocation of a prototype, to which is opposed the episodic representation created by detailed descriptions, prevails in poetry precisely because the parallelisms found at different levels of the language code (phonemes, syllables, syntax, semantics, etc.) prevent readers from constructing a detailed picture of what happened, conveying instead a prototypical image. Alliterations and assonances, repetitions of words ("prisoners," "prisonniers"; "blood," "sang") and syntactical structures ("is it true," "est-ce (donc) vrai"; "you have not died in vain," "vous n'êtes pas morts gratuits" and "you are the witnesses," "vous êtes les témoins") are examples among others, of parallelisms that favor, according to Dominicy's theory, the construction of a prototypical representation of the event, stored in our long-

term memory. The use of poetry and of poetical means, such as parallelisms or repetitions, associated with the blurring of the circumstances lead to present the events of Thiaroye as the prototype of a sacrifice, a sacrifice necessary to make the transition to a better world. In that perspective, the uprising of Thiaroye can be reinserted into the global economy of the collection.

Versification

One of the poetical formal elements to note in the poem is the use of *versets*. According to Aquien and Molinié (729-30), the term designates poetical units longer than a verse, and potentially as long as a paragraph. Instead of a constricting versification, the *verset* is a flexible poetical form. According to African scholar Ansah, since the *verset* offers flexibility regarding the combination of units of sense with units of rhythm, it is likely that Senghor chose it for the possibility of integrating African rhythm and orality to French versification (39).

The term “*verset*” (Aquien and Molinié 729-30) was coined in the 13th century to refer to the paragraphs in the Bible, especially in the psalms, or the Koran. By opting for this form, Senghor placed himself in the tradition of French poets Paul Claudel and Saint-John Perse who purposefully chose it for its solemn and incantatory character. Moreover, like Claudel, Senghor endorses the religious and sacred stamp that surrounds the usage of the *verset*. Along with the liturgic imagery (the “offering of our bodies”¹⁰ in the poem “*Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais*,” “The Senegalese Infantrymen’s Prayer”; the “crucified Africa”¹¹ in “*Prière de paix*,” “Prayer for Peace”), the liturgic vocabulary (the “Virgin of Hope”¹² in “*Tyaroye*,”

¹⁰“l’offrande de nos corps”

¹¹“mon Afrique crucifiée”

¹²“la Vierge-Espérance”

the “ciborium”¹³ in “Prière de paix”) and the liturgic form (some poems are “prayers,” like “Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais” or “Prière de paix”), the *verset* contributes to the Catholic dimension of the collection in particular and of Senghor’s poetry in general.¹⁴

Since the *verset* does not always include a syntactical unit, its “*découpage*,” i.e. the grouping of the words in a same line or the delimitation of the lines by blanks, is significant (Aquier and Molinié 727). It allows the poet to emphasize certain words or to make the form correspond to the meaning. One example in “Tiaroye” is the sixth *verset* in which, to signify the trauma that Thiaroye constitutes, the poet writes, in French, “*Vierge-Espérance*” (“Virgin of Hope”) with a caesura that breaks the word “*Espérance*” itself: “*Vierge-Espé-*” on the one hand and on the other, “*rance.*” The caesura, that deliberately breaks the word, reflects the breaking of hope for the future that the event caused, and of which the poem metaphorically speaks when it evokes the funerals of both the infantrymen and the Virgin of Hope (line 6).

Another noteworthy effect lies in the very last *verset*. Its caesura causes the poem to significantly end, in French, with the last line “de *courroux* que berce l’*espoir*” (Italics are mine; “Of anger cradled by hope”¹⁵), a phrase that mixes opposite emotions that the massacre causes. Unfortunately, the translator Melvin Dixon did not respect the French versification, which in the two aforementioned examples causes a loss of meaning since the formal characteristics do not support nor intensify the content of the words.¹⁶

¹³“un ciboire de souffrance”

¹⁴In “Echos poétiques de l’itinéraire intellectuel et idéologique de Senghor,” Robert Jouanny studies more closely the influence of Christianity, Socialism, Western culture and Negritude in Senghor’s poetry.

¹⁵“My voice of rage cradling hope,” is the translation by Melvin Dixon

¹⁶A new *verset* always begins with a capital letter. This formal mark determines where a *verset*

General Composition of the Poem

Although the use of *versets* demonstrates that Senghor was looking for a flexible articulation between content and form, the global composition of the poem—three stanzas made up of six, four and six *versets*, respectively—is more classical and harmoniously matches the development of ideas from one stanza to another.

The first stanza is made up of six questions. The resort to the interrogative form represents the questioning caused by an event whose occurrence appears to be beyond comprehension. Addressed to the victims of the massacre, the “Black prisoners,” the questions also assume a rhetorical role in that they call for readers’ attention or even approval. The first question, in which Black prisoners are considered French (“Black prisoners, I should say French prisoners”¹⁷), implies that citizenship is not a matter of race but of actions: the men of Thiaroye, who fought in the French army, are French prisoners. Here, Senghor’s poetry echoes his political idea of extending French citizenship to all the populations of the Empire.

Strictly speaking, the men stationed in Thiaroye were not “prisoners.” Senghor chose to refer to one of the possible statuses these men had before coming back to Thiaroye: most of them were indeed prisoners of war. To prefer the term “prisoners” over “fighters” for instance, which they also were at some point during the war, is a choice that contributes to seeing them as defenseless, even as victims. Therefore, France should have taken extremely good care of them, especially given the fact that they became prisoners defending her territory. To call the rebels of Thiaroye “prisoners” has the effect of stressing France’s barbarism: as if a mother

¹⁷“Prisonniers noirs je dis bien prisonniers français”; the English translation does not render the French correctly. Instead of “I should say,” “I really mean” would be more appropriate since it would emphasize the force of the statement that consists in considering African soldiers as French.

slaughtered her own children. The repetition of the process of asking questions as well as the repetition of the same syntactical structure—“is it true” (“est-ce donc vrai”)—reflects a feeling of disbelief, incredulity, a total lack of understanding regarding what happened.

The six rhetorical questions beg the approval of both the “Black prisoners” and the readers: “Yes, it is true that France is no longer France, that the enemy has stolen her face, etc.” The poet himself answers, in the third stanza and on two occasions, but with a completely unexpected response. Instead of “Yes,” he says: “No,” “No, you have not died in vain. . . .”¹⁸ To answer the questions, which point to the absence of meaning, in a negative way, as the poet does, is far from being automatic. It is in itself a *process* that takes time. This process is actually at work in the second stanza in which, basically, the poet expresses his own feelings: “You are the sweat bathing my anguish, you are the suffering/That makes my voice hoarse. . . .”¹⁹ It is only after this moment of intense emotion, where the poet mourns the dead, that he eventually is able to overcome his pain and the absurdity of the event by providing the death of his fellow soldiers with meaning. He does so in the third stanza. Roughly speaking, the poem plays out three phases: disbelief, profound sadness, and hope.

The passage from total negativity to a relative opening to hope is at the core of many poems in the collection,²⁰ and of the collection itself whose internal structure, according to Geneviève Lebaud (157), is based on the passage from night

¹⁸“Non, vous n’êtes pas morts gratuits. . . .”

¹⁹“Vous êtes la sueur où baigne mon angoisse, vous êtes/la souffrance qui enroue ma voix. . . .”

²⁰In the second poem of *Hosties noires*, “A l’appel de la race de Saba” (“At the Call of the Race of Sheba”), the passage from night to day is obvious. While the opening of the poem mentions “the cunning silence of this/European night” (“le silence/sournois de cette nuit d’Europe”), it ends with the greeting of “THE CLEAR DAWN OF A NEW DAY” (“L’AUBE TRANSPARENTE D’UN JOUR/NOUVEAU”; the capital letters are the author’s).

to day. Lebaud's analysis certainly works for "Tyaroye" as well, except that in this poem, the transition occurs thanks to an intermediary stage: the ritual of the sacrifice that aims to purify. The meaning Senghor is able to ascribe to the deaths stems from a religious—Pagan or Christian, it is of no importance—vision of the world in which martyrdom is necessary to permit access to a better condition. The whole process is represented in the poem by a symbolic network of three basic colors—black, red and white. The bloody sacrifice of the "Black race" is a necessary step to purify the "White race" in the hope of creating a new civilization for whom the criterion of humaneness supersedes the notion of race.

The First Phase: Questioning Rationality

The first stanza of the poem represents a first stage of disbelief, in a global process that leads to hope. The first question demonstrates how much the massacre of Thiaroye challenges and even ruins the poet's own schemes of interpreting the world: "is it true/that France is no longer France?"²¹ France, herald of universal values, i.e. values that are in essence atemporal, has changed ("is no longer," "n'est plus") and has failed. She has forgotten ("forgetting," "oublieuse") her "former mission" ("mission d'hier"), the civilizing mission that allegedly consisted in enlightening the world by exporting the concept that every human being was entitled to enjoy inalienable rights.²² In this first question, Senghor implicitly reproaches

²¹"est-ce donc vrai que la France n'est plus la France?"

²²François Maspero (Introduction to Bénot iv) makes of the "civilizing mission" a characteristic specific to France: "But what makes the distinctive characteristic of the French Empire compared to all the others is that it haloed itself, from the Third Republic onwards and until its last day, with a major *moral* justification: the civilizing mission of France. . . It is true that the British Empire, far more pragmatic, never denied the primacy of textile exportation over the Enlightenment" ("Mais ce qui fait la particularité unique de l'Empire français par rapport à tous les autres, c'est qu'il s'est nimbé à partir de la IIIe République et jusqu'à son dernier jour d'une justification *morale* majeure: celle de la mission civilisatrice de la France. . . Il est vrai que l'Empire britannique, autrement pragmatique, n'avait jamais nié la primauté de l'exportation des tissus sur celle des Lumières"; Italics are

France her inconsistency: the nation that promotes human rights denied the rights of the soldiers who fought for her cause. And not only that. She also killed some of them, revealing blatantly that all humans are definitely not equal.

As for the second question (“Is it true that the enemy has stolen her face?”²³), it clearly associates colonial France, and in the case of Thiaroye, *de Gaulle’s France* and not Vichy’s, with the enemy, Nazi Germany, pointing out the hypocrisy which consists in fighting against Nazism while practising discriminatory measures against Black soldiers. For the poet, even de Gaulle’s France has been corrupted by Vichy and Nazi Germany. The question expresses, in a concentrated and poetic manner, an association that was obvious in the camp of Thiaroye. As Cameroonian journalist Charles Onana explains: “the same psychological violences, the same brutalities, the same xenophobic feelings, that fed Nazis’ behaviours, are curiously found in some French people in the Camp of Thiaroye”²⁴ (137).

However, the statement in the poem takes the form of a question, which *attenuates* the impact of what is stated by precisely *questioning* it. The poem questions France’s responsibility even more so since another question is asked, putting forward what resembles the ultimate explanation of France’s behaviour, i.e. the economical interests: “bankers’ hate” (“la haine des banquiers”). The verse “Is it true that banker’s hate has bought her arms of steel”²⁵ may refer to the loans France had to contract with bankers to face the shortages following the war (the “steel”

the author’s). Adam Hochschild (212) explains how, in the British humanitarian tradition, morality in the colonial undertaking was part of pragmatism: “Better treatment of colonial subjects would ‘promote the civil and commercial interests of Great Britain...’ declared a parliamentary select committee in the 1830s. ‘Savages are dangerous neighbors and unprofitable customers, and if they remain as degraded denizens of our colonies, they become a burden upon the State.’”

²³“Est-ce donc vrai que l’ennemi lui a dérobé son visage?”

²⁴“les mêmes violences psychologiques, les mêmes brutalités, les mêmes sentiments xénophobes, qui ont nourri le comportement des nazis, se retrouvent curieusement chez certains Français du Camps (*sic*) de Thiaroye.”

²⁵“Est-ce vrai que la haine des banquiers a acheté/ses bras d’acier?”

suggests a material used for war). However, instead of using the money to remunerate African soldiers, “banker’s hate,” their cupidity, might have contaminated France. With tact and diplomacy, the poet transfers responsibilities from France to anonymous financial institutions, making the distinction between the ideal nation, which he wants to maintain ideal, and low materialistic reasons that are embodiments of Evil.²⁶ The distinction is echoed in the last poem of the collection, “Prière de paix”: “Oh, Lord, take from my memory France that is not France./This mask of meanness and hate on the face of France/This mask of meanness and hate that I can only hate/—And I can surely hate Evil/For I have a great weakness for France.”²⁷ These lines look like a re-writing of the first three *versets* of “Tyaroye”: France, that should promote ideals, is no longer France whenever she puts on her face the mask of financial interests.

“Tyaroye” displays Senghor’s diplomatic mastery of invective. Although the massacre has not been committed by Vichy France, Senghor implicitly associates the de Gaulle government with Nazi Germany. This *tour de force* was only possible thanks to the use of rhetorical questions. As *rhetorical* questions, they have the effect of describing the world instead of asking about it.²⁸ Yet as *rhetorical questions*, they assert while at the same time questioning what is asserted.

²⁶Denouncing the economical reasons behind the war machine is a topos that Damas, for example, embraces as well in the poem entitled “Des billes pour la roulette” (“Marbles for the Roulette,” *Pigments* 75): “Only for the functioning/of factories of canons/shells/bullets/war/it will come soon/to get drunk again singing the Marseillaise/with smoking flesh. . .” (“Rien que pour le fonctionnement/d’usines à canons/obus/balles/la guerre/elle/elle va bientôt venir/s’enivrer encore à la marseillaise/de chair fumante. . .”).

²⁷“Ah Seigneur, éloigne de ma mémoire la France qui/n’est pas la France, ce masque de petitesse et de/haine sur le visage de la France/Ce masque de petitesse et de haine pour qui je n’ai/que haine—mais je peux bien haïr le Mal./Car j’ai une grande faiblesse pour la France.”

²⁸In the first chapter of *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, Paul de Man upholds that rhetorical questions have two interpretations: one literal, where the poetical voice intends and expresses the desire to obtain an answer and another one, figurative, where the poetical voice makes an assertion about the world.

After questioning France's integrity vis-à-vis black soldiers, the poet, in the last three *versets*, which are also questions, of the first stanza, introduces the themes of sacrifice and purification that are deployed throughout the poem, like an extended metaphor. The terms employed belong to a liturgical terminology—"cleanse" ("abluer"), "purified" ("lustral"), "martyrs" ("martyrs")—aiming to emphasize the sacred characteristic of the soldiers' death.

The Second Phase: Laying Bare Emotions

In the second stanza, the massacre is still at stake, but now it becomes a personal matter: the presence of the deictic marker, *my*,²⁹ is more predominant. The poet depicts the impact of the events on his own soul—"anguish" ("angoisse"), "suffering" ("souffrance)—and body—"sweat" ("sueur"), "that makes my voice hoarse" ("qui enroue ma voix"). A variety of senses are summoned to capture the variety of forms taken by the pain: the terms "voice" ("voix"), "blind" ("aveugle"), "sweat" ("sueur") refer to the senses of hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste, respectively. For the poet, Thiaroye can be compared to a traumatic event that put an end to his innocent convictions: "You stain my innocent bedsheets."³⁰ Here, the term "innocence" refers to the immaculate sheets, symbolizing purity. The proximity of the "Virgin of Hope" with the emphasis on the word "blood" by the triple repetition and the phrase "innocent bedsheets" also suggests the apprehension of the massacre of Thiaroye as metaphor of a forced deflowering, a rape.

Yet, as tormented as he might be, the poet expresses his emotions in a very disciplined, even constrained, way, using in these two lines—"You are the sweat bathing my anguish, you are the suffering/That makes my voice hoarse"³¹—a strictly

²⁹"mes. . . mon. . . ma. . ."

³⁰"vous tachez l'innocence de mes draps"

³¹"Vous êtes la sueur où baigne mon angoisse, vous êtes/la souffrance qui enroue ma voix"

similar grammatical pattern: subject + copulative verb + predicate + relative pronouns + verb + object/subject. The poet works to remain, if possible, the master of his feelings. Although the spirits, the “*Wôï*,” to whom he addresses his prayers are “deaf-mutes” (“*sourds-muets*”), he tries to find some relief in various religious beliefs. In the two last *versets* of the second stanza, he evokes his African ancestors—“*Woi! . . . deaf-mute spirits of the night*”³²—and Old Testament mythology as well—“*A bloody rain of red locusts*”³³—that reminds one of the biblical plagues that devastated Egypt: the Nile river transformed into blood and the locusts invading the land. As the plagues swooped down on Egypt, ravaging the country, so did Thiaroye devastate Western Africa. In an attempt to expurgate his pain, both physical and moral, Senghor embraces different visions of the world that traditionally exclude each other, the Pagan and the Christian. At the very heart of the poet’s personality that the suffering lays bare, lies an absolute desire for reconciliation, and in particular for reconciliation of traditions that, in the end, have more in common than one might think: after all, they are both meant to provide some appeasement.

The second stanza represents a transitory phase of purification of emotions since it gives birth to a resolutely soothing statement: “No, you have not died in vain, O Dead!”³⁴ The expression Senghor chose deserves some explanation. The regular French expression is “*une mort gratuite*,” meaning a “useless, vain death.” But Senghor plays with the expression and seems to use the adjective “*gratuits*” (“vain”) as a secondary predicate for the noun “*morts*” (“dead”) used here without a determiner. Therefore, “*gratuits*” can also work as an adverb, “*gratuitement*” (as in the English translation: “in vain”), that modifies the verb “*mourir*” (“to die”) in the *passé composé* tense. Senghor addresses the dead to reassure them that their

³²“*Wôï . . . génies sourds-muets/de la nuit*”

³³“*Pluie de sang rouge, sauterelles*”

³⁴“*Non, vous n’êtes pas morts gratuits, ô Morts!*”

death was not in vain. Yet, the form of the message is stylized³⁵ and one can make the hypothesis that such stylization was intended to reinforce the connection between the form of the message and its content. To consider that the infantrymen of Thiaroye have not died in vain is actually not obvious at all. To convey meaning to these deaths is the result of an interpretative process according to which the deaths belong to a framework of purification. Senghor represented this process or transformation at work in the poem, by using a syntax that is not obvious either and that points to the hermeneutic work that needed to be done in order to deliver the meaning: he significantly employed the French term “*parturitaire*,” which comes from the latin verb “*parturire*,” to deliver.³⁶

The Third Phase: Creating a New Meaning

From the negative sentence, repeated twice, “you have not died in vain,”³⁷ the poet slowly slides to an affirmative one that opens the door to another future world: “You are the witnesses of the new world to come.”³⁸ The grouping of the *verset*, in the French text, emphasizes the relative clause “*qui sera demain*”³⁹ and therefore the belief that a new and better world is to come. Senghor refers here to his cherished idea of a “*civilisation de l’universel*.” As he himself explained years later, in 1971, at the *Colloque sur la Négritude* held in Dakar, the idea of a new universal civilization was a dream of a society, based on fraternal relationships between various

³⁵A similar syntactical construction appears in the second *verset* of this last stanza: “Il arrose épais notre espoir. . .” “*Epais*” is technically a secondary predicate for the subject but can also be interpreted as an adverb modifying the verb. It is, by the way, the English translator’s choice: “It generously feeds our hope. . .”

³⁶The translator missed the term since it does not even appear in the English version: “You are the witnesses of the new world to come.”

³⁷“vous n’êtes pas morts gratuits”

³⁸“Vous êtes les témoins parturitaires du monde nouveau/qui sera demain.”

³⁹The English version does not keep the temporal adverb “*demain*.”

peoples, that would have overcome racial bias and taken the best from each other.

Finally, the whole poem ends on a more positive note: although it begins with the negatively connoted term “prisoners” (“prisonniers”), it ends with the word “hope” (“espoir”). The victims can now rest in peace. Their massacre has not gone unnoticed, since not only has Senghor manifested his wrath (“My voice of rage,” “ma voix de courroux”) but he has also justified their deaths as necessary sacrifices in hope of a better world (“cradling hope,” “que berce l’espoir”). According to Ngandu Nkashama (13-14), Senghor’s contribution to Negritude was precisely to underscore that Black civilization values could be lived “by and for the Others, bringing new Negroes’ contribution to the civilization of the universal”⁴⁰ (Senghor, *Colloque* quoted in Nkashama 14). In a way, for Senghor, acknowledging Black identity and value system was not enough; it was necessary to undertake another step, i.e. to promote the universal character of these values, so that a new humankind, truly mixed, could emerge and populate the earth.

In conclusion, Senghor does not, strictly speaking, *represent* the events that took place in Thiaroye. Readers who are not familiar with what happened could grasp from the poem that Thiaroye is the prototype of *an extreme injustice*. This first conclusion comes from what is stated about France, although the exact circumstances remain blurred, and from the effect the event had on the poet. As a corollary, Thiaroye is also the prototype of *a necessary sacrifice*. Given the socio-historical context and Senghor’s specific political agenda, one can see how he ended up presenting the infantrymen as victims and their death as a deciding event for the advent of a new civilization. Consequently, he remained silent in the poem regarding the righteousness of the uprising. The men of Thiaroye could not be considered heroes

⁴⁰“par et pour les Autres, apportant ainsi la contribution des Nègres nouveaux à la civilisation de l’universel”

unless they were seen as victims and not rebels. Thiaroye is a traumatic event and the poem presents, as prototypical, the process that it takes for an individual to cope with this type of event. The poem first establishes the ways in which the event questions rationality (first stanza), then how it affects the individual emotionally (second stanza) and finally it calls for a re-interpretation and a re-insertion of the event into a more adequate system of beliefs (third stanza) which for Senghor was anchored in Negritude.

The poem also bears a crucial testimonial dimension. As scholar Yves Leclerc noted: “The page becomes a stele and the writing a lapidary inscription”⁴¹ (35). Senghor’s poem is important in that it helped prevent the event from sinking into oblivion and was an impetus for remembering and commemorating the uprising. It acts as a “site of memory” (“un lieu de mémoire”), i.e. a symbolic place where “memory is working” (“la mémoire travaille”; Nora 18), where it “practices itself” (“s’exerce”) and “questions itself” (“s’interroge”; Nora 40). Yet, from this “site of memory” made of words on paper by Senghor the poet, the erection of a concrete commemorative stele by President Senghor never took place. His desire to stay on good diplomatic terms with the French was too strong: he could not afford to publicly and officially humiliate France.

3.2 Fodeba Keita’s Thiaroye: a Transitory Episode in the African Epic

While Senghor chose a slower, more progressive path to independence for Senegal (as I will explain thoroughly in the next chapter), Guinea, in the referendum

⁴¹“La page se fait stèle et l’écriture inscription lapidaire.”

of 1958, proclaimed, with ninety-six percent of the vote, its desire for immediate independence from France. By taking the decision to renounce French tutelage to establish the institutions of his new country, Sékou Touré offended de Gaulle who wanted to be the mastermind behind the African States' independence. Miffed by "the voluntarily strident tone of Sékou Touré, who condemned colonization during his speech to the Territorial Assembly [on August 25, 1958], de Gaulle left [Guinea] in a very bad mood and took off to Senegal"⁴² (Roche 103). There, Senghor was absent. At that specific moment, the Senegalese representative was apparently still hesitant regarding the referendum. He did not want to run the risk of his presence guaranteeing an approval of de Gaulle's views of African politics. In Senegal, de Gaulle's speech to the population was interrupted several times by demonstrators in favor of immediate independence. Irritated, de Gaulle stated that those who wanted independence should take it, an invitation "accompanied by the threat of a complete breakdown in the event of victory of the 'no'"⁴³ (Roche 104). That was the case in Guinea, from which de Gaulle took back, according to Doumbi-Fakoly ("Nicolas Sarkozy"), "all he could, including typewriters, pens and erasers. Obviously, if he could have done it, he would have rolled up the bridges and roads to take them all back with him."⁴⁴

Sékou Touré's radical views towards French involvement in his country were shared by his friend Fodeba Keita, who, by 1957, was both a well-known artist and political figure: "Fodeba was elected to the Territorial Assembly of Guinea as the

⁴²"Choqué par le ton volontairement véhément de Sékou Touré, qui fait le procès de la colonisation lors de son discours à l'Assemblée territoriale, de Gaulle quitte le pays de fort mauvaise humeur et s'envole pour le Sénégal."

⁴³"assortie de la menace d'une rupture totale en cas de victoire du 'non'."

⁴⁴"On se souvient encore qu'après le 'Non' de Sékou Touré, à la communauté française, en 1958, le Général de Gaulle a vidé la Guinée de tout ce qu'il pouvait; jusques et y compris les machines à dactylographier, les stylos et les gommes. À l'évidence, s'il avait pu, il aurait enroulé ses ponts et ses routes pour les emporter avec lui."

representative of his own district of Siguiri, and became the Minister for Internal Affairs in 1957 with jurisdiction over administrative and police matters, while maintaining an intense artistic commitment” (Kaba 203). When Guinea gained its independence in 1958, Fodeba was appointed to major positions in Sékou Touré’s government: he was in charge of National Defense and Security. Unfortunately, the paranoid dictator-to-be, Touré, was frightened by Fodeba whom he felt could be a threat to his authority. He assumed that Fodeba could overthrow him anytime he wished: “Fodeba was arrested in 1969 as a conspirator, and in 1971 was condemned to death without trial, ironically in the military jail he had helped to build” (Kaba 213). The jail, “Camp Boiro,” was indeed built by Fodeba himself to imprison political opponents.

3.2.1 The Activist and Censored Artist

Well before becoming acquainted with Sékou Touré, Fodeba Keita had already achieved widespread recognition as an artist within France, the Western world and sub-Saharan countries. A graduate of the Dakar *École Normale William Ponty*, Fodeba Keita gave up the path advised by his master, Charles Béart, whose teachings “inextricably mixed educational leadership, correction of language and supervision of ideological views, which were often close, on the whole, to the phenomenon of censorship itself”⁴⁵ (Lüsebrink 111). Having mastered the theatrical skills taught at William-Ponty, Keita opposed the didactic and conservative role that Béart assigned to the African theater. The Guinean artist moved forward and decided to create something unique: dance performances including the traditional art

⁴⁵“un rôle mêlant inextricablement la direction pédagogique, la correction de la langue et une supervision des vues idéologiques, souvent proches, dans l’ensemble, du phénomène proprement dit de la censure.”

of musical composition and the oral art of story-telling (the poem is sung). The performances were also politically engaged and denounced the uses and abuses of colonialism. In 1947, along with Facelli Kanté and Soba Dieli, Keita created the famous *Ballets africains*, which “performed African songs and dances from Senegal to Congo, with special emphasis on the Mandika folklore of Guinea and Casamance” (Kaba 202). The success was such that:

First it [the group] performed mainly for African circles in Paris, then it attracted the attention of critics because of its authenticity, the sophistication of its staging, and the literary and ideological quality of its scenario. Indeed it endeavored to present vivid frescoes of traditional life and humoristic scenes of colonial situations. As a result the group received the unofficial title of “Ambassador of African Culture”... (Kaba 202-03).

The company toured France for two years, then East European countries and finally the French colonies in West Africa. Before touring there, Fodeba was already famous because of his series of 78 r.p.m. records of songs and stories accompanied by the guitar, the xylophone and the kora (a twenty-one-string harp-lute typical of West Africa). His records and his poems “Minuit” and “Aube africaine” would soon be censored in French West Africa by the governor of Senegal, who was under colonial supervision. German scholar Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (103-04) called the censorship of Fodeba Keita’s work a “paradoxical” one:

Its paradoxical aspect lies in the fact that the censorship concerned less the offending works of Keita as such than their dissemination in the form of records, i.e. some semi-verbal form of dissemination expected

to reach an audience greatly exceeding the readership of written books and printed matters. . . . The censorship measures enacted by the governor of Senegal concerned therefore a specific geographical area (French West Africa and not the metropolis), a form of materiality specific to Keita's texts, the singing voice (and no other physical media), and a particular method of dissemination, the record, even though the texts designed for the show also circulated in the form of printed matter for reading.⁴⁶

An "activist poet,"⁴⁷ as Lüsebrink (106) describes him, Fodeba is praised by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* as one of the finest representatives of the "fighting phase or a revolutionary literature" (232): "He reinterpreted all the rhythmic images of his country from a revolutionary standpoint. . . . In his poetic works, . . . we find a constant desire to define accurately the historic moments of the struggle. . ." (Fanon 227). "Aube africaine" is certainly one of the poems that recounted the different steps that led to the dawn of African freedom from colonialism.

3.2.2 The Legend of the African Dawn

First published in 1949 in the journal *Réveil*, "Aube africaine" was republished in *Présence africaine* in 1951. In 1965, the poem was inserted, along with "Minuit,"

⁴⁶"Son côté paradoxal réside dans le fait que la censure concerna moins les œuvres incriminées de Keita en tant que telles que leur diffusion sous forme de disques, c'est-à-dire sous une forme semi-orale de circulation susceptible d'atteindre un public dépassant très largement le public des lecteurs de livres écrits et imprimés. . . . Les mesures de censure promulguées par le gouverneur du Sénégal concernèrent donc un espace géographique précis (l'Afrique occidentale française et non pas la métropole), une forme de matérialité spécifique des textes, la voix chantée (et non pas d'autres supports matériels), et un mode de diffusion particulier, le disque, même si les textes montés en spectacle circulèrent également sous forme d'imprimé destiné à la lecture."

⁴⁷"poète militant"

“Chanson du Djoliba,” and others, in the eponymous collection *Aube africaine* published by Seghers. The introductory page explains that all the poems are “legends that are *narrated, danced, mimed, sung* in the villages and whose *popular* substance is given to us by Fodeba Keita in a simple and evocative poetical form”⁴⁸ (Italics mine). Fodeba’s poetry is therefore holistic in that, as Bernadette Cailler (185-6) argues in her article “If the Dead Could Only Speak!,” Fodeba’s works “preclude the development of distinct boundaries between the epic (narration that fills ‘time’), the dramatic (voices, gestures that fill ‘space’), and the lyric (breathing, cries, songs, attempts to bring movement, in its spatio-temporal dimension, to a halt).” However, my analysis focuses mainly on the text. One has to keep in mind that the meaning of the words was once stressed by the whole performance, that unfortunately is missing today. The text remains a clue, to be deciphered, of a past performance event.

Another important point to note in the first page of *Aube africaine* is the link that Fodeba continued to maintain with popular culture: the introduction points to the “popular substance” of the poem. In fact, African scholar Lansine Kaba remarks that in pre-independent Guinea until 1968, there was no “large discrepancy between the artists and the people” (207). Both the elite and common people could relate to Fodeba’s works. Fodeba’s success was also due to the ability of the audience to identify with the characters in his stories. As Fanon accurately wrote, regarding the poem “Aube africaine,” “all those niggers and all those wogs who fought to defend the liberty of France or for British civilization recognize themselves in this poem” (232). Fodeba’s mastery consisted in transforming the contemporary experiences of WWII, as lived by African soldiers, into events belonging to a tradition with which

⁴⁸“Ce sont des légendes contées, dansées, mimées, chantées dans les villages dont Keita Fodeba nous rend la substance populaire sous une forme poétique simple et évocatrice.”

these soldiers were familiar and of which they were proud.

Structure of the Poem

“Aube africaine” is a *narrative* poem, not only because it tells a story, that revolves around a main character, Naman, but also because the story is told by a narrator whose presence is sometimes marked in the text by an hyphen preceding his own words (p. 73, for example). The poem is made up of fifteen stanzas, although “paragraphs” would probably be a better term, given that there are no verses or rhymes at all. At the end of each paragraph, there is an indication that kora music should be played. The narrative poem alternates with the music, giving its rhythm to the performance. Other elements in the poem provide other kinds of rhythms. For example, the poem is paced by the repetition of the sentence “It was dawn. . .” (“C’était l’aube. . .”) that reminds us of the title; or by recurrent letters, in the second part of the poem, that inform Naman’s wife of what has become of him.

The poem could be described as the epic of Naman, an African soldier fighting in WWII. The story unfolds in the following stages: an idyllic initial situation (paragraphs 1-6) disturbed by Naman’s departure for the war (7), followed by the long waiting of Kadia, Naman’s wife, for his return (8-15). While waiting, she receives news from him sporadically: a letter from Naman, from the front lines (9), another letter from him announcing that he has been rewarded for his courage (10), a postcard informing her that he has been held prisoner by the Germans (11), and finally a letter from one of his friends and fellow soldiers announcing that although Naman returned from the front he has died at Thiaroye (14).

A Detailed Look at the Poem

The first six paragraphs all begin with the sentence “It was dawn. . .” The repetition insists on what this dawn has in common with all the other dawns in an African setting. Yet, it also introduces readers to what will make this dawn different from all the others. The first paragraph is a picturesque description of an African hamlet which little by little awakens from a night spent dancing: “The little hamlet that had danced all night woke up gradually.”⁴⁹ Humans (herdsman, girls, “*marabout*” or “witch doctor,” and children) and nature live in perfect harmony: “At the sound of reed flutes, herders drove herds in the valley, while the girls, still drowsy, were following each other on the tortuous path to the fountain.”⁵⁰ Religion, Islam in particular, just takes on its fundamental role of linking (“*religare*” means “to link,” in latin) people together and people with nature: “In the courtyard of the marabout, a group of children around the campfire hummed verses from the Koran.”⁵¹ The second paragraph depicts the end of the night and the beginning of the day in the metaphorical terms of a combat that leads to the death of a personified night. After this general introduction to the peaceful African way of life, the attention is drawn to Naman, the “unwearying” (“infatigable”) tiller whose field is close to the Djoliba river, a source of life.

Suddenly, in this idyllic setting, a disruptive element springs up: a child (paragraph 4) announces to Naman that the village head wants to see him. It is not the message itself that raises Naman’s curiosity, but the fact that the summons came

⁴⁹“Le petit hameau qui avait dansé toute la nuit s’éveillait peu à peu.”

⁵⁰“Au son de flûtes de roseau, les bergers conduisaient les troupeaux dans la vallée, tandis que les jeunes filles encore somnolentes se suivaient sur le sentier tortueux de la fontaine.”

⁵¹“Dans la cour du marabout, un groupe d’enfants autour du feu de bois, chantonnait des versets du Coran.”

so early in the morning⁵² (paragraph 5). After a long look at his field,⁵³ as if Naman felt that he would not see it again, he walks to the village and joins the assembly of tribal leaders under the “*arbre à palabres*.” The narrator describes the gravity of the situation by focussing on the village elders who are said to be “more serious than ever.”⁵⁴ The following paragraph (6) starts with the same words, slightly modified: “It was dawn. . . still dawn.”⁵⁵ This “still” indicates an unusual slowness: it signals the seriousness of the coming drama while postponing it. Naman sits in the middle of the assembly. The “*griot*” tells Naman that a White commanding officer⁵⁶ had come to “take one of our men to incorporate him in their army”⁵⁷ and announces that Naman has been elected to be the one. He must go to war to defend the “Whites’ country.”⁵⁸ The fact that Naman is the only one chosen to satisfy the White Commanding Officer (“le Commandant Blanc,” whose capital letters have the effect of transforming a character into a symbol) provides the scene with a more dramatic and even sacrificial tone, as if Naman, as representative of the whole community, was the chosen one, the victim offered to a deity, thirsty for blood. Moreover, Naman himself did not volunteer to become a soldier, rather he respected the decision made by those responsible for the well-being of the community.

Beginning with “the following day,” paragraph seven is pivotal to the story. As inexorably as the days follow each other, Naman leaves the village to the sound of the tam tam⁵⁹ and embarks for France. Nothing is said about Naman’s feelings; the only emotions expressed are Kadia’s. The solidarity of her people is also em-

⁵²“Une convocation aussi matinale intrigua Naman.”

⁵³“Il jeta un long regard sur son champ, . . .”

⁵⁴“plus graves que jamais”

⁵⁵“C’était l’aube. . . toujours l’aube.”

⁵⁶“le Commandant Blanc”

⁵⁷“pour prendre un de nos hommes afin de l’incorporer dans leur armée”

⁵⁸“le pays des Blancs”

⁵⁹“le son grave des tam tam de guerre l’accompagna”

phasized since her friends gather around her to support her: “young girls. . . grouped together until dawn to console her.”⁶⁰ To Kadia’s sadness is added, month after month, her anxiety (paragraph 8): she is left in total ignorance of her husband’s fate.

Then the succession of letters concerning Naman’s status begins, each of them arriving after long periods of time (“Months and months passed,” paragraph 9; “Many months still passed,”⁶¹ paragraph 10). The content of all the letters coming from Naman is related in indirect speech. In the first one (paragraph 9), Naman says that he is fighting on the front lines, but is nevertheless in good shape. Then he asks how his wife and the young people of the village are doing and how the work in the field is going. Finally, “to the counsel of Elders, he reaffirmed his oath to always act with courage and dignity *for the honor of his village and race*”⁶² (Italics mine). It is crucial to note that Naman does not fight *for the Whites*: his combat is ultimately for his own race, as if fighting in a Whites’ war was just an accident of history and as if that war became, eventually, Africans’ own concerns with pride.

The second letter sent by Naman (paragraph 10) reports that not only is he well, but also that “his military superiors just rewarded him for his exceptional courage on the front lines.”⁶³ Unfortunately, the feeling of relief vanishes immediately when in the next paragraph (11), a postcard announces that Naman was captured by the Germans. This event triggers an important reaction from the “Assembly of Elders.” They decide to authorize Naman “to dance the Duga, the sacred dance of the *Vulture* that nobody dances without a glorious feat in the best interests

⁶⁰“les jeunes filles. . . se groupèrent jusqu’à l’aube pour la consoler.”

⁶¹“Des mois et des mois s’écoulèrent,” “Plusieurs mois s’écoulèrent encore”

⁶²“au conseil des Notables, il réaffirmait son serment de toujours se comporter avec courage et dignité pour l’honneur de son village et de sa race.

⁶³“ses chefs militaires venaient de le décorer pour son courage exceptionnel au front.”

of the Community. . . ”⁶⁴ (Italics from the original text). Naman’s bravery, initially sanctioned by the White commanding officers, is now recognized by his own community, which re-interprets what Naman did in terms of its “best interests.” Naman can receive all the honors due to his rank of brave soldier and among them, the greatest: the privilege to dance the Duga, “this dance of the Mande emperors whose every step is a stage in the history of Mali.”⁶⁵ Naman is actually offered to become a hero in the history of Mali, since to perform this history is to be a part of it.

The *Epic of Soundiata* depicts the foundation of the Mali Empire by Soundiata, who lived in the 13th century. The Duga song, from this epic, “recreates,” according to African scholar Manthia Diawara, “scenes of ferocious battle in which Mande heroes distinguished themselves from the rest by performing acts that echo and surpass the performance of their ancestors. . . . While the Duga is. . . described as a reward for past performances, it can also be used to construct future heroes” (164). Naman is granted the right, by his community, to become himself a hero, proving that African traditions are alive and that “the quality of the present lies in its conformity with what remains significant in the cultural heritage” (Kaba 204). Moreover, by not detailing the circumstances of the conflict in which Naman participates, Fodeba Keita succeeds in this poem in transforming this participation in an event belonging to African history and conveying African concerns. Finally, if the elders of the village authorized Naman to join the heroes’ clan, in return, Naman’s dignity is reflected on his own community, and in particular on his wife, who finds some consolation in his reward of becoming a hero (paragraph 13).

