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Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, Michel Olinga, Cornelius Crowley, Michel Naumann,
Yannick Le Boulicaut, Jacques Coulardeau, Sofiane Taouchichet, Claude Éric
Owono Zambo, Sonia Dosoruth, Fernanda Vilar, et al.

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IMAGES OF DECOLONIZATION IMAGES DE LA DECOLONISATION

With an Introduction by/Avec une introduction de
Cornelius CROWLEY



Edited by/Sous la direction de
Geetha GANAPATHY-DORE & Michel OLINGA

Academic committee:
Cornelius Crowley, Michel Naumann, Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, Michel Olinga

SARI (Société d'activités et de recherches sur le monde indien)
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This collected anthology of essays on the *Images of Decolonization* follows in the footsteps of an earlier SARI publication on *Changing Images of India and Africa* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011). It approaches the idea of decolonization from the point of view of the politics of representation with articles on the gaze of colonial and postcolonial photographers, the fantasized images of indigenous women (Pocahontas in the USA and La Malinche in Mexico) and the image of the soldiers during the First World War in the illustrated French press. Decolonization in the African continent is explored through the iconic figure of the Ghanaian leader N'Krumah, the MAU MAU uprising in Kenya and literatures in the French language, especially in Mauritius and the Portuguese language, with a focus on Mia Couto in Mozambique. The discriminatory caste system in India and class struggles in Ireland –two countries which were marked by the story of partition at the end of empire –are interwoven through the films of Ritwik Ghatak and Ken Loach. Finally, Britain's unique democratic tradition is reviewed through the constitutional and institutional developments in contemporary Ireland.

Ce recueil d'essais sur les *Images de la décolonisation* se situe dans le sillage d'un ouvrage précédent publié sous l'égide de la SARI sur les *Images changeantes de l'Inde et de l'Afrique* (L'Harmattan, 2011). Il aborde l'idée de la décolonisation du point de vue de la politique de la représentation avec des contributions sur le regard des photographes coloniaux et postcoloniaux, sur les images fantasmées des femmes indigènes (Pocahontas aux USA et La Malinche au Mexique) et sur l'image des soldats durant la Première guerre mondiale dans la presse illustrée française. L'ouvrage explore la décolonisation du continent africain à travers la figure iconique du leader ghanéen N'Krumah, la révolte des MAU MAU au Kenya et les littératures francophones, notamment celle de l'Ile Maurice ainsi que l'écriture en langue portugaise de Mia Couto au Mozambique. Le système discriminatoire des castes en Inde et la lutte des classes en Irlande – deux pays marqués par le récit de la partition à la fin de l'empire - sont entremêlés grâce à l'étude des films de Ritwik Ghatak et de Ken Loach. Enfin, la tradition démocratique propre à la Grande-Bretagne est revue à travers l'évolution constitutionnelle et institutionnelle de l'Irlande contemporaine.

**The opinions expressed belong to the authors of different articles.
Les opinions exprimées sont celles des auteurs des différents articles présentés.**

« Dans le monde où je m'achemine, je me crée interminablement »
"In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself"

Frantz Fanon

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Introduction

The title of Yannick Le Boulicaut's article offers useful counsel to all researchers who address questions of empire, colonization, and decolonization. The counsel is equally appropriate for all those who, as citizens of a particular polity or nation-state who are also, no less, the sharers in a global and cosmopolitan destiny transcending the limits of the national, must decide what is to be done, in the now of collective political responsibility and in a context resonant with the continuing echo of these inseparable moments of our modern history: empire, colonization, decolonization, the postcolonial aftermath, whether in the erstwhile colonial possessions or in the erstwhile imperial powers, the rival metropolitan would-be hearts of illumination.

If, for Conrad, there were hearts of darkness, there were also, for his European contemporaries, symbiotically and dialectically, certain presumed hearts of light. Like photography, whose invention and global projection "covered" the 2nd phase of European imperialism, after the first phase of American decolonization between 1776 and 1821¹ (through the severance of the link between the imperial power and the newly-born settler nations), empire is an affair of *illumination*, supported by an ideological discourse of *candour*. The declared intentions divert attention from the less avowable exercise of effective power, to ends of appropriation. If there is "no such thing as a candid shot", the establishment of what Yannick Le Boulicaut qualifies as a "*field of action*" involving a differential relation of contrasting distinction is standard procedure in both photography and in colonial administration. By "candid", we are to understand a claim to innocence and naivety, the quality of a gesture, whether in word or deed, that is supposedly indifferent to the matrix of power and domination. There is no such thing as a candid piece of academic research into the topic addressed in this collection of articles. This observation does not in any sense justify a departure from the ordinary Weberian procedures of "methodological neutrality". It does however imply an acutely reflexive, non-candid awareness on the part of the researcher that in writing of the questions of empire, decolonization, and decolonization, she or he is addressing enterprises of domination and emancipation in which the invocation of

¹ David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

history and the invocation of the social sciences of anthropology and ethnology, whose invention is contemporaneous with the 2nd phase of European imperial expansion, are a structural component of the discourses and action of colonization and of the subsequent phrase of decolonization. She or he thus addresses an agenda of research, an academic “*field of action*”, in which the very discourses practised by the researcher have been constructed out of, and thus manifest the marks and the categories of, this sequence of inseparable moments: *empire and colonization, decolonization*. What is therefore evident or manifest to the researcher today in his or her enterprise of historical comprehension is thus the effect of a specific “régime d’historicité²”. Today’s researcher addresses a diachronic “*field of action*” that is both structured and dynamised by the imperial enterprise of domination and by its inevitably turbulent wake. Like the photographer planting a tripod in the field, the researcher addresses his or her corpus, an ensemble of discourses and images, the records of a nexus of actions “from above” and of responses “from below”. No compositional framing of this vast nexus can be either “candid” or complete. The research into this field of action is a field that stretches out before all of us, in waiting for an interminable enterprise of confrontation and comprehension.

² *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d’Histoire*, n° 117, janvier-mars 2013, in particular the first two essays, Quentin Deluermoz, « Une histoire des historicités est-elle possible ? », pp. 3-11, and Ludvine Bantigny, « Historicités du 20^e siècle : Quelques jalons sur une notion », pp. 13-25. See also the following essays in the volume *1970-2010 : les sciences de l’Homme en débat*, sous la direction de Yan Brailowksy et Hervé Inglebert, Presses universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2013 : François Vatin, « Economie versus Sociologie : du moment marxiste au dialogue des disciplines (1970-2010) : le cas de Nanterre », pp. 51-64, for a useful account of the 19th century genesis of the social sciences, and Ludovic Tournès, « L’histoire et les SHS (1970-2010) : des beaux jours de l’impérialisme aux incertitudes de l’interdisciplinarité », pp. 69-83, in particular for the following passage about historical research since the 1980s : « on peut considérer que l’affirmation actuelle de la posture réflexive est l’un des acquis des travaux menés depuis cette période. Elle ne constitue pas un paradigme à proprement parler, mais plus simplement une posture épistémologique dans lequel de plus en plus d’historiens se reconnaissent naturellement, et qui s’appuie sur le constat d’une triple historicité : historicité des objets d’études (qui sont des constructions et non des réalités objectives à « découvrir ») ; historicité des sources, qui constituent le matériau même de la connaissance historique (l’historien construit ses sources et les invente au gré de ses questionnements) ; historicité, enfin, de l’historien lui-même, qui doit penser sa démarche en questionnant sa propre situation et les catégories d’analyse qu’il emploie », pp. 78-79.

Sofiane Taouchichet examines images from the field of the 1914-18 Great War. He is attentive to the construction of an inclusive iconography of a French imperial “fraternity” in the trenches. He identifies the Christian resonances of the images: their celebration of endurance, their dolorist, sacrificial connotations. The iconographical representation of the colonial troops thus participates in the predominant discourses of suffering and enduring nationhood, so eloquently voiced in the poetry of Charles Péguy. This sense of fraternity, by way of a shared experience of valour and endurance, is a crucial moment in the drama that will be played out in subsequent decades, when the “*frères d’armes*” will become “*ennemis intimes*”, whose revolutionary taking-up of arms is to a large extent a decision born out of the reaction to the flagrant disparities between the discourses of sentimental fraternity and the social and political inequalities of the colonial structure of power and domination.

The strangeness and turbulence of the historical drama of conquest, domination and decolonization, evident in the images examined by Sofiane Taouchichet, will be the determining factor in the search for a style and for a voice through which a writer can negotiate the postcolonial conundrum: his or her sense that as a writer there is no alternative to his or her having to appropriate the imperial language, in order to figure the experience of imperial subjugation and the subsequent adventure and ordeal of independence. Fernanda VILAR quotes Mia Couto’s statement that “to write is to teach people to dream”. She demonstrates both effectively and precisely why a prose of enchanted fabulation is the most adequate, or perhaps the only, narrative response to the colonial and postcolonial theme, which the writer cannot refuse to address. She shows how Mia Couto’s extravagances are the strict delineation of the landscape and legacy of the colonial moment and of its aftermath, and of the relations of gender domination that show up with such stark visibility in the field of post-independence Mozambique.

The fact that, despite differences, there is a general logic underlying the processes of European colonization and the subsequent phase of decolonization is borne out by the quasi-identity between Fernanda Vilar’s presentation, drawing on Patrick Chabal’s book, *The Post-colonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*, Northwestern University Press, Johannesburg, 1996, of the invention of a Mozambican literature in Portuguese and the challenge faced by the current generation of writers and Claude Eric Owono Zambo’s analysis of the inherited ambiguities and the unresolved questions of “independence” in francophone Africa.

The literature of francophone Africa has gone through those same phases delineated by Chabal in relation to Mozambican literature. Owono Zambo states that, in the colonial cultural beginning, « l'écrivain africain déploie son acte d'écriture sous la perspective d'un mimétisme qui frise l'*assimilation littéraire*. Nous l'appellerons ici "la littérature du colonisé" ». This phase is followed by what he calls « l'ère de la rupture ». Owono Zambo's intention is to discern the extent to which a literature whose conditions of possibility and whose effective practice are inscribed in the context inaugurated by such a « *rupture* » might constitute « peut-être un déclencheur, peut-être symbolique, mais déclencheur quand même, d'une indépendance culturelle proposée aux Africains ». Owona zambo is cautious in the statement of his hypothesis and of his hopes.

The fact that there is a recognisable "family resemblance" between all versions of competing European empire and colonisation does not however imply that there is a general "one-size" model of empire, colonization and decolonization. There is, to begin with, a crucial difference between a process of decolonization leading to the independence of a new settler nation and a decolonisation involving either the reappropriation of sovereignty by the indigenous nation or the appropriation of national sovereignty by a nation that is constructed or "invented" through the political dialectics of collective self-affirmation, in reaction to the experience of colonial government. Jacques Coulardeau enlarges the scope of the reader's appraisal of the imperial "field of action" by examining the varying definitions and coding of racial difference, and the differences in legal status for which the structure of racial differentiation is the foundation, as evident in the provisions for the status of the European population of settler stock, for the indigenous American population, for the African slave population, and for those who were of "mixed blood". He informs us that "Historically, the only part of the United States that operated under the three-tiered system was Louisiana, since it was colonized and settled first by the French and Spanish. [...] Because Louisiana was colonized by the French, a "tripartite legal distinction emerged"; whites, African slaves, and free people of color, or *gens de couleur libres*.³ This practice is opposed to the one-drop rule of the English, for whom one single drop of black blood made you black". His analysis provides ample warrant for his lapidary conclusion that "colonization is generally a brutal enterprise". In the

context of American societies which have established their sense of nationhood largely on the basis of the foundational declaration of independence by the founding fathers of the settler nation, Coulardeau's complex argument addresses the question of "decolonialization" in relation to the contemporary culture and politics of America, both north and south of the border of the Rio Grande. He points to certain questions of gender and filiation yet to be faced, questions of hybridity and, to use the Faulknerian term, questions of miscegenation, which are addressed and sublimated by way of the Disney treatment of Pocahontas, dealt with in a more elegiac manner in Terence Malick's film *The New World*, and which, in the culture and politics of Mexico, focus on the seminal figure of *La Malinche*, ostracized and repressed in the Mexican construction of its collective self-image, an ostracism compounded, argues Coulardeau, by the further ostracism as a *chigada* of Elena Garro, the one-time wife of Octavio Paz, who, in her writings, dared question the heroic masculine appropriation of an idealized image of the nation, by way of act of idealization involving the projection on the body of a woman of the unavowable *part maudite* of *mestizo* filiation.

The brutality of colonization mentioned by Coulardeau is the inevitable corollary of colonial settlement and appropriation of land. Michael Olinga examines the struggle for independence in 1950s Kenya, a British colony which did have a white settler class of farmers, and where the colonial administration was faced with the joint challenge set by Jomo Kenyatta's KAU party and by the MAU MAU, a force which at the time was gothicised in the British media and which gave rise to a sustained British campaign of "counter-insurgency". Olinga draws on the recent renewal of the historiography of pre-independence Kenya. His conclusion goes beyond the equation between the MAU MAU and the agitation of a class of displaced, landless peasants: "much of the agitation behind MAU MAU was not really by peasants –basically people who owned modest pieces of land– but mostly by people who were landless, living as squatters on estates owned by Europeans, by urban jobless and gangsters in Nairobi, and by ex-servicemen of the Second World War. All these people who had quite no source of revenue and mostly relied on land exploitation could see large tracts of land –sometimes unexploited, sometimes richly cultivated, but European-owned– all beyond their capacity to acquire".

Given the magnitude of the socio-economic and the cultural ruptures which the dialectics of colonization brings about, the initial programme of independent self-rule will inevitably involve the searching after a self-

image of dignity, to be sought out by way of the reappropriation of an indigenous past: this axiom holds true for the programmes of cultural nationalism in India or in Ireland as it does for the Ghana of Kwame N'Krumah. Let me quote from Michael Naumann's abstract to his article: "When Kwame N'Krumah and his ministers went to meet the Ghanaians at the dawn of independence dressed in togas made of kente, they were reconnecting to an African past that many had still been denying. This image constitutes an essential picture of independence and the Ghanaian preoccupation with linking the past to the present, for the past is a short cut to the future, as Soyinka puts it. What N'Krumah resuscitated and what he thus honoured was not the history of great empires but the economic dynamism of Africa, its aesthetic sense, a civilization where the good goes hand in hand with the beautiful permeating the most sober moments of life as well as the most solemn ones". This cultural politics of re-appropriation would appear to be, on the basis of the evidence from all postcolonial societies where the indigenous population has established full-fledged "nation-state" status, an inevitable phenomenon. It may, but it does not necessarily, involve the invention of a pre-colonial past, to be imagined as an undefiled state of permanence. However the invention of a fantasied pre-colonial past is not the sole or exclusive cultural response. Reappropriation is increasingly coming to involve the comprehensive historical inquiry into the complex networks of exchange, into the dynamics of the material economy of the social world prior to colonization. What Naumann says about N'Krumah, about the necessary connection between past, present and the future of a society –of any society– provides an important perspective on the current moment in our post-colonial world.

Patrick Griffin takes us back to the singular case of Ireland, John Bull's "other island", fully incorporated into the United Kingdom through the Act of Union of 1800, its status anomalous between 1800 and 1921 insofar as it was represented in the Westminster parliament while retaining in Dublin Castle the office of a Lord-Lieutenant or Viceroy habitually associated with colonial administration⁴. He examines the changes which have come about in the relations between the UK and the

⁴ Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Howe complicates the usual picture. He avoids any simplistic casting of Ireland as the politically disaffected territory of imperial domination, focusing notably on the role played by Ireland in the British imperial order, in particular in India and in Africa.

independent Republic of Ireland in the contemporary context that is marked by their common membership of the European Union and by the emergence of a degree of joint responsibility for the affairs of Northern Ireland. Perhaps the most remarkable shift, over the last two decades, has involved the complicit incorporation of Ireland within the wider global society of the “anglosphere”⁵, with the result that whatever conflicts may still arise, there is a common agenda that seems to be implicitly “anglo-global” with regards to the politics of production and exchange and in relation to the politics of information and cultural consumption.

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré returns to the question of the analogies and differences between the pre-independence and post-independence status of Ireland and India through her consideration of two films, Ritwik Ghatak’s 1965 Bengali film *Subarnarekha* and Ken Loach’s *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006). She links the two films by way of their treatment of the relation between the national struggle, the fight for independence and for admission to the world community of nation-states –the essential and overriding aim of the anti-colonial struggle– and a series of other issues left pending, *en suspens*, to be addressed subsequently. Her title posits an adversarial or exclusive relation: “National versus Social Revolution”. This would appear to suggest that the national struggle preempts or trumps the social revolution and that it most certainly trumps issues of gendered discrimination. The historical evidence on this point is massive and indisputable. Movements of anti-colonial national liberation, even when they enlisted the support of either

⁵ <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n06/james-meek/short-cuts>. James Meek writes thus in the *London Review of Books*, 21 March 2013 of the Anglophere: “Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are on every Anglospheroid’s list. The status of the world’s largest collection of native English speakers, the United States, is less certain. After Harper won his third election victory in 2011, the first to give him an absolute majority in Canada’s federal parliament, Britain’s most energetic Anglospherite, the Tory MEP Daniel Hannan, hailed him in his *Telegraph* blog as ‘the effective leader of the Anglosphere’. Although Barack Obama is leader of a one-time British colony with more native English-speakers than all the others put together, Hannan doesn’t for some reason consider him a candidate for the – fantasy – position of Anglosphere leadership, implying, confusingly, that a country’s place in the Anglosphere is dependent on its leaders making their interest in the concept explicit, rather than there being something essentially Anglospheric about the country itself.

There’s a certain honesty in this. The United States didn’t win a war for independence against a tyrannical British king just so that two centuries later it could commune with the spirits of Cecil Rhodes and John Buchan in neo-imperialist seances alongside the set of countries bearing the queen’s head on their coins. But this hasn’t stopped certain Anglosphericals formulating a new mythology of Anglo oneness”.

the USSR or of Communist China, or of Cuba, were primarily or exclusively focused on the question of national liberation, understood as the overcoming of the colonial administration and the submission of the nation to the imperial authority. Reading Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, one is tempted to imagine an entirely counterfactual modern world history, in which the colonial shock treatment of the existing structure of extra-European societies had not been enacted and endured, had not led to the establishment of a structure of colonial administration which would inevitably establish the question of the nation-state as the « *horizon indépassable* » of politics. Questions of gender, of social rights, questions of ecological sustainability must now be addressed in a context still marked by the haunting spectre of the colonial order. Colonial Ghosts are not the tutelary figures under which it is easy to imagine the shared responsibilities of a cosmopolitan future.

Sonia Dosoruth's article about Mauritius presents a paradigmatic case of the vicissitudes of the imperial global order. « En effet, l'île Maurice, découverte par le Portugais en 1498 - qui la baptisent *Cirne* -, connaîtra successivement la colonisation hollandaise, française puis britannique ». As further evidence of the brutality and ironic unpredictability of the imperial and colonial order, I shall quote what she says about the Chagos archipelago: « L'archipel des Chagos est composé de 7 atolls qui comprennent plus de 60 îles. Le plus grand des atolls est Diego Garcia. L'archipel des Chagos fut cédé par la France aux Anglais par le Traité de Paris de 1814 et jusqu'en 1965, cet archipel fut gouverné comme faisant partie de la colonie de l'île Maurice⁶. En 1793, 22 esclaves de Maurice, très probablement d'origine malgache et africaine, ainsi que Pierre Marie Le Normand, créent une plantation sur Diego Garcia. Le 8 novembre 1965, l'Angleterre prend arbitrairement l'archipel pour créer la *British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)*. Cela est rendu possible par ordre de Sa Majesté, la reine d'Angleterre, par le *BIOT Order*⁷ ». Since 1971 Diego Garcia is a US military base, leased from the British and from which the population has been deported.

Sonia Dosoruth focuses on the specific case of Mauritius and on the Chagos archipelago in her presentation of the colonial and the post-

⁶ Lindsey Collen and Ragini, Kistnasamy, "How Diego Garcia was Depopulated and Stolen" in *Diego Garcia was depopulated and Stolen* (Port-Louis: Ledikasyon Pu Travayer, 2002), p. 26.

⁷ Regina v. Secretary of State of the Foreign and Commonwealth office, *Ex parte Bancoult*, 1076.

colonial moment. Her argument is however exemplary, evidence not of “the nightmare of history”, to quote Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, but of the pragmatic brutalism of the historical exercise of power. That there is a moment or epoch during which the dogmatic romance of identity politics, of invented traditions and imagined pre-colonial conditions, is almost fatally inscribed into the dialectics of anti-colonial nationalism, as the latter was forged through its experience of and through the resistance to colonial domination. In the early decades of post-colonial nationhood, a cultural nationalism and a politics of preserved national identity would appear to be unavoidable, collectively irresistible. As Geetha Ganapathy-Doré suggests, such a dialectics has involved the prolonged repression, in the Freudian sense, of any “field of action” opening onto a shared, cosmopolitan politics, where questions of gender and of social solidarity might be taken up anew.

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PART 1

**THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION –
COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL IMAGES**

CHAPTER 1

There is no such thing as a candid shot

Abstract: Contrary to popular belief, photography is neither an objective medium nor an accurate way of representation. It is, on the contrary, a highly subjective art as it is based on interpretation and staging. Illustrated by a number of images dating from colonial and post-colonial times, this article focuses on the basic Eurocentric grammar of any photographic image: choice of lens, framing, structuring lines and the use of artefacts.

Résumé : Contrairement à l'idée populaire répandue, la photographie n'est pas un simple médium au service d'une représentation qui serait forcément précise et objective. C'est au contraire un art hautement subjectif basé sur l'interprétation et la mise en scène. Grâce à des illustrations datant de l'époque coloniale ou post-coloniale, cet article s'intéresse à quelques points appartenant à ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler la *grammaire de l'image*, en l'occurrence ici une grammaire nettement eurocentrique : choix des objectifs, cadrage, structuration des lignes et usage des artefacts.

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Writing, photography and visual arts in general share common visual and social codes, at least in a given civilization. Writers, painters or photographers deal with similar problems as far as representation is concerned: how to create perspective, how to master different planes of focus, how to suggest movement and above all how to treat 'reality'. The starting-point of this reflection on photography is to consider a blank sheet of photographic paper as a *field of action* more than a simple *recorded space*. Hence, the contention of this article is to try and show how photographers -and this from the origin in the 1830's with calotypes¹- have dealt with cultural models, namely a strong Eurocentric model. Western colonizers, missionaries, merchants, travellers, explorers, artists, doctors have lugged their heavy field cameras all over the world, telling stories,

¹ In 1841 Fox TALBOT patented the negative-photograph known as CALOTYPE.

either duplicating western experiences, genuinely documenting the wilderness and the otherness or relaying crude propaganda. As witnesses of turning-points in history, did they question the relationship between reality and its rendering, trying to find some balance between faithfulness and truth? Were they simply trying to duplicate the external world or rather striving to create an illusive response of the omnipresent spectator? Photography -be it at the time of colonization or of decolonisation- follows a handful of basic rules and canons. The grammar of a photograph is basically how graphic elements such as lines, curves, light, patterns and shadows are organized into an effective composition, effective meaning authentic, informative, compelling or suggestive. Using a series of photographs from different epochs, our purpose will be to better understand how images are created, how that visual grammar functions hence how genuine reportage and blatant propaganda can be decoded. At the turn of the 20th century magazines such as *Harmsworth Magazine*, *Illustrations of China and Its People*, *Empire Review*, *The Field*, *La Revue des Troupes Coloniales* both captured information and implemented authority, power and control. In *L'Œil naïf*, Régis Debray² recalls that, "In the 20th century, the photo industry was a means of possessing and celebrating the territory".

Like a writer, a photographer has an authorial voice. Writers and photographers (re)shape reality, with words, grammar and tropes for the first ones and light and linear structures for the others. If the personality behind a camera is less apparent than the one behind a pen, in all cases the relation to reality is highly precarious and one has to be aware of that discrepancy. Is the photographer eager to use reality for aesthetic purposes or for some less artistic criteria? "Truth now refers not to accurate representation of the artist's response to the object or view, Truth now means fidelity to the subjective experience of the artist."³ That statement by Jerry L. Thomson concerning photography as a medium based on selection and interpretation relies on the importance of subjectivity despite the fact that photography is most of the time used to denote ultimate truth⁴. Like a

² « L'industrie photographique fut au XIXe siècle un moyen de prise de possession et de célébration du territoire », p. 80.

³ *Truth and Photography*, p. 22.

⁴ In 1853 Albert Bisbee wrote, "One of the greatest advantages of the Daguerreotype is that it acts with certainty and extent, to which the powers of human faculties are perfectly incompetent. Thus many scenes of the deepest interest can be transcribed and conveyed to posterity, not as they appear to the imagination of the poet or painter, but as they actually are". Quoted by T. Patti in *Biography of the Pictorial Print*. Photographic Society of America, 71-5 (2005): 35.

story, a photograph is meant to make the viewer respond to the presented thing in its setting –the *opsis*- and not to the manner of its representation. Thomson here meets Joseph Conrad who, in the preface to the ‘Nigger of the *Narcissus*’ unveiled his aesthetic credo, “Fiction – if it at all aspires to be art- appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time”.⁵ Art is never neutral, even if for decades photography had a tendency to think of itself as neutral. Susan Sontag⁶ contends that in Europe, photography “was largely guided by notions of the picturesque, the important, and the beautiful”. Strangely enough, the idea that photography is objective and non predatory is still widely shared today in a world overwhelmed by images. It should be added too that the first photographers were mostly ex-painters, no wonder then that the visual tools which were implemented from the very beginning were derived from the rules which had been used in painting since the early Renaissance.

Our first statement, relaying the title of this article, is that an image is *per se* staged. Photos do not ‘take themselves’, someone inevitably *makes* a photo, by choosing his equipment, by deciding to settle his gear in such a place, by using such foreground, such backdrop, such light, such aperture, such shutter speed and finally by deciding to press the shutter release at one particular moment. A great number of usually overlooked factors, inherent to technical factors, influence the final results and we propose to point out the most relevant ones: choice of lens, point of view, rules of composition, framing. We have chosen to reproduce images both from the colonization and the de-colonization periods. Photography as a medium has in fact not followed the evolution of cultures. A clear Eurocentric way of approaching reality still prevails; 20th century European travellers as well as 21st century native African, Indian or South American reporters use a similar grammar even if the way they interfere with the world they look at is different. Photography is a humanist approach and we leave it to scholars dedicated to sociology and history to dig further into those images and analyse them as ways of appropriation or tools for propaganda. Our approach will be mainly aesthetic.

⁵ ‘The Nigger of the *Narcissus*’, p. 12.

⁶ *On Photography*, p. 63.

Composition

The rules of composition used in photography date back to the early Renaissance and have not evolved since. Giotto was the first painter to use perspective as a key to composition. Leonardo da Vinci added draftsmanship to achieve more sophisticated compositions. With Vermeer, who worked extensively on perspectives and advocated the imitation of reality, we have the western blueprint for what we call the ‘rules’ of composition.

Choice of lens

Staging starts with the choice of an angle of view. To use a wide angle lens encompassing 84° -such as a 24mm in 35mm photography- is to offer the viewer a more global reading of a situation than his standard vision would allow. The object is shown in its relation with its environment. The view includes a lot of data. To use a longer lens – a telephoto such as a 200mm offering a 12° angle of view- isolates the object or rather, excludes information. The binocular vision of a human being corresponds to a focal length of 50mm (it corresponds to an angle of 46°).



Photo© Andrea Bruce, Irak, 2011. A 24mm wide angle lens adds a sense of place.



Photo © John Garrett, *Masai Warriors, Tanzania*. A 35mm lens encompasses the environment; it remains the favourite tool of reporters.



Telephotos reduce the angle of vision and help focus of the face; the background is not visible as shown is the two photographs taken a century apart. Jerónimo photographed by Edward S. Curtis in 1905 (with a 6 ½ in x 8 ½ inch field camera and the first telephoto available at that time) and Mfaho from *The Black Light Warriors* photographed by Julius Ise (2012) with an 85mm lens. The results are similar: there is no sense of place and hardly of time.

Contrary to popular belief, the perspective does not change if one uses a 20mm lens or a 200mm from the same viewpoint. Various focal length lenses merely alter magnification, in other words the subject appears smaller if shot with a wide-angle lens than with a telephoto lens. The fact remains

that a particular lens is a tool selecting the portion of space to be photographed. By selecting some spaces to be described, the artist cuts his subject from its environment or gives to the chosen environment more value; a close-up on eyes, on hands, on a piece of clothing reveals a certain emotion, a type of work, a social status. S. Sontag (106) speaks of ‘fragments’ scattered by movement and time, collected by a particular eye using a particular lens, “Each photograph is a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted... A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen”. A slice of space becomes a slice of life.

Point of view

The choice of the point of view is equally important; by moving the camera left or right, above or below, the photographer tells a different story –he already stages- since he decides to place his subject in relation –or not- with the context. By focusing on a particular detail, by adopting a singular point of view or by cropping the situation that interests him, the artist inevitably distorts the reality he might think he is rendering faithfully: from below giving more power to his subject and from above belittling its importance. This kind of manipulation is usually unseen but the slightest shifting of point of view modifies the perception of the viewer. The photograph taken by Michael Lipchitz presented below is a very simple example of standard staging. The photographer has aligned two elements which become relevant when put into a single frame: the blazing derrick in the background and the praying Muslim in the foreground. The knelt man and his shoes create a triangle which responds as a symbolic echo to the inverted triangle of the fire structure in the background. The low point of view emphasizes the importance of the man; his concealed face gives him a universal value. What is shown here as apparent information could well be a typical case of misinformation or even disinformation.



Photo© Michael Lipchitz, *Kuwait*, 1991.

The standard point of view when photographing human beings which has been imposed on us by painting is eye-level, the lens focuses on the eye of the subject. The preference for shooting portraits slightly from below is because this point of view gives more importance to the face.

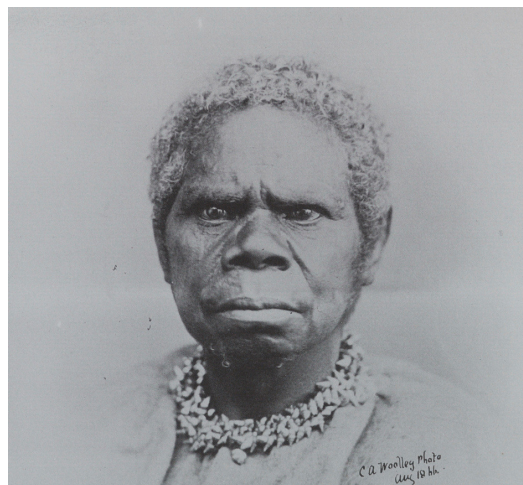


Photo © C. A. Wooley, *Trucanini woman* 1886.
Eye-level shot: standard point of view for this portrait.



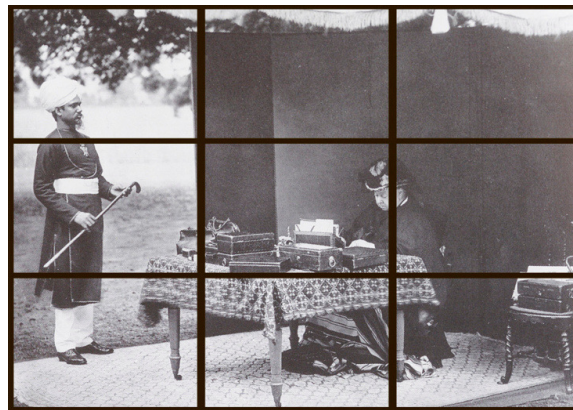
Photo © Edward S. Curtis, *Mohave Indian, Qüniáika*, 1900.
Slightly from below. the subject is given more importance.

Lines & composition

To compose an image is to organize graphic elements into effective, compelling compositions; composition has always been one of the key skills in making photographs.

The Rule-of-Thirds or the Golden rule

One of the basic rules of composition is named the Rule-of-thirds or ‘split focus,’ because you split your image into three equal sections and place your subject on one of these dividing lines. This is where the eye of the spectator will eventually rest after having explored the whole image. This elementary composition derives from painting. Lines, called leading lines, give structure to our lives; they allow a photograph to become a living space into which the eye of the viewer is asked to wander. Photographers make their viewers follow rivers, masts, tree-trunks, horizons, fences, wharfs, railroads, skyscrapers guns and swords. Those lines generate patterns –ascending or descending, vertical or horizontal- and those patterns give structure to the ‘story’ told by the image. Lines form the elementary structuring of space, they constitute another manipulation.



The composition of both images follows similar patterns. The head of the native drinking from a creek (© Harry H. Johnston, *Andorobo drinking*, 1900) and that of Queen Victoria have been placed near the Rule-of-Thirds grid line. In the photograph by Robert Hills, *Queen Victoria working at her dispatch boxes at Frogmore, attended by Sheik Chidda*, 1893, an implied line is created between the standing Sheik and the Queen.

Perspective

A photograph is a flat surface which is meant to evoke a three dimensional vision. To achieve that visual impression, the easiest way is to create a fictional depth thanks to converging lines. Again, we should stress the fact that using perspective to generate an impression of depth is highly cultural and that for westerners the natural way of travelling into an image is from left to right, starting at the bottom left and moving to the top right. Combined with a great depth of field, converging lines -also called vanishing lines- create natural visual paths.



Photo © C. Lamotte, *Textile mill*, Belgian Congo, 1955. A very strong composition is generated by the converging lines and a great depth of field.



Photo© John Moss, *Nigerian Woman*, 1966. The vanishing point is close to the right side of the frame.

Diagonals

Diagonal lines draw the eye of the viewer through the photograph; they usually add a sense of action, of dynamism. A diagonal helps reach the subject. A clever repetition of diagonals creates interesting visual patterns. A diagonal can be visible under the form of a real line such as a sword, a road or a spear or more subtly induced by a shaft of light as shown by M. Freeman.



Photo© Michael Freeman, 2010.

In the case of the photograph presented below, a short but nonetheless strong line is created by the eyes of the native looking at the cut hand displayed by his partner.



Photo© Alice Harris, circa 1905. This is one of numerous photographs showing severed hands. Mark Twain, in a pamphlet entitled *King Leopold's Soliloquy* (New York: International Publishers, 1961, pp.73-74), writes: "The Kodak has been a sore calamity to us. The most powerful enemy indeed... the only witness that I have encountered in my long experience that I couldn't bribe".

The following diptych presented in the brochure *Yesterday and Today* shows African natives before and after colonization. The line of the dug-out serves as a forceful diagonal, starting from the upper left and going to the bottom right corner, it expresses a movement towards something positive, which could be civilisation when simple canoes will be replaced by steam-boats and when standing natives would finally wear the western uniform of power.

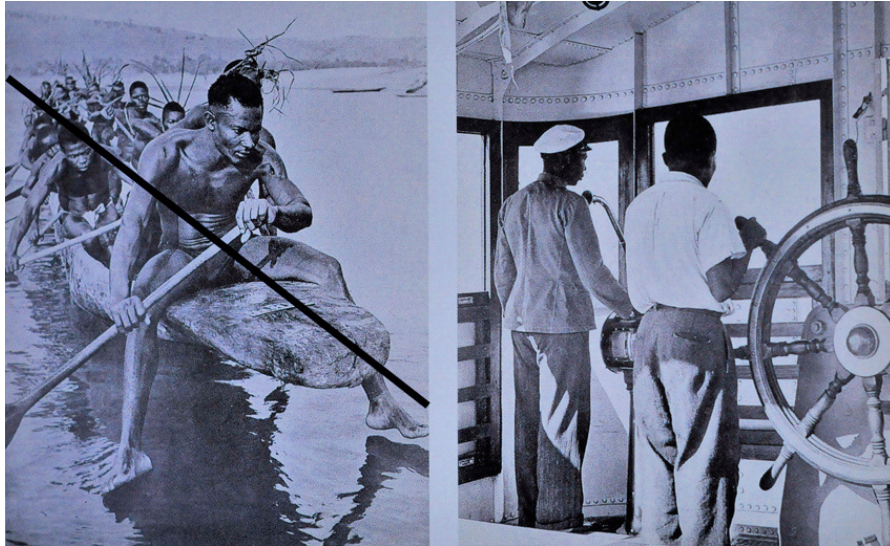


Photo © Unknown photographer, 1950.

Triangle

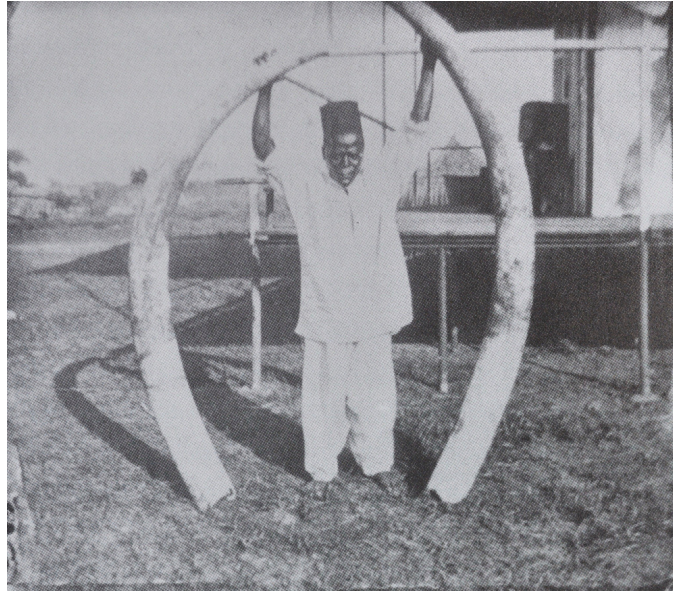
As the simplest of all the polygons, the triangle has the minimum of lines required to close a subject or to connect different objects in the frame. Painters have worshipped triangles because they are simple structures which enforce order and stability. Triangles can be straight, inverted, horizontal and vertical. Triangles in western cultures are implicitly related to basic symbolisms such as the Christian Holy Trinity; the point-up triangle represents ascension to the spiritual world whereas a point-down triangle represents a descent into the physical world.



Photo© Philippe Bordas, *L'Afrique des hérauts* (1995). The strength of this fighter showing off his body is expressed in a well-drawn triangle. The negative space is nothing but texture but explicit enough to give the viewer an idea of his environment.

Curves

Curves imply softness, femininity; they give a sense of peace and calm. As far as composition is concerned, they create a fluid visual path. In the case of the photograph below, they frame the subject. The native seems to be imprisoned by the elephant husks that he supposedly brandishes as trophies or that appear to show the strength of man over animal.



Photo© C.H. Stigand, Royal Geographical Society Archives, 1907.

Curves easily lead to circles. Circles have been associated with femininity for centuries. As geometrical finished forms they also symbolise perfection but may represent imprisonment.



Photo© W. Douglas Burden, *Bali*, 1927. The curve of the back is enhanced by the soft curves of the bare breasts.



Photo©. Michael Freeman. Dith Pran, the main actor of the movie *The Killing Fields* is posing in the foreground; a wide-angle lens allows the viewer to constantly move from the

living character to the symbols of dead ones heaped on the table of a former school which had been transformed into a prison.

Framing

Framing one's subject right in the middle of the frame is both a beginner's error and a basic winner. A winner, because the viewer will not be distracted by other elements and an error because its repetition has a tendency to weaken its original powerful value. A very common and efficient structure is a frame-within-the-frame, when a second frame inside the image helps focus on the main object.



Photo© Graciela Turbide *Women in Power, Battered Women*, 1988. The frame of the window constitutes a second frame, it helps focus on the woman.

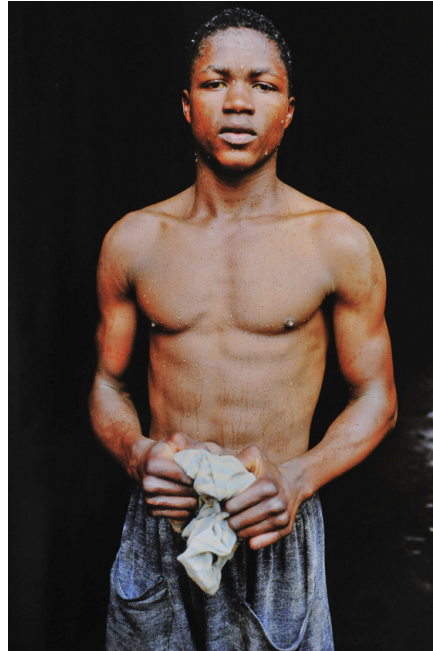


Photo© Robert C. Buitrón, “T.P. Broadcasting Colorizes Stagecoach”, 1995. The composition and framing here are very clever and the intention to tell a story obvious. The two men form a secondary frame for the poster and the computer screen, the ironic -or bitter message- is rather explicit. Both texts are inserted in an inverted triangle formed by the arms of the Mexican workers.

Negative space

In a photograph the negative space is the part of the image containing no discernable information: it can be a texture or a repeated pattern. Great photographers take particular care of their background. Photographers usually want their viewers not to be distracted from the main elements. The important visual data thus corresponds to the positive space. A shallow depth of field greatly helps create a negative space.

Yannick Le Boulicaut



Photo© Philippe Bordas, *L'Afrique des hérauts* (1995). Posing before the open door of a shack, the fighter stands out thanks to the black negative space.



Photo© Robert Maes, *Luba coiffure*, 1937. The photographer's assistants use a white sheet as a negative space.

Depth of field

Depth of field corresponds to the amount of a particular shot which is in focus. It is designed to give the illusion of depth, the impression of being inside a three dimensional space. Since a photograph is a two-dimensional surface, one of the basic skills photographers play with is the use of aperture. Aperture is the extent to which the lens of any camera opens when taking a picture. Aperture control is the primary variable drawn on by photographers. Large apertures (such as f/1.4) cause narrow (or shallow) depth of field; small apertures (such as f/22) cause a wide (or large) depth of field. To obtain an entire scene in which everything needs to be in focus, one has to use a small aperture. To bring attention to a subject by blurring the foreground and the background, one needs to use a selective focus (focusing on the subject which will be sharp) and a shallow depth of field. Since our eyes –our brains- refuse to focus on blurred elements, the visual path created by such a restricted depth of field leads the eyes towards the sharp part of the surface. The depth of field extends behind and in front of the point of focus; the photographer can thence vary with more or less subtlety the amount of visual data which is meant to be sharp.



Photo© Jean Makula, *A Congolese family in Léopoldville*, 1958. All the elements belonging to this family room are sharp. A standard lens (50mm) has been used, mimicking binocular vision, giving the viewer the impression of being part of the family.

Yannick Le Boulicaut



Photo© Leopold Gabriel, *Woman, Katanga*, 1930. The depth of field is very shallow, the backdrop is blurred creating a pleasing *bokeh*; a wide open aperture and a telephoto have been used.



Photo© Anonymous photographer, *Travailleurs à la carrière* (circa 1900). To show those miners, the photographer has used a small aperture to allow all men to be sharp despite the fact they neither stand on the same line nor the same plane.

The photographic technique of depth of field was hardly ever used in the early days of photography, for technical reasons. The first photographic landscapes look desperately flat to the eye of a 21st century viewer overfed by magazines and posters displaying wide panoramas with sharp foregrounds and even sharper backdrops.

Light. Quantity and quality

It always pays to repeat that *photography* means ‘to write with light’ and that *heliography* means ‘to write with the sun’, as for *calotype* devised by William Henry FOX TALBOT⁷ in 1839, it means ‘beautiful’ (Gr. *kalos*). Light shows and reveals, colours exist thanks to light. Light with a particular quality is often at the very core of descriptions. Light can be soft or harsh, strong or subdued. It has a quality; it may be flattering or dramatic. Hard light increases contrast, and therefore drama, whereas soft light alters appearances and makes things look smoother. For portraits, photographers prefer a soft dim light except if they want to enhance a wrinkled face with a harsh side light or a brutal front light. A flat light creates no shadow; it is

⁷ W. Fox Talbot published the first book illustrated by photographs, *The Pencil of Nature*, in 1844.

sometimes linked to *notan*, the Japanese graphic style of representation. Back lighting (when the brightest source of light comes from behind) generates an under-exposition of the subject. The rendition is thus more or less black, becoming a silhouette. The chiaroscuro technique -derived from painting- is often used to enhance a gloomy atmosphere.



Photo© Eugene Smith, *Tomoko Uemura is bathed by her mother, Minamata*, 1971. The light bounces on the naked ailing body and is suffused in the steam. This kind of image has the quality of light typical of Caravaggio or Rembrandt.



Photo© Stéphanie Guillaume, 2012. The digital sensor is meant to pose for grey areas. By including the sun in her image, the photographer has lost all details in the figure and created a silhouette.

Images tell stories

Since the first photographers were painters, the use of an artificial backdrop has always been a tradition for studio photography. This technique is still in use today, be it a curved white wall, a hung carpet or a painted canvas. Such backgrounds serve different purposes: when blank they enhance the main subject, when painted they are meant to re-create a possible natural situation (the use of layers under Photoshop is a similar approach).



Photo© Martin Chambi, *Le frère curé, Cuzco, Pérou*, 1933.



Photo© Anonymous photographer, *Mont Athos, skite Saint-André*, 1864.

Portraits

The rhetoric of the portrait is highly emblematic of the visual habits of the late 19th century: the subject faces the lens at eye level, an attitude which was designed and thought to express solemnity and/or frankness. Frontal paintings and photos were imposed as standards; a standard is to be understood as the result of a social, cultural accepted vision. Standards eventually become stereotypes. The portrait of one of the first American writers, Cotton Mather by Peter Pelham,⁸ (circa 1727) is highly similar to the portraits of Indian chiefs such as Jerónimo or Hlalaküm photographed by Edward S.Curtis, more than 150 years later, or those of John Thomson, who photographed the people of China and Mongolia in the 1870s. These images are all built on the same basic pattern: the subject is shown at eye-level, slightly from below. Modern photographers such as Miguel Gandert in the series *Chicano Narrative Photography* taken in 1995 almost one century later draw on these same visual codes and techniques (shallow depth of field, focusing on the eyes, neutral backdrop).



Photo © Edward Curtis, *Navaho* (circa 1900).

⁸ A mezzotint belonging to the *Massachusetts Historical Society* in Boston.



Laura Aguilera, New Mexico, 1995



Luis Marcos Girón, New Mexico, 1995

Photos © Miguel Gandert.

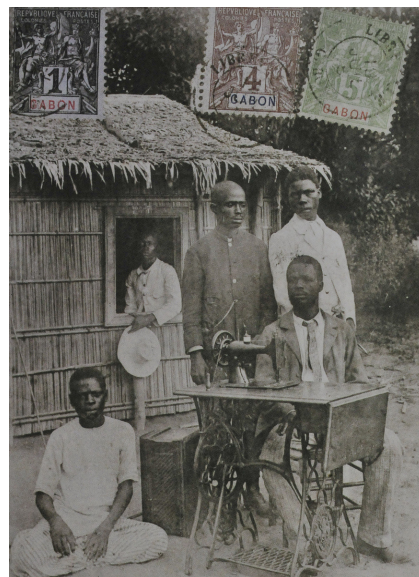
Artefacts in images

An artefact is an object reflecting contemporary society or popular culture, its presence in photographs is highly relevant. To introduce an object thought to belong to a ritual, a cultural habit, such as a piece of clothing or jewellery, a veil or loin cloth, a weapon or a tool, has always been crucial in photography. The typical case is the official portrait that is meant to be a statement: British or French bourgeois families happy to pose and have their family portrait taken wearing their best clothes, but also the gallery of Indians photographed by Curtis at the turn of the 20th century, all wearing headbands, beads, holding weapons or tools they no longer used on a daily basis, but which represent an already vanished culture that the tycoon John Pierpoint Morgan wanted to document. This tradition has never waned. In the USA today parents pay great amounts of money to have renowned artists photograph their children for the “senior photo album”. The high-school students pose wearing their football or basketball uniform, the instrument they play, the ball gowns that will be worn at their prom. A football, a violin, a necklace: these artefacts endorse a more or less accepted idea that clever staging is the way to record an image of what their children look like (or should look like) at the end of their high-school years. The way colonies were –and still are- shown (and, above all, the way the colonizers relayed their vision of the colonies) was largely conveyed through the use of artefacts, mainly pieces of clothing. The Singer sewing machines so carefully displayed in the images below encapsulate far more than a treatise on colonization. The standing nuns represent so-called

civilized knowledge and authority, while the female natives sit in front of the machines, grinning before the lens.



Photo© Anonymous photographer, *Mission des filles de la charité à Nsona-Mbata. La Leçon de couture* (circa 1910).



Photo© Jean Audema, *Congo français. Un tailleur Loango* (circa 1910).

The rifle held by the Indian, or the knife held by another Indian a century before, the feathers displayed on the head of these Mexicans, the calliper

used by a Western ethnologist to measure the skull of a native, the elephants tusks framing the not too happy native hunters or trackers: these objects included in images are added value, they are meant to saturate the visual experience.



Photo© Kaupo Kikkas,
Jonny, a Peruvian hunter, 2012



Photo© E. Curtis, *Cowichan Warrior*, circa 1900.



Photo© Harry H. Johnston,
Doggett and Muamba, circa 1900.



Photo© Robert Visser, *Caravan with ivory offered for sale, French Congo*, postcard, circa 1905

Photographers may introduce clear implicit elements of the environment in order to tell their stories: a young Mexican woman waiting for her train

with her luggage in the 1930's, postcards showing veiled or unveiled North African women as was the tradition of popular Orientalism.



Photo© Christina Fernandez, *Going back to Merelia, 1927*. With an implied perspective generated by the railway tracks, the luggage, a bunch of papers in her hand, this Mexican woman is literally ready to leave, but the caption reveals she is heading back home.



© Collection M. Combiér, *Femmes mauresques*.



© Collection M. Combiér, *Scènes et types : danseuse*.

Why are shots never candid?

The rendition of what surrounds us -the pictorial world, what becomes ‘picturesque’ for an artist- is highly subjective. Any viewer is conditioned by a cultural environment. Some elements are connected to him, others are forgotten. The experience of any artist is always chaotic, fragmentary and his work is to put some order into visual chaos, filling the ‘frame’ with meaning and/or emotion. Order uses codes and codes rely on the above-mentioned techniques, such as the use of foreground and background, the use of sharp or blurred elements, of lighted or shadowed ones, all of which contribute to the creation of an impression of space, or its negation. To the eye of a western spectator, what is set in the foreground always seems closer than what is seen in the background. The eye usually does not linger on a blurred detail. It tends rather to dwell on a sharp one, however minute it may be. A diagonal gives energy to an image, a movement from left to right is considered positive, while a movement from right to left is analysed as negative –one is retracing one’s steps or looking back- all this because western civilisations subscribe to a linear conception of time.

