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Reflections on Linguistic and Literary Colonization and Decolonization in Africa

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Reflections on Linguistic and Literary Colonization and Decolonization in Africa

Abstract

Despite the cultural diversity found in Africa and the complexity of the psychology of the colonizer and the colonized, several fundamental facts emerge regarding the function of language and literature in recent African history. The colonizer sought to instill a sense of inferiority in the colonized as part of the dynamics of conquest, placing special emphasis on education and language. These notions, lucidly discussed by such social thinkers as O. Mannoni, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi, have analogues in the defense of language everywhere where lingua-political oppression occurs, be it in colonial Africa or on an Arapaho reservation in the American West. What is especially significant about the forced acquisition of a European language is the fact that this very tool of oppression tended to become the total of unity and rebellion for the oppressed. From a political viewpoint, the acquisition of a European lingua-franca entailed such logistics of liberation as communication and collective identity which overrode regional and tribal differences. From a cultural viewpoint, the language which had been used to colonize the minds of Africans knew two phases: first, one of simple acquisition of both language and attendant literary forms and second, one in which the European language was warped or "bullied" to fit the author's African cultural impulses. In the second instance we have, as a result of code-mixing and the transfer of cultural factors, the emergence of a unique and vigorous literature. In itself, this literature may be appreciated *qua* literature, but we should not forget that the code-mixing is often as concerned with the rejection of the language of oppression and the restoration of indigenous values as it is with traditional literary self-expression, as, for example, in the two poems by Algerian poet Youcef Sebti which bear the titles "La Soleil" and "Le Lune," thereby pooh-poohing sacrosanct French grammar by reversing the genders of "sun" and "moon" even as the articles reinstate the respective feminine and masculine genders of "sun" and "moon" found in Arabic.

Keywords

cultural diversity, Africa, culture, psychology, colonizer, colonized, language, literature, recent, history, African, inferiority, education, language, O. Mannoni, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, lingua-political, oppression, colonial Africa, colonial, Arapaho reservation, American West, forced acquisition, European language, acquisition, lingua-franca, European lingua-franca, communication, collective identity, regional, tribal, differences, cultural, bullied, code-mixing, literature, *qua* literature, rejection, indigenous values, self-expression, Algerian, Youcef Sebti, La Soleil, Le Lune, French grammar, French, gender, Arabic

Reflections on Linguistic and Literary Colonization and Decolonization in Africa

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A colleague, lecturing to my seminar on major avant-garde movements, declared that “the most important concept, one that characterizes modern art movements, is *break-up and reconstruction*.” To be sure, the idea of fragmenting and re-ordering is seminal to major trends in modern art and culture. Long ago, in his important definition of imagination in Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge laid down the terms for the new vision: “[The secondary, or creative imagination] dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.”

Certain periods in the 19th and 20th centuries have placed at a premium such notions as “art for art’s sake” or such buzzwords as “engagement” (reflecting a current ethic like the existentialism of the 1950s) or “decolonization” (suggesting a vast social and political dynamics). However, the idea of separation, rebellion, confrontation, followed by a new re-ordering, a new “becoming,” lies behind all these words and concepts.

Colonization and decolonization constitute—on the social and political level—a showcase of sorts of my colleague’s proposed *fil conducteur* of “break-up and reconstruction.” Within the period during which much of recent world history has been shaped by the forces of colonization and decolonization, namely since the mid-nineteenth century, the evolution of break-up and reconstruction has displayed its most intense activity during the years since World War II. One of the indicators of the cultural winds of change has been the literature written in French, English, and Portuguese. I propose, in this essay, to examine a few of the more important characteristics of the literature in European languages—and, in particular, the francophone literature in Africa.