“One month later”⁶⁶ (chapter 14), however, Kadia receives a seven-line let-

⁶⁴“l’assemblée des notables décida d’autoriser Naman à danser le Douga, cette danse sacrée du *Vautour* que nul ne danse sans avoir fait une action d’éclat dans l’intérêt supérieur de la Communauté. . . .”

⁶⁵“cette dance des empereurs mandingues dont chaque pas est une étape de l’Histoire du Mali.”

⁶⁶“Un mois plus tard”

ter, the last one, whose sender is “Corporal Moussa, a great friend of Naman. . . .”⁶⁷ Moussa announces that Naman has died, “betrayed by a bullet,”⁶⁸ and “rests [now] in the Senegalese land.”⁶⁹ The letter mentions that the soldiers had returned from the front lines and were stationed in Thiaroye, waiting to go home. Naman’s killing occurred “during a big quarrel” between the soldiers and the “White Heads from Dakar.”⁷⁰ No more description or explanation is provided about what happened in Thiaroye, except that it happened at dawn: “It was dawn. . . .”

As succinct as the description of the events is, all the basic elements are present to convey that the conflict with the White commanding officers must have been serious since it drove Naman, a model of obedience and respect, to be involved in a combat that would lead him to his death. Without any doubt, Naman, who has always acted “in the best interests of his community,” must have believed that what the White officers wanted from him did not match his ideals. The text specifies that the officers were “from Dakar,” implying that the soldiers did not rebel against their military superiors, but against the colonial administrators. Moreover, the text explicitly states that the colonial administration betrayed the African soldiers: “a bullet *betrayed* him. . . .” (Italics mine). From Moussa’s elliptic letter, the audience grasps the essential: Thiaroye was a fight between colonial administrators and repatriated African soldiers who, although they fought for a just cause, as Naman’s involvement proves, were betrayed and killed.

The fact that Moussa starts his letter with what looks like a detail regarding the circumstances of the event, “It was dawn. . . .” makes this detail significant, both from the perspective of the story and of the structure of the poem. That the mas-

⁶⁷“Caporal Moussa, un grand ami de Naman. . . .”

⁶⁸“une balle a trahi Naman”

⁶⁹“Il repose en terre sénégalaise”

⁷⁰“Au cours d’une grande querelle qui nous a opposés à nos Chefs Blancs de Dakar, . . .”

sacre occurred at dawn reinforces the aspect of the betrayal, since it tacitly means that the African soldiers were shot unexpectedly in their sleep. As for the structure of the poem, the sentence-refrain, sort of dirge, works as a link between the beginning and the ending of the poem, leading to a better cohesiveness of the text. It announces the last paragraph (15) and the new and metaphorical meaning that “dawn” is synonymous with the beginning of a new era: “Indeed it was dawn. . . the dawn of African Freedom.”⁷¹

As a response to the introductory depiction of a peaceful African hamlet, the last paragraph describes the sad African landscape surrounding Thiaroye, as if nature was totally sympathetic with the misfortunes that befell the soldiers there: “palm trees”⁷² look like they were “saddened by this early combat”⁷³ whereas “crows, in noisy bands, came to announce, by their caws, the tragedy that blood-drenched the dawn of Thiaroye. . .”⁷⁴ The poem ends with a powerful image: “And in the burned blue, just above Naman’s body, a giant vulture heavily glided.”⁷⁵ The vulture, representative of the ancestors, “seemed to say to him [Naman]: ‘Naman, you did not dance this sacred dance that bears my name! By freeing the African Motherland, others will dance it.’”⁷⁶ The liberation of the “African Motherland” appears here to be more crucial than national liberation, which emphasizes Fodeba Keita’s belief in pan-Africanism and the rejection of the notion of “states,” as Europeans used it to arbitrarily cut up the African continent.

⁷¹“En effet, c’était l’aube. . . aube de la Liberté africaine.”

⁷²“les palmiers”

⁷³“comme attristés par ce combat matinal”

⁷⁴“Les corbeaux, en bandes bruyantes, venaient annoncer aux environs, par leurs croassements, la tragédie qui ensanglantait l’aube de Thiaroye. . .”

⁷⁵“Et, dans l’azur incendié, juste au-dessus du cadavre de Naman, un gigantesque vautour planait lourdement.”

⁷⁶“Il semblait lui dire: ‘Naman, tu n’as pas dansé cette danse sacrée qui porte mon nom! En libérant la Patrie africaine, d’autres la danseront.’”

The Vulture's words, regarding Naman's status as hero, are enigmatic. After all, Naman, because he died in Thiaroye, did not get the chance to dance the Duga and enact heroic behaviors. Do the Vulture's words mean that the heroic status previously conferred upon Naman is eventually questioned? Did Naman not deserve to be a hero? Since Naman is representative of the infantrymen, is the relevance of their rebellion questioned by its failure? Do we hear, behind the vulture's voice, the author's opinion and his disappointment that Thiaroye did not lead to the immediate liberation of Africa? Maybe, yes. After all, let us remember that Thiaroye is the dawn of the liberation, not the liberation itself. Moreover, who are these "others" that will free the African continent? At the time the poem was performed and published, who had Keita in mind, if anyone? In any case, what remains compelling in this rendering of Thiaroye is that the events that happened there were, in Fodeba Keita's eyes, the dawn of the liberation of Africa. As such, they also deserved to be part of an African epic.

Thiaroye as a Transitory Episode

The representation of Thiaroye in "Aube africaine" is not a detailed representation of the events. Yet, despite the narrative's lack of detail, Fodeba succeeded in capturing the quintessence of the events: a rebellion and a betrayal. Another significant trait of this rendering is that Thiaroye belongs to a series of events. It is a transitory episode in that it is the last step of the successive submissiveness to White officers and the first step towards the liberation of Africa. Thiaroye is therefore the event that allows the saga of WWII to be retrospectively significant for Africans. In a way, "Aube africaine" implies that the forced participation in the combat and the imprisonment in German camps made sense *because* it led to Thiaroye, the first step—although it was a failure—toward a liberated African continent. Keita's nar-

rative saves Naman's destiny (and the one of African infantrymen) from the irony that consists in being sent to war by a "*Commandant blanc*" and then shot dead by some "*Chefs blancs*." The poem aims at providing meaning to a senseless and unfair event.

The unfolding of events is not accompanied by a development of the characters' psychology. In fact, the characters are types in the poem, and not individuals. The exploration of emotions, for example, that could be an entrance to the characters' psychology, is not at stake in the text. Naman's feelings, his pain or his pride, are not expressed by himself, but through his wife, as if she were his mirror. Moreover, her feelings are shared by the whole community, by the young girls who cry with her to console her, for instance. The individuals remain, in the poem, representatives of the whole community. One has to keep in mind however that the lack of depiction of emotions must have been compensated during the performance by the emotions that emanate from the music, the voice of the narrator, and other techniques.

3.3 Conclusion

The two poems and therefore the two interpretations of the massacre of Thiaroye are representative of, and consistent with, their author's political agenda. For Senghor, the dream was first to extend French citizenship to the Empire's populations. When the dream was destroyed, Senghor believed that the independence of Africa from colonial rule needed to be processed step by step and to be attained under France's guidance and approval. One understands that the violence deployed by the French authorities in Thiaroye must have jeopardized Senghor's political strategies. A *tour de force* was needed to re-interpret the infantrymen's rebellious action into a

sacrifice *for France*. Moreover, Senghor knew that Africans would never forget the trauma that Thiaroye was, whereas for the French, the bothersome massacre could easily sink into oblivion.

Acknowledging Senghor's African heritage, obvious in the form (rhythm) and content (African cosmogony) of the poem, my analysis has mainly focused on the fact that Senghor also oriented his text to reach a French audience and to sensitize it to the African infantrymen's fate. In order to do so, he reasserted his own Western heritage at both the levels of the content (Catholic liturgy) and the form (*verset*). In the end, Senghor's "Tyaroye" reaches its socio-political goal of inscribing the event in the collective memory of France by using, on the one hand, poetical means promoting prototypicalization and blurring of circumstances over particularities, and on the other hand, philosophical views encouraging reconciliation and *métissage*.

For Fodeba Keita, the political issues at stake were quite different. Far from privileging diplomacy, Fodeba was eager to overtly denounce colonialism and to get rid of the French invaders as soon as possible. His artistic practice matched his political beliefs: his work was directly censored because it incited resistance against the colonial system. Thiaroye was part of this epic of African resistance: the soldiers who had always defended France and its empire—but because they were told to do so by their African leaders—eventually decided to rebel against it. With this poem, Fodeba initiated the tradition of artistic works that see in Thiaroye an event belonging to an epic of resistance, and to which the movie by Sembene *Camp de Thiaroye*, for instance, belongs. Even though the uprising failed, Thiaroye needed to be re-inserted into African history and memory, using means associated with African culture. By its oral form, its perspective—essentially focusing on Africans—and its content—in particular, its reference to Mande history—, "Aube africaine" is

definitely an African poem, that happened to be written in French.

Chapter 4

Representations of Thiaroye in the Post-Independence Era: *Thiaroye terre rouge* by Boubacar Boris Diop, *Morts pour la France* by Doumbi-Fakoly and *Camp de Thiaroye* by Sembene Ousmane

This chapter analyzes the three renderings of Thiaroye produced in the 1980s: a play *Thiaroye terre rouge* (1981) by Boubacar Boris Diop, a novel *Morts pour la France* (1983) by Doumbi-Fakoly, and a movie *Camp de Thiaroye* by Sembene Ousmane (1987). Pursuing the tradition opened by Senghor and Faye, these works keep the memory of Thiaroye alive. However, their main feature, which distin-

guishes them from both the preceding and following representations, is that they take on a critical role, targeting Africa as much as France. For these authors, going back to Thiaroye expresses the necessity to assess a variety of situations: the gains following the accession of African countries to independence, the involvement of France in African politics, the responsibility of Africans in the neo-colonial period. Thiaroye is the event that throws light on their contemporary socio-historical context, as much as these contexts lead to a better understanding of the mutiny and massacre. In order to fully appreciate the significance of the criticism in which they are engaged, as well as the techniques they deploy to reach their goal, I first suggest a brief historical survey to remind us of the circumstances of the West African transition from colonialism to independence.

4.1 From the French Union to an Independent and Senghorian Senegal

After the war, the provisional government of de Gaulle generated great hopes among the representatives of the West African colonies. Because of their participation in the war effort, the overseas populations expected, as a proof of gratitude for their sacrifice, to gain rights similar to all French citizens' ones. This was a sweet illusion that vanished with the second draft of the constitution in October 1946 which suppressed many of the liberal suggestions made previously. The 1946 French constitution, which established the Fourth republic, did not respond to the overseas deputies' expectations. On the contrary, Vaillant states:

Power continued to lie, as it had in the Third Republic, with the fractious National Assembly. On overseas matters, many decisions would

continue to be made by civil service bureaucracy. The much-touted French Union was in fact little more than the old wine of empire poured into freshly labeled new bottles. Overseas representation was still severely limited. . . Perhaps most important, other issues pressed upon the Assembly and crowded out attention to overseas problems: economic recovery and reorganization in France, inflation, and such political questions as the loyalty of the powerful French communist party. In actuality, the National Assembly devoted little of its time to colonial issues in the immediate postwar period (209-10).

One can understand the disillusionment that followed and the fact that the idea of independence from the metropolis became more and more attractive. Yet, for now, the African territories were part of the French Union and according to the new constitution, Vaillant tells us, “no member of the Union could change its status without a constitutional amendment. As a result, any talk of independence by Africans could be construed as an attack on the constitution” (209). Despite the numerous insurrections that occurred in the French territory of Africa (Madagascar in 1947, Ivory Coast in 1949, etc.), France decided to remain deaf to the claims for independence. Not even the start of the Algerian war of liberation would change anything, at least at the beginning.

1958 tolled the knell of the Fourth Republic. In the middle of the Algerian war, de Gaulle returned to power and suggested replacing the French Union by the French Community. One historian affirms: “Although convinced that the independence of the African territories is ineluctable, he (de Gaulle) thinks that, considering the Algerian context, public opinion, which has to reach a decision by referendum,

is not ready to accept the brutal disintegration of the French Union”¹ (Roche 103).

The Fifth Republic constitution, which included the creation of the French Community, was largely accepted by referendum: 79.25% of the votes in France and 97% in Senegal. Only Guinea refused with 96% of negative votes. For Senghor, however, this “yes” to the French Community was nevertheless conceived as a step, even though a small and smooth one, toward independence. He declared:

Our ‘yes’ is not a ‘yes’ to the colonial regime, it is exactly the opposite. It is first of all a ‘yes’ to the African unity which needs to be restored in the two Federal States of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. This is a ‘yes’ to African independence in a unity that has been found again. The Community is only for us a passage and a means to prepare ourselves for independence² (*Le Monde*, October 1958, quoted in Roche 106).

In fact, what Senghor probably had in mind was the creation of a federation of African countries that would prevent the parcelling of Africa in states, whose very conception was European and not African. A pan-Africa had to merge from the ruins of the French empire. Better this than to inherit a Western idea of the state that did not fit the African tendency of promoting common grounds over specificities. Foiling the colonial motto “divide and conquer,” Senghor was convinced that the unity of Africa would make it stronger.

¹“Tout en étant convaincu que l’indépendance des territoires africains est inéluctable, il considère, compte tenu du contexte algérien, que l’opinion publique, qui doit se prononcer par référendum, n’est pas prête à accepter la désintégration brutale de l’Union française.”

²“Notre ‘oui’ n’est pas un ‘oui’ au régime colonial, c’est exactement le contraire. C’est d’abord un ‘oui’ à l’unité africaine qu’il s’agit de reconstituer en deux États fédéraux d’A-OF et d’A-EF. C’est un ‘oui’ à l’indépendance africaine dans l’unité retrouvée. La Communauté n’est pour nous qu’un passage et un moyen de se préparer à l’indépendance.”

In October 1958, Senegal along with Sudan (that became Mali), Dahomey and Upper Volta, decided to become a federation, the Federation of Mali, that would still belong to the French community. Yet, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the deputy from Ivory Coast, managed to convince Upper Volta and Dahomey of the geographical and economical advantages of belonging, along with Ivory Coast and Niger, to another association, the *Conseil de l'Entente*. Only Senegal and Mali were left to form the federation. In fact, Houphouët-Boigny might have wanted the same thing as Senghor, a pan-Africa, yet the two men completely disagreed as to the way it should be achieved: Senghor was attached to the idea of a federation of countries whereas the Ivory deputy believed that the African territory could be reunited if autonomous states joined a common political party, the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*, of Communist allegiance.

In December 1959, de Gaulle accepted the idea of a self-governing Mali Federation and on June 20, 1960 independence was in effect granted. Following this path, the countries belonging to the *Conseil de l'Entente* as well as the states constituting A.E.F. (Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Chad and Oubangui-Chari) proclaimed their autonomy as well. The French Community disbanded itself. Yet, while de Gaulle was granting independence on the one hand, he was, on the other, creating new economical and political ties with Africa, starting the neo-colonial era.

The independent Mali Federation did not last for long since two months after its creation, in August 1960, it was divided into two separate countries, Mali and Senegal. On the 25th, Senegal proclaimed itself independent and adopted a constitution, based on the 1946 French model. Senghor was elected president of the Republic and Mamadou Dia became its Prime minister. Senghor was the head of state but Dia was the one who governed. This situation became the source of division between the two men who hitherto had shared a strong friendship. It did

not survive the 1962 crisis, when Dia attempted a coup. Avoiding bloodshed, Senghor arrested and imprisoned Dia. Senghor then adopted a new constitution that strengthened presidential power. He remained the head of Senegal until 1981 when he finally resigned. Abdou Diouf, his Prime minister and *protégé*, succeeded him. Then, Abdou Diouf himself was elected president in 1983 and stayed in power until 2000. It was only a few months after Senghor's resignation from his fifth presidential term, in 1981, that Boubacar Boris Diop published *Thiaroye terre rouge*.

4.2 Boubacar Boris Diop's Thiaroye: Rebellion and Treason

Born in Dakar, Senegal in 1946, Boubacar Boris Diop, after being a professor of literature and philosophy, embarked upon a dual career as a writer and journalist. Among his fictions, one can mention *Le Temps de Tamango* (*Tamango's Time*; 1981), *Les Tambours de la mémoire* (*The Drums of Memory*; 1990), *Les Traces de la meute* (*The Pack's Traces*; 1993), *Le Cavalier et son ombre* (*The Cavalier and His Shadow*; 1997), and *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (*Murambi, the Book of Bones*; 2000), which explores the drama of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. His most recent novel, *Kaveena. L'Impossible innocence* (*Kaveena. The Impossible Innocence*), was published in 2006. His fictions have in common the mixing of history and African legends. Recently, in the novel *Doomi Golo*, Diop opted to use Wolof instead of French. French and Wolof are considered languages, among many others, used to render the complexity of African reality.

Diop's writing career oscillates between fictional and journalistic writing. In addition to his regular participation in French and Senegalese newspapers—he is the

founder of the first independent newspaper in Senegal, *Sol*–, Diop’s journalistic activity also includes his participation as essayist in collective works such as *Le Temps des aveux* (*Time for Confession*; 1993) and *Negrophobie* (*Negrophobia*; 2005).

As journalist and essayist, Diop’s position is highly critical of neo-colonialism. In an article published in *Le Monde diplomatique*, dating from March 2005, he analyzed the crisis occurring at the time in Ivory Coast not in terms of “secular ethnic hatred,”³ as the then Foreign minister Dominique de Villepin did, but in terms of French interventionism into African politics: “Paris remains a central place—less and less secretive—of the crisis.”⁴ As politically engaged as his article, his novels provide him with the opportunity to explore a wider range of opinions, even opinions that he does not necessarily share with his characters.

Discussing two characters, the Cartesian Gormak and the cynical Nkintri, of the novel *Le Cavalier et son ombre*, which explores the myth of the traditional sacrifice of girls, Diop states: “We really have two completely different viewpoints. *Personally, I do not identify myself with any of them.* Besides, I have more sympathy, more understanding for the monster Nkintri’s viewpoint than for the Cartesian one. Yet, at the same time, I do not accept it”⁵ (Interview by Bouka and Thompson; italics mine). Diop’s comment firstly points to the imperative distinction between the characters’ opinions and the author’s. Secondly, it calls attention to the fact that sympathy, or dislike, for an opinion does not necessarily imply the total approval, or dismissal, of the individual that subscribes to it. People and situations are very complex and in order to grasp them better, a multiplicity of viewpoints are essen-

³“haines ethniques séculaires”

⁴“Paris reste un lieu central—et de moins en moins secret—de la crise.”

⁵“On a vraiment deux points de vue tout à fait opposés. Personnellement, *je ne me reconnais dans aucun de ces points de vue.* J’ai plus de sympathie d’ailleurs, plus de compréhension pour le point de vue du monstre Nkintri que pour le point de vue cartésien. Mais en même temps, je ne l’accepte pas” (Italics mine).

tial. Fictional writing offers Diop the possibility to enter the minds and imagine the thoughts of the people and individuals who committed the worst atrocities, such as genocide or colonization.

4.2.1 Introducing *Thiaroye terre rouge*

Thiaroye terre rouge was published in the same volume as the novel *Le Temps de Tamango*. As scholar Fredric Michelman argues in his article “From Tamango to Thiaroye—the Revolution Back on Course,” the play did not just *happen* to be published in the same volume as the novel. The two works are actually linked to each other. In the fictitious world of the novel, the play was written in the years 1960-70 by the main character N’Dongo who, besides being a chemist and writer, was an opponent of the regime that followed the independence of an unidentified African country. After years of struggle, the revolutionary action initiated by N’Dongo finally succeeds as the country becomes a communist state in 2015.

As leader of the opponents’ group, N’Dongo was known as Tamango, in reference to the character in the eponymous short story “Tamango” by nineteenth-century French writer Prosper Mérimée. Michelman describes the character as follows:

The fictional character was a proud, cruel, canny Black West African slave trader who shot unsalable prisoners (including women and children) and who, in a moment of drunken pique, gave one of his wives to the captain of a French slaver. In the course of attempting to retrieve her, he was himself made prisoner. Furious, he led a successful slave revolt at sea, but having killed the entire European crew, he realized that neither he nor any of his fellow rebels knew how to control the

vessel or where to go with it. Sole survivor of the inevitable disaster that followed. . . , he was rescued and brought to Jamaica where, after several melancholy years, he died in obscurity, probably as the result of health problems created by heavy drinking (62-63).

Choosing Tamango as his *nom de guerre* is a means for N'Dongo to question not only his own legitimacy as a revolutionary but also, and more fundamentally, the validity of revolution itself if one considers the final outcome of Tamango's rebellion. As Michelman points out, in the world of fiction, the periods following revolutions, both the independence and the communist revolution of 2015, are of an "equivocal, unresolved nature" due to their "irresolute, directionless revolutionaries" (65). This will have to be kept in mind in our reading of *Thiaroye terre rouge*, a play written by Diop of course, but also, fictionally, by N'Dongo who, by writing it, explores the complex issue of the motives and outcomes of rebellion.

Thiaroye terre rouge is the only play Diop ever wrote. It is legitimate to question the reason for this choice, and particularly if it was due to the possibility of reaching the public more easily. Was the play ever performed and if so, did it have any success? To my knowledge, the two questions have a negative answer. In a personal communication,⁶ professor H el ene Tissi eres, specialist of sub-Saharan literature and culture, explained the particular conditions of theatrical art in Senegal. In fact, there is no real structure to welcome it properly: there is only one theatre in Dakar, The Sorano, where plays are shown on a sporadic basis and are not very well publicized. They are poorly received if they are not accompanied by dance or music. In addition, there are very few troops. Senegal does not have a very significant theatrical tradition, contrary to other African countries, such as Cameroon or Ivory Coast, for instance, which have welcome Were Were Likings's theatrical research

⁶Tissi eres, H el ene. "Personal communication." 20 April 2008.

and performances. This suggests that Diop's reasons for choosing the medium of a play do not lie in the possibility of a greater dissemination.

The reasons are most probably to be found in the connection of the play with the novel and in the possibilities the genre itself offered. In *Le Temps de Tamango*, the play serves as a script for the movie of which N'Dongo's director friend dreams. The play is thus just a transitory medium, preparatory for a movie dedicated to the enactment of the past event. I further discuss this in the section of this chapter devoted to Sembene Ousmane. As for the genre, even if the play does not allow one to enter into the psychology of the characters, since it remains a play interested in the dynamics of conflicts between *groups* instead of individuals, the genre itself emphasizes the dramatic aspect of the events, their fatality. From the very onset, the conditions are set in such a way that logically, the story must lead to, and culminate in, a tragic ending. In other words, the choice of drama is, in my opinion, related to the possibility the genre offers of illustrating the logic underlying Thiaroye: the mutiny had to end in a massacre.

The play is made up of six *tableaux* and an epilogue. The first *tableau* depicts events that took place in the African village of Sanankoro in 1940. There, the French Army repressed a villagers' insurrection that rose up when the officers in charge ordered the mobilization of all the men for the European front. The five following *tableaux* are concerned with the 1944 mutiny of Thiaroye. The events take place in the camp or in the nearby village, whose inhabitants are sympathetic with the *tirailleurs'* rebellious action. The play ends with an epilogue in which the victims of Thiaroye address the audience.

Obviously the 1940 massacre of Sanankoro and the 1944 massacre of Thiaroye are linked to each other. Even more so since a character, Naman, connects the two events. Naman in fact was one of the men who was sent to France, after

witnessing, in 1940, the massacre of his friends and relatives in Sanankoro. He is also the character who comes back from the war and who, repatriated in Thiaroye, becomes one of the leaders of the uprising. The name “Naman” is certainly a tribute to the main character of Keita’s narrative poem, “Aube africaine,” as is the name of Naman’s lover, Kadia. The loving couple has however a different role in the two works. In “Aube africaine,” Kadia’s character is mainly used to evoke Naman’s emotions, which are buried under his dedication to duty. In *Thiaroye terre rouge*, the couple illustrates the indecency of loving in a country and a continent that are asphyxiated by colonialism. “Love itself is impossible”⁷ (177) states Naman to Kadia. Before the time to love ever comes back, Africa needs to be liberated; the impossibility of having a fulfilling romantic relationship is used to accentuate this necessity.

By naming his characters after Keita’s main protagonists, Diop not only pays tribute to the Guinean artist, but also inscribes his play in the continuation of Keita’s work, establishing a tradition. Yet, while doing so, Diop, in the same movement, contests the tradition itself. In the epilogue, Moctar, one of the dead *tirailleurs*, addressing the audience in a virulent diatribe, states: “Ugh! A poem. . . ! I hate those who put the blood of other people to music”⁸ (203). This criticism can certainly be directed toward Fodeba Keita whose poem was performed with music and dance. It possibly refers to Senghor as well, who in the play is the subject of other harsh criticism, as we will discover. This double movement of inscribing and criticizing at the same time is certainly explainable by Diop’s fascination for the complexity of human actions and the multiplicity of their interpretation. The play is a means to explore a multi-faceted reality through different protagonists’ eyes.

⁷“l’amour même est impossible.”

⁸“Pouah! Un poème. . . ! Je déteste ceux qui mettent en musique le sang des autres.”

Generally speaking, Diop's strategy in the play consists of presenting and confronting opinions that are radically different from each other. In doing so, he establishes a strong opposition, of Manichean proportion, between two stereotypical groups: the French military, on the one hand, and the Africans, on the other. This dichotomy is at the source of the feeling that the story unfolds logically until it reaches its fatal ending. However, while establishing the binary opposition, the author dismantles it, by introducing the figure of the traitor. The simplistic stereotypical view gives way to a more complex vision of the colonial situation. In the next sections, I discuss the French and then the African perspectives on Thiaroye and then I argue that upon dismantling the dichotomy between the two groups, Diop criticizes the involvement of Africans in the misery of (neo-)colonialism.

4.2.2 The French Military Viewpoint

This section focuses on the French perspective, according to Diop: the total disrespect for Africans and African culture leads to cruelty and cynicism, which "explains" the Machiavellian plan conceived to get rid of the rebellious *tirailleurs*. By its barbarism, Thiaroye illustrates the logic of colonial thinking.

In the play, African culture is always despised, either because it is exoticized or because it is reduced to abject stereotypes, or even annihilated. In the first *tableau*, exoticism is illustrated by the Commander's interest in "Nigger music" ("musique nègre"; 148). His dishonest motives are nevertheless easy to discern since he ignores the basic needs of his study's subjects, the inhabitants of Sanankoro: "And to our misfortune this commander adores Nigger music; not only do we have to work and be hungry, but we also have to sing and dance..." (147-

48).⁹ Obviously the commander's study is not motivated by a deep concern for African culture. All the more so since his "study" brings him a considerable amount of money¹⁰ (148), from which the villagers do not benefit. The injustice of the situation is emphasized by the villagers' horrible living conditions: the population suffers from malnutrition¹¹ and children are dying from it.¹²

Through the character of the Commander, Diop denounces the "colonial ethnology" practiced by the military officers in order to "establish French domination on something other than force—or rather, on force plus something else. . . . During the rise and the height of colonial power, the works of most specialists were used by the authority *for* a certain policy, the revival, for scientific pretension, of the old adage 'divide and conquer'"¹³ (Ruscio, "Au service du colonisateur" 5; italics are the author's). Additionally, in the play, colonial ethnology is presented as paralleling explicit cruelty toward the population, children included.

Sergeant Palissot is another character who represents the contemptuous way African culture is seen through colonial eyes. For him, there is no such thing as African culture. Africans' salvation consists in being in contact with "a true civilization"¹⁴ (158), the French one. Africans are considered animals ("Oh no! No verse about the ancestors! Worse than animals"¹⁵; 157), on the basis of some of

⁹"Et pour notre malheur ce Commandant adore la musique nègre; non seulement il nous faut travailler et avoir faim, mais encore chanter et danser. . . ."

¹⁰"cela lui rapporte beaucoup d'argent."

¹¹"a character enters in rags. All signs of malnutrition," "entre un personnage vêtu de haillons. Tous les signes de malnutrition" (149).

¹²"Let me tell you that my son just died. . . of hunger. . ." "Laissez-moi vous dire que mon fils vient de mourir. . . de faim. . ." (149).

¹³"asseoir la domination française sur autre chose que la force, ou plutôt, sur la force plus autre chose. . . . Durant l'essor et l'apogée du pouvoir colonial, les travaux de la plupart des spécialistes ont été utilisés par le pouvoir *pour* une certaine politique, la reprise à prétention scientifique du vieil adage 'diviser pour mieux régner'."

¹⁴"une vraie civilisation"

¹⁵"Ah non! Pas de couplet sur les ancêtres! Pire que des animaux."

their supposed behavioral features, such as cannibalism.¹⁶ In his ridiculous logic, Sergeant Palissot does not understand why men from Sanankoro would refuse to go to war, considering the fact that there, if they wished, they could eat human flesh: “When I think that here, in Sanankoro, they cannot eat their neighbors whereas in the army... Idiots”¹⁷ (157). This remark underlines Palissot’s partial and truncated knowledge as well as his total misunderstanding. It also emphasizes the prevailing simplistic stereotypes and the unwillingness to challenge them by learning more about a civilization different than his own.

Palissot represents the typical racist individual who has a strong sense of hierarchy regarding races and civilizations. His image of the colonized typically illustrates the one that Albert Memmi describes in his essay, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, first published in French in 1957, under the title *Portrait du colonisé*. Memmi insists on two characteristics that are discernible in Palissot’s idea of the colonized. Firstly, colonized people are usually depicted in negative terms to remove human traits from them, their humanity. Secondly, the colonized are most often seen as a collectivity, never as individuals. Deprived of humanity and individuality, the colonized are reified, reduced to objects. Memmi, of Jewish origins, certainly was inspired by Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) in which the philosopher points out these two characteristics, de-humanization and collectivization, to describe on what basis the Nazi machine of human annihilation relied. It is the same kind of process that takes place with the colonizing undertaking.

¹⁶In the paper Tim Stapleton presented during the conference *Wars and Conflicts in Africa* (March 27-29, 2008), entitled “Letters from Burma: Views of Black Zimbabwean Soldiers during the Second World War,” he stated that African soldiers wrote in their letters that they played with this stereotype of cannibalism to scare their European commanding officers or fellow soldiers.

¹⁷“Quand je pense qu’ici, à Sanankoro, ils ne peuvent même pas manger leur voisin alors que dans l’armée... Des idiots.”

Memmi also stresses how vicious this process is in that the colonized themselves are led to contribute to their degrading image:

‘Are we not all a little guilty after all? Lazy, because we have so many idlers? Timid, because we let ourselves be oppressed.’ Willfully created and spread by the colonizer, this mythical and degrading portrait ends up by being accepted and lived with to a certain extent by the colonized. It thus acquires a certain amount of reality and contributes to the true portrait of the colonized. (87-88)

This process of self-inflicted degradation is at work in the play. In the following quotation, African soldier Dièye, at Palissot’s service, states: “Allow me, Sergeant, to point out that our congenital stupidity is not our fault. We did not have the chance to be the heirs of a splendid civilization”¹⁸ (158). The ironic dimension of Dièye’s comments should not be overlooked. The passage, nevertheless, points to the internalization that consists in the transfer of the colonizers’ contempt for the colonized to the colonized themselves, who do not question their image but accept it. In addition, any attempt from the colonized to acquire the colonizer’s knowledge and expertise is completely disregarded by the colonizer. To Dièye who obtained his primary school degree (“certificat d’études”) three years ago, Palissot states: “And I, do I have it? Of course I don’t. I didn’t have the time, bastard. Bullshit. I don’t give a damn about the certificate”¹⁹ (158). The colonizers’ attitude is presented as inconsistent: when the colonized educate themselves within the colonial educational system, the colonizers hate and resent them even more.

¹⁸“Je me permettrai de vous faire remarquer, mon Sergent, que notre sottise congénitale n’est point de notre faute. Nous n’avons pas eu la chance d’être les héritiers d’une civilisation splendide.”

¹⁹“Et moi, je ne l’ai pas? Bien sûr que je ne l’ai pas! Je n’avais pas le temps, salaud. Conneries. Je n’en ai rien à foutre du certificat d’études.”

Despising African culture, Palissot is however deeply convinced of the “benefits of colonization.”²⁰ His words uphold stereotypes about France’s contribution to its colonial empire: “People that we have treated, fed, educated. Yesterday only the most sinister barbarians on the earth, they lived in miserable straw huts and now, thanks to colonization, they can die in ultramodern hospitals”²¹ (156). Because Palissot firmly believes in his cynical view of colonization, he fails to understand how the villagers of Sanankoro can refuse to contribute to the war effort. He takes the refusal as a sign of ingratitude—another flaw in the colonized’s picture that Memmi pointed out—, as an insult and an attempt by “Niggers” to “ridicule France.”²² Accordingly, the villagers’ behavior has to be severely punished. He is the one who, without hesitation, gave this unusual and inhuman order: “Kill only women, children and the elderly. Immortal France needs her soldiers”²³ (158). The army’s cruelty, already detectable when Palissot stated that by now the villagers should have been used to being hungry,²⁴ is here again underlined.

The play illustrates how colonialism leads to racism and to behavior unworthy of human beings. As Césaire pointed out in his book *Discourse on colonialism*, first published in French in 1955, “colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism” (35; italics are the author’s). The stereotypical image of the colonized as animals corresponds

²⁰“les bienfaits de la colonisation,” the expression appears in the text, but later, in General Modiano’s words

²¹“Des gens que nous avons soignés, nourris, éduqués. Hier encore les plus sinistres barbares de la terre, ils vivaient dans de misérables paillotes et maintenant, grâce à la colonisation, ils peuvent mourir dans des hôpitaux ultramodernes.”

²²“Des nègres qui veulent ridiculiser la France?” (156)

²³“Tuez seulement les femmes, les enfants et les vieillards. La France immortelle a besoin de ses soldats.”

²⁴“Qu’est-ce qu’ils attendent donc pour prendre l’habitude d’avoir faim?” (155)

to the real image of bestial colonizers: all French military characters are depicted as stupid and uneducated at best, and certainly as cruel and inhuman. They are embodiments of pure evil. To complete this image of the colonizers, a last trait is to be added: hypocrisy, which is perfectly reflected in the plan imagined by the French to get rid of the *tirailleurs*.

In the play, as in the historical accounts, what triggers the infantrymen's discontent is the poor way they are treated by the French commanders ("segregation, mistreatments, humiliations of all kinds"²⁵; 180), despite the fact that they risked their lives to defend the values of liberty and equality. The military authorities simply do not understand their demands for equality: "that's the first time," says General Modiano, "that I see Niggers express the slightest demand. Can you tell me what is going on?"²⁶ (180). Since the commanding officers remains deaf to their claims, the *tirailleurs* discuss the strategic possibility of holding one of them hostage. However, a traitor denounces them to General Modiano and claims they are planning to kill all the officers: "They intend to kill you all"²⁷ (192), which must have caused fear amongst the officers, since their lives were threatened. Yet, the play does not really evoke this feeling.²⁸ The narrator in *Le Temps de Tamango* explains why N'Dongo, the fictitious author, downplays the feeling of fear: "The Europeans were not threatened, they were by far the strongest, the infantrymen were not even organized. In fact, they killed them as if they were having fun, they had absolutely no fear"²⁹ (63). According to N'Dongo's perspective, Thiaroye reveals

²⁵"ségrégation, mauvais traitements, humiliations de toute sorte"

²⁶"c'est la première fois que je vois des Nègres formuler la moindre revendication. Veux-tu me dire ce qui se passe?"

²⁷"Ils ont l'intention de vous tuer tous."

²⁸The performance of the play could display, or keep silent, the growing fear.

²⁹"Les Européens n'étaient pas menacés, ils étaient de loin les plus forts, les tirailleurs n'étaient même pas organisés. D'ailleurs, ils les ont tués comme en s'amusant, ils n'avaient absolument pas peur."

the sadism of colonial officers who take pleasure in exterminating Africans.

Although the uprising needs to be curtailed, France also needs to save its face and maintain its reputation as a country where rights are respected:

Modiano. -Without any delay! I absolutely need a pretext to shoot them all!

Bachir. -That does not seem necessary! We need to act fast. What do we need a pretext for?

Modiano. -Watch what you are saying, Sergeant Bachir Diallo! France is a country of rights!³⁰ (194)

A Machiavellian plan is then fomented.

A preliminary step consists in calming down the infantrymen by lying to them and assuring them that their demands are not only justified but that they would lead to some measures that would improve their situation:

Moctar.-We insist as well to bring to your attention the injustices committed by the Whites towards us. . . .

Modiano.-Yes. Even more humiliating that we fought together for the same ideal of justice and human dignity. Unbearable! I am saying that it is unbearable! I will, without delay, take necessary measures³¹ (180).

³⁰“Modiano. -Sans plus tarder! Il me faut absolument un prétexte pour les faire fusiller tous!
Bachir. -Cela ne semble pas nécessaire! Il faut agir vite. Qu’avons-nous à faire d’un prétexte?
Modiano. -Prends garde à tes paroles, Sergent Bachir Diallo! La France est un pays de droit!”

³¹“Moctar.-Nous tenons également à porter à votre connaissance les injustices commises par les Blancs à notre égard. . . .

Modiano.-Oui. D’autant plus humiliantes que nous avons défendu ensemble le même idéal de justice et de dignité humaine. Intolérable! Je dis que c’est intolérable! Je vais prendre sans tarder les mesures énergiques qui s’imposent.”

Although he gives his word (“I swear it on my honor as officer”³²; 180), General Modiano had it in his mind to get rid of the rebels, betraying them and his vow: “I made a lot of promises to them. . . It’s just hot air. They will be shot when the time comes”³³ (181). Modiano, a General in the French army who should be a model of virtue, is depicted as a liar and hypocrite.

A pretext is found to open fire on the rebellious *tirailleurs*: “hindrance to the war effort because of misplaced demands”³⁴ (197). For the plan to succeed, it is important that everything happen fast and with precision: “the operation will occur exactly at 12.17 a.m. No rifleman should be alive by twelve thirty-two a.m.”³⁵ (197). That is the reason why the graves are dug out well in advance (“dig out the graves right now, because everything must be done quickly”³⁶; 197), and the villagers, who are sympathetic to the *tirailleurs*’ rebellion, are set back (“Villagers are definitely prohibited from coming closer than 30 feet from the camp”³⁷; 197), so that there will not be any embarrassing witnesses.