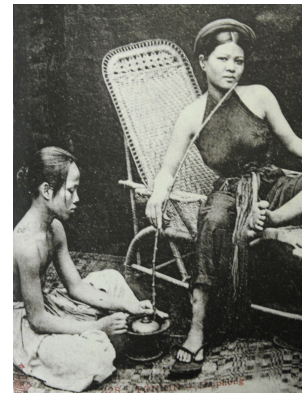
Language deforms experience the way photography transforms reality; the desire to record an experience faithfully does not necessarily amount to an accurate way to reach truth. However this is probably what attracts artists: to explore those cracks, gaps, spaces -or even *rifts* to paraphrase Edward Said- between experience and fiction, to capture the discontinuity or

the mismatch between things, thoughts, memories, raw impressions⁹, between experience and a type of language -be it written or graphic- whose complexity, through the experience of reading, could help the reader step inside the frame and be part of the fiction. Words and photographs are ways to reach a reality that is recalcitrant, sometimes inaccessible. Words become tales and photographs images, both offered to spectators whose task should be to go beyond mere consumption.

Yannick Le BOULICAUT
CRILA, Université d'Angers



© Photo L. Nilsson, *Stanleyville, Congo*, 1948.



© Collection M. Combiér, *Femme fumant la pipe*.

⁹ In digital photography, a *raw file* is a file containing all the information but this information has to be *revealed* thanks to dedicated software.

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CHAPTER 2

Colonization and Decolonization in the US and Mexico

Abstract: This article makes an attempt at comparing the processes of colonization in Mexico and the USA performed by Spain, England and France with different aims and highlights the consequent emergence of two social and cultural models, the three-tiered model (France and Spain) and the one-drop theory (England and USA). Decolonization was achieved through independence between 1776 and 1821, but the native Indian populations and the Black African slaves were far from being truly decolonized. Today the objective is not decolonization but decolonialization -the liberation of the mind, culture and heritage of the American Indians and the descendants of Black African slaves- which is reaching a crucial phase in the USA and is still to be reached in Mexico. In that movement, a second deculturation through exile, i.e., moving out of their reservations as natives, or moving out of their homes as women, is necessary for the search for original roots to become a vital objective. The article particularly focuses on the representations of two Indian Women in Mexican and US literatures and arts, Pocahontas and Malinche, with a view to demonstrating that the decolonialization of the minds is a lot more complex than the simple decolonization of territories.

Résumé : Cet article essaie de comparer trois colonisations au Mexique et aux USA menées par l'Espagne, l'Angleterre et la France avec des objectifs différents qui expliquent l'émergence de deux modèles sociaux et culturels, la société à trois étages (France et Espagne) et la théorie de la goutte de sang unique (Angleterre et USA). La décolonisation a été atteinte par l'indépendance entre 1776 et 1821 mais les Indiens autochtones et les esclaves africains noirs étaient loin d'être décolonisés. Aujourd'hui l'objectif n'est plus la décolonisation mais la décolonialisation, la libération de l'esprit, de la culture et du patrimoine des Indiens d'Amérique et des descendants des esclaves africains noirs, mouvement qui aborde une phase cruciale aux USA mais qui n'a pas encore atteint cette phase au Mexique. Dans ce mouvement une seconde déculturation par l'exil, par la sortie des réserves ou en tant que femme sortant du foyer familial est nécessaire pour que les racines originelles deviennent un objectif vital. L'article focalise sur les représentations de deux femmes indiennes dans la littérature et les arts mexicains et étatsuniens, Pocahontas et Malinche, conscients que la décolonialisation des esprits est bien plus complexe que la simple décolonisation des territoires.

In the 21st century, we are confronted with a vast debate on the heritage of colonial empires and the decolonization that started on August 15, 1947 with the independence of India. In this article we are going to center our attention on Mesoamerica and the USA.

In America, apart from some areas in Latin America and some West Indian islands (Canada has a special status as an independent member of the Commonwealth) still attached to France or Great Britain (Porto Rico is attached to the USA), all countries of the region gained independence a long time ago: the USA on July 4, 1776 (the US Constitution was drafted between 1786-1789), Mexico on September 16, 1810 (recognized on September 27, 1821). French Louisiana, with a surface area of 2,140,000 square kilometers, was sold (The Louisiana Purchase) to the USA by Napoleon in 1803 for a total sum of US\$ 15,000,000, less than 3 cents per acre, and was integrated into the United States.

By 1821 the vast zone covering Mexico and the USA had largely been decolonized, or to be conquered (West and Far West), or was to change hands from Spain, Russia, Mexico to the USA.

But what about the native populations that were colonized by the Europeans: American Indians, Aztecs, Mayas, but also Black Africans who were colonized into slavery? How can such populations be decolonized, within the legal and constitutional framework of the free countries that emerged from the decolonization of the continent? Did the decolonization of the territories amount to decolonialization (CNN, November 27, 2012) of the previously colonized people?

We are going to examine the situation of American Indians, Aztecs and Mayas. Have these Native populations of Mesoamerica and Northern America been reprieved from their ancient colonial status? Decolonization means the loss of the colony-status for a territory, whereas the neological term *decolonialization* means the permanent reprieve of the colonial status of a people.

Mexico and Spain¹

The Spanish arrived in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico in 1517. Malinche, an important Indian woman in this period, helped Cortés, the

¹ This section was researched and composed by Paula OSORIO, a Venezuelan graduate student in Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in History and Political Science, within an editorial project with Dr Jacques COULARDEAU on the role of Indian women in the colonization/colonialization, hence decolonization/ decolonialization of Mesoamerica and Northern America, due for publication in an international review later in 2013.

Spanish *conquistador*. She played a major role during the conquest, acting as interpreter to Cortes in Aztec and Nahuatl. She was also his concubine and the mother of his son, Martín Cortés (el Mestizo, the mixed-blood). She was also Cortes' main strategic, though very controversial, asset for the conquest and has only timidly been re-evaluated, mostly by Chicana intellectuals in the United States.

Many think the Spanish conquest of Mexico succeeded due to the Spanish military tradition, established since Classical Antiquity. In the Roman Empire Hispania resisted for centuries and "Spanish colonial expansion into Mexico grew out of Spain's earlier success in expelling the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula."² On April 21, 1519 Hernán Cortes entered Veracruz with 600 men³. He fought against the Aztec Empire which ruled a population of several million people, stretching from Texas to Guatemala and which succeeded in imposing the domination of the King of Spain. The Indian populations' lack of integration in the Empire was a great help. The Empire levied taxes on the tribes, took teenage and adult men as soldiers and women as slaves.

In Yucatan many civilisations and Empires had emerged and fallen over a period of more than three thousand years prior to the Spanish conquest. The arrival of the Spaniards caused rising tensions which ended in a brutal war and casualties. Many Indians died from diseases, especially smallpox, or from torture. The total number of Indian casualties is still debated. Francis J. Brooks⁴ considers the Indian population collapsed from around 25 million in 1519 to only one million in 1600, a 96% drop: one of the worst slaughters in human history. But how did so few Spanish manage to conquer so many Indians? This remains a still unanswered question, one that is actively explored. If we go beyond the inevitable emotion charge of the question of the eradication of the indigenous population, what are the consequences on the Mexican collective mind today? As seen through the interpretation of one woman: Malinche.

The Aztecs regarded the war as the only way to "feed the sun" with human offerings to the gods. This fate required the expansion of the Empire. This may be why the Aztec did not understand the Spanish attack, because they always attacked first. When the Spanish arrived in Veracruz, where the

² Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

³ Sandra Cohen, "How the Aztecs appraised Montezuma" in *The History Teacher*, Society for History Education, 5-3 (1972): 21-30.

⁴ Francis Brooks, "Revising the Conquest of Mexico: Smallpox, Sources, and Populations", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24-1 (1993): 1-29

Totonacs governed under the Emperor's authority, they were offered vast amounts of gold and gems, which surprised them. This was the Indians' worst mistake. Indeed it reinforced the Spaniards' belief in the myth of El Dorado. No matter how "welcoming" the Indians were, Cortes only thought of conquering this country where gold was so "easy" to find. The Indians assumed the Spaniards resembled their gods in look and dress. Could they actually be their returning gods as they believed? Yet from the very beginning, Emperor Moctezuma was clear with the Totonacs: Cortes was not to reach Tenochtitlan.

The religious dimension of the conquest was fundamental for the various actors, though it is hard to know today what really happened. Two main theories are advanced to explain Moctezuma's behavior. First Moctezuma was convinced the conquistadores and Cortes were gods. For him Cortes was probably *Quetzalcoatl*, a divinity represented as a Plumed Serpent⁵ who was to come back for revenge after his defeat by the war god *Huitzilopochtli*. The Emperor's beliefs must undoubtedly have carried some weight, since Moctezuma did not fight. Secondly Moctezuma's response was based on an ancient Aztec tradition, the Emperor's docile and friendly behavior showed his superiority over his "enemies". Moctezuma tried to keep the Spanish away with gold and treasures. This had exactly the opposite effect and Cortes imposed himself as the legitimate master of Mexico thanks to Christianization, which strengthened the Spanish conquest, while Cortes almost came to be regarded as a Messiah.

Moctezuma was described by contemporary chroniclers, mainly priests, as a cruel tyrant (e.g. Fray Diego Duran⁶), an argument which amounts to justifying the Spanish invasion as the salvation of Indians. The Catholic Church instructed the Spanish to "convert" pagans by all means. The Indians were, therefore, tortured, murdered, though at times some fought back; resisted enslavement. Cholula is one Indian town that fought to the death. The decision-making process in the New World led to many irregular actions. Political and military strategies had to be approved by the King, causing a crippling long delay. To avoid delay, the Spanish demonstrated

⁵ D.H. Lawrence, *Quetzalcoatl*, 1923, first draft of *The Plumed Serpent*, 1925, "D.H. Lawrence and the 'Plumed Serpent'," available at <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/index.php?one=azt&two=aaa&id=271&typ=reg>, accessed January 3, 2013.

⁶ Fray Diego Durán [ca. 1537-1588], *The History of Indies of New Spain*, 1581. Fray Diego Durán, brought to Mexico as a child, grew up in the Aztec capital city Texcoco, learned to speak Nahuatl, the Aztec language, joined the Dominican Order in 1556 and spent his life chronicling the religion and customs of the local people.

brutal efficiency in the name of the Christian faith. They had strategic superiority through their horses, fire guns and canons. Moctezuma's policy also had a high human cost: human offerings were regularly performed justifying war and expansion. However, could not this dimension be seen as being compatible with the Spanish god's son Jesus, who was tortured and then crucified? The violent rituals of the Aztecs were easily replaced by the simultaneously "loving" and brutal sacrifice of Jesus, so that the surviving Indians accepted to be baptized, taking Spanish names and dressing like Europeans: no nudity, feathers, body paint, and earrings. They also imposed Spanish, which led to the nearly total disappearance of Indian languages in today's Mexico.

Simon Bolivar, Latin America's independence founding father, said about the continent's inhabitants in the first phase of decolonization: "We are not Europeans, we are not Indians, but we're what is in between, an intermediary species between Aborigines and the Spanish."⁷ Bolivar dreamt of a united America from Alaska to *Tierra de Fuego* (Argentina), but this project was far too ambitious for such a vast territory of so many identities, so different cultures, languages and heritages. We must not forget the Americas experienced different colonial encounters and interpreted their roots and past in different ways.

Malinche, who was a very talented woman, learned Spanish in a few months and opportunely became Cortes' interpreter. Though she was a slave, Cortes must have really loved her. Her Christian name was Marina and she was also addressed as "Doña" Marina, a respectful way to address ladies in Spanish. She gave Cortes his first son, Martín. Cortes could not marry Malinche because he was married in Spain and considered himself to be strictly bound by the obligations of Catholic marriage. Martín is considered the first Mexican, though not the first "mestizo." Octavio Paz's vision of Malinche⁸ is very negative, since he believes all Mexicans are the sons of Malinche and "La culpa es de la Malinche," (blame it on Malinche) implying they are the descendents of a "chingada" (a prostitute). This negative vision started after independence (1821), it diminished during the revolution (1910) and reappeared stronger in the 20th century, directly generated by the Mexicans' virile nationalism vis-a-vis the USA. They even call Chicanos Malinchistas, those who abandoned their people like Malinche.

⁷ Simón de Bolívar, Message to the Congress of Angostura, 1819. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1819bolivar.asp>, accessed January 2, 2013.

⁸ Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Madrid: Cátedra, 1950-1975.

Malinche, deeply associated with Cortés, has a bad image. At the beginning her positive image was built mainly by the Spanish and is postulated on the celebration of the *Conquista*. Elisabeth Salas pointed out that an important change of her “status as a great *conquistadora* declined at exactly the same time as the Mexicans threw out the Spaniards in 1821.”⁹ Malinche is almost a mythical character in Mexican history: “her individual strength [makes her] a ‘human document’ and a major element of history”⁸ within the history of Mexico itself.

While Malinche’s heritage definitely generates passion, interpretations of her role are neither bad nor good, they are tools intended to provide or deny legitimacy. For anti-imperialistic politicians with precise campaign and electoral purposes, Malinche is evil damnation. Even Octavio Paz had fallen into cursing Malinche. Reevaluation of her role in history has almost exclusively come from outside Mexico, in particular from Chicana intellectuals. There is the case of Elena Garro,¹⁰ (mentioned by Sandra Messinger Cypress,¹¹) who was married to Octavio Paz, divorced from him in 1959, and lived in exile in France for twenty years. She refuted Paz’s chapter “*The Sons of La Malinche*” in his well known essay *The Labyrinth of Solitude* published in 1947 where he raised the controversial topic of machismo and attributed it to the vulnerability of the Indian woman who gave herself to Cortes. She spoke of “*La culpa es de los Tlaxcaltecas*” (Blame it on the Tlaxcaltecas).¹² She died in exile in difficult economic circumstances, only a few months after Paz in 1998. Sandra Messinger Cypress insists on the fact that most of the time researchers studying Malinche ignore Elena Garro. She was a “chingada”, like Malinche. In the view of the intellectual and literary circles in Mexico, her worst sin was her attempt to analyze the real Malinche, given the fact that the Indians held partial responsibility for the successful Spanish conquest. The Mexican revolution mixed Indian heritage with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Such a contradictory union doomed any possible re-appropriation of Indian traditions and history by Mexicans and these still remain banned from all social and political circles.

⁹ Elisabeth Salas, *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Elena Garro, 1920-1998, a Mexican writer, once married to writer Octavio Paz.

¹¹ Sandra Messinger Cypress, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature, From History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

¹² The Tlaxcalans, also Tlaxcalteca, an indigenous group of Nahua ethnicity that inhabited the Kingdom of Tlaxcala. They remained independent from the Aztec though allied to them, and they allied themselves to the Spaniards when they arrived.

The re-evaluation of Malinche, and consequently Indians, can only come from exiled women, mostly in the USA. This means that the renewed acculturation of Indians can only come from Mexicans when they are confronted with a second deculturation, either from exile, mainly to the USA, or from being a woman, or both. Altogether, in Mexico itself, Indians, their culture and their heritage, have not yet been decolonialized.

The English Colonies and the USA

The first English colony, the Lost Roanoke Colony, was established on the island of Roanoke off the coast of North Carolina in 1590 by Sir Walter Raleigh. All the colonists were supposedly killed by local Indians generally, leaving no trace behind them except the word CROATOAN carved on a tree, thus designating the members or allies of the Roanoke tribe.

The first successful settlement was James' Fort, later Jamestown, on an island off the coast of Virginia under the authority, though neither at the beginning nor for long, of James Smith, who was supposedly saved from execution in 1607 by Pocahontas, first mentioned by Smith in 1616 and again in 1624¹³. Pocahontas, by her own efforts, fed the colonists. This short period (1607-1609) was turned into a legend in the USA, starting with John Davis and a romantic rewriting in 1812¹⁴ but whose best-known representation is found in Walt Disney's two films in 1995 and 1998.

This colonization was done under two authorities. King James I granted a charter to a private company, the London Company of Virginia which had to collect funds, find ships, hire sailors and captains and recruit settlers, then transport them to Virginia (so named by Sir Walter Raleigh in honor of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I) and support them to create a colony that had to be profitable by 1616 when the Charter was to be renewed, only if the colony had become self-sufficient and profitable.

Neither the company nor the settlers had the ownership of the land. Their legal title was only to its use since the land remained the King's. John Smith tried to get some land from the Indians to escape the company before he was sent back to England after a pathetic and opportune accident. John Rolfe, the first Englishman to start a plantation for the cultivation of tobacco, acquired his land from the Indians by marrying Pocahontas. His son Thomas Rolfe inherited the land since it was his mother's.

¹³ John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/smith/smith.html>, accessed January 2, 2013.

¹⁴ John Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas, An Indian Tale*, 1805, Gale, Sabin Americana, 2012, <http://www.gale.com/world>, Reprint for sale in bookstores.

The objective was to make a sustainable profit within ten years. The goal, since there was no gold or silver, was to cultivate a profitable crop. John Rolfe arrived in 1608 with stealthily appropriated (by means of theft, black market and smuggling) seeds of the tobacco grown by the Spanish in their colonies. The Spanish had the *de facto* monopoly of tobacco in Europe, which gave them a much higher profit (from the nascent semi-free market economy) than did gold and silver (from minting coins). Tobacco was THE golden crop.

John Rolfe's marrying Pocahontas in 1614, after her abduction by Captain Argall in 1612 and her christening into the Anglican religion soon after, provided him with the land belonging to his wife whom the English assumed, though their assumption is questionable, to be the daughter of Wahunsenaca, the leader of the Powhatan confederation, wrongly identified as Powhatan. She also used connections with family members (according to the common American version of the story) or male priests in the tribe (quiakros, the only people controlling the cultivation and curing of tobacco) because she was herself an initiated priestess (according to the modern Indian version of the story), to provide John Rolfe with the know-how to properly cultivate and cure the tobacco seeds he had. His first harvest was poor, his second in 1615 promising and his third in 1616 a tremendous success. In 1619, when the first black slaves were brought in by the Dutch, Virginia exported 10 tons of tobacco. In 1639, they exported 750 tons, a 7,400% increase.

John Rolfe, Pocahontas and Thomas Rolfe went to London in 1616 with their third harvest to visit the King and Queen to renew the Charter. The colony proved it had a sustainable future and got the charter from the King and finances from private sources to develop. The trip was a great success, though Pocahontas died on the day she was to leave. She was buried in Gravesend, as confirmed by the Gravesend St. George composite parish register which records the burial of "Princess Pocahontas on 21 March 1616" (the year should be 1617 due to the fact England did not follow Rome's calendar corrections): "*Rebecca Wroth wyffe of Thomas Wroth/ gent a Virginia Lady borne was buried/ in the Chauncell.*" The confusion on John Rolfe's identity might have many explanations.

The colonizing method in Virginia was simple: violence to make the Indians feed the colonists in exchange for trinkets or some simple hardware (axes and knives). Paula Gunn Allen gives one example:

They debarked quickly and turned their fury on the village, burning about forty houses; they also killed and injured several villagers, and looted and destroyed the

canoes that were on the bank nearby. The English had threatened such action if their demands were not speedily met, and they proved as good as their word.¹⁵

John Smith in 1624¹⁶ is blunt about the method and the objective:

How to deal with the Salvages . . . To express all our quarrels, treacheries and encounters amongst those Salvages I should be too tedious: but in brief, at all times we so encountered them, and curbed their insolencies, that they concluded with presents to purchase peace; yet we lost not a man: at our first meeting our Captain ever observed this order to demand their bows and arrows, swords, mantels and furs, with some childe or two for hostage, whereby we could quickly perceive, when they intended any villainy.¹⁷

In 1608¹⁸ he clearly stated that there had been no menace on his life when he was a prisoner. He had been proposed some kind of alliance, which he did not seem to understand. He was proposed to be the weroance (chief) of the English “tribe” thus allied to the Powhatan confederation. He reported one of Wahunsenaca’s speeches saying:

“. . . he [Powhatan] proclaimed me [John Smith] Awerowanes of Powhatan . . . and that the Corn, women and Country, should be to us as to his own people. This proffered kindness for many reasons we contemned not, but with the best Languages and signs of thanks I could express, I took my leave.”

The colonists were rough (as John Smith admits in 1624), males exclusively or nearly, at least at the beginning, using violence to get food, land and women.

Doctor Linwood “Little Bear” Custalow¹⁹ recounts to us what the Mattaponi sacred oral history has transmitted over the centuries. The first element is the contempt Wahunsenaca expressed to John Smith:

¹⁵ Paula Gunn Allen, *Pocahontas, Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2004), 191.

¹⁶ John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/smith/smith.html>, accessed January 2, 2013.

¹⁷ John Smith, “A True Relation by Captain John Smith, 1608”, in Tyler, Lyon Gardiner (ed), *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 27-71.

¹⁸ John Smith, “A True Relation by Captain John Smith, 1608”, in Tyler, Lyon Gardiner (ed), *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606-1625* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 27-71.

¹⁹ Dr Linwood « Little Bear » Custalow & Angela L. DANIEL “Silver Star”, *The True Story of Pocahontas, The other side of history* (Golden Colorado : Fulcrum Publishing, 2007).

“Many do inform me, your coming hither is not for trade, but to invade my people, and possess my country, who dare not come to bring you come, seeing you thus armed with your men . . . But this bruit from Nandsamund, that you are come to destroy my Country, so much affrighteth all my people as they dare not visit you. What will it avail you to take that by force you may quickly have by love, or to destroy them that provide you food. What can you get by war, when we can hide our provisions and fly to the woods? Whereby you must famish by wronging us your friends. And why are you thus jealous of our loves seeing us unarmed, and both do, and are willing still to feed you, with that you cannot get but by our labors?”²⁰

Dr Linwood Custalow then recounts how the colonists stole food, killing those who resisted, enslaving and raping children and women. Dr Linwood Custalow reports that Pocahontas would have probably told her sister, when the latter was permitted to visit Pocahontas after her abduction, she had been kept in Jamestown under the uncontrolled authority, use and abuse of local officials, including the governor Thomas Dale and that she had been raped. Dr Linwood Custalow clearly states the child was conceived and even born out of wedlock. The governor, probably the father, was called Thomas just like the son (cf. John Rolfe’s unclear name in Gravesend). The son was not registered in the colony’s books, though Dr Linwood Custalow wrongly says John Rolfe was the secretary of the colony since he only became the secretary after his return from England in 1617.

The Pocahontas myth that states that she supposedly saved John Smith’s life spectacularly voluntarily became a Christian (cf. J.G. Chapman’s *The Baptism of Pocahontas* in the rotunda of the Capitol, Washington DC, 1837), as well as a wife and mother, is today called into question. The oral tradition argues that Pocahontas was too young to have been part of the ceremony in which John Smith was made a weroance, and far too young and too weak to go to Jamestown on her own, crossing several rivers and moving dugout canoes (in complete contradiction with Pocahontas’ ease and agility in Walt Disney’s films). After her abduction she accepted her lot because it was the only way to survive and avoid reprisals against her people. Many voices insist that Pocahontas was married to Kokum at age 13, had a son from him, and that her husband was executed by the English when Pocahontas was abducted while the child escaped. Many question the supposed treachery of the Potowomac chief, Japazaw, Kokum’s older brother, because Argall’s ship in front of the tribe’s main city meant possible heavy retaliations.

²⁰ John Smith, 1624, Part III, 76.

Hanay Geiogamah²¹ in the early 1970s insisted on the treachery of the English, their spoiling and killing, the deculturation and eradication of all that is Indian, the maiming and reduction of their physical, social, cultural “bodies” into total dependence. He called for Indian awakening and a forceful yet non-violent rebellion. He supported the occupation of Alcatraz Island (1969-71), the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington DC (1972), Wounded Knee (1973). He advocated deep introspective meditation in order to recollect, reconstruct and redeem the Indian soul Indians have in them and thus to force respect and acceptance by way of spiritual eco-cultural charisma.

In 1977, the US Catholic Church published their first statement on American Indians, calling for remembrance, reconciliation and recommitment, later reasserted several times, including a conference of American Catholic Bishops in 1991 linking African, Native and Hispanic Americans in remembrance, reconciliation and recommitment. Other churches followed the trend in the years after Walt Disney’s glamorized version of Pocahontas’ myth in 1995 and 1998.

In 2004 Paula Gunn Allen reevaluated Pocahontas from an Indian point of view, rejecting unspecified “revolutionary” approaches. She considers Pocahontas was an initiated and fully recognized priestess at 10 or 11 (when John Smith was taken prisoner). She could be granted admission to special ceremonies as a priestess, with the right of life and death over prisoners. She used that right for John Smith, though his life was not menaced but “remade”, i.e. ritualistically terminated and reborn as the Indian weroance of his English tribe. Gunn Allen seems to think, like Dr Linwood, that John Smith did not understand what was happening.

But then she justifies what Europeans did to Indians by identifying the period as the Great Change in Indian mythology that ended with the Seventh Generation in the early 1990s. She thus minimalizes the genocide and overlooks the 1830 Indian Removal Act and subsequent Indian wars. She claims that the Indians have actually had the upper hand, since tobacco, one of their sacred plants (along with maize, beans and squash, note the absence of *Apios Americana* and the potato), has taken over the whole world.

Later Dr Linwood Custalow in 2007 highlighted the crimes and violence of the Europeans against Indians, who today are confronted to a difficult renewal and rebirth to which we can testify by way of two examples.

²¹ Hanay Geiogamah, *New Native American Drama, Three Plays, Body Indian* (1972), *Forghorn* (1973), 49 (1975), (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

The Crazy Horse Memorial, The American Indian University and Medical Training Center, and The Indian Museum of North American History opened in 1948 under the sole control and financing of the Siouan nation.

Richard L. Dieterle's *Encyclopedia of Hocak (Winnebago) Mythology*, University of Minnesota at Minneapolis was copyrighted in 2005.

Such ventures are building a dynamic renaissance of Indian culture and heritage, as CNN reported on November 27, 2012, three weeks after the 2012 presidential election:

"We are right now living through the last act of this long decolonialization of Indians with the final approval of the settlement of Indian grievances by Congress and President Obama."²²

The question of the amount of Indian blood in the white population seen as White Indians, or in the black population called Black Indians, remains unsolved. But the present evolution should bring American Indians to the common American Thanksgiving table to share Thanksgiving dinner, forgiving the descendants of the colonists and the later Americans who performed the Indian Holocaust.

"I Don't Celebrate Thanksgiving. It's A Story of Murder." Angelina Jolie²³

"In 1637 near present day Groton, Connecticut, over 700 men, women and children of the Pequot Tribe had gathered for their annual Green Corn Festival which is our Thanksgiving celebration. In the predawn hours the sleeping Indians were surrounded by English and Dutch mercenaries who ordered them to come outside. [...]"²⁴

The site gives a lot of historical details about the brutality of the colonization that stand in sharp contrast to Walt Disney's mythical fairy tale, whose main motivations are making a profit from children and their families while bombarding them with an ideological stance.

²² "U.S. finalizes \$3.4 billion settlement with American Indians," CNN Wire Staff, <http://edition.cnn.com/> accessed December 1, 2012.

²³ <http://www.whitewolfpack.com/2012/10/angelina-jolie-refuses-to-celebrate.html>, accessed December 1, 2012.

²⁴ Susan Bates, from Manataka ('Place of Peace'), American Indian Council, <http://www.manataka.org/>, accessed November 30, 2012.

La Louisiane and the French

French Louisiane originally stretched from Québec down the Mississippi valley to present time Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The main cities were Mobile and Baton Rouge, before La Nouvelle Orléans.

The French arrived as individuals and established trading posts to trade with Indians. These trading posts were open to Indians who came to barter their goods against French hardware, fabric and trinkets, mostly beads. In Québec colonists were farmers and traded their land from Indians. That was the model for further ventures down the Mississippi valley.

French Louisiane covered a vast area east of Spanish Texas and extending as far as Saint Louis, Missouri (King Louis IX), Saint Paul, Minnesota, or Detroit, Michigan.

The French King was scarcely involved in the project, either financially or militarily. During the American War of Independence, Lafayette sailed to Louisiane with weapons smuggled by Beaumarchais onto his ship before Louis XVI officially sent Admiral d'Estaing with French troops. Here we should emphasize one real strategic handicap of such colonization: the great time gap between colonies and their authorities, leading to local decisions and a widening distance between the two.

The main actors were trading companies which provided French goods on credit and then bought the Indian goods which the traders had managed to exchange. One such trading post in Louisiane was Natchitoches.²⁵ The first traders arrived in 1699 and the trading post officially opened in 1714, on the Red River flowing down to the Mississippi. Louisiane remained under French control up to 1763 when a secret treaty gave its control to Spain.

A trader was a man who left the trading post in the fall and came back in spring or early summer. He left with a load of French goods on a boat, leading up river with a crew to sail the boat, to load and unload and transport the goods with mules. The crew consisted essentially of male black slaves, some male Indians, whether slaves, employees or free associates, and one or two European helpers, generally younger or apprentices.

The traders lived for six to nine months with the Indians who provided them with food, women and entertainment like tobacco. These traders and their personnel, most of the latter slaves, had sexual partners in all the villages. Indians were easy-going. Women were free to experiment, even

²⁵ Kathleen M. Byrd, *Colonial Natchitoches, Outpost of Empires*, Xlibris Corporation, www.Xlibris.com 2008.

before marriage. Children belonged to the tribe and were taken care of collectively if necessary. Some traders brought back concubines whom the Catholic Church christened. Children were systematically christened at birth. The Church started official records in 1720 for marriages and 1729 for baptism. But the children born in Indian villages were not registered. These records have recently been released online. Apparently these sexual arrangements gave birth to a vast “White Indian” and “Black Indian” population. The proportion of Black Indians among Blacks is estimated to be around 90%. Natchitoches was a multi-ethnic three-tiered community in which Indians and various mixed-bloods were the dynamic of social promotion, as defined and explained by Denise Oliver-Velez, a Professor of Anthropology and Women’s Studies at the State University of New York at New Paltz:

Historically, the only part of the United States that operated under the three-tiered system was Louisiana, since it was colonized and settled first by the French and Spanish. [...] Because Louisiana was colonized by the French, a "tripartite legal distinction emerged"; whites, African slaves, and free people of color, or gens de couleur libres.²⁶

This practice is opposed to the one-drop rule of the English, for which one single drop of black blood made you black.

The second important feature is the nature of the trade performed by the French. They were mostly interested in getting food for the colony, land for the colonists to be self-sufficient farmers, and furs for France and Europe. But French traders were opportunistic: they accepted furs, hides, bear fat or oil, and three other “products” either stolen from the Spanish missions in Texas or raided from the hostile Apaches west and south west: horses, women and children. The traders accepted horses to transport the goods back to the boat and sell them later. They accepted Apache women and children with the widely adopted intention of keeping the women as home-servants or concubines, even wives (the children were the father’s, baptized and French), while children were entrusted to the Catholic Church, were baptized and sent to some school for education and training to become full free members of the community.

Warfare was endemic between some tribes and the rules of such wars were very strict. A victorious war-leader was held responsible for the

²⁶ “Color, Caste and Class,” on AfriGeneas World Research Forum at <http://www.afrigeneas.com/forum-world/index.cgi/md/read/id/95>, accessed December 2, 2012

casualties: the objective was for there to be no casualties. When defeated warriors were to die on the battle field or be taken prisoners for ritualistic execution in the form of offerings to various divinities. They were made to “play with fire,” which means to be tortured and finally thrown into an open fire. But they could also be dismembered for their legs and for their scalps, which could be full heads, and so that other parts of their bodies could be exposed on poles during these ritualistic offerings. A warrior was to endure it without uttering a sound. Women and children were taken to be treated as slaves by the victorious tribe. They changed names and were given to the families of the victorious warriors. Children were often given to isolated women who could not take care of themselves.

Denise Oliver-Velez did not consider Indians, only Blacks. If you add Indians to her description, Indian women were natural mates for the black slaves as well as for the indentured or free white men. The children grew up free and integrated at all social levels. The French had few problems with Indians, except the Natchez in the North because of the land taken by French farmers to start plantations.

In the Natchez area, there were 430 French colonists, 280 African slaves, and about 1,200 Natchez In 1729.²⁷ Such a colonist-slave distribution is far from normal. American slave plantations counted a vast majority of African slaves. In the present situation, the slaves were only of African origin. The French non-slaves could be of any racial or ethnic origin, pure or mixed. That also proves the vast proportion of mixed-bloods in this three-tiered society.

During the 1729 war the Natchez were defeated. The plantations continued, first growing tobacco, before being hampered because of the Spanish control on the market. So the settlers shifted to cotton.

When the French crown decided to give up their support of Louisiane and entrust the territory to the Spanish for some decades, nothing was changed, since the Spanish Catholic Church had no authority on the French Catholic Church which was Gallican and thus had a large degree of autonomy from Rome, which was not the case on the Spanish side.

Decolonization came after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Louisiana became a state on April 30, 1812. The Code Noir and the Code Napoleon remained in official use in Louisiana after statehood and the Code Napoleon is still officially referred to today. But the one-drop rule little by little became the official rule of the state, which was a slave state. It seceded from

²⁷ Patricia Dillon Woods, *French-Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier, 1699-1762* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 73-74.

the Union on January 26, 1861, but was reclaimed by federal troops on April 25, 1862 and was re-instated into the Union. We must keep in mind that 47% of the population was enslaved, though the free African population was the largest in the USA in 1860, which helps explain the vast sympathy of the population towards the Union.

We have to insist on the impact of the 1977 Catholic Church Statement on Indians in Louisiana, since 28% of the population is Catholic in Louisiana. However the figure is 36% for the archdiocese of New Orleans and 29.8% for the metropolitan New Orleans area, which shows a higher proportion in the south and the highest in rural Cajun and Creole southern areas. The Catholic Church's extreme dynamism in opening their archives proves the very positive role they played, one which should not be overlooked.

In the old Louisiane zone, a lot of research has been carried out in various higher education institutions on the historical role and present position of ethnic minorities. Francis J. Powell's dissertation is such a research endeavor.²⁸ To set this study in a comparative perspective, it is useful to take into account Juliana Barr's study on a related subject.²⁹

In the American context, one drop of black blood makes one Black. However, this is not so with Indian blood. The challenge today is the multi-ethnic heritage of many Americans, if not most. By ethnic, we should understand racial, ethnic and national origins. Francis J. Powell quotes dubious journalistic sources saying that 99.9% of the genetic heritage of people in general is the same. Yet no matter how few little differences there may be among people, these differences are meaningful, if they are attached to personal, cultural and historical data. Most Americans are mixed-bloods of one sort or another and this spectrum of genetic mixture has not been seriously tackled.

²⁸ Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in The School of Social Work, *Assessing the Identity of Black Indians in Louisiana: A quantitative and Qualitative Analysis*, May 2004, available at http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-01172004-133705/unrestricted/Powell_dis.pdf.

²⁹ "From Captives to Slaves: Commodifying Indian Women in the Borderlands," *The Journal of American History* 92-1 (2005), available at: <http://faculty.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=Barr2.pdf&tabid=50316&mid=109848>, accessed on December 3, 2012.

Historical Decolonialization

Black slaves under US rule systematically tried to escape slavery. Juliana Barr's study gives us some hypotheses concerning Florida, which, nevertheless, can be extended to all states and territories where the Indian presence was important, particularly Louisiana, which had inherited from the French and Spanish, a systematic mixing of Blacks and Indians.

Black escapees found easy refuge among the Indians who were keen on getting them because of their numerous trades and vast know-how. Both sides benefited: the Blacks were free and the Indians improved their own lot. This explains the fact that Indians in zones where they were in contact with the slave colonies developed fast, even moved towards self-government with constitutions based on the model of the US Constitution. We can mention the examples of the five different nations in the Iroquois Confederacy: the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk tribes. Each nation kept its own territory, language and culture. They had roots which went back to a history long before the arrival of Europeans and the Confederacy was officially set up by the prophet Deganawidah and his disciple Hiawatha ca. 1570.

The so-called Five Civilized Nations, a name given to them by Europeans -the Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, and Cherokee tribes in the Southeast- were never members of an alliance and they converted early to Christianity. They were sedentary and urbanised farmers, with a sophisticated government system. The first Indian writing system was invented for Cherokees by Sequoyah, who was born around 1770 in Taskigi in western North Carolina, today part of Tennessee. His mother was Indian and his father was white. He was raised in the tribal ways of the Cherokee and learned to hunt and trap animals. When he grew up, he worked as a hunter and fur trader. He also became a skilled silver craftsman. His syllabary was created between 1809 and 1821. It was quickly adopted and taught to many people in addition to being adopted by the Cherokee tribe. In February 1828, the first newspaper in an American Indian language, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was launched.

Black slaves, on the other hand, gradually came to learn English, how to read and write it. This development was rather delayed when compared to the impact of French and Spanish colonization. The French and the Spanish settlers taught the language and how to read and write rather quickly in order to spread Christianity. Concerning Indians it is being discovered today that many tribes left behind drawings on rocks (pictographs) and in some cases engravings (petroglyphs). A significant process of decolonization is currently under way regarding the development and reappropriation of such

heritage, both at the local and state level.³⁰ This is an important factor in the USA. All great progress has to come from or involve local and state levels. It is the result of the permanence of the US Constitution and the cumbersome nature of the procedure of constitutional amendment, which has to be ratified at the state level. The alternative is the judicial procedure, which starts at the local level with a local lawsuit and court decision that may eventually go up to the US Supreme Court.

What is more, Indians had developed a full sign language for communication among tribes that did not speak the same languages. A sign language is a writing system, just the same as the testified fact that Indians drew certain stylized figures on hides to recollect and then tell stories.³¹

Learning alphabetic writing was child's play for them, since they already possessed sign and iconographic symbolism. The escaping Black slaves furthered this development by way of their contact with European alphabetical writing systems, especially on the French and Spanish sides that had encouraged literacy.

At the same time Indian women became a "commodity" in the colonial situation. In French colonies, this commodity was recognized and valorized by Christianization, whereas in English colonies it was valorized as an easy way to make black slaves happy and sexually productive, while the one-drop rule made these mixed-blood children slaves, and hence the property of the master. Beyond this practice, escaping slaves found their freedom by integrating Indian tribes through marriage, giving birth to Black Indians who were considered as Indians by Indians.

These scholarly studies, which have regenerated the approach of Indians and Blacks, on the previously French (and Spanish in Florida) side of the United States (and which is now becoming a model for similar studies elsewhere in the USA), are bringing about a real decolonialization of Indians and Blacks, by reinstating a three-tiered society, at least at the cultural level where the dynamic role of each ethnic group, including all various mixed-bloods, is legitimized. This evolution, in which the Catholic Church has played and is still playing an essential role, along with the

³⁰ Kurt Carr and Paul Nevin, "Petroglyphs of Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, <http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/petroglyphs/3892>, accessed on December 3, 2012, Copyright © 2012 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All Rights Reserved).

³¹ Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/buffalo/>, accessed on December 3, 2012.

Baptist Church for the Blacks in the Deep South of English tradition, slowly joined by other clerical and cultural organizations, has slowly lead to a policy based on three objectives. To remember (never forget the past), to reconcile the various segments of society (forgive the present descendents for the crimes of their ancestors) and to recommit oneself to the full collaboration of ethnic groups in society (requiring acculturation based on exchange and integration of heritage and patrimony in all domains).

Conclusion

Colonization is generally a brutal experience, one which is coupled with an enterprise that effects the deculturation of the colonized populations and their forced acculturation into the culture of the colonial power.

Decolonization was purely formal in America. It resulted in the independence of the ancient colonies. The three colonizing methods produced two social models though: the three-tier model and the one-drop two-tier theory and model. The first of these created a vast middle stratum of free and mostly mixed-blood people, which energizes the lower stratum and pulls them up the social ladder. The latter model cuts the society into two groups, with the top group supposedly the only dynamic one, and the lower group being seen as entirely dependent, both unable and unwilling to improve their position.

The concept of decolonization must then be considered. In spite of all blocking resistance on the part of the top layer of the society, the deepest layers of colonized identity are coming back, most of the time, when a second shock weakens the post-colonial acculturation, thus causing a second deculturation that demands a recapturing of the older roots and cultures that had been deculturalized by the initial colonialization.

The USA is living this phase today and is coming to the end of the decolonialization process. For Indians and Africans, this means a recapturing of their original cultures that were not lost, but had been “integrated” into the mainstream American or European culture in various alienating ways: for example, through the apprehension of Indian culture as anthropological folklore, and the integration of polyrhythmic African music into European music in order to produce pure entertainment. What had previously been regarded as “folklore” is slowly being reintegrated as a humanistic cosmic philosophy into the American culture, while the polyrhythmic music produced by Africans (gospel, jazz, blues, rock and roll, etc) is more and more becoming an authentic form of decolonialized American culture (that has in fact spread to the world). On the Mexican side, it is the second shock of emigration to the USA that is producing the

return to ancient Aztec and Mayan roots among Chicanos, in particular Chicana intellectuals who have begun to reevaluate Malinche.

This can finally lead to the hypothesis that the second shock of deculturation can be either through emigration, where, for example, Mexicans become Chicanos in the USA, or gender deculturation for women, who are moving from containment at home to socialization through education and work, thus becoming the main agents of the movement back to Indian roots. It is absolutely significant that two women are at the very center of this decolonialization: Pocahontas and Malinche. It is quite significant that the final congressional settlement of the Indian reservation challenge is named after a woman, Elouise P. Cobell,³² thus providing a final support for our hypothesis. It is also significant that it is a Black President who declared: "I welcome the final approval of the Cobell settlement agreement, clearing the way for reconciliation between the trust beneficiaries and the federal government."³³ Above all, we have to keep in mind that it is a woman, Rosa Parks,³⁴ who started the Civil Rights movement that produced Martin Luther King's dream.³⁵

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³² Elouise Pepion Cobell, Yellow Bird Woman (1945-2011), a *Niitsítapi* (Blackfoot Confederacy) elder and activist, banker, rancher, and lead plaintiff in the groundbreaking litigation *Cobell v. Salazar*, which challenged the United States' mismanagement of trust funds belonging to more than 500,000 individual Native Americans.

³³ "U.S. finalizes \$3.4 billion settlement with American Indians," <http://edition.cnn.com/> accessed on December 31, 2012.

³⁴ Rosa Louise McCauley Parks, 1913-2005, boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus around 6 p.m. on December 1, 1955 in downtown Montgomery after a full day of work, and refused to yield her seat to a white passenger, thus starting the Montgomery bus boycott, the first field victory on the Civil Rights "Front". The U.S. Congress called her "the first lady of civil rights" and "the mother of the freedom movement."

³⁵ Martin Luther King Jr., *I have a dream*, speech delivered on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

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CHAPTER 3

Du frère d'armes à l'ennemi intime Presse illustrée, Grande Guerre et Troupes coloniales

Abstract: In addition to the numerous publications on African and Asian colonial soldiers, the topic of the image of colonial soldiers has found an important place in colonial historiography, but a true history of the image of colonial soldiers has not yet been written. The subject remains hampered by prejudices against the colonial past, due probably to the emergence of postcolonial studies and war memories. In fact, studies on the iconography of colonial troops inevitably link imperialist ideology and colonial soldiers. The colonial troops supported the idea of « Plus grande France » which was used for propaganda during the First World War against the Germans as well as during the war effort afterwards. However, each image has a material, cultural and historical reality. The new orientation of colonial research -colonial studies- insists on the historicity of the objects and subjects of studies. The analysis of the iconography of the colonial troops has to take into account, therefore, the characteristics of the iconographic corpus, such as postcards, posters, movies or illustrated press which form the object of our scrutiny. After placing the illustrated newspapers - *L'illustration journal universel* and *Le Journal des voyages des aventures de terre et de mer* – in their media context, the article retraces the iconography of colonial soldiers, before, during and after the First World War. The brief study also raises the question of the relationship between the iconography of colonial troops and the first images of decolonization.

Résumé : Le 17 octobre 1914, le journal illustrée généraliste *L'illustration journal universel* publie une caricature d'Henriot sur l'entrée en guerre des troupes coloniales. Un officier français fait les présentations entre les différents corps d'armée. La légende raconte : « Cipaye, permets moi de présenter un fils de Bouddha à un fils de Mahomet... On ne se connaît pas, mais on est tous des frères ». La fin de la Grande Guerre amorce une réorganisation de la géopolitique mondiale. Dans le monde colonial, les luttes, pour l'égalité ou l'indépendance, commencent à résonner sur le continent européen. Or, la Première Guerre Mondiale, par l'appel aux colonies, a établi de nouveaux rapports iconographiques entre colonisateurs et colonisés. En partant d'une interrogation : quels liens s'établissent entre l'image de L'autre, qui cesse pour un temps d'être un colonisé pour devenir un frère d'arme, et les premières luttes nationalistes ?, l'article souhaite revenir sur l'iconographie des colonisés lors de la Grande Guerre en se concentrant sur la presse illustrée française. Bien que source majeure de la culture visuelle au XIXe siècle, elle demeure encore abordée superficiellement. Cependant,

elle constitue un patrimoine imagé immense, dont l'étude permettrait de comprendre la constitution, la diffusion et la persistance d'imaginaires sur le passé colonial.

En provenance de Londres, Nguyễn Tât Thành, le futur Hô Chi Minh, débarque à Paris, fin 1917. S'il n'a été lui-même ni travailleur ni au front, on pourrait toutefois se demander quel impact a exercé la Première Guerre mondiale, avec la présence de milliers de tirailleurs et travailleurs indochinois en France, sur le jeune révolutionnaire. Avant les Indépendances, la Première puis la Seconde Guerre mondiale ont joué à divers degrés dans l'effritement des empires. Élément destructurant et restructurant, la guerre réorganise les pratiques sociales, politiques, scientifiques et culturelles. L'espace colonial n'y échappe guère, et en France, l'appel aux colonies lors de la Grande Guerre annonce une redistribution du monde colonial, de part et d'autre.

Les troupes coloniales, au sens large, sont constituées lors de la conquête de l'Algérie, et dès lors, elles ont pris part aux conflits européens et coloniaux. Avant 1914, l'ailleurs géographique a délimité et caractérisé d'ordinaire les images des soldats indigènes. Avec l'afflux des soldats et travailleurs coloniaux à partir de 1914, la séparation tombe et entraîne *de facto* une réédification de l'iconographie coloniale. Le 17 octobre 1914, *L'Illustration* publie une caricature affirmant l'unité fraternelle des troupes : « Cipaye, permets-moi de présenter un fils de Bouddha à un fils de Mahomet... On ne se connaît pas, mais on est tous des frères ». Alors, l'iconographie des frères d'armes colonisés a-t-elle modifié les rapports visuels entre l'Empire et ses colonies ? Avant cela, quelles images accompagnent les troupes coloniales ? Comment l'iconographie évolue-t-elle lors du conflit ? Enfin, quels liens s'établissent entre l'image du soldat indigène, qui cesse pour un temps d'être un colonisé pour devenir un frère d'armes, et les premières luttes pour les libertés ?



L'Illustration, 17 octobre 1914, Henriot, « Les croquis de la semaine ». © *L'Illustration*

Il ne s'agit évidemment pas de refaire l'histoire des troupes coloniales, qui par ailleurs jouit d'un relatif succès dans l'historiographie coloniale¹. Le thème est fécond et régulièrement remotivé par des approches historiques, anthropologiques, sociologiques ou encore iconographiques. Si les travaux sur la mise en images des troupes coloniales restent moins prolixes, les écrits brossent toutefois à grands traits les caractéristiques du sujet. Cependant, à l'instar des travaux sur « l'image coloniale », avec toutes les ambiguïtés autour du terme, les études iconographiques prennent rarement en compte les spécificités médiatiques et les efficacies des sources sur le message. En définissant l'image du soldat noir², Marc Michel mêle caricature, presse enfantine féminine, presse illustrée ou encore peinture. Cependant, lorsqu'il avance l'infantilisation des soldats noirs, comme d'autres³, avec des illustrations de la presse enfantine (*La semaine de Suzette*), on peut se demander si le lectorat ciblé et les spécificités du genre ne transcrivent pas le sujet selon des modalités internes. L'infantilisation répondrait donc en premier lieu aux pratiques iconographiques, à la logique

¹ FOGARTY, Richard. *Race and War in France : colonial subjects in the French army, 1914-1918*. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008 ; FRÉMEAUX, Jacques. *Les colonies dans la Grande Guerre : combats et épreuves des peuples d'outre-mer*. Saint-Cloud : Editions 14 -18, 2006.

² MICHEL, Marc. « L'image du soldat noir » in *Images et colonies : propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française 1880 à 1962*. Paris : BDIC/ACHAC, 1993.

³ LÜSEBRINK, Hans-Jürgen. « Les troupes coloniales dans la guerre : présences, imaginaires, et représentations » in *Image et colonies : propagande coloniale sur l'Afrique française 1880 à 1962*, p. 78 : « L'image du soldat colonial « grand enfant » allait alors de pair avec l'intention de faire de lui non seulement un soldat apte à mener une guerre « moderne », mais également, à long terme, un français de langue et de culture ».

sérielle et enfin à la matrice du support. Notre propos n'est pas ici de rejeter des travaux antérieurs, mais bien de proposer une lecture serrée d'une source distincte, la presse illustrée. Marc Michel a aussi exposé les débats, vifs, entourant les soldats africains⁴. Outre, la volonté de reconstituer la généalogie des images de la décolonisation, notre propos participe à un effort similaire de compréhension.