The literature and other intellectual and cultural activities in Africa reflect several prime traits: the overall psychology attendant upon establishment of a colonial relationship between colonizer and colonized; differences from one area to the next according to racial and administrative policies imposed by the metropolitan (or European homeland's) regimes; the perhaps poisoned gift of having been given one language by birthright and another by political and pedagogical design in which one finds oneself constrained to express feelings that might more naturally find expression in the first language. Let us consider these factors seriatim. And lest one feel that discussing European-language literature in Africa is arbitrary, let us remember that in the period since the Industrial Revolution and, especially, in the first half of the twentieth century, when colonialism was in high gear, we have had a eurocentric view of history, a period dominated by what some critics (for example, Hans Freyer, in Albertini 4) have called "European World History." Indeed, as Rudolf von Albertini has averred, "[o]ne can say that the historical function of colonialism was to integrate Asian and African peoples into the world economic system controlled by Europe." Albertini goes on to point out that, even after decolonization, due to the nature of this colonial integration which has remained vigorous, "the former colonies are still peripheral areas within that system, even though they have achieved the status of independent states" (xxiv). The condition was inevitable, for the colonial forces against which independence movements fought were not just military, but also social, psychological and linguistic—that is, forces that do not quit the territory with the departing colonial armies.

But let us turn to our three main colonial givens mentioned earlier, namely the colonizer-colonized relationship, differences in colonial input, and the element of having been formed intellectually in a language other than one's maternal language spoken in the home during childhood.

Colonizer-Colonized

There have been a good many essays and books written on the psychology of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the most frequently cited books being those by Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and O. Mannoni.¹ As with any studies reflect-

ing a new cultural paradigm, these look for antecedents, finding them in such disparate examples as the relationship between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Nietzsche's reflections on the Master-Slave relationship. Any detailed analysis of dependency—Albert Memmi's latest preoccupation—tends to lean toward caricature, for dependency—which may, as Memmi maintains, be a natural and necessary part of the individual psyche and, therefore, of the human condition—brings out the foibles in the individual and in society. We are inclined to describe dependency negatively in terms reminiscent of Strindberg's emasculated, mummified men in *The Ghost Sonata* or two of Samuel Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo leading Lucky around by a rope tied around the latter's neck.

All the major psychological explorations of this colonizer-colonized relationship trace the same evolution from exploitation of the supine continent to inculcation in the colonized—incidentally, as well as by design—of a sense of inferiority and self-hatred and to the angry rejection of that self-hatred, a rejection that finds expression in revolt.

Let me indulge in an anecdotal illustration of the fundamental nature of the egocentric and eurocentric quality of the we-they relationship consequent to the "fatal impact," to use Morehead's term, between European culture and other cultures.

Reading an entertaining account of circumnavigations of the globe in small sailboats, I came across the following passage:

The voyagers sailed in search of adventure, and they came back from their voyages with memories. There was the thrill of sighting the tops of a palm cluster between the troughs of blue Pacific waves. There was the week-long fight for life against the West Indies hurricane. There was the bartering with tattooed savages who could communicate only by signs and gestures. (Klein 110)

Another reader might not have been attuned to the irony in this last sentence, but I had long been a student of the dynamics of colonialism and the sentence stopped me short.

We need not even consider here the paternalistic vocabulary ("savages") or the exoticism inherent in the fear of the unknown

("tattooed"), for what is the most revealing is the arrogance—all the *more* arrogant for the fact that there is surely no *intent* on the narrator's part to be arrogant—in the phrase "savages who could communicate only by signs and gestures." What lesson can be learned from this phrase? Did the narrator expect the tattooed people to have learned English for the convenience of the occasional sailor? The relationship could equally well be expressed—I dare say better—by reversing the terms: "savages with whom *we* could communicate only by signs and gestures." I say "better," for the narrator is, in this instance, the intruder. It is much the same as the egocentric urge that makes us say "I've enjoyed talking to you" rather than "I've enjoyed listening to you," escalated to an intercultural scale.

It is this phenomenon that Sartre pinpointed when he declared in his epoch-making 1948 essay "Black Orpheus" that "the white man created the black man." He did not mean, as a superficial reading might suggest, that the white man came along and trained the black man and made him into something. He rather meant that the black man was not a black man, but simply man—we might say Everyman in his given universe—until the white man arrived and cast him into a role in the we-they drama, or made him aware of an impelling force frequently called "the Other."

Differences in Colonial Inputs

Africa is not—as anyone who has traveled about on that continent knows—a monolithic culture. There are great ethnic differences from area to area and even from village to village. In Senegal, for example, the Wolof, the Toucouleur, the Mandinké, the Peul, the Serer, and the Diola have different temperaments or ethnic traits, if one generalizes their behavior.