By the way they behave, talk and think, Sergeant Palissot and General Modiano appear as stereotypical characters used by Diop to render to the colonizers a pitiful image of themselves. The colonial system has transformed them into inhuman, cruel, immoral, and perverse individuals. Their behavior is associated with Nazi practices to the point that Naman states, in a hyperbolic way that indicates his rage and disgust: “I call anywhere on earth where more than two Whites are brought together a concentration camp”³⁸ (162). The Nazis’ and colonizers’ practices are

³²“Je vous le garantis sur mon honneur d’officier.”

³³“Je leur ai fait beaucoup de promesses. . . Du vent. Ils seront tous fusillés le moment venu.”

³⁴“entrave à l’effort de guerre par des revendications intempestives.”

³⁵“l’opération aura lieu exactement à minuit dix-sept. Plus aucun tirailleur ne devra être en vie à minuit trente-deux.”

³⁶“creuser dès à présent les tombes, car tout doit se faire très rapidement.”

³⁷“Interdiction formelle aux villageois de s’approcher de plus de cent mètres du camp.”

³⁸“J’appelle camp de concentration tout endroit sur cette terre où se trouvent réunis plus de deux

presented as equivalent, since they both aim at annihilating the human features in humans.

4.2.3 The African Perspective

The 1944 massacre of Thiaroye is associated in the play with the events that took place in 1940 in the Senegalese village of Sanankoro. There and then, the French army shot dead all women, children and the elderly of the village as punishment for resisting the order to send the healthy male villagers to the front in France. Naman, like the other men, was sent to France, which happened not only against his will, but also by the imposition of colonial force.

Naman is also one of the heads of the uprising in Thiaroye. For him, the massacre of Sanankoro belongs on the long list of atrocities that colonizers committed toward Africans:

We are all from all the tortured villages of Africa. I see the dead of Sanankoro and through them the dead of all the countries. I still feel the chains that surprised me while I was sleeping. I hear the innocent scream from my village, those who did not want to go to Strasbourg. I stand up in the center of Sanankoro, which does not exist anymore, but which settles back in the deepest fibers of the deepest part of my body³⁹ (164).

He expresses his feelings with powerful words that render the trauma he experienced.
Blancs.”

³⁹“Nous sommes tous de tous les villages suppliciés d’Afrique. Je vois les morts de Sanankoro et à travers eux ceux de tous les pays. Je sens encore les chaînes qui m’ont surpris en plein sommeil. J’entends les cris innocents de mon village, ceux qui ne voulaient pas aller à Strasbourg. Je suis debout au centre de Sanankoro qui n’existe plus mais qui se réinstalle dans les plus profondes fibres du plus profond de mon corps.”

enced and continues to experience “in the deepest fibers of the deepest part of [his] body,” the superlatives underscoring the depth of his pain.

Sanankoro and Thiaroye are connected to each other in two ways. First, they are linked by a cause-and-effect relationship: what happened in Sanankoro is one of the causes of the desire to rebel in Thiaroye. Second, they seem to belong to a repetitive chain of events, as the stage directions suggest at the end of the fifth scene: “Rifles gradually cover his voice. *Exactly the same as in the first scene. Wailing. . . , etc.*”⁴⁰ (198; emphasis mine). The emphasis stresses the similarity of the outcome for the two events: a bloody repression. The events are not only similar in their outcome but also in the motives that triggered them: the same will to put an end to unjust measures. In the end, the two uprisings seem to belong to a repetitive and recursive movement that led them to their irrevocable failure. Despite the seal of doom affixed on the events, in the mind of Naman, Thiaroye looks more like a necessary step toward a systematic struggle that Africans would eventually carry through⁴¹: “Our enemy. . . Altogether we have to try to shoot them. . . If they resist, others will continue what we already tried. . .”⁴² (172). In a way and in Naman’s view, a successful outcome is less important than the dynamics of rebellion that Thiaroye was believed to initiate.

The terms “rebellion” or “uprising” are used in the play, but only by the French army, which sees the discontent soldiers as a temporary problem that needs to be rapidly and brutally solved. On the contrary, the Africans see their actions as something more fundamental that should change their situations drastically. They want to wage their “war” on France. “*Guerre*” is indeed one of the terms they use

⁴⁰“Les fusils couvrent petit à petit sa voix. Exactement comme à la fin du premier tableau. Lamentations. . . , etc.”

⁴¹“une étape de la lutte des peuples d’Afrique” (190)

⁴²“Notre ennemi. . . Tous ensemble nous devons essayer de l’abattre. . . S’il résiste, d’autres continueront ce que nous avons essayé. . .”

to refer to their undertaking:

Seydina. -I think that we waged two wars [WWI and WWII] but that we never wage war⁴³ (162);

Seydina. -We have to prepare for the real fight⁴⁴ (163);

Naman. -We are at war! The real fight against the real enemies⁴⁵ (185).

These three quotations represent some sort of logical steps in the transition from reflection to action.

First, the infantrymen, represented by Seydina, become aware of the significance of the battles they fought on behalf of France. A negative parallelism at the level of the form—“we waged two wars” vs “we never waged war”—underscores the paradox of their situation: Africans fighting *for* France, whereas they should have waged war *against* France. The second quotation, arising naturally from the first, insists on the necessity of being resolute, thanks to a formula which marks the obligation—“We have to”—, as if it were a moral duty. Finally, the last quote, from Naman, is a sentence stated just before the outbreak of the revolt. The enthusiasm and exaltation for combat is marked by an exclamation point. The words, in particular the adjective “real,” have a performative effect, as if they were creating the “reality” of war just by shouting it.

African soldiers experience the feeling that they fought two wars for a cause which was stranger to them: “I saw comrades, brothers dying, their weapons in hand, for a cause which was not theirs”⁴⁶ (162). This feeling of “strangeness”

⁴³“Seydina. -Je pense que nous avons fait deux guerres mais que nous n’avons jamais fait la guerre.”

⁴⁴“Seydina. -Il nous faut préparer le vrai combat.”

⁴⁵“Naman. -Nous sommes en guerre! Le vrai combat contre les vrais ennemis.”

⁴⁶“J’ai vu des camarades, des frères mourir l’arme à la main, pour une cause qui n’était pas la leur.”

toward the European conflict is mainly due to the fact that the colonized populations could hardly see the justice and prosperity that the French colonization was supposed to bring them. For the colonized such as Naman, for instance, colonial France's practices are similar to the Nazis' treatment they received when they were prisoners of war: "I am from Sanankoro. I spent three years in Dachau and Buchenwald. Today it's Thiaroye. Another concentration camp"⁴⁷ (162). The obvious lack of interest in the European conflict was also due, very concretely, to the fact that it was happening in a remote place completely unknown to the vast majority of them. This is illustrated by the ironic question Naman asks to the head of the village at the beginning of the play: "Would it be possible to know where Strasbourg is located?... We would like to know where Strasbourg is located, this part of ourselves"⁴⁸ (152). Their motherland is the region in which they were born, certainly not France.

The point made in the play is that the concept of a just and fair struggle is a relevant one, to the extent that it will end "the extreme injustice"⁴⁹ (162). Resorting to an armed conflict is justified for at least two reasons. First of all, the motives to fight are worth it since getting rid of the colonizer is a matter of *survival*. Since they invaded Africa, not only have they massacred the indigenous populations, but they have devastated the natural environment to the point that the natives have no more resources and are slowly but surely starving: "the trees are nothing but dead wood, not the slightest green quivering of the slightest leaf but ceaselessly the scream of the woman and child..."⁵⁰ (148). The gravity of the content is emphasized by the

⁴⁷"Moi je suis de Sanankoro. J'ai passé trois ans à Dachau et à Buchenwald. Aujourd'hui c'est Thiaroye. Un autre camp de concentration."

⁴⁸"Pourrions-nous savoir où se trouve Strasbourg?... Nous voudrions savoir où se trouve Strasbourg, cette partie de nous-mêmes"

⁴⁹"la suprême injustice"

⁵⁰"les arbres ne sont plus que du bois mort, pas le moindre frémissement vert de la moindre feuille"

poetical force of the words. The silence of a devastated nature—superlatives, “the slightest,” render the seriousness of the situation—, serves as background stressing the disarray of human beings, in particular the most valuable, women and children.

The second reason that war is necessary is because dialogue has become impossible. The virtues of dialogue are certainly asserted in the play, if only ironically by the traitor Bachir who states: “There is no issue so difficult that it does not find its solution in the dialogue”⁵¹ (169). Yet, dialogue is doomed to fail, mainly because the French are depicted as having lost their sense of honor: they do not respect their given word any more. They are liars and hypocrites.

Since the enemy “combines force with ferocity”⁵² (172), the only way to stand up to it is by taking up weapons: “Give us guns and the world will be beautiful”⁵³ (174), says the Old Farba, one of the wise men of the village of Thiaroye. The sentence is almost oxymoronic, by its association of “guns” and war with the idea of beauty. Farba’s revolutionary formula proves the gravity of the colonial situation: for the colonized, war is better than a colonized Africa, since war at least offers the hope of another world to come.

The war envisioned in the play is not strictly reserved for the soldiers. It also involves the participation of the civil populations that agree with the necessity to wage war on the French: “The Toubabs [as Europeans were called in West Africa],” says Old Farba, “are crazy about war. . . If they don’t fight each other, they *force* us to fight against them. . . My sons, do not leave the camp if they do not do justice to you. Their money is useless but show that you have only one word”⁵⁴

mais sans cesse le cri de la femme et de l’enfant. . .”

⁵¹“Il n’est pas de problème si difficile qu’il ne trouve sa solution dans le dialogue.”

⁵²“allie la force à la férocité”

⁵³“Donnez-nous des fusils et le monde sera beau!”

⁵⁴“Les Toubabs ont la folie de la guerre. . . S’ils ne se battent pas entre eux, ils nous *obligent* à lutter contre eux. . . Mes fils, ne quittez pas le camp s’ils ne vous rendent pas justice. Leur argent ne

(178; emphases are mine). The Old Farba points to the main fracture between the supposedly backward and supposedly advanced civilizations: whereas the first one, the African, has not lost the meaning of the word “honor,” the second one, the European, has lost it to its hunger for money. The Old Farba analyzes the situation with accuracy and wisdom, as one would expect from an old man. His speech reaches the mind, when he evokes “justice,” as much as the heart, when he addresses the *tirailleurs* with the kind denomination of “my sons.” The infantrymen are incited to act, with the wise man’s blessing.

In the play, the uprising of Thiaroye is considered, by the ones who participated in it, as a step towards the liberation of colonized populations across Africa. The fight has definitely a pan-African dimension, underlined from the beginning of the play (second scene of the second *tableau*), since the stress has been put on the variety of the regions from which the *tirailleurs* originally come: “We are all from all the tortured villages of Africa,”⁵⁵ states Naman (164).

The play replaces the dichotomy Colonizer vs Colonized (White vs Black) with the opposition between Exploiter and Exploited (Master vs Slave). This is obvious from the very onset of the play, in the discussion between the villagers:

Third villager. -Stop it! We are not Niggers! What is a Nigger? Where does one meet such an animal? You know it: we are slaves. We are just slaves! . . . We are from the bad race of slaves who, at night, as we leave the master’s fields, go and howl at the sound of the tomtom instead of conspiring against the master!⁵⁶ (148)

sert à rien mais montrez que vous n’avez qu’une parole” (Emphases are mine).

⁵⁵“Nous sommes tous de tous les villages suppliciés d’Afrique.”

⁵⁶“Troisième villageois. -Arrête! Nous ne sommes pas des Nègres! Qu’est-ce qu’un Nègre? Où rencontre-t-on cet animal? Vous savez: nous sommes des esclaves. Nous ne sommes que des esclaves! . . . Nous sommes de la race mauvaise des esclaves qui, le soir, au sortir des champs du maître, va hurler au son du tam-tam au lieu de conspirer contre le maître!”

This passage illustrates how, from Senghor to Diop, the issue of colonialism has shifted from a discussion in terms of *essence*—the Senghorian Negritude—to a discussion in terms of *condition*—the relationship that links masters and slaves.

According to Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958), the nature of humanity, or the answer to the question “*Who am I?*,” is knowledge that can only be disclosed by a god. On the contrary, the answer to the question “*What am I?*” is the only one accessible to humans since it deals with the conditions of human existence. Moreover, the answer to this question remains open since there is always the possibility for humans to modify their conditions of existence, to the point, underscores Arendt, that “we may almost say that we have demonstrated even scientifically that, though we live now, and probably always will, under the earth’s condition, we are not mere earth-bound creatures” (11). In his play, Diop chooses immanence over transcendence and offers the characters the possibility of modifying their condition and of engaging with resistance: “We have to resist”⁵⁷ (151), “against the invader”⁵⁸ (150). The play, politically committed, calls for change. In terms of style, the many exclamation marks reflect the enthusiasm for action.

4.2.4 An African Self-Criticism

Diop’s play explores another painful aspect of colonization: the voluntary implication of Black people in the colonial process, on the side of the colonizers, for pecuniary benefits, and to the detriment of their own kin that they were ready to betray. His play is therefore also a criticism directed at Africans themselves, that Diop does not hesitate to harshly judge.

The play calls attention to the fact that colonizers took advantage of social

⁵⁷“Nous devons résister.”

⁵⁸“contre l’envahisseur”

inequalities or disparities that existed before the colonial era. This aspect is underlined in the very first scene of the play when the head of Sanankoro, Makhary, encourages his subjects to join the French army and to participate in a combat from which he himself is exempted. His speech reveals that for him, colonization proved to be beneficial since it reinforced his position of power. Makhary's words to Naman, who challenged Makhary's commitment to his people, demonstrates that Makhary has a strong sense of his hierarchical position: “(*Howling.*) On your knees! Slave, slave's son, on your knees!”⁵⁹ (153; the italics are the authors's and signal the stage directions). Hence, colonization was not disadvantageous for all strata of society. It actually reinforced structures based on social inequalities that existed in the traditional communities well before colonization. The “struggle” (“*lutte*”; 190) that the *tirailleurs* and the villagers want to initiate is not only against the colonizer, it is more broadly against the oppressor, the ones who hold power and outrageous wealth: colonizers in particular, masters more generally. For the rebels of Thiaroye, getting rid of the colonial power is a first step to create a fairer society, free of social discrepancies.

Without complacency towards the colonizers, Diop's play also denounces Africans who collaborated with the colonial power. According to the play, the failure of the uprising is precisely due to a betrayal from the African side—and not to a lack of organization (“We have to succeed! Let's organize ourselves and let's act without pity,”⁶⁰ says Naman; 190) as it was the case in Sanankoro, Dièye rightly predicted: “They won't be able to organize themselves”⁶¹ (157). The figure of the traitor is used to represent the ethical perfidy of Africans who participated in

⁵⁹“Makhary. -(*Dans un hurlement.*) A terre! Esclave, fils d'esclave, à terre!” (The italics are the authors's and signal the stage directions)

⁶⁰“Il nous faut réussir! Soyons organisés et sans pitié!”

⁶¹“Ils ne sauront pas s'organiser.”

the colonial mistreatment of their own people. Several characters in the play are traitors.

In Sanankoro, a traitor is identifiable in the character of Makhary, the head of the village, who, in complicity with the French, has no difficulty at all in encouraging the young males of his village to go to war. Whereas the whole village is starving, Makhary benefits from a “magnificent prosperity” (“magnifique prospérité”; 153) which implies that in exchange for his collaboration with the colonial power, he receives non-negligible pecuniary compensation. The griot is on the traitors’ side as well since his task is to flatter Makhary and to threaten the population: “The chief arrives. A month of hard labor and fifteen days of imprisonment for any absent”⁶² (151). Finally, the educated Dièye is not only a traitor, he is a coward and a liar: “Listen, brothers, the Whites’ will is superior to ours. . . Go and fight like lions, we will take care of your family”⁶³ (154).

In Thiaroye, Bachir has replaced Dièye on the side of those who betray their people. His identity is obvious to everybody, since one of the *tirailleurs*, Kalidou, even calls him a traitor: “You have the delicate skin of traitors”⁶⁴ (165). Bachir himself is well aware of his role since with cynicism he states to General Modiano: “I am a filth necessary to colonization”⁶⁵ (181). There is also one character called “The traitor” (“Le traître”; 192-93) who reveals to General Modiano the infantrymen’s plan to hold the officers hostage and to take control of the weapons.

The dialogue between the Traitor and the General lasts for approximately seven exchanges only; yet, in the reference to “the values of Negro-African civi-

⁶²“Le chef arrive. Un mois de travaux forcés et quinze jours de prison pour tout absent.”

⁶³“Écoutez, mes frères, la volonté des Blancs est une volonté supérieure la nôtre. . . . Allez vous battre comme des lions, nous veillerons ce que rien ne manque vos familles.

⁶⁴“Tu as la peau délicate des traîtres.”

⁶⁵“Je suis une ordure nécessaire à la colonisation.”

lization,” one can obviously detect a harsh criticism of Senghor and his politics⁶⁶:

Modiano. -Get rid of your mask so that I can see you; we need men like you. (*The traitor turns his back towards the audience -slap in the face.*)
You don't react? Does that please you to receive slaps in the face?

The Traitor. -I am a man of dialogue, my General.

Modiano. -Exactly what we need. With a little chance you will become one day head of State. . . You know, my son, you should never get rid of your mask. It symbolizes the values of the Negro-African civilisation. We might need them one day to reign.

The Traitor. -(*With complicity.*) A word to the wise is enough!

Modiano. -(*Beside himself.*) No familiarities! Shirker! Go to the devil!⁶⁷ (193; the italics are the author's and signal the stage directions)

This passage is central in many ways. At the level of the plot, it is crucial, since the

⁶⁶The criticism affecting Senghor in the play echoes another one in the novel *Le Temps de Tamango*, that scholar Fredric Michelman (60) points out:

the country is governed by a pedantic president for whom reaffirmations of 'black African values' take the place of policy statements. He is the one who allows the affairs of the state. . . to be managed by French 'advisers.' This leader at times addresses his fawning cabinet in blank verse, an obvious allusion to the foremost champion of Negritude, ex-poet-president Senghor.

⁶⁷“Modiano. -Enlève ton masque, que je te voie; nous avons besoin d'hommes comme toi. (*Le traître tourne le dos au public -gifle.*) Tu ne réagis pas? Cela te fait plaisir de recevoir des gifles?

Le Traître. -Je suis un homme de dialogue, mon Général.

Modiano. -Exactement ce qu'il nous faut. Avec un peu de chance tu seras un jour chef d'Etat. . . Tu sais, mon garçon, il ne faut jamais enlever ton masque. Il symbolise les valeurs de civilisation négro-africaines. Nous en aurons peut-être besoin un jour pour régner.

Le Traître. - (*Complice.*) A bon entendeur!

Modiano. -(*Hors de lui.*) Pas de familiarités! Fumiste! Au diable!” (The italics are the author's and signal the stage directions)

Traitor's disclosure entails the ruin of the *tirailleurs*' plan and lives. From the staging viewpoint, the scene is of great significance since the reasons for the uprising's failure are embodied in the Traitor. In other words, the explanation provided for the failure is not only stated, it is also shown and even *performed* by means of a scenic device, a character. Finally, the scene is of significance regarding the way Africans and African values are considered: they are just means to make colonization prevail.

The passage harshly criticizes the diplomatic strategy, based on "dialogue." The very possibility of dialogue in this scene is prevented mainly because, as Spivak (1988) would put it, the subaltern remains in the position of a subaltern and is not allowed to access a level equivalent to the one occupied by the one who holds power. Modiano does not show any respect for his interlocutor and even slaps him in the face. In the circumstances, the dialogue is just a cover, a veneer under which the hegemonic discourse of inequality continues to have effect. As the scene reveals, the hegemonic discourse is particularly vicious since it is based on the supposed acknowledgements of the Other's values, the "values of the Negro-African civilisation"⁶⁸ (193). It nevertheless remains an hegemonic discourse in that it aims to maintain the power in the hands of the ones who hold it, guaranteeing the smooth transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism: "We," says Modiano, "might need them one day to reign"⁶⁹ (193). In that context, African leaders are just puppets in the hands of Europeans. African values and traditions are nothing but instruments to maintain European power.

This fact is symbolized by the use of the mask. A symbol of African civilization, it has a depreciative meaning in the play since it embodies deceit and hypocrisy. Overall, the scene is extremely negative. It points out the Europeans'

⁶⁸"valeurs de civilisation négro-africaines"

⁶⁹"Nous en aurons peut-être besoin un jour pour régner."

manipulative skills and thus immorality without giving any positive counterpart. On the Africans' side indeed, the ambition for power at all cost supersedes any sense of honor and self-esteem.

Instead of focusing on the repressive aspect of Thiaroye, which is not overlooked however, the play presents the events of Thiaroye as the start, the impulse of an armed and yet justified uprising aiming to liberate the African continent from colonialism and more generally, from any submission. Diop therefore suggests that an alternative to the Senghorian diplomatic model exists, a model based on the existence of a "just war" and maybe inspired by the Marxist class struggle. Compared to the diplomatic model, the model of liberation suggested in the play is of course more radical and violent, and less consensual, even less hypocritical. At least this alternative, in the play, is not, as the diplomatic model is, the explicit root of neo-colonialism.

Yet, Diop does not simply and wholeheartedly embrace the combative model; while proposing it, he criticizes it. Within the play, the revolutionary model is contested to the extent that it is obvious that the rebels have not seriously thought about the post-revolutionary era. Of course, the desire to live in an egalitarian society is explicit; yet, there is no concrete plan as to how to achieve it:

Kouadio. -And afterwards?

Naman. -I don't know... I really don't know! What is sure is that we have finally become men!...

Kouadio. -And after all this?

Naman. -We will see... We will see... Ah! It will be beautiful!⁷⁰ (190)

⁷⁰“Kouadio. -Et après?

Naman. -Je ne sais pas... Je ne sais vraiment pas! Tout ce qui est sûr c'est que nous sommes enfin

The rebels behave like Tamango: they do not anticipate the way the post-revolutionary society should actually work. This could lead to the failure of the rebellion itself, if it had not been repressed.

In 1981, the assessment made by Diop on the status of the African independence was very pessimistic. The play is an African self-criticism, in which Diop, without necessarily willing to respond to them, raises the crucial and painful issues of Africans' own involvement in the misery of colonialism and the nightmare of neo-colonialism. The African values and culture are used by Diop to undermine the African civilization, involved in its own physical and spiritual death.

4.3 Doumbi-Fakoly's *Morts pour la France*: Thiaroye as a Key Episode to Understanding (Neo-) Colonialism

Like Boubacar Boris Diop, who is two years his junior, Doumbi-Fakoly represents the figure of the African intellectual. "African," instead of "Malian," even though he was born in Mali and grew up in Senegal, Doumbi-Fakoly, like other writers and artists considered in this study, has been anxious to promote pan-Africanism, as evidenced by his essay dating back to 1997, *Le Guide du panafricaniste (The Pan-Africanist's Guide)*. Trained in France as a banker, Doumbi-Fakoly chose to be heard as an essayist. His latest essay, published in 2006, *La Colonisation. L'Autre crime contre l'humanité—le cas de la France coloniale (Colonization, the Other Crime Against Humanity—The Case of Colonial France)* advocates, as the title in-

devenus des hommes! . . .

Kouadio. -Et après tout ça?

Naman. -Nous verrons. . . Nous verrons. . . Ah ce sera beau!"

dicates, the recognition of the colonial enterprise as a crime against humankind. In this essay, Doumbi-Fakoly first lists and characterizes the various “crimes of colonization”⁷¹ (59): “spiritual diversion”⁷² (59), “linguistic terrorism”⁷³ (63), “mental abuse”⁷⁴ (65), “institutionalized rape”⁷⁵ (69), “attempts to divide Africans”⁷⁶ (70), “raising of African armies to serve as cannon fodder”⁷⁷ (70), “economic hold up”⁷⁸ (72), “breaking up of society”⁷⁹ (75), “destruction of health and scientific facilities”⁸⁰ (76) and “humiliation in human zoos”⁸¹ (78). Then, he calls for an African “burst of dignity”⁸² (109) that should trigger the “rehabilitation of African values”⁸³ (110), by “reconquering financial independence”⁸⁴ (114) and “developping budgets”⁸⁵ (116) in education, health and so on.

The tone of this essay is the same as the one found in a pamphlet Doumbi-Fakoly published on the Internet “Nicolas Sarkozy est revenu nous insulter sur nos terres,”⁸⁶ in response to the French president’s speech at the University of Dakar in July 2006 and to which I refer in the introduction of this study. To the disastrous evils of colonization, Doumbi-Fakoly proposes the solution of an “African

⁷¹“crimes de la colonisation”

⁷²“détournement spirituel”

⁷³“terrorisme linguistique”

⁷⁴“détournement mental”

⁷⁵“viol institutionnalisé”

⁷⁶“tentative de division des Africains”

⁷⁷“levée d’armées africaines ‘chair à canon’”

⁷⁸“hold-up économique”

⁷⁹“éclatement de la société”

⁸⁰“destruction des structures sanitaires et scientifiques”

⁸¹“humiliation dans les zoos humains”

⁸²“sursaut de dignité”

⁸³“réhabilitation des valeurs africaines”

⁸⁴“reconquête de l’indépendance financière”

⁸⁵“élaboration de budgets”

⁸⁶“Nicolas Sarkozy came to insult us on our own land,” the pamphlet is available on the following website: http://www.africamaat.com/article.php3?id_article=983, consulted on 8 April 2008.

Renaissance”⁸⁷ (“African Rebirth”; 5) or the “reappropriation of the entire Tradition bequeathed by the Ancestors”⁸⁸ (8). These socio-political concerns go hand in hand with Doumbi-Fakoly’s literary career that started twenty-five years ago. His novels tackle social, political or historical issues and target different audiences, from African youth to African women. In *Certificat de contrôle anti-sida* (*Anti-Aids Certificate of Inspection*; 1988), for instance, he explores the impact of Aids on families, whereas in *Un Mariage forcé* (*A Forced Marriage*; 1999), he invites a younger audience to reflect on the arbitrary constraints of society. Novels like *Bilal le prophète* (*Bilal, the Prophet*; 1992) or *La Révolte des Galsénésiennes* (*The Galsenesians’ Revolt*; 1994) are reviving the historical trend opened by the author in his first novel, *Morts pour la France* (*Dead for France*), published in 1983.

4.3.1 *Morts pour la France* or The *Tirailleurs sénégalais*’ Saga

Because the novel is dedicated to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* that participated in the 1914-18 and 1939-45 conflicts, *Morts pour la France* can be considered as the narrative equivalent of *Hosties noires* by Senghor. Both works praised the infantrymen’s courage, dedication and spirit of sacrifice, as their title, *Morts pour la France* and *Hosties noires*, suggest. In many respects, however, and mainly because *Morts pour la France* is also an open criticism of French (neo-)colonialism, the comparison with Senghor must remain minimal.

The novel is made up of twenty-one chapters. Thiaroye is described in the eighteenth chapter, whereas chapters 19, 20 and 21 are concerned with Senegalese independence. The first seventeen chapters, that are considered in this section, are

⁸⁷The topic of another of his essays, *Afrique, la Renaissance* (*Africa, the Rebirth*) published in 2000.

⁸⁸“la réappropriation de toute la Tradition léguée par [l]es Ancêtres.”

devoted to describe the saga of the Senegalese infantrymen who participated, in a variety of ways, in the Second World War. The novel recounts the infantrymen's trip from Africa to Europe, and then back to Africa, where the evils of colonialism have been exacerbated by the war. The novel is a salute to the infantrymen that are presented not as a group, or as a type, but as individuals with a somewhat developed psychology: feelings, hopes, and aspirations. This narrative technique creates a deep sympathy for the painful experiences each of them underwent.

At the beginning of the novel, in November 1939, ten thousand infantrymen, ready to join the frontlines, board the *Normandy*. Doumbi-Fakoly focuses on a dozen of them, whose ups and downs are described throughout the novel; Dieudonné, Cissoko Bourama, Bodian Alphonse, Paul Koffi, Diop Mactar are the ones with whom readers become more familiar. I will briefly describe the most relevant circumstances and/or characteristics concerning them.

Dieudonné, known as Verdun, is an ex-serviceman from WWI, whose experience made him “crazy” (“fou”), although he still has “moments of lucidity”⁸⁹ (9): “The white officers’ excesses, the senseless death of his friend, and his dismissal from the army had finally pushed him over the edge”⁹⁰ (9), meaning that he had lost his mind. He nevertheless sets out for the second European conflict: the war requires bodies, not necessarily sane minds.

Like Verdun, Cissokho Bourama is a “veteran of the Marne”⁹¹ (12), whose grandfather had been recruited by Faidherbe (13), the governor of Senegal, who under Napoleon created the military corps of the *tirailleurs*. Cissokho Bourama comes from “a large family of warriors,”⁹² his ancestors were indeed “warlords of

⁸⁹“des moments de lucidité”

⁹⁰“Les excès des officiers blancs, la mort absurde de son ami, et son renvoi de l’armée avaient fini par le basculer de l’autre côté de la barrière.”

⁹¹“vétérans de la Marne”

⁹²“une grande famille guerrière”

bloodthirsty sovereigns”⁹³ (13). In the novel, history is not a set of dates and battles, it is made up of experiences lived by individuals and their relatives. Moreover, Doumbi-Fakoly emphasizes how the pasts of African families are affected by the colonial experience. Some African soldiers involved in WWII came from a long line of soldiers, and it just so happened that they fought in the service of France.

In addition to references to colonial history, through his characters Doumbi-Fakoly underscores the complexity of the colonial situation. As I mentioned previously, France had established a special status for the residents of the four *communes*, Dakar, Saint-Louis, Gorée, and Rufisque. Their status distinguished them from the other inhabitants in West Africa, who were mere subjects of the empire. This discriminatory practice took place in the colonial army as well.⁹⁴ In the novel, as in real life, most of the soldiers were French subjects, like Bodian Alphonse, or Paul Koffi (10-11). By contrast, Corporal Diop Mactar, described as a “sycophant”⁹⁵ (10), is also identified as a French citizen. This pejorative nickname points to the fact that the preferential treatment granted by the French colonial administration led to discord among Africans, which served the interests of the empire: “Divide and conquer.”

Once the soldiers arrive in Europe, the novel focuses on their diverse experiences: combat, defeat, concentration camp, participation in the resistance network, and inclusion in the Free French army. Upon their arrival in 1939, one group of soldiers joined up with “their units of assignment along the Italian border and in other southern garrisons”⁹⁶ (21) whereas another group departed “for the fronts of

⁹³“les chefs de guerre de souverains sanguinaires”

⁹⁴This was confirmed by the paper Jacqueline Woodfork presented during the conference *Wars and Conflicts in Africa* (March 27-29), entitled “Making Soldiers for France: Senegalese Troops in the Second World War.”

⁹⁵“lèche-cul”

⁹⁶“leurs unités d’affectation le long de la frontière italienne et dans les autres garnisons du sud”

the Somme, the Ardennes and the Marne”⁹⁷ (21) where they faced, along with European soldiers, the phony war (27), and then the short combat that led to France’s crushing defeat.

Following the debacle of May 9, 1940 (40), some soldiers, including Koffi Paul, were captured by the Germans and sent to concentration camps (45; 95), where they suffered many abuses. Koffi Paul’s tragic end is described later in the novel, in the following terms:

He finally left the universe of concentration camps through the gates of the monstrous dissection room and crematorium. Only Else Koch, the bitch of Buchenwald, kept a piece of his body. In her bedroom, a bedside lamp provided the essential lighting for her lovemaking, through the skin of an ebony infantryman transformed into a lampshade⁹⁸ (95-96).

As for his companion in the camp of Buchenwald, Bodian Alphonse, he was liberated by an American soldier, with whom, however, communication proved impossible, dispelling the dream of a non-problematic pan-Africanism: “Bodian Alphonse was pained to know that no conversation was possible with this brother. . . . The African-American soldier realized, in turn, that dialogue was excluded”⁹⁹ (112).

In this context of experiences in Nazi concentration camps, the narrator recounts the story of captain N’Tchoréré, known for having defied an order from a

⁹⁷“les fronts de la Somme, des Ardennes et de la Marne”

⁹⁸“Il quitta définitivement l’univers concentrationnaire, par les portes monstrueuses de la chambre de dissection et du four crématoire. Seule Else Koch, la chienne de Buchenwald, conserva une parcelle de son corps. Dans sa chambre à coucher, une lampe de chevet dispensait la lumière tamisée indispensable à ses ébats amoureux, grâce à la peau d’ébène du tirailleur, transformé en abat-jour.”

⁹⁹“Bodian Alphonse était peiné de savoir qu’aucune conversation n’était possible avec ce frère. . . . L’Afro-Américain réalisa, à son tour, que le dialogue était exclu.”

German officer: “Now, officers on one side, soldiers on the other, added the commander. This new order was addressed only to the group of whites. After the formation of the groups, a Nigger advanced toward the French officers”¹⁰⁰ (55). The captain was shot without any protest from the French officers (10), which saddened him. N’Tchoréré’s death is interpreted by himself as having an honorary dimension that makes his sacrifice one for the cause of Africans:

Infantryman Bongo Albert, explain to my men, he said in his dialect, to my brothers, that the idea of renouncing my race is far from me. On the contrary, it is the respect for the black man that made me join the white officers. It is necessary that the German also knows that the Negro has the same intellectual capacity that can make him an officer in the army of any white¹⁰¹ (56).

It is important to notice the shift symbolized by N’Tchoréré’s death: to die for Africa replaces the concern of dying for France.

In addition to experiences in concentration camps, other experiences lived by the infantrymen are presented in the novel. Some, such as Diop Mactar and Togoma Kanou Bemba, joined the resistance network in France (64; 79; 97), which, in the novel, echoes the indigenous resistance in Dakar, led by Gorgui N’Diaye (70-71). The author underlines the many aspects of African contribution to (the outcome of) the war.

¹⁰⁰“Maintenant les officiers d’un côté, les subalternes de l’autre, avait ajouté le commandant. Cette nouvelle injonction avait été adressée uniquement au groupe de blancs. Après la formation des groupes un Nègre avait avancé vers les officiers français.”

¹⁰¹“Tirailleur Bongo Albert, explique à mes hommes, avait-il dit dans son dialecte, à mes frères, que l’idée de renier ma race est bien loin de moi. C’est au contraire pour le respect de l’homme noir que je me suis mis avec les officiers blancs. Il faut que l’Allemand lui aussi sache que le Nègre est doté des mêmes capacités intellectuelles qui peuvent faire de lui un officier dans l’armée de n’importe quel blanc.”

Other infantrymen yet joined the Free French army and fought in the second division of Free France, led by General Leclerc. With a certain defeatism, the narrator notes that this division was renamed “Second Armored Division”¹⁰² (77), “appellation which silenced, voluntarily or involuntarily, the presence of *tirailleurs*, all infantrymen”¹⁰³ (77).

The European epic of the African infantrymen ends with the liberation of Buchenwald and the surrender of Germany in May 1945. The survivors are preparing to go back to Africa: “the journey to Africa began a few weeks later on a cold and sunny morning, in the silence of anonymity”¹⁰⁴ (113).

The representation of Thiaroye, studied in the next section, is thus only one episode among many others in the novel. The chapter devoted to it is barely ten pages long. I argue that it is nonetheless crucial in the economy of the novel because the event is an interpretative key to understanding the events that preceded it, the *tirailleurs*’ fate during WWII, as much as those that followed, the political status of African independence—no other document of the corpus does *explicitly* tackle the consequences of Thiaroye. In order to comprehend the significance of Thiaroye for the *tirailleurs* as well as for Africa, Doumbi-Fakoly resorts to different narrative techniques, emphasized in the next sections: the postponement of Thiaroye to 1945 instead of 1944, the cynical scene of the dignitaries’ meeting, the development of characters, in particular Diop Mactar, the growing intervention of the narrator with bitter and satirical comments.

¹⁰²“deuxième division blindée”

¹⁰³“appellation qui mettait sous silence, volontairement ou involontairement, la présence des tirailleurs, tous fantassins.”

¹⁰⁴“Le voyage en terre africaine commença quelques semaines plus tard, par une matinée ensoleillée et glaciale, dans le silence de l’anonymat.”

4.3.2 The Chapter dedicated to Thiaroye

In this section, I discuss the main traits characterizing Doumbi-Fakoly's depiction of Thiaroye: the wrong date, the reason for the infantrymen's discontent, their desire to enter into a dialogue with the French authorities, the French's hypocritical reaction, and the degrading situation that led to the mutiny/massacre. It is worth noting that Doumbi-Fakoly is the only author of the corpus that uses the word "mutiny" (116) to refer to the events. He therefore explicitly recognizes that the rebellion was a military uprising and also implicitly acknowledges that the French authority's reprisal had to follow: a mutiny must be punished.

In *Morts pour la France*, the mutiny and massacre of Thiaroye takes place in November-December 1945, whereas it actually occurred one year earlier.¹⁰⁵ What can explain this blatant historical error? So obvious that one may make the assumption that the author made it on purpose. Reasons internal to the economy of the novel explain this. By temporally situating the mutiny in 1945, the author places it after the liberation of the camp of Buchenwald. He explicitly establishes this connection in the text,¹⁰⁶ as mentioned earlier: the "trip to African soil"¹⁰⁷ occurred in the wake of the fall of Buchenwald, the capitulation, and the Armistice (113). The jubilation following the Liberation actually allowed the return: "And the return became an accessible dream for the infantrymen"¹⁰⁸ (113).

¹⁰⁵In reality, the soldiers arrived on African soil on December 21, 1944 and the mutiny was put down on the night of November 30 to December 1. In the novel, they arrived in Dakar at the end of November 1945 and are massacred "at the beginning of the second week of December 1945... towards the end of the morning" ("au début de la deuxième semaine de décembre 1945... vers la fin de la matinée"; 129).

¹⁰⁶In his film, Sembene Ousmane also establishes that link and makes the mistake, although no explicit mention of dates confirms it. Yet, Pays, one of the characters, is a soldier mentally scarred by the experience in the camp of Buchenwald.

¹⁰⁷"voyage en terre africaine"

¹⁰⁸"Et le retour au pays devient un rêve accessible pour les tirailleurs."

The clear link between Buchenwald and Thiaroye is strengthened by the character of Alphonse Bodian. The same prisoner that the African American soldier liberated from the Nazi camp will be shot in a French camp. The irony, which consists of Bodian Alphonse being treated by a supposedly anti-racist France in a worse way than the Nazis, is thus underscored, especially in this passage: “They had passed through the mesh of death, more present to the front. They were not aware that the appointment had been set on African soil. There was among the victims. . . Bodian Alphonse who was however released from his condition as sub-human”¹⁰⁹ (131). By establishing a parallel between Thiaroye and Buchenwald, the author thus equates France with Germany. This echoes the feeling expressed by the soldiers during their discussion in “little white”¹¹⁰: “The French and the Germans are all the same. The French are now angry at the Germans because the Germans did. . . what the French did to us”¹¹¹ (128). France is explicitly denounced as acting the same way that Nazi Germany did.