Presse illustrée et images coloniales

Auparavant, il est utile de rappeler que le magazine illustré est un média distinct, où les relations entre l'iconographie et l'écrit sont multiples. Sans rentrer dans une analyse historiographique poussée de l'iconographie coloniale, le périodique illustré, en tant qu'objet matériel, avec une existence propre, une identité éditoriale distincte ou encore un lectorat et des horizons d'attentes définis, est rarement pris en compte. Jean-Pierre Bacot précise :

[...] Dans tous les cas ou presque, ce qui est proposé à une post-réception est très largement décontextualisé. En effet, les conditions techniques de fabrication et de diffusion des gravures, comme la nature de leur lectorat originel, ne sont que très exceptionnellement précisées. Plus encore, le support dont l'image est issue est souvent omis de citation, comme l'est la date de parution, si bien qu'il est difficile, sauf à connaître l'entier corpus des gravures de presse, de déterminer l'ampleur de leur seconde vie, voire de s'assurer qu'il s'agit bien à l'origine d'une gravure de magazine ou de supplément illustré et non pas d'un tirage à part, ou, encore, d'une illustration spécifiquement créée pour un livre.[...]⁵

La presse illustrée est généralement cantonnée à manifester la mise en place de la domination, de la propagande et de l'idéologie coloniale. Ainsi, pour Pascal Blanchard et Nicolas Bancel, « Cette idée d'une hiérarchie des races est diffusée dans l'opinion publique par la grande presse - *L'Illustration* ou *Le Petit Journal* -, les journaux de vulgarisation scientifique - *La Nature* ou *La Science populaire* - »⁶. Facturant 75 centimes le numéro, *L'Illustration* cible une bourgeoisie politisée, avec une édition luxueuse. Sans préciser s'il s'agit de la version illustrée hebdomadaire ou de la version non illustrée quotidienne, *Le Petit Journal* est un journal populaire à grand tirage, au coût de 5 centimes. Plus problématique, les illustrations issues de la presse

⁴ MICHEL Marc, « Soldats africains de l'armée française : mémoires et débats » in *L'Europe face à son passé colonial*. Paris : Riveneuve éditions, 2008.

⁵ BACOT Jean-Pierre, *La presse illustrée au XIXe siècle, une histoire oubliée*. Limoges : PULIM, 2005, p. 175.

⁶ BANCEL Nicolas et BLANCHARD Pascal, *De l'indigène à l'immigré*. Paris : Gallimard, 1998, p. 20.

illustrée tiennent bien souvent un rôle idéologique considérable face aux enjeux mobilisés par les lecteurs : « Les illustrations du début de la période ont pour but de justifier les prises de possession territoriales. Les indigènes sont donc présentés comme des barbares aux mœurs sanguinaires puisque cette vision des populations locales permet de conforter l'idée d'une conquête effectuée au bénéfice des autochtones, la France leur apportant "civilisations et bienfaits", pour les faire sortir de l'obscurantisme »⁷. En établissant une relation verticale et coercitive des images avec le lectorat, en délaissant la réception, la thèse de Jean-Christophe Mabire fait des illustrés les vassaux de l'œuvre colonisatrice. Or, en passant sous silence les structures médiatiques des illustrés, on se prive d'actants qui composent, en partie, le message et jouent aussi sur la réception. Les magazines illustrés ont des impératifs économiques et éditoriaux qui ne peuvent être négligés. Pour reconstituer finement l'iconographie des troupes coloniales, attardons-nous sur *L'Illustration* et *Le Journal des voyages*.

L'Illustration, Journal des voyages

Le choix apparaît sans doute restrictif. Entre 1880 et 1939, les titres illustrés sont nombreux et variés. Sans connaître toutefois précisément les fonds, le risque d'échantillonnage maladroit est grand. Il faudrait réaliser un travail similaire sur les troupes coloniales avec la presse illustrée coloniale, militaire, satirique, féminine, juvénile, monarchique, grivoise et étrangère.

En France, la presse illustrée commence avec un titre satirique *La Silhouette* (1829-1830) qui, nouveauté, périodise l'iconographie. En 1833, *Le Magasin Pittoresque* du saint-simonien Édouard Charton s'oriente lui vers une presse illustrée culturelle et pédagogique, en calquant l'illustré anglais *Penny Magazine* (1832). *L'Illustration* commence la diffusion en 1843 et s'achève en 1944. Le modèle est également d'origine insulaire, *The Illustrated London News* (1842), qui se caractérise par un double projet, à la fois illustré pédagogique et d'investigation. En reprenant la formule anglaise, *L'Illustration* introduit une nouveauté dans le paysage médiatique français. Pour répondre à son projet éditorial, le journal investit conséquemment et affiche en retour un prix de vente dispendieux (75 centimes) ; au XIXe siècle, la presse illustrée oscille entre 15 et 40 centimes. Donc, pour un abonnement annuel de 36 francs, l'abonné reçoit chaque fin de semaine un numéro de seize pages, avec des rubriques relativement

⁷ MABIRE Jean-Christophe, *La représentation iconographique des colonies françaises à travers les périodiques français illustrés (1881-1939)*. Thèse de doctorat, Paris : IEP, 1997, p. 305.

fixes : actualités internationales, nationales, culturelles, mondaines. Le journal intègre, dans une édition standard, une vingtaine de gravures, essentiellement des lithographies sur le mode naturaliste. Lithographies, croquis, gravures, les dessins collectés proviennent d'un réseau national et international. Le lectorat visé est prioritairement une bourgeoisie aisée, instruite, politisée ; précisons que les pratiques de lecture et la circulation des gravures entre les périodiques nationaux et internationaux élargissent la diffusion. Bref, *L'Illustration* est un journal d'actualité généraliste couplé à des visées éducatives.

L'illustré comme support pédagogique est aussi au cœur du projet du *Journal des voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, de Georges Decaux. Avec un coût de 15 centimes le numéro et un abonnement de 8 francs, le journal est composé de seize pages, contenant moins d'une dizaine de gravures. Le périodique ambitionne de vulgariser les connaissances géographiques à destination des jeunes lecteurs, dont les supposés manques ont entraîné la défaite de 1870⁸. Or, l'ambition éditoriale se trouve progressivement réinterprétée par l'expansion coloniale, qui résonne et amplifie le projet de Decaux, mais selon des modalités internes. En effet, *Le Journal des voyages* mêle astucieusement vulgarisation géographique, roman-feuilleton, textes documentaires et textes de fiction ; l'iconographie, sensationnaliste ou romanesque, oscille aussi entre les genres. Comme le démontre Matthieu Letourneau, spécialiste de la littérature populaire, l'illustré est ambigu : « il n'y a pas seulement contiguïté, mais ambigüité et contagion des formes, et surtout contagion des pactes de lecture »⁹. Entre fiction ou réalité, l'illustré brouille la réception. Retenons que *Le Journal des voyages* est un illustré géographique romanesque.

Auxiliaires dans la conquête

Avant 1914, les troupes coloniales font l'objet d'une attention particulière du *Journal des voyages*. L'illustré leur consacre en effet une rubrique mensuelle intitulée : « Nos troupes coloniales ». La mise en images des troupes s'inscrit dans le cadre des conquêtes coloniales, qui prennent généralement un ton aventureux et romanesque : structure dynamique,

⁸ *Le Journal des voyages*, n°1, juillet 1877, « Avis de l'éditeur » : « [...] des évènements récents ont démontré le danger qu'il y avait à s'isoler des autres peuples et à en ignorer les mœurs, les coutumes et les tendances [...] ».

⁹ LETOURNEUX, Matthieu. « La colonisation comme un roman ; Récits de fiction, récits documentaires et idéologie dans le *Journal des voyages* », In *Idéologie et stratégies argumentatives dans les récits imprimés de grande diffusion*, Belphégor, IX, 1, 2010, p : 2.

valorisation de l'effort physique et du courage, héroïsation des militaires, pathos des morts, conquête symbolique. Les troupes indigènes sont présentes, mais elles restent reléguées à des rôles d'auxiliaires, au profit des officiers métropolitains. Il faudrait interroger une périodicité longue, mais la hiérarchie correspondrait à plusieurs éléments. Les troupes coloniales, rompues aux conquêtes, sont encadrées par des officiers métropolitains. Même s'il existe des indigènes gradés, la mise en images insiste d'abord sur les officiers en lieu et place des soldats, qu'ils soient indigènes ou européens. De plus, dans une relation cathartique et pédagogique, le jeune lecteur trouverait dans l'officier blanc un modèle. Par contrecoup, les soldats indigènes deviennent donc les signes de la vraisemblance des récits. Soulignons que l'iconographie s'oriente vers le spectaculaire, au détriment d'une approche documentaire ou historique ; l'extraordinaire relève directement des pratiques de l'illustré¹⁰. Un article aborde cependant les troupes coloniales¹¹.

Il [tirailleur annamite] montre une tendance nette à la dissimulation. [...] ils semblent aussi un peu indisciplinés, et, si un sous-officier nouveau, nerveux et sans autorité, leur est donné, « à son nouveau commandement tout va de travers » ; la moitié de la section part à gauche et l'autre tiers à droite et cependant le malheureux sous-officier s'arrache les cheveux et reste la risée de ces nhaqués qui se moquent à son nez et à sa barbe.

Et tout ceci serait assez attristant si le lieutenant ne nous disait qu'il s'agit seulement des Cochinchinois et s'il ajoutait ceci qui éclaire tout. « C'est l'action personnelle du chef qui se fait sentir ici. Sa fermeté, - non pas sa brutalité, - son attitude, son entrain, sa vigueur, son esprit de justice, voilà les parcelles qui composent son prestige et qui l'imposent aux tirailleurs, à la manière d'un dompteur qui domine ses fauves. Le tirailleur se sent-il tenu, se sent-il surmonté, il obéit sans broncher et pas un muscle de sa face n'accuse la mauvaise humeur ; alors demandez tel effort que vous vous voudrez, exigez une marche pénible, imposez la correction des mouvements, la rectitude des allures, vous l'obtiendrez sans aucun doute ». C'est donc la valeur du chef qui fait la discipline et la force de la troupe.

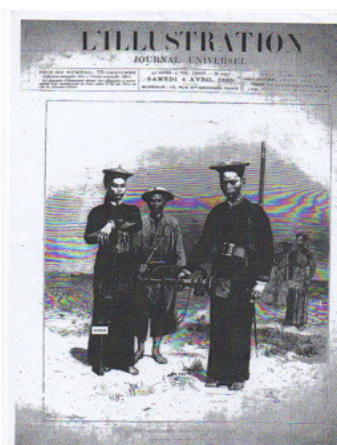
Et ce n'est pas seulement chez nos auxiliaires cochinchinois que cette formule est juste ! Les tirailleurs algériens et sénégalais se distinguent, eux aussi par leur dévouement à leurs chefs. Ils valent ce que vaut l'officier qui les commande. Jamais, ils ne l'abandonnent [...].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p : 3 : « le journal ne s'aventure guère sur le terrain de la politique. Bien plus, il donne généralement une place assez restreinte aux textes discursifs et à l'argumentation. On peut même aller plus loin en constatant que les modalités du descriptif sont elles-mêmes négligées au profit du narratif. Paradoxalement, dans ce journal de géographie, peu de descriptions savantes de la faune et de la flore, peu d'exposition des spécificités d'un pays, encore moins d'analyse de la position française à l'étranger ».

¹¹ *Le Journal des voyages*, 5 avril 1914, « Le tirailleur annamite ».

Empreint de paternalisme et de pathos, l'article réaffirme le statut d'auxiliaire des troupes, à quelques mois de l'entrée en guerre.

Dans son ambition informative et pédagogique, *L'illustration* a traité les troupes coloniales exclusivement dans le cadre des conquêtes. Le discours illustré implicite demeure similaire au *Journal des voyages*. Les indigènes sont certes indispensables, mais en tant qu'exécutants. *L'Illustration* fournit toutefois davantage d'éléments mettant en perspective le corps d'armée. La vision subalterne persiste, mais les identifications géographiques, culturelles, nominales donnent une représentation moins stéréotypée des soldats.



L'Illustration, 4 avril 1885, « Nos auxiliaires indigènes au Tonkin – Tirailleurs tonkinois et annamites ». © *L'Illustration*

Les troupes coloniales dans la Grande Guerre

Le 8 août 1914, *L'Illustration* entre symboliquement en guerre, avec « On ne passe pas » de Georges Scott. En prenant pour sujet (héroïque), non plus l'officier, mais le soldat d'infanterie, la une expose la nouvelle orientation du journal quant aux événements. Les premières semaines s'orientent vers la mise en place d'un discours illustré optimiste, glorieux et confiant qui est inversement proportionnel aux images péjoratives, dévalorisantes et défaitistes accolées à l'Allemagne¹². C'est dans ce

¹² *L'Illustration*, 22 août 1914, « Correspondance militaire » - « ... Nous venons de... ; nous allons à... (il ne faut pas le dire où) ; ni malade, ni blessé ; tout va très bien... » ; -, 29 août

contexte iconographique que les soldats des colonies apparaissent pour la première fois le 22 août 1914 : « La France entière passe ! ». La gravure montre un wagon ouvert, à l'arrêt, d'où s'entassent des tirailleurs coloniaux, ravitaillés par une femme. Le texte et l'image posent explicitement l'entraide et l'unité, tout en reprenant un ton paternaliste.

Dans un pays en ébullition, où vibrent, confondues dans un même belliqueux enthousiasme, les races de toutes les provinces, où la nation armée tout entière se rue d'un seul élan vers les frontières [...] « des Parisiens rêveurs qui n'ont pas voyagé », des « banlieusards » surtout, auront pu, ces jours derniers, saluer au passage des combattants qui viennent du plus loin où s'étend le sceptre paternel de la France, et les combler de fleurs, et leur verser à boire : les « turcos », comme on les appelait autrefois, qui, dans la précédente guerre franco-allemande, avaient su fort déconcerter nos adversaires en maintes rencontres, - les tirailleurs indigènes, dans les rangs desquels marchent coude à coude de blonds fils de la métropole que l'amour des aventures poussa à quelque engagement sensationnel, des Berbères au teint presque aussi clair, des Arabes au nez aquilin, et jusqu'à des noirs du plus bel ébène, enfants du torride Soudan.

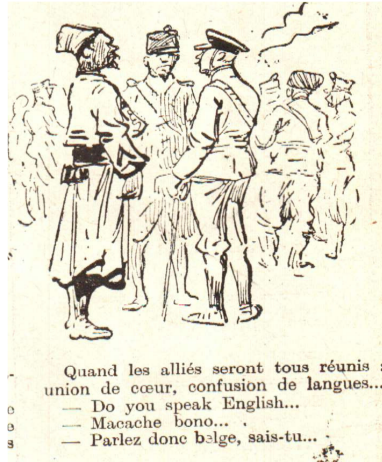
L'éloignement géographique et l'organisation générale orientent les premières images vers les soldats du Maghreb. Alors que les soldats noirs arrivent dès septembre 1914, il faut attendre 1916 pour que l'iconographie consacre un reportage à la mobilisation indochinoise et océanienne¹³. La mobilisation est également l'occasion de présenter l'enrôlement dans les colonies. Le 10 octobre 1914, l'article « Nos contingents algériens et tunisiens de la France » avance (exagérément) que « neuf mille se sont présentés en une seule journée ». En calquant la structure de *La Noce juive au Maroc* de Delacroix, la photogravure souligne l'exaltation des troupes en les représentant en marche dynamique, tambour battant.

Les premières images s'intéressent aussi aux troupes dans leurs singularités géographiques, physiques et culturelles, dans la guerre. Le 21 novembre 1914, *L'Illustration* fait un reportage sur « Un village de paillotes et de huttes africaines, construit en quinze jours par nos artilleurs de la cinquième armée ». En présentant l'habitat spécifique des tirailleurs, l'article illustré met en évidence une distinction entre les hommes. La séparation se retrouve aussi dans les croquis des champs de bataille de 1914 qui se concentrent uniquement sur les métropolitains. Cet état de fait répond

1914, « Leur façon faire la guerre ». À une semaine d'intervalle, les deux gravures se répondent. La première présente, dans un cadre champêtre, l'allant d'un soldat français, tandis que la seconde expose un soldat allemand piétinant des cadavres, devant une ville en feux.

¹³ *L'Illustration*, 29 avril 1916, « Nos recrues d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Océanie ».

d'abord à une réalité militaire où les troupes mixtes sont relativement rares ; les disparités langagières obligent à regrouper les soldats selon des impératifs stratégiques.



L'Illustration, 19 septembre 1914,
Henriot, « Les croquis de la
semaine » : « Quand les alliés
seront tous réunis : union de cœur,
confusion de langues... - Do you
speak English... - Macache bono... -
Parlez donc belge, sais-tu... ».

© *L'Illustration*

Les premières mises en images des troupes coloniales restent attachées au courant général, dominées par l'enthousiasme et la fraternité, mais des différenciations subsistent. Quantitativement et thématiquement, les troupes coloniales ne se trouvent ni totalement identifiées aux représentations des métropolitains ni des troupes étrangères, qui, bien que figurées, restent traitées superficiellement. La double page, *Les nouveaux rois mages*, de Lucien Jonas caractérise le traitement iconographique de *L'Illustration* face aux troupes des colonies lors des premiers mois.



L'Illustration, 26 décembre 1914, Lucien Jonas, « Les nouveaux rois mages ». © *L'Illustration*

Quelle est cette scène ?... Mais oui : cet enfant... ces présents... ces gestes d'adoration... et la date que viennent marquer nos calendriers, - Noël ! l'intention, la trouvaille de l'artiste éclatent à nos yeux. Ce sont bien les fils des rois mages, le Sénégalais, l'Indien, l'Arabe, qui offrent leurs humbles richesses à un petit enfant belge, éveillé dans une ferme de Flandre où les ravages de la guerre n'ont laissé debout que l'étable. Et beaucoup d'autres avec eux sont accourus vers ce coin du monde où brillait une étoile plus belle. Le soldat français présente son jouet : un soldat ; l'Écossais joue de la cornemuse... tous les Alliés sont là, apportant au petit enfant belge leur foi, leur dévouement... et la Libération, la Délivrance.

En reprenant un motif classique de l'iconographie chrétienne, Jonas symbolise l'espérance pour un avenir meilleur, avec la résurrection, non plus du sauveur, mais bien de l'armée par les troupes coloniales. Signifié par le symbole des rois mages, l'éloignement géographique qui, auparavant érigeait une frontière, devient là une forme de reconnaissance et rappelle en même temps l'origine des hommes. Hormis les Russes, la représentation marque l'unicité de l'armée, avec l'inclusion des soldats européens.

À la différence de *L'Illustration*, *Le journal des voyages* est directement touché par la guerre. La publication cesse le 9 août 1914, puis reprend du 14 mars 1915 au 1 juillet 1915. Dès la reprise, l'illustré consacre des photogravures à « Nos cavaliers d'Afrique ». L'iconographie présente un reportage documentaire sur le campement des spahis, à l'arrière. À l'instar de *L'Illustration*, on note une réelle fascination pour les soldats des Indes :

« Les guerriers hindous en France »¹⁴ ; puis, à partir du 5 mai 1915, « Ma campagne avec l'armée des Indes ». Malgré l'engouement pour les Indiens, les troupes coloniales françaises sont peu représentées ; les quelques mois de parution limitent la production. Avant l'interruption, le journal illustre les troupes coloniales selon la mise en images des conquêtes (différenciation, héroïsation). « Dans les rangs de nos tirailleurs - Race arabe et berbère »¹⁵, illustré par trois portraits anthropométriques, l'article traite des différences raciales au sein des tirailleurs. Il rappelle aussi l'union de l'armée pour l'objectif commun : « [...] autour du drapeau tricolore, il n'y aura pas de tirailleurs tunisiens, algériens, marocains, sénégalais, il n'y aura pas de Berbères ou d'Arabes, mais seulement des soldats français ». La glorification est mise en images avec le front camerounais. Lors des quelques mois de parution, l'iconographie du *Journal des voyages* se caractérise davantage par une germanophobie et un courant russophile¹⁶.

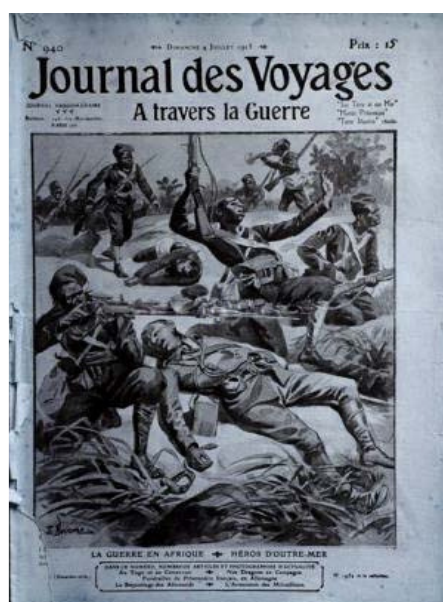
¹⁴ *Le Journal des voyages*, 21 mars 1915, « À Marseille nos soldats se rangeaient sur le passage des Hindous pour leur offrir des fleurs et leur distribuer des cadeaux ; sans parler la même langue, ces frères d'armes s'entendaient à merveille ».

¹⁵ *Le Journal des voyages*, 4 avril 1915.

¹⁶ *Le Journal des voyages*, 25 avril 1915, « Comment les cosaques savent mourir » - « Sur ordre de l'officier, les soldats allemands jetèrent la terre à pelletées dans la fosse, et les cosaques destinés à être ensevelis vivants entonnèrent l'hymne russe, attendant la mort ».



Le Journal des voyages, 5 mai 1915, « Ma campagne avec l'armée des Indes ».



Le Journal des voyages, 4 juillet 1915, « La guerre en Afrique - Héros d'Outre-Mer ».

Les troupes au front

Paradoxalement, si les troupes coloniales ne sont pas représentées sur les champs de bataille en 1914, elles figurent parmi l'iconographie du retour des blessés. Le 9 janvier 1915, le journal fait paraître « Y'a Bon ! Keletiki Traoré qui a donné son sang pour la France, reçoit ses étrennes »¹⁷. Sur un lit-hôpital, un tirailleur sénégalais reçoit les bons soins de deux infirmières. L'image est lourde de sens ; elle marque l'inclusion des troupes coloniales dans une pratique culturelle française (étrenne), dans une logique d'assimilation ; puis, elle symbolise en même temps l'image de la France protectrice de ses soldats ; enfin, c'est encore implicitement l'union des hommes et de la nation que l'image véhicule. L'iconographie des blessés est l'occasion de présenter les rites funéraires des soldats musulmans¹⁸. En abordant les pratiques religieuses des soldats d'Afrique du Nord, *L'Illustration* commence à élargir les thèmes accolés aux soldats coloniaux. Certes, le journal poursuit dans la distinction (mortuaire), mais le rôle d'auxiliaire laisse peu à peu place à celui d'un soldat consacré à part entière. L'enlisement du conflit abolit plus encore les frontières. Les troupes coloniales se normalisent. Le 8 mai 1915, « Le rideau de lourdes vapeurs asphyxiantes », de Lucien Jonas, grave la mort qui fauche sans distinction. Lorsque le journal couvre le naufrage du *Lusitania*, *L'Illustration* offre une planche en couleurs, « La Guerre des nations », de Maurice Orange. À travers les soldats, où manquent seulement les Océaniens et Indochinois, Orange associe tous les corps d'armés. La bataille des Dardanelles homogénéise encore la représentation des troupes coloniales. Les hommes apparaissent à l'arrière ou dans des tranchées de fortune¹⁹.

À partir de 1915, la mise en image se divise en deux ensembles. Un premier segment se caractérise par les troupes coloniales au front, sous un mode laudatif et documentaire²⁰. Évidemment, dans un contexte d'effort de guerre, le traitement héroïque des troupes coloniales rejoint l'image des poilus et autres soldats alliés. L'héroïsme n'est pas un élément caractéristique des troupes coloniales, mais bien du soldat. La vaillance confirme l'homogénéisation du traitement iconographique qui se poursuit encore avec les représentations artistiques caractérisant la seconde

¹⁷ Nous supposons que la photogravure est la matrice de la publicité « Y'a bon banania ».

¹⁸ *L'Illustration*, 30 janvier 1915, Lucien Jonas, « Funérailles musulmanes au cimetière de Pantin ».

¹⁹ *L'Illustration*, 3 juillet 1915, « La bataille du 4 juin, sur mer et sur terre aux Dardanelles ».

²⁰ *L'Illustration*, 9 janvier 1915, « Nos héroïques soldats noirs - une phase tragique d'un sanglant complot ».

perspective imagée de *L'Illustration*. Lucien Jonas, Georges Scott et particulièrement François Flameng fournissent des œuvres artistiques qui prennent pour sujet les hommes des colonies, à l'exemple des « Ruines de l'église de Dompierre ». L'arrière-plan est formé par des ruines, tracées nerveusement ; au premier plan, décentrés sur la gauche, trois soldats assis scrutent l'horizon. Le plus à gauche nous fixe, au centre, un soldat regarde au loin tandis que le troisième se tourne vers le paysage désolé. Les trois hommes sont immobiles. La peinture semble silencieuse. Ni exotisme²¹, ni héroïsme, la guerre s'exprime ici dans toute sa désolation. On relève un souci de vraisemblance, notamment par l'habillement, et en même temps une poétique de l'affliction, avec l'utilisation de tons froids. Peut-on interpréter ces œuvres comme une réponse aux critiques formulées par l'Allemagne et certains milieux français concernant l'utilisation des troupes indigènes ?²² En partie, sans doute, néanmoins, cette production ne diffère ni sur la forme ni sur le fond d'autres reproductions artistiques prenant pour sujet le soldat.

²¹ L'exotisme persiste dans l'iconographie des soldats maghrébins, où l'habillement et la récurrence de représentations équestres renvoient à une généalogie artistique exotique et orientaliste. Cf. *L'illustration*, 26 février 1916, Georges Scott, « Goumiers dans les Flandres » ; *L'illustration*, 26 mai 1917, François Flameng, « Abreuvoir des saphis, au Sud de la Somme ».

²² FRÉMEAUX J., *op. cit.* p. 176.



L'Illustration, 8 mai 1915, Maurice Orange,
« La guerre des nations ». © *L'Illustration*



L'Illustration, 5 mai 1917, François Flameng,
« Ruines de l'église de Dompierre ». © *L'Illustration*



L'Illustration, 11 novembre 1916,
« Ceux qui ont repris Douaumont ». © *L'Illustration*

Loyalisme et motivations politiques

Au milieu des louanges et de l'héroïsme, on relève la persistance de dissonances iconographiques, qui perpétuent une frontière entre les soldats. Bien que les cas de défections des soldats colonisés soient relativement bas²³, *L'Illustration* insiste sur le loyalisme : « Le loyalisme musulman à Bondoukou », 3 juin 1916 ; ou encore, le 23 octobre 1915, lors d'un reportage sur une exposition franco-marocaine, un dessin d'enfant s'appesantit sur le loyalisme marocain. Tourné vers les opérations européennes militaires, *L'Illustration* ignore, évite ou censure les soulèvements populaires dans les colonies. Le loyalisme illustré peut alors s'interpréter de différentes façons ; il apporte une réponse aux critiques sur l'armée coloniale ; il exprime l'attachement des soldats colonisés à la mère

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 186-189.

patrie, dans une période d'instabilité dans les colonies ; c'est peut-être aussi une manière de répondre aux revendications libertaires des colonisés. En tant que journal d'investigation, l'illustré est-il conscient des enjeux politiques autour des troupes coloniales ? Il est difficile de trancher. Néanmoins, un reportage sur des soldats musulmans blessés aborde les motivations de l'engagement et constitue une reconnaissance du sacrifice²⁴.

- Et pourquoi, lui dis-je, es-tu venu guerroyer pour nous, toi un homme religieux ? Cette question le scandalise. Il relève sa tête enveloppée d'un grand turban bleu et, jetant en avant ses bras squelettiques : - Parce que la France est notre mère ! Si on insulte une mère, est-ce que ses fils ne doivent accourir pour la défendre ? - Et que penses-tu de la guerre ? C'est une guerre de tombeau, mais la justice en est ressuscitée pour nous ! Maintenant les Français et les Arabes sont égaux. On ne nous appelle déjà plus des *bicots*, on nous appelle des *sidis*. Le sang du vaincu a coulé uni avec le sang du vainqueur. Aujourd'hui nous sommes véritablement vos frères, et c'est pour cela que cette guerre sera une guerre bénie entre toutes parmi les peuples arabes.

Si l'on accorde du crédit au texte, les soldats musulmans sont conscients des enjeux liés à la guerre. Bien que l'article pose en négatif un ton paternaliste, il montre aussi que la dette du sang doit réorganiser les relations entre colonisés et colonisateurs.

À partir de 1917, la production d'images sur les troupes coloniales baisse, à l'instar de celle des poilus. L'enlèvement du conflit, les mutineries, la défection du front est et l'entrée en guerre des É.-U. réorganisent la politique éditoriale du journal²⁵. Les reportages s'équilibrent entre l'actualité militaire et les questions de géopolitiques ; notons qu'à partir de 1918, les troupes américaines accaparent une grande partie de l'iconographie. La guerre s'achève en remettant à l'honneur le soldat métropolitain, et hormis les Américains, les troupes coloniales et étrangères n'apparaissent déjà plus.

Entre 1914 et 1918, l'iconographie des troupes coloniales révèle un passage du statut d'auxiliaire à celui de frère d'armes. Bien qu'à la fin de la guerre, les troupes coloniales disparaissent, il est abusif de parler d'oubli. Le journal s'oriente vers une célébration du dénouement et relègue l'infanterie, métropolitaine ou coloniale, au profit des officiers et personnalités

²⁴ *L'Illustration*, 25 septembre 1915, Myriam Harry, illustré par J. Simont, « Nos convalescent musulmans à Royan ».

²⁵ Pour les États-Unis cf. *L'Illustration*, 3 août 1918, « Une solidarité amitié nouée devant Château-Thierry ». Pour la Russie cf. *L'Illustration*, 14 septembre 1918, « Petrograd sous la commune ».

politiques de la Grande Guerre. L'iconographie des troupes coloniales est somme toute stable et en adéquation avec le contexte iconographique du journal²⁶. L'héroïsme est souligné, valorisé et exploité. Les zones sombres, comme les opérations de pacification ou les soulèvements dans les colonies, notamment lors des périodes de recrutement forcé, sont passés sous silence, à l'instar des désertions des soldats métropolitains. Par des artistes comme Flameng et Scott, la reconnaissance est manifeste, mais une production rappelle des différences. Finalement, la mise en images des troupes coloniales illustre parfaitement le concept développé par Hannah Arendt, et repris également chez Jean-Pierre Dozon, où les colonisés sont vus « à la fois en frères et en sujets »²⁷.

Le soldat impérial

Le Journal des voyages reprend la publication le 23 octobre 1924. Bien qu'il continue à publier des romans d'aventures et des reportages géographiques, il s'oriente progressivement vers le tourisme et les nouveaux moyens de transport ; à partir de 1928, le journal prend comme sous-titre : *Tourisme-Science-Sports*. La réorientation éditoriale touche l'espace coloniale. Hormis la guerre du Rif, qui reprend la mise en images des conquêtes, les colonies deviennent des lieux de passages et d'aventures pour les raids motorisés²⁸. Avant la guerre, le journal s'est peu préoccupé de la pacification et de la mise en valeur. Après, l'iconographie propose des reportages descriptifs sur la vie aux colonies, où les réalisations françaises sont mises à l'honneur²⁹. Alors que des contestations apparaissent à de multiples endroits dans l'espace colonial, le lecteur du *Journal des voyages* reste à l'écart. Seule, l'Inde a le droit à un reportage. Le 25 février 1926, « Quand l'Inde s'agite » portraiture les opposants ; le ton est moqueur et l'auteur ridiculise l'opposition indienne.

L'Illustration développe aussi une iconographie sur le tourisme. La période de deuil et la reconstruction de la France effacent peu à peu les

²⁶ Une seule image joue ironiquement sur le thème de la sauvagerie du soldat colonial. « Ti viens voir le sauvage », 27 janvier 1915, de Jonas, présente un enclos de soldats allemands, gardé par un tirailleur. En demandant « Ti viens voir le sauvage », en désignant les Allemands, l'image inverse et déplace définitivement un signe récurrent des représentations accolées aux conquêtes coloniales au nouvel ennemi.

²⁷ ARENDT, Hannah. *L'impérialisme*. Paris : Fayard, 1982 ; DOZON, Jean-Pierre. *Frères et sujets. La France et l'Afrique en perspective*. Paris : Flammarion, 2003.

²⁸ *Le Journal des voyages*, 12 novembre 1925, « À travers le continent noir - le raid Citroën ».

²⁹ À partir de 1926 le journal couvre régulièrement l'Empire avec la rubrique : « Notre Empire colonial ».

soldats d'infanterie ; les inaugurations de monuments aux morts rappellent toutefois l'apport des troupes coloniales³⁰. À la différence du *Journal des voyages*, *L'Illustration* s'intéresse aux troubles dans les colonies. Le combat de Gandhi recueille une couverture médiatique importante. Quant aux luttes des colonisés français, elles sont rarement développées et restent pauvrement illustrées. « Dans le Nord-Annam troublé par la propagande communiste », l'article et les photogravures représentent à la fois les dégâts occasionnés par les communistes (« Légionnaires réparant un pont détruit par la force ») et la force coloniale (« Arrestation de quatre communistes saisis avec des drapeaux soviétiques »). On le perçoit, les troubles viennent d'abord de l'extérieur ; dans la série d'articles « Que se passe-t-il en Afrique du Nord »³¹, l'élément perturbateur vient aussi de l'extérieur. Toutefois, aucun des articles ne développe une iconographie distincte ; les photogravures restent rares. À l'instar du *Journal des voyages*, *L'Illustration* s'attarde davantage sur la mise en valeur de l'Empire, notamment lors du centenaire de l'Algérie et de l'exposition coloniale de 1931, qui sont richement illustrés. Effacées depuis la fin de la guerre, les troupes coloniales n'apparaissent plus ; un article dénonce cependant vigoureusement la « honte noire ». Or, la disparition ne signifie pas la liquidation du sujet. On peut même avancer que l'iconographie de la mise en valeur de l'Empire prend comme soubassement le soldat indigène. Par exemple, lors de la couverture médiatique de l'exposition coloniale de 1931, l'auteur rappelle en introduction l'apport des troupes : « Faut-il rappeler quel a été, durant la guerre, le puissant secours que nous ont apporté nos colonies - alors même que leur outillage était des plus insuffisants ? Outre les 920.000 de leurs enfants qui sont venus généreusement verser leur sang sur nos champs de bataille ou contribuer comme travailleurs à la défense nationale, elles nous ont fourni leur riz, leur maïs, leur sucre, leur café, leur huile et leur rhum »³². Et jusqu'à la Seconde Guerre mondiale, la majorité des articles débutent, citent ou convoquent le soldat indigène, non en tant que sujet, mais comme signe implicite glorieux de l'Empire. La presse illustrée fonctionne dans une logique sérielle intertextuelle/intericonique. C'est-à-dire, au sein de *L'Illustration* et, spécifiquement dans l'iconographie coloniale, des figures centrales permettent de construire des relations existantes (parfois schématiques) parmi les actualités coloniales. Lors des

³⁰ *L'Illustration*, 2 février 1924, « L'inauguration du monument aux morts de l'Armée d'Afrique » ; *Ibid.*, 7 janvier 1928, « À la mémoire des soldats musulmans morts pour la France ».

³¹ Articles parus du 8 au 29 août 1936, puis du 9 janvier 1937 au 20 février 1937.

³² *L'Illustration*, 11 août 1931, « L'exposition coloniale de 1931 ».

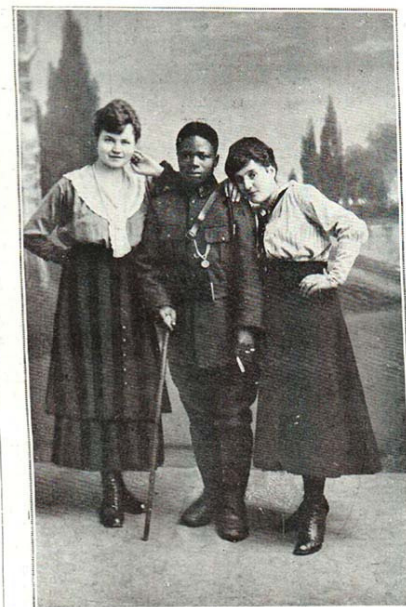
conquêtes, l'explorateur puis le militaire-aventurier construisent et distribuent l'iconographie de la colonisation. Le soldat indigène prend le relais, après 1914. Il n'est nullement besoin de le représenter, et l'évocation textuelle permet à elle seule de matérialiser l'idée de la Plus Grande France, en rappelant que la presse illustrée est un média hybride texte/image.

Nous arrêtons l'analyse à l'aube de la Seconde Guerre mondiale qui redessine à son tour le monde colonial. Les représentations coloniales, au sens large, ont indéniablement évolué lors de la Grande Guerre. Avant 1914, l'iconographie de l'espace colonial est essentiellement tournée vers la conquête. Après 1918, les thèmes se diversifient. Les troupes coloniales sont déterminantes dans l'évolution. Finalement, en tant qu'élément déstructurant/restructurant, la guerre provoque deux effets contraires. En France, elle illustre l'Empire tandis que dans les colonies, les ressentiments grandissent.



LA FICTION. — Une prise de vues bien réglée : comment des noirs, recrutés par l'entreprise cinématographique Film-Druckerei de Munich, et costumés en bleu horizon, surprennent et enlèvent une blonde artiste qui joue le rôle de la jeune Rhénane qu'un chevaleresque Allemand essaie en vain de protéger.

L'Illustration, 13 août 1921, « Propagande allemande – La Honte noire » : « La fiction – Une prise de vues bien réglée : comment des noirs, recrutés par l'entreprise cinématographique *Film Brüstelle* de Munich, et costumés en bleu horizon, surprennent et enlèvent une blonde artiste qui joue le rôle de la jeune Rhénane qu'un chevaleresque Allemand essaie en vain de protéger ». © *L'Illustration*



LA RÉALITÉ. — Un tirailleur sénégalais authentique, photographié à Mayence, en 1919, avec deux de ses victimes. Photographie confiée par le tirailleur à son lieutenant, après le retour du régiment au Sénégal.

L'Illustration, 13 août 1921, « Propagande allemande – La Honte noire » : « La réalité – Un tirailleur sénégalais authentique, photographié à Mayence en 1919, avec deux de ses victimes ». © *L'Illustration*

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PART 2

IMAGES OF DECOLONIZATION IN AFRICA

CHAPTER 4

Nkrumah Héros de l'Indépendance africaine, Images et mémoires d'un monument historique

Abstract: When Kwame N'Krumah and his ministers went to meet the Ghanaians at the dawn of independence dressed in togas made of kente, they were reconnecting to an African past that many had still been denying. This image constitutes an essential picture of independence and the Ghanaian preoccupation with linking the past to the present, for the past is a short cut to the future, as Soyinka puts it. What N'Krumah resuscitated and what he thus honoured was not the history of great empires but the economic dynamism of Africa, its aesthetic sense, a civilization where the good goes hand in hand with the beautiful permeating the most sober moments of life as well as the most solemn ones.

Résumé : Lorsque Kwame N'Krumah et ses ministres se présentèrent au Ghanéens, à l'aube des indépendances, vêtus de toges kente, ils renouaient avec un passé africain encore nié par beaucoup. Il s'agit donc là d'une image essentielle des indépendances et de leur souci de relier le présent au passé et au futur car, comme sut le dire Soyinka, le passé est raccourci vers le futur. Ce que N'Krumah faisait revivre et ce qu'il honorait ainsi ce n'était pas que l'histoire des grands empires mais le dynamisme économique de l'Afrique, son sens esthétique, une civilisation où le bien n'allait pas sans le beau qui traversait les moments les plus discrets de la vie autant que les plus solennels.



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¹ <http://ujep.fr/gd/KWAME-N-h-Krumah.htm>, consulté le 20 avril 2013.

² <http://www.afrik.com/article6347.html>, consulté le 30 avril 2013.



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Nkrumah, l'*osagyefo*, est un personnage fondamental pour comprendre l'Afrique en marche à l'ère des indépendances. Lumière fulgurante qui fascina un peuple que sa voix et ses apparitions inventaient, il disparut de l'histoire dans des circonstances mal comprises et très injustement présentées lorsqu'on attribue sa chute à la corruption et à la dictature. Nkrumah n'était pas Staline ni même Ben Ali. La corruption de ses successeurs dépassa d'ailleurs largement celle de son régime. Ce n'est pas le peuple ghanéen qui se souleva, mais un groupe d'officiers qui craignaient que le panafricanisme du Président ne les lance dans une opération militaire contre la Rhodésie blanche, ssinquiétude instrumentalisée par l'impérialisme qui depuis longtemps déjà rêvait de faire tomber celui qui ne cachait pas ses objectifs socialistes et sa vision d'unité continentale, dont le but était de mettre dans cet ensemble gigantesque les peuples africains à l'abri des interventions étrangères, violentes ou corruptrices. D'ailleurs, très vite, l'aura de Nkrumah renaissance confondit ses détracteurs qui n'en persévérèrent pas moins à présenter ses idées comme un idéal fou et enfantin. Peuples nègres, peuples enfants, cruels et pervers : nous connaissons la (triste) chanson ! Dans les années 1960 il fallait montrer que tous les rêves de libération de l'homme noir semblaient dans la démence et l'horreur. L'image du Dieu déchu et rejeté par son peuple servait cette vision raciste et impérialiste

Mais moins de 20 ans après sa chute, nul ne pouvait déjà plus s'ouvrir un chemin en politique sans se réclamer de lui. Si nombre d'héritiers furent indignes de leur grand aîné, Jerry Rawlins pour sa part fut de la même trempe que l'*osagyefo*. Nkrumah est en cela comparable à Patrice Lumumba, qu'il forma et qu'il aimait, météore assassinée par les forces néo-

³ <http://afroeuro.org/magazine/?p=5047>, consulté le 30 avril 2013.

⁴ <http://nkrumahconference.com/history.htm>, , consulté le 30 avril 2013.

colonialistes en 1961 mais dont le nom souleva maintes fois les peuples du Congo.

L'image de Nkrumah enveloppé dans une toge est peut-être une des plus marquantes. Cette apparition publique du héros ghanéen et de ses ministres fit date. Ces vêtements avaient en outre une noblesse toute romaine. Pour moi qui vécus ces années en Afrique, revoir ces images sans émotion est impossible.

I L'ombre et la lumière dans l'idéologie coloniale :

Les peuples jetés dans les ténèbres par l'idéologie coloniale, manichéenne et violente, tentaient alors de sortir de l'ombre. L'espoir était immense de recommencer une histoire de l'homme. Pour cela il fallait partir des damnés de la terre africains, ceux dont on disait qu'ils n'étaient ni sujets de l'histoire, ni civilisés, ni même complètement humains, ceux qui ne comptaient pas, les *boys*, les porteurs, les *indigènes* (le terme indique une catégorie juridique inférieure). Ils étaient les millions sacrifiés au progrès d'une autre race : nul ne savait ou ne voulait savoir que le bassin du Congo avait perdu la moitié de ses habitants ni que les colonnes sanglantes de Voulet et Chanoine massacraient des villages entiers, nul ne s'interrogeait sur l'ampleur des famines d'un continent exportateur de céréales avant l'époque coloniale.

Les vêtements traditionnels affichés en cette occasion officielle par les acteurs les plus importants de l'actualité ghanéenne du moment renversaient l'ordre du monde. Durant la colonisation en effet, les *durbars* montraient des Africains en costumes traditionnels paradant devant les responsables territoriaux blancs vêtus à l'européenne. Le décor de la cérémonie coloniale faisait donc brusquement irruption sur le devant de la scène. Les hommes de l'ombre apparaissent en pleine lumière, à la tribune principale, sur les marches d'un escalier prestigieux, et récusaient les ténèbres où ils furent longtemps confinés.

II Indépendance et rédemption :

Pour signifier encore plus clairement que les hommes en toge étaient les maîtres du jeu, ils s'étaient munis de bâtons de chef.

Nous ne pouvons à ce sujet que rappeler l'importance du bâton de Moïse. Or Nkrumah avait lu la Bible et il savait que les peuples opprimés avec la complicité de certains missionnaires naïfs et mal formés politiquement, avaient retenu la charge subversive de l'histoire de l'Exode. Ghanéens et Nigériens lisaient assidument la Bible et le *Pilgrim's Progress*. Les années entre les deux guerres mondiales avaient vu se lever des prophètes

africains : Matchoua au Congo-Brazzaville, Kimbangou au Congo-Kinshasa, les prêcheurs tokoï de l'Angola, Harry Thuku au Kenya, les églises sionistes et éthiopiennes d'Afrique du Sud... Ils furent les premiers membres des élites formées par l'étranger et ils surent se montrer de dignes fils de l'Afrique. Ils prononcèrent contre tous les dangers une parole de justice à la fois chrétienne et africaine. Persécutés, martyrisés, ils semèrent de bonnes graines pour ceux qui les suivirent. Nkrumah n'est-il pas leur successeur de par son titre : l'*osagyefo*, le rédempteur ?

Tout nationaliste de haut vol est, depuis ces ancêtres de l'avenir, un prophète.

III Sens et puissance du symbolique :

Première objection : l'habit ne fait pas le moine, le vêtement est un déguisement, une illusion ! La fausse indépendance se berce de spectacles. La maîtrise est toujours entre les mains des armées et des compagnies occidentales.

La parade à laquelle se prêtent Nkrumah et ses ministres a en réalité plusieurs buts stratégiques.

Balandier :

Il y a un point que nous avons négligé dans nos rapports avec l'Afrique. Ces civilisations qui n'ont recours ni à l'écriture (ou si peu) ni au livre ont provoqué des démarches intellectuelles et des expressions lyriques que nous sommes mal préparés à comprendre. (307)

Incluons parmi ces gestes celui de s'habiller d'une certaine façon et continuons à suivre Georges Balandier.

La parole et le geste y prennent une importance que nous sous-estimons, y conservent un caractère de sérieux presque sacré. Quelques écoles et quelques missions n'y ont pas changé cet état de choses. Lorsque nous privons le Noir des moyens d'expression qui lui appartiennent en propre, nous lui faisons subir la plus lourde des contraintes... Mais cela n'est pas seul en cause. Au moment même où l'Africain se trouve culturellement dépossédé, on l'introduisait dans le système d'une économie comptable, à laquelle rien ne le préparait ; on le projetait dans des entreprises où il devenait une force de travail anonyme. Cet effacement de la marque personnelle, dans les relations de la vie quotidienne et les rapports avec les choses, a renforcé en l'aggravant notre attaque contre les civilisations nègres. (309)

Ainsi la révolution anticolonialiste est-elle autant une révolution contre l'impersonnalité créée par la domination du quantitatif sur le qualitatif, de

l'individu abstrait sur l'homme concret, c'est-à-dire un combat contre les effets du capitalisme, qu'une protestation contre la misère et la dépossession politique. L'ouvrier vend sa force de travail comme s'il était une simple marchandise puis se met au service d'une machine comme s'il en était un simple rouage. La dimension de lutte pour la dignité est incontournable. Les Ghanéens savent en outre qu'à la dépossession de l'ouvrier s'oppose le prestige et le savoir-faire incomparable de l'artisan. Or les tissus utilisés par les chefs de la nouvelle nation en cette occasion ont un nom, le *kente*, résultat d'un travail qui nécessite une exceptionnelle adresse dont firent preuve les ghanéens du passé : ces pagnes superbes sont faits en défilant des pièces de coton et de soie pour en mélanger les fils. Ce passé méprisé, rejeté hors de l'histoire par l'ordre capitaliste et le racisme impérialiste, y revient donc par la grande porte.

L'apparition en costume traditionnel est un choc salutaire que Balandier ne surestime pas plus qu'il ne le nie lorsqu'il décrit les attentes populaires.

Quant aux masses, qui donnent au parti gouvernemental sa puissance, elles sont littéralement séduites. Elles scandent avec ivresse le slogan « Liberté ! Liberté ! Liberté ! » Ce qui signifie pour elles d'une manière immédiate : liberté d'être Africain et sans honte. Elles sont liées par des serments qui ont toute la valeur des anciens engagements. Elles idéalisent leur chef, lui découvrant tous les attributs d'un messie et d'un faiseur de miracles, voyant en lui un rédempteur, un Mahatma africain, « une porte ouverte sur l'avenir de l'Afrique. » (309)

S'effacent alors 126 ans de domination humiliante.

IV Investir l'Etat :

Certes, la mise en scène porte des fruits que recueille l'élite. Mais ne nous trompons pas d'époque. L'Afrique se lance à l'assaut de la machine politique coloniale et l'apparition de ces hommes en *kente* illustre ce moment de lutte.

L'Etat c'est l'élite, semblent-ils nous dire, ou, plus exactement pour Nkrumah, l'avant-garde. Ce n'est nullement par vanité ou désir de manipulation qu'ils se prêtent à ce jeu, mais pour faire comprendre l'étape politique que traverse le pays. En 1957 le pourcentage de cadres fonctionnaires étranger est de 75 %. Les juges, les hauts fonctionnaires de police, les officiers sont blancs. La politique du gouvernement élu peut être sabotée par l'administration anglaise locale et par les pouvoirs que conserve Londres. Il faut donc que l'exécutif africanise les cadres, il faut investir l'Etat, un objectif qu'illustre fort habilement l'apparition des ministres et de Nkrumah en togas traditionnelles. En 6 ans Nkrumah va d'ailleurs inverser

les statistiques si défavorables à l'élite africaine : en 1963 les fonctionnaires non-ghanéens seront 0,6 %. (Ziegler, 95)

Sans cet effort de formation et l'adresse de Nkrumah l'indépendance n'aurait rien signifié.

V Vaincre la féodalité :

Une autre dimension stratégique est à relever.

La colonisation instrumentalise à son profit la féodalité africaine. Les chefs se voient donner des fonctions importantes quant au contrôle de la terre et la justice. Elle en fait des consultants et des courroies de transmission. Lorsque monte le nationalisme bourgeois, plus que jamais, la colonisation se tourne vers les rois et empereurs du passé. Elle invente des constitutions où ils tiennent la chambre haute et où les collèges électoraux déforment le suffrage universel. Elle préfère aussi les constitutions fédérales. Dans ces configurations les chefs deviennent les défenseurs de leurs régions contre les autres régions et ils contribuent à rétrécir l'horizon politique du peuple soudain ramené à des peurs tribales.