In addition to these differences, the administrative policies of the British, the Portuguese, and the French were quite different, and these overlays interacted with the natural temperaments of the population. The British tended to practice what they called "indirect rule," leaving intact the local systems of authority and governing through them, or conveniently appointed simulacra thereof (picking headmen to convey policy of whom the local population, however, did not approve, continuing instead to go to the "real" headman). The French practiced the policy of "assimilation," endorsing a colonial infrastruc-

ture which would train the Africans to become French-style jurists, teachers, and so forth. The Portuguese practiced a policy of intermarriage as a means of minimizing the potentially volatile situation inherent in the colonizer-colonized relationship. None of these systems would stem for long the tide of the liberation movements.

The Dynamics of Hybrid Lingua-ontology

Just as humanity is, in a sense, one ongoing uninterrupted being—if we consider that were the umbilicus somehow to be left uncut, there would be one continuous physical being, at least on the female side—so language is the uninterrupted externalization of the human psyche, handed down from generation to generation, evolving much as people evolved—at least if there is no outside interference. Language, including body language and sound, is the only expression entailing solely one's own body. By this, I mean that other vehicles of artistic expression, such as painting and sculpture, and the playing of musical instruments, are inconceivable without some external accomplice in the form of canvas, clay, flute, and the like whereas language need only use the body's innate capacities—tongue, mouth, vocal chords, lungs, diaphragm, etc.—for expression. To be sure, language has its external accomplices, too, but at the other end of the process—at the beginning—when language is learned. Thus language, and literature, which is built on language, are the enshrinement, so to speak, of one's cultural and personal intellectual patrimony.

It is not then strange that language should have a privileged place in any given culture. It is, in a general sense, the very culture itself. That language should be the cause for strong feelings, political schisms, and violence, is not at all amazing. We all know of the violence that has occurred in Belgium over the question of the priority of the Flemish and Walloon languages: The *Biennales poétiques* were moved from Knokke-le-Zoute to Liège a few years ago, this change resulting, according to one reporter, “from that unfortunate ‘rift of tongues’ which has increasingly divided Belgium in the course of these past years” (Brown 166). This violence inherent in “tongue-rifts” is seminal to the colonial system as well as to its destruction. When one cannot move to some equivalent of Liège, but must remain supine and accept the imposition of a language, the particular linguistic dynamics of colonialism becomes evident. Like economics, language is an

arm of colonization, as both were later to become arms of revolution (a banner strung across an Algiers street in 1969 celebrated emigration of workers to France as “L’arme économique de la révolution”).

The acquisition of European languages by Africans was often a prerequisite to the latter’s reaching a level of proficiency necessary for literary assimilation, so this form of linguistic colonialism is most germane. Various autobiographies, such as Bernard Dadié’s *Climbié*, report that the French pedagogical system in Africa punished pupils for speaking their mother tongues by hanging a token or “signale” around their necks, the pupil wearing the token when school ended being punished by having to do some menial chore.

It is on the basis of this linguistic oppression and subversion that some contend that Brittany and Languedoc have been colonized. Apparently such punishment was handed out in schools for speaking Breton or Provençal. The title of an anthology of Breton poetry, edited by Yann-Ber Periou published by P. J. Oswald (Honfleur:Oswald, 1971) bears the title “It is forbidden to spit on the floor or speak Breton [Patois],” allegedly taken from a sign on the wall of a school in Brittany.

Every effort was made to impose French, Portuguese, or English language and to demean the native languages in Africa. That this process is universal to colonialism is evidenced by the following remarks by an Arapaho Indian reported in an article in the *New York Times* entitled “Indian Tongues Coming back to Life”:

“So long as we have our language we are a people yet,” said Pius Moss, a 71 year-old Arapaho language teacher who attended St. Stephen’s Indian Mission School in the late 1920’s when speaking in his own tongue was not only discouraged but forbidden under school policy set by the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“I got my whippings twice for talking in Arapaho and I never got whipped a third time,” the gray-haired rancher remarked. “I learned the lesson. You had to speak English and that was how it was going to be from now on.”