Another reason that may have motivated Doumbi-Fakoly to move the date of the Thiaroye events is that in doing so, in the fictitious world of the novel, this revolt follows the proclamation of independence of Vietnam, by Hô Chi Minh on September 2, 1945, and France’s repression of struggles for liberation. It underscores the inconsistency of France toward the rights of people to self-determination (Bénot 51-54) and reinforces the idea that the repression of Thiaroye was meant to be “preventive” (Bénot 77), given France’s fear of completely losing its empire.

¹⁰⁹“Ils étaient passés au travers des mailles serrées de la mort plus présente au front. Ils ignoraient que le rendez-vous avait été fixé en terre africaine. Il y avait parmi les victimes. . . Bodian Alphonse qui était pourtant sorti de sa condition de sous-humain.”

¹¹⁰I repeat here the term used by Mauritanian filmmaker Med Hondo (Leahy 4) to describe the pidgin used in West Africa. To use that term is meant to mock the phrase used by the colonists “little nigger” (“*petit nègre*,” in French).

¹¹¹“Lui et lé Alléman kif-kif. Lui minténant il a faché contré lé Alléman, paci qui lé Alléman il a fait. . . cé qué lui il a fait à nous.”

This situation is well reflected in the interior monologue of the officer who, filled with doubt and fear, finally gives the order to fire on the rebels:

The officer suddenly quivered. What dirty fly had bitten his infantrymen? How was it possible that the order remained ineffective? What danger threatened him? And what risks was the Empire running? These Negroes more or less enlightened by the cohabitation on the fronts with other peoples, were they affected by the revolutionary virus which was eating the Vietnamese people?¹¹² (130)

The revolt of Thiaroye is associated by Doumbi-Fakoly to a broader and more ambitious destiny: the liberation of oppressed peoples from colonial rule. However, in the novel, the repatriated African infantrymen are in transit to Vietnam. In inventing this situation, the author, via the narrator's voice, recalls the dirty work that the infantrymen have done since the inception of their corps:

So, the infantrymen were mobilized, again. Since they had the exclusivity of thankless tasks. Precisely those that consisted in taking the dignity of others to make gifts to imperial France. And those that consisted in scattering the same obstacles, that they had just swept aside, along the road to freedom taken by a responsible people, so that imperial France could get back her confiscated honor¹¹³ (124).

¹¹²“L’officier trembla soudain. Quelle sale mouche avait donc piqué ses tirailleurs? Comment était-il possible que son ordre restât sans effet? Quel danger le menaçait-il? Et quels risques couraient l’Empire? Ces Nègres plus ou moins décillés [*sic*] par la cohabitation sur les fronts avec d’autres peuples, étaient-ils touchés par le virus révolutionnaire qui rongait le peuple du Vietnam?”

¹¹³“Alors, on mobilisa les tirailleurs, de nouveau. Puisqu’ils avaient l’exclusivité des tâches ingrates. Précisément celles qui consistaient à prendre la dignité d’autrui pour en faire cadeau à la France impériale. Et celles qui consistaient à parsemer la route de la liberté, empruntée par un peuple responsable, des mêmes obstacles qu’ils venaient de balayer pour que la France impériale retrouvât son honneur confisqué.”

The narrator's comments are uncompromising: he harshly judges the infantrymen not only for serving France, but worse, for quelling colonized peoples wanting to liberate themselves from the colonial power. However, the comments are also tinged with a certain compassion, as if the soldiers were not totally responsible for being colonial France's instruments. This can be noted in the implied opposition between "a *responsible* people" (my italics) and infantrymen, who would not be responsible. Therefore, the mutiny of Thiaroye takes on a more dramatic dimension: it is all the more significant since it is made by those who have always been the fervent supporters of the empire.

In the novel, the only reason claimed as having triggered discontent in the repatriated infantrymen of Thiaroye is the extremely low exchange rate offered by the colonial administration: "The exchange rate imposed by the colonial authorities were, in fact, so disgusting that the most submissive slave in the world could not resign to accept it"¹¹⁴ (125). The soldiers obviously wanted to establish a dialogue with the authorities and sent, to this end, a delegation. Among the chosen men, there is Diop Mactar. "Citizen" ("citoyen"; 10) of West Africa, he was previously described as a "corporal" and a "sycophant"¹¹⁵ (10-11). Yet, in Europe, he became a member of the Resistance and was trained with the "techniques of urban guerrilla"¹¹⁶ (64).

Diop Mactar's change of attitude, from extreme submission to revolt, perfectly illustrates Tunisian writer Albert Memmi's words. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi underlines the fact that liberation movements blossomed after WWII because the event "did not only... imprudently teach the colonized the tech-

¹¹⁴"Le taux de change imposé par les autorités coloniales était, en effet, si révoltant que l'esclave le plus soumis au monde ne pouvait se résigner à l'accepter.

¹¹⁵"caporal-chef," "lèche-cul"

¹¹⁶"techniques de la guerilla urbaine"

nique of guerilla warfare, but it also reminded them of the possibility of aggressive and free action” (94). In this context, Thiaroye is seen not only as a harbinger of liberation struggles that engulfed the empire, but also as having its source in the varied experiences of combat carried out by the infantrymen during the war.

Despite the infantrymen’s desire to negotiate, the “legitimacy of their claim”¹¹⁷ (125) is opposed by “the unwillingness of the colonial authorities”¹¹⁸ (126) who finally demonstrated “great hypocrisy”¹¹⁹ (126). Indeed, before being shot dead by “four infantrymen who had never left the camp of Thiaroye and three white non-commissioned officers”¹²⁰ (130), the infantrymen discovered that they had been victims of “treason” (“trahison”; 130).

The situation between soldiers and officers is deteriorating gradually. The soldiers feel “the need for a common approach that would irrevocably lead to victory”¹²¹ (127). During a discussion that they are forced, against their will, to have in French, since “the variety of dialects would leave no solution”¹²² (127), the soldiers realized, after a slight hesitation,¹²³ that it was better, for their common good and the success of their cause, to be united, rather than divided (127). This conclusion is somewhat a response to a remark made by a soldier at the very beginning of the book: “If all villages were to say no at the same time, would the toubabou [word

¹¹⁷“revendication légitime”

¹¹⁸“la mauvaise volonté des autorités coloniales”

¹¹⁹“une grande hypocrisie”

¹²⁰“quatre tirailleurs qui n’avaient jamais quitté le camp de Thiaroye, et trois sous-officiers blancs.”

¹²¹“la nécessité d’une démarche commune irrévocable qui devait mener à la victoire.”

¹²²“la diversité des dialectes ne laissait aucune solution”; it is interesting to note that the narrator speaks of “the mental gymnastics that engaged the soldiers to speak French” (“la gymnastique intellectuelle à laquelle se livraient les tirailleurs pour s’exprimer en français”; 127). Reading the passage in pidgin proves to be an arduous exercise for readers. In doing so, the author presents a shift in perspective, while introducing us to the difficulty of pidgin. In the same way as any descriptive linguist, the author gives us a non-prescriptive vision of the language, devoid of value judgements.

¹²³Considering they have to provide their families with financial support, some soldiers think that perhaps they should accept the exchange rate in order to have some money to bring back, rather than nothing (127).

used by Africans to refer to the Whites] be able to treat us as he does now? I believe Salifou Oudraago who says that we must mix with the toubabou to know their habits in order to better combat them”¹²⁴ (35-36). The mutiny of Thiaroye is thus interpreted as the culmination of a long preparation, made on the European fronts, for the struggles of liberation from colonial rule.

Since “the colonial authorities still did not deign to offer a middle solution that would bring both sides closer”¹²⁵ (128), the situation of protest hardened to the point where the infantrymen opted for “fighting until the end”¹²⁶ (128). It should be noted that in a commentary from the narrator—and not the characters—, French motivations are explored: “Perhaps the stubborn attitude of the colonial authorities was dictated by the policy of budgetary austerity adopted by all the countries harshly affected by the war? Maybe the capital, which France needed to get back on her feet and revive her economy, could only come from fleecing the infantrymen?”¹²⁷ (128-29). The possible reasons for French reprisal are stated with biting irony: it did not suffice that many infantrymen lost their lives for France, the survivors had to be swindled in order for the metropolis to get back on its feet. The infantrymen are presented as a military corps that France exploited as much as possible, without any feelings of guilt.

To the French pretexts, the narrator opposes the determination of the African soldiers: “The infantrymen were aware of their right to receive their due and did not

¹²⁴“Si tous les villages disaient non à la fois, est-ce que le toubabou serait en mesure de nous traiter comme il le fait actuellement? Moi je crois Salifou Ouédraago qui dit que nous devons nous mêler aux toubabou pour connaître leurs habitudes afin de mieux les combattre.”

¹²⁵“Les autorités coloniales ne daignaient toujours pas proposer une solution médiane qui rapprocheraient les deux parties.”

¹²⁶“une démarche jusqu’aboutiste”

¹²⁷“Peut-être l’attitude obstinée des autorités coloniales était-elle dictée par la politique d’austérité budgétaire adoptée par tous les pays durement touchés par la guerre? Peut-être les capitaux, dont la France avait besoin pour relever ses ruines et relancer son économie, ne pouvaient-ils provenir que de l’arnaque des tirailleurs?”

want to be frustrated. They were, in fact, sentenced to defend it to give meaning to their aspirations of so many years lived in the heat and cold, mud and dust, among the dead, the lost wounded and the humiliated prisoners”¹²⁸ (129). Their decision not to give up and to face death resulted from the desire to give meaning to their experiences of war and their suffering. As in the poem by Fodeba Keita, Thiaroye is an opportunity to reinterpret the struggle in Europe in the light of the liberation of Africa. Moreover, as in the poem by Fodeba Keita, Doumbi-Fakoly refers to the Douga dance, which clearly indicates that the ancestors have recognized in the mutineers the legendary heroes of the Mali empire: “A group of four vultures arrived from who knows where, and suspended their flying over the camp, between the soldiers and the officer. Then, to the sound of the strange music coming from the village, the birds executed the Douga dance, the sacred dance of Mandingo, reserved for perpetrators of heroic actions”¹²⁹ (131). Referring to African culture and tradition is the means used by Doumbi-Fakoly, as well as Fodeba Keita, to instill meaning into Thiaroye, so that it becomes a significant *African* episode in the legend of resistance and combat, despite the fact that for the French, it was just a mutiny to repress and a massacre to hide.

Now that the soldiers are certain to be part of the African legend, their fate, to die or to live, is irrelevant: “Whether the officer went back on his senseless words to open fire or whether he finished descending the steep slope of authoritarianism that leads to madness would not change anything. The ancestors had decided; the

¹²⁸“Les tirailleurs avaient conscience de leur droit de toucher leur dû et ne voulaient pas en être frustrés. Ils étaient, du reste, condamnés à le défendre pour donner un sens à leurs aspirations de tant d’années vécues dans le froid et la chaleur, la boue et la poussière, parmi les cadavres, les blessés perdus et les prisonniers humiliés.”

¹²⁹“Un groupe de quatre vautours arriva, d’on ne sait où, et suspendit son vol au-dessus du camp, entre les tirailleurs et l’officier. Puis, au son de l’étrange musique provenant du village, les oiseaux exécutèrent la danse du Douga; cette danse sacrée du Mandingue, réservée aux auteurs d’actions héroïques.”

vultures had danced”¹³⁰ (131). The sententious tone of the narrator presents the elements of African culture as guarantors that the African soldiers are on the right path, whereas the French officer’s order is “madness.” Even though the soldiers were buried “in the absence of the civilian population”¹³¹ (132), likely to ensure the erasure of the crime, it is nonetheless true that their memory was preserved and remained present in the African legend.

4.3.3 The Aftermath of Thiaroye

Morts pour la France is the first of the documents studied so far which represents and thus explains, through fiction, the aftermath of Thiaroye for Africa. In the scheme of the novel, Thiaroye is the dramatic turn of events that triggers the unwinding of the last three chapters, 19, 20 and 21.

Chapter 19 documents how the importance of Thiaroye is watered down and confiscated by the colonial administration and its African underlings. Everything is played at a meeting¹³² that brings together the Governor general of French West Africa, the General of French forces in West Africa, the Advisor for Political Affairs and the Chief of Police. Any “representative of the people”¹³³ (133) is of course excluded. To be precise, there are Africans in the room where the meeting is taking place but their presence is only tolerated because of their function as slaves. The narrator comments in a satirical tone: “four Niggers with shiny skulls. . . substituted for the faulty electric fan by dispersing air with enormous fans”¹³⁴ (133). As for

¹³⁰“Que l’officier revînt sur sa parole insensée de faire ouvrir le feu ou qu’il achevât de descendre la pente abrupte de l’autoritarisme qui conduit à la folie, n’y changerait rien. Les ancêtres avaient décidé; les vautours avaient dansé.”

¹³¹“en l’absence de la population civile”

¹³²Sembene Ousmane, perhaps drawing on the novel by Doumbi-Fakoly, inserts also the scene of the meeting in his film.

¹³³“représentant du peuple”

¹³⁴“quatre Nègres au crâne luisant. . . remplaçaient le ventilateur défaillant en dispersant l’air à

the “three girls. . . [with] a cut tongue and a punctured eardrum”¹³⁵ (135), a sign of colonial indecency and decadence as well as a symbol of Africa’s condition under colonial power, they also assume their role as slaves by bringing “golden trays filled with bottles of alcohol and glasses”¹³⁶ (135).

The meeting is held sometime after the massacre and is meant to assess the true danger of fragmentation of the colonial empire now that the news of repression has spread despite the discretion imposed on this event. Very quickly, the danger of Thiaroye becoming the start of a systematic African revolt is rejected for a variety of reasons, all of them, as we shall see, related to race theories and racism. At Thiaroye, notes the General, Africans have fired on Africans: “Their brothers shot them! That proves that the French empire does not run any risk of dislocation. If those soldiers who have obeyed the captain were not savages, so devoid of reason, they would never have opened fire on their brothers”¹³⁷ (134). Conveying the same old stereotype concerning the primitive nature of Africans, the General is convinced that no rebellion is to be feared since Africans have demonstrated at Thiaroye that they have no sense of solidarity.

Africans would be even less of a threat since they are racially inferior to Asians who, as evidenced by the Vietnamese, have nevertheless been driven by their “instinct. . . to show their solidarity in a timely manner”¹³⁸ (134). The Adviser adds that, if Asians are “closer to us”¹³⁹ (135), they nonetheless remain “a white man whose evolution on the triple level of intellectual, moral and physical development

l’aide d’éventails kilométriques”

¹³⁵“trois jeunes filles. . . [à] la langue sectionnée et [au] tympan crevé”

¹³⁶“des plateaux en or remplis de bouteilles d’alcool et de verres”

¹³⁷“Ce sont leurs propres frères qui ont tiré sur eux! Voilà qui prouve que l’empire français ne court aucun risque de dislocation. Si ces tirailleurs qui ont obéi au capitaine n’étaient pas des sauvages, donc dépourvus de raison, jamais ils n’auraient ouvert le feu sur leurs frères.”

¹³⁸“instinct. . . à se solidariser au moment opportun”

¹³⁹“plus près de nous”

is still imperfect”¹⁴⁰ (135). Following the Adviser’s argument: if Asians can be repressed, why should France be afraid of Africans, savages *par excellence*?

The racist discussions reflect, according to the Governor of French West Africa, the ideas “expressed in the past year in Brazzaville by the heads of Free France”¹⁴¹ (135), a conference “which no African representative attended”¹⁴² (136). The meeting which takes place in the wake of the repression of Thiaroye consists in practically implementing the “new African policy of France”¹⁴³ (136), described in these terms by the General:

There has been talk that we implement a new pace to our civilizing mission, so that Africans can rise to our ankle, which is a level of change necessary to hold certain positions. But in any case it has been discussed that we give them greater responsibilities. And if an exception should be made to that decision, the African invested with such responsibilities would be under close supervision. So, it will never be an option that Africa draws back from our control.¹⁴⁴ (136)

In short, the new policy is designed to give the illusion that the Africans have some control when in reality the white colonists continue to pull the strings. This policy has two advantages: to calm down any dissatisfaction from Africans

¹⁴⁰“un Blanc dont l’évolution sur le triple plan intellectuel, moral et physique est encore imparfaite”

¹⁴¹“exprimées l’an passé à Brazzaville par les chefs de la France Libre”

¹⁴²“à laquelle n’assistait aucun représentant africain”

¹⁴³“la nouvelle politique africaine de la France”

¹⁴⁴“Il a été question d’imprimer un nouveau rythme à notre œuvre civilisatrice, afin que les Africains puissent se hisser à notre cheville; ce qui est un niveau d’évolution indispensable pour occuper certains postes subalternes. Mais en aucun cas, il n’a été question de leur donner des responsabilités plus importantes. Et si une dérogation devait être apportée à cette décision, l’Africain investi de telles responsabilités serait sous surveillance étroite. Donc, il ne sera jamais question que l’Afrique se soustraie à notre contrôle.”

and to save France's face internationally. If Africans are willing to participate in the governing of their continent, there is no reason why France should be criticized since she is planning to provide the African people with an apparent "right to self-determination"¹⁴⁵ (136).

To concretely implement this new policy, the dignitaries at the meeting decide to send "three advanced Niggers"¹⁴⁶ (137) to the camp of Thiaroye so that "Africa comes to believe. . . that advanced Niggers have contributed to solve the crisis"¹⁴⁷ (137). In the evening, the three characters are summoned by the Governor, who tells them their cynical mission: "I want them to believe that it is you who managed to convince me with your supplications. I say thanks to your supplications, because they must in no way feel that their seditious movement made me think. The second reason why I have chosen you is that tomorrow, I will need the influence that you gain through this success"¹⁴⁸ (138). These "advanced Niggers" are used by colonial France to maintain its authority under the mask of decolonisation.

In the description of these three characters, made by the chief of police, the two future deputies at the French National Assembly, Senghor¹⁴⁹ and Lamine Guèye, and President Senghor's future prime minister Mamadou Dia are recognizable without much difficulty:

They are Bocar Gueye which is Wolof, we are in Senegal, Keita Ballo who is from Mali and Mamadou Barry, who is Fulani. All three have

¹⁴⁵"droit à disposer d'eux-mêmes"

¹⁴⁶"trois Nègres évolués"

¹⁴⁷"l'Afrique arrive à croire. . . que des Nègres évolués ont contribué à dénouer la crise"

¹⁴⁸"Je veux qu'ils croient que c'est vous qui avez réussi me convaincre grâce à vos supplications. Je dis bien grâce à vos supplications, parce qu'ils ne doivent en aucun cas penser que leur mouvement séditieux m'a fait réfléchir. La deuxième raison pour laquelle je vous ai choisis est que demain, j'aurai besoin de l'influence que vous allez acquérir grâce à ce succès."

¹⁴⁹In his pamphlet "Nicolas Sarkozy," Doumbi-Fakoly describes Senghor as "seriously alienated, culturally speaking" ("gravement aliéné culturel"; 9).

been educated in Africa and France. The first two are teachers and the third an assistant. All three are representatives of indigenous communities and have therefore already had some hearing within the population.¹⁵⁰ (137),

We are dealing with a harsh criticism of these three “elected representatives” (“élus”; 140), supposedly “chosen to defend the interests of Africa”¹⁵¹ (140).

Using the narrator’s voice, Doumbi-Fakoly denounces the fact that these “prototypes of future pimps of Africa”¹⁵² (142) are voluntarily and completely manipulated by the colonial authorities, since they assure the infantrymen, as the Governor had ordered them to do, that it is thanks to their influence that the crisis of Thiaroye is resolved and that the Governor has finally decided to apply the steady exchange rate. Besides, the author denounces their inclination to lie and deceive their own people, as this exchange with the soldiers at Thiaroye proves:

-That pleases us, but we are saddened at the same time. Because this decision comes only after the death of our brothers.

-Since you have so much influence, why did not you go to see the Governor earlier?

-We were not aware of this history. Otherwise, there would not be a single death. The Governor would have given satisfaction from the outset.¹⁵³ (140)

¹⁵⁰“Il s’agit de Bocar Gueye qui est Wolof, nous sommes au Sénégal, de Ballo Keita qui est Ma-linké et de Mamadou Barry qui est Peulh. Tous les trois ont fait leurs études en Afrique et en France. Les deux premiers sont instituteurs et le troisième commis. Ils sont tous les trois représentants de collectivités indigènes; ils ont donc déjà une certaine audience au sein de la population.”

¹⁵¹“choisis pour défendre les intérêts de l’Afrique”

¹⁵²“prototypes des futurs proxénètes de l’Afrique”

¹⁵³“-Cela nous réjouit, mais nous attriste en même temps. Parce que cette décision n’intervient

At the end of the chapter, the infantrymen end up being paid as they should have. However, a feeling of deep disgust emanates from this situation. Africa is the prey of a cynical neo-colonialism to which corrupted African representatives themselves contribute. In this picture, infantrymen appear as victims of machinations that they are too naive or too honest to perceive. The depiction of this moral decay in Africa continues in the next two chapters.

Chapters 20 and 21 deal with the periods up to Senegalese independence, more precisely until 1969. They are characterized by an abundance of disgusted comments by the narrator and a narrowing of the intrigue around the figure of Diop Mactar who becomes a kind of emblem of the irony surrounding the fate of the infantrymen, who themselves represent the sad fate of Africa. The narrator bitterly criticizes all the steps that led to the independence of the West African states. The referendum of 1958, in which Africans were given the choice between immediate independence or maintenance of colonial ties in the framework of the French-speaking community is described as an “act of submission... to imperial France”¹⁵⁴ (144). The independence of Senegal in 1960 is described as “monitored” (“surveillée”; 144) while the heads of African states are decried in 1959 for having fomented a “conspiracy” (“complot”; 144) against the infantrymen by “purely and simply selling off [their] future”¹⁵⁵ (144).

The soldiers increasingly find themselves caught in a stranglehold, stifled by circumstances they do not understand. They are powerless puppets of a *deus ex machina*, who has first the features of colonial France and then neo-colonial Africa.

qu’après la mort de nos frères.

-Puisque vous avez autant d’influence, pourquoi n’êtes-vous pas allés voir le gouverneur plus tôt?

-Nous n’étions pas au courant de cette histoire. Sinon, il n’y aurait pas eu un seul mort. Le gouverneur nous aurait donné satisfaction dès le début.”

¹⁵⁴“acte de soumission... à la France impériale”

¹⁵⁵“bradant purement et simplement leur avenir”

The narrator sympathizes with the feelings of “resignation” (“résignation”; 142), “lethargy” (“léthargie”; 144), and bewilderment that the infantrymen experience. However, he does not hesitate to repeat his criticism against those who have never ceased to prove their attachment to colonial France by participating in the struggle against the colonized peoples in rebellion:

Africa is crying silently in front of the misfortune of the infantrymen. No voice ran the risk of demanding the halt to the wasteful use of forces of the continent or calling to action, like the Vietminh or Fellagah. But, by contrast, all the voices that dominated the groans of the resigned people proclaimed the unwavering commitment of daughter Africa to her imperial mother¹⁵⁶ (143).

The narrator deplors the lack of African commitment and action in comparison with what was undertaken in Vietnam or in Algeria. In his tone, one detects a profound deception that Thiaroye was not the event triggering any action, which drastically would have cut the ties of “daughter Africa” with the colonizer. The refusal of independence in 1958 and the corollary maintenance of the corps of *tirailleurs* are seen as an insult to Africa against the oppressed peoples that rebelled.

However, the infantrymen have paid a high price for their devotion to France, literally and figuratively. Politicians, French or Africans, duped them many times. For example, Article 71 of the 1959 Law has led to the freezing of their pensions and retirement funds, which have been transformed into non indexed indemnities. As a consequence, their pensions are reduced to one seventh of they value (144).

¹⁵⁶“L’Afrique pleurait discrètement devant l’infortune des tirailleurs. Aucune voix ne courut le risque d’exiger l’arrêt de la dilapidation des forces vives du continent ou d’inviter à l’action, à l’instar du Vietminh ou du Fellagah. Mais, par contre, toutes les voix qui dominaient les gémissements du peuple résigné proclamaient l’attachement indéfectible de la fille d’Afrique à sa mère impériale.”

This discriminatory measure, based on nationality, had the effect of preventing these veterans of the French army, no longer French subjects nor citizens, from further enjoying the same rights as their French peers, although they fought in the same war.

The narrator underscores yet another legislative inconsistency with paradoxical effects. The unpublished decree number 680403, dating from April 1969, “stipulated that veterans residing in France since 1963 were not subject to Article 71”¹⁵⁷ (147): “Interpreting this passage, African veterans concluded that only French nationality could give one the right to obtain full pensions. Several of them then began the necessary steps for their regaining of French nationality”¹⁵⁸ (147). This procedure was often done by the ex-servicemen because they had “to support [their] families”¹⁵⁹ (149).

A certain irony, even a curse, seems to be attached to the unglamorous fate of the soldiers, who seem to be desperate to maintain their meager pecuniary interests. The narrator’s severe judgement is nevertheless not deprived of a certain understanding, even compassion for a destiny which is due to historical and social forces rather than to personal choices.

The personal itinerary of the character Diop Mactar is exemplary, since it combines the main traits characterizing the fate of the infantrymen as a group. Diop Mactar participated in all the struggles. During the Second World War, he was a soldier and then a resistant. At Thiaroye, he was the rebels’ spokesman. In 1950, he established a group of Veterans who required, unfortunately without any success, the erection of a monument, and a commemorative ceremony devoted to

¹⁵⁷“les anciens combattants domiciliés en France depuis 1963 n’étaient pas soumis à l’article 71.”

¹⁵⁸“Interprétant ce passage, les anciens combattants africains en conclurent que seule la nationalité française donnait droit à l’obtention et au rappel des pensions intégrales. Plusieurs d’entre eux entreprirent alors les démarches indispensables à leur réintégration dans la nationalité française.”

¹⁵⁹“faire vivre [leur] famille”

the dead of Thiaroye (145). Later, he struggled to obtain additional payments, by the African states, to compensate for the frozen French pensions (146). Diop Mactar's undertakings are unfortunately described as "an illusion"¹⁶⁰ (147).

The novel ends with a discussion between veterans, including Diop Mactar, after which they consider taking French citizenship as a solution for restoring justice for their mistreatment, as evidenced by the rhetorical questions of the narrator: "After all, were they not entitled to the full value of the point of the frozen retirement funds? Did they not deserve the 35.80 French francs that the French veterans received per day? Had they not fought for the same cause, under the same flag?"¹⁶¹ (149). Diop Mactar dies, however, before French nationality is restored to him. Even in his tomb, Diop Mactar's life bears the mark of the tragic contradiction and irony of those Africans who became, either willingly or forcibly, France's unfortunate infantrymen.

4.3.4 Evaluating the Present in Light of Thiaroye

Doumbi-Fakoly in *Morts pour la France* undertakes a literary rewriting of history. In other words, history—in particular, of Africa during and after WWII—becomes the plot of a novel and Thiaroye a key episode to understanding the ins and outs of the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism. The creation of characters, the invention of a story that sometimes deviates from history, and the narrator's presence are elements that make *Morts pour la France* an opinionated interpretation regarding Africa's past and future.

The author engages in a pessimistic assessment of the passage from French

¹⁶⁰"de la poudre jetée aux yeux"

¹⁶¹"Après tout, n'étaient-ils pas en droit de prétendre à la totalité de la valeur du point de la retraite cristallisée? Ne méritaient-ils pas les 35,80 francs français que les anciens combattants français percevaient par jour? Ne s'étaient-ils pas battus pour la même cause, sous le même drapeau?"

colonialism to African independence. Foreshadowing the decay of the French colonial empire, the events of Thiaroye unfortunately also mirror the implementation of the new African policy of France, a novelty that lies in the prefix “neo” of “neo-colonialism.” The author engages in a caustic criticism of those he calls “pimps of Africa”¹⁶² (142), a barely masked criticism of Senghor, Guèye and Dia. As for the infantrymen, they are the emblem, even the allegory, of West Africa, victims of forces that they cannot overpower. Except in the case of Thiaroye, infantrymen are seen as blindly submissive to the French invader, whether it manifests itself directly or hides behind African masks.

In this context, the novel shows that in 1983 the history of Africa continues to be the history of France. Unlike Senghor’s poem, which called upon this inscription, Doumbi-Fakoly denounces this unbearable state of affairs: the insertion into French history aims to point at a malfunction. The novel unfortunately offers no escape from the situation, unless Thiaroye is also considered an episode in the African tradition. The ancestors have not deceived those who, by signs—the Vultures and the Douga dance—have transformed the rebellious soldiers into legendary heroes. To remember and commemorate Thiaroye means to believe in the potential of Africa, to believe in a possible “African renaissance,” a concept that Doumbi-Fakoly develops in his essays and pamphlets. It consists first in definitively rejecting the colonial ties and then making efforts to “reclaim the complete Tradition bequeathed by the Ancestors”¹⁶³ (“Nicolas Sarkozy” 8).

¹⁶²“proxénètes de l’Afrique”

¹⁶³“réappropriation de toute la Tradition léguée par les Ancêtres.”

4.4 *Camp de Thiaroye* by Sembene Ousmane: Art and/as Resistance

The Senegalese filmmaker, Sembene Ousmane, died in 2007, at the age of 84.¹⁶⁴ Referred to as the “Father of African cinema,” he nevertheless started his career as a writer and continued until the 1980s to be a prolific novelist. Among his early novels are *Le Docker noir* (*The Black Docker*, 1956), *O Pays, mon beau peuple!* (*Oh Country, my beautiful people!*, 1957), *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (*God’s Bit of Wood*, 1960). In these works, he tackles economic, social and racial issues in what critics have characterized as a social realist mode, in the tradition of Zola and Brecht. In his later books, *Le Mandat* (*The Money Order*, 1965), *Xala* (1973), *Le Dernier de l’Empire* (*The Last of the Empire*, 1981), and *Niiwam et Taaw* (*Niiwam and Taaw*, 1987), Sembene addresses issues related to the corruption of the African elite in the newly independent states.

Because he soon realized that his books would only be read by *a happy few*, Sembene decided to become a filmmaker and to be trained in Russia, funded by a fellowship, instead of France. His first movie *La Noire de...* (1966) received the Jean Vigo Prize. Wanting to reach a wider African audience, Sembene then made movies in Wolof: *Mandabi* (1968), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977)—censored by president Senghor, most probably for its anti-Muslim themes—, *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987)—censored by the French, but rewarded by a Prize at the Venice Film Festival—, and *Guelwaar* (1992). He also made a movie in Diola, *Emitai* (1971). *Faat Kiné*, released in 2000, promotes women’s empowerment in Africa. For his movie *Moolaadé*, tackling the issue of excision, he received awards at the Cannes Film

¹⁶⁴General information about the life and work of Sembene Ousmane was found on this website: <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Sembene.html>, consulted on 17 May 2008.

Festival and the Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) Film Festival. Generally speaking, his movies denounce all kinds of exploitation, colonial, neo-colonial, and inequalities, based on gender, religion or social classes.

The following pages, all devoted to *Camp de Thiaroye*, focus on the many ways in which the film is one of *resistance*. The first subsection analyzes the system of dichotomy and parallelism as well as the dramatic progression displayed in the movie. The techniques described in this part convey the idea that the strong opposition between the *tirailleurs* and the French had to inevitably lead to a point of no return. Next, discussing the main trends of criticism of *Camp de Thiaroye*, I tackle the issue of the fidelity of the movie to the historical past. In the third and last subsection, I argue that, as interested as Sembene was to direct a film based on true events, he also (if not mainly) cared for the *artistic* aspect of it. He insisted on this feature by multiplying the references to varied cultural documents, songs, films, literature, from various part of the world, Africa and the West. Although these cultural references confer depth and richness to the film, few critics have noticed their profusion and tried to explain their meaning. As I shall demonstrate, the dialogue with cultural artifacts is another technique Sembene employs to create a network of meanings favoring the idea of resistance, and more importantly resistance through art.

4.4.1 *Camp de Thiaroye*: Opposition, Parallelism, and Point of No Return

The film is based on three structural elements: a narrative tension leading to the final massacre, a parallelism between France and Germany reinforcing France's guilt, and a strong opposition between Blacks and Whites. My conviction is that

Sembene introduces this strong dichotomy, but criticizes it as well, by way of the story—contrary to Diop’s play, in the movie, there is at least one White who takes the *tirailleurs*’ side—and by way of references to cultural documents. Before arguing further in favor of this interpretation, the first step consists in describing the scenes where oppositions are at work.

Opposition The very first scene, the infantrymen’s landing at the port of Dakar, sets up the conflict between the colonized Blacks and the white colonizers. While the black families remain silent because of their concern at the sight of their wounded relatives, the white families express their joy by shouting several times “Vive la France.” For them, the return of troops means the liberation of France by de Gaulle, without the loss of loved ones. From the onset, there is a clear misunderstanding regarding France’s victory: it encourages the French’s sense of patriotism whereas for Africans, it brings them grief.

The gap between Blacks and Whites is also visible in the depiction of the housing. The isolated camp of Thiaroye, made up of primitive wooden barracks, is contrasted with the wealthy neighborhoods of Dakar, with their elegant houses. There are no trees in the camp, whose constant bright highlighting of the *mise-en-scène* evokes the unbearable heat. In Dakar, numerous trees in the gardens give the white population the opportunity to escape the sun. The *tirailleurs*’ poverty contrasts with the colonizers’ indecent luxury.

The film presents the confrontation between two well-defined groups: on the one hand, the group of infantrymen, and on the other, the group of officers who, although small, holds the power and wants to maintain it. The scenes where the repatriated soldiers are all gathered together are recurrent. Among themselves, and against the French who do not want to give them their war allocation nor a correct

exchange rate, they demonstrate solidarity. As much as possible, the opinions of each are taken into account during group discussions where everybody is entitled to speak. The infantrymen, who demonstrate a keen awareness of the situation, make wise decisions for the group, such as the one to choose a representative who will face the authorities. Except Diatta, all speak broken French. Pidgin French is used as their *lingua franca*, otherwise they could not understand each other since they all speak different native languages. However, the terseness of their expression does not prevent them from promoting essential values such as equality and justice.

All this contrasts of course with the depiction of the French officers. Their refined language is pure veneer hiding their colonial racist ideas and hypocritical behavior. As we will discuss later, in order to preserve the empire against the threat of rebellion while keeping up appearances, the French chose to have the dirty work done by Africans: infantrymen serving in Dakar were chosen to execute the orders against the repatriated infantrymen. Sembene contrasts on one side, infantrymen who speak French poorly but with respectable ethics, and on the other, commanding officers who speak perfect French but are devoid of morality.

Parallelism The film is built on a parallel between colonial France and Nazi Germany. Through the character of Pays, a survivor of a concentration camp, a parallel is drawn between the camp of Thiaroye and Nazi camps. The watchtower he looks at, the barbed wire he touches remind him of the mistreatment he underwent during the war. In a way, Pays symbolizes the equation between France and Germany. Regarded as a madman, he is nevertheless the one who knows the truth and senses the dramatic turn of events. He is Thiaroye's visionary, who at the end of the film sees the arrival of the tanks. Like most prophets however, he will unfortunately not be listened to.

Narrative Progression The repression of the mutiny of Thiaroye was an act of extreme violence, excessive when one considers the appropriateness of the claims. In *Camp de Thiaroye*, the exacerbation of this violence is represented by various means. One of them is the crescendo of violence exhibited in the film, whether this violence is physical or moral. By moral violence, I mean the series of humiliations inflicted upon the repatriated soldiers: minimal amount of meat ascribed to them, refusal of a decent exchange rate for German marks, exchange of U.S. uniforms against colonial uniforms. When the infantrymen returned from France, they were given American uniforms: the French army could not provide them with decent outfits and had to borrow clothes from the Allied forces. Later in the movie, the infantrymen are forced to wear the colonial outfit, including the *chechia*, which belittles them, since it represents the French attitude aimed at keeping them in an inferior position. They protest against this humiliation. The authoritarian silence they receive then announces the violence they will receive in response to their claim for justice.

With regard to physical violence, it progresses to a point of no return. The first image of the film sets the tone: the wounded and crippled soldiers returning from the European front are the traces of the inhumane violence of wars. Then, direct and indirect violence affects the character of Diatta in particular, in two scenes that are analyzed in greater detail later: one where he learns that his entire family was massacred during the rebellion of the village of Effok and another scene where he is beaten by American soldiers. Finally, the sudden arrival of tanks in the calm African night announces the incongruity of the violence of the final massacre, a scene discussed later as well.

Gradual but real, the violence toward the infantrymen is also represented symbolically. One scene in particular, depicting the killing of sheep according to

Muslim tradition, foreshadows the final massacre and provides it with the sacred character of sacrifice. The scene is particularly cruel since spectators witness the cutting of the sheep's neck, the flow of blood that spreads on the ground as well as the convulsive movements linked to the sheep's agony. The images are hard to take, even for a European audience, less naively sensitive to "animal cruelty" than its American counterpart.

The disgust and repulsive feelings experienced during the sheep's slaughter announce the intensity of the emotions that the massacre of Thiaroye should evoke. Moreover, one may wonder to what extent this scene, because of the negative reaction it produces, suggests a critique of Islam. Sembene has never hidden his animosity towards colonialism, nor has he hidden the fact that he considered the spread of Islam in Africa as a kind of colonialism. His movie *Ceddo* is proof, among others, of this position. It therefore would not be a surprise if the scene of the sacrifice carried a criticism of Islam. Even more so in the context of the massacre of Thiaroye since, according to Echenberg,

Seydou Nourou Tall and other conservative members of the Muslim hierarchy (*sic*) in Senegal supported the French repression on the grounds that men who had disobeyed and struck their officers could not escape punishment without producing severe troubles in the countryside... In the wake of Thiaroye, his immediate reaction was to criticize the French not for having acted repressively, but for having failed to call in traditional Islamic leaders earlier to help calm down the men and prevent the uprising in the first place (Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye" 121).

The slaughter of the sheep certainly announces the massacre of the infantrymen,

but it might also convey the idea that it was partly supported, or at least tolerated, by the traditional Islamic leaders.

4.4.2 The Dialogue with History

Most critical studies on *Camp de Thiaroye* so far have focused on two aspects: how the movie, since it is based on historical events, matches past reality, and how the realistic filmic devices used by the director are at the service of his ideology. These two trends are perfectly illustrated in Kenneth Harrow's article, "*Camp de Thiaroye: Who's That Hiding in those Tanks, and How Come We Can't See Their Faces?*" In it, Harrow accuses Sembene of hiding, in the scene representing the massacre, the historical fact that in the tanks used to massacre the (repatriated) *tirailleurs sénégalais*, were in fact other (stationed) *tirailleurs sénégalais*: "the film sets up a dialectical opposition between oppressed blacks and oppressive whites, that would have been vitiated by showing the identities of the soldiers in the tanks" (147). Harrow upholds that the system of binary oppositions, underlying the movie, is supported by Sembene's realist techniques that have, in the end, the effects of eluding the complexity of the situation (151) and of promoting a non ambiguous and Manichean vision of what happened. The issue of the correspondance between past realities and the filmic representation is discussed first since it then leads us to the analysis of the realist techniques deployed in the film.