Mais Nkrumah a déjoué les pièges que l'administration coloniale avait semés sur sa route vers la liberté. En 1958 la pratique du « *destooling* » lui permet d'éliminer du jeu institutionnel un certain nombre de féodaux. Le terme vient de « *stool* », le banc qui symbolise la royauté. L'Empire Ashanti, créé au XVIIe siècle par Osei Toutou et le prêtre Anokye, naquit le jour où descendit du ciel un trône d'or, le *Sika Dwa* ou « *Golden Stool*. » Osei Toutou prit soin de ne pas s'y assoir : il était le fondateur de la nation mais non la nation. D'ailleurs Anokye fut pour l'Etat aussi important que le roi et un parlement (*l'asentemanhyiamu*) les contrôlait. Nkrumah et ses ministres veulent assurément laisser entendre qu'ils ont repris le bâton de la main des chefs traditionnels compromis avec l'occupant, qu'ils sont une nouvelle race de dirigeants, davantage semblables aux grands fondateurs comme Osei Toutou qu'aux créatures de l'administration coloniale.

A ces ancêtres qui furent des rois responsables devant le peuple assemblé, l'agora pouvait déclarer sans crainte :

Dis-lui

Que nous ne voulons aucune avidité de sa part,

Nous ne voulons pas que ses oreilles soient sourdes

Et qu'il agisse de son propre chef... (Davidson, 61)

Ce qu'esquissent ces images de l'indépendance ghanéenne est une modernité africaine en projet et en chemin.

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CHAPTER 5

MAU MAU¹ Images and Decolonization of Kenya: From Black Savagery and Tribal Mysticism to Haunting Ghost

Abstract: The MAU MAU uprising has always conveyed images reminiscent of savagery and mysticism. Actually, images widespread through the official literature, representations in newspapers or scenes broadcast in some movies like *Simba* (1955), directed by Brian Desmond Hurst, and *Safari* (1955) depicted the MAU MAU movement as merely a group of native Africans slitting the throats of white farmers. One could even read on *Safari*'s cover artwork this message: "As never before... all the awesome spectacle and savagery of darkest Africa... in Cinemascope." By the same token, some British officials like the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Littleton, even saw in MAU MAU the perfect embodiment of bestiality and the devil. Yet, not any of those images dares to acknowledge any political influence of the MAU MAU uprising on the timing of decolonization in Kenya.

This paper focuses on the different images of this uprising and their political impact on the decolonization process in Kenya. It actually appears that the widespread images of darkness, secrecy, slayings, etc.... brought about a ghost image, once the movement was crushed, that came to haunt and deeply influence the decolonization process in Kenya.

Résumé : La révolte MAU MAU a toujours véhiculé une image évoquant barbarie, sauvagerie et mysticisme. Cette image a été largement diffusée par les colons européens et les autorités coloniales britanniques de l'époque, par le biais de la presse, de publications officielles ou même dans des films comme *Simba* (1955),

¹ MAU MAU = a word of uncertain provenance. There is much disagreement among sources as to whether it is an actual word, while some claim that it is the name of a range of hills and others state that it was created by British settlers to demean the rebels and just simplify the intricate organisational structure of the insurgents.

According to some Kenyans I spoke to, Mau Mau may also be an acronym of sorts: "Mzungu Aende Ulaya — Mwafrika Apate Uhuru." This Swahili phrase may be translated into English as: "Let the white man go back in Europe so that the African can get his independence."

par Brian Desmond Hurst, et Safari (1955). Le mouvement MAU MAU est alors dépeint comme étant tout simplement un groupe d'indigènes Africains régressifs égorgeant de pauvres fermiers blancs. Certains officiels britanniques comme Oliver Littleton voyaient en ce mouvement l'incarnation même de la bestialité et du diable. Cependant, aucune de ces représentations ne reconnaît aux activistes MAU MAU quelque revendication politique que ce soit. Cet article s'intéresse aux différentes images liées à la révolte MAU MAU ainsi qu'à son impact politique sur la décolonisation du Kenya. Il apparaît en effet que l'image officielle liée au MAU MAU cache une toute autre image ; celle relative à la façon brutale par laquelle les Britanniques ont écrasé la révolte. L'opération militaire britannique face au soulèvement des MAU MAU a en effet mis en jeu l'image même du Royaume-Uni et la révolte n'a eu de cesse de hanter les esprits, même une fois la guerre terminée, autant au Kenya qu'en Angleterre, marquant ainsi de son sceau le processus de décolonisation du Kenya.

Kenya was the first African territory to be the site of a war of independence, even though the British authorities and settlers kept on despising MAU MAU activists and acts, denying them any political claim and even pretending that the situation was normal and that everything was just all right. As late as June 1952 for instance, there were many officials in Kenya, including the governor, Philip Mitchell, who simply refused to recognise that the colony was at bay. When commenting upon the situation in Kenya before his retirement in 1952, the governor stated his belief that "the corner had been turned". Indeed, Philip Mitchell, on the eve of his retirement, could speak of seeing "only happy smiling faces wherever he [went] in the colony". Obviously, his discourse expresses a patent and wilful dismissal of the then hatching revolt in the colony. This was probably because Sir Mitchell was not willing to accept discontent in the colony on the eve of his retirement from what he considered to have been an illustrious career.

Whatever the reason for Sir Philip Mitchell's dismissal of the situation, what is indisputable is that when the new governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, arrived in September 1952 he found Kenya seething with discontent, bitterness, sporadic violence, and heightened racial tension. The colonial government had done everything possible to ignore the situation all along, refusing to acknowledge the MAU MAU movement as a nationalist group. But this did not help to improve the situation at all and finally, on 20th October 1952 after the assassination of Senior Chief Waruhui, who had expressed his loyalty toward the colonial authorities and spoken against the MAU MAU, Sir Evelyn Baring had to declare a state of emergency. Thus,

Kenya's history entered an unpredictable phase of 7 years characterized by violence, prejudice and propaganda. The sensational colonial campaign against the MAU MAU generated a backward-looking image of the movement. Yet, this widespread atavistic and bloodthirsty image covered up another image, the one relating to the British military offensive, or to what Ashley Pettus quite justifiably called "10 Downing Street's Gulag"². As a consequence of the military offensive, the British image in general was at stake. Once the insurgents were officially vanquished, the images relating both to the sensational campaign and to the military offensive were patently conducive to what was another image, a haunting image and a legacy of terror left behind by the conflict. All the images were then undoubtedly instrumental in decolonising Kenya.

Black Savagery and Tribal Mysticism: A Sensational campaign

From 1952, when the colonial authorities in Kenya finally acknowledged that the situation was not as idyllic as Mitchell had pretended, a strong and comprehensive campaign describing the MAU MAU as a "savage atavistic movement" was launched by way of sensational press reports, army hand-outs and by the British authorities in Kenya through its handling of the Cornfield Commission, which Kenyatta dismissed in 1960 as "a pack of lies collected from needy informers". The aim was to make the rebellion lose credit in the people's eyes. And to reach this aim, the government, the colonial press and the European settlers would publicly claim that MAU MAU activists were bloodthirsty sub-human savages who were plunging Kenya back into tribal savagery and that its leaders were not political leaders, but witch-doctors and terrorists. It may be of a prime importance to point out the fact that the activists never called themselves "MAU MAU". It was the colonial authorities and the European settlers who did so. The activists would call themselves "Freedom fighters", which had a political connotation, unlike the quite savage onomatopoeia "MAU MAU", patently part of the sensational campaign. So, instead of considering the political claims of the movement, the colonial government and the white settlers were more interested in the oaths and in what they considered to be witchcraft and backward-looking rituals. A case in point is the publication of pictures displaying the alleged ingredients, seized by the police, that were used by MAU MAU during oath-taking ceremonies. The ingredients under scrutiny then included "gourds, cattle brains, goat intestines, skulls, beans,

² Ashley Pettus, "10 Downing Street's Gulag", in *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2005.

raw flesh and animal blood”³. In focusing on such purely formal and ceremonial characteristics of the movement, the colonial authorities and its press agents easily swept away the political dimension of the uprising and could demonstrate that African Kenyans were not ready to run a country, that they were still intellectually unable to run modern political institutions. Besides, the MAU MAU organisation was described as a gang of terrorists, as one could read on a hoarding at the entrance of a country chapel at the time of the revolt:

WARNING
IT IS MOST DANGEROUS
TO PICNIC IN THIS AREA
BECAUSE OF TERRORIST
GANGS⁴

According to the hoarding, MAU MAU, apart from being an intellectually backward-looking organisation, was thus a “terrorist gang”. Such propaganda contributed to the isolation of the movement, causing it to lose credit even among the African community. Two films, *Simba* directed by Brian Desmond Hurst and *Safari* by Warwick Films, were released during the conflict. Both depicted the uprising as merely a group of native Africans from the Kikuyu tribe slitting the throats of white farmers. One could even read on *Safari*’s cover artwork the message: “As never before... all the awesome spectacle and savagery of darkest Africa... in Cinemascope.”⁵

The propaganda war against MAU MAU was also carried out through various publications. These writings were essentially the production of local white settlers, who painted the movement as dark and satanic in content and inspiration. J.F. Lipscomb’s *We Built a Country* and L. S. B. Leakey’s *Defeating Mau Mau*⁶ are without any contest, examples of the efforts by white settlers to explain and denounce the MAU MAU movement as essentially destructive and barbaric. Sir Michael Blundell’s *So Rough a Wind* is another biased reading of the revolt. As a member of the War Council against MAU MAU, Blundell wrote of the detailed plan worked out by the Council to defeat MAU MAU, but nowhere were the legitimate aspirations of the fighters acknowledged. One should bear in mind that from

³ Roy Lewis, “Kenya Brings Uhuru for Kenya”, in *The British Empire*, N°86. Time-Life International, London, 1973, p. 23

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ *Safari* by Warwick Films, 1955

⁶ Seymour Bazett and Louis Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*. London: Methuen, 1954

the very first days of the colony, the white settlers had controlled the dominant economic and sociopolitical powers. The powers, however, bore no relation to the actual number of the European settlers. They were however a reflection of their relative economic and agricultural activities, which enabled them to exert a partial influence on every single aspect of life in the colony, ensuring that it operated in their favour. This influence was so important that no colonial official would ever force a row with them. The colonial state felt compelled to explain the uprising in the country and this proved to be another way of campaigning against MAU MAU.

Two studies were therefore commissioned. The first one, entitled *The Psychology of Mau Mau* by J. C. Carothers, published in 1955, explained MAU MAU in terms of psychology. Actually, J. C. Carothers, an ethno-psychiatrist, diagnosed the members of the movement to be afflicted with “mass psychosis” arising from “a crisis of transition between primitive and modern worlds”⁷. As such they provided a case study of a people whose weak tribal cohesion and worldview, if not culture, had been broken down “in the face of a superior and more profitable culture”⁸ – the Western culture assuredly. Carothers would recommend confession as the sole remedy. The book’s claim was therefore that the activists had to confess and renounce their oaths so as to embark on their re-education under British tutelage. Confession as remedy brought about forced confession and interrogation for those who resisted and who were then administered beatings. The sensational British campaign thus proved to be a psychological war. The emphasis was placed on the psychology of MAU MAU, but never on politics or economics and the smell of Ethnocentrism and state violence was actually stifling.

The *Cornfield Report* written by F. C. Cornfield is the other study which was commissioned by the colonial government. It emphasised the recourse to oaths and also the Kenyatta factor. What accounted for the troubles, according to the report, were the oaths. It is however important to point to the function of oaths in African culture in general, to their role in the expression of solidarity, commitment, loyalty, even honesty, qualities which some Europeans patently preferred to associate exclusively with mysticism and backwardness. According to this report, Kenyatta was the chief architect of MAU MAU, whose intention was to direct it as a weapon aimed “against Western civilisation and technology and, in particular,

⁷ J. C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau*. Nairobi, Kenya: Government Printer, 1954.

⁸ *Ibid.*

against the government and Europeans as symbols of progress”⁹. Kenyatta is certainly considered, and without any contest, to be the father of Kenyan liberation. He embodied however the legal form of nationalism. But what also freed Kenya proved to be not legal nationalism, but a revolution which the British colonial policy, the European settlers and the ineffectiveness of African legal nationalism helped create. From the end of the war in 1945, Africans had actually made regular presentation of their grievances to the colonial government in Kenya. Under the leadership of Kenyatta, the Kenya African Union (KAU) became a national party with wide support from the people. Kenyatta had been trying, by constitutional and lawful means, to increase the Africans’ share in the government, but in spite of the nomination of a second African to the Legislative Council in 1946, followed by two more in 1948 and a fifth in 1951, successive British governments and the colonial administration were not willing to cooperate with Kenyatta and KAU, or even to carry out the land reform which the people desired, amongst other measures. Meanwhile, the white settlers were pressing Britain for independence under white minority rule. Thus in late 1951, some radicals began to think that what could not be achieved by peaceful means might be achieved by violence. Besides, they feared the eventuality of Kenyan independence under a white minority rule. KAU’s lack of success thus led to a split between moderates and radicals inside the party. The radicals, known as the Forty Group, were generally ex-servicemen who gained the support of unemployed Kikuyu in Nairobi along with that of many villagers. They outflanked the moderate KAU leadership and resorted to violence as the ultimate tactic to achieve African aims.

Although Kenyatta did not advocate violence - and he did hold meetings where he denounced violence and MAU MAU radicalism, claiming that he had nothing to do with the movement and that the entire Kikuyu tribe was not committed to MAU MAU – the colonial authorities declared a state of emergency in October 1952 and arrested him along with five other KAU leaders for their alleged management of what was then called a terrorist and barbaric movement. The Governor, Sir Patrick Renison, even described Kenyatta later on as “the African leader to darkness and death,” explaining why it was highly necessary and urgent to keep him in detention. In April 1953 the six leaders were tried and convicted and KAU was banned. Kenyatta, Dagia, Fred Kubai, Kingu Karumba and Paul Ngei were tried at Kapenguria, a remote place in northern Kenya, they were wrongly found

9 Frank Corfield, *The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: an Historical Survey* ('The Corfield Report'). Nairobi: Government Printer, 1960.

guilty of “managing MAU MAU” and sentenced to seven years’ hard labour to be followed by restriction of their movements. The colonial authorities and the white settlers as well actually explained the revolt as an organised plot against them that was overseen by KAU. They thus believed that the banning of KAU and the arresting of Kenyatta, along with the other KAU leaders, would put an end to the revolt. However to make KAU responsible for the rebellion is a serious distortion of the facts, leading to a serious misunderstanding of the very nature and subtlety of Kenyan nationalism at the time.

Undoubtedly Kenyan nationalism had turned violent. However this was certainly not because of KAU’s plot against British authorities and white settlers, as the latter were striving to demonstrate, but because, for more than thirty years, the British authorities in Kenya had been treating nationalism as seditious, denying it any legitimate outlet. KAU, along with other political spokesmen, were dismissed as agitators instead of being recognised as the vocal chord of a whole people. It therefore appeared to the radicals that KAU and other lawful means were inefficient in bringing about the political changes they were asking for, and that only violent means could be productive. In that perspective, the revolt was a challenge, better, a coup d’Etat on the part of the radicals and on the part of marginal people, mostly from the kikuyu tribe, not only against the colonial state, but also against Kenyatta and KAU, the legal form of Kenyan nationalism. Indeed, David Throup was certainly not far from the truth when he wrote that “In Nairobi, the Kikuyu street gangs linked up with the militant Kikuyu trade unions, led by Fred Kubai and Bildad Kaggia, to challenge Kenyatta’s leadership.”¹⁰ After the capture of General China on 15th January 1954, surrender talks were mooted before the great British plan to end the rebellion was launched. The fighters were asked why they were fighting and what had to be done to get them to come out of the forest peacefully with their arms. They then replied:

We are fighting for all land stolen from us by the Crown through its Orders in Council of 1915, according to which Africans have been evicted from the Kenya Highlands...The British Government must grant Kenya full independence under African leadership, and hand over all land previously alienated for distribution to the landless. We will fight until we achieve freedom or until the last of our warriors has shed his last drop of blood¹¹.

¹⁰ David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau: 1945-1953*. Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann, 1988.

¹¹ *Not Yet Uhuru, ibid.*, p.120

Indeed, quite for the first time, a Kenyan nationalist movement was strongly and openly demanding immediate independence. Despite this, the political nature of the movement was still denied. Furthermore, the Freedom Fighters pointed out the decisive role of the land issue. The MAU MAU revolt has in fact been interpreted by many as a peasant revolt. The argument was that land hunger in Kenya created a situation of peasant grievance, and that this had initiated the revolt. While this interpretation has proved not to be entirely wrong the fact nonetheless remains that much of the agitation behind MAU MAU was not really by peasants – basically people who owned modest pieces of land - but that it was mostly carried out by people who were landless, living as squatters on estates owned by Europeans, by urban jobless and gangsters in Nairobi, and by ex-servicemen of the Second World War. All these people who had virtually no source of revenue and who mostly relied on land exploitation could see large tracts of land – sometimes unexploited, sometimes richly cultivated, but all European-owned – and beyond their capacity to acquire. And just for these reasons, they were ready to fight to death. So, it seems that there is little evidence linking Kenyatta with MAU MAU activists. In a speech at the Kenya African Union Meeting at Nyeri, in July 26, 1952 Kenyatta stated:

K.A.U. speaks in daylight. He who calls us the Mau Mau is not truthful. We do not know this thing Mau Mau. We want to prosper as a nation, and as a nation we demand equality, that is equal pay for equal work.¹²

As a matter of fact, it appears that Kenyatta actually had scant regard for MAU MAU, calling the movement “this thing” and arguing in the following terms in 1967:

We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. MAU MAU was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.¹³

What is striking here is that the vocabulary used by the colonial authorities and the white settlers in vilifying the MAU MAU movement during the revolt was also used by Jomo Kenyatta himself, years after MAU MAU had been crushed. Just like the colonial authorities and the white

¹² Jomo, Kenyatta. Speech at the Kenya African Union Meeting at Nyeri, July 26, 1952. In “Jomo Kenyatta: The Kenya Africa Union is Not the Mau Mau, 1952”, *Modern History Sourcebook*: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1952kenyatta-kau1.html>

¹³ Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness*. East African Publishing House, 1968, p. 189

settlers, Kenyatta seemed to deny the insurgents any political claim, even going as far as to label them “hooligans” who must be forgotten for ever. In accusing KAU and arresting its leaders, the British authorities were writing history from their own perspective. They were making Kenyatta and KAU responsible for all the massacres and atrocities that had occurred and for the coming ones, allowing a deafening silence to come down on the grievances of the activists. And still, with or without KAU’s help, the revolt would nevertheless have broken out anyway. The irony of the situation is that not only were the preparations for the uprising not initiated by KAU and Kenyatta, better still, they were deliberately dissimulated from him and his party. And yet, when the colonial government cracked down, it was KAU that was made the scapegoat and Kenyatta the evil genius who was to pick up the pieces. Nevertheless, Kenyatta patently took advantage of being accused as the MAU MAU leader. Actually, the accusation levelled against Kenyatta of being the leader of the activists and the decision to send him to jail can be said to have constituted, paradoxically, a form of assistance on the part of the colonial authorities which was conducive to his ascendancy as a hero and a “martyr” over the other nationalists in the territory. Besides, the arresting of Kenyatta, the messiah of the people, coupled with the banning of KAU, merely helped to further poison the already tense atmosphere. The declaration of emergency and Kenyatta’s arrest fanned the rebellion instead of weakening it. Thousands of Kikuyu took the oath, many went to the forests and began to organise themselves into guerrilla bands.

Actually, those who went into the forests were of two principal groups: there were the convinced “Freedom Fighters”, who formed the majority, and there were the less politically conscious Kikuyu, who simply fled to escape anti-Kikuyu sweeps that the colonial troops were launching against the kikuyu tribe, accused of being the instigators of the revolt, and who ended up forming gangs for survival. Among the leaders of these two groups of activists, were several ex-servicemen who had taken part in the military campaigns of the Second World War, in the jungles of Burma for instance, such as Waruhiu Iote, who took the code name of ‘General China’ and led the fighters in the Mount Kenya forest. At the height of the rebellion in early 1954, there were an estimated 30, 000¹⁴ fighters in the forests of the Nyandarua mountains, formerly Aberdare Mountain and Mount Kenya. The fighters achieved some military successes in the first stage of the war, from October 1952 to April 1954. They managed to go on the offensive, using the

¹⁴ Oginga Odinga, *Not yet Uhuru. The Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*. Heinemann; 1st edition (June 1968), p. 117

forest as the base for raids mainly on loyalist guard posts, chiefs appointed by the colonial administration, headmen and tribal police in the reserves, and, to some extent, on European farms. The most famous attack at the time was the daring raid on Naivasha police station in March 1953 when 173 prisoners were released and considerable ammunition was seized.

The two state-commissioned studies, along with the writings of private settlers, did little to clarify the origin and spread of the revolt or its basic principles. They merely focussed on considerations which were purely formal and psychological, part of the propaganda war launched by the colonial authorities. There was actually an overemphasis on what was depicted as the dark side of the movement: oaths and their administration, and the maiming of cattle, with an obvious refusal to acknowledge what Murray-Brown called “a genuine expression of frustrated nationalism”. The news agencies propaganda aimed at creating horror and fear among both Europeans and Africans by describing unimaginable crimes attributed to the fighters. It is the propaganda and psychological war which the colonial state was to claim as its first real victory over the MAU MAU. The insurgents however, did not have a propaganda organisation to rival the colonial state’s publicity. They could not even count on political leaders like Kenyatta to publicly side with them. Their attacks can however be considered as part of their own psychological war. In the absence of any counterargument, most people were left with the official explanation, and even though they might have wished to sympathise with MAU MAU, they would find it difficult to do so regarding what they saw as the unimaginable atrocities allegedly committed by MAU MAU fighters. With this lack of support both inside and outside Kenya, MAU MAU can be considered as an orphan movement. In addition to the propaganda, the colonial state launched another strategy designed to end the revolt: a fully-fledged divide-and-rule strategy targeted at the African community in Kenya.

In the introduction of their book: *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy point out:

A basic dialectic to understand in Africa is that while the greatest friend of African nationalism is race consciousness, the greatest enemy of African nationhood may be ethnicconsciousness. Modern African nationalism was born and prospered under the stimulation of racial solidarity and shared blackness. On the other hand, the struggle for viable modern nations within Africa is considerably hampered by acute ethnic cleavages, often separating Bantu from Nilotes, Ibo from Hausa and the like.¹⁵

¹⁵ Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa: From about 1935 to the Present*. London: Heinemann, 1984, Introduction.

By and large, the various colonial governments in Africa, and the European settlers as well, were conscious of the spirit of racial solidarity and the danger which this sense of solidarity represented for their rule in the continent. Yet they also knew that African solidarity was often undermined by ethnic cleavages and that they could use these cleavages to take control whenever the situation fitted. This is what the colonial state in Kenya achieved by setting the Kikuyu tribe against the other Kenyan tribes and communities during the revolt. Tensions were in fact aroused through the government policy of detaining only Kikuyu - with a few individual exceptions like Ngei and others – and removing many Kikuyu from the civil service, replacing them with men from other communities. To take the example of Operation Anvil¹⁶ carried out in Nairobi in 1954, 25,000 soldiers and policemen rounded up over about 100,000¹⁷ Kikuyu and detained all Kikuyu aged between 16 and 35, the warrior age. This colonial policy of detaining only people from one single tribe is smacks of a divide-and-rule policy and it aroused the hostility of some Kikuyu against other ethnic groups or against other communities – like the Indian community for instance, and vice versa. In his autobiography, Oginga Odinga, a member of the Luo tribe and former vice-president of Kenya, acknowledges:

When the Emergency began, the indiscriminate arrest and beating of every Kikuyu tribesman seemed to augur the elimination of the whole tribe; they, too, formed gangs for survival, raiding for food and clothes and guns¹⁸.

It seems that the idea was to make the Kikuyu responsible for the whole situation in the eyes of the other communities in the territory. It is worthwhile to highlight the fact that colonial Kenya was made up of various African ethnic groups, in addition to the white settlers and the heterogenous Indian community. The tensions which resulted from this patent discrimination were fanned when the rebels assassinated prominent moderates like Tom Mbotela, the Kenyan African Union (KAU) Vice-President, and Councillor Ambrose Ofafa, respectively from the Coast province and Nyanza. While both were non-Kikuyu, it is important to highlight the fact that they also represented KAU, in the case of Mbotela, and the colonial government, in the case of Councillor Ofafa, in other words

¹⁶ During operations like Anvil, the colonial troops would gather people, mostly Kikuyu to sort out MAU MAU sympathizers from the rest of the population. Out of a total of 116, 000 suspects detained during Operation Anvil, 44,500 were sent for trial and the rest were released; see Roy LEWIS, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Oginga Odinga, *Not yet Uhuru. The Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*. *Ibid.*, p.117.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the two main entities against which the MAU MAU had basically rebelled. Kikuyu domination in the KAU, and even in Kenyan nationalism in general, may be a natural outcome of certain conditions and factors at the time: KAU was built from the earlier political movement of the Kikuyu before the First World War, the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). The Kikuyu were, furthermore, of all Kenyan tribes, those who were most strongly influenced by contact with Europeans and with Western civilisation, including Western education, especially in Nairobi. They were thus able to provide a larger number of elite cadres who could take part in politics. Also, it appeared that the Kikuyu had greater grievances against the colonial government and white settlers. Indeed, although they had not lost as much land as the Maasai for instance, there were far more landless among kikuyu than among any other community in Kenya. They thus represented the first workforce as squatters in European farms. Consequently, they were the first victims of repatriation from European farms, whether to the reserves or to Nairobi, where they joined up with other marginal people.

To crush the MAU MAU, the colonial authorities first decided to ignore nationalist claims. In the face of Kenyan nationalism they opposed indifference, and as they did not meet with the anticipated results with this policy, they moved on to the propaganda strategy in which the MAU MAU was described as a savage backward-looking and terrorist movement. This strategy was aimed at provoking a loss of credit for the movement, both inside and outside the country. The other aim was to arouse fear amongst the different communities of Kenya. The other strategy which followed was that of divide-and-rule. Here nationalism was distorted into tribalism. This was not however sufficient to eradicate the movement and the colonial state thought that a military offensive should do its trick.

“10 Downing Street’s Gulag”: British Image at Stake

Despite the biased propaganda of the colonial state against the MAU MAU, the revolt continued to spread, until the colonial state eventually decided to harden its reaction, with the recourse to a military intervention drawing on the far more powerful weaponry and equipment of the Royal Army and Air Force. The military intervention then led to what Caroline Elkins has called the “10 Downing Street’s Gulag”. After some MAU MAU successes up to 1954, the colonial troops gradually got on top of the situation. The government policy until mid-1954 focused on destroying supports for the MAU MAU in the towns and reserves. Consequently, from Nyeri in the north to Kiambu in the south, thousands of Kikuyu villagers were forcibly resettled in new fortified villages under the control of the

security forces. At the edge of the forests, villages were razed and trees were cut down to provide a free-fire zone and cut off the forest fighters from the reserves from where they could get supplies. In the new fortified villages, people lived under the regime of curfew, endured forced labour, starvation, torture and diseases. Many of the women for instance, were forced to labour on so-called “poor relief” projects on the reserves where some died of exhaustion and disease. Others would find out that their babies had died while strapped to their backs during work brigades.

Apart from destroying MAU MAU support from the reserves, through the isolation of the insurgents, these new and controlled villages were also a punitive measure against areas suspected of strongly supporting the MAU MAU. Thus the colonial authorities did not react only against the activists. Their action was also directed against anyone suspected of being sympathetic to them. At the beginning of 1955, it was estimated that over a million Kikuyu had been resettled in these fortified villages and by the same period, official reports suggested that since 1952, over 70,000 Kikuyu tribesmen suspected of MAU MAU membership had been imprisoned, while over 13,000¹⁹ people had been killed by both British troops and MAU MAU activists. After 1955, the most effective weapon used by the government against the MAU MAU was the 'pseudo gangs', largely made up of former forest fighters who had been captured. The 'pseudo gangs' were later renamed the 'Special Force Teams'. These units, initially led by whites, and subsequently by loyal Africans, would go into the forests on seek-and-destroy expeditions against the MAU MAU hideouts. Actually, the Home Guard and Special Force Teams were responsible for undermining and neutralizing the MAU MAU organisation and their first very success was the capture of Dedan Kimathi in Nyeri. Kimathi was captured in 1956 and executed in February 1957. His capture and death signified however the ultimate defeat of the MAU MAU and officially ended the military offensive against the movement. However the British troops kept on tracking down what they called “terrorists”, up to 1959 and 1960.

For Oginga Odinga, casualties inflicted by the MAU MAU amounted to about 2,000 of whom only 30 were accounted for by Whites. On the other hand – again in Oginga’s view - government troops killed 11,000 MAU MAU activists and detained 90,000²⁰ in detention camps. In these detention

¹⁹ Alistair Boddy-Evans, “Timeline: Mau Mau Rebellion”,
<<http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/Mau-Mau-Timeline.htm>>

²⁰ The figures are taken from: *Not Yet Uhuru*, *ibid.*, p.124

camps, they were subjected to indescribable brutalities and atrocities. In his autobiography, Oginga gives a comprehensive description of the way prisoners were treated in the camps:

No detainee was released until he had been passed along a security clearance channel known as the 'Pipe Line'²¹; among the Emergency casualties not recorded are the victims of the Pipe Line who were injured and permanently disabled by torture to extract confessions.²²

When the British left Kenya in 1963, they destroyed all official files relating to their crimes. Some Kenyans still recall seeing bonfires around Nairobi in the final days before the British departure in 1963; some former colonial officers even acknowledged receiving orders to destroy hundreds of thousands of documents relating to the Pipeline's victims. The very story and the evidence of how Britain crushed the revolt in Kenya were thus in effect going in smoke, along with the evidence as to the exact number of casualties. Consequently, until today, there is still not a single death toll, but several. If we consider the figures given by Odinga in his autobiography (2,000 killed by the Mau Mau and 11,000 activists killed by government troops) the death toll is about 13, 000. This does not include civilian Kenyans and the victims of the Pipe Line, as Oginga points out. Similar figures are given by the colonial authorities and are advanced in Olson & Shadle's *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire* (11,503 rebels, 590 security forces and 1,877 civilians killed: about 13,970 killed in total).

However, according to 'Secret History',²³ a program broadcast on Channel Four Television in Britain on 15th September 1999, the activists' death toll during the emergency was "11,500, of whom around 1,000 were hanged. 80,000 Kikuyu were imprisoned in concentration camps, 150,000 Africans, mostly Kikuyu, lost their lives, with many dying of disease and starvation in the protected villages". On the other side – again according to the Channel Four documentary- the MAU MAU killed around 2,000 people, including 32 European civilians and 63 members of the security forces. Putting all these figures together, the death toll for the revolt, according to

²¹ 'Pipe Line' = official name of the detention system during the revolt aimed at finding out Mau Mau activists. Through tough questionings, it meticulously sorted people according to their alleged MAU MAU sympathies.

²² *Not Yet Uhuru*, *ibid.*, p.124

²³ *Secrete History*. Channel Four Television. London, 15th September 1999

Published on: http://www.channel4.com/nextstep/secret_history/.

A verbatim extract of the program is also published on:

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/026.html> (a world history archives online)

the Channel Four program, would thus amount to 163,500. Actually, in order to gain an exact account of what did happen in Kenya at the time, it would be interesting and helpful to have the survivors' own account also, and Channel Four did rely on several testimonies of the survivors. The program also takes into account casualties among civilians, a dimension which for instance does not figure in Oginga's biography.

In the same perspective, Caroline Elkins published *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, for which she interviewed MAU MAU veterans and some ex-British officers in Kenya in a thorough historical documentation of the capital crimes during the revolt. She came to the following conclusion: "I now believe there was in late colonial Kenya a murderous campaign to eliminate Kikuyu people that left tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands dead."²⁴ In fact, while interviewing some MAU MAU veterans and other witnesses of the events, such as missionaries, Elkins discovered that detainees in camps moved up or down the "Pipeline" according to their degree of resistance and also that brutality was something natural and took place at every degree, ranging from electrocution and mutilation to beatings and various forms of sexual abuses and humiliations. In an interview for the BBC Two program: *Kenya: White Terror* broadcast on 17th November 2002, she personally admits when evoking the death toll of the revolt and how Britain crushed it: "Conservatively, I would put that figure [the death toll] at somewhere around 50, 000"²⁵.

There may not be an exact death toll - and as investigations are pursued, new figures and facts will continue to be uncovered. However regarding all the studies which have been made on the subject up to now, it clearly appears that the nature of the colonial propaganda against the MAU MAU does indeed reveal a facet of British imperial rule that was not very far from that exhibited by the French in Algeria. Living conditions in the detention camps constituted serious violations of human rights. John Nottingham, himself a district colonial officer in the 1950s and who stayed on in Kenya after the uprising, told the BBC Two correspondent of "*Kenya: White Terror* that: "compensation should be paid immediately as most of the victims are now in their 80s". He added: "What went on in the Kenya camps and villages was brutal, savage torture. [...] I feel ashamed to have come

²⁴ Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, January 2005

²⁵ *Kenya: White Terror*. BBC Two. London, November 17th 2002,

Interview broadcast on:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/2416049.stm>

from a Britain that did what it did here.”²⁶ Basically, with the colonial state campaign, most British citizens saw little reason to question their government's line on the situation in Kenya and on internment camps in particular. The newspapers helped stir up racist fears during the rebellion by publishing gory pictures of murdered settlers and through their depictions of the “bestial” and “degraded” practices of the activists. This sensational coverage made the MAU MAU synonymous with savagery and butchery. So, even though some people began to question the living conditions in detention camps in operation as late as 1958, most British citizens continued to consider that the MAU MAU activists were just getting what they deserved. One might still wonder whether savagery and bestiality weren't actually perpetrated on both sides, even though MAU MAU activists were said to be the only savages and barbarians. Both the colonial secretary at the time, Alan Lennox-Boyd, and Winston Churchill continued to praise the successes of the colonial state, despite the mounting evidence of abuses in camps until 1959, after the fatal beating of 11 detainees in Hola prison.

Actually, on 3rd March 1959, 85 prisoners at the Hola Detention Camp refused to take part in forced labour and sat down in protest. They had been refusing to work for nine days. When the camp commander, G M Sullivan, blew his whistle, guards attacked the prisoners with clubs and rifle butts, killing one of them. The prisoners were then asked if they would work and as they still refused, Sullivan blew his whistle once more and the attack was renewed several times. By the end of the assaults, the guards had beaten eight prisoners to death and seriously injured 60 others. A survivor of the Hola camp reported to Channel Four:

We refused to do this work. We were fighting for our freedom. We were not slaves. There were two hundred guards. One hundred seventy stood around us with machine guns. Thirty guards were inside the trench with us. The white man in charge blew his whistle and the guards started beating us. They beat us from 8 am to 11.30. They were beating us like dogs. I was covered by other bodies - just my arms and legs were exposed. I was very lucky to survive. But the others were still being beaten. There was no escape for them.²⁷

Governor Sir Evelyn Baring issued a statement claiming that the prisoners had died from drinking contaminated water. The incident became front-page news in Britain and the Labour opposition in parliament attacked

²⁶ *Ibid.*, on <http://newswww.bbc.net.uk/1/hi/england/london/3026747.stm>

²⁷ Barbara Slaughter, “How Britain crushed the ‘Mau Mau rebellion’”. Channel Four TV's Secret History—Mau Mau”, 15th September 1999: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/026.html>

the Conservative government for the brutality of their methods in Kenya. The detention camps finally closed in Kenya after the massacre, heralding the end of British rule in the country, with the MAU MAU continuing to haunt the socio-political arena both in Kenya and in the UK.

The Decolonization Process and Haunting Image of the MAU MAU

Basically, the way in which Britain crushed the revolt, along with the colonial sensational campaign and MAU MAU radicalism as well, all amounted to the factors causing a certain “wind of change” to blow over British rule in Kenya from 1957 on. Six African members were elected in 1957 in the Legislative Council: this was the turning point on the path to independence. The African elected members could then claim that they were supported by a large electorate and could use the Legislative Council to demand further constitutional reforms. Among the elected members were Oginga Odinga for Central Nyanza, Tom Mboya for Nairobi, Ronald Ngala for the Coast and Daniel Arap Moi for the Rift Valley. In 1958, the new Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, added another eight African elected members and four, specially-elected, African members, along with four specially-elected European and four specially-elected Asian members. Yet, the major weakness of the African elected members was the lack of a national political party and the lack of a charismatic national leader, with Kenyatta in prison and the ban on political activities still effective.

Thus far, it appears that things actually went very quickly just after the MAU MAU revolt. The rebellion had certainly been very murderous on all sides, and because of the sensational campaign it had left its marks on the populations and officials both in Kenya and the UK. One cannot moreover deny that it had hastened the process toward independence. While it was already a well-known fact that the white settlers were fiercely opposed to independence with African majority rule, the revolt revealed their precarious hold on the colony. Former Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton eventually acknowledged that the decolonization of Kenya came about as a result of a general understanding that the continuation of Britain’s rule would entail a use of force unacceptable to the British public²⁸. And the Hola Camp massacre brought Kenya to the attention of the world and, more importantly, to the attention of the UK with, for instance, Enoch Powell’s expressing his public indignation at the massacre when he stated that if Britain couldn’t show moral leadership of the highest order, then the game

²⁸ Oliver Lyttelton, *The Memoires of Lord Chandos*, London, 1962

of empire was up.²⁹ And so the image of Great Britain was at stake, while it also became impossible for Britain to continue to claim that most Kenyans were happy under their rule. Now if it is true that the possible jeopardising of the image of Britain did have some influence in the decolonization process, it also seems apparent that while the territory became independent long after the revolt was officially over, the MAU MAU ghost was to influence virtually every aspect of the decolonization in Kenya. As a matter of fact, the MAU MAU left behind a legacy of violence, terror and fear, both in Kenya and in the UK. As Hilda Nissimi rightly pointed out:

Racial relations, international power considerations, party politics, and strategic calculations are well-know factors in the decolonisation process. The Mau Mau ghost influenced each such factor, playing a part in constructing the 'liberal state of mind' that is said to have made the British leave Kenya. As a vanquished movement, the Mau Mau left behind a legacy of terror that proved more enduring than the acutal struggle had been. It is a potent example of the influence of such a movement on policy changes beyond the armed conflict.³⁰

Virtually everyone, in Kenya and in the UK, feared a renewal of the MAU MAU sooner or later. This factor might account for MAU MAU's lack of official recognition on the part of Kenyan politicians and society in general, even years after independence. In addition, the revolt effectively brought to an end the secret hopes of the white settlers for the achievement of independence under the white minority rule. In view of this crucial impetus to the process of decolonization in Kenya, we can argue with good grounds that the MAU MAU is one of the actual agents of Kenyan independence.

One recurrent question which always returns, when dealing with the MAU MAU uprising, is whether the source of its struggle is to be located in a forward-looking or a backward-looking vision. Some commentators therefore still wonder whether it was a modern nationalist or just a traditional ethnic movement. The historiography of the MAU MAU provides a considerable range of arguments on these two issues. The *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, also called the *Cornfield Report* (the official account of the revolt published by the colonial administration in 1960), portrays the movement as backward-looking and

²⁹ David Anderson, *History of the Hanged. The War in Kenya and the End of Empire*. New York, London, 2005, pp. 326-7.

³⁰ Hilda Nissimi, "MAU MAU and the Decolonisation of Kenya". *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Spring 2006, Vol. 8, Issue 3.

‘tribal’. There is thus no need to specify that as long as the movement was directed against the colonial rule, the uprising had the reputation of being barbaric, savage and even terrorist. Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham in *The Myth of ‘Mau Mau’*, published in 1966, on the contrary portray the movement as forward-looking and as a Kenyan nationalist movement rather than a Kikuyu sub-nationalist or terrorist movement. Bethwell A. Ogot, formerly a professor of history in the University of Nairobi, has also described the MAU MAU as both forward-looking, insofar as it fought for political freedom and the end of a colonial rule, and sub-nationalist, as it evidenced a strong sense of Kikuyu nationalism, as opposed to KAU, which represented Kenyan nationalism in general. However despite all the research which has been undertaken to understand the MAU MAU movement, the organisation, with its oaths and as a result of the sustained campaign which was waged against it, nonetheless remains quite mysterious, still retaining something of the aura of a secret and rather mythical organisation. Yet one cannot deny that, both regardless of and also owing to its violence and its radicalism, the MAU MAU movement did enhance African political consciousness in Kenya, thus contributing to its access to independence and has continued to haunt both Nairobi and London.

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PART 3

**DECOLONIZATION AND LITERATURE IN FRENCH-SPEAKING AND
PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING AREAS**

CHAPTER 6

Colonisation/décolonisation par la langue et la littérature françaises : l'« indépendance » (ir)résolue en Afrique

Abstract: Decolonization has been far from demonstrating the features it presupposes, namely, freedom, and by extension, self-determination. In the current geostrategic landscape of trade between nation states, the fate of the colonized has not changed. They are still governed from the outside. It becomes quite difficult, in this context, to think calmly about the relevance of independence announced so eagerly. In the case of languages, cultures and literatures that the immense continent of Africa possesses, it so happens that via their dubbing programmed over time, the African bears witness to the fact that he is yet again losing power to the diktats imposed by linguistic and cultural forces from the outside. How does hopelessly persistent colonization emerge through African literature and by inference the eternal question of decolonization?

Résumé : La décolonisation a du mal à révéler jusqu'à ce jour les traits justificatifs de ce qu'elle postule, à savoir, la liberté et par ricochet, l'autodétermination. Dans le paysage géostratégique actuel des échanges entre les États, il se trouve que le sort des colonisés n'ait point changé. Ils sont toujours gouvernés de l'extérieur. Il devient assez difficile, dans ce contexte, de penser avec sérénité à la pertinence des indépendances annoncées avec empressement. Pour le cas des langues, cultures et littératures, pourtant immenses, que compte ce continent, il se passe que par leur adoubement (programmé) au fil du temps, l'Africain enregistre encore une fois de plus sa défaite face à la puissance du diktat que lui imposent les forces linguistiques et culturelles de l'extérieur. Comment, au travers de la littérature africaine, se dessine irrémédiablement la persistance de la colonisation, et donc l'éternelle question de la décolonisation ?

Introduction

Les origines de la littérature africaine écrite ne sont pas très anciennes. À peine un siècle suffit pour qu'on en trouve les premiers textes publiés. On retiendra toujours *Batouala* de René Maran comme étant le pionnier, dans le genre romanesque, du monde noir, de manière globale. En tout cas, Maran ouvre la porte de la littérature africaine, non pas en tant qu'Africain

d’Afrique, mais comme un Noir dont les origines se trouvent en Guyane. On comptera donc par la suite des auteurs, cette fois-ci africains, tels que Diallo Bakary¹, Chouchoro Félix², Socé Ousmane³, Hazoumé Paul⁴, Lomani Tshibamba Paul⁵, Naigiziki J. Saverio⁶, etc. À regarder de près cette littérature qui naît, on se rend compte qu’elle est publiée en France/Belgique et dans une langue qui n’a rien à voir avec la langue réelle des auteurs. Ils ont choisi (sont-ils contraints ?) d’écrire dans la langue de leur maître. Ce qui se fera certainement avec des soupçons plus ou moins évidents de l’influence de l’ancienne métropole au travers des réseaux de publication et d’édition qui « contrôlent », censurent et légifèrent sur le livre noir à partir du prétexte sur la correction/perfection du style. Ainsi, l’auteur est soumis, non aux normes que lui inspire son propre génie, mais à celles dictées par des référents hexagonaux où des modèles en la matière auront brillé bien avant lui : Hugo, Mallarmé, Chateaubriand, Ronsard, Boileau, etc. Le cadre de son écriture fixé, l’écrivain africain déploie son acte d’écriture sous la perspective d’un mimétisme qui frise l’*assimilation littéraire*. Nous l’appellerons ici la « littérature du colonisé », celle qui aura consisté à faire la volonté de son ancien maître, soit à travers un mimétisme scripturaire, soit dans un silence qui oblige à ne pas heurter sa sensibilité en abordant les questions liées à sa politique (de perpétuité) hégémonique. Sur la base donc du contexte littéraire mimétique des écrivains africains, après avoir montré en quoi il s’illustre, nous examinerons, dans une visée de décryptage de l’évolution scripturaire, l’ère de la rupture qui l’a suivi afin de mieux comprendre enfin en quoi une telle littérature peut être un déclencheur, peut-être symbolique mais déclencheur quand même, d’une indépendance culturelle proposée aux Africains.

¹ Pour son roman *Force-Bonté*. Paris : Rieder et Cie, 1926.

² Pour son roman *L’Esclave*. Paris : La dépêche africaine, 1929.

³ Pour ses romans *Karim, roman sénégalais*. Paris : Nouvelles éditions latines, 1935 et *Mirages de Paris*, Paris : Nouvelles éditions latines, 1937.

⁴ Pour son roman *Doguicimi*. Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 1938.

⁵ Pour son roman *Ngando*. Bruxelles : Deny, 1948.

⁶ Pour son roman *Escapade ruandaise, Journal d’un clerc en sa trentième année*. Bruxelles : 1949.

I Colonisation par assimilation de la norme de la langue/culture françaises

a) La littérature africaine à l'ère du mimétisme

Pour mieux comprendre cette forme d'extériorité de l'écriture africaine, il faut rentrer dans le contexte historique de la colonisation. Le colon qui arrive en Afrique a une idée fixe. Le continent qu'il découvre est une véritable *jungle* qui a besoin d'être ordonnée selon ses valeurs et ses paradigmes. Ignorant/déniant toute possibilité d'un univers socioculturel local, il impose son modèle de société aux riverains, avec pour devoir d'« apporter la civilisation aux peuples [dits] barbares⁷ ».

Il découle manifestement d'une telle entreprise, qui masque une certaine supercherie sur le postulat de l'humanité/humanisme, que le colonisateur recherchait en réalité à graver sa culture et sa vision du monde sur le colonisé. Cela passait par divers mécanismes mais nous nous intéresserons surtout à celui qui consistait à imposer au dominé la langue du dominant. C'est ainsi que l'Afrique sera répartie en différentes zones linguistiques reflétant les diverses dominations impériales dont elle a été l'objet, à savoir : la zone anglophone (près de 19 pays), la zone lusophone (5 pays), la zone hispanophone (1 pays) et la zone francophone (près de 24 pays). À chacune de ces ères linguistiques, correspondront des spécificités littéraires définies par des modèles d'écriture prenant en compte des référents métropolitains.

Nous allons surtout nous pencher au cas de la littérature francophone pour examiner le comportement qui a été le sien dans un milieu profondément traversé par le mimétisme. Considérant le colon français (sous le sceau de l'obligation, de l'aliénation ou du complexe) comme un exemple à suivre (quitte à se nier soi-même), le colonisé finira par considérer la langue et la culture françaises comme gages de son propre essor et de son accomplissement. Pour ainsi parvenir à *singer* son « maître », le colonisé s'assurera qu'il est un élève assidu, si ce n'est parfait, dans son apprentissage du français. Il se donne ainsi pour défi, en plus des exigences de *maestria* attendues de lui, d'égaliser son *maître* au travers d'une

⁷ CELLIER, Léon. (1958 : 156) reprend d'ailleurs cette expression dans son analyse du romantisme à travers le mythe d'Orphée. Mais, PELLARIN, Ch. (1867 : 461-462-467) l'avait déjà bien fixée sous l'angle des représentations péjoratives qu'elle suggérait. Le CNRTL les met en lumière en définissant la « civilisation » ainsi : « État de développement spirituel et matériel tenu pour supérieur par opposition à *Barbarie* [...]. *Apporter la civilisation à des peuples barbares.*» <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/academie9/civilisation> consulté le 6 novembre 2012.

maîtrise sans faille de sa langue. C'est là que commence justement l'acculturation.

Écrire et parler correctement la langue française deviennent dès lors des idéaux sacrés que chacun voudrait atteindre, soit pour son honneur, soit pour plaire au maître. Ce dernière ne cache pas ses intentions. S'il veut donner du crédit à son argument de « civilisateur » en Afrique, il lui faudra bien apporter la preuve que ces peuples dits indigènes ont fini par être capables de s'exprimer dans la *superbe* langue française. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, naturellement, les langues locales sont découragées et exclues de tout espoir d'être érigées en langue d'enseignement. Seul le français compte et devrait mériter ce privilège puisqu'étant déjà accepté comme langue de la science et capable de rendre compte des idées abstraites.

L'on comprend ainsi que l'entreprise coloniale ait travaillé à compromettre toute possibilité d'émergence des langues et cultures locales qui statistiquement, étaient majoritaires. D'une soi-disant idée d'humanisation, par la présence du colon en Afrique, l'on assiste plutôt à celle de déshumanisation à travers l'acculturation des peuples colonisés. L'identité du Noir à travers sa culture lui est reniée sur l'autel de la politique d'assimilation. L'Africain est invité à se renier pour se revendiquer, par l'assimilation au Blanc, une langue et une culture entièrement exogènes à ses habitudes.

La langue française va de ce fait passer en force et bousculer tout sur son passage ; quitte à ce que les politiques éducatives qui encouragent une telle situation reposent sur des stéréotypes. Ces propos de Pierre Alexandre, cités par Chevrier⁸, décrivent parfaitement la profondeur de la pensée coloniale française en Afrique :

La politique coloniale française, en matière d'éducation et d'administration est facile à définir : c'est celle de François I^{er}, de Richelieu, de Robespierre et de Jules Ferry. Une seule langue est enseignée dans les écoles, admise dans les tribunaux, utilisée dans l'administration : le français tel qu'il est défini par les gens de l'académie et les décrets du ministre de l'Instruction Publique. Toutes les autres ne sont que folklore, tutu panpan, obscurantisme, biniou et bourrées, et ferments de désintégration de la République.

Il faut donc éviter ce sacrilège à la France. Les colonisés ne sauraient échapper à l'immense entreprise de formatage identitaire qui voudrait que l'empire colonial français soit grand et partout pareil, c'est-à-dire capable de manifester l'unicité conforme à la métropole de la langue et de la culture

⁸ CHEVRIER, Jacques. *Littérature nègre*. Paris : Arman Colin, 1989, p.205.

hexagonales. Cette ambition, très critique sur le plan axiologique, restera néanmoins un non-dit qui est rarement exprimé comme le révèle (par indélégance ?) ces propos tenus en 1885 par l'homme politique français Victor Duruy (1811-1894), repris par Mouralis :

Quand les indigènes apprennent notre langue, ce sont nos idées de justice qui entrent peu à peu dans leur esprit, ce sont des marchés qui s'ouvrent pour notre industrie⁹.