“This was true all over the country before the war,” said Zdenek Salzmann, professor of anthropology at the University of Massachusetts and an authority on Indian languages. “Indian students at Government schools or even at mission boarding

schools were not allowed to speak their native language, the rationale being that they would sort of melt into the dominant culture that way.” (Indian Tongues 20)

There are two factors I should like to consider with regard to the European-language imposition on Africans through the colonial process: the interesting fact that the very language that was used to dominate and conquer became the unifying and liberating force behind many independence movements in the 1950s and 1960s, and the positive results of a hybrid literature blending felicitously the deep-lying visions of the colonized and the adopted cadences and ideations inherent in the learned language: French, English, or Portuguese.

a. *The Lingua Franca Concept*

Africa, like India, knows many languages, dialects, and vernaculars. The history of colonization failed sometimes to take into account natural geographic boundaries and never took into account African linguistic boundaries or entities. The first contacts of Europeans with Africans go back to the mid-fifteenth century when the Portuguese ventured down the West coast of Africa, established forts and trading posts such as that at Elmina (in what is now Ghana), ventured on around the Cape of Good Hope, and established trading posts on the East Coast which had already, since the 9th century, been peppered with Arab trading posts and plantations. However, no Europeans ventured into the interior of Africa for another three and a half centuries. The first European penetration was the Great Trek of the Boers, in the mid-nineteenth century. In the second half of that century, with trips up the Nile and especially with Stanley’s trips up the Congo River, Africa was breached. The natural wealth that Stanley and others saw there—wealth needed to feed the insatiable furnace of the Industrial Revolution—soon led Europe to embark on the colonial adventure that was the inevitable adjunct to industrialization and the rise of international capitalism. In 1884-85, European heads of state and representatives—and an observer from the United States—were convened by Bismarck at a conference in Berlin, and they proceeded to carve up Africa into spheres of influence and potential exploitation. This operation, devised over maps in far-off Germany, butchered Africa. Corridors were drawn here to the sea, there to a river, ethnic populations were summarily assigned to this or

that metropolitan authority, and so forth. A typical example of the sundering that was to occur is that of the Kikongo-speaking people. Their natural ethnic area (read "language area") was divided among the Portuguese, the Belgians, and the French and today lies spread over Angola, Zaire, and the People's Republic of the Congo.

I once picked up a Gambian border guard who was hitchhiking home after work. We drove south on the highway that runs from Kaolack to Ziguinchor in Senegal, crossing the Gambia. When we came to the ferry slip on the Gambia River, this man introduced me to the manager and cook of a tiny restaurant near the slip. They were cousins and, as the three of us stood there, they conversed in Malinke which I could not understand, and when they spoke with me, the border guard spoke English—which the cook could not understand—and the cook spoke French—which the guard could not understand. This cameo scene typifies the dilemma inherent in the colonial situation, which holds to a certain strange rationale while a prior linguistic rationale continues to prevail. The tensions are there as long as the two overlapping identities exist. Some people speak of the ongoing divisive force of what they call "tribalism." It would be more appropriate to speak of linguistic identities. Given this situation, it is clear why the colonial powers sought to destroy the native languages: to do so would not destroy all ethnic loyalty rifts, but it would destroy perhaps the greatest one, for colonial—and later national—boundaries would at least coincide with linguistic boundaries. We might mention, in passing, that the reverse direction, namely toward reaffirmation of one's original language, would tend to subvert the colonial divisions. This does not mean that problems are obviated, for the colonial divisions have been handed over to the new African regimes which find themselves constrained to fight to vouchsafe the artificial boundaries established by the Europeans!

Ironically, as the Europeans—whether espousing policies of indirect rule, assimilation, or intermarriage—progressively imposed their language through education, they provided the various ethnic groups in countries like Nigeria, Zaire, Angola, or Senegal with a lingua franca that permitted the setting up of a revolutionary intelligentsia. Let us remember that armed revolutions are always preceded by an intellectual formative stage and succeeded by periods of intellectual justification and cultural zeal in support of the essentially "illegal" act one has just undertaken. The American revolution was really forged from about 1760 to 1776 in the writings and exhorta-

tions of the nation's founding fathers, and the Declaration of Independence was a document written after the actual decision was ratified and was rather designed to explain or justify the act. It is also noteworthy that Thomas Jefferson, when asked why he had not composed a more daringly new document, replied that he wanted to persuade those traditionalists back in England and had, therefore, used the common intellectual currency of the day, namely Cicero, Locke, and Aristotle.