As I discussed in the first chapter of this study, one has to be aware of the difficulty of accessing the records of the events of Thiaroye. Moreover, the official sources are not always consistent with each other, as confirmed for instance by the variation in the figures regarding the victims. Yet, when one reads Echenberg's account ("Tragedy at Thiaroye") and one watches Sembene's movie, one is struck by

the amount of similarities between the historical account and the movie. Sembene, who did research to document his movie, certainly knew Echenberg's narrative and is mostly faithful to it.

The following are a few examples where the filmic rendering is consistent with the historical account. Both Echenberg and Sembene point out that the French authorities kept postponing the payment of the infantrymen's demobilization bonuses: they promised to compensate them once on African soil, but then they found pretexts not to do so. In fact, the 1,280 infantrymen were in possession of significant amounts of money earned in the Front-Stalags: under the Geneva convention, the Germans had to pay minimum wages to forced workers. The French officers believed that the money was gained by unlawful means (stripping of dead bodies and allowances received from the Germans to destabilize the French empire were both mentioned) and were even less eager to pay the remaining allowances. In reality, France was undergoing financial difficulties and administrative chaos but instead of recognizing it, the commanding officers chose to discriminate against the African ex-POWs whereas the French ex-POWs were fully compensated. Both Echenberg and Sembene insist as well on the increased consciousness of the infantrymen and on the sense of solidarity that emerged among themselves in Thiaroye. They were well aware of the sacrifices they made for the "motherland" and expected to be rewarded for it, if only with a just financial compensation. The claim for back pay was only part of a more generalized demand "for equal treatment for equal sacrifices" (Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye" 119).

It is appropriate to wonder why critics (Harrow and also Gugler) are rather inclined to note the director's inconsistencies instead of underlining his consistency, which seems to be more relevant since it characterizes most of the movie. Moreover, the inconsistencies are always invoked as a proof of the director's dishonesty,

as if his unavowed and yet main purpose was to lie and to mislead the audience and as a corollary, as if critics, fortunately for the audience, were defenders of the Truth, conceived here as the perfect (and idealistic) adequation between past realities and artistic documents. These critics' attitude is demeaning not only towards the director, but towards the audience as well, who is believed to be so naive as to accept a movie as a straight depiction of reality. It actually sheds more light on the critics' flaws and misunderstandings than on the author and his intentions. To escape from this sterile debate, several considerations have to be made.

Firstly, Kenneth Harrow forgets that Sembene's movie does not come out of the blue, but is inserted into a tradition of preceding representations of Thiaroye. As we shall see later, it is even believed that Diop's play, that clearly states that the rebellious soldiers were killed by other African soldiers, was the basis for Sembene's film. Instead of questioning Sembene's fidelity to past realities, critics should have attempted to recount a history of representations of Thiaroye; a history that would find coherent interpretations and convincing reasons behind the variations imposed by the authors on motifs that belong to an artistic tradition. The motif of African soldiers killing other African soldiers is as much a literary motif in the story of Thiaroye as the vultures of the Mali legend that reappears in the works of Keita, Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly and Sembene as well. Their appearance at different moments of the *diegesis* has its significance as do the changes around the motif of African soldiers killing each other.

Secondly, the roles and purposes of historians and artists are obviously quite different. Whereas historians are bound by truthfulness, such is certainly not the case for artists, even if they choose to depict past events. As artists, they totally have the right of modifying elements of reality. When their objective is clearly to adhere, for the most part, to the narratives provided by historians, they obviously

manifest a desire to provide an access to history that historiography or historical textbooks do not allow. In the case of Sembene Ousmane, whose first historical feature film was the 1971 *Emitai*, resorting to past events that occurred in Africa meant “the appropriation of African history” (Gadjigo 34) by African people. As Gadjigo suggests,

when he (Sembene) turns to the past, it is in order to interrogate it. He questions the stories being told and offers counterstories by telling them differently. Additionally, through the medium of film, Sembene humanizes the past. By bringing the viewer into the present of characters who belong to the past, the filmmaker reminds us that those men and women had an open future and that they left behind unfulfilled dreams (45).

One of Sembene’s purposes was to make the past continue to be present in people’s lives. That is certainly one of the reasons why he chose the medium of cinema since it gives a sense of immediacy with the situation and proximity with the characters.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, let us remember that Sembene always attended the screenings of his movies: for him, the debate following the movie screening was as important as the issues raised in it. According to Brian Goldfarb, cinema served, for Sembene, a “political function. . . . the cinema had become in post-liberation Africa a critical site of contestation over language and pedagogical authority” (7). Most of Sembene’s films are polemical precisely to encourage lively discussions leading to the contestation of hegemonic discourses.

¹⁶⁵Sembene turned from novel to film “because he saw the latter as a more viable medium for reaching audiences in Africa across divergent language groups and among nonliterate people” (According to Pfaff, *The Cinema of Sembene Ousmane*, quoted in Goldfarb 7).

With respect to the correspondence to past events, one understands that Sembene had to be very scrupulous; otherwise his viewpoint on history would not be worth more than the hegemonic discourse he wanted to undermine. Therefore, if Sembene chose to take liberties with historical records, as Doumbi-Fakoly did, the reasons do not lie in his dishonesty, but in internal reasons, that is reasons related to the coherence and meaning of the movie. Let us examine closer the case of the tanks and the reason why Sembene is supposed to have lied regarding the people who were in them.

As critic David Murphy points out in his article “Fighting for the Homeland? The Second World War in the Films of Ousmane Sembene,” which is partly an attempt to answer Harrow’s harsh criticism of Sembene, “the idea that Sembene’s binaristic thinking leads him to hide the fact that those who carried out the massacre were themselves Africans is deeply misleading: throughout the film, we are made aware that the camp is guarded by African soldiers who man the gates and the watchtowers...” (65). Unfortunately, Murphy does not elaborate on this divide within the *tirailleurs*’ corps itself, although it is crucial in the movie. As Femi Okiremuete Shaka points out in “Vichy Dakar and the Other Story of Stewardship in Africa,”

the acrimony that is reflected in *Camp de Thiaroye* between those who fought for the liberation of France like the *tirailleurs* and their commander, Captain Raymond, and the French troops based in Dakar who initially honored the armistice and who refused to fight is born of the conflicts between the supporters of General de Gaulle and those of the Vichy regime. (No pag.)

Indeed, under the terms of the armistice that Petain concluded with Germany, the

French empire was supposed to remain neutral during WWII. The Vichy-appointed governor of West African territories, Pierre Boisson, was therefore hostile to de Gaulle and the Allies. Yet, “the supporters of de Gaulle. . . continued surreptitiously to recruit troops in the region, employing agents in neighboring anglophone West African countries, despite Boisson’s objections and sabotage of their efforts,” affirms Shaka (No pag.). Sembene’s movie, far from offering any simplistic and Manichean view of the situation, insists on several occasions on the frictions and conflicts that arose between the *tirailleurs* that came back from Europe and were marked by various experiences of war on the one hand, and on the other hand, the *tirailleurs* who stayed in Dakar. Sembene distinguishes them by their uniforms. The repatriated soldiers wear American uniforms, which points to the poverty of the French army/government who could not even supply their troops with the bare necessities, whereas the African soldiers who stayed in Africa wear the traditional uniform which includes the typical hat, the *checheya*.

The first argument arising between the repatriated and the stationed soldiers concerns food and occurs during a scene reminiscent of *The Battleship Potemkin* by Eisenstein, when the sailors refuse to eat rotten meat. While the repatriated infantrymen complain to the (stationed) cook about the quality of what is given to them (“even pigs would not eat it,”¹⁶⁶ says one of the complainers, whereas the others state that they were treated better in German camps) and the fact that no meat is on the menu, the cook responds that he does his best considering what was supplied to him. He also lets them know about the strict hierarchy that governs the meat distribution, illustrating his words with gestures. For the Whites, a lot of meat (he shows his whole hand); for people of mixed race (“métisses”), less (he shows half of his hand); for the natives, very little (he shows a quarter of his hand); and

¹⁶⁶“Même les cochons refuseraient d’en manger.”

for the *tirailleurs*, meat only once a week and a tiny little bit (he shows the tip of one of his fingers).

Another conflict reveals the tension between the two groups of *tirailleurs*: two repatriated infantrymen are riding a bike—to be more specific, one is teaching the other how to ride a bike—when a stationed infantryman on a truck almost knocks them over. The two yell curse words at the other, complaining that he did not pay enough attention and could have hurt them, while the other one mocks them for not being able to ride a bicycle. Finally, the event that more obviously proves the divide between the two groups occurs when the repatriated soldiers demand of the colonial authority that their dues and allowances be paid. The discussion grows more bitter and the officer in charge orders the soldiers to keep their guns pointed towards the mutineers. The image of a group of *tirailleurs* ready to shoot their peers is both powerful and shocking, yet it is also true since that is in effect what happened.

Obviously, Sembene did not intend to hide the troubling fact that Africans shot at and killed their African brothers: it suffices to read the movie more accurately. It is even possible to argue that the conflict and its outcome are in fact expressed at the very beginning of the movie. Pays, the infantryman who lost his mind because he underwent Nazi persecution in a concentration camp, is the first one to “feel” and fear that the way he will be treated in this camp will resemble the treatment he received under the Nazis. A powerful scene indicates it. Pays, wearing a Nazi helmet—he wears it as a trophy, as African warriors would wear belongings from their defeated enemies—, is seen in a close-up shot showing his full face, very expressive and moving. Then the camera shows his profile and while his head is presented in the foreground, in the background, a stationed sentry standing in the watchtower appears. Next, Pays’ picture dissolves with that of a Nazi soldier, wearing a helmet and watching the horizon with binoculars. The scene is accompanied

by noises of submachine gunfire. In the scene that follows, real pictures of prisoners of concentration camps, who tried to escape and were shot dead by Nazi soldiers, are inserted. The filmic technique, which consists in melting Pays' and the sentry's faces, announces that the stationed infantrymen will be instrumental in the coming oppression, a violence similar to the one imposed by the Nazis.

Sembene is a master of nuances and likes to complicate situations. For instance, at the end of the movie, when the repatriated infantrymen, holding General Dagnan hostage, are about to "take" the camp, a stationed corporal, who should in principle be obedient to the colonial administration, prevents his soldiers from shooting the mutineers and orders his sentry to come down from the tower so that a repatriated infantryman can take his position and the camp be totally under their command. The corporal and the mutineer even shake hands. All these elements prove that Sembene intends to present all the ambiguities and complexities of the colonial system. Moreover, he prevents us from judging people, preferring to emphasize how people can be "caught" in a situation that damages both themselves and their fellow humans.

In the end, it is not Sembene that misleads the audience, it is Harrow's reading of the film. Even more so that Harrow should then have exploited the argument of fidelity to reality more consistently and accurately than what he did. In reality indeed, there seems to have been no tank at all present in Thiaroye: "as for the tanks, the French had none in West Africa in 1944" (Echenberg, quoted by Gugler 73). According to another source however, the rebels were subdued by the use of "3 companies of natives, an American tank, 2 semi-tracked vehicles, 3 armored cars, 2 battalions of infantrymen, 1 squad of non-commissioned officers and French troopmen"¹⁶⁷ (Mabon 90).

¹⁶⁷"3 compagnies indigènes, 1 char américain, 2 semi-chenillés, 3 automitrailleuses, 2 bataillons

Leaving aside the endless debate concerning the accuracy of the historical records as well as the correspondence between past reality and historical fiction, we can focus on a more relevant issue: the plausible reasons why Sembene decided to show the slaughter perpetrated by tanks. Firstly, intertextuality with Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* is not to be excluded, Sembene having been trained in Russia and both movies dealing with mutiny against oppressive officers. The tanks evoke the canons used by the ship's mutineers and Sembene establishes a filiation between his film and the Russian master's.

Secondly, the symbolical aspect of the scene has to be taken into account. The noisy tanks that break the silence of the night represent the violence and the immoderation of the colonial response to legitimate demands. Sembene had to find an image as impressive as possible to render the complete imbalance of the situation. Even from the French perspective, Echenberg notes that "the uprising at Thiaroye came as such a shock that it served effectively to delegitimize naked force as a political instrument" ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 120). Using the tank as a symbol of excess, Sembene also presents the colonial violence as similar to the violence deployed by any invading army, such as the German one that invaded France four or five years prior to the events of Thiaroye. Finally, choosing to focus on the killing machines, instead of the men behind them, is a means to underscore the de-humanization process at work in the colonial system as well as in wartime.

In the movie, the tanks work less as elements of reality than as symbols. As David Murphy points out regarding Sembene's movies,

Although the primary register of his films is often one of closely observed realism, they often contain symbolic, non-realistic or non-linear

d'infanterie, 1 peloton de sous-officiers et hommes de troupes français."

sequences. . . . Sembene's notion of realism is not, as is often argued, governed by a naturalistic sense of verisimilitude; on the contrary, his work is deeply informed by the Brechtian notion of realism as the deployment of form in the fashion that is most effective in revealing the fundamental reality of a situation.

In the end, Sembene's use of realist techniques misleads whomever wants to be misled. Since Barthes' admirable studies on Balzac and Flaubert, no serious scholar would uphold that realism provides the audience with a direct, univocal and unproblematic access to reality. Structuralist studies, which were for the most part based on 19th-century realist texts, have demonstrated that realism rests on the *illusion* of reality. That cinema is even more illusory is something certainly true. Sembene must have been aware of this. Another reason why he attended the screening of his movies was most probably to artistically "educate" the audience. If all that matters was the content, i.e. African History, Sembene would have made documentaries, instead of (historical) fictions. As historical as his movie is, Sembene's intent was also to make an artistic artifact. In the following pages, I will put aside the dialogue between *Camp de Thiaroye* and history and explore instead the dialogue that Sembene establishes between his movie and other cultural documents.

4.4.3 The Dialogue with Cultural Documents

This subsection focuses on the inter-cultural aspect at work in Sembene's *Camp de Thiaroye*. Exploring the references to varied cultural documents in Sembene's *Camp de Thiaroye* is the most appropriate way to demonstrate that Sembene's work, far from being Manichean and representing a binary vision of the world, accentuates the complexities and ambiguities of the issues tackled in the movie, such as colo-

nialism, racism, and communism. By focusing on cultural references, I support scholar Robert Stam's research statement in "The Dialogics of Adaptation" and apply it not only to the process of novel adaptation, as he does, but more generally to that of making historical fictions:

our statements about films based on novels or other sources need to be less moralistic, . . . more rooted in contextual and intertextual history. Above all, we need to be less concerned with inchoate notions of "fidelity" and to give more attention to dialogical responses—to readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material. If we can do all these things, we will produce a criticism that not only takes into account, but also welcomes, the differences among the media (75-76).

In *Palimpsestes. La Littérature au second degré*, Gérard Genette defines "intertextuality" as the "relationship of co-presence between two or several texts, i.e. . . . most of the times. . . the effective presence of a text in another one"¹⁶⁸ (8). It is necessary here to extend the notion of text so that it includes other kinds of cultural artifacts, such as movies, songs, music, and literary works. The underlying justification is that all cultural documents need to be deciphered and interpreted, as such they function as "texts." Genette (8) suggests the existence of three types of intertextuality: "quotation" ("citation"), "plagiarism" ("plagiat") and "allusion" ("allusion"). In *Camp de Thiaroye*, quotations and allusions are numerous. The two types differ from one another in that the first is explicit whereas the second is implicit. An allusion is an "utterance whose complete understanding implies the perception of a relation between the utterance itself and another one to which the

¹⁶⁸"relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c'est-à-dire. . . le plus souvent. . . la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre."

first one refers one or another of its inflections, otherwise not receivable”¹⁶⁹ (8). Allusions are more subtle and difficult to perceive in that they highly depend on the readers’ level of cultural knowledge. Yet, if allusions are not detected, and quotations and allusions are not interpreted, it does not mean that the text or the movie is not understood, it just means that a *dimension* of understanding is lost. As Michaël Riffaterre points out, “linear reading” (“lecture linéaire,” quoted in Genette 8-9) produces meaning whereas intertextuality produces “significance” (“signifiante”), that is a network or layering of meaning.

In the following pages, I focus on the numerous cultural references mentioned in *Camp de Thiaroye* to bring out the double role they take on in the film. They firstly participate in a “linear reading.” As such they function as elements of the story to the unfolding of which they contribute and they accentuate the initial meaning of a scene. For example, Albinoni’s *Adagio* is used to create a particular emotional atmosphere in the scene where Diatta writes to his wife. Cultural references have an additional role that lies in their “significance,” a second-degree dimension. They “open”—as Umberto Eco would put it (“Opera aperta”)—the text, the film, the painting to the audience’s interpretation. For instance, the *Adagio* establishes a rich dialogue between Sembene’s movie and Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli*, an anti-war movie. Although the cultural elements have been grouped in three separate categories, African culture, popular culture, and high culture, they all commonly resist prevailing hegemonic discourses and accentuate the complexity of Sembene’s vision of the world.

¹⁶⁹“énoncé dont la pleine intelligence suppose la perception d’un rapport entre lui et un autre auquel il renvoie nécessairement telle ou telle de ses inflexions, autrement non recevable.”

African Culture

This section focuses on cultural references to documents, movies, plays, literature and music, produced by African artists or by artists from the African Diaspora. It explores the richness they bring to the meaning of *Camp de Thiaroye*.

The Massacre of Effok, *Le Temps de Tamango*, and *Emitai* In *Camp de Thiaroye*, the massacre of Effok—the village Corporal Diatta comes from—refers to the massacre of villagers from Effok (including Diatta’s own parents) who were shot dead because they refused to hand over their rice harvest to support the war effort. It is mentioned two times during the movie: in a conversation, which will be discussed later, between Diatta and Raymond regarding colonization, and when Diatta’s family comes to the camp to let him know the circumstances of his parents’ death. Yet the massacre is not just a mentioned event: because it affects a character personally, it becomes a significant element in the story. One may argue that it certainly influenced Diatta in making the radical decision to take the infantrymen’s side whereas the sergeant had been hitherto the embodiment of balance, even in his musical tastes that embrace both classical music and the nascent jazz. Effok is the deciding factor: it acts as an amplifier and an omen of the situation in Thiaroye.

By connecting the two events, Sembene uses a technical device similar to the one exploited by Diop. Obviously, Sembene as well as Diop wanted to build a history of African resistances that went together with a history of French atrocities. In *Le Temps de Tamango* by Diop, two characters, the writer N’Dongo and the filmmaker Mahécor, have some similarities with real-life Diop and Sembene. The former character does indeed write a play on Thiaroye while the latter intends to make a film out of it: “Mahécor has taken it into his head to adapt a great movie

from a play by N'Dongo on the massacre of the infantrymen in December 44.”¹⁷⁰ There are some elements of truth concerning the collaboration between Sembene and Diop: “For the record, it should be noted that before finding its way to Sembene’s hands, the project of a film on Thiaroye was initiated by Ben Diogaye Bèye and Boris Diop, whose script *Thiaroye 44* was financed by the SNPC but not filmed” (Gadjigo 43). What is enlightening, however, is less the connection with reality than the discussion that arose between the characters of the novel regarding the link between history, art and the audience. For Mahécor, the main purpose of the movie is to encourage people to keep the massacre in mind forever¹⁷¹. The first step in order to accomplish this didactic goal is, according to Mahécor, to “gather a maximum of facts”¹⁷² (62). Kaba, a friend of his, disagrees and suggests that

from some basic data, one can achieve an efficient work. Essentially, one has to actualize the events. Never mind the number of infantrymen that were assassinated in Thiaroye. The eighty thousand dead of Madagascar show with evidence that what matters is the logic of a system: one shoots at everything that moves. To scare people. Because one is scared¹⁷³ (63).

The discussion sheds light on the previously mentioned debate on Sembene’s respect of historical facts and his use of realist techniques. Sembene conformed to the historical facts only to the extent that they served to illustrate the logic behind

¹⁷⁰“Mahécor s’est mis en tête de tirer un grand film d’une pièce de N’Dongo sur le massacre des tirailleurs en décembre 44” (29).

¹⁷¹“Je veux par mon film introduire à tout jamais ce massacre dans la tête des gens!” (62)

¹⁷²“rassembler le maximum de faits”

¹⁷³“à partir de quelques données fondamentales, on peut réussir une œuvre efficace. L’essentiel est d’actualiser les événements. Peu importe de savoir si à Thiaroye le colonialisme a assassiné tant ou tant de tirailleurs. Les quatre-vingt mille morts de Madagascar montrent bien qu’il s’agit de la logique d’un système: on tire sur tout ce qui bouge. Pour faire peur. Parce qu’on a peur.”

them. As artist, and not historian, he had the possibility to neglect what could be considered as details, in order to “reveal. . . the fundamental reality of a situation,” claims Murphy (66). In any case, the reference to *Le Temps de Tamango* accentuates the contradictory forces (embodied in the novel by the two characters’ opinions) at work in a cultural document based on historical facts.

Despite the similarity regarding the connection between the two massacres and the violent nature of the events, Diop and Sembene’s representations differ slightly: Diop’s Sanankoro rebellion occurred in 1940 and was caused by the conscription whereas Sembene’s Effok took place in 1942 and was a reaction against the requisitioning of rice imposed by the Vichy government. The choice of the date is significant in that Sembene chose to contrast a massacre taking place under the Vichy administration and another one occurring under de Gaulle. Yet, the contrast is meant to emphasize the similarity: “Sembene seeks explicitly to represent what he views as the fundamental continuity in colonial practice,” states Murphy (59) or as Sembene himself put it: “there is no difference between Pétain and de Gaulle” (“Interview with Michael Demabrow” 4). Certainly, Diop’s play points to the logic of colonial violence as well. However, in Sembene’s movie, this aim is achieved while, at the same time, de Gaulle’s image is questioned.

Sembene is not only willing to create a dialogue between his film and cultural documents produced by others, but also with his own productions. By referring to Effok, Sembene connects *Camp de Thiaroye* with his first historical movie, *Emitai*, as if they were “two chapters in the same tragic and shameful saga,” notes Downing (194). For Sembene, it was important to make people aware of a *tradition of African resistance* against colonialism. He even had plans for an ambitious historical film “about nineteenth-century resistance to French colonial imperialism in West Africa. It was so important to Sembene that he once declared: ‘If I die with-

out finishing *Samori*, you may write that I have failed my career' (quoted by Diop, personal interview)" (Gadjigo 33). Sembene has certainly not failed in his career if what mattered was the affirmation of the resistance potential that African peoples had. Many of his movies, if not all, deal with this topic: from the earliest movies, like *Ceddo* in which he represented the Ceddo tribe's resistance against islamization in the 17th century, until the latest, *Moolaadé*, that denounces the tradition of excision. In fact, reviving the tradition of resistance was crucial for him in that it brought the hope of getting rid of neo-colonialism: "For the struggle against neo-colonialism, it is possible to reactualize all these scattered and little-known battles" (Sembene, "Interview with Ghali" 42). In that perspective, Sembene's reference to his own movies is meant to reinforce his entire work's cohesiveness. Moreover, because his own films have been censored many times—although *Camp de Thiaroye* won the Jury's Special Prize at the Venice festival, it was censored in France when released—,Sembene's work takes on *de facto* the aura of resistance.

Charlie Parker's Music, African (American) and Diaspora Culture Because he was wearing an American uniform, Diatta was mistaken by the American Military Police for an American soldier who was not wearing the regular uniform, with a number and a badge on it.¹⁷⁴ Subsequently, he was captured and beaten up: the soldiers broke one of his arms. After negotiations undertaken by the French officers who were forced to do so because the other infantrymen, by solidarity, had kidnapped an American soldier, Diatta was finally released. The African-American soldier who took part in the beating of Diatta is the only one to come to the camp

¹⁷⁴Diatta had removed the number and the badge that both indicated that he was a French colonial soldier. He got rid of them because he wanted to have a drink (a *pastis*) at a local bar and knew he could not get one unless he was taken for an American. Not only did he remove the badge and number, but he also put on a tie and a pair of sun glasses (the "aviator" model) to look even more like an American.

and apologize to Diatta for his mistake. Diatta forgives him. He then plays a record by Charlie Parker on his gramophone. While the music is playing, they discuss the works of major Black poets, writers and thinkers such as Marcus Garvey and Langston Hughes. The American soldier is amazed by Diatta's knowledge and culture and comes to the conclusion that Diatta has "a lot of luck," in comparison with the "Negroes" in Detroit, where he comes from, who are destined to work in car factories. The only way for the African American soldier to escape his fate was to enlist in the Allied forces, in hopes of discovering the world.

Since the music by Parker is played during the entire scene, it acts as a symbol of harmony and understanding between Black people around the world. The music by Parker creates a bond between the two men. The choice of Parker's music is particularly salient since it is known as fusing jazz with other musical styles, a path followed later by others.¹⁷⁵ The writers mentioned in the conversation are equally significant. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940),¹⁷⁶ from Jamaica, was the founder of a famous pan-Africanist movement, namely Garveyism. He believed that the union between Black people across the world would lead to an improvement of their conditions. His ideas were implemented by the creation of the Universal Negro Improvement Association that promoted the development of Liberia as the "Promised land" where the victims of the Diaspora could go back and settle down.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967),¹⁷⁷ mentioned by Diatta, is another important figure. He was one of the first African American poets to assert and be proud of

¹⁷⁵General information about Charlie Parker was found in: Woideck, Carl. *Charlie Parker: His Music and Life*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.

¹⁷⁶General information about Marcus Garvey was found on the Marcus Garvey Website: <http://www.marcusgarvey.com>, consulted on 30 November 2007.

¹⁷⁷General information about Langston Hughes was found on the Library of Congress Website: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/hughes.html>, consulted on 30 November 2007.

his “blackness.” In a poem published in *The Nation* in 1926, considered as his manifesto, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” he wrote: “The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express/our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame./If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not,/it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too.” Hughes encouraged Black writers to get rid of the need, conscious or unconscious, for Whites’ approval and to develop pride and confidence in their Black sensitivity. Hughes’ influence was decisive on the Negritude movement of the 1930s which developed in the face of French colonialism. In the context of the movie, it is also relevant to note that Hughes first disapproved of the involvement of African American soldiers in WWII. For him, it was quite ironical to ask these soldiers to fight Nazism and its racial policies when in the American army the Jim Crow discriminatory laws¹⁷⁸ were still standard practice. Later, however, Hughes thought that this participation could actually be an argument to invoke in order to change the living conditions at home. This echoes Sembene’s plea: that the infantrymen’s involvement in WWII should have led to a reappraisal of their colonial status.

References to pan-Africanist thinkers and believers and the apparent communion that unites Diatta and the American soldier¹⁷⁹ while they listen to Parker’s music do not necessarily indicate, as Kenneth Harrow upholds, that “their single point of identity, their race, suffice[s] to join them in an uncomplicated fashion” (150). Instead of presenting pan-Africanism as “unproblematic” (Harrow 150), Sembene points to the limits of this idea. First, he does so diachronically, by confronting the ideals of yesterday, the year of the *diegesis*, to the reality of 1987 Africa,

¹⁷⁸The Jim Crow laws claim “separate but equal” status for Black Americans. In reality, they led to treatment that was almost always inferior to those provided to White Americans.

¹⁷⁹Another wink to pan-Africanism can be found in the names given to some infantrymen in the movie: they are names of African countries. This is also how Sembene conveys that many African countries contributed to the European conflict.

the time the movie was released. The African audience of the 1980s knew, for instance, that the dream of the “Promised Land” in Liberia was definitely lost. The 1980 military coup in Liberia blatantly revealed the gulf that existed between the native groups and the American settlers, since the former killed the President of Liberia, William R. Tolbert, to install Samuel Kanyon Doe as the first Head of State who was not a member of the Americo-Liberian elite.¹⁸⁰ In the 1980s and the following decades, the names of Garvey and Hughes convey not only the dreams of a generation, but also, and maybe above all, the ashes of it.

Sembene also problematizes a supposedly immediate and illimited racial understanding in a synchronic way. He does so by showing us two men who, despite their shared enjoyment from listening to Parker’s music, cannot really understand the situation in which the other lives. The American soldier finds indeed Diatta’s life enviable, compared to his own fate that he shares with his Black brothers in Detroit. Again this comment is quite ironical when one knows that Diatta will be one of the victims of the massacre. Claiming that “elision of complexity and mixed cases makes *Camp de Thiaroye* too easy to digest” (Harrow 150) is certainly proof of the critics’ failure or inability to read between the lines and between the spaces that Sembene left purposely open. The cracks that exist between the time of the story and the time of the viewing, between the characters’ and the audience’s knowledge, are particularly favorable to create surplus of meaning, to question the characters’ beliefs and opinions, to reflect on the complexity of issues and on their corollary complex answers.

¹⁸⁰Information on Liberia is available in this introductory book: Runn-Marcos, K. T. and B. Ngovo Kolloholon. *Liberians: An Introduction to their History and Culture*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005.

Popular Culture

In his film, Sembene draws on popular music and songs. The use of popular culture tends to confirm, at the level of the content, the filmmaker's desire to make his work also available to a more general audience instead of privileging an intellectual one, which he does not however reject. The French songs, *En passant par la Lorraine* and *Que reste-t-il de nos amours?*, and the German one *Lili Marlene* are now analyzed to bring out the various and rich connotations they convey.

En passant par la Lorraine The first popular song played in the movie is the children's song *En passant par la Lorraine*,¹⁸¹ a song that belongs to, and represents, French heritage. It is not sung, but played by the military orchestra, after they have played military tunes. The orchestra, made up of Black military musicians, stationed *tirailleurs* wearing the checheya, welcomes the repatriated *tirailleurs* as they land in Dakar, i.e. in *French* territory, as the song associates the Lorraine region with the West African land. The lyrics of the song are not really significant

¹⁸¹Here are the lyrics: "En passant par la Lorraine avec mes sabots/En passant par la Lorraine avec mes sabots/Rencontrai trois capitaines, avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh! avec mes sabots/Rencontrai trois capitaines avec mes sabots/Rencontrai trois capitaines avec mes sabots/Ils m'ont appelée 'Vilaine,' avec mes sabots dondaine Oh, oh, oh! avec mes sabots/Ils m'ont appelé 'Vilaine,' avec mes sabots/Ils m'ont appelée 'Vilaine,' avec mes sabots/Je ne suis pas si vilaine, avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh! avec mes sabots/Je ne suis pas si vilaine, avec mes sabots/Je ne suis pas si vilaine, avec mes sabots/Puisque le fils du roi m'aime, avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh, avec mes sabots/Puisque le fils du roi m'aime avec mes sabots/Puisque le fils du roi m'aime avec mes sabots/Il m'a donné pour étrenne avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh, avec mes sabots/Il m'a donné pour étrenne avec mes sabots/Il m'a donné pour étrenne avec mes sabots/Un bouquet de marjolaine avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh, avec mes sabots/Un bouquet de marjolaine avec mes sabots/Un bouquet de marjolaine avec mes sabots/Je l'ai planté dans la plaine avec mes sabots/Je l'ai planté dans la plaine avec mes sabots/S'il fleurit je serai reine avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh, avec mes sabots/S'il fleurit je serai reine avec mes sabots/S'il fleurit je serai reine avec mes sabots/S'il y meurt, je perds ma peine avec mes sabots dondaine/Oh, oh, oh avec mes sabots." The lyrics can be found on the following website: <http://www.momes.net/comptines/personnages/en-passant-par-la-lorraine.html>, consulted on 14 November 2007.

per se. Yet, its history is worth mentioning because it echoes the situation depicted in the movie. According to Claude Duneton's *Histoire de la chanson française*, the song (melody and lyrics) dates back to the 16th century and originated in the region of Brittany. Yet it was significantly modified during the Third Republic (more precisely in 1885) when the government, implementing the public school service, wanted to have at its disposal a repertoire of songs for the children. The original "En m'en revenant de Rennes" then became "En passant par la Lorraine." Lorraine was at that time, and until the 1919 Versailles Treaty, a region that France had lost to Prussia in 1871. The song had therefore a strong patriotic connotation: "No French people could then sing this refrain without thinking of the lost province, to the shame of the 1870 defeat, and to the revenge that was already being prepared"¹⁸² (Duneton).

To play the song to welcome African soldiers that fought for France is a means of linking the colonial territory of West Africa to the lost, and recovered, Lorraine: West Africa is finally freed from Vichy and Nazi/German influence and France's territory is reunited again under one ruler, de Gaulle. When the orchestra starts to play the song, the movie only displays an African crowd: the military musicians playing and the families of the repatriated soldiers. In the next scene, the spectators do not see the crowd any longer. Yet they hear not only the music played by the military orchestra, but also "Vive la France. Vive la victoire. Vive de Gaulle. Vive de Gaulle. Vive la France." The standard French in which these words are pronounced suggest that they are spoken by the colonizers. The song assumes a role similar to the one it endorsed during the Third Republic, which encouraged the expansion of colonization: it is meant to reinforce the sense of national cohesion

¹⁸²"Aucun Français ne pouvait alors chanter ce refrain sans songer à la province perdue, à la honte de la défaite de 1870, et à la revanche à laquelle déjà on se préparait."

and to inspire patriotic fervor during times when France was weakened.

Yet, because the song is played by Black soldiers and in overseas territories, so far away from France, it is rather meant to question the beliefs that lie at the basis of any nation building: what does it mean to belong to France, and to be patriotic, for natives of Africa? Does it only mean to be drafted in the army and probably killed for the “motherland” or does it involve the possibility for them to become French citizens? What is “Frenchness” exactly? Can it be “exported” to foreign territories? Is that a condition or a feeling that the African soldiers could have experienced, having fought for France? Will that ever be compatible with the feeling of belonging to another community? The inclusion of the song in the movie raises questions, mainly because the song and what it represents cannot help but cause an effect of “strangeness.” It confronts the audience with the inconsistencies of the colonial situation and nation building.

Que reste-t-il de nos amours? Another song that certainly symbolizes “Frenchness” is the song by Charles Trénet, “Que reste-t-il de nos amours?”¹⁸³ The song was released in 1942 and was a hit, like most songs by Trénet.¹⁸⁴ Trénet never quit singing during the German occupation of Paris. During those times, he also started

¹⁸³Here are the lyrics: “Ce soir le vent qui frappe à ma porte/Me parle des amours mortes/Devant le feu qui s’éteint/Ce soir c’est une chanson d’automne/Dans la maison qui frissonne/Et je pense aux jours lointains/Refrain: Que reste-t-il de nos amours?/Que reste-t-il de ces beaux jours?/Une photo, vieille photo/De ma jeunesse/Que reste-t-il des billets doux?/Des mois d’avril, des rendez-vous?/Un souvenir qui me poursuit/Sans cesse/Bonheur fané, cheveux au vent/Baisers volés, rêves mouvants/Que reste-t-il de tout cela?/Dites-le-moi/Un petit village, un vieux clocher/Un paysage si bien caché/Et dans un nuage le cher visage/De mon passé/Les mots les mots tendres qu’on murmure/Les caresses les plus pures/Les serments au fond des bois/Les fleurs qu’on retrouve dans un livre/Dont le parfum vous enivre/Se sont envolés pourquoi?” The lyrics can be found on the following website: <http://www.paroles.net/chansons/20882.htm>, consulted on 14 November 2007.

¹⁸⁴General information about Trénet was found on the website devoted to his life and work: <http://www.charles-trenet.net>, consulted on 14 November 2007.

a career in cinema, playing in movies by Prévert. He continued to have success in Paris and in France where songs like “Espoir” or “Douce France” seemed to have brought some consolation to the French population. Later, the song “Que reste-t-il de nos amours?” was extensively used by Truffaut in his 1968 movie, *Baisers volés* (*Stolen kisses*), whose title is taken from the lyrics: “stolen kisses, shifting dreams, what is left from all this?”¹⁸⁵ The film is the continuation of the story of Antoine Doinel, the main character in *Les 400 coups* (*The 400 blows*). The movie deals with Antoine’s relationship, its beginning and its end, with Christine. It is a romance whose end is announced from the onset with the song by Trénet. Yet, Truffaut manages to transform the song into a joyous motif. The song is itself ambiguous since the sad lyrics, dealing with a couple’s break up, are disconnected to the light and happy tone of the melody. It is worth mentioning that the historical background of *Baisers volés* is de Gaulle’s France during the 1968 students’ demonstrations: in the movie, a protest is shown on the TV screen.

The choice of the song by Sembene is certainly not innocent: it refers, with a light, not to say comical tone, to the ending (love) relationship between France and its empire. It is played twice in the film. The first time, it announces the beginning of the end of the empire. The second time, it confirms the split. In the first scene where the song is played, an area of Dakar, resembling an affluent neighborhood of Paris, or any French city, is presented. The houses are luxurious, the trees are in bloom and the only people in the street are White and wealthy people arriving to a party held in one of the beautiful houses. Except for the Black newspaper seller that runs in the street shouting “Paris-Dakar,” it is difficult to tell that this neighborhood is actually located in Dakar. As the song is played, the spectators realize that the “love” mentioned in the song must refer in the context

¹⁸⁵“Baisers volés, rêves mouvants/Que reste-t-il de tout cela?”

of France's "love" for its colony. And yet, what Sembene films of the colony is not the population, not even the "exotic" landscapes, but a place which, although situated overseas, looks exactly like a French city. "Love" here is perverse since it has the connotations of possession, imposition, and exclusion. Contemporary to the events, the song by Trénet certainly captures the current climate of the aftermath of war. The song allows the French population to escape current political concerns and to take refuge in easy entertainment: what was valid for the metropolis during the occupation is also valid, with a time-lag, for the French living in the overseas territories and facing the colonial situation.

The second time the song is heard, it is played on the radio in a bar where officers usually have a drink. This time, they go to the bar after a significant meeting: General Dagnan has asked all the officers in charge at the Camp de Thiaroye to come and give their opinions on the infantrymen's demands. Only Captain Raymond, who was responsible for the infantrymen back in France and who therefore knows them very well, takes their side. Not only does he support their fair claims in the name of Justice, but he also quells all the arguments presented by the other officers who believe it is unnecessary to pay the infantrymen, either because France, in the aftermath of war is undergoing economic austerity or under the pretext that the soldiers could not spend the money in their remote villages anyway. Although the meeting is held in an advisory capacity, we understand that Captain Raymond's plea will not be heard and that, on the contrary, a severe punishment awaits the rebellious soldiers. After the meeting, all the officers go to the bar, where the song by Trénet is playing on radio. Although Raymond is the first to arrive and to sit at a table with other chairs available, everybody avoids him. He is left alone while the other officers settle down outside, discussing the meeting and accusing Raymond of being a communist whose purpose is to destabilize the empire. Whereas there

have been tensions between Raymond and the other officers all along the movie, the song now represents the ideological gap that now separates the defender of the infantrymen's cause, on the one side and on the other, their adversaries. The two parties' positions have become so radical that dialogue is not possible any more, a situation symbolized by Raymond closing the window that allowed hitherto access to the other officers' conversation. The song may also represent the disappointment and bitterness Raymond experiences toward the military administration and the way it managed conflicts: for him, something is now broken; he is disillusioned. Of course, the song also announces the end of the French domination of the overseas territories.