Évidemment, si on a du mal à accepter l'argument de Duruy sur la « justice », la colonisation étant foncièrement injuste elle-même, nous comprenons qu'il le faisait pour essayer de se justifier auprès de l'opposition coloniale française. Il se dégage de sa pensée l'idée d'un transfert d'attributs culturels et donc de dépendance ontologique.

Celle-ci est envisageable à travers une politique d'infantilisation du colonisé que Brevié, gouverneur général de l'AOF, formule en 1921 en ces termes :

Le devoir colonial et les nécessités politiques et économiques imposent à notre œuvre d'éducation une double tâche : il s'agit d'une part de former des cadres indigènes qui sont destinés à devenir nos auxiliaires dans tous les domaines, et d'assurer l'ascension d'une élite soigneusement choisie [...] Au point de vue politique, il s'agit de faire connaître aux indigènes nos efforts et nos intentions, de les rattacher à leur place à la vie française. Au point de vue économique enfin, il s'agit de préparer les consommateurs de demain.¹⁰

Réaffirmons donc ici que les objectifs d'enseignement sont axés sur l'acculturation et la robotisation du colonisé afin que celui-ci soit plus porté vers le modèle exogène que celui endogène pour et contre lequel il devrait se constituer. Cela ne se passe pas en toute tranquillité. Le recours quasi systématique à tous les niveaux de violence est permis. D'ailleurs, en 1924, le durcissement dans le ton du discours du gouverneur colonial Roume révèle assez bien les enjeux : « Tout l'enseignement de l'histoire et de la géographie doit tendre à montrer que la France est une nation riche, puissante, capable de se faire respecter »¹¹.

Sur les plans linguistique et culturel, cette mission impériale de la France va être servie par l'implantation de grandes bibliothèques et la réalisation de vastes chantiers d'écriture d'anthologie. Ces chantiers permettront non

⁹ MOURALIS, Bernard. *Littérature et développement : Essai sur le statut, la fonction et la représentation de la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française*. Paris : Silex, 1984, p.80.

¹⁰ In *Bulletin de l'enseignement en AOF*, numéro 74, 1933, p.3.

¹¹ In *Bulletin officiel de l'AOF*, numéro 1024, 1924.

seulement de recenser la pensée profonde des grands auteurs français sélectionnés intentionnellement, mais aussi, par leurs traits achevés dans l'usage et la création littéraire, pourraient inspirer, et être adoptés par, la petite élite noire en tant que modèles à reproduire. Pour ce faire, l'excellence des classiques français va être affichée aux jeunes africains désireux de s'affirmer eux aussi en littérature.

Cependant, parce que les Africains ne sont que des novices dans le domaine de l'écriture, et pour susciter l'envie de lire et la confiance des Français de France, ou des autres lecteurs occidentaux, il va se mettre en place une politique de parrainage par des écrivains métropolitains déjà reconnus. La littérature africaine va être ainsi encadrée par des écrivains réputés français. André Breton commente *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*; R. Desnos préface la première parution de la revue *Pigments* de Damas; R. Delavignette fait la préface de *Karim* d'Ousmane Socé lors de la deuxième sortie du roman en 1948; J.-R. Bloch préface *Force-Bonté* de Bakary Diallo; G. Hardy introduit *Doguiçimi* de Paul Hazoumé; Gaston Périé préface *Ngando* de Lomami-Tshibamba, etc. La conséquence logique attendue est que la littérature africaine avait donc besoin d'encadrement et du cachet de quelques Occidentaux de renom afin qu'elle bénéficie de l'accueil du public bourgeois pour lequel elle se destinait de préférence.

Il va sans dire dans ce contexte que l'école et la langue françaises, s'étant chargées d'une aura particulière dans l'imagerie populaire, avaient parachevé l'entreprise coloniale entamée sur le plan politique. Les colonisés, perçus comme des embryons certainement inachevés de la caste humaine, le colon se donnait le devoir de continuer à leur apporter son assistance et son encadrement. D'ailleurs, comme le relève si bien Sartre, cité par Chevrier, le colon s'avisera à ne jamais quitter ce statut voulu indétronable d'entité présente perpétuelle :

c'est dans cette langue [française] [...] que Damas, Diop, Laleau, Rabiearivelo vont verser le feu de leurs ciels et de leurs cœurs : par elle seule ils peuvent communiquer ; semblables aux savants du XVIIe siècle qui ne s'entendaient qu'en latin, les noirs ne se retrouvent que sur le terrain plein de chausse-trapes que le blanc leur a préparé : entre les colonisés, le colon s'est arrangé pour être le médiateur ; il est toujours là même absent.¹²

Pour asseoir le primat du français sur les langues du cru et surtout pour pouvoir espérer des indigènes une expression acceptable, l'initiation aux grands classiques français est un recours incontournable. Le colonisé est

¹² CHEVRIER, Jacques. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

ainsi, tôt certainement, mis au contact des grands auteurs de la civilisation occidentale/française. Il doit s'en inspirer et révéler sa propre expression sur le versant du génie de ces maîtres à penser. Le colonisé est attendu sur le terrain de l'excellence. Il n'a d'ailleurs pas de choix ; puisqu'il ne connaît aucune autre norme que celle de l'excellence.

Pris dans l'effervescence d'une telle ambiance de clonage, les jeunes colonisés, ressentant le besoin d'écrire, s'essayeront sur le même sillage que leurs aînés français dont ils tenteront de reproduire non seulement la langue stylée, mais aussi les techniques d'écriture, s'il ne s'agit pas tout simplement de copier les imaginaires. La devise est simple à ce niveau. Il faut mimer son maître et s'abreuver à sa source. Procéder autrement n'était pas envisageable car il fallait éviter de « pécher » contre ses vénérés modèles.

La langue française va s'avérer incontournable et les modèles de l'Hexagone vont servir de guides au déclic des nouveaux écrivains noirs francophones. Ceux-ci, affranchis de leurs véritables ressources créatrices et inspirationnelles, vont s'arrimer à un prestige avilissant que leur procure néanmoins le sensationnel d'une écriture dans une langue exotique. Orphelin de son univers socioculturel, l'écrivain noir va se retrouver pris dans les chaînes d'une langue qui lui *vole* toute possibilité de penser ou d'écrire en sa propre langue ou de publier dans son continent/pays d'origine. Colonisé politiquement et économiquement, ajoutons même environnementalement puisque ses ressources naturelles sont gérées de (et profitent à) l'extérieur, le jeune écrivain africain va connaître l'expérience douloureuse de la colonisation linguistique et culturelle. L'écrivain noir francophone a ainsi les pieds en Afrique et la tête/pensée/modèle en Europe/France. Son activité scripturaire tente, dans un effort digne des exigences de *L'Art poétique* de Boileau, de reconstituer le paysage littéraire et artistique de son maître ; ceci au travers de l'imitation servile et de l'identification de soi à l'altérité envisagée comme voie de (sur)vie.

De Balzac, Molière, Stendhal à Hugo, Malherbe, Voltaire, Corneille, Chateaubriand, Proust en passant par Baudelaire, Flaubert ou Rousseau, le désir de ressemblance est avéré/avoué. Pour l'écrivain René Philombe, cité par Fotsing (2004), la confession en dit long sur l'attention qu'il réserve à ses « aînés » français :

Tout enfant, je savourais délicieusement tous les livres qui étaient mis à ma portée [...]. C'est par cette voie que j'ai découvert des écrivains [tels que] La Fontaine, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Boileau... Je me suis

abondamment abreuvé de ces auteurs français à l'école primaire et au cours de mes études secondaires.¹³

Comme on peut le constater, la flamme occidentale brûle en l'écrivain francophone au point que sa création puisse en dépendre fondamentalement.

b) De la peau noire au masque blanc : l'écriture comme passerelle

La France et le français se portent bien en Afrique. Les valeurs de ce pays sont allègrement considérées et reprises par les écrivains noirs qui ne trouvent d'ailleurs d'autres formes d'écriture que sous le devoir de reconnaissance vis-à-vis d'un pays/nation/culture qui leur a tout appris/transmis. Le reconnaître, c'est aussi prendre la plume et manifester une certaine louange à la langue française et au génie français. La conséquence qui serait alors attendue est que non seulement les auteurs africains vont écrire dans la langue du *colon*, mais aussi, ils seront publiés et récompensés par ce dernier lorsqu'il jugera les textes suffisamment soignés à son goût. Souvenons-nous que le premier roman de Kourouma n'avait pas été publié en France parce qu'il s'éloignait des vertus normatives attendues d'un roman de colonisé. Souvenons-nous aussi que Mongo Beti n'a presque rien reçu comme prix littéraire du fait de son positionnement idéologique contre l'ancienne métropole dans ses romans.

En d'autres termes, lorsqu'un Africain affichait une certaine dépendance de la norme française, en plus de ne pas manifester une plume acerbe à l'encontre du colon, il pouvait être rassuré de l'encadrement et de la prospérité à lui accordés. *Paris* se positionne, d'après moi¹⁴, comme un censeur et un faiseur d'écrivains.

Les premiers écrivains, dans cet environnement basé sur la perspective de l'excellence par l'imitation des « aînés », vont reprendre avec un certain talent, les techniques d'écriture de leurs modèles français. L'assimilation est presque totale à ce niveau. L'écrivain noir, inscrit sur les traces de son maître, tend à le camélioniser, avec succès d'ailleurs. C'est alors que va se mettre en place le grand marché de l'intertextualité où la technique du citationnel reconnue au texte est abondamment employée. Les énoncés se répondent comme en échos au point qu'il devient intéressant d'en étudier les formes de correspondances entre les textes d'origine métropolitaine et ceux d'origine africaine qui les miment.

¹³ PHILOMBE, René. Entretien avec David Ndachi Tagne. *Notre Librairie* 100 (1990) : 52-53.

¹⁴ Cf. Mon article intitulé « Paris au cœur de la production littéraire francophone : monopole éditorial, péril créateur », in *La tortue verte*, 2012, pp. 12-13.

Les relations intertextuelles entre ces deux ensembles de textes montrent bien les liens de filiations entre les deux classes d'écrivains également. Il se trouve que le langage du texte d'origine est repris, presque à l'identique, par le langage du texte africain. L'écrivain noir cherchait, pour atteindre ce niveau de correspondance des formes, à se débarrasser de toutes les tropicalités liées à son oralité basique. Le courant en vogue en France, tel que le naturalisme de Zola, a bien influencé René Maran. Chevrier reconnaît la ferveur naturaliste de Maran en ces termes :

En tant que roman, l'œuvre [...] se réclame à l'évidence de l'esthétique naturaliste [...] En déclarant dans sa préface que « ce roman est tout objectif. Il ne tâche même pas à expliquer : il constate. Il ne s'indigne pas : il enregistre », Maran se place dans la perspective des romanciers naturalistes français, et notamment Zola avec qui la parenté éclate.¹⁵

Ricard, analysant les romans de Félix Couchoro, en arrive à la conclusion qu'ils sont tous d'un niveau de langue qui, de manière conséquente, se veut châtié :

Les trois premiers romans de Félix Couchoro fourmillent des mots et de tours appartenant à ce style dit relevé qui n'est que stéréotypé. Un goût [...] pour les « grands mots » et le « beau style », souvent dans la grande tradition classique.¹⁶

Cette obsession de la perfection, même si elle peut paraître extravagante parfois, a aussi habité la plume de Camara Laye. Les interminables subjonctifs imparfaits dont regorge *L'Enfant noir* ont assuré une plus-value à une maîtrise de la syntaxe et de la mesure rythmique de sa phrase.

Dans le domaine de la poésie, Senghor, en 1927, use avec virtuosité des figures des courants parnassiens et symbolistes, comme le souligne Armant Guiltier¹⁷. Des similitudes se nouent ainsi entre la poésie de Senghor et celle de Claudel. La pensée de Senghor se rapporte à la volonté conceptuelle de Pierre Teilhard de Chardin dont il ne se cache pas en tout cas lors d'un discours qu'il prononce à Bordeaux en 1980 :

Nous avons voulu aider au grand projet exprimé par Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, au projet de bâtir une civilisation de l'Universel, où tous les continents, toutes les races,

¹⁵ CHEVRIER, Jacques. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁶ RICARD, Alain. *Naissance d'un roman africain : Félix Couchoro, 1900-1968*. Paris : Présence africaine, 1987, pp. 119-120.

¹⁷ Cité par CHEVRIER, Jacques, *Ibid.*, p.26.

toutes les nations, en un mot toutes les civilisations, apporteraient chacune toutes ses valeurs irremplaçables.¹⁸

Bien plus, dans cette tendance à l'adossement des poètes africains à la pensée occidentale, Magnier (1995 : 15) s'autorise les conclusions suivantes : Tchikaya U Tam'si est un disciple de Rimbaud, Birago Diop se revendiquerait du parnasse alors Bernard Dadier répondrait aisément à l'esthétique classique. On pourrait donc dire que Maran est celui qui a reproduit Zola, Couchoro a retracé les lignes définies par Hugo, Mongo Beti, celles élaborées par Voltaire, Hamidou Kane a opté pour les classiques, etc. Tout cela porte à croire que nous sommes bien dans la logique de peau noire, écriture blanche.

Ainsi, cette littérature des colonisés résout la question selon laquelle l'entreprise coloniale a au moins quelques raisons de continuer puisque des indigènes ont pu accéder à une connaissance acceptable de la langue du colon. Même si on peut admettre avec Chevrier que « [n]ul ne peut contester en effet qu'à l'époque coloniale la maîtrise de la langue française a constitué pour l'intelligentsia africaine un atout de premier ordre »¹⁹, il faut toutefois relever que celui-ci aidera l'Africain à mieux saisir les contradictions liées à la politique coloniale plus tard. C'est en prenant mieux connaissance de son état de clone du Blanc que l'écrivain noir va peu à peu se déchaîner du contrôle linguistique et culturel qui le lie à l'expérience scripturaire métropolitaine. Il va ainsi revendiquer, à défaut d'écrire en sa propre langue maternelle, sa méthode de création, de composition et d'affirmation, en tant qu'auteur, dans la langue française qu'il lui convient d'utiliser. C'est à ce niveau que bascule le « bon usage » de la langue française dans ce qui est retenu comme le nouvel ordre linguistique de la littérature noire émancipée.

II Décolonisation par abâtardisation de la norme de la langue/culture françaises

a) Indépendance littéraire en Afrique noire francophone

Loin donc de continuer de voir en la langue française, un outil de conformité à une norme intangible et incontournable, le rapport des écrivains africains à cette langue va changer de pesanteur au point qu'il lui donnera le visage qu'ils souhaitent. Ils défigureront à volonté le français pour qu'il soit capable de s'adapter à eux et non plus l'inverse. Le français devient ainsi, non plus une langue de contraintes ou d'imposition, mais une

¹⁸ Discours de Bordeaux, 14 mars 1980.

¹⁹ CHEVRIER, Jacques. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

langue flexible/propice à la création et pouvant véhiculer des réalités tout aussi exotiques, c'est-à-dire liées à la socioculture locale. L'affranchissement vis-à-vis du diktat d'une norme jugée exogène et peu ouverte à l'expression du moi africain est déclaré. La fin de la colonisation linguistique au travers du français standard métropolitain est annoncée. On se rend presque déjà compte du mal immense que crée cette langue quant au vide dans lequel elle installe les Africains par rapport à leurs ressources originelles. L'Haïtien Gérard Chenet, cité par Chevrier exprimera cet état dans un sentiment d'occupation/invalidation linguistique :

Dans mon enfance où je m'épanouissais dans la connaissance, grâce à la langue maternelle, l'intrusion du français m'est apparue comme la présence d'un gendarme²⁰.

Il est évident que les écrivains africains commencent déjà à se sentir à l'étroit dans une langue française incapable de libérer efficacement leur pensée profonde. Conscient de ce malaise qui trouble viscéralement son identité violée, le poète haïtien Léon Laleau, cité par Ngal écrira :

Ce cœur obsédant, qui ne correspond
Pas à mon langage ou à mes coutumes,
Et sur lequel mordent, comme un crampon,
Ses sentiments d'emprunt et des coutumes
D'Europe, sentez-vous cette souffrance
Et ce désespoir à nul autre égal
D'appriivoiser, avec des mots de France
Ce cœur qui m'est venu du Sénégal ?²¹

Fort de cette déroute intérieure, l'écrivain va aller à la conquête de lui-même comme l'avait souhaité les chantres de la négritude. Ne pouvant ni publier dans son continent, ni écrire en langues locales, il va néanmoins tirer sa revanche sur la langue française sur laquelle il appliquera sa propre volonté et sa définition de la littérature. Celle-ci, difficilement classifiable aux canons occidentaux, va explorer les domaines de l'inattendu et de l'oralité. Nous entendons par ce concept, le fait que le texte francophone africain puisse mêler dans sa constitution, les ressources de l'oral et de l'écrit dans l'émergence d'une poétique postcoloniale.

Juste après les indépendances, Kourouma va inaugurer cette tendance nouvelle de la littérature noire basée sur l'abâtardisation/désacralisation du

²⁰ CHEVRIER, Jacques. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²¹ NGAL, Georges. *Création et rupture en littérature africaine*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 1995, p. 45.

français sur l'autel de l'appropriation et de l'indigénisation/endogénéisation²². Le colonisé va ainsi renier sa filiation normative à la métropole jusque-là en vigueur. Sa déconnexion du courant paternaliste l'oblige à la rupture, comme le signale Ngal:

L'histoire des textes littéraires négro-africains enregistre des ruptures successives symbolisées par des mutations de plusieurs ordres que semblent attester les points de repère dont le premier est sans conteste constitué par l'émergence de la négritude.²³

C'est ainsi que sur le plan du fond, le roman africain va se donner une vocation contestataire de l'hégémonie occidentale sur le destin du continent. Sur le plan de la forme qui nous intéresse dans cet article, on observera des décalages voulus sur la pratique de l'expression du français. Le devoir de rupture s'impose ainsi dans l'agenda scripturaire des écrivains noirs. La première preuve de désobéissance à la norme veut le renversement non seulement de celle-ci, mais aussi à doter à l'écrivain noir le pouvoir de décider de son style.

Nouvellement sortis de la désillusion des pseudo-indépendances obtenues, les écrivains vont conduire une entreprise scripturaire de la rupture. Il ne faut plus se soumettre aux normes commandées de l'extérieur. La voix intérieure a été abondamment interdite de parole et de manifestation. Elle va désormais jaillir avec cette volonté de dire la pertinence du contexte africain avec une langue qui en témoigne la couleur/spécificité. Le français va ainsi aller à la rencontre avec les images/rythmes du monde et des langues locales. Yambo Ouologuem (*Le Devoir de violence*) et Ahmadou Kourouma (*Les Soleils des indépendances*) vont tracer le sillage²⁴ de cette expérience du dévoiement de la norme exogène par les normes endogènes non seulement majoritaires, mais aussi conformes, autant qu'elles essaient d'y parvenir, à la pensée profonde de l'Africain.

Le français se créolise ainsi, au sens que lui donnait Glissant, c'est-à-dire qu'il construit l'Inattendu. Plus rien ne contraint l'écrivain africain à se

²² Il justifie, en 1970, ses choix d'écriture dans *Les Soleils des indépendances* de cette manière : « *Qu'avais-je donc fait ? Simplement donné libre cours à mon tempérament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s'y meuve. J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français en cassant le français pour trouver et restituer le rythme africain. [...] J'ai pensé en malinké et écrit en français.* » (cité par M. Badday, in *Afrique littéraire et artistique*, n°10, 1970, p.7.

²³ NGAL, Georges. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴ Ce sillage sera suivi par d'autres auteurs tels que Sony Labou Tansi, Patrice Nganang, etc.

conformer ou à reproduire. Son émancipation est telle que seule sa propre imagination se constitue en guide. Tout est maintenant possible. Son esthétique oscille entre le fragmentaire, l'arithmétique, la tropicalisation du français où l'oralité est en compétition avec l'écriture. Le vaste chantier d'appropriation de la réalité africaine et des langues de ce continent fera apparaître celles-ci dans les livres. Ainsi, des mots, expressions et phrases entières rentreront en conflit de positionnement avec le français dans une littérature qui postule pourtant s'élaborer en « français ». En fait, ce sont des « littératures de traduction » dont il est question ici. Les auteurs cherchent à écrire leurs univers socioculturels d'origine avec les mots de la langue française. Kourouma l'atteste bien en ces termes :

Mon premier problème d'écrivain, d'écrivain francophone, est donc d'abord une question de culture... je me bats dans une grande confusion de termes avec les expressions françaises que j'utilise.²⁵

Cela justifie donc sa raison de malinkiser le français pour tenter de libérer sa parole profonde. C'est un acte de courage scripturaire qui vient rompre avec les réflexes assimilationnistes. Kourouma opte pour un public africain qu'il faut désormais satisfaire, plutôt que celui européen qui, pour peu qu'il est mis au centre de l'écriture, aliène à coup sûr l'auteur noir :

Ce livre s'adresse à l'Africain. Je l'ai pensé en malinké et écrit en français prenant une liberté que j'estime naturelle avec la langue classique [...] Qu'avais-je donc fait ? Simplement donné libre cours à mon tempérament en distordant une langue classique trop rigide pour que ma pensée s'y meuve. J'ai donc traduit le malinké en français, en cassant le français pour retrouver et restituer le rythme africain.²⁶

Cette liberté dans le ton et la démarche caractérise aussi Labou Tansi pour qui écrire chercherait à ramener au strict minimum la distance qui sépare l'écrivain dit francophone de son public africain à travers le concept de tropicalisation. Pour lui, cité par Chevrier, « [j]e fais éclater les mots pour exprimer ma tropicalité : écrire mon livre me demandait d'inventer un lexique des noms capables par leur sonorité de rendre la situation tropicale »²⁷.

Une nouvelle norme est ainsi imposée à l'ancienne norme centrale qu'était le français métropolitain. Gassama la justifie de cette manière :

²⁵ KOUROUMA, Ahmadou. « Écrire en français, penser dans sa langue maternelle » in *Études Françaises*, vol. XXXIII, n° 1, 1997, p.115.

²⁶ Cité par CHEVRIER, Jacques, *Ibid.*, p.125.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.237.

c'est précisément les mots de France qui doivent se plier, se soumettre, pour épouser les contours parfois si sinueux, si complexes de nos pensées ; il faut bien qu'ils acceptent cette obéissance aveugle, qu'ils admettent des déviations, puisqu'ils ont pris le risque de traverser les mers ; il faut bien qu'ils acceptent de s'acclimater.²⁸

Les rôles sont ainsi inversés. Ce n'est plus l'écrivain noir qui se plie à la norme exogène ; c'est celle-ci désormais qui se plie à la volonté libérée de la norme locale. D'ailleurs, on se souvient bien de ce propos retentissant qu'avait émis Tchicaya U Tam'si en 1976 et repris par Soubias pour encourager le phénomène d'appropriation : « il y a que la langue française me colonise et que je la colonise à mon tour, ce qui, finalement, donne bien une autre langue.²⁹ »

b) Pour une libération scripturaire de l'écrivain noir (conclusion)

L'un des principaux signes de l'indépendance littéraire de l'Afrique est incontestablement l'affranchissement des recettes proposées par la langue et les canons des classiques français. L'on ne s'en inspire plus. La rue et la société africaines suffisent pour servir de lieux de composition et de création littéraires. Le terroir n'est donc plus ignoré ou négligé. Il rentre désormais sur la scène de construction de l'identité nationale et littéraire africaines. La source d'inspiration n'est plus loin cherchée ; elle est disponible sur le plan local et découle de l'imaginaire singulier de l'écrivain qui en exploite les ressources dans le langage qu'il lui convient de convoquer.

Parler de décolonisation serait donc chercher à donner une existence centrale au contexte et au génie africain à travers une littérature d'abord affranchie de la dictature que lui impose les milieux d'édition et de reconnaissance occidentaux, mais aussi, se doter de ses propres arcanes de production en masse de la pensée locale. Pour cela, l'industrie du livre africain doit se doter de ses propres maisons d'édition qui vulgariseront les publications en langues locales, ensuite, les prix littéraires visant à rassurer les écrivains noirs sur leurs talents, enfin de grands marchés de traduction en langues européennes des livres authentiquement africains. Il va sans dire que tout ceci doit s'accompagner d'une politique du livre non seulement qui le rende disponible partout, mais aussi est aidée d'une éducation scolaire et académique mettant au rang de langues officielles et d'enseignements, les

²⁸ GASSAMA, Makhily. *La Langue d'Ahmadou Kourouma ou le français sous le soleil d'Afrique*. Paris : ACCT/Karthala, 1995, p.115.

²⁹ SOUBIAS, Pierre. « Entre langue de l'autre et langue à soi », in *Francophonie et identités culturelles* (dir. Ch. Aubert). Paris : Karthala, 1999, p. 131.

richesses socioculturelles et linguistiques que compte ce continent. Ce n'est qu'ainsi que l'Afrique s'affranchira pour se constituer en force de proposition conséquente au commerce de la pensée dans le monde.

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CHAPTER 7

La décolonisation de Maurice : entre changement et aporie

Abstract: The 12th of March 1968 marks a new beginning for Mauritius, as the island becomes independent after being consecutively Dutch, French and British colonies. Decolonization left Mauritius with a melting pot of ethnic groups, cultures and languages that come from Africa, China, India and Europe, all of which have been feeding the island in terms of slaves, immigrants as well as colonizers. Hardly can it be said that the independence of Mauritius was obtained smoothly. Major militants of the island struggled for the upliftment of Mauritians' well-being and human dignity. Those who had the vision of an independent nation were Ramgoolam, Anquetil and Pandit Sahadeo, among others. There were also the intellectuals like Marcel Cabon (*Namasté, Brasse-au-vent*) and Loys Masson (*L'Étoile et la Clef*) who did not refrain from the promotion of the manifesto of "cutting the cord" with the British Empire. Their writings speak lengths about it. More recently, *Le Silence des Chagos* (Shenaz Patel) brings to light the trauma caused when the inhabitants of Diego Garcia were forced to exile in 1965, after the UK excised the Chagos Archipelago (with Diego Garcia being the main island) from Mauritian territory. The UK leased the atoll to US to accomplish the UK/US mutual defense strategy.

Postcolonial literature seeks objectivity, and neither tries to force readers to sympathize with nor to feel resentment for any expression of radical victimization. It seeks to unravel the pain of the mass through a delicate combination of thoughts and words. The Mauritian postcolonial francophone literature lays emphasis on what is called 'unevenness' like crossbreeding (*À l'Autre bout de moi* by Humbert), while exploring the global literature as in *Le Chemin des poussières* by Gordon-Gentil and *Le Dernier frère* by Nathacha Appanah.

We are now in 2013. Does this metamorphic genre still show the trauma caused by colonization? Is self-governance, after decolonization, sufficient for the construction of the identity of a nation? If sovereignty fails to do so, what then does the aporetic metamorphosis conceal? Are we still negotiating nationalism behind the mask of a recuperative discourse of empowering effects and attitudes?

Résumé : Le 12 mars 1968 semble marquer un tournant définitif pour Maurice; l'île accède à son statut d'indépendance de la colonisation britannique qui, elle-même, est précédée par une colonisation hollandaise, puis française. Le peuple mauricien est un brassage d'ethnies et de cultures africaine, indienne, chinoise et

européenne, issues d'esclaves, d'immigrants ou de colons. Si l'indépendance du pays est acquise non sans heurts, il faut saluer le rôle majeur qu'ont joué les activistes du pays dans cette lutte pour l'indépendance (Ramgoolam, Anquetil, Pandit Sahadeo). Sans compter les intellectuels dont la plume littéraire devient une assignation à la revendication. En effet, si Loys Masson (*L'Étoile et la clef*) ou Marcel Cabon (*Namasté, Brasse-au-vent*) sont les chantres de l'indépendance, d'autres - comme Marcelle Lagesse (*La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube*) - démontrent une stratégie d'écriture qui encense la colonisation. Sans doute cela nous informe-t-il que le transfert de pouvoir est mal vu par certaines couches de la population, dont celles qui voient cela sonner le glas de leurs prérogatives, quand le pouvoir sera majoritairement entre les mains de la communauté hindoue.

L'obtention de l'indépendance, engendrerait-elle pour autant une métamorphose de l'horizon littéraire francophone mauricien ? Alors que ceux qui se sentent lésés s'exilent, l'écriture leur sert d'exutoire et, au mieux, d'arme de combat. Humbert (*À l'autre bout de moi*), par exemple, aborde l'épineux problème de l'identité des métis et de leur acceptation dans une société où le métis a souvent le traitement d'un subalterne. Plus près dans le temps, Patel (*Le Silence des Chagos*) dénonce la spoliation des Chagossiens de Diego Garcia depuis 1965 par les Anglais. Les Chagossiens, exilés de force à Maurice, pleurent de ne pouvoir regagner leur terre alors que Les Chagos servent aujourd'hui de base militaire américaine notamment pour les expéditions en Afghanistan, entre autres.

En somme, l'écriture postcoloniale nous convie à l'objectivité afin de ne pas tomber dans la complaisance ou la radicalisation de la victimisation. Il y a comme une discontinuité féconde de cette écriture qui privilégie les déséquilibres (métissage), explore les nouvelles avenues en ligne avec une littérature dite « globale » (*Le Chemin des poussières* de Gordon-Gentil et *Le Dernier frère* d'Appanah). Mais, pour autant, l'écriture de la décolonisation, est-elle complètement défaite de certaines complexités qui lui sont existentielles ? L'indépendance, n'a-t-elle pas dans son sillage laissé une aporie liée à une nouvelle acquisition de l'identité ? L'écriture postcoloniale qui semble s'affirmer, n'autorise-t-elle pas à porter un autre discours à l'interrogation collective des sujets souverains ?

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Mais, pour autant, l'écriture de la décolonisation, est-elle complètement défaite de certaines complexités qui lui sont existentielles ? L'indépendance, n'a-t-elle pas dans son sillage laissé une aporie liée à une nouvelle acquisition de l'identité ? L'écriture postcoloniale qui semble s'affirmer, n'autorise-t-elle pas à porter un autre discours à l'interrogation collective des sujets souverains ?

Nous proposons donc d'articuler notre analyse selon trois axes principaux. Dans un premier temps, nous aborderons une perspective historique afin de mieux en cerner les enjeux. La première partie intitulée « Île, colonisation et littérature : pour une perspective historique » abordera l'aspect historique de Maurice afin de mieux comprendre la littérature qui en a émergé. La deuxième partie intitulée « De l'appel au changement au processus de décolonisation », mettra en évidence le texte de Loys Masson, roman-phare de la période pré-indépendance de l'île. La troisième et dernière partie ou « Aporie liée à la décolonisation de Maurice » alliera histoire et le texte de Shenaz Patel afin de mieux cerner l'émouvante histoire entourant l'Archipel des Chagos.

Île, colonisation et littérature : pour une perspective historique.

Nous ne pourrions faire état de la décolonisation de Maurice en faisant abstraction de la période coloniale, elle-même instrumentale à l'émergence d'une littérature dite 'engagée'. En effet, l'île Maurice, découverte par le Portugais en 1498 - qui la baptisent *Cirne* -, connaîtra successivement la colonisation hollandaise, française puis britannique. Si les Hollandais qui s'installent dans l'île en 1638 - l'appelant *Mauritius* - ne peuvent maîtriser l'île car les forêts indigènes (notamment les ébéniers) furent saccagées alors que « [l']établissement principal formé au Grand-Port autour d'un fort nommé Fort Frederik Hendrik ne développa guère »¹, ils trouveront leur salut au Cap, « bien mieux situé »². Par ailleurs, la destruction occasionnée par les rats qui dévoraient leurs récoltes, ainsi que leur incapacité, de manière générale, à gouverner le pays, les feront abandonner l'île. Alors que les Français prennent possession de Bourbon l'année où les Hollandais colonisent Maurice, ce sera le 20 septembre 1715 que l'île est rebaptisée *Mauritius*. *Mauritius* devient officiellement colonie française et elle est renommée *Isle de France*³. Le développement de Maurice connaît alors une ascension fulgurante, grâce au génie de Bertrand-François Mahé de Labourdonnais, note Nagapen. Effectivement, Mahé de Labourdonnais :

[...] conçut pour la ville un plan d'urbanisme, selon un tracé régulateur quadrillé qui a régi le percement des rues perpendiculaires [...] fit construire [...] des casernes, des magasins, un moulin à farine, un moulin à poudre, des salines au Caudan, et des aqueducs pour alimenter le chef-lieu en eau potable. En 1737, à l'emplacement de l'actuelle *Mauritius Commercial Bank*, il fit ériger la première église Saint-Louis⁴.

Il organise également la traite négrière et en mars 1685, Louis XIV promulgue l'édit - le Code Noir - afin de réglementer l'esclavage aux Antilles. Le départ à la retraite de Mahé de Labourdonnais ainsi que ses successeurs ne permettra pas à la France de maintenir sa supériorité dans l'île. Le 3 décembre 1810, la capitulation est signée et l'île devient

¹ TOUSSAINT, Auguste. *Histoire de l'île Maurice*. Paris : PUF, 1974. Coll. « que sais-je ? », p. 26.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³ NAGAPEN, Amédée. *Histoire de la Colonie, Isle de France - Île Maurice, 1721 -1968*. Port-Louis : Diocèse de Port-Louis, 1996, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

officiellement colonisation britannique, bien que les colons français « conserveront leur religion, leurs lois, leurs coutumes »⁵.

Il est intéressant de noter le regard porté à la colonisation britannique car l'histoire de l'île prendra une tournure tout à fait particulière durant cette période spécifique. Tandis que 1835 marque l'Abolition de l'Esclavage, « l'émancipation de 66 613 esclaves fut proclamée au sein d'une population globale de 101 469 habitants »⁶. Alors que l'île est en pleine expansion sucrière et afin de maintenir le prix préférentiel de sucre, l'Angleterre décide d'avoir recours à une main-d'œuvre étrangère bon marché et servile à savoir les immigrants indiens. Si, dans un premier temps, on justifie l'introduction des travailleurs étrangers à cause du « [...] penchant naturel des individus, qui passent de la condition servile à l'état de liberté, pour la paresse et l'oisiveté [...] »⁷, le Rapport de 1845 révèle, pourtant, d'autres raisons légitimes pour avoir recours à une main-d'œuvre importée :

Le Comité est convaincu qu'il ne faut pas évaluer les besoins de la colonie par le nombre de travailleurs qu'elle avait en 1832. Les ressources de l'île pour la production du sucre ne faisaient que commencer à se développer à cette époque. La moyenne des coupes des 5 années, de 1820 à 1824, étaient seulement de 22 millions de livres et celles des cinq dernières suivantes de 42 millions de livres seulement. En 1830, la coupe a atteint 68 millions et en 1832, 73 millions. À cette époque, l'île n'avait d'autres travailleurs que les esclaves qui s'y trouvaient alors et le nombre des machines applicables à la fabrication du sucre y était aussi limité. Mais un grand cheminement s'est opéré depuis ; les ressources productives de l'île sont mieux connues ; ses produits ont trouvé un meilleur accueil sur le marché de la métropole et ses moyens de rivaliser avec les produits des autres pays se sont accrus... Les procédés de fabrication se sont grandement améliorés. Le nombre de machines a beaucoup augmenté. Des capitaux anglais considérables ont été introduits... Les propriétés ont changé de mains... Il faut pour cela augmenter le nombre de laboureurs...⁸

⁵ MOUTOU, Benjamin. *L'île Maurice, vingt-cinq leçons d'histoire (1598-1998)*. Riche-Terre: Alfran Co. Ltd, 1998, p. 54.

⁶ NAGAPEN, Amédée. *op. cit.*, p. 69. Auguste Toussaint note, pour sa part, 76 774 d'esclaves émancipés. In Toussaint, Auguste. *Port-Louis – Deux Siècles d'Histoire*. Port-Louis : La typographie Moderne, 1936, p. 313.

⁷ Ordonnance du 3 octobre 1835 (jamais promulguée (!)).

⁸ NAGAPEN, Amédée. « À propos de *La fin d'une légende : en marge de l'abolition de l'esclavage et engagisme indien* par Rivalentz Quenette » in *Abolition de l'esclavage et « engagisme indien »*. Port-Louis : IPL, La Vie Catholique, 1ère édition, 1979, p. 4.

Les *liberated Africans* allèrent, pour leur part, « peupler les dépendances, les Seychelles, Rodrigues, les Chagos ou même Agalega - d'où la similarité ethnique d'une large tranche de ces communautés insulaires »⁹.

Si, selon Hugh Tinker, les premiers engagés arrivèrent à Maurice en 1829¹⁰, il ne s'agit là que d'un début de la grande traversée du *Kala Pani* (mer noire) pour ces nombreux immigrants. Dans son roman intitulé *Les rochers de Poudre d'Or*, Nathacha Appanah décrit, avec minutie, les conditions dans lesquelles ont voyagé les immigrants, leur condition de vie en Inde et ainsi qu'à Maurice : « 28 avril. Première nuit des Indiens dans leur cale »¹¹, « [i]ls étaient les uns sur les autres, en grappes. La cale sentait le corps rance, la pisserie, la crasse. J'ai pensé que si la misère devait avoir une odeur, ce serait celle-là »¹². Le voyage des immigrants ne diffère pas de celui de la période de la traite négrière avec des conditions sanitaires choquantes à bord des navires à marchandise et des punitions corporelles pénibles une fois sur les propriétés sucrières¹³.

Cependant, lorsque sonne le glas de l'esclavage et que la population civile s'émancipe, l'histoire de l'île Maurice prend une tout autre tournure. Deux hommes - Adrien d'Épinay et John Jeremie - aux idéologies contraires, vont s'opposer. Si le premier est fondamentalement en faveur du maintien du système esclavagiste, le second, agent de la *Société Anti-Esclavagiste*, s'y oppose farouchement. John Jeremie,

envoyé en 1832 pour tenter d'abolir l'esclavage sans indemnité, est très mal reçu et doit quitter l'île peu après. Il retourne dans l'île en 1834 avec un fort contingent de troupes mais ne réussit pas mieux. L'opposition s'atténua cependant lorsque l'Angleterre accepte de payer une indemnité aux propriétaires d'esclaves. Les deux millions de livres sterling poussent la spéculation sur le sucre et en stimulent la production¹⁴.

De l'appel du changement au processus de décolonisation.

Comme le précise l'écrivain Abhimanyu Unnuth dans *Sueurs de sang*, les difficultés rencontrées lors de la période de l'esclavage, suivies de celles

⁹ NAGAPEN, Amédée. *Histoire de la Colonie, Isle de France- Île Maurice, 1721 -1968*. Port-louis : Diocèse de Port-louis, 1996, p. 71.

¹⁰ TINKER, Hugh. *A New System of Slavery*. London: Hansib Publishing Limited, 2nd edition, 1993, p. 63.

¹¹ APPANAH, Nathacha. *Les Rochers de Poudre d'Or*. Paris : Gallimard, 2003, p. 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³ SELVON, Sydney. *A new comprehensive history of Mauritius: from the beginning to 2001*. Port-Louis: Mauritius Printing Specialists Ltd, 2005, p. 226.

¹⁴ NAGAPEN, Amédée. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

des immigrants indiens dans l'île poussent la communauté à se regrouper afin de se défendre :

Après combien d'atrocités, de châtiments et de mauvais traitements ces trois arpents étaient-ils devenus la propriété des laboureurs ? L'Histoire elle-même les leur avait accordés. On n'allait pas les rendre si facilement. À l'époque, ils n'avaient été qu'une poignée d'hommes à s'aventurer jusqu'ici. Seuls, ils avaient coupé les arbres, retourné la terre, ôté les pierres une à une, coupé les ronces et les lianes, et d'une jungle avaient fait de beaux champs fertiles¹⁵.

Loys Masson, célèbre écrivain mauricien, publie *L'Étoile et la Clef* où il raconte le combat qu'ont mené les différentes communautés venues habiter l'île afin de revendiquer leurs droits au syndicalisme.

Il y a plusieurs similarités entre ce roman de l'avant-indépendance et l'Histoire de Maurice elle-même. *L'Étoile et la Clef* est, comme son titre l'indique, un roman de l'indépendance parce qu'il reprend, en partie, la devise inscrite sur les armoiries de l'île « L'Étoile et la Clef de l'Océan Indien » (traduite du latin « *Stella Clavisque Maris Indici* »). Mais aussi parce qu'il interpelle, avec véhémence, l'appel au changement. Alors que l'étoile symbolise l'espoir, « parce qu'elle se disait que les gens la voyaient et c'était un grand soleil de pauvre »¹⁶, la clé sera le symbole du Parti Travailleuse. Le texte est imprégné de ce cadre particulier - la pauvreté - qui semble anéantir l'homme et le réduire à une solitude certaine, surtout lorsque l'on est entouré de riches : « Il y avait la sensation de solitude, mais aussitôt une autre, la sensation d'être entouré d'invisibles amis, il y avait la sensation d'être pauvre, dénué de tout, à côté la préséance d'une richesse infinie »¹⁷.

Dans le texte, Henri Barnèse, le protagoniste principal d'origine blanche, sera le dirigeant du Parti Progressiste alors que dans la réalité, l'histoire fait état du véritable creuset où se retrouvent les grandes figures de l'Histoire dont Curé, Ramgoolam et Anquetil (parmi d'autres). Cela étant, la méfiance, dans le texte, se fait jour lorsque l'on doit se regrouper afin de combattre l'ennemi suprême à savoir l'oligarchie blanche. Coulombe, un métis qui épouse une bordelaise, nourrit une « haine du blanc »¹⁸, lorsque sa fille, Jeanne, « mise en pension chez les sœurs de Notre-Dame-de-Lorette...

¹⁵ UNNUTH, Abhimanyu. *Sueurs de sang*. Paris : Stock (pour la version française), 2001, p. 253.

¹⁶ MASSON, Loys. *L'Étoile et la Clef*. Paris : Gallimard, 1945, p. 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

se [voit] méprisée, tenue à l'écart par ses camarades blanches »¹⁹. Coulombe « [descend] dans l'arène à cause [de cette] déception, non de plein gré en quelque sorte »²⁰. Poppingol, quitte le parti, en refusant catégoriquement qu'un Blanc fasse partie de l'équipe - car « [dès] leur naissance ils [les Blancs] sucent la hargne, la volonté de domination »²¹ - alors que Ramdour rêve de l'absolu soit l'harmonie entre les différentes ethnies, la « vaste confraternité des blancs et des Indiens »²². Il va même jusqu'à nourrir une admiration irraisonnée pour les Blancs. D'ailleurs, « [o]n l'appelait Ramdour-le-Blanc²³ ». Ce sobriquet est plus qu'un simple jeu de mots : « Dans le Parti Progressiste, Ramdour était seul de son espèce : il aimait les Blancs »²⁴. Quant à Barnèse, il n'hésite pas à sacrifier Simone, la Blanche, pour Totie Mallefille, la Mulâtresse car, « sa chair [le] ramènera toujours aux blancs »²⁵ alors qu'intérieurement, il lutte contre toute forme de parti pris.

En 1936, le Front Populaire est au pouvoir en France alors qu'à Maurice dans les années 1930, un nouveau souffle se fait sentir dans la sphère politique. Matelot, un des personnages, précise, à ce sujet : « Aujourd'hui 16 janvier, les journaliers ont décidé de former des syndicats. Ils demandent à leur administrateur de les appuyer auprès du gouvernement »²⁶, ce qui attise la colère de son chef qui le gifle. En effet, en 1938, *The Individual Association Ordinance* autorise la création d'associations industrielles, ce qui donnera lieu, plus tard, aux *Trade Unions*. 1938 sera charnière car, d'une part, le 1^{er} mai, le Dr Maurice Curé, leader du *Parti Travailleiste* créé en 1936, organise le premier meeting pour marquer la fête du Travail alors que, d'autre part, le 1^{er} septembre, Emmanuel Anquetil, syndicaliste, paralyse le port avec les débardeurs, en faisant une grève générale. Le 5 septembre de la même année, les laboureurs de la sucrerie Trianon font grève et brûlent les champs de canne. La guerre est ouverte : les problèmes de gages, de droit au syndicalisme et surtout les problèmes liés au respect de l'homme sont les trois facteurs principaux qui expriment le mécontentement de la population mauricienne²⁷.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 266.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

²⁷ NAGAPEN, *op. cit.*, pp 118-120. Ces insurrections coïncident avec l'administration de Sir Bede Clifford. Le jeune syndicaliste Hurryparsad Ramnarain aussi bien que son cousin,

Néanmoins, si les luttes intestines se font jour chez Masson, il n'empêche que ce roman, à la thématique politique, fait scandale. Comme nous l'indique le livre *Loys Masson, entre Nord et sud : Les terres d'écriture*: « Ce roman qui marque l'introduction du roman "moderne" à Maurice, fut qualifié de scandaleux parce que l'auteur issu lui-même d'une famille blanche, osa décrire les blancs mauriciens d'un point de vue dépréciateur »²⁸. En effet, le roman n'est pas bien accueilli à sa sortie et, dans un entretien, Hervé Masson, son frère, dira :

Ce livre dont un écrivain disait qu'il nous ferait un tort immense [...] Ce « nous » m'a beaucoup amusé. Où avait-il pris, ce monsieur, que je pouvais ne pas être socialiste, que je pouvais ne pas souscrire à ce que Loys a écrit - si magnifiquement - dans ce livre, contre le conservatisme mauricien et le préjugé de couleur ? *L'Étoile et la Clef* est, peut-être un roman raté avec des parties d'une réelle beauté, mais pour les pauvres de ce pays, c'est un document sans prix²⁹.

Nous ressentons également que le métissage fait son entrée dans l'analyse littéraire mauricienne francophone. D'abord, et d'une manière symbolique, lorsque Barnèse repousse Simone la Blanche pour la mulâtresse Totie. Mais aussi à travers l'élan de solidarité qui s'installe bien que subrepticement entre les personnages des différentes communautés afin de mener à bien leur entreprise pour le droit de former des syndicats. Il serait intéressant de faire une comparaison avec le roman de Marcelle Lagesse, *La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube*. En effet, le roman de Lagesse diffère sensiblement de celui de Loys Masson dans son approche. Même si tous deux s'engagent dans une approche historico-littéraire et qu'ils abordent, de manière précise, des événements qui se sont déroulés, certes, il y a une nuance à faire ressortir. *La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube* raconte l'histoire d'un Français, Nicolas Kerubec, qui vient à l'île Maurice, au décès de son cousin, François. Il devient propriétaire de ses biens dont « [u]ne

Sharma Jugdambi, prètent main forte au mouvement contestataire. Cependant, le 23 septembre 1942, Bell-Vue-Harel connaît de nouvelles confrontations. L'officier A.J de Fondaumière est blessé alors que trois manifestants y perdent vie dont Anjalay Coopen, femme laboureur, enceinte.

Les années d'après-guerre qui voient successivement une évolution politique caractérisée par la crainte et surtout les clivages ethniques, le suffrage universel de 1959 mais surtout la demande pour une plus large autonomie politique. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, à la tête du Parti Travailleurs, réussit à obtenir l'indépendance le 12 mars 1968.

²⁸ BOOLELL, Shakuntala, CUNNIAH Bruno Clifford et LOUIS, Norbert. *Loys Masson, entre Nord et sud : Les terres d'écriture*. Vacoas : Éditions Le Printemps, juin 1997, p. 37.

²⁹ CABON, Marcel. "À Paris, Hervé Masson", entretien avec Hervé Masson. In *Le Mauricien*, mardi 2 mai, 1950, p. 1.

grande maison à étage, comme on en construisait autrefois quand on y mettait cette sorte d'amour que met votre parent à faire prospérer mon domaine, [...] avait écrit le notaire, Me. Leperet »³⁰. Ce sera à bord de *La Minerve* qu'il arrivera au Grand-Port, le 22 avril 1833.

Néanmoins, Marcelle Lagesse aborde l'esclavage de manière particulière dans son texte. Nous constatons qu'elle puise beaucoup de la réalité historique de l'époque. Par exemple, le roman aborde un aspect historique important lorsque John Jeremie, Procureur-Général, « ... avait eu la charge d'appliquer l'ordre voté en novembre 1831, ordre décidant de l'émancipation des esclaves sans indemnités »³¹ et comment, par suite, le Colonel Draper « avait voté le renvoi de Jeremie » alors qu'Adrien d'Épinay « avait mené une violente campagne de presse contre Jeremie »³². Marcelle Lagesse fait aussi mention de l'*Inertie*, soit les 40 jours de grève provoquée par le Comité colonial, au port, dans le judiciaire et dans les écoles³³. Même si le décor paraît enchanteur avec accent mis sur l'apport de Mahé de Labourdonnais, Lagesse, comme par une nostalgie du passé 'glorieux' des colons dans l'île, a pour personnages principaux des Français (Nicolas Kerubec, Isabelle Ghast, Monsieur et Madame Boucard...). Aussi, cette préférence pour l'administration coloniale se fait davantage ressentir lorsqu'elle semble présenter de manière sensiblement positive l'esclavage (comme pour rappeler le mythe de *Paul et Virginie* où les esclaves vivaient en parfaite harmonie avec leur maître). En effet, Marcelle Lagesse semble articuler son écriture autour d'une vision strictement personnelle et non représentative de la réalité même si, au premier abord, les interventions historiques donneraient l'impression d'une absolue vérité. Nous pouvons répertorier un incident majeur – soit lorsque Mme Ghast décide de fouetter l'esclave L'introuvable – alors que cette punition sera évitée de justesse après l'intervention de Nicolas Kerubec lui-même. Ce dernier nous démontre également qu'il est un « bon colon » qui achète « une montre et une chaîne argent » et permet aux femmes d'acheter du « tissu des vêtements que l'on distribue aux esclaves deux fois l'an »³⁴. Pourtant, plus tôt dans le texte, il est dit : « Les esclaves étaient de véritables sauvages... il fallait les apprivoiser »³⁵. Voilà en quoi Marcelle Lagesse, sous prétexte

³⁰ LAGESSE, Marcelle. *La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube*. Rose-Hill : Éditions de l'Océan Indien, 1995 (8ème édition), p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

d'édifier l'image du bon colon, présente un tableau bien moins obscur que n'a été la réalité. Comme le précise Vicram Ramharai :

La vision à l'eau de rose de l'esclavage décrite par certains romanciers blancs s'estompe et à la place émergent les images d'un maître blanc cruel et machiavélique, exerçant le fouet au moindre manquement de l'esclave. Marcel Cabon montre un autre aspect de l'esclavage, un aspect que Marcelle Lagesse occulte volontairement dans *La diligence s'éloigne à l'aube* (1955). Le roman de Marcel Cabon se situe à l'opposé de celui de Marcelle Lagesse. Le temps a changé et il faut que certains romanciers évoluent dans leur mentalité. Toute tentative de montrer que les colons blancs étaient bons envers leurs esclaves traduit davantage une mentalité colonialiste et raciste³⁶.