Similarly, the education and lingua franca provided by the Metropole, gave the Africans the "common linguistic and intellectual currency" needed to promote and justify their revolutions. African critics and writers and European scholars of colonialism often cite the Caliban and Prospero relationship, and did not the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire adapt Shakespeare's *The Tempest*?

Caliban's island has been colonized and Caliban enslaved and debased. But the classic scene which Africans and the colonized everywhere take to heart is that in which Caliban rebels and asks to have his expropriated island back, railing at Prospero, yet thanking him for having provided him with the language by means of which he can attack his usurper: "you taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse; the red plague rid you, / For learning me your language!" (Act I, Scene 2).

b. *The Literature of Hybrid Lingua-ontology*

As Ralph Waldo Emerson has said, "The whole of nature is a metaphor of the mind." Although we might invoke Cartesian dubitability to discredit the ultimate reality of this or any other metaphor, we must conclude that there is such a thing—real or false—that can be considered natural as opposed to man-made or artificial. If, indeed, nature is a metaphor of the mind, nature may be said, then, to provide us with configurations of the mind from which the metaphor emanates. Furthermore, the metaphors by which the mind signifies nature in a given art form—such as writing—will derive directly from the world-view of the particular culture. Thus the analysis of a given metaphor (that is, a writer's expression) will reveal the writer's psychic world. Conversely, the analysis of a writer's world will, inevitably, provide the data for a better understanding of that writer's metaphors.

Let us consider a case in point: *water*. Someone who has been raised in the desert will metaphorize water in an entirely different

way than someone who has been raised on a low-lying island or on a riverine flood plain. And yet, writers may explore the verso of their natural obsessions. For instance, the sea is significant in the works of Camus (*La Mort heureuse*, *L'Étranger*, "Noces à Tipasa,") or Mohammed Dib (*Qui se souvient de la mer*, *Les Terrasses d'Orsol*), and yet these same authors have penned major works in which the sea is remote (Camus's "Le Rénégat," Dib's *Le Maître de chasse*). In short, the actual content of an author's work is not a very reliable index of the "metaphor of his mind," for the writing may—as Jung would say with regard to dreams—actually express an image which is diametrically opposed to that which we would have spontaneously expected. He who is starved may be obsessed with want or may be obsessed with plenty.

If *content* may vary considerably and even be dichotomous, the *form* that a writer adopts by preference, even instinctively, for expression of the metaphor of his mind will tend to assume structures that go far deeper than the capricious surface images involved in our Jungian examples.

There are, in other words, two levels of Emersonian "mental metaphor" at play here: (1) the metaphor of rhetoric itself (namely such referents as sea, thirst, desert, reproduction functions, and the like) and (2) the metaphor of structure in the very expression of the metaphor itself (brevity, complexity, episodocity, and the like).

African literary works—north and south of the Sahara—which are composed in European languages combine a foreign lingua with an indigenous or domestic ontology. This presents special problems for the writer, but provides opportunities for unexpected and unique results which would not occur to the writer with an integrated lingua-ontology.

The lingua brings with it that language's ongoing cultural tradition. A French person might well be able to say "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois . . ." ("Our ancestors the Gauls . . .") and have that remark reflect the truth of his ontology (and this dynamics also forms the basis for a rational distinction of Canadian literature from African and Asian francophone literature, a distinction which Léon Damas underlined in his 1947 anthology, *Poètes d'expression française*), but when West African schoolboys had to recite these words, it became ludicrous. Such absurdities aside, the mixture of French lingua and African ontology provides for some interesting phenomena.

The African ontology favors creative literary structures which

are episodic: short tales, alternating and/or repetitive patterns, rather than long narrative developments of the sort we find in the Russian novel, for example. This is true—albeit for slightly different reasons—both north and south of the Sahara.