The song is ambiguous: the lyrics deal with the remains of a love affair whereas the refrain is rather sparkling. Truffaut exploited this duality to give a happy tone to his movie. It is the case for Sembene's movie as well. After all, the end of the French empire leads to the independence of the colonies. The song has therefore an ironical tone, underlined by the light melody, in that what appears to be a disaster for the French, is actually happy news for the natives, whose point of view is actually never taken into account in the two scenes in which the song is played. The song only gives access to the French perspective on the colonial situation and thus contributes to our understanding of colonization as, to say the least, a "non shared" love relationship. To compare colonization to a love affair and to symbolize its ending by a popular song is in itself a humorous strategy. As Michaël Riffaterre points out, the amusement caused by humor is due to a "gap between a funny form and a content which is not (neutral, serious, even tragic) or between an unusual form and a content which, by usage, excludes the oddities of expression"¹⁸⁶ (164). Humor here comes from the confrontation between a serious

¹⁸⁶ "un décalage entre une forme amusante et un contenu qui ne l'est pas (neutre, grave, tragique

content, colonization, and a form, the song, that does not reflect the seriousness of the situation.

Since the song was extensively used by Truffaut, Sembene's use of it can also allude to Truffaut's movie. Although apparently mainly concerned with the male character's love affairs, the movie by Truffaut also refers to the difficulty for him to find himself personally in the troubled socio-political context of 1968. The film refers to controversial times, during de Gaulle's leadership. It would not be unreasonable to think that Sembene's use of the song is also a wink at de Gaulle's weakness in order to break the myth that erected him as France's savior and the colonies' liberator. Sembene dares to present another facet of de Gaulle, like the one that made him hush up the massacre of Thiaroye. In *Emitai*, he already suggested the continuity of colonial violence from Vichy to de Gaulle, in a scene where the picture of de Gaulle is replaced by Pétain's. With humor, Sembene, acting in the movie in the role of a *tirailleur*—that he really was at some point of his life—questions the logic of the French who dismissed a four-star marshal for a two-star general.

Besides, the contestation of the image of de Gaulle as “the liberator, the healer of the wounds caused by the pro-Nazi Maréchal Pétain, and the father of African independence” (Gadjigo 41) is also carried out explicitly in *Camp de Thiaroye*. Part of a dialogue between Diatta, the Black Sergeant, and the White Captain Raymond revolves around the similarities between the Nazi and the colonial armies. Whereas Raymond upholds that such a comparison is not appropriate and even exaggerated, Diatta is convinced that the massacre that took place in Effok under the Vichy administration could well have been carried out under de Gaulle. At the end of the movie, Diatta's words will prove to be true. The dialogue allows Sembene to kill two birds with one stone: he denounces the colonial system, intrinsically

même) ou entre une forme insolite et un contenu qui dans l'usage exclut la bizarrerie d'expression.”

perverse, while suggesting that a more nuanced depiction of de Gaulle has to be provided since its undertaking of de-colonization did not go without violence and went hand in hand with the neo-colonization of Africa.

Lili Marlene *Lili Marlene*,¹⁸⁷ a poem originally written by school teacher Hans Leip in 1915, owes its popularity as an anti-war song, as much by its lyrics¹⁸⁸ as by the history of its reception. It recounts a soldier's longing for his beloved one, Lili Marlene, whose love provides him with the courage to accomplish his dirty work, i.e. fighting. Because records were scarce, Radio Belgrade, which could be received throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, played the song very often. The song ended up being censored by the Nazi regime. However, because the radio station received, from both German and the Axis soldiers, a lot of requests to play the song again, they decided to broadcast it every evening at 9:55pm. It is said that sometimes the hostilities would stop while the song was playing.

There exist numerous versions of this song. One of them is called the *D-Day Dodgers'song*: the Allied forces in Italy made up their own lyrics¹⁸⁹ and adapted

¹⁸⁷General information on the song was found on the Official *Lili Marlene* Page: <http://ingeb.org/garb/lmarleen.html>, consulted on 15 November 2007.

¹⁸⁸“Outside the barracks by the corner light/I’ll always stand and wait for you at night/We will create a world for two/I’ll wait for you the whole night through/For you, Lili Marleen For you, Lili Marleen/Bugler tonight, don’t play the Call To Arms/I want another evening with her charms/Then we will say goodbye and part/I’ll always keep you in my heart/With me, Lili Marleen/With me, Lili Marleen/Give me a rose to show how much you care/Tied to the stem, a lock of golden hair/Surely tomorrow you’ll feel blue/But then will come a love that’s new/For you, Lili Marleen/For you, Lili Marleen/When we are marching in the mud and cold/And when my pack seems more than I can hold/My love for you renews my might/I’m warm again, my pack is light/It’s you, Lili Marleen/It’s you, Lili Marleen/My love for you renews my might/I’m warm again, my pack is light/It’s you, Lili Marleen/It’s you, Lili Marleen.” This version (one of many), sung by Marlene Dietrich, can be found on the following website: [http://www.prato.linux.it/\\$\sim\\$\lmasetti/canzonicontrolaguerra/canzone.php?lang=en&id=1600\#lyrics_song](http://www.prato.linux.it/\sim\lmasetti/canzonicontrolaguerra/canzone.php?lang=en&id=1600\#lyrics_song), consulted on 15 November 2007.

¹⁸⁹“We’re the D-day Dodgers out in Italy,/Always on the vino and always on the spree,/8th Army scroungers and their tanks,/We live in Rome among the Yanks,/We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy./We landed at Salerno, holidays with pay,/Jerry brought his band out to cheer us on

them to the original tune. The song was composed after Nancy Astor's words. A member of the British Parliament, she named the Allied servicemen on the Italian front the "D-Day dodgers," referring to the fact that by serving in Italy, those soldiers had avoided the invasion of Normandy, and the major combats that took place in the Northwest of Europe. She supposedly did so thinking it was a compliment, as the name "Desert Rats" was in 1942. Since a lot of African soldiers fought along the Free French forces during the Italian campaign, the song can well be a nod by Sembene to the African ex-servicemen serving in Italy alongside the Allied forces. The recurring use of the song is a reminder of the participation of African troops in WWII.

The song is actually never sung in the movie, but the melody gives a rhythm to it. The audience ends up anticipating the type of situation that will be depicted, when the song is played. Instead of having an anti-war tone, the song signifies tensions and conflicting situations. The first time an infantryman plays the song with an harmonica, another infantryman, Gabon, runs to the camp to inform the others that he just saw, in town and in broad daylight, sergeant Diatta being "kid-

our way,/Showed us sights and made us tea,/We all sang songs and beer was free,/To welcome D-Day Dodgers to sunny Italy./Naples and Cassino were taken in our stride,/We didn't come to fight there. We just came for the ride./Anzio and Sangro were just names,/We only came to look for dames,/The randy D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy./On the way to Florence we had a lovely time,/We ran a bus to Rimini right through the Gothic Line,/Soon to Bologna we will go,/And after that we'll cross the Po. We'll still be the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy./Once we heard a rumour we were going home,/Back to dear old Blighty, never more to roam,/Then someone said, 'In France you'll fight,'/We said 'No fear, we'll just sit tight,/The windy D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy./'Dear Lady Astor, you think you know a lot,/Standing on your platform talking tommy rot,/You-England's sweetheart bride-/We think your mouth's too bleeding wide,/That's from the D-Day Dodgers in sunny Italy./Look across the mountains in the mud and rain,/See the rows of crosses some without no name,/Heartbreak and toil and suffering gone:/The Boys Beneath Just Slumber On,/They were the D-Day Dodgers who stayed in Italy." The lyrics of this version can be found on the following website: [http://www.prato.linux.it/~sim\\$lmasetti/canzonicontrolaguerra/canzone.php?lang=en&id=1600\#lyrics_song](http://www.prato.linux.it/~sim$lmasetti/canzonicontrolaguerra/canzone.php?lang=en&id=1600\#lyrics_song), consulted on 15 November 2007. More information about the song can be found on the following webpage: <http://www.jacksdale.org.uk/pages/Poems/DDay.htm>, consulted on 15 November 2007.

napped” by American soldiers. The third time, the song is heard (the second time will be discussed in the next paragraph) in the scene where the stationed infantrymen have their guns pointed at the repatriated infantrymen who just demanded that their money to be changed to the regular rate. The fourth and last time the music is heard is after General Dagnan, who was held hostage by the infantrymen in their barracks, promises them that he would go to Dakar and ask the authorities to treat the men fairly. He gives his word that they would be paid immediately and their money exchanged at the correct rate. Yet, Pays, the insane infantryman, does not trust the General. The tension of the scene, that announces the coming drama, is signified by the song.

Only one time, the second time, is the melody related to a peaceful event. The exception deserves to be noticed and interpreted. The scene is the conclusive part of what could be called the “Diatta affair.” Since the Americans have given their sergeant, Diatta, a hard time, a group of infantrymen decide, as a revenge, to kidnap an American soldier. Diatta has come back and the American soldier is released. A discussion follows between Diatta and the infantrymen that organized the kidnapping. One of them tells Diatta how happy they all are that he is back, safe and sound. Another one says, mockingly, that they finally are all, himself included, a bunch of idiots, considering that, to avenge their Black sergeant and friend, they captured a White soldier. One of the other infantrymen argues that these words are racist: a soldier is a soldier, whether he is White or Black. To conclude the discussion, a fourth infantryman states: “Him talked” (“Lui parler”), meaning that what the other just said was quite logical. They all end up laughing. Then, *Lili Marlene* is played while Diatta places the Nazi helmet, Pays’ war trophy, on Pays’ head. The scene has a moving tone since Pays, in close-up, is about to cry. Finally, all the men leave so that Diatta can rest.

The scene is one of the few where a small group of infantrymen are at peace and relax. They simply enjoy being together, they joyously converse and there is no tension at all. Moreover, the scene is crucial in that, despite their lack of French language skills (they speak a pidgin French), they are able to formulate a simple and yet powerful thought: the world will be free of racism only when people are able to think about situations without referring to the race as a significant element. The Nazi helmet and the song, which was famous during the war, tend to intensify the message, since they act as indices proving that the world is not ready for such an idea. Yet the song, for the first time, also signifies a moment of appeasement, like the ceasefires that the soldiers in Europe respected before an impending battle.

This song is often played on the harmonica. Besides, this instrument is used many times in the movie, sometimes introducing a Western movie-type of music, like the one by Ennio Morricone. This kind of music, at times played with other instruments, such as the trumpet, is heard repeatedly in *Camp de Thiaroye* in a significant fashion. There are at least two non-exclusive interpretations to this recurring musical theme. First, given the topic of the movie, it can be an implicit critique of the U.S. and their merciless and bloody expansion on the American continent. Second, Sembene probably uses the music to signify the American presence in West Africa and the threat that it constituted then for the French colonial empire. According to Echenberg,

the presence of significant numbers of Allied, and especially American troops in Dakar from 1943 until the end of the war against Hitler added a significant second dimension to French fears. In this view, it was held that the Americans coveted France's West African empire and would welcome a convenient excuse to take over control ("Tragedy at

Thiaroye” 119-20).

This fear echoes the comments an American officer makes to Diatta in the movie: “Those French are crazy. They have lost their empire,” words to which Diatta seems to agree by smiling, but that he does not find useful to translate to Captain Labrousse: “Nothing important”,¹⁹⁰ he answers to Labrousse when the officer asks him to translate. Sembene has translated the French’s fear of losing their West African territories to the U.S. by subtly distilling a score similar to the one present in movies describing the conquest of the American West.

High Culture

Although belonging to a high cultural stratum, the works analyzed in this section resist hegemonic discourses. The *Adagio* by Albinoni, *Gallipoli* by Peter Weir, *Le Corbeau* by Henri-Georges Clouzot, and the references to French writers belonging to the resistance network, such as Vercors and Aragon, demonstrate that *Camp de Thiaroye* is a complex film which raises more questions than answers them.

From the *Adagio* by Albinoni to *Gallipoli* by Peter Weir After the discussion between Diatta and the American soldier, Diatta writes to his wife while listening to the *Adagio* by Albinoni. The scene contributes to the depiction of Diatta as being a “music lover” (“mélomane”), as the Lieutenant had named him and to which Captain Labrousse had sarcastically replied: “A music lover! Now, I have seen everything,”¹⁹¹ emphasizing the impossibility, for him, that an African could appreciate “great music” (“de la grande musique”). With the preceding scene in mind, this one reveals Diatta’s alienation. As Brian Goldfarb notices, Diatta symbolizes

¹⁹⁰“Rien d’important.”

¹⁹¹“Un mélomane! On aura tout vu.”

the perfect outcome of an assimilation process that unfolded within the military system: “As an exemplary product of the heterogeneous pedagogical/disciplinary mechanisms of cultural, educational and military institutions, he occupies the pinnacle of the assimilationist hierarchy among colonized subjects” (16). As such, Diatta also represents the failure of the assimilationist ideology. His character reveals how the structure and ideology of colonialism not only affect but also deeply disturb individuals at a psychological level.¹⁹² Mocked by his intellectually inferior commanding officers, misunderstood by his brothers of race (as we noticed earlier), rejected by his family who does not understand why he married a White woman, i.e. a woman who belongs to the community of people who massacred Diatta’s own family,¹⁹³ he is profoundly isolated and alienated.

The scene in which he writes to his wife stresses his alienation at the most intimate level, in the relationship with his beloved one. Scholar John D.H. Downing (199) has noticed the following:

we see him writing to his wife, telling her only as one element in a whole list of events that his parents had both died while he was away—not that they had been shot down like dogs by order of the French army. We are left to wonder whether he is gradually distancing himself from her, since he cannot seemingly express horror and grief and anger at their loss, or whether the information is still only gradually penetrating and challenging the carapace of French-ness that has been overlaid on him during his previous years of university education and military

¹⁹²Another character, Pays, demonstrates this point: “Intent on wearing a Nazi helmet, he ambivalently identifies with both concentration camp victims and Nazi soldiers. His character embodies the tragic effects of Eurocolonial pedagogy: the contradictions of assimilation internalized as psychosis. In his schizoid identification with the colonizer, he is both subjugator and subjugated” (Goldfarb 16).

¹⁹³Diatta’s aunt, who comes with her daughter to pay him a visit, leaves his shed furiously after she notices the picture of a white woman on the shelf and he confirms to her that it is his wife.

service.

It is not only the telling of his parents' death that sounds distant, but the entire letter, whose writing sounds discordant, out of tune, or even fake, like these final words that conclude the letter: "I love you, not for your body, but for the fullness you put in my body. It is a very sad letter for a very big love".¹⁹⁴

While he is writing, in order "to be with you (his wife) better and to be together,"¹⁹⁵ Diatta plays the *Adagio* by Albinoni, the couple's favorite piece of music. Because Diatta shows extreme difficulty in expressing, or even experiencing emotions, the *Adagio* by Albinoni acts in the scene as a better medium, maybe because it is non linguistic, to convey feelings. Here, the music certainly has a poignant quality. Indicating his deep alienation, the *Adagio* is instrumental in helping Diatta, and maybe the spectators, to eventually connect with what he feels.

Strictly speaking, it is historically impossible for Diatta to be listening to Albinoni's *Adagio*. It is anachronistic.¹⁹⁶ Although Albinoni lived in the late 17th century until 1751, he actually did not compose the famous *Adagio*. This piece of music is a late composition, actually dating from the mid-20th century, by Remo Giazatto who supposedly based it on fragments of a sonata found at the Dresden State Library. A large part of Albinoni's work had been destroyed in WWII when the Allied forces bombed Dresden in February 1945. Sembene's insertion of the *Adagio* had to correspond to a preoccupation other than setting the historical background. One can make the hypothesis that Sembene, in 1987 when he directed *Camp de Thiaroye*, is referring to it to establish a dialogue with the 1981 anti-war

¹⁹⁴"Je t'aime. Pas pour ton corps, mais pour la plénitude que tu as mise dans mon corps. C'est une bien triste lettre pour un amour grand."

¹⁹⁵"pour être mieux avec toi et être ensemble"

¹⁹⁶General information on Albinoni's life and work can be found on the on-line music encyclopedia, *Grove Music*: <http://www.grovemusic.com>, consulted on 3 December 2007.

movie *Gallipoli*,¹⁹⁷ in which director Peter Weir uses the *Adagio* extensively. Like Weir's movie, Sembene's is the first film to document the participation of the (ex-)colonies in world conflicts: WWI for Weir, WWII for Sembene.

Gallipoli is based on the actual Battle of Gallipoli, the name of a peninsula in Turkey, that took place during WWI. The battle opposed the Australian Imperial Forces, mostly made up of young men from rural Australia, to the Turk army which sided with the Germans. The film therefore engages with a topic of significance for Sembene: the issue of the participation of the Empire forces in a war, far away, which barely concerned the overseas populations. The Australian sentiment toward Great Britain was however quite different from the feelings of the African colonies toward the metropolis. For one thing, the issue of the Empire's participation was deprived of any racial dimension in the case of Australia. All Australians and New Zealanders enrolled in the movie were White men.¹⁹⁸ Second, Australia was already a nation in 1901, when the six Australian colonies federated into the Commonwealth of Australia. As Bill Gammage underscores in his book *The Broken Years*, the Australian and New Zealander voluntary participation in WWI was politically important because it was the first time they would fight as a unit alongside the British ones. In short, it was their first national military undertaking, which has been celebrated since then as "Anzac Day."

Weir's movie as well as Sembene's express the disdain with which the "motherland" officers considered the "imperial forces," but more importantly, they emphasize the fact that the imperial soldiers only served as cannon fodder and their

¹⁹⁷General information on the movie was found in: *The Complete Film Dictionary*. Ed. Ira Koningsberg. New York: Penguin Reference, 1997.

¹⁹⁸Weir nevertheless tackles racial issues when he addresses in the movie the relationships between the White colonists of Australia and the natives, and when he depicts the White soldiers' behaviors towards native populations in Egypt (where the troops are stationed before going to Turkey) and towards the Turkish soldiers at Gallipoli.

sacrifice was simply underestimated. The comparison needs to stop here since in the case of Thiaroye, the situation was far more dramatic. To the British officers' contempt, the Australian soldiers could respond by mocking them without fearing any retaliation. In one scene of *Gallipoli*, a squadron of soldiers riding donkeys meets two British officers on horses and makes fun of them by imitating the British linguistic and behavioral manners. The men of Thiaroye could only endure their French officers' disdain. And when they could not stand it anymore, they found a solution in mutinying, which led to a severe reprisal.

As for the sacrifice of their lives, let us remember that for the Australian soldiers, this sacrifice, however disastrous it was, was nevertheless *voluntary and consensual*,¹⁹⁹ which was rarely the case for the African soldiers who battled during WWII. Myron Echenberg explains that there was a tradition of protest against the enrollment into the French army in West Africa:

the strongest resistance of all came against inclusion into the army in the first place. . . . Draft resistance in West Africa was characterized by techniques peasants had developed wherever undemocratic regimes have attempted to place the burden of military service on their backs. Flight, mutilation, and substitution were only some of the techniques involved. Although more rare, and ultimately disastrous, some communities even went as far as to take up armed resistance in opposition to conscription ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 112).

¹⁹⁹The feeling of sacrifice is reinforced in the movie by the interpretation of the events of the Battle of the Neck. According to the story in the movie, the Australian attack (which indeed was devastating in terms of loss of lives) served as a diversion to permit the landing of British troops. There are some historical controversies about this interpretation. In *Entrenched. The Making of Gallipoli*, Peter Weir insists on the fact that "there is no way a film of battle will match the real thing." He emphasizes, on the other hand, that despite this difficulty, "for a lot of Australians, it [the movie] depicts what Gallipoli was." Mel Gibson adds that the film achieves "what the Anzac spirit was."

Despite their unwillingness to join the army, the African infantrymen fought and experienced a variety of traumatic war experiences, for which the soldiers of Thiaroye were rewarded in a sarcastic and offensive way. The dialogue that Sembene engages with Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* allows him to stress the more dramatic circumstances surrounding the massacre of Thiaroye. Because of the similarities, striking differences between the two situations inevitably arise, insisting on the far more tragic aspects of Thiaroye. In a way, Weir's movie serves as a foil to Sembene's.

Albinoni's *Adagio* is featured in Weir's movie during the opening and ending credits as well as during dramatic scenes, always the ones that precede the battles, to which the music contributes to bring solemnity. The scene in which the *Adagio* is played, and that echoes the most Sembene's movie, is the one in which a dying soldier gives his diary to one of his mates, urging him to deliver it to his parents. This scene points to the personal testimonies that gave access to the historical events. In *Entrenched. The Making of Gallipoli*, David Williamson, who wrote the movie's script, mentions his various sources of inspiration, among which the letters and diaries the soldiers left. He describes the experience of reading these documents as "traumatic" in the sense that after reading a diary that depicts a man's life and inner thoughts for four years, one feels as if one knows this person intimately. Sembene's intent in Diatta's writing scene was probably a way to enter the psyche of a man doomed to die, so that his promise to be soon reunited with his wife and daughter, being the last words he will ever write, takes on a more dramatic and pathetic dimension. Although Sembene, for the most part, treats the massacre of Thiaroye from a collective perspective, from time to time, he introduces the personal and familial drama that the victims and their family experienced.

***Le Corbeau* by Henri-Georges Clouzot** Unlike *Gallipoli*, the reference to *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven*, 1943)²⁰⁰ is explicit in the movie, although possibly unrealistic, since it is quite difficult to learn whether the movie was released in Dakar in 1944. Yet, a poster of the movie stands in the street and two local men, Africans, discuss it (“It is a beautiful movie”²⁰¹) and decide to go and see it in the evening.²⁰² Then the two men see Diatta and mistakenly take him for an American soldier, an understandable mistake since Diatta wears an American uniform. This detail is significant if one argues, as I will later, that the mention of *Le Corbeau* in Sembene’s movie is a reflection of the way one judges people.

Clouzot’s movie is indeed artistically striking, at least according to filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier. In an interview about *Le Corbeau*, Tavernier upholds that the first movie by Henri-Georges Clouzot displays great technical mastery: Clouzot was at the very onset in full possession of his art. Yet, the beauty of the film is not only aesthetic, it also lies in the complex ethical issues it raises. No movie has ever been more controversial than *Le Corbeau*, with regard to its story, its context of release and its interpretation. My argument is that by referring to the movie, Sembene engages himself in a similar complex ethical debate. To better understand the ethical impact of Sembene’s movie, the complexity of Clouzot’s film must be explored first.

Part of the controversy surrounding Clouzot’s movie lies in the fact that it was produced by a German company, the Continental, headed by Alfred Gréfen. Clouzot had been in charge of the screenwriting section at the Continental and was a screenwriter himself before he became a director. As Tavernier explains in the in-

²⁰⁰General information on the movie was found in: *The Complete Film Dictionary*. Ed. Ira Kongsberg. New York: Penguin Reference, 1997.

²⁰¹“C’est un beau film.”

²⁰²“Nous allons aller le voir ce soir.”

terview, Clouzot's job in a German film production company is about the only thing for which Clouzot could be blamed. Although he was condemned for collaborating with the enemy after the Liberation, once at the Continental, Clouzot never acted in a pro-German way nor was he submissive; on the contrary, he even protected Jews within the Continental. As illustrated in the real-facts-based movie by Tavernier, *Laissez-passer (Safe Conduct, 2001)*, Clouzot hid Jewish, communist and resistant director Jean-Paul Dreyfus, who was then known as Jean-Paul Le Chanois, for years. It seems that what attracted Clouzot to the Continental was, paradoxically, the relative freedom that the movie industry afforded him. As he himself stated in the documentary by Arnaud Panigel *The Story of Cinema by Those Who Made It*, in *Le Corbeau*, "I did what I wanted to do."²⁰³

In fact, as Tavernier explains, French movies during wartime had to be evaluated by the tough Vichy state censorship, except of course for the movies produced by the Continental since who could be more respectful of the Nazi propaganda than the Germans themselves? Strangely enough, working in the lion's mouth sometimes offered the directors more freedom. They could, paradoxically, afford to make subtle, implicit or allegorical critical statements. For example, the character of Denise (played by Ginette Leclerc), for whom Clouzot says that he is "full of sympathy," combines the "moral and physical flaws" that both Vichy moralism and Nazi eugenism denounced: she is a physically disabled prostitute. Yet, her intelligence is noticeable since she is the one who first guesses the identity of the writer of the poison-pen letters.

The release of *Le Corbeau*, according to Tavernier, was permitted by Gréfen two months after he received a memo from Goebbels in which he severely criticized the release of *La Symphonie fantastique* by Christian-Jaque. Goebbels thought the

²⁰³"J'ai fait ce que je voulais."

film was (re)awakening French nationalism. The same reproach could not indeed be addressed to Clouzot's movie. Based on actual events that occurred in Tulle decades beforehand, the movie depicts a small French town ravaged by anonymous letters denouncing the inhabitants. First sent by "*the corbeau*," who will later be identified as Doctor Vorzet, the letters can actually have been written by any villager who, at one point or another, wants to take revenge on someone else. An atmosphere of suspicion envelops the town: everyone suspects and is suspected. Squalid truths are unveiled (especially the many adulterous affairs that link the villagers together), but hurtful lies (Nurse Laura Corvin is accused of her patient's suicide, as she is supposed to have told him that he had no chance of survival) are also uttered, to the point that spectators end up losing any certainty as to who is telling the truth and what the truth is. None of the villagers receive an unreserved approval from the audience.

After the Liberation, explained Tavernier, the movie was harshly attacked both by the right and the left wings. For the conservatives, the movie depicted "perverted" people: Doctor Germain (played by Pierre Fresnay), for instance, is not only an atheist and free thinker, he is also a pro-choice doctor. For the left, obsessed with the idea of heroism and of an ideal France united against the enemy, the movie did not correspond to their views. According to Tavernier, at a time when everyone wanted to forgive and especially to forget, in particular French people's responsibility toward the denunciation and deportation of so many Jews, Clouzot was one of the few who showed French people as they were. Tavernier states that Clouzot's depiction was "too true, too loyal, too close to reality" to be accepted in a period of denial and nascent resistant myth.

Forbidden after the Liberation, the movie experienced difficulties during German occupation of France. According to Clouzot himself, in the interview

taken from Panigel's documentary, the *Kommandatur* complained that the movie was meant to deter people from writing denunciatory letters at a time when informing was crucial for the Nazis: "Then," says Clouzot, "I was fired."²⁰⁴ From the interview, one gets the feeling that Clouzot was fascinated by the many, and sometimes contradictory, interpretations of his movie and that he obviously did not foresee. *Le Corbeau* demonstrates the "openness" of a work of art, i.e. how much its interpretations can escape its creator's initial intentions, and how interpretations depend as much on the context of production as on the context of reception of the work.

Mentioning *Le Corbeau* is a way for Sembene to provide his work with a specific ethical dimension. Dealing with the wave of anonymous letters sent by the French to the Gestapo and the militia, *Le Corbeau* is a critique of the Vichy government that encouraged people to denounce Jews, among others, through letters. The French were manipulated by the propaganda of the time, just like the colonizers embraced the racism of colonialism and the fear of communism. Sembene, like Clouzot, does not hesitate to represent shameful French behaviors and mentalities.

Another ethical aspect of the film, from its creation to its reception, deals with the issue of the definition of Good and Evil: who judges? On what basis? Oddly enough, the *diegesis* of the movie appears to have foreshadowed this issue, since it tends to blur the borders between Good and Evil, Truths and Lies. An aesthetically noteworthy scene in the film summarizes Clouzot's opinion on the matter, since he stated in the documentary by Panigel: "this swaying between shade and light, between white and black, between evil and good, I have it in the bottom of my heart."²⁰⁵ The scene depicts a discussion between the two doctors, Vorzet and

²⁰⁴"Alors, je me suis fait virer."

²⁰⁵"Cette balance entre l'ombre et la lumière, entre blanc et noir, entre le mal et le bien, j'ai ça au fond du cœur."

Germain, concerning the notion of Good and Evil. To illustrate his point, Vorzet makes the lamp swing, whereas Germain makes it stop to illustrate his position. The movement of the lamp enlightens or darkens each of the protagonist's faces, creating an aesthetic correspondent to the ethical issue at stake. The dialogue is as follows:

-Vorzet: You think people are all good or all bad. You think that Good is light and Evil is dark. (He makes the lamp swing.) But where does each begin? Where does Evil end? Are you on the good side or the bad side?

-Germain: What a rhetoric! You just stop the lamp.

-Vorzet: Then stop it. (Germain burns himself.) You burned yourself. You see, the experiment proves it.²⁰⁶

The moral of the story, if any, is that Good and Evil are nothing like absolute values, but depend on one's perception. As a corollary, one should be cautious when pronouncing a value judgement: appearances are misleading, as illustrated in Sembene's movie by the two men who mistakenly took Diatta for an American soldier. The movie incites one to give up any judgmental position (doomed to hurt people, as the metaphor of the burn exemplifies) and instead adopt a more humble attitude in appreciation of others' deeds.

Seen through the filter of *Le Corbeau*, Sembene's movie reveals its full ethical dimension. Although in the story of Thiaroye, it is difficult not to take the side of

²⁰⁶“-Vorzet: Vous croyez que les gens sont tout bons ou tout mauvais. Vous croyez que le Bien, c'est la lumière et que l'ombre, c'est le mal. Mais où est l'ombre, où est la lumière? Où est la frontière du Mal? Savez-vous si vous êtes du bon ou du mauvais côté?

-Germain: Quelle littérature! Il n'y a qu'à arrêter la lampe.

-Vorzet: Arrêtez-la! Ahaha. Vous vous êtes brûlé. Vous voyez, l'expérience est concluante.”

the infantrymen against the French, Sembene advocates the consideration of other points of view. At least one white officer, Raymond, takes the side of the infantrymen and disagrees with the treatment the French authorities inflict upon them. On the other hand, all Africans are not on the “good side,” since some infantrymen, under colonial command, are ready to shoot their brothers. What is certain though is the distinction Sembene makes between individuals and the system, the colonial system in this case. Although Sembene uncompromisingly condemns the system, he tends to be more indulgent with individuals, even the perpetrators who, like the victims, are caught in socio-historical circumstances that, for the most part, escape them.

French Writers The two main references to French literature, to Vercors and Aragon,²⁰⁷ allow Sembene to draw attention to issues important to him: resistance and communism. In so doing, Sembene also anchors his work in the French tradition of *littérature engagée*.

The mention of Vercors and in particular of *Le Silence de la mer* occurs in a scene where Captain Raymond asks Diatta to lend him a book. Diatta lists some French authors whose books he owns in his portable library: Roger Vaillant, Jules Romains, Roger Martin du Gard.²⁰⁸ These writers are important enough to Diatta since he brought their books back from Europe. These authors, each in their own way, could have been significant to Sembene as well. In Roger Martin du Gard’s *Jean Barois* (1913), Sembene may have admired the first literary representation of the *Affaire Dreyfus* and the Zola trial that followed it; or he may have appre-

²⁰⁷General information on these authors and their works was found in: *Dictionnaire des œuvres du XXème siècle*. Ed. Henri Mitterand. Paris: Le Robert, 1995.

²⁰⁸General information on these authors and their works was found in: *Dictionnaire des œuvres du XXème siècle*. Ed. Henri Mitterand. Paris: Le Robert, 1995.

ciated, in *Les Thibault* (1922-1940), the detailed description of a social class, the *bourgeoisie*, against which one of the protagonists, Jacques Thibault, rebels. The historical panorama that Jules Romains depicts in *Les Hommes de bonne volonté* (1932-1946) was certainly of interest for Sembene for its intertwining between history and individual stories, and the question of how these “small stories” fit in the broader scheme of history. As for Roger Vaillant, Sembene may have been fascinated by the character of Vaillant himself who, from collaboration with the enemy, shifted to an involvement in the *résistance*.

After listing his books, Diatta recommends another reading, *Le Silence de la mer*, a short story by Vercors that he feels is more appropriate since he states: “It’s a beautiful book. It’s very patriotic.”²⁰⁹ As we noticed for *Le Corbeau* but explicitly in this case, the beauty of the book is related to moral concerns, its alleged patriotism. The issue of patriotism leads Raymond to a question concerning Captain Labrousse who has been present all along in this scene:

-Raymond: Will you allow me to lend it to Captain Labrousse when I am done with it?

-Diatta: If Captain Labrousse is interested.²¹⁰

Later in the movie, when Raymond returns the book to Diatta, he informs Diatta that Labrousse read it and both wonder what he thought of it, hoping that the book, in one way or another, had enlightened Labrousse. Labrousse belongs to Dakar’s colonial authorities which until 1943, under Vichy government, did not participate in the war. Moreover, Labrousse is firmly convinced of the importance of the “civ-

²⁰⁹“C’est un beau livre. C’est très patriotique.”

²¹⁰“-Raymond: Vous me permettez de le prêter au Capitaine Labrousse quand j’aurai fini?”

-Diatta: Si le Capitaine Labrousse le désire.”

ilizing mission” of colonization but does not consider himself a racist, although he calls the infantrymen “savages.”

Vercors was a member of the Resistance during WWII. His real name was Jean Bruller and he took his surname from the region in which the famous *maquis* where he fought was located. His novel *Le Silence de la mer* is the paragon of resistance literature, not only because of its story but also because it was published in 1943 by the then clandestine Minuit editions. It depicts the passive resistance of a man and his niece to the imposed presence of a German officer in their house. Their resistance is “passive” to the extent that they are not involved in underground combats at all but instead, they resist the invader by offering him their complete silence in response to conversations the officer ideally would have liked to share with them. The patriotism of the book lies in the fact that it demonstrates that one did not need to be a fighter to belong to the resistance movement: to resist was also possible for the most ordinary people, such as the characters in the story.

Sembene’s reference to Vercors is relevant with regard to the character of the German officer and his beliefs in the beneficial aspects of the German invasion of France. The officer truly loves France and he is deeply convinced that the German occupation will bring out the best in the two peoples (Vercors 53-55; 79-81, for the English translation). Yet, back from an important meeting with his superiors, he realizes that his love for France and his hope for a better world that would combine the best of two civilizations are not shared at all by his superiors, who are only motivated by dreams of destruction and humiliation:

We’re neither madmen nor simpletons: we have the chance to destroy France, and destroy her we will. Not only her material power: her soul as well. Particularly her soul. Her soul is the greatest danger. That’s our

job at this moment—make no mistake about it, my dear fellow! We'll turn it rotten with our smiles and our consideration. We'll make a groveling bitch of her²¹¹ (92).

Given the emphasis of Sembene's scenario on the character of Labrousse regarding Vercors's book (did he read it? What did he think of it?), one may argue that the German officer's disillusionment about the German invasion of France is related to a reflection on colonialism, its motives and achievements. The reference to Vercors is a device for Sembene to associate Nazi ideology and practices to the ideology and practices behind colonialism as well as to associate the mutiny of Thiaroye as an act of resistance, like Senghor had done.

Diatta also refers to Aragon, another famous resistant figure. His name is uttered when two French soldiers are sent in Diatta's room to search it and check out if he had hidden any weapons or money. Of course, they found nothing but books. Among many others, on the shelf, Vercors' book and Aragon's collections of poems stand out, which leads to this short exchange between the two searchers:

-First soldier: Look at what he reads. Aragon, Vercors, Aragon. He is a communist.

-Second soldier: Of course he is a communist. All intellectuals are communist. Fortunately, this one will not have an army career.²¹²

The same identification of Diatta as a communist was made earlier by the commanding officers who were unconvincingly listening to the speech he was pronouncing

²¹¹“Nous ne sommes pas des fous ni des niais: nous avons l'occasion de détruire la France, elle le sera. Pas seulement sa puissance: son âme aussi. Son âme surtout. Son âme est le plus grand danger. C'est notre travail en ce moment: ne vous y trompez pas, mon cher! Nous la pourrions par nos sourires et nos ménagements. Nous en ferons une chienne rampante” (63).

²¹²“-Premier soldat: Regardez sa lecture. Aragon, Vercors, Aragon. C'est un communiste.

-Second soldat: Bien sûr que c'est un communiste. Tous les intellectuels sont des communistes. Heureusement, celui-là ne fera pas carrière dans l'armée.”

to defend his fellow infantrymen. In this scene, the word “communist” is written by an officer on a piece of paper that circulates among the other officers and on which all agree.

Diatta is associated in the movie with the international ideological trend of communism, an ideology to which Sembene himself subscribed and on which he based his pan-Africanism. Communism is presented as a movement of solidarity that gathers individuals regardless of their race—the White Captain Raymond and the Black Sergeant Diatta. Yet by referring to Vercors and Aragon, Sembene does more than affiliate his character and himself with communism. Indeed, the involvement in the communist party did not only have bright sides. There are darker aspects that Sembene points out by referring to the two authors. Both were indeed members of the *Comité national des écrivains* that was instrumental in purging the French writers after the Liberation, a process that had its excesses. The story of the *Comité*, and in particular its break-up, reminds us of the exactions of the communists in the U.S.S.R. and of how many French intellectuals had been deaf to them. Sembene proposes the idea that *engagement* can be problematic. While he himself takes a stand, he also draws attention to the limits and the limitations of political *engagement*, as if it was crucial for Sembene, despite his own opinion, to present characters, situations and issues as objectively as possible.

4.4.4 Beyond Dichotomies: An Apology of Resistance

It is important to assess the role of references to multiple cultural documents in Sembene’s movie. First of all, in doing so, Sembene inserts his work in a cultural network of significance. For instance, the reference to *Le Corbeau* inscribes Sembene’s movie into a specific ethical trend, as a piece of art that raises questions rather

than provides answers. As for the reference to *Gallipoli*, for example, it affiliates *Camp de Thiaroye* with anti-war movies and with issues related to the relationship between ex-colonizers and ex-colonized. Moreover, the process of inserting one's work in a family of preceding artistic pieces is also a way to give credit and legitimacy to one's artistic undertaking. (It is not essentially different from the 16th century Pléiade looking for inspiration in Antiquity.)

Because references to cultural artifacts intrinsically suggest that a dialogue wants to be established with them, it emphasizes the artistic aspect of the original work. What is accentuated is its existence not as a representation of *reality* but as *representation* of reality, which means that the issue of fidelity to (past) reality is less important.

References to cultural documents also render the cultural climate, popular as well as intellectual, contemporary to the events. Such is the case for *Lili Marlene* or for *Le Silence de la mer* that recreate the socio-historical context in which the events occur.

Most of the time, however, the link established with other cultural works causes a gap, a discrepancy; for example, (1) between a serious content and a "light" form, such as the song by Trénet describing the end of the colonial era, or (2) between the time of the *diegesis* and the time of the screening, for example the reference to pan-Africanist, resistant or communist writers, or (3) between the content of a work and the story of its reception-interpretation, for instance the popular song *En passant par la Lorraine* or more dramatically, *Le Corbeau*. Because of this *décalage*, the meaning resonates and increases the complexity of the issues. The usage that Sembene makes of culture is not only a means to refer to various systems of belief or ideology, it is also a means to question them. It therefore softens, complicates, nuances the apparent simple and straightforward ideological stance

that Sembene, according to some critics, is supposed to have taken. The film, because of its network of cultural references, becomes a “polyphonic” (Bakhtin) work which encourages mistrust of what has the evidence of the Truth and resistance to hegemonic discourses.