Tandis que l'île Maurice vit des soubresauts politiques et sociaux majeurs qui vont lui permettre plus loin d'accéder à son indépendance, certaines personnes, par nostalgie du passé colonial et surtout, par peur de voir le pouvoir basculer entre les mains des hindous, stagnent dans le passé et encensent le pouvoir colonial sans réserve.

Aporie liée à la décolonisation de l'île Maurice.

Alors que les différents auteurs de la littérature mauricienne sont pro-indépendantistes ou plus subtilement anti-indépendantistes, reste une autre catégorie d'écrivains qui s'exile au lendemain de l'indépendance. Marie-Thérèse Humbert figure parmi ces écrivains. Son roman, *À l'autre bout de moi*, aborde l'épineux problème des clivages ethniques, accentué lorsque le personnage issu de la communauté créole, Nadège Morin, tombe enceinte d'un Indo-mauricien. Une étude approfondie de ce texte intitulé « *L'exil de Marie-Thérèse Humbert : entre mort et renaissance* », effectuée par moi-même est disponible en ligne³⁷.

Avec l'accession de l'île à son indépendance, le 12 mars 1968, la décolonisation a graduellement fait opérer des changements au sein de la communauté locale.

Toutefois, l'île Maurice a dû payer son indépendance au prix fort. Ce sera sur une tonalité déchirante que Shenaz Patel articule le début de son

³⁶ RAMHARAI, Vicram. « La littérature des années soixante à Maurice : reflet ou refus d'une société en mutation » in *Revue des Mascareignes – Les années soixante dans le sud-ouest d'Océan Indien*, N° 4, 2002, p. 112.

³⁷ DOSORUTH, Sonia. « L'exil de Marie-Thérèse Humbert : entre mort et renaissance ». *Les écrits des femmes de l'Océan Indien et des Caraïbes – Les Cahiers du G.R.E.L.C.E.F.* [En ligne] (numéro 3, mai 2012, p. 161-174) : http://www.uwo.ca/french/grelcef/cgrelcef_03_numero.htm (Page consultée le 30 octobre 2012).

roman *Le silence des Chagos* : « Chagos. Diego. Déportation. Exil forcé »³⁸. D'ailleurs, l'épigraphe de son roman confirme le développement de cette idée : « À Charlesia, Raymonde et Désiré, qui m'ont confié leur histoire. À tous les Chagossiens, déracinés et déportés de leur île, au profit du "monde libre" ... »³⁹.

Pour mieux comprendre ce qui sous-tend cette œuvre, il convient d'appréhender les événements qui ont précédé l'accession de Maurice à son indépendance⁴⁰.

L'archipel des Chagos est composé de 7 atolls qui comprennent plus de 60 îles. Le plus grand des atolls est Diego Garcia. L'archipel des Chagos fut cédé par la France aux Anglais par le Traité de Paris de 1814 et jusqu'en 1965, cet archipel fut gouverné comme faisant partie de la colonie de l'île Maurice⁴¹. En 1793, 22 esclaves de Maurice, très probablement d'origine malgache et africaine, ainsi que Pierre Marie Le Normand, créent une plantation sur Diego Garcia. Le 1964, le gouverneur britannique à Maurice conseille à sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, au sujet d'une possible excision de l'Archipel. Un memo du gouverneur conseille aux Ministres d'approuver les recommandations américano-britanniques. Ramgoolam préfère cependant un bail à long terme et le droit de pouvoir bénéficier des minéraux qui pourraient être découverts⁴². En juillet 1965, l'Angleterre fait parvenir sa proposition pour le détachement de l'Archipel des Chagos de Maurice⁴³.

Du 7 au 24 septembre 1965, le *Mauritius Constitutional Conference* a lieu à Lancaster House à Londres. La conférence est représentée par les délégués des partis politiques majeurs de Maurice dont le *Parti Travailleurs*, le *Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate*, l'*Independent Forward Bloc* et le

³⁸ PATEL, Shenaz. *Le silence des Chagos*. Paris : Éditions de l'Olivier, 2005, p. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Dans son mémoire de Maîtrise de Droit International Public à l'université d'Utrecht, 2012, intitulé « Chagos : Where international law stops », Mihai Martoiu Ticu analyse la problématique des Chagossiens et analyse, bien objectivement, le sujet.

⁴¹ COLLEN Lindsey et KISTNASAMY, Ragini. "How Diego Garcia was Depopulated and Stolen" in *Diego Garcia was depopulated and Stolen*. Port-Louis: Ledikasyon pu Travayer, 2002, p. 26.

⁴² PRO FCO 32/484/No 1.

⁴³ Mauritius is « sympathetically disposed to defence facilities proposals, but object[s] in view of likely public opinion, to detachment and prefer[s] long-term lease of islands. Also asked for safeguards for minerals, oil and fishing rights, meteorological, air and navigational facilities and provision for a defence agreement with U.K as well as British help in obtaining trade (sugar) and other concessions from U.S ». (PRO FCO 32/484/No 1; PRO FCO 1036/1150.

Comité d'Action Musulman. Le 20 septembre, la conférence tire à sa fin mais les « Mauriciens ont exprimé leur souhait d'une compensation pour l'excision de Diego Garcia »⁴⁴. Selon l'accord de Lancaster : i. l'archipel des Chagos serait détaché de Maurice et placé sous la souveraineté britannique par Ordre au Conseil ; vii. si le besoin pour les facilités aux Chagos disparaissait, Maurice retrouverait la souveraineté de l'archipel⁴⁵.

Le 8 novembre 1965, l'Angleterre prend arbitrairement l'archipel pour créer la *British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)*. Cela est rendu possible par ordre de Sa Majesté, la reine d'Angleterre, par le *BIOT Order*⁴⁶. Dans la pratique, malgré le fait que Maurice obtienne son indépendance en 1968, Les Chagos demeurent britanniques (aussi bien que sa population)⁴⁷. Le *BIOT Order* créa le poste de commissaire qui obtient le pouvoir, sous la section 11, de « promulguer des lois pour l'ordre, la paix et la bonne gouvernance du Territoire »⁴⁸. Toutefois, il l'utilise pour promulguer l'*Immigration Ordinance 1971* qui, sous la section 4, stipule l'expulsion obligatoire de toute la population existante sur l'île car elle ne possède pas un permis émis par le gouvernement. Cette information ne sera publiée que dans le *BIOT Gazette*, et reste donc sans grande diffusion⁴⁹. Une fois la procédure liée à l'immigration enclenchée, les Britanniques entrent dans un contrat à bail à long terme avec les États-Unis et transfèrent la possession des Chagos en 1971.

Si les Chagossiens sont pendant longtemps frustrés de ne pouvoir regagner leur archipel, en 1998, Olivier Bancoult poursuit l'Angleterre. Il déclare qu'on ne lui permet pas de regagner son île où il est né, Peros Banhos, alors qu'il est venu à Maurice pour des raisons médicales en 1967 lorsque sa sœur est blessée lors d'un accident. Les juges du *Queen's Bench Division* rendent un verdict en sa faveur, alors que, dans la pratique,

⁴⁴ PRO PREM 13/3320.

⁴⁵ Traduit de l'anglais : "i. the Chagos Archipelago should be detached from Mauritius and placed under British sovereignty by Order in council; vii. if the need for the facilities in the Chagos Archipelago disappeared, sovereignty would be returned to Mauritius;" CM(65) 183, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS UK/US Defence Interests in the Indian Ocean, MEMORANDUM BY THE CHIEF SECRETARY, 4 Nov 1965. Reproduced in the Excision Report, p. 59.

⁴⁶ Regina v. Secretary of State of the Foreign and Commonwealth office, *Ex parte Bancoult*, 1076.

⁴⁷ NAUVEL, Christian. "A return from exile in sight? The Chagossians and Their Struggle" in *Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights*, vol. 5, issue 1, Fall 2006, p. 11.

⁴⁸ BIOT Order, 1965.

⁴⁹ *Ex parte Bancoult*, [2001], QB at 1086.

plusieurs obstacles persistent, comme pousser les Américains à changer de position sur le bail existant.

Si Shenaz Patel écrit son roman, c'est aussi sa façon à elle de se faire porte-parole des Chagossiens. C'est cette triste constatation de la déportation qui déclenche une aporie tant chez les Chagossiens que chez les Mauriciens. Charlesia et Raymonde, deux personnages du roman, auront le même destin que d'être déportées vers Maurice contre leur gré. Charlesia, comme bon nombre de Chagossiens, travaille à la sécherie : « [I]a plupart d'entre eux sont assignés aux cocoteraies, à la sécherie ou au calorifère »⁵⁰. Rentrée chez elle, elle s'attèle à la préparation d'un bon « seraz » de poisson-banane.

Tout comme Charlesia, Raymonde mène une vie ordinaire aux Chagos, sauf qu'elle est enceinte de Désiré. Or, un matin de 1967, elle se rend compte que progressivement, l'administrateur réduit la charge de travail de tout le monde⁵¹ et que les navires assurant le ravitaillement de Maurice se font rares. Ce sera dans un décor tout aussi glauque, en contraste avec l'incipit du décor exotique (« C'est une pluie d'îles posées sur la mer. Frangées de sable blanc, un semis de gouttelettes laiteuses... Chagos. Un archipel au nom soyeux comme une caresse... »⁵²) que l'histoire prend une tournure pour le moins dramatique (des « sacs en jute... comme des peaux mortes ; l'odeur sournois de la poussière [qui] avait chassé le parfum vivace de la nourriture »⁵³). Bien que son intuition lui indique qu'« il se passait quelque chose »⁵⁴ et qu'une « sorte d'abattement s'était emparée de l'île »⁵⁵, l'arrivée du *Norvaer* sonne littéralement le glas des derniers Chagossiens. Le coup dur arrive lorsque Raymonde entend « -Vitesse ! Vitesse ! Bisin alé »⁵⁶ et que les habitants n'ont « qu' [u]ne heure » et « pas une minute de plus »⁵⁷ pour quitter l'île. C'est en mer que Raymonde donne naissance à Désiré, et ce sera aux Seychelles que l'enfant sera déclaré⁵⁸.

En réalité, il y a eu des plaintes par Mme Mein, une Chagossienne, qui clame qu'en 1971 et 1972, les représentants des États-Unis et du gouvernement britannique les ont forcées, elle et sa famille, à monter à bord

⁵⁰ PATEL, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94. « Vite! Vite! Il faut s'en aller ».

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

d'un bateau qui allait de Diego Garcia à Peros Banhos, et, plus tard, aux Seychelles⁵⁹. Elle allègue avoir été victime de brutalité, ce qui aurait été la cause d'une fausse couche. Mme France-Charlot, issue de la première génération des Chagossiens, soutient pour sa part que la cause de l'extrême pauvreté dont sa famille souffre à Maurice a fait qu'elle et sa famille sont socialement, culturellement et économiquement opprimées. Olivier Bancoult abonde dans le même sens en disant que des demandes d'emploi ont été rejetées sur la base de Diego Garcia⁶⁰. Lisette Talate, née sur l'atoll de Diego Garcia, raconte au *Mauricien* comment « elle et ses enfants, tout comme de nombreux autres Chagossiens, sont témoins de chiens brûlés dans les calorifères. Un acte qui leur indique que la vie dans l'archipel tire à sa fin »⁶¹.

Le 20 décembre 2012, la Cour Européenne des Droits de l'Homme a rejeté l'appel des Chagossiens contre le gouvernement britannique d'avoir expulsé 1786 d'entre eux soutenant qu'ils avaient accepté la compensation offerte dans le passé. En effet, en 1975, Michel Vencatessen porte plainte à la Haute Cour de Londres pour dommages causés suite à son expulsion de Diego Garcia. Le gouvernement britannique accepta par suite de verser la somme de 4 millions de livres au-delà des 650 000 livres déjà versées aux Chagossiens entre 1977 et 1978. Les Anglais, ayant offert une compensation, pensaient que cela allait classer définitivement l'affaire alors que M. Vencatessen retire sa plainte⁶². Olivier Bancoult précise : « Depuis 1998, j'ai entamé des actions légales dans l'intérêt des Chagossiens et de 2000 à 2008, j'ai remporté et perdu des procès. Cependant, j'ai maintenu la lutte », rétorque le président du *Groupe Réfugiés Chagos*⁶³.

Le groupe va contester la proposition d'édifier un parc marin en 2013 à Diego Garcia. Si la zone maritime protégée est déclarée, aucun Chagossien ne pourra y avoir accès pour la pêche même s'il advient qu'on donne le droit aux Chagossiens de regagner leur pays. Ce sera en 2014 que les États-Unis et l'Angleterre vont décider s'ils renouvellent le bail qui arrive à expiration en 2016.

⁵⁹ Bancoult et al. V. McNamara et al., 227 F. Supp. 2d 144 (D.D.C 2002) (No. 01-2629 RMU).

⁶⁰ BANCOULT et al. V. McNAMARA, *op.cit.*

⁶¹ « Mémoire : Lisette Talate demeure une force inspiratrice ». In *Le Mauricien*, [En Ligne] (6 janvier 2012), <http://www.lemauricien.com/article/m%C3%A9moire-lisette-talate-demeure-force-inspiratrice>

(Page consultée le 12 décembre 2012).

⁶² 54-56, 60-69, *Chagos Islanders v. The Attorney General, her Majesty's British Indian Ocean Territory Commissioner*, [200 »] ENHC 2222, § 124.

⁶³ *The Independent Daily*, vol. 4, no 33.

L'aporie dont nous avons fait mention au début de cette partie et donc largement justifiée et le combat continue voire s'intensifie avant l'expiration de ce bail qui agit véritablement comme une épée de Damoclès.

Conclusion.

Il est un fait que la littérature francophone mauricienne, à travers ses différentes représentations politique, sociale, économique ou autres, est profondément 'engagiste'. Loys Masson véhicule dans son roman la lutte des travailleurs pour un meilleur traitement et surtout pour leur droit de former des syndicats alors qu'en contrario, Marcelle Lagesse semble imprégnée de la culture esclavagiste si bien qu'elle écrit un texte en déphasage avec la réalité de son temps. Shenaz Patel, écrivaine contemporaine, n'hésite pas à mettre son talent d'artiste au profit des plus démunis comme au profit des Chagossiens, dans leur long et douloureux combat pour regagner leur terre. La décolonisation de Maurice donne lieu, dans bien des cas, à des débats et contentieux. Alors que Maurice, prise dans les affres de la maltraitance des colonisateurs, lutte pour son indépendance, voilà que, bien des années plus tard, les répercussions perdurent comme pour signifier que l'obtention de l'indépendance ne s'est pas faite sans heurts et qu'il pourrait s'agir au fait d'une décolonisation inachevée.

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CHAPTER 8

Le flamant, la lionne et la décolonisation au Mozambique

Abstract: A critical reading of two novels by Mia Couto, *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, 2000 and *A confissão da Leoa*, 2012, allows us to raise some issues that are superimposed with regard to the process of decolonization. How do governments established after independence continue to participate in the same colonial logic? How do people feel about this "change"? To solve the enigma of UN soldiers who mysteriously explode and the attacks on women by lions, the administrators have called in foreigners in Mozambique. The contact with the local community has led them to find out that the real problem lays beyond these mysterious deaths. This critical reading tries to show the process of decolonization from the perspective of the administration and the people with a focus on the "character-mirrors": the foreigners and the outcasts of society.

Résumé : Une lecture critique de deux ouvrages de Mia Couto, *Le dernier vol du flamant*, 2000 et *La confession de la Lionne*, 2012, nous permet de poser des questions qui se superposent en ce qui concerne la décolonisation : comment les gouvernements instaurés après les indépendances participent-ils d'une même logique coloniale ? Quelle est la perception du peuple par rapport à ce « changement » ? Afin de résoudre l'énigme des soldats de l'ONU qui explosent sans explication et des attaques par des lions qui tuent exclusivement des femmes, on appelle des étrangers. Confrontés à la communauté locale, ils découvrent que le vrai problème se situe au-delà de ces morts mystérieuses. Cette lecture critique, centrée sur les figures des personnages-miroirs -les administrateurs, les étrangers et les marginaux de la société- analyse le processus de décolonisation du point de vue de l'administration et du peuple.

La littérature africaine lusophone : phases de développement

Pendant longtemps l'Afrique a été perçue comme une unité historique fondée sur les concepts du savoir occidental¹. Penser les littératures issues du système colonial entraîne une discussion sur l'histoire littéraire qui s'appuie sur les modèles européens et la quête d'émancipation qui en résulte. Il est vrai que parfois les généralisations sont utiles pour créer un panorama où insérer les particularités. Dans ce sens, nous ferons appel à la théorie de Patrick Chabal et de Russel Hamilton pour expliquer les phases de la formation de la littérature lusophone africaine, pour ensuite mettre en évidence les particularités du Mozambique et le rôle de Mia Couto dans cette production.

Dans l'introduction de *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*², Patrick Chabal décrit le processus d'écriture en langue portugaise dans les pays africains en distinguant quatre phases. Au moment de la colonisation, le modèle d'écriture est celui de l'assimilation (1). Dans cette première étape de la production littéraire, les écrivains, pour prouver leurs capacités intellectuelles, imitaient le modèle européen. Toujours dans la période coloniale, une production de la littérature de la résistance (2) a entraîné la lutte pour l'indépendance. Cela veut dire que le rejet de la culture métropolitaine et le désir de rédemption de la culture africaine étaient au centre de la préoccupation des écrivains. Ils croyaient que la recherche des sources et de racines pourraient fonder l'écriture d'une Afrique originelle. La troisième phase décrite par Chabal est ce qu'il appelle « assertion » (3) et se passe après les indépendances. Les écrivains ne cherchent plus à exorciser l'impérialisme culturel. Ils s'efforcent de trouver leur position dans la société postcoloniale. Les thèmes sont centrés sur la réalité quotidienne, dans la voix de la conscience et de la morale ainsi que dans la recherche de soi en tant qu'artiste. La dernière période traitée par Chabal est celle de la consolidation (4) qui a permis d'élargir la discussion sur le fait littéraire et de penser le futur de la littérature dans ces pays.

Pour compléter le travail de Chabal, il est intéressant de citer également la périodisation en quatre phases établie par Russel George Hamilton³. Hamilton préfère commencer la discussion au XIX siècle avec la littérature

¹ MUDIMBE, V. Y. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, James Currey, 1994.

² CHABAL, Patrick. *The Post-colonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*. Johannesburg : Northwestern University Press, 1996.

³ HAMILTON, Russel George. « Existe-t-il encore une littérature africaine d'expression portugaise ? » in *Littérature du Mozambique*, Organismes : Laban, Michel et Magnier, Bernard. Numéro 113. Notre Librairie, avril-juin 1993, pp. 92-100.

écrite par les voyageurs, aventuriers et colons. Il s'agit d'une production de romans ultra-marins coloniaux, ou bien des nouvelles ethnographiques qui montraient l'Africain comme l'Autre. Cette phase a duré jusqu'au début du XXe siècle. La deuxième phase est déjà celle d'une littérature africaine d'expression portugaise, produite dans les années qui suivent la fin de la deuxième grande guerre. Les poèmes sont porteurs de l'expression des revendications culturelles et sociales, où l'on cherche également une certaine authenticité africaine et l'expression d'un désir d'autonomie politique. La troisième phase est celle de la littérature de combat qui, vers les années 1960, va faire porter une revendication sociale et lutter pour la ré-africanisation. Les sentiments indépendantistes éclosent dans la poésie des "poètes-soldats" – il s'agit d'une littérature clandestine de la guérilla. La quatrième phase s'étale à partir des années 1980 jusqu'aujourd'hui : la poésie reprend une qualité épique et la prose réexamine les infrastructures historiques et réinvente les superstructures socioculturelles. La prose de Mia Couto s'inscrit dans ce courant.

La littérature mozambicaine

Aux généralisations de Chabal et Hamilton viennent s'ajouter les recherches spécifiques sur le Mozambique d'Ana Mafalda Leite⁴ et Francisco Noa⁵. Les auteurs expliquent qu'à partir de 1930 l'on distingue un système littéraire spécifique au Mozambique. La production de cette époque est essentiellement ancrée sur la poésie, la prose ne s'affirmant qu'à partir des années 80.

En 1940, une première génération créée autour de la revue « Itinerário », cherche une conscience littéraire innovatrice et nationaliste. Les valeurs esthétiques et éthiques venaient de l'influence de la littérature du modernisme portugais et brésilien. Orlando Mendes et Fonseca Amaral sont les deux auteurs qui agglutinent les tendances de cette époque. José Craveirinha et Rui Knopfli sont les interprètes les plus significatifs de la « mozambicanité », phase littéraire où la thématique sociale était liée à une

⁴ LEITE, Ana Mafalda. *Literaturas africanas e formulações pós-coloniais*. Lisboa : Colibri, 2003. Ana Mafalda Leite, « Tópicos para uma história da literatura moçambicana », in *Moçambique das palavras escritas*, Afrontamento, Porto, 2008.

⁵ NOA, Francisco. *A escrita infinita: ensaios sobre literatura moçambicana*. Maputo : Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, 1998. NOA, Francisco. *Império, mito e miopia: Moçambique como invenção literária*. Lisboa : Caminho, 2002. NOA, Francisco. « Literatura moçambicana: trilhos e margens », in *Moçambique das palavras escritas*, Porto : Afrontamento, 2008.

esthétique endogène et exogène qui fonde la tradition modernisatrice du Mozambique.

Les années 1960 sont marquées par la lutte armée, se reflétant dans une poésie de combat nationaliste. En 1971-72, le projet « Caliban » lutte pour l'affirmation d'un compromis esthétique à travers la diversité thématique et esthétique dans la littérature. Après l'indépendance apparaît une polémique dans les journaux entre ceux qui désiraient une littérature politique et alignée au régime et ceux qui luttèrent pour des idéaux esthétiques insubordonnés⁶.

En 1980 se crée l'Association des Écrivains Mozambicains (AEMO). Il s'agit d'un espace de débat qui a aidé à promouvoir ses écrivains par la revue *Charrua* (1984). Une partie des voix littéraires les plus importants du Mozambique en faisait partie et proclamaient l'irrévérence de la liberté esthétique et thématique. Cette époque n'a pas duré longtemps et est tombée en décadence, faute d'investissement des politiques publiques en faveur de la lecture et de l'édition. La production des années 1980-90 voit le roman fleurir en détriment de la poésie. Le roman est l'espace de confrontation et de conciliation de plusieurs ordres et dimensions⁷. L'écriture de Mia Couto se situe dans cet espace de la prose, qui concilie la tradition et la modernité et réexamine l'histoire.

Mia Couto et la prose enchantée de poésie

« Écrire c'est apprendre aux gens à rêver »
Terre Somnambule, Mia Couto

Mia Couto est peut-être le plus connu et le plus étudié des écrivains du Mozambique. Fils de Portugais, il est né à Beira en 1955. En 1971 il déménage à Lourenço Marques, aujourd'hui Maputo, pour faire ses études de médecine. Cependant, avec la Révolution des Œillets au Portugal en 1974, le parcours de l'écrivain va changer drastiquement, reflétant le changement de son pays. L'écrivain abandonne son cours de médecine en troisième année pour se dédier au journalisme durant douze années de sa vie. Membre et militant du FRELIMO - Front de libération du Mozambique – il participe comme journaliste à la guerre de libération du pays. Après l'indépendance, il devient biologiste, ce qui lui permet de développer un contact beaucoup plus direct et profond avec les habitants du Mozambique.

⁶ NOA, F. *op.cit.*, 2008, pp. 38-41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

Son œuvre porte la trace de son itinéraire⁸, ses romans et ses nouvelles témoignent « d'une démarche qui mêle volontiers le plus immédiat environnement avec la fécondité d'un imaginaire puisé aux sources de la tradition et de l'oralité. Entre fable et fiction romanesque l'écrivain bâtit un univers qui mêle mythe et réalité, quotidienneté et déraison ».⁹

En 1983 il publie son premier recueil de poèmes *Raiz de Orvalho*. Il écrit ensuite des nouvelles, parce qu'il lui semble « important de raconter ce qui se passait dans tout le pays au début de la révolution, cette exaltation d'une idée, d'une cause. Il me semblait également important de chercher la racine des choses. C'est une démarche à laquelle la prose convient le mieux »¹⁰, explique-t-il à Bernard Magnier. Mais ce n'est qu'en 1992 qu'il est reconnu comme un grand écrivain. Son roman *Terre Somnambule* est considéré un des douze meilleurs romans africains du XXe siècle.

Mia Couto est connu par son écriture qui brasse la langue portugaise. Il l'enrichit des mots trouvés auprès du peuple et de ses nombreux néologismes. Sa langue est originale, la seule capable de raconter la démesure et le dérèglement des personnages et de son environnement. La structure de sa pensée est très imagée : « Qu'est-ce que le destin sinon un doux ivrogne conduit par un aveugle ? » La destinée décrite dans son œuvre écarte la raison au profit de la possibilité d'oser le pas ivrogne.

La décolonisation dans la figure de la lionne et du flamant

Le dernier vol du flamant et *A confissão da Leoa* sont des romans qui ont pour but de montrer comment l'indépendance n'a été qu'un changement superficiel, en étant elle-même une fiction. Dans ces deux livres, les fantômes de l'ancien régime colonial règnent, subtils, avec l'approbation de tous. Contrairement à ce qui était attendu, les indépendances n'ont pas auguré d'un avenir meilleur. La politique de répression n'a pas disparu dans les sociétés nouvellement libérées. La machine politique au Mozambique ne cesse de se désagréger et l'instabilité politico-économique devient de plus en plus chronique. L'idéologie de la Négritude et du Panafricanisme qui en quelque sorte aide à fonder l'imaginaire d'une unité africaine est bouleversée. Les beaux projets socialistes qui ont guidé les différentes luttes révolutionnaires ne reflètent guère la réalité d'une société écrasée par des gouvernements qui ont pactisé avec les puissances étrangères. Colonialisme

⁸ BIDAULT, Marie Françoise. « Mia Couto: La vie avant tout » in *Études Littéraires Africaines – Autour de Mia Couto*, vol. 25, APELA, Paris, 2008, p. 122.

⁹ MOURALIS, Barnard. « Mia Couto ou la fable du chaos ». Sur : <http://www.afribd.com/article.php?no=1252>. Consulté le 16 avril 2012.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

et néocolonialisme constituent la même face d'une triste histoire de domination.

Les deux romans que nous allons analyser montrent comment un gouvernement, loin de s'engager dans la lutte pour l'édification nationale et le développement, s'engage dans la propagation des violences, préjugés et dépendances de l'époque coloniale. Nous analyserons aussi la confrontation de la tradition avec l'espace de la modernité et le sentiment des gens qui vivent ce moment de décolonisation au Mozambique.

Le dernier vol du flamant

Pendant 16 ans (1976-1992) le Mozambique a été en proie à une sanglante guerre civile. C'est à la fin de la guerre que l'ONU initie une mission d'aide à l'établissement de la paix dans ce pays¹¹. Sa fonction était d'être une agence de distribution de dons et une intermédiaire pour l'installation de la paix. Cependant, cette mission a été perçue comme un pouvoir parallèle, comportant des ressemblances avec l'ancien pouvoir colonial, tandis que le gouvernement local la vivait comme une diminution de sa souveraineté.

Écrit en 2000, LDVF¹² dresse une critique dévastatrice et pleine d'humour contre les « nouveaux agents de l'empire ». Les Nations Unies et les ONGs sont dénoncées pour avoir créé une culture de dépendance qui a facilité l'instauration du néocolonialisme au Mozambique. Le livre démarre avec l'étrange cas d'explosions qui tuent des soldats de l'ONU. Un inspecteur est appelé pour résoudre l'affaire des « explosés ». Quand il arrive on lui apprend qu'il n'y a pas de corps, mais que seuls restent les pénis des soldats pour prouver leur existence. Le rôle des pénis est un symbole fondamental pour comprendre le mécanisme de décolonisation : au moment des explosions, les soldats sont réduits à leurs pénis, symbole de domination masculine. Cette castration inversée manifeste la rupture avec le pouvoir étranger et l'enterrement du symbole masculin de domination par la violence.

¹¹ ROTHWELL, Phillip. *A Postmodern Nationalist: Truth, Orality, and Gender in the Work of Mia Couto*. Lewisburg [Pa.], Etats-Unis : Bucknell University Press, 2004.

¹² Nous allons utiliser l'abréviation LDVF pour *Le dernier vol du flamant* et ACL pour *A confissão da Leoa*, puisque ce dernier livre n'a pas encore été traduit au français. Toutes les traductions de citations des livres ont été faites par moi et sont donc des traductions libres (TL).

A confissão da leoa

Inspirée d'une expérience réelle vécue par Mia Couto, le livre raconte l'histoire d'un village assailli par l'attaque des lions. Pour aider la population, les dirigeants demandent l'aide d'un chasseur de la capitale. Un écrivain accompagne le chasseur et prend des notes sur l'affaire. Au fur et à mesure, l'on comprend que la présence des étrangers et des lions est mise à profit par les habitants du monde invisible, mécontents avec les conflits sociaux : « aos poucos, os caçadores entenderam que os mistérios que enfrentavam eram apenas os sintomas de conflitos sociais que superavam largamente a sua capacidade de resposta »¹³.

Le discours de Mariamar, le personnage principal, met en valeur le rôle de la femme dans la conservation des traditions et révèle sa position paradoxale, une position fondamentale mais en même temps reléguée aux confins de la société. La communauté patriarcale, intéressée par la modernité du capitalisme, par la cupidité et l'oubli, est en train de tuer les véritables sources de la vie africaine. L'on comprend ainsi que l'effacement des femmes de la vie en société déforme la communauté et condamne le peuple à l'extinction, les lionnes ne travaillant que pour concrétiser les actions commencées par les hommes.

La décolonisation

Le noyau des problèmes traités dans les deux livres peuvent être résumés par le conflit entre tradition et modernité et par le rapport des habitants et des étrangers avec la terre. La voie simple et directe du rationnel nous permet d'expliquer les causes des problèmes qui ont lieu à Tizangara et à Kulumani. Le manque d'attention des soldats de l'ONU est tel qu'ils marchent sur les mines laissées cachées lors de la guerre civile. En ce qui concerne les lionnes qui attaquent la ville de Kulumani, Couto explique l'hypothèse réelle de l'histoire : la guerre a laissé des corps morts dans la forêt et les lions se sont habitués à les manger. Les femmes, par leurs activités, par exemple le fait d'aller chercher de l'eau à la rivière, sont plus exposées au danger de l'attaque des lions. Néanmoins, les récits nous présentent une réalité où ces problèmes se montrent beaucoup plus complexes : le surnaturel agit comme une alerte face aux dangers dont la société est victime.

Pour mieux comprendre les procès de décolonisation tels qu'ils sont inscrits dans ces ouvrages, nous nous pencherons sur quatre couples de "personnages-miroirs" qui nous en montrent les enjeux. D'un côté, nous

¹³ COUTO, Mia. *A confissão da leoa*. Lisboa : Portugal, Caminho, 2012, p. 10.

avons les administrateurs, un prolongement du pouvoir colonial, et les étrangers, qui sont appelés à résoudre un problème ciblé et qui démontrent la relation de dépendance du peuple mozambicain. De l'autre, il y a les marginaux de la société, comme le vieux et le grand père, le sorcier et l'aveugle, qui apparaissent comme une sorte de voix de la conscience. C'est par la présence de l'étranger et le rôle joué par les marginaux que sont révélés les leurres du procès de décolonisation.

Les étrangers

Il existe deux catégories d'étrangers dans les livres : d'abord les administrateurs, puis les personnes chargées de résoudre un problème. Les gouvernants de Tizangara et de Kulumani sont des étrangers « du dedans ». Anciens révolutionnaires pour la libération du Mozambique, ils occupent un poste de direction dans une ville qui n'est pas la leur. Incapables de gérer les problèmes qui ont lieu dans leur environnement, ils ont recours à l'aide d'autres étrangers, un du dedans, s'agissant du chasseur, et un du dehors, s'agissant de l'autre, l'enquêteur italien. L'insistance sur les termes *étrangers du dedans et du dehors* est récurrente dans les livres, marquant l'importance de la présence du peuple autochtone passive. C'est un avertissement quant à la mise en place du néo-colonialisme qui empêche tout mouvement de décolonisation effective.

Dans les deux livres, il existe un clivage net entre l'intérêt des gouvernants et celui de la population, manifeste dès l'arrivée des étrangers. L'intérêt des chefs de gouvernement est de perpétuer leur pouvoir. Tuer les lions est pour le chef de Kulumani une mission politique, il ne faut surtout pas que les habitants du village s'engagent dans cette lutte : « Não pode ser essa gente, esses tradicionais, a levar a melhor¹⁴ ». A aucun moment le peuple n'est censé participer à la vie politique et se voir reconnu comme étant capable de s'autogérer. Le même propos est tenu par l'administrateur de Tizangara :

[...] com os donativos da comunidade internacional, as coisas tinham mudado. [...] Era preciso mostrar a população com a sua fome, com as suas doenças contaminosas. Lembro bem as suas palavras, Excelência: a nossa miséria está render bem. Para viver num país de pedintes, é preciso arregaçar as feridas, colocar à mostra os ossos salientes dos meninos. [...] Essa é actual palavra de ordem: juntar os destroços, facilitar a visão do desastre. Estrangeiro de fora ou da capital deve poder apreciar toda aquela coitadeza sem despendar grandes suores. É por isso os

¹⁴ COUTO, M. *op. cit.*, p. 162.

refugiados vivem há meses nas redondezas da administração, dando ares de sua desgraça¹⁵.

Ces deux passages expriment clairement que le néocolonialisme est un procès initié à l'intérieur du pays avec l'aide étrangère : les deux pôles de cette chaîne ont intérêt à dominer le peuple, pour en tirer profit. L'autonomie du peuple menace le pouvoir. La logique de dépendance est favorable au maintien d'un ordre néocolonial qui ne contribue en rien au processus de décolonisation.

Une façon de mettre en alerte, quant aux mécanismes de néocolonisation, est d'insister sur l'idée que si l'on est étranger à un monde, on ne peut pas le comprendre et moins encore aider à le transformer. L'Italien Massimo Risi apprend cette règle quand il va à Tizangara chercher la cause de l'explosion des "casques bleus" : « Eu posso falar e entender. O problema não é a língua. O que eu não entendo é esse mundo daqui »¹⁶. Le chasseur et l'écrivain de Maputo, Arcanjo Baleiro et Gustavo Regalo, se confrontent à precepte quand ils partent défendre la ville de Kulumani contre l'attaque des lions : « O escritor ainda ergue o rosto para dizer que não entendia. Mas logo desiste: não entender passou a ser sua atividade mais bem sucedida desde que chegou a Kulumani »¹⁷.

La confusion augmente dans la tête des étrangers quand ils se confrontent au peuple soucieux de les alerter quant à la réalité des faits : un aveugle s'approche du chasseur pour lui suggérer le surnaturel de l'événement : « Você traz uma espingarda? Para quê? Essas leões não se matam com bala »¹⁸. Ana Deusqueira révèle à l'italien « Os soldados estrangeiros explodem, sim senhor. Não é que pisam em mina, não. Somos nós,

¹⁵ COUTO, Mia. *O último voo do flamingo*. São Paulo, Portugal : Companhia das Letras, 2005, p. 77. Traduction libre (TL): [...] avec les dons de la communauté internationale, les choses avaient changé. [...] Il fallait montrer le peuple avec sa famine, avec ses maladies contagieuses. Je me rappelle bien de ses mots, Excellence, notre misère nous donne pas mal d'argent. Pour vivre dans un pays de mendiants, il faut montrer les plaies, montrer les os saillants des enfants. [...] C'était l'actuel mot d'ordre : rassembler les débris et faciliter la vision de la catastrophe. L'étranger du dehors ou de la capitale doit pouvoir apprécier tout ce malheur sans dépenser de grandes sueurs. C'est pourquoi les réfugiés vivaient dans le quartier de l'administration depuis des mois, donnant l'air de leur malheur.

¹⁶ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 40. TL : Je peux parler et comprendre. Le problème n'est pas la langue. Ce que je ne comprends pas c'est quoi le monde d'ici.

¹⁷ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 114. TL : L'écrivain lève le visage pour dire qu'il ne comprenait pas. Mais aussitôt il abandonne son propos: ne pas comprendre a devenu son activité qui a eu le plus de succès depuis son arrivée à Kulumani

¹⁸ *Ibid.* TL : Vous apportez un fusil de chasse? Pour quoi faire? Ces lions ne peuvent pas être tués d'une balle.

mulheres, os engenhos explosivos»¹⁹. Au moment où les étrangers entrent en contact avec la population locale les problèmes de compréhension entre les mondes augmente. Ils sont confrontés à des réalités qui leur échappent. Si dans un premier temps ces avertissements, prononcés par des marginalisés et proposant une vision surnaturelle des faits, leur semblent sans importance, les étrangers ne tardent pas à se rendre compte que ces personnages possèdent une grande connaissance de la réalité qui les entoure : « Morreram milhares de moçambicanos, nunca vos vimos cá. Agora, desapareceram cinco estrangeiros e já é o fim do mundo ? »²⁰, dit Ana. Un travailleur du champ demande à l'écrivain Gustavo « Querem saber como morremos? Mas nunca ninguém veio saber como vivemos »²¹.

Le peuple profite de la figure de l'étranger pour se manifester : l'élite, le gouvernement, l'aide extérieure sont les cibles des attaques. C'est à ce moment que les étrangers comprennent qu'il y a aussi un décalage entre ce qu'ils ont été appelés à faire et ce qu'il faut faire; il ne sert à rien d'examiner les champs minés ou d'aller chasser les lions, il faut aller plus loin pour résoudre le vrai problème.

Dans ce sens, le grand père de Mariamar explique que le plus grand ennemi du peuple n'est autre que lui-même :

« Os de Kulumani são hospitaleiros para quem é longínquo e estranho. Mas entre eles reina a inveja e a maledicência. [...] Nem precisamos de inimigos. Sempre nos bastamos a nós mesmos para nos derrotarmos »²².

Le grand problème que les étrangers doivent résoudre est résumé dans cette dernière phrase, puisque le peuple dans son inertie et son refus d'agir est son pire ennemi. L'avertissement est lancé dans les deux romans : ce ne sont pas les étrangers qui doivent s'occuper des problèmes des Mozambicains. Le peuple doit assumer la responsabilité de son futur et travailler uni pour le construire, c'est seulement ainsi que l'on arrivera à la décolonisation.

¹⁹ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 83. TL : Les soldats étrangers explosent, oui monsieur. Ce n'est pas parce qu'ils marchent sur les mines, non monsieur. Ce sont nous, les femmes, les machines explosives.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34. TL : On a tué des milliers de Mozambicains, on ne vous a jamais vu ici. Maintenant, cinq étrangers sont disparus et c'est déjà la fin du monde?

²¹ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 117. TL : Vous voulez savoir comment on meurt? Mais personne n'est jamais venu pour savoir notre façon de vivre.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 52. TL : Ceux de Kulumani sont accueillants à toute personne qui est lointaine et étrangère. Mais parmi eux règne l'envie et la calomnie. [...] Nous n'avons pas besoin d'ennemis. Nous nous sommes toujours suffi pour nous vaincre.

La voix des marginalisés

La question du subalterne, traitée par G. Spivak²³, s'interroge pour savoir si le marginalisé est en mesure de s'exprimer ou s'il est obligatoirement une présence silencieuse, une parole non récupérable par les autres. Pour Mia Couto, le marginalisé est la figure centrale dans la dénonciation des problèmes : sa parole contredit et invalide la voix du pouvoir. Le subalterne, répondrait Couto, peut parler, mais il faut quelqu'un pour l'écouter.

Nous avons choisi deux couples de voix marginalisés pour illustrer leur place dans la société et leur rôle de dénonciateurs. Le premier couple de personnages miroirs est celui formé par le père du narrateur de l'LDVF et par le grand père de Mariamar de ACL. Les deux personnages ont été exclus de la société pour avoir travaillé pour les Portugais dans le régime colonial : Dans LDVF « Durante anos ele se exerceu como fiscal de caça. Era o tempo colonial [...] era quase o único preto que detinha igual lugar »²⁴. Dans ACL « No tempo colonial, [...] Cobrava impostos e resolvia conflitos locais a favor dos colonos. Esse cargo custou a meu bisavô culpas, invejas e duradouras inimizadas »²⁵.

Avoir travaillé pour les Portugais génère une situation de malaise qui ne permet pas aux personnages de se sentir membre de la société, quelle que soit l'époque. Ils sont marginalisés dans deux moments différents de l'histoire : à l'époque coloniale (victimes de racisme) et postcoloniale (considérés comme des réactionnaires).

Se trouvant dans une situation d'entre-deux, ces personnages sont capables de discerner des problématiques qui ne sont pas mises en questions par les autres :

Quando chegaram os da Revolução eles disseram que íamos ficar donos e mandantes. Todos se contentaram. Minha mãe, muito ela se contentou. Sulpício, porém, se encheu de medo. Matar o patrão ? Mais difícil era matar o escravo que vive dentro de nós. Agora, nem patrão, nem escravo.²⁶

²³ SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 21-80.

²⁴ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 136. TL : Pendant des années il a servi comme garde-chasse. C'était à l'époque coloniale [...] il était presque le seul noir qui a occupé une telle place.

²⁵ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 53. TL : À l'époque coloniale, [...] il était le responsable de ramasser les taxes et de résoudre les conflits locaux en faveur des colons. Cette position a apporté à mon grand-père une culpabilité, des jalousies et des éternelles inimitiés.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 137. TL : Quand les révolutionnaires sont arrivés, ils ont dit que nous allions devenir propriétaires et chefs. Tous étaient contents. Ma mère, elle était très contente.

Sulpício souligne que l'esclave qui habite au coeur des Africains ne leur permettra pas de développer une véritable politique de décolonisation. Tuer le colonisateur est une mission simple à côté du défi qui est de combattre la mentalité africaine qui permet et justifie la domination externe exercée sur le pays. La même question est analysée par le dernier couple de "personnages-miroirs" : le sorcier Andorinho et l'aveugle de Kulumani. Ils expliquent le procès utilisé par les Portugais lors de la colonisation. La façon dont ils ont réussi à propager les préjugés et persuader les noirs de leur infériorité explique pourquoi il sera difficile d'en finir avec la mentalité du colonisé:

Falam muito do colonialismo. Mas isso foi coisa que eu duvido que houvesse. O que fizeram esses brancos foi ocuparem-nos. Não foi só a terra; ocuparam a nós acamparam no meio das nossas cabeças. Somos madeira que apanhou chuva. Agora não acendemos nem damos sombra. Temos que secar à luz de um sol que ainda não há. Esse sol só pode nascer dentro de nós.²⁷

Aconteceu o mesmo no tempo colonial. Os leões fazem-me lembrar os soldados do exército português. Esses portugueses tanto foram imaginados por nós que se tornaram poderosos. Os portugueses não tinham forças para nos vencer. Por isso, fizeram com que as suas vítimas se matassem a si mesmas. E nós, pretos, aprendemos a nos odiar a nós mesmos²⁸.

Surmonter une mentalité qui a été construite au long de nombreuses années est le vrai défi de la décolonisation. Une fois que le peuple commencera à se valoriser par ses vraies qualités, ce sera le moment où le soleil pourra briller à nouveau en Afrique. De là découle une autre question : se croyant inférieurs, les Africains croient aussi que leur culture est méprisable. C'est à ces personnages que revient aussi la tâche de mettre

Sulpício, cependant, fut rempli de crainte. Tuer le chef? Plus difficile était de tuer l'esclave qui vit en nous. Or, ni chef ni esclave.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154. TL : Ils parlent beaucoup du colonialisme. Mais c'était quelque chose dont je doute. Ces blancs, ce qu'ils ont fait, c'était de nous occuper. Ce n'était pas seulement la terre: ils nous ont occupés, ils ont campé au milieu de nos têtes. Nous sommes du bois qui a pris de la pluie. Maintenant, nous ne pouvons pas être allumés et même pas donner de l'ombre. Nous devons sécher à la lumière d'un soleil qui n'y est pas encore. Ce soleil ne peut naître qu'en nous.

²⁸ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 120. TL : C'était la même chose à l'époque coloniale. Les lions me rappellent les soldats de l'armée portugaise. Ces Portugais ont été si idéalisés qu'ils sont devenus puissants. Les Portugais n'avaient pas la force de nous battre. Donc, ils ont fait en sorte que leurs victimes se donnent la mort. Et nous, les noirs, nous avons appris à nous haïr.

en garde quant au lien entre la tradition, l'histoire et la construction du pays. Ils dénoncent l'oubli et le manque de respect envers la terre et les ancêtres qui ne peuvent que conduire à un oubli total de qui ils sont. Les paroles de Sulplício l'illustrent bien:

Nem a terra, que é propriedade exclusiva dos deuses, nem a terra é poupada das ganâncias. Nada é nosso nos dias de agora. Chega um desses estrangeiros, nacional ou de fora, e nos arranca tudo de vez. [...] Porque esses chefes deviam ser grandes como árvore que dá sombra. Mas têm mais raiz que folha. Tiram muito e dão pouco.²⁹

Adjiru défend l'idée qu'oublier la condition d'esclave d'autrefois transforme la population en d'éternels esclaves du pouvoir et en esclaves de leur histoire :

Já se esqueceram que fomos escravos? [...] Os escravos não deixam memória sabem porquê? Porque não têm campa. Um dia destes, em Kulumani, ninguém mais terá campa. E nunca mais haverá lembrança de que aqui houve gente... [...] Aqui, moramos todos juntos, escravos e donos de escravos, os pobres e os donos da pobreza.³⁰

Sulplício signale que les nouveaux chefs sont avides de richesse et n'agissent pas au profit de la population. Adjiru prévient que le peuple, éloigné de sa mémoire collective continue à être victime de ses gouvernants. Un discours complémentaire l'autre et nous fait penser au devoir de raisonner en faveur d'un lien d'harmonie entre tradition et modernité, histoire et mémoire, gouvernement et population.

Morale de l'histoire

Si la question de la décolonisation est traitée dans les deux livres de manière similaire, on constate une divergence s'agissant de leurs dénouements. Les dernières péripéties dans LDVF permettent à Mia Couto

²⁹ COUTO, Mia. *op. cit.*, p. 152,153. TL : Ni la terre, qui est la propriété exclusive des dieux, ni la terre n'a été épargnée de la cupidité. Rien n'est à nous ces jours-ci. Un étranger, national ou du dehors, arrive et nous enlève tout [...] Parce que ces chefs devraient être aussi grands comme un arbre qui donne de l'ombre. Mais ils ont plus de feuilles que de racines. Ils nous prennent tellement des choses et nous donnent si peu.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102. TL : Avez-vous oublié que nous étions des esclaves? [...] Les esclaves ne laissent pas de mémoire, et vous savez pourquoi? Parce qu'ils n'ont pas de tombes. Un de ces jours, dans Kulumani, personne d'autre n'aura une tombe. Et jamais plus on pourra se rappeler qu'il y avait des gens ici ... [...] Ici, nous vivons ensemble, les esclaves et les propriétaires d'esclaves, les pauvres et les propriétaires de la pauvreté.

de donner vie à la fable du flamant. Le papier où l'italien annonce à l'ONU la fin du pays vole en forme d'oiseau dans l'infini. Ce papier représente un nouveau commencement où les Mozambicains réussiront à surmonter leurs défis et seront prêts à vivre et à gérer leur vie et leur pays sans intervention étrangère. Dans *ACL*, la question de l'autonomie laisse place au message de valorisation de la femme. La femme, victime pendant plusieurs années d'une société patriarcale et machiste, sera reconnue comme l'entité essentielle pour l'harmonie et le prolongement de la vie africaine. Ainsi, peu importe l'attaque des lionnes sur des personnes déjà mortes :

Todas essas mulheres já estavam mortas. Não falavam, não pensavam, não amavam, não sonhavam. De que valia viverem se não podiam ser felizes? [...] Se elas tiverem que continuar a viver uma vida que se lhes destina e não que escolhem, o melhor é que não haja mulheres enquanto elas não forem as deusas.³¹

Conclusion

La lecture critique des deux livres montre que la mission de décoloniser est une lutte doublement interne. Il faut combattre le pouvoir local, qui ne veut que continuer le cycle de dépendances initié durant la colonisation, et plus profondément encore, il faut dépasser la mentalité du colonisé pour réussir à vraiment *se décoloniser*. Mia Couto souligne dans ces deux romans que la décolonisation est en marche, qu'une partie de la population est consciente des problèmes du néocolonialisme et est prête à le dénoncer : il ne nous reste plus qu'à écouter ces voix et agir en faveur du pays.

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³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.TL : Toutes ces femmes étaient déjà mortes. Ne pas parler, ne pas penser, ne pas aimer, ne pas rêver : est-ce que ça valait la peine de vivre si elles ne pouvaient pas être heureuses? (...) Si elles devraient continuer à vivre une vie que l'on leur a choisie et qu'elles ne peuvent pas choisir, il est préférable qu'il n'y ait pas des femmes jusqu'à ce qu'elles ne deviennent des déesses.

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PART 4

DECOLONIZATION IN INDIA/IRELAND

CHAPTER 9

Nationalist versus Social Revolution - A comparative Study of Ritwik Ghatak's Subarnarekha (1965) and Ken Loach's The Wind that Shakes the Barley (2006)

Abstract: Decolonization of British dominion was synonymous with partition in several countries (Ireland, India). The founding myth of some newly independent states is unmistakably one of partition. Literary and film critics like Bodh Prakash and Bhaskar Sarkar have extensively dealt with partition narratives in former British colonies. Ken Loach's view that nationalistic struggles that led to decolonization foregrounded the fault lines of these societies and highlighted the need for social revolution at the dawn of independence offers new perspectives for research. This article explores how partition is mirrored in terms of breaks within the family in some English (*The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, 2006) and Bengali (*Subarnarekha*, 1965) films and how the familial tragedy is used by movie makers (Ken Loach, Ritwik Ghatak) to reveal the social challenges that postcolonial societies have had to face (property law in Ireland, caste and gender discrimination in India) by using music as an aesthetic force.