In the north, the need to memorize—for the Bedouin could not carry a library on his meanderings—favored a highly intricate and repetitive structure. The oral tradition in Berber and the semi-oral tradition in Arabic also favored shorter episodes and repetition to retain interest. In addition to this, the very land may have contributed to the Bedouin's world view. As Henri S erouya has written in *La Pens ee arabe*:

Besides the necessity for a plan which imposes itself in the elaboration of every work, whether it be conceived before the composition, or as one's inspiration progresses, there is, in the Arab mind (*esprit*) a predilection for extremes and for the juxtaposition of contrasts which is conveyed by a brusque succession or by a mixture without transitions. This state of mind derives from life in the desert and on the steppes, or from the rigors of nomad life. The infinite which the desert suggests to the Arab soul (* me*) appears under the grandiose guise of the infinity of a homogeneous expanse. (21)

As one might place a series of hieroglyphics in a cartouche, contrast in the Arab mind functions in the framework of this awareness of the timeless or infinite, again according to S erouya for I am leery of such sweeping ethnic generalities and use them solely as crude indicators. S erouya extends the idea of contrasts—learned no doubt in part from the brusque changes in the desert, such as hot days followed by freezing nights—to all major phases of Arab culture: “The juxtaposition of contraries sums up the whole Arab mentality (* me*), and the Muslim mentality: religion, history, political and social organization, art in its various forms, language, even the details of dress and cuisine.” (18). S erouya refers here to striped tents and burnouses and to a cuisine that alternates cool yoghurts with spicy harissa-laden platters.

South of the Sahara, the traditional pre-colonial form of entertainment in the villages was, and is, to gather in the center of the village, on a moonlit night, for what we might call a variety show. As Camara Laye tells us in *L'Enfant noir*, the day is meant for work and

farming and one does not play then, for that would be sinful, but at night—when it is not *too* dark—the villagers have their poetic evenings which consist of riddles, songs, musical pieces, dances, short tales, and the like. Again, the oral tradition marking many of the traditional African literary conventions favored short tales rather than long-winded psychological narratives.

Thus, the ontological impulses of the African are attuned to the episodic. This preference is evident in the evolution of the literature in European languages which has only flourished since the early 1950s and is, therefore, a compact corpus suitable for analysis. Taking the example of francophone literature we find that the early texts tended to adopt—with a natural timidity—the ready made forms in the literature that came along with the learned language which yet best conformed to the African writer's predilections. The favored forms were, at first, the autobiographical account, which touched on the high points of a life (Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*, 1953), the short novel (from *L'Enfant noir* to Mariama Bâ's *Une Si Longue Lettre*, novels have tended to be quite short), and such literary conventions as letter exchanges and the diary, which permit episodic treatment without the burden of logical transition (Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de boy* [1956] is a good example of a novel written in the diary mode).

There have been, in the French-language literature, two principal phases of development. That of the above-mentioned adoption of favored ready made models, during which writers tended to let themselves be *bousculés* or bullied by the language and culture (and literature is, as several Maghrebian writers—Chems Nadir, Nabile Farès, Abdelkebir Khatibi—have suggested, *un corps-à-corps* or hand-to-hand combat with language). Then there has been a second period, significantly originating and developing at a time when Europe was shaken by dissent, namely from 1968 to the present, in which the writers have forced the vehicular European language to conform to or fit their ontology, in which the African has bullied the French language into the confines of his or her predilections.

In the north, in the late sixties, we saw Rachid Boudjedra (*La Répudiation*, 1969) and others wield French with violence, whereas—with the exception of the works of Kateb Yacine (*Nedjma*, 1956)—the works of the fifties and early sixties had tended to be episodic, so-called ethnographic novels describing life in a traditional setting. Again, like Camara Laye's chapters on such things as the circumcision ritual, these prose works tended to describe customs

and rites in a North African town or village (Mouloud Mammeri's *La Colline oubliée*, 1955, Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, 1950, Ahmed Sefrioui's *Le Chapelet d'ambre*, 1949). Perhaps the most violent assault on the adopted language was that of several Algerian poets who—having not been included in an official writer's conference (in fact they had yet to publish anything)—presented, in June 1968, a manifesto entitled "Mutilation" in which they accused the establishment of complacency and neglect of young experimental writers. We should also mention Abdellatif Laâbi's journal *Souffles*, launched in Rabat, Morocco, in 1966, which was a beacon for experimental writing and revolutionary writing—the two being, in the colonial context synonymous.