Because of its anti-establishment tilt, Sembene’s movie belongs to the same group of works on Thiaroye as Diop’s play and Doumbi-Fakoly’s novel. Released in the 1980s, the play, the novel and the film demonstrate the need all these authors had to assess their contemporary situation—the end of Senghor’s long reign and the French interference in Senegal’s affairs—in the light of the past rebellion. Each of them employed specific techniques appropriate to uphold the content of their criticism: for Diop, a strong dichotomy eventually dismantled at the Africans’ expense; for Doumbi-Fakoly, narrative devices aiming at criticizing both France and, to a lesser degree, the *tirailleurs*; for Sembene, references to cultural documents to dismantle dichotomies and promote resistance through art.

Chapter 5

Representations of Thiaroye in a New Era: *L'Ami y'a bon* by Rachid Bouchareb and *Aube de sang* by Cheikh Faty Faye

With the works by Rachid Bouchareb and Cheikh Faty Faye, both produced in the years 2000, we are entering another stage in the history of representations of Thiaroye. Of course, the two authors' representations deal with memory: if it is not by anchoring the event into memory, like in Senghor's and Keita's works, it is by reviving it, by keeping it alive. Bouchareb wants to disseminate a part of history too little known, whereas Faye, on the cover of his play, speaks of a "duty of memory." Like the works by Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly and Sembene, these two works also have a critical dimension toward colonization. Yet, what distinguishes them from all the other works is the idea that a society has to build up and evolve from its mistakes.

The past is there, one cannot modify it. Yet it is possible to understand how past events occurred and more importantly how the knowledge of this past can help understand the society we live in. From this knowledge, also stems the hope that a better society for tomorrow is possible. After all, philosophers (such as Ricœur, for instance, in *La Mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli*) and historians (such as Pierre Nora or Bernard Mouralis) themselves recognize the relevance of the knowledge of the past to illuminate the present, and perhaps even to prevent the recurrence of regrettable mistakes. These general objectives take a very concrete dimension for our two authors however: for Bouchareb, the claim regarding the re-evaluation of the veterans' pensions, and for Faye, the preservation of the site of Thiaroye and the building of a memorial to the soldiers.

5.1 Rachid Bouchareb's Minimalist Representation of Thiaroye

Born in Paris in 1953, of Algerian origin, Rachid Bouchareb has become internationally renowned for his latest film, *Indigènes (Days of Glory, 2006)*. Before reaching celebrity, Bouchareb directed a non-negligible number of movies, which commonly address the impact of history on the life of individuals, especially humble people. He made about a dozen films since 1976, including *Poussières de vie (Dust of Life, 1994)*, nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, and *Little Senegal* (2000), nominated for the Golden Berlin Bear. *Poussières de vie* tells the story of Son, the son of an African-American soldier and Vietnamese woman, who survives in the streets of Saigon after his father hastily leaves Vietnam in 1975. As for *Little Senegal*, the story revolves around Alloune, a Senegalese man who

devotes his life to documenting the history of the slave trade. Intrigued by what happened to his ancestors, he decides to go to the U.S. in the hope of finding members of his extended family.

Indigènes was also nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, and for the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film festival, where it won two prizes for Best Actor and for the “François Chalais” award. The movie caused a lot of controversy in France, since it revived the issue of the “crystalization” of the infantrymen’s war pensions, i.e. the fact that the pensions have not been reevaluated since the independence of the colonies. Recounting the adventures of Maghrebi soldiers who participated in WWII to liberate France, the movie supposedly moved France’s then president Jacques Chirac to make the commitment to tackle the issue of “de-crystallisation” for good. In reality, the situation is very complex and will take a long time to solve, as I explained in the first chapter. In any case, *Indigènes* can be seen as the culmination of a project concerning the (financial) rehabilitation of the participation of the colonized population during WWII, a project that the author already had in mind with *L’Ami y’a bon*, a short animated film (about 7 minutes), in black and white drawings, made in 2004, available for free on the Internet,¹ that addresses the massacre of Thiaroye.

5.1.1 The “Paratext”

The film is accompanied by a substantial “paratext” which complements, in an essential way, its meaning. By using the word “paratext,” I am translating the concept of “*paratexte*,” forged by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes. La Littérature au second degré* (9). The “paratext” consists of all that surrounds the document itself (the

¹<http://www.tadrart.com/tessalit/lamiyabon/home.html>, consulted on 19 June 2008.

cover of a book, for instance) and which influences the audience's reception. In the case of Bouchareb's movie, it refers to what is available on the website and that which introduces the spectators to the animated film, in particular: the synopsis, the storyboard, the technical list, the descriptive accounts concerning the *tirailleurs sénégalais* (including numerous pictures) as well as the historical event the film addresses, and the author's note regarding his motivation ("Notes d'intention").

The homepage is in itself indispensable, because it helps, first of all, to understand the film's title. On it, are included those famous advertisements for Bannania, a banana and cocoa powder to add in milk. The ads represent a *tirailleur sénégalais* with a big smile, under which the legend reads: "*Y'a bon*" ("It's good," the expression is supposed to transcribe, in West African pidgin, the French "C'est bon"). The title of the short movie is thus a nod to the advertising campaign of Bannania, during the colonial period, in which the infantryman's essence was believed to be captured in his smile and his approximative language. Harmless as a child, the infantryman was then at the service of a brand targeting children.

The synopsis is equally necessary, without which, for example, we would not know the name of the short film's hero: Aby. To identify the character by his first name allows us to experience more closely what is happening to him. Of Aby, we learn that being Senegalese, he is mobilized in 1939 by the French army to fight the Germans, the colonies constituting "an important reservoir of men."² In 1940, following the debacle, Aby is taken prisoner in Germany. He stays there many years until he can finally return home after the Liberation in . . . 1945. The mistaken date is recurring on the site. This is regrettable though it is most probably due to a distraction, since the correct date, 1944, is mentioned at least one time (against four

²"un important réservoir d'hommes"; unless otherwise mentioned, quotations in this section are referring to the *L'Ami y'a bon* webpage.

errors) and since Bouchareb obviously created the movie to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Thiaroye.

The description of the massacre, qualified as a “day of infamy,” mentions two reasons why the infantrymen protest: the delay in the payment of due allowances and the poor exchange rate for their marks. The text is deliberately vague about the number of dead (“25, 38, 60 or more”) and, most importantly, insists on the ignorance of this historical episode in France. “In France we know nothing,”³ this is the sentence in bold that closes the text.

The “statement of intent of Rachid Bouchareb”⁴ is another significant aspect of the site. In it, the author describes the mission he foresaw for his movie: “to disseminate this chapter of history,”⁵ i.e. the injustice that consists in that “the African and Maghrebi soldiers who sacrificed themselves for the motherland have still not been compensated.”⁶ This statement allows us to understand why the film is accompanied by a considerable “paratext”: the movie is only a means, among others, to disseminate the historical knowledge.

However, the director’s goal is not only pragmatic. He stated that he was motivated by the artistic dimension of the project, by the opportunity to work with a new medium, the animated film. He was interested by the “equation” (“équation”) between “animated movie” (“film d’animation”) and “a serious topic” (“sujet grave”).

In fact, this note by Bouchareb also illuminates the project of the film *Indigènes*, as if the short animated movie, *L’Ami y’a bon* was a preparatory phase for the Hollywood-type feature-length film. For the director, the dissemination of historical knowledge, and especially less known facts, is key. Therefore, he seeks the

³“En France, on ignore tout.”

⁴“La note d’intention de Rachid Bouchareb”

⁵“diffuser ce chapitre de l’histoire”

⁶“Les tirailleurs africains, maghrébins qui se sont sacrifiés pour la mère patrie, n’ont toujours pas été indemnisés.”

most appropriate means to achieve this purpose and captivate an audience as broad as possible, especially the young and new generations for whom history, since it is not memory, is less accessible. Animated films, the Internet, Hollywood-type movies are all the preferred means selected by Bouchareb to reach a wider audience.

The dissemination of history using artistic means is important in Bouchareb's eyes because the historical knowledge is a necessary first step for a better understanding and analysis of the dynamics of the contemporary situation. For instance, released in 2006, *Indigènes* may be considered an artistic response to the social and ethnic tensions existing in France in 2005 (including the riots in French suburbs in November of that year). The movie emphasizes the implicit fact that second and third generation emigrants should be considered first-class citizens, given the high price paid to France by their ancestors. *L'Ami y'a bon*, released to celebrate the anniversary of Thiaroye, pursues similar purposes: to remember the past, to promote a fair financial compensation for the African veterans, (the least that France could do,) and to encourage the integration of African emigrants based on the common past that France shares with its colonies.

5.1.2 The Minimalist, Almost Childlike Representation

In order to make public the least known historical facts as effectively as possible, Rachid Bouchareb uses means that correspond to the content he tries to convey. In *L'Ami y'a bon*, the conciseness in terms of content matches the minimalism of the techniques deployed. I argue that conciseness of content and minimalism of techniques belong to a "rhetoric of childhood," used by Bouchareb to "respond" to the clichés and stereotypes depicting the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. In the next sections,

first the content is presented and then the techniques, although sometimes, the two cannot help but overlap.

The Concise Content

To reach his pragmatic goal, the short animated film must focus on a straightforward and powerful message. It can be summarized in three propositions articulated so plainly that it is almost child's play. First premise: given the sacrifices endured by the infantrymen and the services they have rendered to France, it is normal to treat them like any other soldier who fought for France. Second proposition: yet, not only were they treated in a discriminatory fashion, when they complained about this state of affairs, they were severely and unjustly punished. Conclusion: it is necessary to repair the injustice committed sixty years ago and the (re)compensation of pension would be a way to do so.

The conclusion is not explicit in the movie: it is the cognitive effect the movie causes. The movie itself is only concerned with the first and second propositions, presented in a sequence of five (chronological) episodes, which are clearly divided in the movie by the following captions: *Sénégal, 1939; France 1940; Débâcle française, juin 1940* ("French Defeat"); *Allemagne, 1941; Sénégal, 1944*. In fact, the first four episodes underline Aby's involvement in the war (his sacrifices and services) whereas the final episode insists on his mistreatment by the French army, by representing Thiaroye.

In terms of sacrifices, the movie points to the many difficulties that Aby had to face because he was forced to fight for France. First, he had to leave his peaceful village and his loving family. The movie opens with a scene in which Aby and his daughter are cultivating the field together; then they both join the mother who is crushing wheat to make flour. The whole family is united around the daily

chores, which provides them with a simple but strong happiness. The atmosphere resembles the one depicted in “Aube africaine” by Keita: everything is quiet and serene until mobilization is ordered. Second, once in France, Aby has to face the unfamiliarity of Europe, significantly represented by the bad weather—it rains, then it snows, which makes Aby regret Senegal’s warmth. One scene shows rows of African soldiers walking in the rain on a road planted with plane-trees, wondering, so we guess, what they are doing there. In another scene, Aby is looking at the snow, which he has probably never seen before, and admiring the sky full of flakes with a full moon behind, Aby thinks of Senegal: the music made by a xylophone briefly introduces us to a picture of the Senegalese village.

Then, Aby is confronted with the realities of war: an unbearable wait during the Phony war, life in the trenches and its corollary privations of all kinds, deadly fights on the front line, and desolation after the defeat. Another scene depicts soldiers running in all directions trying to escape the firing of guns and bombs. Then a close-up focuses on the devastated fields, the bombed houses, and the destroyed village, crossed by ragged African soldiers, in very bad shape, prisoners of the Germans. Finally, Aby is confronted with the daily life of a prisoner of war, suffers solitude, and nostalgia for his country and his family. This feeling is obvious when Aby is shown looking intensely at the landscape behind the barbed-wires surrounding the camp or when focusing first on Aby’s head, the scene introduces us to the Senegalese village, baobabs and birds, of which Aby is dreaming.

As for the services rendered by Aby, they are cast in a relatively long scene, given the short length of the film. Against the backdrop of Hollywood-type music, which encourages the expression of *pathos*, the scene depicts Aby taking care of a white soldier who is wounded. From the black and white colors of the movie, stands out the red color of the fatal injury of the white soldier, whom, dead or alive

(the movie is vague about it) Aby carries on his back. The play on colors is made to intensify the emotion: it stresses the significance of the blood, symbolic of the sacrifice made by all soldiers, but also symbolic of Aby's patriotic behavior and generosity toward his brother in arms. Indeed, the color red, which appears only a few times in this black and white movie, also refers to the red of the French flag, previously emphasized in the movie. Even if Aby did not die for France, by carrying his fellow soldier, he acted bravely, like a patriot, and even more importantly, as a man who demonstrated compassion for a human being who was not of his "race." The movie may imply that it is doubtful that a white soldier would do likewise for an African one. If only for showing *fraternité*, Aby deserves *égalité*.

Then the episode of Thiaroye occurs, which illustrates the second premise, opposed to the first one: the obvious injustice made toward African soldiers in general, and our hero, Aby, in particular, whereas they should have received a fair treatment. The sequence concerning Thiaroye, *Sénégal, 1944*, begins with Aby's return to his village and his reunion with his family, in particular his daughter. Then we see him going to the military barracks in Dakar where, along with other soldiers, he listens to the colonial officer's voice over the loudspeaker—the officer is recognizable as a colonial officer thanks to his typical colonial hat: "My dear children, the war is over now. You are demobilized. Go home. Your balance will not be paid. Go home. It is an order."⁷ Addressing the soldiers in a very paternalistic way at the beginning, the officer ends up giving orders. The message is laconic, expressing simple facts in simple words.

In the following scene, the soldiers look at each other, as if they could not believe their ears. Anger emerges and to show it publicly, Aby takes off his medal

⁷"Mes chers enfants, la guerre est finie maintenant. Vous êtes démobilisés. Rentrez chez vous. Votre solde ne sera pas payé. Rentrez dans vos foyers. C'est un ordre."

(with black and red stripes), throws it on the ground and crushes it with his foot. He is followed by all the other infantrymen. A strong cause and effect connection exists between the officer's speech and the soldier's reaction, although the reasons for the anger are not explained in detail and must be concluded by the information provided in the synopsis.

The next scene is an exchange of glances between Aby and the other soldiers, on the one hand and the colonial officer, on the other. Since the scene that follows shows machine guns firing into the crowd of soldiers, spectators conclude that the officer must have felt threatened by the African soldiers' glances. The threat was not obvious to grasp if one only relies on the African soldier's mimics. The crowd of soldiers is then decimated and the ground is littered with dead bodies, including Aby's. Before the movie ends, a last powerful scene shows dead soldiers' boots, scattered on the ground.

The mutiny and the massacre are briefly presented in schematic scenes, in which spectators are invited to fill in the missing pieces or complete their understanding of the events, either by reading the synopsis after or before watching the movie or by making the connections explicit, since only a few verbal explanations are provided. Bouchareb emphasizes brevity and conciseness and compensates for the lack of explanation by striking images (soldiers escaping the machine guns, corpses on the ground, dead soldiers' boots lying on the floor) that convey a feeling of cruelty and a sense of injustice.

The story is deliberately presented in a straightforward and simple way so that, supposedly, even a child could easily make sense out of it. It appeals to basic reasoning and basic feeling regarding the concept of justice. Bouchareb promotes childlike emotions and reasoning because although they *appear* to be simple, they are truthful. Besides, childhood is central in the animated film: Aby's relationship

with his daughter acts as a counterpart to Aby's military history. It has different levels of significance. First, it stresses the sacrifice made by Aby when he goes to the European frontline. The farewell scene with his daughter is particularly emotional, as the close-up focuses on the child and her mother left alone. While Aby is leaving, he turns back and gestures "good bye" one more time.

Second, the relationship between Aby and his daughter also serves to present another side of the *tirailleurs* who, in the colonial imagery, were imagined and treated as "big children." Bouchareb dismantles the cliché by showing how the "big child" is raising his own children, unveiling a more private aspect of a *tirailleur's* life, his close relationship to his daughter. The quality of their relationship is underlined in many scenes: when they are seen ploughing the field together, going back home together, or during the farewell scene and even more in the reunion scene when Aby tenderly holds his little girl in his arms for a long time. This goal of presenting the *tirailleurs* through another aspect of their life is relayed in the documents available on the webpage, since some pictures represent them with their families. Finally, the child in the story is a way for Bouchareb to emphasize the emotional impact of his story since we see part of it through the eyes of Aby's daughter: to the sadness of the situation is added a deep incomprehension and a feeling of unfairness.

The Minimalist Techniques

Because the film is very short and barely relies on words to transmit its content, the images are of crucial importance, conveying informative as well as emotive information. The images are powerful to the extent that they are either shocking, like the ones used to depict the war, or beautiful, like the ones that show, very poetically, Aby's nostalgia for Senegal even while he is admiring the snowflakes.

The use of black and white drawings underlines the beauty of the pictures while contributing to the minimalism of the project. It also emphasizes the contrasts and the binary oppositions displayed in the movie: hostile Europe, with dark sides *versus* convivial Africa, always represented as enlightened and enlightening; Aby's happiness *versus* Aby's loss of innocence, Aby's bravery actions *versus* Aby's unfair treatment, etc.

From time to time, and always significantly, the color red is used. The first time, it appears on the mobilization poster that Aby and other villagers are reading. The poster shows the French flag from which the red color is visible. Another scene also represents the French flag flapping in the wind while in the preceding scene the red color was associated with the red chechia, referring by synecdoche to the *tirailleurs*. Here, the red color serves to establish the logical connection between these two parts of the equation: colonial subjects fighting for France should equal the gaining of French citizenship and its corollary rights.

In a third scene described earlier, the red indicates a white soldier's injury and since it was previously associated with the French flag, it establishes a strong connection between Aby's behavior (helping the soldier) and the fact that he deserves to be treated as a proper French citizen. Yet, the red and grey stripes of his medal in the final minutes of the movie are a sign that he was not treated fairly and a symbol of his rebellion and resulting death. The use of the color red is twofold: it is a way to emphasize and dramatize the meaning, and it also links Aby to France and suggests that he deserves to be treated as a French citizen. Like Senghor, Bouchareb plays with the symbolism of colors to establish the equivalence between a Black soldier and a White one by using the Red color of sacrificial blood. Since Red also refers to the flag, the movie identifies the Black soldier as a French citizen, echoing visually the powerful words used by Senghor sixty years earlier: "Black prisoners,

and I really mean French prisoners. . . .”⁸

The animated movie is made up of drawings which do not always respect realistic proportions. Even a non-specialist can tell that when Aby waves good bye, his hand, too small, is out of proportion. However, one may wonder to what extent these kinds of “errors” are not made on purpose, in order to mimic children’s drawings. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that at the very end of the movie, on the black screen, is written an explanatory sentence (“On December 1, 1944, in the camp of Thiaroye, Senegalese soldiers demanding their unpaid allowances during their detention in Germany were massacred.”⁹), whose handwriting looks like that of a child. These elements contribute to the “rhetoric of childhood,” promoting children’s qualities such as simplicity, straightforwardness, and veracity, while questioning the clichés attributed to the *tirailleurs*.

Verbal expression is used at a minimum in Bouchareb’s movie: words only appear for the captions, for the explanation of the events on the final black screen (that then looks like a blackboard in a classroom), on the poster to announce the mobilization process, and on the loudspeaker to announce that the soldiers will not be paid and must go back home. In the first two cases, words have an informative role to clarify the context of the events for spectators, who would be confused without them. In the next two cases, verbal expression triggers a sequence of dramatic events that lead to Aby’s death. Although, or maybe because, they are few, words have the central role, like the red color, of highlighting the decisive moments of the story.

In addition to words, the soundtrack is made up of other sounds, but is still quite minimal. Noises, such as the birdcalls or other animal noises, footsteps on the

⁸“Prisonniers noirs je dis bien prisonniers français. . . .”

⁹“Le 1e décembre 1944, au camp de Thiaroye, les tirailleurs sénégalais qui réclamaient leurs soldes impayés durant leur détention en Allemagne furent massacrés.”

road, firing of machine guns, contribute to describe the atmospheres in the village, in France, in the camp, respectively. Music is also a means to identify the different situations: the military music is used to gather the new recruits in Senegal whereas Hollywood-type music accompanies Aby's act of bravery. Yet, the most appealing music in the film is a simple melody played on a xylophone, an instrument often played in Africa and often associated with children. The music sounds like a lullaby and connects Aby with the world he loves and was forced to leave. Like an umbilical cord, music is what links Aby with his maternal Africa.

The lullaby, the child's handwriting and childlike drawings, the basic colors (black, white, and red), and the simple soundtrack are all techniques, among others, that favor a terseness of expression. This conciseness of form refers to a simplicity of content, since it is straightforward, favoring implicit over explicit content. Content and form work in Bouchareb's movie as two sides of the same medal, the "rhetoric of childhood," used to dismantle the stereotypes usually associated with the *tirailleurs*: as demeaning as being treated as "a big child" is, it can be after all, when one reflects on children's qualities, a compliment. The same rhetoric is used as the best means to reach a larger audience, according to the saying: "less is more." This rhetoric aims to convince the audience first, that African soldiers deserve fair financial treatment and second, that the second and third generations of African emigrants should, as much as any other French citizen, feel at home in France, given their grand-parents' sacrifices for France.

5.2 Dismantling of Thiaroye's Dichotomies in Cheik Faty Faye's Play

Little is known about Cheikh Faty Faye, except that besides being an activist, as we shall see later, Faye is a history professor. He wrote two books, *Les Enjeux politiques à Dakar* (*Political Challenges in Dakar*, 2000) and *La Vie sociale à Dakar* (*Social Life in Dakar*, 2000) devoted to the daily life in Dakar during the crucial period (1945-1960) that led to independence. In these studies, he explores the mechanism of institutions such as schools, trade unions, youth and student associations, religious groups, etc. with the final intention of understanding “how the historical phenomenon of colonization influence the fate of dominated people”¹⁰ (*La Vie sociale à Dakar* 265).

To our knowledge, *Aube de sang* is the only literary work written by Faye. In it, as in his research work, Faye aims to draw general conclusions on the functioning of societies, from the particular case of the colonization of the African continent. The play is made up of five *tableaux*, of which three take place in the repatriation camp of Morlaix, France, and two in the camp of Thiaroye, Senegal. At the very beginning of the play, the characters are presented into two categories: Africans (“Africains”) and Europeans (“Européens”). This classification introduces us to the general economy of the play.

Just like Diop's play, the one by Faye establishes a strong dichotomy between the two camps. Also like Diop, Faye gradually dismantles the binary opposition. However, the final goal of these two plays is completely different. Diop removes the dichotomy by showing how Africans themselves are responsible for their (neo-)colonial misery. African culture (symbolized in the mask) and African

¹⁰“comment le phénomène historique de la colonisation influence le devenir des peuples dominés”

values (the dialogue, for example) are devalued because they are seen, ultimately, as serving the (neo-)colonial expansion. Diop underlines the fact that Thiaroye was a failure, and was so because Africans betrayed themselves. Faye, on the other hand, suppresses the dichotomy by promoting African values, lifestyles, and systems of beliefs in order to demonstrate that had they become universal values (like Senghor wished it), they could have improved the way individuals live in society and the way societies interact with each other. Even if the uprising failed, Faye still conceives Thiaroye as a success for Africans, in that the victims died for values that deserved it.

In this chapter, I first present how Faye creates a dichotomy to reach the point where a clash of values is unavoidable. Then, I discuss how Faye manages to dissolve strong oppositions first, by promoting an African vision of the world and second, by considering the Colonizer as the “Other,” who needs to be understood. A fourth section argues that the general tone of the play contributes to the dismantling of dichotomies, making the play the most “optimistic” work about Thiaroye.

5.2.1 Thiaroye, the Logic of a System and the Unavoidable Dichotomies

Echoing Kaba’s words (a character in Diop’s *Le Temps de Tamango*), who states that Thiaroye was an example of “the logic of a system”¹¹ (Diop, *Le Temps de Tamango* 63), Faye’s character, Le Mossi, also speaks of the “logic” (80) of the repression that occurred in Thiaroye. Thiaroye may be an example of the violent repression of mutineers, but it is more particularly an example demonstrating the logic of a historical process, namely, colonization. In the foreword of the play, Faye states

¹¹“la logique d’un système”

that Thiaroye is “one of the many humiliations done to Africa by colonization.”¹² Pointing to the singularity of Thiaroye (“one of the many,” “une des”), Faye blames the historical machinery (“colonization,” “la colonisation”), instead of particular nations: there is no reference to specific countries. Faye insists on abstract historical forces shaping the destiny of particular continents or countries and separating the world populations between the Colonized, on the one hand and the Colonizers, on the other; both of them being “victims” in a way of their times. The binary opposition, Colonizer *versus* Colonized, is challenged right away to the extent that it does not appear as absolute, but as anchored in historical circumstances which could transform the Colonizer from yesterday into the Colonized of today.

An example of the logic of a system, Thiaroye is more precisely, as Brian Goldfarb points out, an example that demonstrates the failure of assimilationist ideology and the internal contradictions of the French “*mission civilisatrice*.” In the play, one of the officers in charge, Captain César, is aware of this reversal of situation, as the following question proves: “Would our beneficial action backfire against us?”¹³ (26) Because they were “exposed to European culture and the ideology of first-world struggles for democracy” (Goldfarb 15), the repatriated African soldiers were then in a position to point to the injustices committed against them and to obtain redress: “Nobody here, among us, understands why, unlike our fellow liberated French soldiers, we do not have the same rights. Would it be because there is a double standard that France applies to her soldiers?”¹⁴ (29) They were nevertheless denied any possibility of being considered as equal to their fellow European comrades: “For the French administration, no matter what degree of cultural

¹²“une des nombreuses humiliations faites à l’Afrique par la colonisation.”

¹³“Notre action bienfaisante aurait-elle retourné notre œuvre contre nous?”

¹⁴“Nul ici, parmi nous, ne comprend pourquoi, contrairement à nos camarades français libérés, nous n’avons pas les mêmes droits. S’agirait-il d’une politique de deux poids deux mesures que la France applique à l’égard de ses soldats?”

assimilation colonial subjects achieve, they will always be children” (Goldfarb 15).

Children at best, most of the time though, they were treated like animals: in the play they are referred to as “beasts” (“bêtes”; 10), “sauvages” (26) or “men-monkeys” (“hommes-singes”; 73). The demands coming from the *tirailleurs* (i.e. back pay, war allowances, demobilization bonuses¹⁵) remained unanswered by an administration that complained about the African soldiers’ insolence (26), pettiness (24), and indiscipline (72). In this dialogue of deaf people, the use of force became unavoidable. Like Diop and Sembene, Faye introduces us to the viewpoints of the African soldiers as well as to the French authorities’ ones. His play illustrates how these two “forces” oppose each other to reach the point where a violent response from the strongest was unavoidable. In that context, the mutiny of Thiaroye appears to be a case of self-defense¹⁶ (77), even more so since in the play, the *tirailleurs* are “unarmed”¹⁷ (34), which emphasizes the fact that their uprising was far from threatening the French army.

The *Tirailleurs*’ Perspective

On the African side, the treatment received by African soldiers during war and its aftermath is in fact a series of humiliations, one after another (“a long humiliation”¹⁸; 57). First, they were sent to the front, serving as cannon fodder: “The first victims of the enemy were among us, your canon fodder”¹⁹ (24). Then, although the military authorities formally promised that they would transfer the mail sent by their families (10), the soldiers never received any letters and were simply left ig-

¹⁵“rappel de solde,” “primes de guerre,” “indemnités de démobilisation” (22)

¹⁶“obligations de légitime défense”

¹⁷“sans arme aucune”

¹⁸“une longue humiliation”

¹⁹“Les premières victimes de l’ennemi se comptaient parmi nous, votre chair à canon.”

norant of what had happened to their relatives (11). Once in the repatriated camps, they were treated unfairly with respect to the remuneration they deserved. They were even cheated on to the extent that the money they owned in Europe was exchanged at a much lower rate: “the money that we received on the boat by way of advance has been cut in this exchange of notes from the Bank of France against those of the A.O.F. Bank”²⁰ (62).

In addition, the soldiers felt as if the Whites were provoking them, seeking to humiliate them on every occasion,²¹ as if they were doing this on purpose: “a kind of atmosphere of deliberate provocation towards us is clearly perceptible”²² (55). For the soldiers, it became obvious that the French administration, insulting them with racist remarks or attitudes (54, 55), maintained an atmosphere of tension while at the same time spreading the word that the soldiers, supposedly at the pay of the Nazis, conspired to dismantle the Empire (51). It looked as if the authorities were preparing the ground to justify any resort to violence, unwilling though they were to respond to the soldiers’ demands. Because the soldiers sensed that the French were setting something up, they were determined to use violence (“confrontation with our chiefs is inevitable”²³; 67) and to fight to the end (“we will only leave the camp of Thiaroye in caskets”²⁴; 67).

One of the innovations of Faye’s play is to call attention to the fact that the conflict between the soldiers and the officers had already started in the repatriation camp located in Morlaix, France. The first three *tableaux* of the play take

²⁰“L’argent que nous avons reçu sur le bateau à titre de simple avance nous a été rogné lors de cet échange des billets de la Banque de France dont nous étions porteurs contre ceux de la Banque d’A.O.F.”

²¹“Pourquoi donc ces Blancs cherchent-ils à chaque occasion à nous humilier?” (54)

²²“une sorte d’atmosphère de provocation délibérée à notre égard est nettement perceptible.”

²³“l’épreuve de force est inévitable avec nos chefs.”

²⁴“nous ne quitterons le camp de Thiaroye que dans des cercueils.”

place in the camp of Morlaix. There, the repatriated soldiers express contentment at ending up together, sharing similar experiences of war (their surrendering to the Germans in 1940 and their imprisonment since then; 9), complaining about their physical (they suffer from various health problems; 10) and moral conditions (they miss their families and sympathize with Africa's fate during the war: massacres of population, shortage of food due to seizures of supplies for the army, etc.; 11-17). Given this common background and a developing common enemy (the French officers), a sense of brotherhood and solidarity rises among the *tirailleurs*: "Originally from Senegal, Upper Volta, Dahomey, Cameroon, Togo, Guinea, Ivory Coast or anywhere else on the land of Africa, we are all *brothers*"²⁵ (67; italics mine). It is only in Thiaroye however that the men's discontent grows to the point of leading to an uprising, for reasons that Faye's play makes explicit.

Apart from the army's provocative behavior, other factors must be taken into consideration to explain why the uprising occurred precisely in Thiaroye. It is one thing to be insulted, but another thing to be insulted *on one's own territory*. Faye brings this reason forward to explain the *tirailleurs*' growing wrath: "This land is our common heritage. Humiliated, exploited, abused for a long time, we are nevertheless *on our land*"²⁶ (67; italics mine). The soldiers' "heightened consciousness" (Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye" 115) includes an awareness to their belonging to a territory, which goes along with a certain pride and the corollary inacceptance of being mistreated on their own land.

Another element that triggered the mutiny in Thiaroye is mentioned by historian Echenberg ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 115) as follows: "The men of Thiaroye

²⁵"Originaires du Sénégal, de la Haute-Volta, du Dahomey, du Cameroun, Togo, Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire ou de partout ailleurs sur la terre d'Afrique, nous sommes tous des *frères*."

²⁶"Cette terre est notre patrimoine commun. Humiliés, exploités, maltraités depuis longtemps, nous sommes pourtant sur *notre terre*."

were well aware that isolated in units of two or three as civilians in some remote rural district where they might encounter a minor French official once a year at best, their ability to obtain redress was severely limited.” Faye’s play emphasizes this aspect, making it even more complex in that the African soldiers do not only fear the tricks of “a minor French official,” but the African chief in their village, who might be paid by the colonizers: “Do you understand that, outside this camp of Thiaroye, all our strength fizzles out? Each of us in his native village, we are but simple individuals on which any village chief will exercise his whole authority of servant of the colonizer”²⁷ (65-66). In Thiaroye, the soldiers realize that their unique chance to fight more efficiently against the colonizer’s force (including its branching out to the villages) consists in fighting as a group. In the end, the outcome becomes less important than the act of rebelling *collectively*: “For all oppressed peoples, tomorrow always comes because, behind us who are only twelve hundred here, stand all our people”²⁸ (83). The mutineers of Thiaroye could become an example despite the failure of their uprising, for the reason that *together*, and with the sake of *others* in mind, they dare rebel against an authority that upheld unfair measures.

The French Army’s Viewpoint

Like the other works examined so far, Faye’s play contributes to our understanding of how the French officers dealt with their subalterns’ demands. Little by little, the *tirailleurs* lost confidence in their commanding officers who, instead of taking their side and asking for their demands to be heard at a higher level, established them as

²⁷“Comprenez-vous que, hors de ce camp de Thiaroye, toute notre force tombe à l’eau? Chacun dans son village natal, nous ne sommes plus que de simples individus sur lesquels le moindre chef de village exercera tout entière son autorité de serviteur du colonisateur.”

²⁸“Pour tous les peuples opprimés, demain arrive toujours car, à travers nous qui ne sommes ici que quelques deux mille deux cents, il y a tous nos peuples.”

enemies of the state.

On the French side, except for one white officer (like in Sembene's film), Captain Valois, there was no understanding whatsoever as to the reasons why the soldiers should be complaining about their fate. On the contrary, French officers believed the soldiers should be happy and thankful for France's magnanimity (23): "France, the eternal France, exempts [them] to participate in the final phase of the struggle. Because [they] have an undeniable need for rest as a result of all the deprivations that have been [their] lot during [their] detention"²⁹ (21-22). The French officers stuck to their line and remained convinced and decided that they had to "demonstrate strength and superiority to justify [their] civilizing work"³⁰; 42). The officers, still holders of colonial values, were unable to face the new historical situation that emerged in the aftermath of the war.

In the play, like in Sembene's movie, their obstination is such that they are ready to believe in a Nazi conspiracy, according to which the Nazis would have paid the *tirailleurs*, who lived for years in German workcamps located inside occupied France, to dismantle the French empire: "In one word, the Nazis worked on you so that you can play an activist role against France"³¹ (27). This conspiracy theory emerges when the officers realize that the repatriated soldiers are in possession of large amounts of money (50) and have to find an explanation that could match the current situation of discontent. In his article, Echenberg ("Tragedy at Thiaroye" 114) notes that:

To paternalist officials the existence of such substantial sums not only

²⁹"Mais elle, la France, la France éternelle, [les] dispense de participer à la phase finale de la lutte. Parce que, [ils ont] indéniablement besoin de repos par suite de toutes les privations qui ont été [leur] lot durant toute [leur] détention."

³⁰"faire preuve de force et de supériorité pour justifier [leur] œuvre civilisatrice."

³¹"En un mot les nazis vous ont 'travaillés' pour un rôle d'activistes contre la France."

minimized the urgency to pay the soldiers what was due them in back pay and demobilization bonuses, but it also caused French officials to assume that the money had been gained by unlawful means, despite the evidence indicating that the men had received wages from their German captors.

“To have received wages from their German captors,” does not *ipso facto* transform the *tirailleurs* into saboteurs of the empire. This is only a convenient link between facts that the French authority found easy to fabricate, even easier since it could justify the violent repression they were going to administer.

The Clash in Values

Thiaroye is emblematic of the clash in values between the progressive *tirailleurs* and the backward colonists. Although they supposedly defended Africans against the racist policies of the Germans (21), the French officers did not realize that, in the aftermath of the war, they continued to apply a double standard policy³² (29) in the colonial context, refusing to consider that African soldiers should benefit from the same rights as any other soldiers in the French army. Faye’s play stresses the opposition between the African soldiers’ demands for “justice” (“We are asking questions about France’s sense of justice, not about her magnanimity”³³; 23) and the French officers’ unfailing attachment for values that promotes inequalities between peoples. By insisting on their “*mission civilisatrice*,” the French officers’ stubbornness serves to enlighten the cruel irony of the colonial situation (Goldfarb): once the “barbarians” (26) had been civilized to the point that they demanded the same rights as the civilizers, they were simply denied the rights of being equal.

³²“une politique de deux poids deux mesures”

³³“Nous posons des questions relatives à la justice et non à la magnanimité de la France.”

The gap between the African soldiers' values and the colonizers' is emphasized even more when a disagreement emerges in the second *tableau* within the group of French officers, opposing Captain Valois' values to the other officers' values. Captain Valois is the only officer to take the side of the *tirailleurs*, recognizing that their demands for a just remuneration are totally "legitimate"³⁴ (34), and that a failure to reimburse them properly would be a "a direct breach in honesty and justice"³⁵ (35). He is eager "not to differentiate humans by the color of their skin"³⁶ (35). His conviction of equality for all makes Valois progressive, compared to his peers who end up accusing him of being a "communist militant"³⁷ (35). Valois' values of "honesty" and "justice"³⁸ (37) sharply contrast with those of the old value system lauded by General de Merle, whose mention of his aristocratic origins (38) is meant to mark the difference between the two men's ideologies.

For General de Merle, the "honor of France"³⁹ (38) and the blind obedience to military law ("I have to act in absolute conformity with military law"⁴⁰; 38) are traditional principles that deserve to be respected to maintain the order of the world, based on the stability of hierarchic relationships. Valois, who has known de Merle for years since they went to military school together, is not fooled by the general's speech, promoting traditional values. He knows that de Merle is an upstart, capable of anything to promote his career: "unlike you, my conception of social justice comes before my career as a soldier. I do not want, at the expense of honesty and

³⁴"leurs revendications sont légitimes. Leurs camarades européens ont été satisfaits intégralement."

³⁵"un manquement flagrant à l'honnêteté et à la justice"

³⁶"de ne point différencier les hommes par la couleur de la peau."

³⁷"militant communiste"

³⁸"honnêteté," "justice"

³⁹"l'honneur de la France"

⁴⁰"je dois agir en totale conformité avec la loi militaire."

justice, quickly to climb rapidly the ranks of the military hierarchy”⁴¹ (37). To the just struggle of the *tirailleurs* and their supporter, Captain Valois, is opposed de Merle’s traditional value system that itself hides a darker aspect: the selfish and immoral social promotion of a shameless individual.

5.2.2 Beyond the Dichotomies: Exploring the African Psyche through Culture and Values

All the documents analyzed so far have introduced readers to elements of African culture. In Keita, for instance, the only African perspective on the event is expressed with techniques that are specifically rooted in African culture (oral tradition, performance, etc.). Faye uses African culture as well, but in a distinctive way. It is not only that the amount of material is more substantial, it is also that it is related to more varied aspects of life. In addition, the African cultural elements have essentially a different role than in the previous works: they function as external expressions of inner thoughts and feelings, giving access to what can be called *an African psyche or vision of the world*. In turn, this conception of the world mirrors the position of the African mutineers and their rebellious action. *Aube de sang* is imbued with African culture or knowledge about Africa. References are made to conditions of life in West Africa during WWII, to the noble lineage of some of the soldiers, to various rituals and proverbs, and eventually to values cherished by African peoples.