Résumé : La décolonisation des dominions britanniques est synonyme de la partition dans certains pays (Irlande, Inde). Le mythe fondateur de quelques pays nouvellement indépendants est sans doute celui de la partition. Des critiques littéraires et cinématographiques tels que Bodh Prakash et Bhaskar Sarkar se sont penchés sur les récits de la partition dans des anciennes terres coloniales britanniques. L'éclairage de Ken Loach selon lequel les luttes nationalistes qui ont mené à l'indépendance ont mis en avant les failles de ces sociétés et souligné la nécessité de la révolution sociale à l'aube de l'indépendance offre des nouvelles perspectives de recherche. Cet article explore la façon dont la partition se reflète dans la rupture à l'intérieur de la famille dans des films anglais (*Le vent se lève*) et indien (*Subarnarekha*) et de la manière dont la tragédie est utilisée par les cinéastes (Ken Loach, Ritwik Ghatak) pour dévoiler les défis sociaux que les sociétés postcoloniales ont du soulever (droit de la propriété en Irlande, discrimination basée sur la caste et le genre en Inde) en se servant de la musique comme force esthétique.

The effect of imperial sway in some indigenous societies had been one of administrative unification, albeit tenuous, albeit forced. But this did not help iron out the fundamental fissures in society such as the caste system or the class system. When the empire was dismantled and decolonization took place, it was as if a veil of smoke had been lifted from the eyes of the former subjects. The societies awoke to freedom and what they thought was happiness. However, between the dreamed nation and the reality that was theirs, the gap was tragic. War, famine, riots and partition are common topics that link Irish and Indian histories. This paper attempts to look at how decolonization was played out in Indian and Irish societies through the filmic portrayal of family dramas by Ritwik Ghatak and Ken Loach, who are both known for their cinema of social conscience. Indeed Ritwik Ghatak belonged to the Indian People's Theatre Association which was the cultural arm of the Communist movement in pre-independence India. Ken Loach is an avowed Marxist and has been associated with the Fourth International, the Trotskyite movement founded in 1938.

From the strictly artistic point of view, it must be said that Ghatak's film is in black and white, while that of Ken Loach is in colour. The period in which these films were shot must also be taken into consideration: *Subarnarekha* was produced in 1962, the year of the Chinese invasion of India but was released in 1965. *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* was released in 2006, i.e., after the disarmament of the IRA. The historical moments focused on in the two films, 1948 in the case of Ghatak and 1920-23 in the case of Ken Loach's film, whose title was borrowed from Robert Dwyer Joyce's ballad of the same name and which was written in the 19th century in memory of the 1798 Irish rebellion against Britain) are also quite different. Ghatak's purpose was to engage with the formative role of cinema as a language of nation building.¹ Ken Loach, who got interested in Ireland after reading Jim Allen's script for *Days of Hope* (1974) and convinced that the Irish question is a topical and crucial one,² intended his film to be "a very little step in the British confronting their imperialist history."³ Telling

¹ Erin O'Donnel, "'Woman' and 'homeland' in Ritwik Ghatak's films: Constructing post-Independence Bengali cultural identity," in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 47 (2004). <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc47.2005/ghatak/text.html>, accessed April 5, 2013. The dialogues from Ghatak's film are quoted from the English subtitled version held by the National Film Archives of India. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVEgAPyps3M>, accessed April 5, 2013.

² Consult Page 12 of the *French Press Kit, The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/assets/Image/Direct/016537.PDF>, accessed April 5, 2013.

³ Ken Loach, quoted by Michael Phillips, "Cannes festival wraps with top honours," in *The Spokesman Review*, 29 May 2006. See also Donal Ó Drisceoil, "Framing the Irish

the truth about the past was for him one way of telling the truth about the present (the US invasion of Iraq). However, the perpetually deferred dream of a home and a free nation by the newly decolonized, the patriarchal oppression of women and the paradoxical affirmation of their strength, the love and rivalry between siblings as a metaphor for the rebalancing of power between the mighty Empire and the independent nation states, the fragmentation of their territorial space, and the use of the music in the film as a form of deep national connection, warrant the comparison.

Sara Suleri has argued that the founding myth of India and Pakistan is one of perpetual partition.⁴ Poetry, fiction and theatre in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and English have dwelt extensively with this traumatic period of the history of Indian subcontinent. Both commercial and avant-garde film makers on both sides of the border have created unforgettable masterpieces on the death, survival and epic journey of refugees.⁵ Scholars on partition cinema have insisted that “the Bengal partition provides the context within which all of Ghatak's work is situated.”⁶ It is to be remembered that Ghatak himself came from a Bengali Hindu family from Dacca that sought asylum in Calcutta after the partition of British India. Ghatak does not depict partition as such, but partition as memory and the aftermath of partition in the dispossession, dislocation and deprivation which come to constitute postcolonial destiny.

***Subarnarekha*- Synopsis**

The middle class and the Hindu protagonists of *Subarnarekha*, Ishvar and Sita are orphans of partition violence. They are exiles in Calcutta from East-Bengal, trying to forge a new home in a country that is itself in the process of being formed as a new and sovereign nation. They witness the separation of a low caste mother, Kausalya, and her son, Abhiram, because the people from Kausalya's *Bagdi* caste on the outskirts of the New Life (*navjiva*)

Revolution: Ken Loach's The Wind That Shakes the Barley, in *Radical History Review*, (104) 2009: 5-15.

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1314&dat=20060529&id=amlWAAAIBAJ&sjid=JPMDDAAAIBAJ&pg=4884,7834324>, accessed April 5, 2013.

⁴ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 204.

⁵ Bodh Prakash, *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley Pvt Ltd, 2009).

⁶ Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). See in particular Anindya Raychaudhuri, “Resisting the resistible: re-writing myths of partition in the works of Ritwik Ghatak,” in *Social Semiotics* (19-4) 2009: 469-481.

Colony in Calcutta would accept only refugees from a village called Pabna, not from the city of Dacca. Ishvar, a Brahmin, takes Abhiram with him without manifesting any sense of caste discrimination when he decides to accept the position as a bookkeeper in a foundry that his businessman friend Rambilas offers him. He thus leaves the city for a village called Chatimpur situated on the banks of the Subarnarekha River that runs through Orissa and Bengal. However Haradas, his teacher friend, treats him as a selfish traitor who puts his sister's welfare above communal solidarity and accuses him of abandoning the school he set up.

After settling down in Chatimpur, Abhiram is sent to a boarding school while Sita flowers into a good singer and housewife. Ishvar plans to send Abhiram to get trained as an engineer in Germany while Abhiram's aspiration is to become a writer. Abhiram and Sita are in love. But when Kausalya dies in Chatimpur having come to look for her son after all these years, his low caste birth is disclosed. There is surprisingly fierce opposition on the part of Ishvar's brother, who would prefer to see Sita "die" rather than allow Abhiram to wed her. He decides to force an arranged marriage on her. The disapproving attitude of Rambilas, now ready to propose him a contract for partnership, and his eagerness to succeed in his profession are the factors that lead to Ishvar's rejection of his sister.

Like the heroine Sita from *The Ramayana*, his sister decides to transgress the "golden line" (the *subarnarekha* of restriction and protection that Rama's brother Lakshman draws around the legendary Sita, asking her not to step across that line) and elope with Abhiram. Their new life is a miserable one as they try to make both ends meet and bring up their little son. Proud Sita would not go to her brother for help. Abhiram gives up his dreams of becoming a writer and turns into a bus driver instead. Before he could bring in his first month of pay, he is killed by an angry mob, when his bus meets with an accident, killing a girl in the process. In the meantime, Ishvar travels with his friend Haradas to Calcutta to get drunk and forget his woes. He is tempted by a tout to enter a brothel. The prostitute he meets is none other than his own sister. Though shocked, his sister has the presence of mind to commit suicide in front of his eyes. Ishvar declares himself to be guilty of her death. But police enquiry concludes that it is a suicide and releases him.

At the end, his employer friend changes his mind and hands over the charge of the foundry to the next in command, Mukherjee. Bereft of home and saddled with his nephew Binu, Ishvar returns disillusioned and staggering to the Subarnarekha River banks, when Binu starts to sing a song by Tagore that his mother had taught him.

*Over the rice fields sun and shade play a game of hide and seek today
At hide and seek they play.
In blue skies, who floated rafts of white clouds o pray?
At hide and seek to play.
Bees forget to sip at honey, ecstatic with light they just fly around, visiting.
And why in the river sandbanks are the ducks and drakes all gathering?
Let us not go home today let's not go home today.
Let us break out through the sky and plunder the outdoors today.
Like foam upon the flood laughter floats in the air today.
In futile fluting let us squander our live long day.⁷*

The memory of the land of Bengal thus transmitted by the musical art brings the smile back to Ishwar's face and establishes the bond between the old uncle and the young nephew, as they embark on yet another journey in search of a new home to house their selves. "Once a refugee, always a refugee," as Ruth Praver Jhabvala remarks.⁸

A Family divided by Caste, a Nation united by Art

The film starts with a flag hoisting ceremony, thus inscribing it clearly in the space of the nation. However, rather than the national anthem that lays stress on national integration and the commingling of India's diversity in one national identity, the anthem composed by Tagore,⁹ it is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Vande Matharam* ("Hail to thee, my mother country")¹⁰ that is sung, giving the film its characteristic Bengali tilt.¹¹ For Ishvar, Haradas and Sita, India is certainly a mother figure. The collective dream is for a modern India that will rely on educated citizens who will know both the past and the present and speak Indian and European languages. Nevertheless, the country has to deal with its persisting and

⁷ Rabindranath Tagore composed over 2500 songs. Aaj Dhaner Khete is one of them. This translation is from the following link.

<http://greenjaydeep.tumblr.com/post/34702231153/over-the-rice-fields-sun-and-shade-play-a-game-of>, accessed April 5, 2012.

⁸ Jana Gana Mana, a Bengali song composed by Rabindranath Tagore in 1911 was adopted as the national anthem by the Constituent Assembly on 24th January 1950.

⁹ Vande Matharam, is a poem by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay that appeared in his 1882 novel *Anandamath*. It was first sung by Tagore at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress founded by the Scotsman Allan Octavian Hume in 1895.

¹⁰ Ruth Praver Jhabvala quoted by Maya Jaggi, "Brave New Worlds," in *The Guardian*, 19 march 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/mar/19/books.featuresreviews>, accessed April 5, 2013.

¹¹ Sandra Alvarez de Toledo, *Ritwik Ghatak, Les films du Bengale* (Paris: L'Archnéen, 2011).

parochial territorial and caste loyalties before this enlightened India could see the light of day. The refugee settlement called Navjiva Colony is a metaphor for the new nation state that promises a brand new life of freedom from the British. But its practice of excluding the lower caste from Dacca spells trouble for the expected renaissance. The film portrays a group of Bengali landowners (*zamindars*) who are chasing away the refugees. This furtive image of their show of force is an allusion to their feudal power under the Mughal and British administration of India. When Kausalya and Abhiram are torn asunder, the drama of partition is re-enacted. A few scenes later, Mahatma's Gandhi's assassination is indirectly represented through a news cable. The father of the nation thus tragically disappears from the scene at a crucial time. Alluding to James Joyce's definition of the nation as father's time and mother's species, Julia Kristeva has proposed an idea of the nation as a configuration of intertwined history and geography.¹² In the context of a clear break with geography and history in Ghatak's film, both really and also symbolically, the newly independent citizens of India are depicted as orphaned and as being left to find a way out and fend for themselves, like Hansel and Gretel in Grimm's fairy tale.

The representation of borders in the film, "those lines, zones or bands of separation, contact and confrontation, of barrage and passage, fixed or mobile, continuous or discontinuous, but overdetermined, polysemic and heterogeneous", as Etienne Balibar defines them,¹³ are significant. Makeshift fences hurriedly set up separate the urban space of Calcutta from its refugee colonies in the suburb. When Ishvar and his family take the train and arrive in Chatimpur, they cross the railway lines to reach their quarters. Though unobtrusively included, this particular scene is the one that connects the film's narrative with *The Ramayana*, insofar as the legendary Sita's crossing of the golden line which her brother-in-law has drawn is the action that drives the plot. Abhiram and Sita explore the ruins of Chatimpur. These empty, deserted and scorched spaces, such as abandoned wartime airport and the pilots' club, are traces of the colonial and imperial past. The conversation between Abhiram and Sita during this exploratory scene hints

¹²Julia Kristeva, « Le temps des femmes », in *Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme* (Paris: Fayard), 297-331.

¹³Étienne Balibar, « Qu'est-ce qu'une frontière ? », in *Asile, Violence, Exclusion en Europe. Histoire, analyse, prospective*, M. C. Caloz-Tschopp & A. Clevenot eds. (Geneva : Cahiers de la Section des Sciences de l'Éducation, Université de Genève et Groupe de Genève, 1994) 335-343.

http://exil-ciph.com/htdocs/ressources_dwnld/textes/B/BalibarFrontiere.pdf, accessed April 5, 2013.

at the conventional borderline and the resultant tension between genders. Abhiram wants to show the way around, but Sita, who is younger and hindered by the traditional sari she wears, seems to have a prior knowledge of the place, surprising him at each turn with her perceptive remarks. A no man's land lies between the foundry and the living quarters. When Sita comes across a frightening *bahurupi*¹⁴ performer wearing a mask, in other words her ominous destiny, her father's old colleague tells her the story of Sita who was the daughter of the Earth and had to return to Earth, thereby giving the spectators a premonition of Sita's impending fate. When Abhiram and Sita declare their mutual love, the setting is a stretch of woodland, suggesting the wilderness of desire. The invisible frontier between castes is foregrounded when Kausalya comes to die in Chatimpur.



The Subarnarekha River itself is both a geographical and psychological frontier in the sense that it separates a friendly, slow paced, rural and pastoral Bengal from the fast-paced and fashionable (embodied in the person of Rambilas's wife who alights from a car, takes off her sun glasses and bids her words of goodbye in English to Sita) Calcutta of the *nouveaux riches*. It thus functions as a transitional and comforting mother. It is on the banks of the river that Sita makes up her mind to break free from the

¹⁴ Bahurupi - quick-change artists across India who physically metamorphose into many characters. See Ananda Lal ed., *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2004.
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195644463.001.0001/acref-9780195644463-e-0035>, accessed April 5, 2013.

unjustness of her brother. She takes off the bridal mask and throws it away. As the mask of social veneer floats by,¹⁵ she takes responsibility for her life into her own hands. This is the moment in the film where the post-patriarchal is equated with the postcolonial. Sita thus traverses the distance that separates her covered head from the erect and bare bodies of her brother and friend who are casually arranging her marriage while bathing in the very same river.

At one point in the film Ishvar compares the scolding attitude of Sita to that of his own mother, when she accepts the role of the substitute mother and strokes his hair.¹⁶ Sita's own coming of age, from a curious little girl to a stubborn adolescent, before becoming a devoted and selfless wife and affectionate and responsible mother encountering her ultimate and tragic fate as a bereaved and impoverished widow, seems to parallel India's difficult development as a postcolonial nation. Sita's tumultuous journey can be compared to Radha's in Mehboob Khan's *Mother India*. Though the mother goddess is depicted in Bengal as the castrating and destructive Kali, in the movie's final scene, Sita coalesces into another mythological figure, Durga, who sets fire to herself in order to avoid the incestuous advances of her father, Daksha. Geetha Kapur has remarked that Ghatak "provided the impetus to see Indian tradition turned inside out by confronting perennial symbols with a historically framed subjectivity".¹⁷ The study of Sita in this film is a case in point. As in Satyajit Ray's *Devi*, the ordinary woman metamorphoses into a goddess under societal pressure.

The idea of a home is what informs the lyricism of the movie. At the beginning of the film, a worried Sita queries Haradas, who reassures them that their new home is in Calcutta. When Mukherjee welcomes the little girl in Chatimpur, he bewitches her with a poetic description of a home with a garden, enlivened by bright flowers and butterflies and the sound of songs. Immediately, Ishvar interrupts him in order to discourage him from telling lies to a little girl. It is as if the world-weary Ishvar knows that paradise is lost once and for all. Though the home Sita gets is not ideal, she cherishes

¹⁵ The copyright of the image reproduced from *Subarnarekha* belongs to its rightful owners. Grateful acknowledgement is made to them. It is reproduced here as citation for purely academic and non-commercial purposes in accordance with the "fair use" and "fair dealing" clauses of the copyright law.

¹⁶ Sudhir Kakar in his book *Intimate Relations: exploring Indian sexuality* (New Delhi: Viking, 1989), 18 reads the patriarchal *Laws of Manu* as arising out of the fantasies of an oedipal boy.

¹⁷ Veena Das quoting Geeta Kapur in Timothy Mitchell ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 181.

the memories of it and entertains her son in the Calcutta *bustee*, repeating the same words used by Mukherjee. When Binu meets his uncle, he repeats these images again, connecting the past to the nostalgic present.

Ritwik Ghatak engages with absurdist philosophy by having recourse to non-sense speech, sleepiness, mad rage and drunkenness. When Ishvar speaks in delirious nonsensical rhymes, Sita puts a stop to it. Ishvar gets worked up when Sita tells him point blank that he is wronging her and wishes her to die. He then crosses the limits of sanity. Healthy sleep is a sign of sanity. When she is young, Ishvar wants his sister to have a proper sleep just as Sita would want her son Binu to sleep peacefully. However, the empire's value was the spirit of enterprise with its correlative restlessness. The lines in Sanskrit from the Aitareya Upanishad¹⁸ heard in the background as Ishvar and Binu head back to Chatimpur extolling the virtues of mobility citing the forces of the sun that never sleep as example emphasize the irony underlying the condition of the refugee brought about by the end of the empire where the sun never slept. The refugee is always in an in-between state of wakefulness and slumber. This confused state is translated into the blurry-eyed drunkenness of Ishvar and the sleepiness of the journal's reporter, who wants to find out the truth about Ishvar from Haradas. As the latter speaks to the reporter, the camera angle is such that he seems to be addressing the spectator directly, giving him or her a lesson in meaninglessness. The martyrdom of freedom fighters had a meaning. But in independent India, a dog's death is mistaken for martyrdom and a senseless beating for a meaningful struggle. As for Abhiram's writings, neither Ishvar nor his publishers understand them. Their meaning is lost due to lack of time, resources and simply the willing availability of minds.

Music is the metaphorical protagonist of this film, as in his earlier films *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Komal Gandhar*.¹⁹ When Ishvar makes his crucial choice, we hear their Guru playing in the background as if to give his benedictions. Sita sings a haunting Bengali song of longing (*Krishnakirthan*). The vocalese of this song inherited from the Vaishnava Bakhti tradition forms the signature tune of the film. At one level, the song fills the void between her and Abhiram, who is separated from her. At another level, it is an expression of the longing felt by the people of Bengal

¹⁸ Trina Nileena Banerjee, "Journeys of No Return, Exile and Travel in the Films of Ritwik Ghatak," in *Pratilipi*, December 2012, <http://pratilipi.in/2010/06/journeys-of-no-return-trina-nileena-banerjee/>, accessed April 5, 2013.

¹⁹ Subroto Mihir Roy, "Semiosis of Music in Ghatak's Select films," http://www.academia.edu/260635/Semeiosis_of_Music_in_Ghataks_Select_Films, accessed April 5, 2013.

who yearn for the reunification of their partitioned homeland. Bengali folk tunes are heard both as a performance by a street artist and as a performance by Sita. Music helps Ghatak weld the epic and the historical and to give birth to a modern myth of the sacrifice of women to enable the nation to proceed. While partition has often been compared to fratricide, Ghatak gives it a suicidal twist, accentuating the tragic rather than the cruel aspect. The ironic use of the Nina Rota's theme song Patricia from Fellini's *Dolce Vita* at the night club and at Sita's room in Kajal's house underscores the degradation of Bengali culture. Decolonization had been harsh on the vulnerable, the women, the children and the underprivileged. Rather than uplifting them, it had plunged them into the abyss of pain and misery.

***The Wind that Shakes the Barley* - Synopsis**

In Ken Loach's Cannes award winning film,²⁰ two County Cork brothers, one a medical student, Damien O'Donovan and another an IRA commander, Teddy O'Donovan are pitted against each other.²¹ Damien is on the verge of leaving his hometown to practice medicine in a London hospital while his brother wants him to join the nationalist struggle. Before his departure, Damien witnesses two incidents that help change his mind – the summary execution of Micheál Ó Súilleabháin by the *Black and Tans* because he refuses to say his name in English and the brutal intimidation of the railway guard and train driver who refuse to allow the British troops to board. Damien joins the IRA, gets trained and participates in subversive activities with the help of his girl friend and member of the Irish Women's Council, Sinéad Sullivan.

After the attack on the village's Royal Irish Constabulary and assassination of four British auxiliaries, Anglo-Irish landowner Sir John Hamilton forces his farmhand Chris Reilly to denounce the IRA militants to the British army's intelligence corps. IRA members are arrested and Teddy is tortured. With the help of a British soldier of Irish descent, all but three of them manage to escape. When these three are shot, Damien is ordered to execute the traitors. Damien shoots both Sir Hamilton and Chris, his long time friend. Damien is guilt stricken at the prospect of meeting Chris's mother who supports nationalist cause. After another attack on an armed

²⁰ Ken Loach, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, DVD, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006.

²¹ The figures of these two protagonists and some episodes of the film were inspired by the life and writings of the Irish freedom fighter Ernie o'Malley. See Damon Smith, "Our Time of Troubles – Interview with Ken Loach," in *Bright Lights* 56 (2007). <http://brightlightsfilm.com/56/kenloachiv.php>, accessed April 5, 2013.

British convoy by the IRA, the British army retaliates by burning down Sinéad's homestead and humiliating her. At that precise moment, a young boy arrives with the news of a ceasefire.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1920 only grants dominion status to the partitioned Ireland. While Teddy and his allies favour the treaty, Damien and his friend Dan, the train driver and member of the Irish Citizens' Army who gives voice to the ideas of the Irish republican and socialist leader James Connolly,²² are opposed to it. Sinéad works for the courts and stops a greedy landowner from exploiting a helpless woman. Damien and his group aspire for a United Irish Republic and the nationalization of industry and agriculture for more social justice. Teddy and his friends parade in Irish Army Uniforms and are sneered at by the opposite camp. When the civil war breaks out in Dublin, the Anti-Treaty group of the IRA in Cork perpetrates acts of violence against the Irish Free State. Teddy is obliged to turn against his own brother.

Dan is killed and Damien captured during a raid for arms on a Free State barracks commanded by Teddy. Damien is imprisoned in the same cell where he and his brother were earlier held by the British, and sentenced to death. Teddy asks Damien to disclose the IRA's cache. In return, he offers him full amnesty and the prospect of a life with Sinéad in a peaceful Ireland. Damien stands firm and writes a good bye letter to Sinéad.

At dawn, Damien is brought before a firing squad. Teddy orders the squad to fire, and Damien falls dead. Teddy takes Damien's letter and hands it over personally to Sinéad. Her anger and grief know no bounds and she orders Teddy to leave. The film ends with Sinéad weeping for Damien and Teddy walking away in remorse.

An attempt at comparison

If Ghatak from the outset installs the nation as a frame, showing the flag-hoisting ceremony and the singing of *Vande Matharam*, Ken Loach achieves a similar initial framing, first visually, through the depiction of the hurling game forbidden by the British in 1918,²³ then aurally, through the inclusion of Gaelic sounds in an English film. As in Ghatak's film, the burden of a momentous choice is brought to bear on the protagonist in Ken Loach's film. Ishvar flees the city in search of security and serenity. In Ken

²² Consult the discussion between Jim Creegan and Phil Ferguson on the topic, "Was Connolly right? Debate on 'The Wind that shakes the Barley'" dated 30 July 2007. <http://www.socialistdemocracy.org/Debate/DebateWindThatShakesTheBarley.html>, accessed April 5, 2013.

²³ The British suspected that it was the breeding ground for tough Irish freedom fighters.

Loach's film, Damien decides to stay and risk his life in the village. Just as the Bengali landscape provides not only the setting but the very heart of Ghatak's movie, the lush green fields and the cosy brown interiors of Ireland captured by cinematographer Barry Ackroyd form an integral part of Ken Loach's narrative.

Much like the contrast between the city and the village and the factory floor and home depicted in *Subarnarekha*, the contrast between Sinead's farmhouse and Sir John Hamilton's mansion is striking in *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. In Ghatak's film, the foundry is an inheritance of industrial revolution and empire, while the rural landscape represents the motherland. The solidity and spaciousness of Sir Hamilton's house, the opulence of its interiors and its many servants, clearly establish it in Loach's film as a symbol of the empire. The farmhouse is a more domesticated and peripheral space representing the colony. Similarly, the British soldiers move in armoured vehicles while Sinead uses a bicycle. The sound made by the army vehicle and its speed that shakes the stillness of the Irish countryside are in contrast to the slow paced and quiet ride of the bicycle. Ken Loach seems to suggest that resistance to empire could be articulated as a refusal to synchronize local time with imperial time.



In Ghatak's film, it is the women who are sacrificed—treated as objects, abused, oppressed, driven to commit suicide or who are killed. In Ken Loach's film, it is young men who are punished and murdered in the name of the nation. The struggle between Teddy and Damien, reminiscent of the Biblical fight between Cain and Abel, is a metaphor for the partition tactics played by the British and the internal divisions of the Irish Free State.

Micheál's mother and Sinéad are facilitators of men's actions. Women's integrity and involvement in the republican values of equality and justice are manifest when Lily and Sinéad sit as judge²⁴ and clerk in the Republican court. They come off as strong women who could not be politically manipulated.

Like Rabindranath Tagore's song in Ghatak's film, Robert Dwyer Joyce's ballad sung at the funeral of Mikhail forms the aural theme of Ken Loach's movie.²⁵

*I sat within a valley green
I sat me with my true love
My sad heart strove to choose between
The old love and the new love
The old for her, the new that made
Me think on Ireland dearly
While soft the wind blew down the glen
And shook the golden barley²⁶*

A religious conflict is at the core of the partition of India and Ireland. However both directors set aside this aspect²⁷ and choose to look at the more practical challenges that the new nation-in-formation has to face, i.e., corruption and inequality. In Ghatak's film, corruption is subtly suggested when Rambilas tells Ishvar that he would be paid one hundred and fifty rupees per month as salary, but the accounts will show that as two hundred and fifty rupees. Ken Loach shows how the former IRA male militants are tempted to close their eyes on the infringement of one of their rich supporters who exploits a peasant woman by charging exorbitant interest rates. The discourse of Damien and Dan at the court clearly indicates that independence will not represent a real change in Ireland unless the problems

²⁴ The copyright of the image reproduced from *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* belongs to its rightful owners. Grateful acknowledgement is made to them. It is reproduced here as citation for purely academic and non-commercial purposes in accordance with the "fair use" and "fair dealing" clauses of the copyright law.

²⁵ The other traditional songs that the film's music director George Fenton used to give a patriotic flavour are: The Irish national anthem 'Amhán Na bhFiann' by Peadar Kearney and Patrick Heeney, the rebel song 'Oró! Sé Do Bheatha 'Bhaile' by Pádraic Pearse and 'The Doon Reel'. Consult page 25 of the *French Press Kit*. Supra.

²⁶ Robert Dwyer Joyce's ballad can be read at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wind_That_Shakes_the_Barley, accessed April 5, 2013.

²⁷ The parish priest's denunciation of the anti-Treaty militants asking for the nationalization of land of wealth of Ireland in *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* merely alludes to the role of religion in the Irish freedom struggle.

of unemployment and poor working conditions are solved. Dan's conclusion that the treaty will only "change the accents of the powerful and the colour of the flag" could apply to any transfer of power where the welfare of the people is not given priority.

Dan's rejoinder reminds us of the words of B.R. Ambedkar, the president of the Constituent assembly,

We are going to enter a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life, we will have inequality ... We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this assembly has so laboriously constructed.²⁸

In Ghatak's film, this contradiction is revealed by Sita, who is surprised by the out of character behaviour of her brother who does not tolerate falsehood. However, as Perry Anderson remarks, "It was not a contradiction of the democracy to come. It was the condition of it. India would have a caste-iron democracy."²⁹ David Abernethy in his book on the *Dynamics of Global Dominance* underscores the difference between class and caste: "Once a racial category becomes a socioeconomic caste it is extremely difficult for those at the scale's lower end to move up and potentially explosive of social relations if they do."³⁰

Ghatak's story has an autobiographical element insofar as his family too was a family of refugees from East Bengal to Calcutta. Though Ken Loach is not Irish, he is able to identify himself with the working class Irish, as a person hailing from the English working class. Besides, the film narrative, though fictional, is based on real life stories. The autobiographical element of Dwyer's ballad permeates the whole picture. Just as there is a reference to Gandhi's assassination in Ghatak's film, by way of a voiced criticism of his policies, there is an intertextual reference to the Irish leader Michael Collins, who appears in a newsreel³¹ on the Irish Peace Congress inserted in Ken Loach's film. While some IRA members prefer his negotiated solution

²⁸ B.A. Ambedkar quoted by Perry Anderson in "After Nehru," *London Review of Books* (34-15) 2012: 21-36. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n15/perry-anderson/after-nehru>, accessed April 5, 2013.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 365.

³¹ <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/irish-peace-congress-and-delegates>, accessed April 5, 2013. See also Neil Jordan's 1996 feature film *Michael Collins*.

to war and bloodshed, others consider him to be a betrayer, thus sowing the seeds of discord which will later result in the civil war.

Conclusion

Niall Ferguson has argued that the British Empire has had beneficial effects on its colonies.³² But his critics contend that far from identifying the fault lines of Indian and Irish societies and mending them, the expansionist enterprise of the Empire had only aggravated them. However, reality on the ground was more complex than the usual contrast drawn between Britain's savagery and the colonies' heroism. Just as the local elite in Ireland were found to be no different from the British elite, sharing their capitalistic preoccupations,³³ some leaders in India were distrustful of the local elite and their parochial interests. Indeed Ramachandra Guha sustains that British heritage, in the form of the secular institution of the university, urbanization, industrialization, press and political parties helped promote social mobility. According to him, "The British were far from being militant reformers, but indirectly and unwittingly they enabled the circumstances in which social reform could take place."³⁴ In this, he is only echoing the Marxist view that English colonization was a wakeup call to an Indian society that had become static and self-satisfied.

The question is, 'Can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?' If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.³⁵

These two films of Ghatak and Ken Loach engage with the issue of social revolution and stand out as illustrations of the failed politics of decolonization. Decolonization leaves a bitter taste in the lives of the people who fought for the departure of the British, precisely because the social revolution had not preceded the national one. While the people aspire for unification, the imperial administration imposes partition as the only postcolonial way forward. By doing so, it only acknowledges its inability to

³² Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

³³ See Fintan Lane & Donal Ó. Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class, 1830-1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁴ Ramachandra Guha, "Perfidy, Villainy, Intrigue," in *London Review of Books* 34-24 (2012): 29-30. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n24/ramachandra-guha/perfidy-villainy-intrigue>, accessed April 5, 2013.

³⁵ Karl Marx quoted by Guha in the article above.

dissolve the internal divisions in society which it had earlier used for its benefit. As Amit Chaudhuri says,

the story of Partition does not stop in 1947: it is not the story of a moment but the story of exile, movement and resettlement; an agonized transition from old to new that presages the preoccupations that have come to dominate the latter half of this century.³⁶

It is, therefore, a fallacy to look upon decolonization³⁷ as a mere gesture of non-violence similar to decommissioning, ignoring the long term and contradictory effects of imperial de-and reterritorialization³⁸ of colonized lands. Though from the point of view of the Irish and Indians decolonization meant switching to home rule or *swadesh*, from the British stand point it was a form of the “contraction” of the Empire as David Abernethy³⁹ puts it. Britain’s disengagement from Ireland or quitting India is to be understood as a particular phase of this process. The splintered glasses in the nightclub scene in Ghatak’s film symbolize not only the fractured identity of the postcolonial citizen, but also Nehru’s disillusionment with his idea of India as “an alternative site for universality.”⁴⁰

Currently, in Ireland, a group of revolutionary republican socialists opine that decolonization has been a deferred process in so far as «the Good Friday Referenda were in reality a continuation of the old partitionist dynamics of the early 1920s.” It is therefore seeking “to create a united Irish working class, united not within a national or communal identity but in common purpose for progressive human gain.”⁴¹ It believes that the path to

³⁶ Amit Chaudhuri, “Partition as Exile,” in *Index on Censorship* 26-6 (1997): 92-96.

³⁷ Though the word decolonization has existed since 1932, it did not appear in the Oxford English Dictionary or Encyclopaedia Britannica before 1975. See Anthony Greene, “Decolonization in British Africa,” in *History Today* 42-1 (1992). <http://www.historytoday.com/anthony-greene/decolonisation-british-africa>, accessed April 5, 2013. He also refers to the French Herni Grimal’s 1965 title *La décolonisation 1919-1963* and the German Rudolf von Albertini’s 1966 Title *Dekolonisation*.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guttari, *L’Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972),162.

³⁹ David B. Abernethy, *Ibid.*, 325-344.

⁴⁰ Sunil Khilnani et al, *Non Alignment 2.0, A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century* (New Delhi: Centre for Policy research, 2012), 69. http://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/NonAlignment%202.0_1.pdf, accessed April 5, 2013.

⁴¹ “The Revolutionary Alternative, Standing Outside the Peace Process,” in *Irish Republican News*, March 22, 2013. http://republican-news.org/current/news/2013/03/the_revolutionary_alternativ1.html, accessed April 5, 2013.

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true Irish freedom lies that way. The emergence of regional Dalit political parties and the rise to power of their elected leaders has ushered in a silent revolution and the third age of democracy⁴² in India, while the Naxalite-Maoist insurgents defending the rural poor are very active in the district of Howrah in West Bengal. There is no political dream of bringing India, Pakistan and Bangladesh under one umbrella because of the sectarian politics which plagues their relationship. But it is to be hoped that greater economic cooperation under the aegis of SAARC will mitigate political and diplomatic risks. All the three countries are using celluloid diplomacy as an effective tool of soft power.

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⁴² Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution. The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (New York: Columbia University Press & New Delhi: Permanent Black), 2003.

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CHAPTER 10

Is one of the world's oldest democracies under threat? A comparative look at the constitutional organization of the United Kingdom and Ireland might tell us why

Abstract: The United Kingdom ranks amongst the world's oldest democracies and has, through its colonial empire helped to spread western democratic traditions around the world. The article asks if British democracy is now under threat and whether that threat comes from the flexible undefined character of the system itself. This is done by comparing the UK's constitutional structure with that of its close neighbour Ireland. The role of the three branches of government in each jurisdiction is examined in order to ask whether the UK's executive branch has become too dominant, thereby leading to a potentially dangerous concentration of power. The article considers that the Irish constitutional structure, modelled closely on the Westminster model, has nonetheless avoided the challenge presently facing the UK, mainly through the existence of a written constitution, a democratically elected head of state and reliance on a system of voting based on proportional representation.

Résumé : Le Royaume uni figure parmi les plus vieilles démocraties du monde et il a contribué à répandre la tradition démocratique occidentale à travers son empire colonial. Cet article pose la question de savoir si la démocratie britannique est menacée et si la menace provient de la nature flexible et non défini du système même en comparant la structure constitutionnelle britannique avec celle de son voisin plus proche, l'Irlande. Le rôle des trois branches du gouvernement dans chaque juridiction est examiné afin de voir si le rôle de la branche exécutive du royaume uni est devenu trop puissant résultant dans une concentration de pouvoirs dangereux. L'article soutient que la structure constitutionnelle irlandaise qui s'inspire étroitement du modèle du Westminster a su éviter la difficulté à la quelle fait face le royaume uni grâce principalement à l'existence d'une constitution écrite, à un chef d'état démocratiquement élu et au recours à la représentation proportionnelle.

The UK ranks amongst the world's oldest democracies and has through its colonial empire played a key role in spreading the western democratic model around the world. However, it is contended that British democracy, built partly on the unwritten rules, convention and custom may be under threat. The author seeks to demonstrate this by comparing the UK's constitutional structure with that of its close neighbour Ireland. The Irish constitutional structure, modelled closely on that of Westminster has avoided some the challenges presently encountered by the United Kingdom. It is proposed to consider the two systems comparatively (A) and thereafter to identify the particular dangers facing democracy in the UK (B).

The United Kingdom's (UK) modern democratic traditions date back the 13th century when Norman Kings first summoned parliaments, put in place the foundations of the common law system and accepted legal restrictions on the exercise of monarchical power by signing the Magna Charta. Ireland as a former constituent member of the UK shared in that system and later, upon gaining independence, put in place a similar constitutional structure. However, the two systems are not identical and fundamental differences exist between them; the most important of which being the fact that Ireland is a republic with an elected President whilst the UK remains a constitutional monarchy.

A. The political institutions of the UK and Ireland

Despite the unprecedented levels of cooperation between the Irish and British governments leading to the establishment of a peace deal in the North of Ireland,¹ it is important to remember that the two states remain independent political entities with separate political institutions.² It is proposed (1) to first look at the respective constitutions of each country before (2) before looking at the specific nature of their respective political institutions.

1. The British and Irish Constitutions

A constitution is the name given the rulebook that defines the relationship between the different powers of state. It is often said by non-jurists that England has an *unwritten* constitution. However, although

¹ Good Friday Agreement (also known as Belfast Agreement), April 1998.

² The island of Ireland is a divided entity with the North of Ireland forming part of the United Kingdom and the South a separate republic.

seductive by its simplicity, this statement remains fundamentally incorrect. Indeed, it is important not to confuse the notions of:

- a codified Constitution, i.e. a bringing together in one document the laws organizing the offices of state, for example the Irish Constitution;
- a written constitution, i.e. the existence of constitutional laws in written form, but not codified in a single document;
- an unwritten constitution made up of unwritten rules having constitutional status, i.e. accepted practice that, although never formally recorded, is accepted as binding.³

The rules making up the UK Constitution are for the most part written, although there are also unwritten rules enjoying constitutional status. Thus, rather than saying that the UK has an unwritten Constitution it is probably more correct to say that the UK constitution is uncodified.

a) The UK Constitution

As the UK has no codified constitutional document, its Constitution comes from a number of sources including:

- *fundamental documents*: the Magna Charta is an example of a fundamental document making up UK constitutional law. The importance of the Magna Charta lies in the fact that it forced King John to accept that there was a system of law existing parallel to the throne and that the Crown had to respect this law.⁴ Under the heading of fundamental documents also comes the 1689 Bill of Rights, vesting sovereignty in the Parliament and setting out the rights of UK subjects under the newly created constitutional

³ For example in the United Kingdom it is convention that the Queen will appoint as Prime Minister the leader of the political party enjoying the support of the majority of the House of Commons.

⁴ Signed at Runnymede June 15, 1215 by King John, probably one of the most important clauses of the Magna Charta created a committee of Barons who could meet at any time security required it and impose their will on the King through force if necessary. Civil War followed its signing, as John immediately reneged on his promises. Understanding the threat that the document posed to the then monopoly of power enjoyed by church and state, the Pope also became involved, describing it as a shameful document signed under conditions of force. However, the genie was out of the bottle and after John's death, the new King (Henry III), still a child, was forced to agree to a revised version of the document.

- monarchy.⁵
- *constitutional statutes adopted by the UK Parliament*: some of the laws adopted by the Parliament are considered to be constitutional in character. The more important include the:
 - Act of Settlement (1701) – establishing *inter alia* that only persons of the Protestant faith can accede to the throne.
 - Acts of Union, 1707 and 1801 - whereby Scotland and Ireland respectively became part of the Union and lost their independent parliaments. The effect of both Acts of Union has been partially overturned by New Labour's policy of devolution in Wales,⁶ Northern Ireland and Scotland, under the Government of Wales Act, Northern Ireland Act (1998) and Scotland Act (1998) all providing for varying degrees of devolved government for the home countries.
 - Parliament Act (1911) - restricting the power of the House of Lords. Pursuant to this Act the House of Lords' power to veto bills coming from the House of Commons was brought to an end, effectively establishing the dominance of the Commons over the Lords.
 - Statute of Westminster (1931) – creating legislative equality for the self governing dominions making up the Commonwealth.⁷
 - Human Rights Act (1998) - applying the European Convention on Human Rights, (1952) directly in UK law.
 - House of Lords Act (1999) - whereby the House of Lords has seen the number of hereditary peers sitting in the House reduced to ninety-two lords, the heirs of which will no longer enjoy an automatic right to sit in the Lords.⁸
 - *the laws created by the judiciary*: these laws are sometimes referred to as *case law* or the *common law*. Perhaps one of the most

⁵ Drawn up in the context of the “glorious revolution” and the investiture of William of Orange as King after the forced abdication of James II.

⁶ There was never an Act of Union for the Welsh Parliament, which probably explains the initial hesitant response of the Welsh to devolution.

⁷ Namely, at the time, Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, New Zealand, South Africa and the then Irish Free State.

⁸ There are many more Acts of Parliament of constitutional importance and this list is obviously open-ended.

important common law rules is that of Habeas Corpus.⁹ Under this principle, which can roughly be translated as *you shall have the body*, any person imprisoned has a right to appear before the courts to question the legality of his imprisonment. As is often the case with good case law, this rule was later confirmed by the adoption of an Act of Parliament, the Habeas Corpus Act, 1679;¹⁰

- *the Treaties emanating from the European Union*. The UK joined the EU in 1973¹¹ and by signing a succession of treaties it has surrendered part of its sovereignty to the former organization.¹² It is this loss of sovereignty and that fact that EU law, where applicable, takes precedence to UK law that explains the unpopularity of the European Union among UK citizens.

Perhaps the single most important characteristic of the UK Constitution is that because it is not set out in any one document, its exact content is difficult if not impossible to define. Moreover, unlike most modern democracies, changes to the Constitution are made not by referendum but by statute adopted by the UK Parliament. This gives the UK Parliament and especially those who control it tremendous powers.¹³

b) The Irish Constitution

The Irish Constitution officially referred to as *Bunreacht na hEireann* was adopted in 1937, replacing the former Free State Constitution signed in

⁹ Habeas Corpus comes from the Latin for "Thou (shalt) have the body (before the court)"; this means that a court has the right to require the state imprisoning a person to bring the latter before the Court so as justify the imprisonment. The right of each person in England to his personal freedom from imprisonment rests ultimately on that Act. Prior to the adoption of the Act, Habeas Corpus already existed. Since the time of Elizabeth I the state has had to justify its imprisonment of persons in the Tower of London. In the celebrated case of the African slave Sommersett, the King's Bench (High Court) required his alleged owner (one captain Knowles) to justify his keeping of Sommersett in captivity. Famously the Court commented, "The air of England is too pure for any slave to breathe". Apparently, once Sommersett had breathed England's air, he was automatically free.

¹⁰ Case law and statute law are two different sources of law that exist side by side. In the case of conflict between the two, statute law takes precedence, as it is law adopted by the Parliament and thus comes indirectly from the people.

¹¹ The UK joined the European Union in 1973 pursuant to the European Communities Act, 1973. At the time the organization was called the European Economic Community.

¹² Namely the European Community Treaty (or Treaty of Rome, 1957), the Single European Act (1986), the Treaty on European Union (or Maastricht Treaty, 1992), Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Treaty of Nice (2001), the Lisbon Treaty 2009.

¹³ However, Parliament may decide that important questions should be decided by referendum if there is a sufficient public interest issue at play.

1922. Article 5 of *Bunreacht na hEireann*, expressly cuts all ties with the UK, providing that “Ireland is a sovereign, independent, democratic state”. Independent courts were established, endowed with a power of judicial review over the other branches of government. Moreover, a series of personal rights were expressly established and guaranteed¹⁴. The Constitution is a centrist document, although it is socially conservative expressing the dominant Catholic ethos existing in the country at that time.¹⁵ Thus, it guarantees, on one hand the right to private property and on the other enshrines the duty on the state to assist weaker members of society.¹⁶

The difference between the Irish and UK Constitutions is not focussed on their respective content and the rights they guarantee, which for the most part are broadly similar. Rather the difference is to be found in the organization and status of those rights. The rights established by the Irish Constitution form part of a written constitution and can only be changed by referendum. Thus power reposes directly in the hands of the Irish citizens. The UK Constitution, as we have seen, can be amended by Parliament. Thus power is directly held by Parliament and indirectly by the citizens who elect it. This is significant, as the recent Lisbon Treaty¹⁷ adoption process demonstrates. Although a majority of the UK people appeared to be against the Lisbon Treaty, they were denied a chance to vote on its content. This results from the fact that the UK Parliament may change the UK Constitution without having to consult UK citizens regarding any such change. Irish citizens also appeared at first to be against the Lisbon Treaty, the difference is that they were allowed to express this opinion and voted

¹⁴ Equality before the law, the right to life, the right to trial by jury, the right to bodily integrity, freedom to travel, personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, religious liberty, the rights of the family, property rights, the right to earn a livelihood, inviolability of dwelling, the right to fair procedures/due process, the right to privacy. Moreover, the Irish Supreme Court has given these rights a dynamic interpretation whereby a large series of implied rights have also been recognized.

¹⁵ The “Catholic” element in the Constitution has slowly been diluted, with the pre-eminence of the family and the rights of the unborn being increasingly called into question.

¹⁶ Boring as it may sound, this middle-of-the-road position probably reflects the strong conservative Catholic background of Irish society, with high levels of private property ownership. These characteristics have combined to prevent the emergence of any real radical socialist or communist movement, with the obvious exception of the independence movement. This is not to say that Irish political parties are exactly the same. However rather than differentiating themselves on questions of ideology, they do so by reference to priorities.

¹⁷ Reference is made to the Lisbon Treaty, the last Treaty adopted by the European Union amending and extending the powers of the Union.

against its adoption.¹⁸ If the Treaty ultimately became part of Irish law, it is because the Irish people chose to adopt it, not because they were forced to do so.¹⁹ The powers of the Irish Parliament are restricted, as if it acts outside of the Constitution the adopted legislation is subject to control by the courts under the heading of judicial review. The UK courts, given that ultimate sovereignty resides in Parliament, do not have equivalent power under this heading.

2. Political institutions in the UK and Ireland

The political institutions in Ireland and the UK are similar, due to Ireland's historically close links with the United Kingdom. However, differences between the two systems do exist and one should not be considered a carbon copy of the other. The UK system has slowly evolved from monarchy to constitutional democracy. The result is that existing powers, for example those of the monarchy, are frequently restricted by convention rather than by any express rules to that effect. Thus there exists a delicate balance between the different institutions and possibly an over-concentration of power in the office of prime minister, which in the UK is nearly presidential in its scope.

By contrast, the creators of the Irish system had a blank canvas with which to work and as a result were in a position to put in place a modern system based less on convention and more on republican tradition, with clear rules delineating the relationship between the different powers of state.

Nowhere is this distinction clearer than in the case of the monarchy in the UK and the office of President in Ireland.

¹⁸ The requirement to have a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty results from *Crotty v. An Taoiseach* [1987] IR 713. The Irish Supreme Court ruled that the State cannot ratify a European Treaty without first amending the national Constitution if the Treaty contains one or several provisions which alter "the essential scope or objectives" of the original European Communities. For further analysis, see generally G. Hogan and G. Whyte, *J.M. Kelly: The Irish Constitution* (Dublin: LexisNexis Butterworths, 4th ed., 2003); C. Costello, "Ireland's Nice Referenda" in *EuConst*, 2005, 357; M. Cahill, "Ireland's Constitutional Amendability and Europe's Constitutional Ambition: The Lisbon Referendum in Context," in *German Law Journal*, 9-10 (2008): 1191; G. Barrett, "Building a Swiss Chalet in an Irish Legal Landscape? Referendums on European Union Treaties in Ireland & the Impact of Supreme Court Jurisprudence", in *EuConst*, 2009, 32. G. Hogan, "The Lisbon Treaty and the Irish Referendum" in *European Public Law*, 15-2 (2009): 163.

¹⁹ Although the democratic character of the vote approving the Lisbon Treaty can be questioned, as it was only accepted at the second attempt at a time when the Irish people effectively had an economic gun to their head.

a) Head of State – Monarchy/President

Both the UK and Ireland are similar insofar as they both have Heads of State that serve primarily a symbolic role. However, as we shall see, the office of President in Ireland, as a result of its democratic legitimacy and the existence of a codified constitution clearly setting out its powers, has a larger and more defined role. Consequently it better fulfills its modern-day primary function of acting as a brake on the exercise of power by the other branches of state.

1) UK - The Monarchy

Normally the existence of a monarchy would imply that a state is not democratic, especially when, as is the case in the UK, the Queen apparently has a power of veto over legislation adopted by the Parliament and is also titular head of the Church of England. However, as is frequently the case with UK constitutional law, all is not quite what it seems. The Queen is considered a constitutional monarch and her powers are thus limited pursuant to the terms of the UK Constitution. In reality, the monarchy's powers are now mainly ceremonial and may be considered under a number of precise headings.

- *Head of State*: the Queen is the Head of State in the UK. Coins and notes bear her image and the state brings actions in her name.²⁰ When she travels abroad she represents the UK. Visiting diplomats present their credentials to her and she signs international treaties on behalf of the British people. On the advice of the prime minister, she is responsible for conferring honors such as knighthoods and appointing government ministers, bishops of the Church of England, peers of the realm and judges.
- *Consultative role*: the Prime Minister meets every week with the Queen in order to discuss government policy and, more generally, the affairs of state. The Queen has no real power over the formation of government policy and has been said to have the right “to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn.”²¹ Moreover, for a bill to become an Act of Parliament, the Queen must give her Royal Assent. In reality this is only a formality and pursuant to constitutional tradition it is inconceivable that the Queen would

²⁰ For example, all criminal cases in which the State is prosecuting are brought in the Queen's name: “*Regina*”.

²¹ William BAGEHOT, “The English Constitution”, first published in 1867.

withhold her assent.²² Nonetheless, combined with a right of weekly consultation, it allows the monarch a certain indirect influence over government policy that should not be underestimated.