The most telling example of linguistic assassination in this period may be a brace of poems by young "Mutilation" poet Youcef Sebti bearing the titles "La Soleil" and "Le Lune," in which he deliberately reverses the genders of the articles "le" and "la." Poetry itself has thus become the destruction of syntax. Here is "Le Lune":

Ensemencement rythmique dans le creux des
sinuosités verbales
la larme concilie l'attirail vivifiant
la sentence condamne les élégies secrètes
O lune beau dans la musette d'un frémissement nocturne
lune bleu dans un ciel aux carillons rajeunis
lune faucille en miniature dans le travers douloureux
lune chance à reculons vis-à-vis du tourbillon récalcitrant
une palmier dans le lune et pas si étrangers à la soleil
GRALMIS. KAN. Bel Aç Cuvénista

A. L. B. C. D.

Email et denture dans la duréalita
O ma mère
je parle une langue délirante
je parle d'amour en lagmastravi
O ma mère et la langue
la langue
Une langue langue langue langu lang lan
lan la l . . . l . . . l . . .
—quels châtiments? (*Anthologie* 49)²

South of the Sahara, the same phenomenon occurred. In 1968,

Yambo Ouologuem's novel *Devoir de violence*, patched together in a collage of original and derivative sections, won the Prix Renaudot and caused a sensation. Another important novel appeared in 1968 in a Canadian imprint and was reprinted in 1970 in Paris: *Les Soleils des indépendances* by Ahmadou Kourouma. This work forces the French language to adhere to every interstice of the African ontology: from the sentence unit, which is often based on proverbial discourse to the sections or chapters (for it remains episodic) that resemble lessons, or fables, and are almost extended proverbs.

Conclusion

If, as Terry Eagleton reports in reference to the theory of the Russian formalists, literary language is "a set of deviations from a norm, a kind of linguistic violence" (4), then African literature in European languages is laced with violence. The dynamics of the mixed lingua-ontology entails considerable departure from the norm. This violence, seconded by the violence inherent in the political revolt of the liberation movements, has not only become something of a trademark in literature but has provided us with a different and vital corpus of writing, a literature that may lay claim to being at once a continuation and a rupture, of possessing traits that can not be learned from others—for they are new and unique—but that rather constitute a veritable avant-garde, a rejection of a derivative past and an affirmation of a subjective future, albeit one symbiotically blending the Other and the Self.

Notes

1. Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, *White Skin, Black Masks*, and *A Dying Colonialism* and Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* have become classic texts on the psychology of the colonizer and the colonized. O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban*, though less widely read, has also become something of a seminal work in the field.
2. We do not have the space here to explore the several implications of Sebti's gender reversal; suffice it to say that it is not merely a destruction of an alien presence but reaffirms the linguistic and cultural givens of the Maghreb, namely Arabic—in which "sun" is feminine and "moon" is masculine—and the Koran, in which the sun and the

moon are given a good bit of importance. That Sebti is aware of the Koranic connection would seem quite logical, but almost conclusive evidence of a link is the final question in "Le Lune": "—quels châtiments?" ("—what punishments?"), for the leitmotif of Sura 91 ("The Moon") is one of warning and the threat of punishment. The sura speaks directly of punishment in verses 16, 18–21, 30, 33–34, and 36–39.

To sow seeds rhythmically in the hollow of verbal

sinuosities

the tear conciliates life-giving paraphernalia

the sentence condemns secret elegies

Oh handsome moon in the kitbag of a nocturnal trembling

blue moon in a sky full of youthful chimes

miniature sickle moon in its painful width

moon of fortune rolled backwards in relation to the stubborn twister

a palm tree in the moon and not so alien to the sun

GRALMIS. KAN. Bel A. Cuvénista

A. L. B. C. D.

Enamel and teeth in *duréalita*

Oh my mother

I speak a delirious language

I speak of love in Lagmastravi

Oh my mother and language

language

a language language lingua langu lang

lang la l . . . l . . . l . . .

—what punishments?

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