⁴¹“contrairement à vous, ma conception de la justice sociale passe avant ma carrière de soldat. Je ne veux pas, au détriment de l’honnêteté et de la justice, gravir rapidement les échelons de la hiérarchie militaire.”

The Plight of Populations in West Africa

In the first *tableau*, the African soldiers, repatriated in the camp of Morlaix, discuss the plight endured by West African populations during WWII, providing readers with a less known perspective on the event. The war caused the migration of people who wanted to escape the requisitioning of working forces or food:

-Alimou Diallo: the Fulani from Fouta Djallon came massively to settle in Eastern Senegal. In so doing, they flee the requisitioning of the colonial administration, relating to the production of rubber.

-Eniabe Diedhiou: . . . The village of Effoc, after the failure of its resistance, has seen its population rise from the other side of the border in Portuguese Guinea⁴² (16).

Beside the populations of Fouta-Djallon and Effoc, the inhabitants of Dakar are also mentioned: they had to flee to Baol (17) to escape the German bombing of the city when de Gaulle intended to land in West Africa, in 1940.

This enumeration of the migratory impact caused by WWII on West African populations is not merely rough information given to Western readers. In the economy of the play, it is also meant to show how these events affected the *tirailleurs* personally: they indeed discuss what happened to *their* people, *their* family. Therefore, it emphasizes the range of sacrifices the African soldiers made for France. The sacrifice of their own person was not only at stake; the war also deeply affected people for whom they cared, their relatives and friends.

⁴²“-Alimou Diallo: les Peuls du Fouta-Djallon sont venus massivement s’installer au Sénégal oriental. Ils fuient ainsi les réquisitions de l’administration coloniale relatives à la production du caoutchouc.

-Eniabe Diedhiou: . . . Le village d’Effoc, après l’échec de sa résistance, a vu sa population passer de l’autre côté de la frontière, en Guinée portugaise.”

Rituals, Dreams and Proverbs

At the beginning of the play, in the first *tableau*, the evocation of the ritual of the “sacred wood” (“bois sacré; 13) helps comprehend the personal cost that the African soldiers paid to a war “whose real motives [they] did not understand”⁴³ (13). The ritual of the “sacred wood” is a rite of passage to adulthood, common in Guinea. It gathers the whole village around its members in transition to adulthood and is celebrated by eating and dancing, among other things. Because in 1940 the celebrations were interrupted by the arrival of the conscription officers, the ritual, originally a source of happiness and rejoicing, is associated in the play with the loss of innocence that the young African conscripts experienced once they were sent to Europe to fight for France. The passage, a monologue, that contrasts the two experiences, the blessed ceremony of the “sacred wood,” on the one hand and on the other, the dreadful life during wartime, expresses an extreme melancholy and a desire to go back to Africa, the beloved “motherland”⁴⁴ (15).

Another element of African tradition is depicted in the fourth *tableau*: the premonitory dream (46). The dream partly refers to the ritual of “sacred wood,” creating an internal connection between different aspects of African culture. The first part of the dream depicts in fact two rituals: a ritual celebrating the passage to adulthood, the “circumcision ceremonies”⁴⁵ (46), and another ritual devoted to the harvests. The whole village is celebrating and honoring the hard work of some of its members, a possible symbolic reference to the participation in the war. At that point, the dream topples. The second part depicts indeed a herd of bulls that attacks the crowd, killing and wounding the majority of the village members. The

⁴³“Cette guerre dont nous ne comprenions pas les mobiles réels.”

⁴⁴“notre Afrique-mère”

⁴⁵“cérémonies de la circoncision”

interpretation of the dream is left open in the play. The soldiers are less interested in details than in the general feeling that the dream left in their minds: “All this seems to be a bad omen”⁴⁶ (48). The dream occurs at a specific moment in the play, almost right in the middle: the dream is described on pages 46-47, and the entire play is made up of 86 pages. From then on, the soldiers act more and more like characters in a Greek play. The knowledge of their fate left them aching even more for their heroic ends.

Proverbs are scattered throughout the play (76, 83), but the one mentioned on page 76 captures the feeling of being doomed that the dream had also conveyed. Instead of bulls, the proverb deals with an animal that symbolizes a blind and excessive force: “Against the elephant, one that has only one branch of baobab to not surrender to it, with bound hands and feet, has to use it, says a proverb from home.”⁴⁷ The *tirailleurs* might well be condemned to a grievous destiny, they nevertheless meet it, heads held high.

In this enumeration of African cultural elements, what is important to note is that they are not simply mentioned in the text to create a realistic background. First, they are connected to each other, which creates a network of meanings that reinforces the cohesiveness of the play. Second, they are closely related to a certain fashion of apprehending the world: rituals, dreams and proverbs are outward expressions that translate the relationship of Africans to the world they live in. Finally, the elements of African tradition seem to embrace, each step of the way, the different stages in the unfolding of the plot: the longing for Africa, the announcement of death, the necessity to fight despite the knowledge of the outcome. They all converge to lead to the massacre, as if this contributed to transform the drama of

⁴⁶“Tout ceci me semble être un mauvais présage.”

⁴⁷“Contre l’éléphant, celui qui ne dispose que d’une branche de baobab pour ne pas se livrer pieds et poings liés doit l’utiliser, a dit un proverbe bien de chez nous.”

Thiaroye into an episode of the African cosmogony.

Genealogies and Empires

The family lineage is yet another element that contributes to enrich the play with African culture and tradition. The mention of the lineages takes on several functions. First, it attests to the high social class of some of the fighters that served France as cannon fodder, emphasizing the double standard created by the French army that treats its own aristocratic members (like Général de Merle) rather well. Second, the noble lineage of the soldiers does not stand on its own, it is always connected to values that underlie and justify the nobility, such as courage or bravery:

Ah! How *brave*! Really, Bakyoko, the blood of the founder of the Mandingo empire flows in your veins. In you, we recognize the *valiant* Soundiata⁴⁸ (52; italics mine);

We, the worthy descendants of Tiébo Sikasso, Ahmadou Segou and so many other *valiant* warriors of the village. . .⁴⁹ (66; italics mine).

The value of courage goes hand in hand with the praise for resistance against the invader, as this excerpt shows: “We, in the veins of which runs the blood of Samory Toure, Emperor of Wassoulou, *a worthy defender of the homeland against invaders. . .*”⁵⁰ (67; italics mine). The mention of the lineage therefore fulfills a third role: it anchors the act of resistance into African tradition. Resistance to invasion becomes as significant a part of the African culture as family lineages.

⁴⁸“Ah! Quelle preuve de *courage*! Vraiment, Bakyoko, le sang du fondateur de l’empire mandingue coule dans tes veines. En toi, on reconnaît bien le *valeureux* Soundiata” (Italics mine).

⁴⁹“Nous, dignes descendants de Tiébo de Sikasso, d’Ahmadou de Ségou et de tant d’autres *preux* du village. . .” (Italics mine).

⁵⁰“Nous, dans les veines desquels coule le sang de Samory Touré, empereur du Wassoulou, *le digne défenseur de sa patrie contre l’envahisseur. . .*” (Italics mine).

The concept of “invader” includes colonization by Europeans of course, but it also applies to invasions within Africa itself, i.e. invasions of African territory by African peoples, such as in the case of the Emperor Soundiata Keita who, to create the Mali Empire, conquered the surrounding kingdoms: “the vast empire created by Soudiata Keita, brought to its outer limits by Sakoura and which reached its zenith under Kanko Moussa whose pilgrimage is famous in all the Arab countries, this empire, despite its power, eventually fell apart and ultimately was the victim of these former colonized”⁵¹ (81). In the play by Faye, colonization is considered in a broader historical perspective, as one of the many manifestations of a larger phenomenon, conquest and its corollary, invasion. Moreover, the above-mentioned excerpt places colonization and, more generally invasion, in the life cycle of civilizations, doomed to die and to be reborn. In the context of history, i.e. in the very long run, the colonized from yesterday may well become the colonizer of tomorrow and *vice versa*. This larger perspective contributes to relativize the destructive impact of colonization on African peoples and their ability to make the best out of European turpitude.

Values

The play emphasizes values and beliefs to which African soldiers are attached and which determine their behavior. In the following citations, the African belief in the word of honor is presented in contrast to European disrespect of their promises, emphasizing the superiority of the African perspective: “At home, keeping one’s word is sacred. Anyone who is the author of a failure in this regard is sanctioned by the

⁵¹“le vaste empire réalisé par Soudiata Keita, porté à ses limites extrêmes par Sakoura et qui atteint son apogée sous Kanko Moussa dont le pèlerinage est resté célèbre dans tous les pays arabes, cet empire donc, malgré sa puissance, a fini par se disloquer et en définitive, être la victime de ces anciens colonisés.”

social group. They, the toubabs (term referring to the colonizers), are deliberately lying to us”⁵² (64). The quotation insists on the importance of the social group and how its cohesiveness constrains the individual to act honestly.

If the individual feels compelled to respect certain values, it is also because in the African vision of the world, as confirmed by the following excerpt, the individual is a representative of the whole group: “Among us, the one who speaks on behalf of the community is sacred. Him as an individual, no one should touch”⁵³ (28). This principle is so deeply rooted into the soldiers’ system of beliefs that it sheds new light on their motivation to bring their uprising to fruition, whatever the outcome might be. The following words pronounced by soldier Eniabé Diedhiou explains the logic behind the soldiers’ resolution:

My brothers of race, you have all heard these remarks made by the general. It demonstrates that the civilian authorities in Dakar are in collusion with the military authority in this attitude towards us. *We can certainly give up our rights. But it’s obvious, we can not abandon our duties to ensure the safety of those who, on behalf of all of us and on our mandate, spoke to the toubab head. Our obligations in this respect are sacred*⁵⁴ (75-76; italics mine).

Although they know they will be massacred, the *tirailleurs* are resolute to face their

⁵²“Chez nous, le respect de la parole donnée est sacré. Quiconque est l’auteur d’un manquement en la matière est sanctionné par le groupe social. Eux, les chefs toubabs, nous mentent délibérément.”

⁵³“Chez nous, celui qui parle au nom de la collectivité est sacré. Sur lui en tant qu’individu, nul ne doit porter la main.”

⁵⁴“Mes frères de race, vous avez tous entendu ces propos tenus par le général. C’est la preuve que l’autorité civile de Dakar est de connivence avec l’autorité militaire dans cette attitude à notre égard. *Nous pouvons certes renoncer nos droits. Mais c’est l’évidence même, nous ne pouvons pas renoncer à nos devoirs de veiller à la sécurité de ceux qui, en notre nom à nous tous et sur notre mandat, ont parlé au chef toubab. Nos obligations en la matière sont sacrées*” (Italics mine).

death. However, their resolution is not related to a desire to fight for their rights. Instead, it is based on their engagement towards others, their duty to defend the ones who spoke on their behalf. Compared to the other renderings of Thiaroye that mainly focus on the repatriated soldiers' rights, this explanation provides a totally different perspective of the events, one that emphasizes the soldiers' *spiritual grandeur*. Hence, Thiaroye becomes an emblematic event because of its ethical dimension, which lies in the prevalence of a sense of duty owed toward the ones who represent the community.

The soldiers' system of values and beliefs prove that African societies exhibit more social cohesiveness. Or to put it differently, the solidarity between soldiers demonstrates that their belief systems are thriving and not ossified. The soldiers' values are once again contrasted in the play with the European colonizers' value system, that rests on superficial indices:

Ah! What a difference between their values and ours! They ask us where is the paper on which are recorded the promises we stated. Of course we do not have any. White heads came to speak to us. That was enough. They have no respect for the given word, but a blind consideration for a scrap of paper with doodles⁵⁵ (74).

The African perspective on European ethical behaviors emphasizes the troubled institutional process of the so-called civilized societies for which the written letter ends up having more value than what is at its origin, the oral contract. Since oral promises are deprived of any substance, it is the concept of promise, as it is seen through European eyes, that is questioned.

⁵⁵“Ah! Quelle différence entre leurs valeurs et les nôtres! Ils nous demandent où est le papier sur lequel sont consignées les promesses dont nous faisons état. Bien sûr que nous n'en avons pas. Des chefs blancs étaient venus nous parler. Cela nous avait suffi. Ils n'ont aucun respect pour la parole donnée; mais une considération aveugle pour un chiffon de papier avec des gribouillages dessus.”

5.2.3 Beyond the Dichotomies: Exploring the Colonizer's Position

As in the other documents analyzed thus far, the colonizer's perspective and opinions on the events of Thiaroye are also rendered in the play, directly, in the third *tableau* (I discussed this in the subsection "The French Army's Viewpoint") and indirectly, in the fourth *tableau*. Indirectly because the opinions are not expressed by the French characters, but *imagined* by the soldiers. Indeed the African soldiers are engaged in a humble exercise (humble, because they are unsure about their capacity to understand their chiefs' mindsets) which consists in exploring the reasons why the military authorities would have recourse to violence instead of reaching a consensus: "Why do they behave like this? Their motivations maybe partly escape us"⁵⁶ (77). The verbal exchange of the following pages aims to unveil the real motivations behind the pretext.

For the infantrymen, the army wants to get rid of them at all costs ("it is obvious that you want to get rid of us"⁵⁷; 77) because they are an embarrassment to them ("We are somewhat embarrassing for their conscience"⁵⁸; 78) since they were "eye-witnesses of a France beaten and humiliated, betrayed by some of her children and occupied by the winner"⁵⁹ (78). According to the repatriated soldiers, France cannot stand the humiliation she underwent and found it unbearable that her defeat and humiliation were eye-witnessed by colonized peoples that took part in the war: "The same France that wants to be strong, powerful, united and great in the eyes of the colonized peoples, can she stand to be seen in this condition by the same col-

⁵⁶"Pourquoi se comportent-ils ainsi? Leurs motivations nous échappent peut-être en partie."

⁵⁷"il est évident qu'on veut se débarrasser de nous."

⁵⁸"Nous sommes quelque peu gênants pour leur conscience."

⁵⁹"les témoins oculaires d'une France battue, humiliée, trahie par certains de ses enfants et occupée par le vainqueur."

onized?”⁶⁰ (78) France’s pride is at stake in this passage and becomes, throughout the conversation, the ultimate explanation for what happened in Thiaroye.

The infantrymen regret that France is unable to acknowledge the fact that her failure was due to “the technological backwardness compared to Hitler’s Germany”⁶¹ (78). They would have appreciated France’s honesty. Instead, to preserve her reputation, France has a plan to wipe out the witnesses of her debacle: “That [Explaining the real reasons for the failure, i.e. the technological backwardness] would have been more honest than trying to get rid of those who, by force of circumstance, attended the debacle”⁶² (79). According to historian Bernard Mouralis (33), at the Liberation de Gaulle “whitened” the troops in order to facilitate the integration of resistance fighters into the regular army. There was indeed a desire to minimize the role of the colonies in the liberation process of the French territory. However, to advance the notion that the downplaying of the African participation would go as far as to eliminate the embarrassing African soldiers that eye-witnessed France’s defeat is an argument that no historians have yet confirmed, although the historian Echenberg has pointed to France’s vulnerability in the aftermath of the war and to her fear of losing the empire, which would have led to violent repressions.

In addition to the above-mentioned ideological explanation (based ultimately, on France’s lost *grandeur*), another one comes to the infantrymen’s minds: “Some of us had selected, as possible explanation for this Whites’ behavior towards us, monetary aspects”⁶³ (79). The explanation does not stand for long, another in-

⁶⁰“Cette même France qui se veut forte, puissante, unie et grande aux yeux des peuples colonisés peut-elle souffrir d’être regardée dans cette condition par ces mêmes colonisés?”

⁶¹“le retard technologique sur l’Allemagne hitlérienne”

⁶²“Cela aurait été plus honnête que de chercher à se débarrasser de ceux qui, par la force des choses, ont assisté à la débâcle.”

⁶³“D’aucuns parmi nous avaient retenu comme éventuelle explication de ce comportement des Blancs à notre égard les aspects pécuniaires.”

fantryman pointing to the fact that France had received substantial financial help from the U.S. and should then be able to duly pay her fighters (79).

The ideological motive is the one that seduces the soldiers the most. Le Mossi returns to it and refines it:

Any colonization has one absolute necessity: that of maintaining the colonized in a condition of inferiority in all matters relative to the colonizer, always strong. Thus, the defeat of May-June 1940 is a scathing disclaimer to French colonial claims. Accordingly, we infantrymen on the front lines of fire, therefore eyewitnesses to the defeat, we are the bad conscience of the colonial truth. So within the logical framework of these data that are theirs, we have to disappear⁶⁴ (79-80).

Le Mossi points to the *logic* of colonial thinking. Whomever the colonizers may be, they need to keep an unquestionable position of power. If they fail to do so and the colonized witness it, the solution the colonizers will choose to restore their initial authority will most likely be to silence the embarrassing witnesses by getting rid of them.

Repeated one more time, and in more detail, the ideological explanation, based on the colonizers' logic, convinces us more. It introduces us to the colonizers' psyche, and to the realm of psychoanalysis, but a psychoanalysis of the group, which might be one of the reasons why this explanation is not mentioned in historical works. Faye, a historian, might be speaking here via his fictional characters

⁶⁴“Toute colonisation a une nécessité absolue: celle de maintenir le colonisé dans la condition d'homme inférieur à tout égard par rapport au colonisateur toujours fort. Aussi, la défaite de mai-juin 1940 est-elle un cinglant démenti aux affirmations coloniales françaises. En conséquence, nous les tirailleurs aux premières lignes du feu, donc témoins oculaires de la défaite, apparaissions comme mauvaise conscience pour la vérité coloniale. C'est donc dans le cadre logique de ces données qui sont les leurs qu'il faut que nous disparaissions.”

and he might be doing so because of the adventurous trait of his argument. Via the strategy of what resembles a maieutic dialogue, i.e. a dialogue from which the truth eventually rises, the colonizers' motives behind Thiaroye are dissected and explored in order to better understand the way they function. Unlike the other works studied so far, Faye's play exhibits a desire, from the colonized, to put oneself in the others' place. The Other is, for once, the colonizers, and not the colonized.

The *tirailleurs'* discussion is however anachronistic. Even if we grant that they could have a sufficient knowledge of the historical circumstances or if they were able to guess or feel, at the times of the events, the French authorities' real motivations, it is harder to believe that they could express them with such serenity. In the realm of reality, one might wonder about the soldiers' composed and quiet behavior and discussion. Justified and understandable wrath and rage against the colonizers, like the other works of art rendered, are more likely to have occurred. The calmness displayed by the soldiers towards the enemy is nonetheless consistent with the promotion of the African value system: they respond to each other. Both have to be understood as authorial constructions proving that the period of mourning regarding the events is finished and that a new era can be envisioned, where one can stand back and have a different and maybe clearer look at what happened.

5.2.4 Beyond the Dichotomies: A Different Tone

In addition to the new angles or elements pointed out throughout this chapter, the general *tone* of the play radically distinguishes it from the other artistic works. Faye's rendering of Thiaroye displays the course of events in a more serene, even optimistic fashion. This quiet and calm overtone stems from two sources: the structure of the play itself and the narrative "voice" that appears at the very end of the

play.

The Serene Tone of the Play

Faye creates, and plays with, a contrast between the officers' turmoil, who feel threatened in their colonialist ideology and the soldiers' self-control, coming from their profound conviction that their actions are in harmony with their beliefs and values. This opposition emphasizes the soldiers' tranquility since it is this side that is privileged in the play.

It is not that the soldiers do not clash; they do, with the Whites, and even between themselves. However, if violent disputes exist, they are not the topic of a *direct* representation. They are not shown to viewers, but are reported after the fact, thus diminishing their violent aspect:

-Alimou Diallo: But why are these Whites looking at every opportunity to humiliate us? Yesterday evening, at soup time, when I was washing my dish to be served, the White head cook shouted at me: "Hey Negro! Do you need to wash your dish so long for us to wait? In your village, do you not eat in the dirt when you are, the whole family, like vultures, gathered around the gourd?" My reaction. . .

-Diogomaye Sène: . . . Your reaction, Alimou, I witnessed it. From a sharp blow that you administered to him at the same second, his eye was immediately swollen like a sponge which, a year-long, was kept in the sun of Africa and, subsequently, put in a ocean⁶⁵ (54).

⁶⁵"-Alimou Diallo: Mais pourquoi donc ces Blancs cherchent-ils à chaque occasion à nous humilier? Hier soir, à l'heure de la soupe, au moment où je lavais ma gamelle pour être servi, le chef cuisinier blanc m'a crié: 'Eh Nègre! As-tu besoin de laver si longuement ta gamelle pour nous faire attendre? Dans ton village, ne manges-tu pas dans des saletés quand vous êtes, toute la famille,

The story is told to emphasize the Whites' aggressivity, not the soldiers'. Moreover, the narratives of the soldiers' humiliation by the Whites (54-57), to which belongs the above-mentioned excerpt, do not serve to feed hatred or retaliation, but lead, in the following *tableau*, to the main discussion, aiming to understand the executioners' motivations.

Between themselves, the soldiers also have conflicting discussions, in particular the one related to the various religions of Africa and the delicate issue of the overlapping between religion and politics:

-Alimou Diallo: Whew! The Serer and Diola! Still believing in the forces of the night, in "pangols" and "beguines". And then, what does Islam, the religion of Allah the Almighty, represent to you?...

-Eniabe Diedhiou: Since the Fula people began speaking about Islam, the world has turned upside-down. Yesterday, poor wanderers, having as a sole concern the search for grass, you are now those who speak of Allah and Mohammed. However, your conversion to Islam was, ultimately, a political calculation for those who have neither a home nor a state organization. And who today want to have all of this together⁶⁶ (48-49).

comme des charognards, réunis autour de laalebasse?' Ma réaction...

-Diogomaye Sène: ... Ta réaction, Alimou, j'en étais témoin. D'un coup sec que tu lui as administré à la seconde même, son œil s'est gonflé immédiatement comme une éponge qui a été, un an durant, gardée au soleil d'Afrique et qui, par la suite, est plongée dans un océan."

⁶⁶"-Alimou Diallo: Off! les Sérères et les Diolas! Toujours croyant aux forces de la nuit, aux 'pangols' et aux 'beguines'. Et alors, que représente l'islam, la religion d'Allah le Tout-puissant, pour vous?..."

-Eniabe Diedhiou: Depuis que les Peuls parlent d'islam, le monde est à l'envers. Hier, de pauvres errants, n'ayant pour unique préoccupation que la recherche de l'herbe, vous êtes aujourd'hui ceux qui parlent d'Allah et de Mohamed. Pourtant, votre conversion à l'islam n'a été, en définitive, qu'un calcul politique pour ceux qui n'ont ni foyer fixe ni organisation étatique. Et qui veulent aujourd'hui avoir tout cela ensemble."

Disagreements and conflicts, however, remain at the verbal level and do not trigger any physical violence. The infantrymen remain united, promoting the beneficial aspects of genuine dialogue based on respect for others' opinions.

The Reassuring Voice

The serenity resulting from the construction of the play echoes the assurance of the voice that speaks at the very end, an anonymous one addressing Africa, shortly after the moment when the infantrymen have been executed, i.e. in the past with respect to a potential theatrical performance in the present: "Land of Africa! Land of Africa! Despite this dawn of blood, you will keep an indelible memory of Thiaroye, alive so that tomorrow, your sons will sweep colonialism off the continent, that only believed in brutal force to facilitate exploitation"⁶⁷ (86). The future of the prediction ("You will keep"⁶⁸) has been realized since the play in itself is a proof that the past is still "alive" ("vivacité") in the present. Due to this narrative device, the assurance that Thiaroye has not fallen into oblivion and that the *collective memory* of the events has been preserved is provided.

The role of history in the voice's speech is, on the other hand, more dubious: "how many others fell at Thiaroye? How many? How many? History will tell us perhaps because, yesterday like today, the authority has always imposed silence on the African dawn"⁶⁹ (86). The work of history (the scientific discourse on the past) has not been executed properly because of the censorship imposed by political authorities. The play argues in favor of the need for an accurate historical account of

⁶⁷"Terre d'Afrique! Terre d'Afrique! Malgré cette aube de sang, tu garderas indélébile dans ta mémoire ce souvenir de Thiaroye, vivace pour que demain, tes fils balayent du continent le colonialisme qui n'a cru qu'en la force brutale pour faciliter l'exploitation."

⁶⁸"Tu garderas."

⁶⁹"combien d'autres sont tombés à Thiaroye? Combien? Combien? L'histoire nous le dira peut-être, car, hier comme aujourd'hui, l'autorité a toujours imposé le silence sur cette aube africaine."

Thiaroye, which could begin, for instance, with the precise victim count. Here, the narrative voice echoes the professional and personal concerns of the author, Cheikh Faty Faye, the activist.

In 2006,⁷⁰ Faye signed, along with other members of the “Association sénégalaise des professeurs d’histoire et de géographie” (“Senegalese Association of History and Geography Professors”), an open letter to the Senegalese President, Abdoulaye Wade, asking for the preservation of the site of Thiaroye. According to the same source, Faye was convinced of the existence, on the camp premises, of mass graves that would be worth excavating to eventually figure out the total and exact number of victims. The letter came at a moment when, because the project of a toll highway was planned, the site would have been erased and with it, the traces of the past event. The letter asked, if the site could not be saved, so that at least a commemorative stele could be erected.

If no further information was found on the outcome of the epistolary request, it is known that from November 26, 2007 to December 1, 2007, Faye participated into another major event in Dakar, the festival that commemorated the 150th anniversary of the creation of the corps of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The festival ended, presumably on purpose, on the very day of the commemorative ceremony of Thiaroye. If a stele had not already been built on the premises, one might think that these events were the appropriate occasion for Faye to reiterate the request to the authorities.

⁷⁰Information was found on the following website: <http://www.allAfrica.com>, consulted on 4 December 2006.

5.3 Conclusion

More than sixty years after Thiaroye and more than forty-five years after the Senegalese independence and supposedly the end of colonization, the stage of mourning, that characterizes all individual or collective traumas, has ended. It is now possible, for artists coming from regions of the world formerly colonized, like Faye, or for artists of second or third generation immigrants, like Bouchareb, to comprehend Thiaroye and colonization with somewhat less passion and more calmness. The experience of colonial oppression can become the topic of a less controversial representation insofar as the immediacy of the suffering has disappeared and time has done its work of healing. The animated film by Bouchareb and the play by Faye both belong to another interpretive stage of Thiaroye, where Senghor's dream of reconciliation and *métissage*, can perhaps come true.

L'Ami y'a bon, through its minimalism of expression and content, aims to convey a primary emotion of injustice sufficient of making people reflect on the conditions of (ex-) colonized populations. For Bouchareb, forgiveness and reconciliation are possible, but they demand reparations. Very concretely, a just monetary compensation provided to the war veterans would be proof that France acknowledges her colonial past and wants to move forward. It would also mean that France is taking a step toward a better integration of the various communities of which she is constituted.

Unlike Diop's play in which the characters display legitimate anger, *Aube de sang* has a more positive tone. The characters, who believe that "history teaches us that those who oppress always end up losing"⁷¹ (83), are able to overcome their rage for the profit of a better understanding between peoples. On the cover of the play,

⁷¹"L'histoire nous enseigne que ceux qui oppriment finissent toujours par perdre."

Faye states: “By duty of memory, we owe to our peoples to provide responses to these strong questions in order to build, between peoples, a solid relationship of cooperation.”⁷² By “peoples,” and because he speaks of “relationship of cooperation,” Faye certainly includes French people. His play is therefore meant to overcome the injuries of the past by letting them become a historical moment, able to teach us a lesson of blatant injustice and magnanimous forgiveness.

⁷²“Par devoir de mémoire, nous devons à nos peuples d’apporter des réponses à ces interrogations fortes pour mieux asseoir, entre les peuples, des relations solides de coopération.”

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Part of the novelty of this study consists in the finding and grouping of documents representing the mutiny and massacre of Thiaroye, which all contribute to shape and circulate memories of WWII. This study has demonstrated that the seven representations of Thiaroye form a coherent body of works, less by virtue of the historical event they represent than by the establishment of an explicit or implicit dialogue between them. By the recurrence of the same narrative elements, such as parallelism between the first and second world wars in L.S. Senghor's poem and in Doumbi-Fakoly's novel, parallelism between the massacres of Sanankoro/Effok and Thiaroye in B.B. Diop's play and in O. Sembene's movie, inclusion of Thiaroye as one of the many episodes of the epic of WWII in F. Keita's poem and in R. Bouchareb's animated movie, the works respond to those that precede, contributing to the family resemblance of the corpus.

This study has proved that from this body of works can be constituted a *history of the representations of Thiaroye* and that this history is characterized by three main stages. These stages are primarily defined in terms of chronology, since they are related to three historical periods: before the accession of African countries to

independence, twenty to twenty-five years afterwards, and the “global” era. Superimposed upon this chronological aspect is a criterion which concerns the functionality of these works. Each assumes a different role to which correspond specific writing techniques.

The major role of the works by L. S. Senghor and F. Keita is to inscribe Thiaroye into the collective memory of France, for Senghor; of West Africa, for Keita. In the case of Senghor, poetical means are used to blur the fact that the infantrymen of Thiaroye are rebels to the French. A *métissage* of African and French contents and forms is a technique employed by Senghor to more easily reach a French audience, and to convince it that the victims of Thiaroye are the sacrifice necessary for the advent of a new mixed humankind. By using the oral form, referring to the Mande history and turning the poem into an entire performance with music and dance, Keita aims to transform Thiaroye into a transitory episode of the African epic, despite the fact that the *tirailleurs* originally form a military corps serving the colonial empire, and in doing so, doing Africa a disservice.

The works by B.B. Diop, Doumbi-Fakoly, S. Ousmane (as well as those by R. Bouchareb, and C.F. Faye) continue, of course, to take on the role of inscription in the collective memory. However, they assume another function insofar as they are more openly critical of (neo-)colonialism. In his play, Diop *a priori* introduces strong dichotomies, almost Manichean, that collapse as the play unfolds, in order to highlight the involvement of Africans themselves in the misery of (neo-)colonial ties. In Doumbi-Fakoly’s novel, the episode of Thiaroye is a key to understanding Africa’s colonial past and its neo-colonial future. Thiaroye is the interpretive clue to a story that, from its beginning to its end, disadvantages Africans. This defeatism is manifested by the narrator’s growing presence and bitter comments toward the end of the novel. As for Sembene, his film reminds us that Thiaroye is a moment

of resistance in a long tradition of African resistance against colonialism. More generally, the movie, by its reference to various cultural artifacts, stresses the need to resist against any hegemonic position or discourse and makes art the medium of supreme resistance.

For R. Bouchareb and C.F. Faye, Thiaroye is an event that must be remembered to the extent that the knowledge of past mistakes engenders the hope that relations between peoples and individuals can be improved. In his animated film, Bouchareb opts for minimalism, at the levels of both form and content, to build what refers to as a “rhetoric of childhood,” which is meant to trigger the minimal emotion of compassion and reparation of past injustices. In the play by Faye, strong dichotomies between Africans and Europeans are overcome by the promotion of African values, since they help imagine the others’ situation, and even the perpetrators’ perverse mind. These values intrinsically encourage a better understanding between peoples.

The dialogue existing between the representations as well as their three functional roles provide these artistic works with an internal consistency. These representations are also consistent in an external fashion. In other words, this history of representations also finds its cohesiveness in its articulation with two other discourses, history (the scientific discourse on past events) and politics (the official discourse).

My work has demonstrated that concerning Thiaroye, there has been a countering of amnesia through poetry, drama, and cinema. Thiaroye is literally a “site of memory” (“*lieu de mémoire*”) as historian Pierre Nora (18) puts it. All these representations commonly resist the political discourse of oblivion or blurring of embarrassing past events. However, as Onana reminds us (126), an official acknowledgement still needs to be done to heal the victims of Thiaroye: the construction

of a monument on the premises of the massacre would be a crucial gesture. The non-existence of an official monument in Senegal appears suspect, since such a commemorative monument exists, but in . . . Bamako, Mali (Onana 124). It is my opinion that only an official monument on the scene of the massacre will enable Senegalese and French peoples to move forward.

Although Senghor's poem that follows "Tyaroye" in the collection *Hosties noires* is "Prière de pardon," in which the poet asks God to forgive France for her bad actions toward her Black children, it is doubtful that any forgiveness might be given to France. As the philosopher Paul Ricœur points out in his book entitled, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, in order to work, the economy of forgiveness should be based on "a system of exchange"¹ since "there exists something such as a correlation between forgiveness that is asked for and forgiveness that is granted"² (619). The dead of Thiaroye will not be able to rest in peace until they are considered by France herself as victims of her own tyranny, which means that, France should officially recognize her deed and ask to be forgiven. An official monument, with an official ceremony at which both French and Senegalese representatives would be present, would be a decisive step on the path of repairing past injustices.

All the artistic works on Thiaroye have aimed to resist official discourses of oblivion and denial. However, the main difference between Senghor and Bouchareb lies in Bouchareb's acknowledgement that compensation is a necessary step toward forgiveness. Janet Vaillant, Senghor's biographer, makes this relevant remark: "To a certain extent, as Soyinka suggests, he [Senghor] offered a poetical foreshadowing to the South African experience [Truth and Reconciliation Commission]. However, unlike Senghor, Soyinka is not satisfied with politics that make no effort to seek

¹"le régime de l'échange"; translation is mine.

²"Il existe quelque chose comme une corrélation entre le pardon demandé et le pardon accordé."

justice, or at least that do not offer some compensation to people that were harmed”³ (*Vie de Léopold Sédar Senghor* 17). From Senghor to Bouchareb, sixty years passed before the authors realized that money can take on a decisive symbolic meaning.

As for the historical discourse, works of art representing Thiaroye do not necessarily oppose it, but complete its role on different levels. The artistic representations contribute to make the scientific discourse of history more accessible. One of all the authors’ avowed intentions is to struggle against oblivion and ignorance. Whereas people are less likely to read a work of historical non-fiction, they are more interested in reading a historical novel or watching a historical movie. Artistic works representing Thiaroye bring forward facts that might be well-known to historians but are little known to a wider audience. They contribute to a more complete, complex and objective representation of the past. As for the delicate issue of the “mistakes” made by the artists, I have argued that they cannot possibly be due to carelessness or ignorance of past facts, but have to be understood as variations used to enhance the content of the works.

Whereas history works to explain past events, the goal of artistic works is to make the audience understand these past events. This distinction is rooted in the theoretical one Paul Ricœur makes between the cognitive processes of “explaining” and “understanding” (or “comprehension”). Explanation involves the intellect whereas understanding involves our senses and emotions. Comprehension deals mainly with our “empathy,” or our capacity to “transfer ourselves into another’s psychic life” (*Interpretation theory* 73) in order to “re-live, re-actualize, re-think intentions, ideas and feelings”⁴ (*Du Texte à l’action* 183). In other words, under-

³“Dans une certaine mesure, comme le suggère Soyinka, il offrait une préfiguration poétique de l’expérience sud-africaine. Cependant, Soyinka, à la différence de Senghor, ne se satisfait pas d’une politique qui ne fait aucun effort pour rechercher la justice, ou du moins n’offre pas quelques compensations à ceux qui ont subi des torts”; translation is mine.

⁴“revivre, réactualiser, repenser les intentions, les idées et les sentiments”; translation is mine.

standing is “to apprehend, on another level than the scientific one, our belonging to all that exists”⁵ (*Du Texte à l’action* 181-82). In director Peter Weir’s terms, historical works of art are re-enactments of past events that help keep them alive.

In conclusion, this study exemplifies the fact that, as Ashcroft would put it, *the Empire writes back*. Yesterday’s colonized master the former colonizers’ tools, namely their language, textual and filmic techniques. One cannot but be impressed by the lyricism and the power of the means of expression. In addition, the powerful form is at the service of a content that articulates critical positions in relation to France and Africa as well.

⁵“l’appréhension, à un autre niveau que scientifique, de notre appartenance à l’ensemble de ce qui est.”

Appendix

TYAROYE

- 1 Prisonniers noirs je dis bien prisonniers français,
est-ce donc vrai que la France n'est plus la France?
- 2 Est-ce donc vrai que l'ennemi lui a dérobé son visage?
- 3 Est-ce vrai que la haine des banquiers a acheté ses
bras d'acier?
- 4 Et votre sang n'a-t-il pas ablué la nation oublieuse
de sa mission d'hier?
- 5 Dites, votre sang ne s'est-il pas mêlé au sang lustral de
ses martyrs?
- 6 Vos funérailles seront-elles celles de la Vierge-Espé-
rance?
- 7 Sang, sang, ô sang noir de mes frères, vous tachez
l'innocence de mes draps,
- 8 Vous êtes la sueur où baigne mon angoisse, vous êtes
la souffrance qui enroue ma voix,
- 9 Wôï! entendez ma voix aveugle, génies sourds-muets
de la nuit

- 10 Pluie de sang rouge, sauterelles! Et mon cœur crie
à l'azur et à la merci.
- 11 Non, vous n'êtes pas morts gratuits, ô Morts! Ce
sang n'est pas de l'eau t pide.
- 12 Il arrose  pais notre espoir, qui fleurira au cr puscule.
- 13 Il est notre soif, notre faim d'honneur, ces grandes
reines imp rantes.
- 14 Non, vous n'êtes pas morts gratuits. Vous  tes les
t moins de l'Afrique immortelle.
- 15 Vous  tes les t moins parturitaires du monde nouveau
qui sera demain.
- 16 Dormez,   Morts! et que ma voix vous berce, ma voix
de courroux que berce l'espoir.

Paris. D cembre 1944

(Senghor, L opold S dar. *Hosties noires*. Paris: Seuil, 1948.)

Thiaroye

Black prisoners, I should say French prisoners, is it true
That France is no longer France?
Is it true that the enemy has stolen her face?
Is it true that bankers' hate has bought her arms of steel?
Wasn't it your blood that cleansed the nation
Now forgetting its former mission?
Tell me, hasn't your blood mixed with her martyr's purified
blood?

Will you have the same grand funeral as the Virgin of Hope?
Blood, blood, O my black brother's blood,
You stain my innocent bedsheets
You are the sweat bathing my anguish, you are the suffering
That makes my voice hoarse
Woi! Hear my blind voice, deaf-mute spirits of the night.
A bloody rain of red locusts! And my heart cries out for blue
 skies,
And for mercy.
No, you have not died in vain, O Dead! Your blood
Is not tepid water. It generously feeds our hope,
Which will bloom at twilight.
It is our thirst, our hunger for honor,
Our absolute authority.
No, you have not died in vain.
You are the witnesses of immortal Africa
You are the witnesses of the new world to come.
Sleep now, O Dead! Let my voice rock you to sleep,
My voice of rage cradling hope.

Paris, Décembre 1944

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