- *Ceremonial role*: the Queen summons and dissolves parliament by Royal proclamation and she also opens and prorogues each individual session of parliament. Thus, each year she travels from Buckingham Palace by horse-drawn coach to the Houses of Parliament and plays out a public ritual much loved by the British people. She is also Head of the Church of England and is officially referred to as the *Protector of the Faith*. As we have seen, pursuant to the Act of Settlement 1701 the British monarch must be of Protestant faith. In a modern country made up of millions of citizens of diverse religions or indeed professing no religious faith, this requirement clearly makes the monarchy less representative.

2) Ireland - The President

Under *Bunreacht na hEireann*, the president is elected by direct vote of the Irish citizens every seven years. Candidates must be nominated by 20 members of Parliament or by the Councils of four County Councils.²³ The President is the head of state and, as with the Queen, for most part acts on the advice and authority of the government. For example, the President appoints the prime minister, referred to as *An Taoiseach* (hereafter the *Taoiseach*) on the advice of parliament and then appoints government ministers on the advice of the *Taoiseach*. Before a bill can become law, it must be presented to the President for his signature. He then promulgates the law by having a notice published in *Iris Oifigiul*.²⁴ The supreme command of the defense forces is vested in the President and commissioned officers take their commissions from him. The President is also the nominal head of international affairs and consequently it is to the President that

²² It is accepted convention that the Queen would never withhold her consent, and indeed were she to do so it might well pave the way for the end of the monarchy in the UK. However, this convention as to the non-use of the royal assent is relatively modern in constitutional terms and previous monarchs exercised the power which the royal assent actually gives. The last monarch actually to do so was Queen Anne in 1707, although later monarch used its threat to have legislation altered.

²³ The present President of Ireland is Michael Higgins, elected for a first term of office in 2011. Previous Presidents include: Douglas Hyde (Irish nationalist and writer), Sean T O' Ceallaigh (political leader), Eamonn de Valera (political leader), Erskine Childers, Cearbhall o' Dalaigh (lawyer), Patrick Hillary (politician), Mary Robinson (lawyer), and Mary McAleese (University lecturer).

²⁴ The Official Gazette.

diplomats present their credentials and it is he who, on the advice of the government, accredits Irish representatives abroad. Finally, as is the case with the Queen, the President must be kept informed by the Taoiseach on matters of international and domestic policy.

Thus, the Irish President, like the Queen performs a mainly ceremonial role. However, unlike the British monarch, the President has a number of real powers that are in no way limited by convention and have to do with his express role as guardian of the Constitution.

- *Refuse to sign a bill and send it to the Supreme Court for review.* *Bunreacht na Eireann* envisaged the President as more than just a mere ceremonial head of state. Thus, when presented with a bill for signature, the President may choose to refer the bill to the Supreme Court for a review of its constitutionality. If the Supreme Court finds that a provision of the bill is unconstitutional, the law must then be submitted to the Irish people in referendum, who will then decide whether the bill should pass into law or not. This power is significant, if we look at the issue of emergency powers and the question of detention without trial. In the past, the Irish President has referred legislation seeking to extend to seven days the period of detention available to the Irish police for review by the Irish Supreme Court and when asked, the Court found such legislation to be unconstitutional.²⁵
- *Refer a bill for referendum.* If a majority of the *Seanad* and not less than a third of the *Dail*²⁶ petition the President not to sign a bill on grounds that it contains a proposal of such national importance that the “will of the people ought to be ascertained”, the President can choose to refuse to sign the bill until:
 - a referendum has been held on the question; or
 - a general election is called and the bill is once again presented for signing by the newly elected *Dail*.

This is a significant power that allows the Head of State to require a referendum on legislation which, although probably constitutional, is nonetheless controversial in character.

²⁵ In the UK attempts to increase the period of legal detention to what many would consider an incredible long *forty-two days* has for the moment been delayed in the House of Lords. However the Queen or the courts are in reality powerless to prevent its adoption, if the bill is reintroduced before the new Parliament.

²⁶ The *Dail* and the *Seanad* make up the two houses of parliament in Ireland referred to as the Houses of the *Oireachtas*.

- *Convene an emergency meeting of either or both Houses of the Oireachtais.* The President has the power to convene a meeting of either or both Houses of the *Oireachtais* where there is an emergency of national importance that requires consideration.²⁷
- *Refuse to dissolve the Dail.* The President, at his absolute discretion, may refuse to dissolve the Dail where a sitting *Taoiseach* has lost the majority in the *Dail* and has requested President for a dissolution of the parliament. Instead, the President may require the *Dail* to nominate a successor for the *Taoiseach*. This power has never been used but it is presumed that the President may choose to exercise it where there has been a series of costly elections and where the President considers that the loss of the *Dail* majority is linked specifically to the personality of the outgoing *Taoiseach*.²⁸

Thus, although the Queen and the President are above all ceremonial heads of state, the President of Ireland enjoys real powers that are in no way constrained by convention and thus the office serves a useful function in tempering the powers of the other institutions.

b) The Houses of Parliament/Houses of the *Oireachtais*

Both the UK and Ireland share a bicameral system. In the UK the houses of Parliament are made up of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In Ireland, the Houses of Parliament, referred to as the Houses of the *Oireachtais*, and are made up of the *Dail* and the *Seanad*.

1) UK - The Houses of Parliament

As we have seen, Parliament in the UK is divided into two chambers:

- the House of Commons – made up of democratically elected “commoners” called Members of Parliament (MPs); and
- the House of Lords.

The main functions of the two houses working together are to:

- adopt laws ;

²⁷ Prior to exercising any of the above three powers the President must first consult with and have the opinion of the Council of State, not unlike the Queen’s Privy Council. The Council of State is made up of the *Taoiseach*, *Tanaiste* (deputy prime minister), the Chief Justice, President of the High Court, the *Ceann Comhairle* of both Houses of *Oireachtais* (House Speakers) and previous Presidents. The President is not bound to follow their opinion, but consultation must take place.

²⁸ There was talk of it being used at the beginning of the 1980’s when successive Fianna Fail and Fine Gael governments fell repeatedly.

- to finance the work of government by voting laws allowing the government to raise taxes;
- protect the rights of individuals;
- implement European directives into UK law;²⁹
- act as a watchdog as regards government policy and, more generally, discuss and debate the major issues of the day. This is perhaps the most important function of the Houses of Parliament.

The House of Commons, referred to as the lower house, is the more important of the two Houses of Parliament. It is made up of MPs from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Unlike the House of Lords, MPs are elected to the Commons by direct vote of the people³⁰ for up to a maximum period of five years, after which time they must seek reelection.³¹ Traditionally, the decision as to how long a parliament will last rests with the prime minister. Normally, the prime minister calls an election before the end of the five year period, at the time he considers it is most likely that his party will win reelection.³² Once his decision is taken, the prime minister goes to see the Queen who must then dissolve the Parliament on the Prime Minister's recommendation. However, under the recent Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition agreement there is now a five year fixed-term parliament in place and any earlier dissolution will require a majority of 55%.³³ This constitutional amendment concerning the House majority needed to call a general election was developed to meet the challenge of coalition government and is a good example of the flexible

²⁹ It is estimated that over 80% of commercial legislation adopted in Europe comes from Brussels. Obviously this has led to a significant decline in the importance of national parliaments.

³⁰ MPs are elected by UK citizens over eighteen years of age.

³¹ The period of time during which the House of Commons sits is called *a parliament* and each parliament can last up to five years. Each parliament is divided up into sessions, each session normally lasting a year. Again, the Queen has the ceremonial duty to summons and prorogue every session of Parliament. After Parliament is summoned, the Queen reads out a speech declaring the policies the government intends to adopt during the session in question. The opening of each session involves the Queen parading through London in rich pageantry before arriving at the Houses of Parliament. Once the Queen has opened a session of Parliament then business begins.

³² The new coalition government has attempted to put in place a fixed five-year parliament by increasing the majority needed at parliament to bring the government down from the traditional simple majority; see discussion below.

³³ Conservative/Lib Dem Pact – point 6 §2;

http://www.latribune.fr/actualites/economie/international/20100512_trib_000508605/retrouvez-le-pacte-de-la-coalition-lib-dems-tories-en-v.o.html, accessed April 15, 2013.

nature of the UK constitutional system. Legislation changing the terms of the dissolution of the House of Commons was simply introduced as part of coalition negotiations and passed by the subsequent parliamentary majority vote of those who negotiated its terms. While not questioning the actual character of the legislation, which indeed makes sense when viewed from the viewpoint of a coalition government, what could be questioned is whether it is advisable to have in place a constitutional system in which such fundamental changes can be introduced as part of negotiations between two political parties seeking power.

The House of Lords is the unelected upper house of the UK Parliament. The role of the House of Lords is similar to that of the House of Commons, although it is generally considered as complementary to the lower house. Unlike MPs from the Commons, members of the House of Lords do not represent constituencies and are appointed by the Queen acting on the advice of the Prime Minister. Since the creation of the two Houses of Parliament in the 14th century, the House of Lords has steadily lost power to the House of Commons over the centuries,³⁴ culminating in 1911, when the House of Lords lost its power of veto over legislation coming from the House of Commons. Now the Lords can only delay the adoption of legislation coming from the lower house:

- in the case of regular legislation, if the House of Commons adopts a bill in two successive sessions, the bill may be presented for the Monarch's royal assent, even if the House of Lords votes against it;
- in the case of money bills, the House of Lords may only delay their passage for one month.

Up until the introduction of reforms by the Labour Party,³⁵ the House of Lords was dominated by hereditary peers. However, in a bid to make the second house more representative of the general British public, the hereditary peers were effectively abolished. Now the House of Lords is made up of two types of Lord:

- lords temporal, made up of life peers and a small number of remaining hereditary peers. The latter are no longer hereditary peers in the sense that their seat will not pass to their heirs upon their death;³⁶

³⁴ The emergence of two separate houses dates from the reign of Edward III (1327-1377), who was the first monarch to agree that there should be no taxation without the agreement of Parliament.

³⁵ House of Lords Act, 1999.

³⁶ Originally the House of Lords was dominated by hereditary peers, lords who inherit the title from relatives. However, under recent reform the number of hereditary peers has been

- lords spiritual, chosen from bishops and archbishops of the Church of England. Interestingly, when reforming the House of Lords, the government did not consider it necessary to abolish this exclusive automatic right of the Church of England to seats in the upper legislative chamber.³⁷

Despite having over ten years to consider the matter, the House of Commons still has to successfully adopt legislation proposing replacement Lords for the abolished hereditary peers.³⁸ In the interim, the House is dominated by government-appointed life peers, which could lead some to question its independence from the executive power responsible for their appointment.

Moreover, the recent decentralization of parliamentary power has led to a fundamental imbalance as regards the organization of UK legislative power. As we have seen, recent reforms have led to devolution of power from the UK parliament to the different regions making up the UK. Thus, depending on the power transferred, assemblies or parliaments have been created in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland allowing each of these regions to have, to varying degrees, limited independence from the centralized source of power concentrated in Westminster.³⁹ Without entering into a discussion

reduced to 92. However, although the 92 hereditary peers still enjoy the right to sit in the House of Lords, their children will not enjoy this right. Thus, although these lords entered the House as hereditary peers, in reality they now are life peers, as their right to sit in Lords will only be for life.

³⁷ Favoring one religion over another is hardly the mark of a secular western democracy. However, issues such as this and the stipulation that the Monarch must be of Protestant faith are throwbacks to the English reformation and to the tremendous fear of popery and the political threat posed by Catholicism to the Protestant monarchy at that time.

³⁸ The recent Conservative/Liberal Democrat pact for government provides for the introduction of legislation leading to the putting in place of a largely elected House of Lords on the basis of proportional representation and in the interim, the appointment of life peers reflecting the party representation in the House of Commons. However, recent attempts by the Lib Dems (the junior coalition partner) to place House of Lords reform on the political agenda have been rejected by the Conservatives (the dominant coalition party).

³⁹ In the case of Wales, after already being rejected in 1979, there was in fact little support for devolved government in Wales. The 1997 referendum, which rested on the question of the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, resulted in only fifty per cent of voters turning out and was passed by the smallest of majorities. Originally, the Welsh Assembly did not have anything like the powers enjoyed by either its Scottish or Northern Ireland counterparts; however, since devolution has occurred there has been an upsurge in Welsh nationalism with more and more of the population now favouring greater devolved government. As a result, the Government of Wales Act 2006 was adopted creating a separate Welsh executive and making the greater devolution of powers in the future easier. Devolved power in the North of Ireland is carried out by the Northern Ireland Assembly sitting in Stormont. The

of whether devolution is advisable or not, the manner of its execution has led to an imbalance whereby the citizens of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are represented both in their local assemblies/parliaments and are also represented in Westminster, which is made up of MPs from all the regions making up the UK. However, English citizens, who make up the large majority of British citizens, are only represented in Westminster. In these conditions, an interesting side-effect of devolution has been to indirectly promote separatist sentiment in England. The failure to have a policy in place to deal with this situation gives the impression that New Labour devolution policy, like the reform of the House of Lords, was developed somewhat *on the hoof* and was not necessarily thought through in great detail.⁴⁰

Assembly was established under the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and unlike in the case of Scotland and Wales, devolution has had the primary aim of bringing about a peaceful conciliation between the North's warring factions. The Assembly has been suspended on numerous occasions as a result of a failure of Unionists and Nationalists to agree, but on 8 May 2007 full power was restored to the devolved Assembly amidst much hope for an end to violence. Like Scotland and now Wales, the North of Ireland has an independent legislature and executive. The head of the Executive is referred to as the First Minister. The Assembly has power to legislate in "transferred matters" made up of those powers not explicitly retained by the Parliament at Westminster. Westminster's reserved powers are divided into "excepted matters", which it retains indefinitely, and "reserved matters", that may later be transferred to the Northern Ireland Assembly, all going well. The transferred powers include, *inter alia*, health, education, agriculture, enterprise and trade, finance, social development and culture. The Scotland Act 1998 established devolution for Scotland and sets out the role of the Scottish Parliament and delimits its legislative competence. As in the case of Wales and Northern Ireland, the Parliament of the UK at Westminster continues to constitute the supreme legislature of Scotland, but significant powers have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament concerning above all domestic policy, including health, agriculture, justice, education. Unlike Wales, the Scottish Parliament has also been granted limited tax raising powers. As in Wales, limited devolution, for the moment at least, appears to have given Scots a taste for increased separation of Scotland from the UK and there is talk of a new referendum on the matter in the near future.

⁴⁰ In its 2002 Election Manifesto, the Labour Party spoke of an intention to create regional assemblies in England to rectify the imbalance created by partial devolution. However, this, not inaccurately, has been rejected by some as glorified local government and not the devolution that has been enjoyed by the UK's other regions. The Conservative Party has spoken of the Westminster Parliament turning into an English Parliament where only English MPs can vote, once the matter under consideration is a purely English one. This solution seems unnecessarily complicated. Perhaps the obvious solution would be to provide for a separate English Parliament and then consider the Westminster UK Parliament as a sort of federal entity. However, whether English voters, especially English conservative voters would be ready for such a formal breaking up of the "UK" based fundamentally on the Acts of Union with Scotland and Ireland is questionable. The former

2) Ireland – Houses of the Oireachtas

As in the UK, legislative power in Ireland is organized on a bicameral basis. The 1937 Constitution established two new houses of parliament called the Oireachtas, made up of *Dail Eireann* and the *Seanad Eireann*.⁴¹ The *Dail*, the lower house, is made up of 166 members⁴² and is elected by direct vote of Irish citizens.⁴³ The *Seanad*, the upper house, comprises 60 members and is elected in the following way; eleven are nominated by the *Taoiseach*,⁴⁴ three are elected by the National University of Ireland, three by the University of Dublin and the remaining forty three members are elected by five panels: the Cultural and Educational Panel, the Agricultural Panel, the Labour Panel, the Industrial and Commercial Panel and the Administrative Panel. Each panel contains the names of persons with knowledge and practical experience of the interests represented by the panel. As with the House of Commons, the *Dail* sits for a maximum period of five years and is dissolved and convened by the President. *Seanad* elections are triggered by the dissolution of the *Dail* and must take place not later than ninety days after the dissolution of the latter.

As in the UK, the lower house, the *Dail* is the more important of the two assemblies. The *Seanad* plays a reduced role in the legislative process, as its restricted electoral college would imply.⁴⁵ It can delay the adoption of bills, as can the House of Lords, but the power of the *Seanad* in this regard is

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has stressed that he opposes Conservative moves towards English votes for English MPs but has commented vaguely that one has to consider the "evolution of the constitution". According to Brown:

"You have to be sensitive to the needs of 85 per cent of the population who are our English partners in the union as well as the needs of the rest of the union. We have dealt with the problems that people felt in Wales and Northern Ireland and Scotland about not having more devolution in their affairs but if there are issues that we have to deal with in the future so that the 85 per cent feel all their concerns have been listened to and addressed, we will do so" (*Scotsman Newspaper*, 23 June, 2007).

⁴¹ The Dail is located in Leinster House.

⁴² The Irish Electoral Commission recommended a reduction in the number of TDs to 158 members in 2012.

⁴³ The deputies are referred to as *Teachtaí Dalai* (TDs).

⁴⁴ The name given the Prime Minister in Gaelic.

⁴⁵ This is the normal status of upper houses in countries that are not federal states. In many federal states, for example, Germany, the United States or Switzerland, both Houses are more or less on an equal footing enjoying complementary powers. For example, the US House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment and the exclusive right to begin legislation on tax, whilst the Senate has the power to control Presidential appointments and must agree to foreign treaties.

slightly less than that enjoyed by the Lords. As in the UK, the government is responsible to parliament and controlling the government of the day is one of their central functions.⁴⁶ Indeed, the overall general organization of the Houses of the *Oireachtas* is very similar to the UK model. However, the rules governing the election to the legislature are different and worth a closer look; especially as depending on the electoral system employed the character of the legislature changes and consequently its ability to control the government of the day.

Under the first-past-the-post system employed in the UK,⁴⁷ the country is divided into one-member constituencies.⁴⁸ The elector then exercises his or her vote by placing an “X” against the name of the candidate of his or her choice. The candidate with the most crosses then wins the seat, i.e. a simple majority system. The system does promote strong and stable government, as the largest party will normally receive a far greater number of seats than its proportion of the votes would tend to justify. Furthermore, the simplicity of the system for the voter is advantageous, allowing for quick counting of votes. The transparency of the democratic process is thus heightened. However, the system favours the development of two-party politics and consequently discourages smaller parties from participating in elections.

⁴⁶ In particular it controls public spending. However, there is a strong tradition of clientelism or what is more colourfully referred to a *gombeenism* in Ireland and many TDs (the name given members of parliament) appear to spend most of their time in clinics attempting to seek the benefits of government patronage for members of their constituency. On this see Tom Garvin “The destiny of the soldiers: tradition and modernity in the politics of de Valera’s Ireland,” in *Political Studies* 26-3 (1978): 328 – 347.

⁴⁷ However, this system only applies to general elections to Westminster. When in opposition in the 1980s and 1990s, Labour looked at the question of electoral reform and set up its own working party, chaired by Lord Plant, to look at the options, including various systems of proportional representation. The Plant Commission Report in 1993 led to different methods being employed at different elections once Labour came to power. Elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly use the Additional Member System. This involves most of the representatives being elected via first past the post with a “top-up” vote rewarding parties that win many votes but fail to win seats. In the European elections, voters in England, Scotland and Wales use a closed list system under which votes are cast for a party and the victorious candidates come from a pre-ordered party list. Northern Ireland employs the single transferable vote system in multi-member constituencies for both the European and Northern Ireland Assembly elections. Voters rank the candidates in order of preference and votes from candidates eliminated are transferred to second then third preferences, and so on. However, not surprisingly, the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, wished to keep the present system in place for Westminster elections as it had ensured Labour three electoral wins in a row.

⁴⁸ For parliamentary elections, the UK is divided up into 659 constituencies - 18 in Northern Ireland, 40 in Wales, 72 in Scotland and 529 in England.

This indirectly leads to a reduction in voter choice, as a vote for a smaller party will normally be without any effect.⁴⁹ This indeed is the weakness of the simple majority electoral system. It results in a situation where MPs are frequently elected without an overall majority and thus go on to represent constituencies, the majority of which did not vote for them. This can result in virtual *disenfranchisement*. For example, in the recent national elections over half a million Scots voted conservative, but yet only one Tory candidate was returned to Parliament in Westminster.⁵⁰ In the same way, the Liberal Democrats Party secured 25% of the national vote but only secured 8% of the actual seats in Parliament with other smaller parties nearly locked out of Parliament entirely.

The system in Ireland seeks to overcome these problems through use of the “proportional representation” (PR system).⁵¹ Under PR the state is divided into constituencies returning three or more candidates.⁵² Each voter casts his vote in order of choice for the different candidates going for election in a given constituency. Votes are then counted by the quota system, whereby a candidate to be elected must register a fixed quota of votes polled.⁵³ Once a candidate is elected, the surplus votes the candidate received, i.e., those votes over the fixed quota, are distributed according to the second preference votes by way of a second count. If on redistribution none of the remaining candidates reaches the quota, the candidate with the

⁴⁹ For example, in the 2005 UK general election the governing Labour party won 35.3% to the Conservative party's 32.3% and the Liberal Democrats' (Lib Dems') 22.1%, yet Labour secured 356 parliamentary seats to the Conservatives' 198 and the Lib Dems' 62. With such a large majority, the Prime Minister Tony Blair, as head of the executive has been able to adopt any policy he considers appropriate and despite significant backbench revolts. The incredible majority possessed by the Labour Party, in proportion to their percentage share of the vote renders the system questionable.

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/results/general_elections/uk-general-election-2005, accessed April 15, 2013.

⁵⁰ 2010 UK general election where despite gaining 16.7% of the national vote, the Conservative Party only won one seat, see http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/results/general_elections/ and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Scotland. Accessed April 15, 2013.

⁵¹ Proportional representation was introduced into Ireland by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 and continued to be the system of choice as set out in the 1937 Constitution.

⁵² The largest constituencies return a maximum of five parliament members and the smaller three members.

⁵³ The manner in which the quota is set is quite complicated but is arrived at on the following basis: In a constituency returning x TDs, the quota is the smallest whole number that exceeds the figure obtained when we divide the total number of votes cast in that constituency by $(x + 1)$; on this see James D O'Donnell, *How Ireland is governed* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1965).

least votes is eliminated and the latter's second preference votes are then distributed amongst the remaining candidates, and so on until the election of all the representatives for the constituency in question takes place. PR has a number of clear advantages:

- it leads to the elector having a wider choice of candidates as smaller parties are more likely to enter the race;
- it promotes the representation of these parties in government, as in the absence of a clear majority the dominant party will have to form a coalition government. Thus government becomes more representative and better controlled by the legislature;⁵⁴
- it forces TDs to look after all their constituents, as second and third preference votes may be needed to secure election in the future and the presence of other TDs in their constituency promotes competition.⁵⁵

However, the PR system can lead to instability and frequent elections, as one political party rarely dominates government.⁵⁶ However, although this is a possibility, it does not necessarily have to be the case.⁵⁷ The main value of PR is that by its tendency to deny mainstream parties full majorities, it ensures that the role of the legislature is reinforced, as the executive branch cannot rely on large majorities to force government policy through parliament.⁵⁸

Recently the UK attempted to tackle the problems raised by the first-past-the-post system. The Conservative Liberal Democrats Coalition Pact leading to the formation of the present UK government contained a proposal to introduce legislation providing for the introduction of a different voting system referred to as Alternative Voting (AV). Under this system, the same

⁵⁴ The price for this can be less stable government.

⁵⁵ Of course this can also be considered a disadvantage as it naturally promotes clientelism.

⁵⁶ For example, the 1980's in Ireland were characterized by considerable instability as an Irish electorate appeared divided on the question Charlie Haughey, leader of *Fianna Fail*. Given subsequent revelations about Haughey's financial dealings, however, the country was probably fortunate to have avoided the spectre of a Prime Minister of suspect honesty leading a strong majority, which Haughey's *Fianna Fail* would have enjoyed under the first past the post system.

⁵⁷ Since 1974, Ireland has been ruled frequently by coalition governments. During this period, during which Irish society underwent vast change, there was no instability in government with perhaps the exception of a period in the early 1980s where the instability it could be claimed was linked not so much to the existence of a PR system but the divisive character of the above-mentioned Charlie Haughey.

⁵⁸ On the role of the legislature to control government in Montesquieu's separation of powers, see discussion below.

constituency boundaries were to be used and voters were to continue to elect one person to represent them in parliament, as is presently the case. However, rather than marking an 'X' against their preferred candidate, under the proposed AV system each voter would rank their candidates in an order of preference, noting '1' next to their favorite, a '2' by their second choice and so on. If a candidate received a majority of first place votes, he or she would be elected just as under the present system. However, if no single candidate received more than 50% of the vote, the second choice votes for the last placed candidate were to be redistributed. The process was then to be repeated until one candidate received more than 50% of the votes. The alternative vote is not actually a proportional system, but a majoritarian system. In favour of the AV voting system, it should be noted that:

- extremist parties would be unlikely to gain exaggerated representation and coalition governments would be no more likely to arise than they are under present system;
- elected MPs would have the support of a majority of their constituents and the system would thus prevent MPs being elected on a minority of the vote. In 2005, only 34% of British MPs were elected by more than 50% of their constituency vote;
- it removes the need for negative voting. Electors can vote for their first choice of candidate without the fear of wasting their vote.

However, when the choice was put to the UK electorate on 5 May, 2011, UK voters voted overwhelmingly against its adoption.⁵⁹ As is frequently the case in democracies, it is hard to know whether this vote reflected a real rejection of the AV voting system or an indirect rejection of the LibDem ruling party championing its introduction.

c) The government – executive branch

Although the Queen and President of Ireland are heads of state of their respective countries, real executive power lies with their respective governments. Generally speaking, the role of the government is to define national policy and lead the country. At the same time it must respect and protect individual rights and also the prerogatives of the legislative power. Indeed, it is this balancing act that is at the heart of Montesquieu's separation of powers. In performing this role, the executive branch of both countries enjoys significant powers. For example, although the power to

⁵⁹ In a poor turnout 67.9% of voters rejected the proposal. For an in-depth analysis of the election see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Results_of_the_United_Kingdom_Alternative_Vote_referendum,_2011, accessed April 15, 2013.

legislate is vested by both the Irish and British Constitutions in their respective parliaments, in reality their legislative branches frequently merely rubber stamp government policy. This is all the more true should the government enjoy a large majority in parliament, which it normally does in the UK under the direct voting system.

1) *Government in the UK*

As we have seen, it is the function of government to shape and implement policy for the country. There are five basic themes to government action in the UK:

- *Preserving order*: ensuring law and order is one of the fundamental roles of government. Activities coming under this heading include ensuring national defense, justice and external affairs in general.
- *Welfare*: in the provision of health care, social insurance, social protection and local services, the government is above all looking to the welfare of the nation's citizens.
- *Administration*: in today's modern society there has been a regulatory explosion whereby nearly every activity or action is subject to control at government level. This has sometimes been referred to pejoratively as the development of a "nanny state" and certainly government appears increasingly willing and sometimes expected to control every aspect of interaction in society today.⁶⁰
- *Economic development*: increasingly governments are required to act virtually as agents trying to attract businesses to their country. In this context, the UK government has developed as an Anglo-type social model so as to be attractive to business and yet provide the general population with relatively high levels of social protection.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Indeed, part of present Conservative leader David Cameron's election policy was to demonstrate that in government the Tories would seek to delegate back to local communities the power of determination over the organization of local activities, schools for example. This proposal has failed to have found any traction in the period since Cameron has been in power with many Tories questioning whether there is the local will or ability to manage local facilities on a local part-time basis.

⁶¹ For the sake of simplicity social models in democratic European countries broken up into four main groups:

- the Continental model, typified by France and Germany. Briefly, this system is characterized by generous unemployment and pension benefits. Job protection

- *Culture*: the promotion of culture also comes under the heading of government functions, including *inter alia*, financing museums, library services and financial assistance to theatres.

In the UK, the government performs its functions on behalf of the Queen, in whom nominal executive power is vested. Thus, it is the Queen who appoints the Prime Minister; however, she does so strictly constrained by convention. Once appointed, the Prime Minister then selects the other members of the government, called ministers. Ministers must either be members of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. In all, there are over one hundred ministers and the most important, together with the Prime Minister, form the Cabinet.⁶² As government is controlled by the Parliament, rejection by the latter of a piece of key government legislation will normally trigger a general election, as it is interpreted as a vote of no-confidence in the government of the day.⁶³ In theory one of the most important powers of the legislative over the government is its power to question government ministers or the Prime Minister as regards proposed policy or other government activities. This is done in *Question Time*, parts

laws in these states tend to be extensive with rigid regulation of the labour market and significant income redistribution;

- the Scandinavian model, relied on by Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands. As with the Continental model, large sums are spent on wealth redistribution, health and education. However, labour laws are not as rigid although unemployment benefits remain significant. Considerable state expenditure occurs in the area of job creation;
- the Mediterranean model, developed in member states such as Greece, Italy and Spain. This model offers extensive job protection with rigid labour protection laws. Unemployment and pension benefits are limited and wealth distribution is not significant;
- the Anglo model, developed in the UK. This model spends little on wealth redistribution and offers only limited job protection. However, unemployment benefits are adequate and significant funds are spent on job creation;
- the Anglo-Saxon liberal model relied on in the US and which characterized social development in Thatcher's UK. This model appears increasingly to be relied upon by the new member states of central Europe and uses flexible labour laws, pro-business tax laws combined with little or no wealth distribution.

⁶² There are 120 ministers in the UK at national level, the 22 most important of which make up the cabinet. On top of this there are regional governments and ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In comparison India, a country with a population of close to one billion has 76 ministers. It would appear there is room to cut the number of ministers.

⁶³ However, as we have seen under recent legislation proposed by the new UK coalition government this now only occurs if there is a special majority of 55% voting against the government.

of which are televised. Above all, Question Time is aimed at allowing the Opposition⁶⁴ to exercise limited control over the government. To do this, it forms a shadow cabinet with a shadow prime minister and shadow government ministers. The role of the Opposition is to comment on government policy and to propose alternative policy where it considers it necessary. In this way it seeks to make the government answerable for the policies it proposes to adopt.

2) Government in Ireland

Government in Ireland is modeled on the UK system but is limited by the Constitution to fifteen members. Ministers must come from the Dail, although an optional maximum of two may be chosen from the *Seanad*.⁶⁵ Each minister heads a government department and together they make up the Cabinet which, as in the UK, operates on the principle of collective responsibility.⁶⁶ The government is headed by the *Taoiseach* appointed by the President upon the nomination of the *Dail*.⁶⁷ Once appointed, the *Taoiseach* then appoints the *Tánaiste*⁶⁸ or deputy prime minister and the other members of the government.⁶⁹ The Irish government, as in the UK, is also assisted by an Attorney General who, although not a formal member of the government, advises the latter on the legality of its acts and represents the state in legal proceedings.

Although both the UK and Irish Constitutions provide for the sole and exclusive power for making laws to be vested in their respective parliaments, as we have seen, in reality the legislative process in each country is dominated by the government. This of course is a negation of Montesquieu's separation of powers and potentially can lead to an abuse of power by the government. This is all the more in the case of the UK, given that there is a lack of counterbalancing powers such as an empowered president or truly representative upper-house to challenge government

⁶⁴ The second largest party in the House of Commons.

⁶⁵ There are however another fifteen junior ministers.

⁶⁶ This is also the case in the UK and means that once government policy is decided it must be officially supported by all ministers without any public indication of dissent.

⁶⁷ The President nominates the *Taoiseach* upon the nomination of the *Dail* and in this way presidential powers are constrained not so much by convention as in the UK but by express mechanisms aimed at sharing powers in a balanced moderate way.

⁶⁸ The *Tánaiste* acts in the *Taoiseach's* place as deputy Prime Minister in case of incapacitation of the latter.

⁶⁹ The actual appointment is made by the President. Although the *Taoiseach* has the power to nominate the members of the government, they can only be dismissed by vote of the entire government.

policy. Indeed, it is these and other imbalances discussed below that have opened the UK democratic process to the threat of undue concentration of power.

B. Specific challenges facing UK democracy

As we have seen, power in the UK and Ireland is vested in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.⁷⁰ However, under Montesquieu's theory power was not just divided between different branches of government,⁷¹ power is also supposedly organized so that each branch can control and check the other.⁷² This aspect of the theory of the separation of powers does not appear to work fully in practice in either the UK or Ireland. In both countries, the legislative branch is in reality dominated by the government, through the application of a strict party whip at legislative level.⁷³ In reality this means that the government dominates the legislative branch, to the extent that frequently the latter can nearly be considered an agent of the former. This distortion of the separation of powers is further aggravated in the UK by a number of factors that we do not see in Ireland.

1) Absence of a codified constitution

Firstly, the absence of a codified constitution in the UK in reality means that there are few limits placed on government and, in particular, on the prime minister as regards the adoption of policy. As there is no codified constitution establishing a supreme law of the land which may only be modified by referendum the UK parliament is truly sovereign. However, as it is the government and in particular the prime minister that controls parliament, in reality it is the prime minister who is the beneficiary of this sovereignty, with the consequence that there is little limit on the exercise of prime ministerial power. Of course a general election must be held at least every five years and so the government is ultimately answerable to the

⁷⁰ Based on Montesquieu's separation of powers; in his celebrated book, *De l'esprit des lois*, 1758 (Spirit of Law), Charles de Montesquieu set out his vision where the excess concentration of power is prevented through the introduction of mechanisms whereby each branch of government is permitted to partially control the other.

⁷¹ This in itself was not new, Locke and indeed Aristotle had both advised that absolute power vested in one branch of government necessarily led to corruption and tyranny.

⁷² This is sometimes referred to as the system of checks and balances.

⁷³ By "party whip" is meant that legislative members belonging to the ruling party in government are forced, frequently under threat of expulsion (of the political party) to vote in favour of government policy. This threat is all the more "threatening" in systems using the first past the post voting systems as it is nearly impossible to be elected to parliament if one is not a member of an established party.

people. Five years can however be a long time. In contrast, *Bunreacht na hEireann* clearly establishes that its provisions are the supreme law of the land and any act of parliament failing to respect the terms of the Constitution will be declared unconstitutional by the courts. Thus government policy must respect the provisions of the Constitution and through the operation of a system of judicial review limits are placed on the exercise of prime ministerial power.⁷⁴

2) The first-past-the-post electoral system

The impact of the lack of a codified constitution on the power of the office of prime minister is reinforced by the UK's reliance on the first-past-the-post electoral system for national general elections.⁷⁵ The use of this system has resulted in the recent past in Westminster politics being dominated by the Labour Party for thirteen years and, prior to that, by the Conservatives for a consecutive four terms in office. With long-term significant majorities, governments and prime ministers are able to introduce the policy of their choice, even in the face of inter-party revolts.⁷⁶ This dominance is reinforced by the fact that the price for revolt at party

⁷⁴ Interestingly, former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown has suggested that in the future the UK might adopt a written constitution considering that "[W]e need a constitution that is clear about the rights and responsibilities of being a citizen in Britain today." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/6644717.stm, accessed April 15, 2013. Jack Straw, another former member of the UK government has said that although there was no need for a written constitution at present, there "may come a time" for one.

⁷⁵ The author accepts that the first past the post system is not the only electoral system relied on in the UK and that, for example, in Northern Ireland a hybrid part proportional representation system is used: "the single transferable vote", and that in Scotland, Wales or the London Mayoralty elections another system called the "additional member system" is used. Finally, for the European Parliament a regional list system is used. However, it is unlikely that any form of PR will be introduced for Westminster as to do so would be an act of suicide by either the Labour or Conservative government introducing it. If by chance there was a hung Parliament, the Lib Dem's could demand as a price of participation but frankly I am not sure either party would be willing to pay the price; moreover as seen with the fate of the national referendum on AV voting in 2011, the UK population seem attached to the direct voting system and unwilling to alter the character of their constitutional system.

⁷⁶ Labour Party revolts under Tony Blair include: Iraq (2003) 139, Trident (2007) 95, Higher Education Bill (2004) 72, Education and Inspections Bill (2006) 69, Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill (1999) 67, Health and Social Care Bill (2003) 65. Indeed, the Labour Party has been particularly rebellious over the thirteen years of Labour government, probably as a result of the frequent non-socialist character of the policies adopted by the government and the fact that given the Labour majority, MPs knew they could rebel without any chance of the government actually going under.

level can often be exclusion from party membership, which is effectively a parliamentary death sentence in a direct voting system, as it is next to impossible for independent members of parliament to be elected in such a system. Moreover, the exclusion of minority parties cannot be good for government. Since the end of the 1970s up until 2010 “minority” groups have been starved of representation at national level.⁷⁷ Parties such as the Greens or the UK Independence Party (UKIP) or the far right British National Party (BNP) are virtually non-existent at national level. This remains the case, despite the fact that immigration, environment and mistrust of Brussels rank high amongst the concerns of British voters. True the first-past-the-post system can guarantee strong government. However perhaps representative rather than strong government should be the first aim of any democratic system.⁷⁸

In contrast, excessive prime ministerial power is limited in Ireland by the application of a system of proportional representation, whereby it is less likely that any one party will dominate government sufficiently to be able to govern alone. The introduction of coalition partners requires a dilution of party policy and results in more representative government, as indeed its name suggests.⁷⁹ For example, *Fianna Fail*, in the past the traditionally dominant Irish political party, has frequently had to form coalitions in order to be able to exercise power. Despite securing a larger percentage of the vote in the 2007 Irish general election than did Labour in the 2005 UK general election, Fianna Fail nonetheless had to rule in coalition with the Irish Green Party. This has meant that it had to alter its policy sufficiently so as to ensure the support of its coalition partner.⁸⁰ In this way, prime

⁷⁷ Interestingly, Labour itself would appear to recognize the danger of such a situation; consequently one of the first gestures of the then newly elected Prime Minister Gordon Brown was to offer government posts to non-labour members, much to the annoyance of Labour backbenchers.

⁷⁸ It is true that the 2010 election results have returned a hung parliament for the first time since 1974. However, this is the exception that proves the rule (whatever that means!) and the although the Parliament is hung, it is *hanging* between three parties with similar economic policies and thus the true benefits of a representative proportional representation system continue to be denied the British public as “fringe” parties such as UKIP and the Greens continue to have no input into government policy.

⁷⁹ Even if the Fianna Fail Party has dominated Irish politics since its formation, the threat of pluralist parliament as encouraged by the PR system has forced successive Fianna Fail governments to develop and embrace broad based manifestos and thus indirectly national politics becomes more representative.

⁸⁰ In the 2007 general election, Fianna Fail polled 41.6% of the vote whilst Fine Gael scored 27.3%, Labour 10.1%, Sinn Fein 6.9%, Green Party 4.7%, PDs 2.7 and independents 6.7%. The partial involvement of the Green party in government, despite their

ministerial domination is tempered by the operation of PR, instead of being reinforced as it is under a system of direct vote. Moreover, in a PR system independent members of parliament stand greater chance to be elected and thus party members are more willing to vote against government policy, knowing that they can continue to survive politically outside the party structure.

3) Absence of credible upper house

No matter how laudable New Labour's intentions to democratize the House of Lords may have been, for the moment the reform process appears only to have reinforced executive power. Prior to Labour's reforms the House of Lords was primarily made up of a mixture of hereditary peers and life peers. These were a single-minded bunch and although primarily of conservative character they could not be relied upon by any government, Conservative or other, to automatically back government policy.⁸¹ By removing most of the hereditary peers and leaving the Lords dominated by government-appointed life peers, prime ministerial control over the upper house has, if anything, actually been reinforced. It is inexplicable that the proposed reform of the House has spent an inexplicable number of years in the doldrums, despite the fact that the House of Commons has already voted to have an elected House of Lords.⁸² This proposal was in fact later rejected by the House of Lords itself⁸³ and the reform has been left hanging in no-man's land. This is an unforgiveable way to manage constitutional reform. Given the vast power of the office of prime minister in the UK, it is necessary to have a fully functioning second house to act as a possible brake on the exercise of this power. Instead, through the over representation of government-appointed life peers, it has nearly become another tool reinforcing power for the prime minister. By rejecting hereditary peers before having something to put in their place, the Labour Party, in reality

obtaining only 4.7% of the vote, meant that they had some effect on the environmental character of Fianna Fail policy in government.

http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/publications/Electoral_Handbook1.pdf, accessed April 15, 2013.

⁸¹ The government of Margaret Thatcher was defeated more than 100 times in the House of Lords.

⁸² House of Commons vote March 2007 promoting a second house in which the majority of members were elected by direct vote of the UK population as opposed to being appointed by the Prime Minister.

⁸³ House of Lords vote, March 2007. The Lords are, it would seem, keen to avoid eradication and thus favour an appointed house in which they will be allowed to keep their seats.

hampered the House of Lords' ability to carry out this function at a period when its Blair's prime ministerial power was at its zenith and in need of reinforced parliamentary control. Even though the Conservative/Lib Dem pact for government proposed to introduce a House of Lords elected by the vote of UK citizens under a system of proportional representation, once again the present government appears to have shied away from introducing any reform in the present parliament.⁸⁴ The Irish *Seanad*, enjoying stronger democratic roots than the House of Lords in theory at least, is better positioned to act as a brake on government policy.⁸⁵

4) The Monarch's powers restricted by convention

As we have seen, under *Bunreacht na hEireann*, the Irish President has exceptional powers whereby he can hold up the adoption of legislation and refer it for review to the Irish Supreme Court or alternatively refer it to the people for a vote by referendum. In this way, the judiciary or the people can be brought into play by the President as a means of controlling the exercise of government power. The President can also convene an emergency meeting of the Houses of the *Oireachtas* or refuse to resolve the *Dail*. All of these powers are a necessary attempt to balance the powers exercised by the executive branch.⁸⁶ In comparison, any powers the monarchy in the UK enjoys are limited by convention. Understandably, it is difficult to imagine the Queen, given her unelected status, refusing the royal assent and blocking legislation adopted by a Parliament elected by the people. However, it is necessary that some office have these powers if balance is to be maintained; otherwise the power of the government and in particular the office of prime minister remains unchecked and effectively becomes a repository for the

⁸⁴ Conservative/Lib Democrats' Pact – Point n°. 6 § 3; http://www.latribune.fr/actualites/economie/international/20100512trib000508605/retrouve_z-le-pacte-de-la-coalition-lib-dems-tories-en-v.o..html, accessed April 15, 2013.

⁸⁵ Although in the context of the recent Irish financial meltdown there is talk of eradicating the *Seanad* in a bid to save money.

⁸⁶ The power to refer legislation for review by the Supreme Court has been exercised by Irish Presidents. This has occurred especially in the case of the adoption of emergency legislation where the executive seeks to limit civil rights in response to a threat to society. In 1976 after the killing of the British Ambassador to Ireland Sir Christopher Ewart-Biggs by PIRA, tough emergency legislation was proposed by the government of the day. The then President Cearbhall O'Dálaigh referred the legislation to the Supreme Court for review. Members of the then government objected, leading the President to resign, which in turn was a contributing factor to the government losing the next general election. Previous referral in 1939 also concerned the adoption of emergency legislation following the beginning of WWII. It is particularly relevant, in a UK context, that referrals have concerned the adoption of emergency legislation limiting civil rights.

partially unused powers of the other branches. That the UK system is to be admired for having achieved a gradual, predominantly peaceful, handover of power from absolute monarch to the Houses of Parliament to the House of Commons is not being questioned.⁸⁷ However, in reality, much of this power has now passed from the Commons to the government and in particular to the office of prime minister. Clearly, balancing the needs of a modern democracy with the need for stability and keeping past traditions in place is a difficult process. However in a situation where Parliament does not fully control the executive branch, it is necessary to have some other mechanism in place to ensure that abuses of power do not occur. If the position of Monarch, for whatever reason, is an unsuitable vehicle for the exercise of such control, then an alternative mechanism must be established. The existence of a government free to adopt any type of legislation it considers necessary, without any effective domestic based control mechanism in place⁸⁸ is in particular an invitation for the abuse of power. It is true that by adopting the Human Rights Act, 1998,⁸⁹ incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into UK law, some measure of control has been put in place. However, although government ministers, devolved assemblies, local authorities and other public bodies are subject to the provisions of the ECHR, its provisions are not considered superior to parliament and so it is still possible for a government controlling parliament to maintain legislation in place that contravenes the provisions of the Convention.⁹⁰

5) Growth in the adoption of secondary legislation

Finally, the power of the UK executive has been reinforced by an increased trend in the use of secondary delegated legislation.⁹¹ Use of such techniques has led to a further reduction in the power of the legislative branch. For example, legislation is frequently adopted in the form of

⁸⁷ The execution of Charles I has not been forgotten but this uncharacteristic bout of extremism, as much religious as ideological was to a certain extent counterbalanced by inviting his son to return to the throne a number of years later.

⁸⁸ Other than voters at general election.

⁸⁹ Entering into force 2 October 2000.

⁹⁰ It is not contended that it is the aim of the UK government to deprive the British people of their rights, however, different branches of power have different priorities and a different vision of what circumstances require and for this reason to prevent any potential abuse, power should be sprinkled over many different branches rather than accumulated in one.

⁹¹ Secondary legislation, also called delegated legislation or subordinate legislation is law made by ministers under powers given to them by parliamentary acts (primary legislation) in order to implement and administer the requirements of the primary Acts.

“skeleton acts”, which have no actual substantive law content, and instead merely provide Ministers with power to act, as they consider necessary, in given circumstances. Even more worryingly, we have seen the development of what has been termed “Henry VIII” clauses, whereby Ministers are empowered to modify the provisions of primary legislation without having to consult parliament. No one doubts the efficiency of such powers, but in reality they represent a usurpation of legislative power by the government and, added to the other elements listed above, have led to the development of a Presidential-like office of prime minister, capable of acting with little or no restraint.

Conclusion

Perhaps surprisingly, given the above-mentioned weaknesses, for the moment the democratic system in the UK appears to work reasonably well. This is mainly because government for the most part has chosen not to exploit its weaknesses.⁹² However, relying on constitutional convention, good intentions, established practice and even good manners as a means of defending democratic principles is perhaps overly optimistic and thus inadvisable. Although the healthy and humoristic exchanges of Prime Minister’s Question Time appear to signal the existence of a solid democracy, in reality such performances are mere theatricals, if not underwritten with clear rules delineating the division of powers.⁹³ To paraphrase the old adage, excessive power will eventually lead to abuse. Indeed, the effective neutering of the UK legislative branch by the executive was probably an underlying factor in the recent expenses scandal, as members of a demoralized house, with little else to do other than rubber stamp government policy, put their not inconsiderable intelligence toward personal gain, and in this they were indulged by an executive branch keen to

⁹² Although it could be said that the decision of the Blair government to go war in the Second Iraqi War in the face of significant public opposition was an exercise of overreaching prime ministerial power. However, the author would prefer not to open up that particular can of worms.

⁹³ Indeed, Ian Duncan Smith, a former Tory leader, dismissed Prime Minister Question Time as a non-event as regards its effect on public opinion and said that it is merely a means of shoring up party support (*Newsnight*, BBC 18 June, 2007). Indeed, upon becoming leader of the opposition, Smith expressly attempted to drop the humoristic approach of his predecessor Hague and to promote an actual discussion of policy. However, he soon discovered that no one was listening and realized the necessity to turn up the humour if only to try and quell dissatisfaction amongst his own backbenchers. The fact that he was largely considered humourless did not help his case and probably partly led to his being replaced.

placate a weakened legislative branch.⁹⁴ The existence of a codified constitution, an active President, restricted use of secondary legislation, a representative upper house, a more representative voting system and a stronger judiciary does not mean that Ireland enjoys a better system of democracy than the UK.⁹⁵ However, what it does mean is that in times of turbulence, the constitutional system in Ireland might be considered better equipped to deal with the threat of over-reaching power.

For centuries, the UK has basked in the light of being one of the world's oldest functioning democracies; however, it may be time to wake up and ask if the system is not in need of some reform. In most states, codified written constitutions enshrine the separation of powers. In the UK this is achieved above all by tradition and a general confidence in the probity of the ruling elite. It is contended here that it is time that proper safeguards, such as a codified constitution, were put in place to ensure an orderly and structured balance of power. The price of freedom is, as we all know, eternal vigilance and whilst it is true that the result of the recent UK general election has led to some proposals for constitutional reform it is inappropriate that the matter has become a hostage to the respective bargaining powers of political parties seeking power. The issue is far too fundamental and important to become

⁹⁴ That the role of the House of Commons needs to be reformed is clear from the Wright Committee Report on this matter, which the coalition partners have promised to implement in full in their coalition pact. <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmrefhoc/1117/1117.pdf>, accessed April 15, 2013.

⁹⁵ Indeed, the last few decades have demonstrated that some Irish politicians have had, in the past at least, an unhealthy relationship with business accentuated by the fact that Fianna Fail has dominated Irish political and social life for decades. However, because of the safeguards referred to above, the Irish political system appears, for the moment to have been able to weather these storms. Indeed, given that Fianna Fail have been in power nearly continuously since the party's creation up to 2011 with short breaks in the 1940s, 1970s and 1980s the level of corruption in Irish life is relatively low with the country rated 6th in the EU in Transparency International's always controversial 2010 corruption index. In the 2011 Index Ireland's position dropped to 9th probably reflecting the banking scandals that have continued to rock the country. It could be cynically argued that given the Irish tolerance for its politicians receiving "dig-outs" (*Taoiseach* Ahern's popularity ratings amongst the Irish public actually rose during a period where it was demonstrated that he received "loans" from "business friends", characterised by him as a "dig out"; a dig out can be defined as assistance given to help a person in bad financial straits and thus somehow apparently more justifiable), it appears the Irish people expect or at least tolerate cronyism in its political class and thus however unfortunate it cannot really be characterized as a failure of the system not to have stamped it out as it/was not considered a problem! One can only hope, but it by no means definite that such tolerance has faded as Irish citizens face the prospect of repaying the consequences of such financial irregularities for the foreseeable future with the accompanying cuts in public spending that such repayment implies.

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the plaything of those who benefit directly from the changes they introduce. A democracy, as old and hallowed as the Westminster constitutional system of government deserves better than this.

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