

199

Hello and Goodbye to Négritude: Senghor, Dadié, Dongala, and America

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And I told myself of . . . New York and San Francisco
not a bit of this earth not smudged by my fingerprint,
and my calcaneum dug into the backs of the skyscrapers and my dirt
in the glory of jewels!
Who can boast of having more than I?
Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama.
Monstrous putrefaction of ineffective revolts,
swamps of rotten blood
trumpets, absurdly stoppered
red, blood-red lands of one blood.
Aimé Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*

Le fait est donc là: il n'y a pas
de *négritude* de demain. Ce matin, levé avant les coqs,
Caliban, l'homme des bonnes tempêtes
de l'espérance, a vu l'Orphée noir de sa jeunesse
remonter des enfers avec une
fée sans vie dans ses bras.
René Depestre, *Bonjour et adieu à la Négritude*

The facts are there. There will be no
négritude of tomorrow. This morning, having risen before the rooster,
Caliban, man of many stormy hopes,
saw the Black Orpheus of his youth
come back up from Hell with a
lifeless fairy in his arms.

The representations of other countries and their peoples and cultures constitutes undoubtedly not only one of the oldest and most popular literary topics but also one with the most fearsome ideological and socio-political effects. Is there still a need to remind ourselves that the invasion and colonization of Africa were more or less direct consequences of the ways in which she was represented by the West? Western discourse has most often been—and still is—a hegemonic, racial, and racist one. Emerging about half a century ago, one of the primary objectives of African literature in European languages was precisely to correct the rather negative image of Africa provided by Western literatures, to counter the derogatory hetero-image with a positive self-image. This literature thus immediately presented itself as a counterdiscourse against a certain type of

Western discourse. Given that all discussion about the Self is simultaneously a discussion about the Other and vice-versa, this literature turns toward the Other as well, which in this case is the West. It is in light of the construction of identity of the Self through the apprehension of the Other that this study addresses the representation of the United States of America (referred to here as "America," according to a well-established custom), by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Bernard B. Dadié, and Emmanuel B. Dongala, three authors from francophone sub-Saharan Africa.

To see or to apprehend the Other always implies a relationship based on real or symbolic power, as Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out in "Black Orpheus," his celebrated introduction to the first anthology of Black francophone poetry edited by L. S. Senghor:

When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises? Did you think that when they raised themselves up again, you would read adoration in the eyes of these heads that our fathers had forced to bend down to the very ground? Here are black men standing, looking at us, and I hope that you—like me—will feel the shock of being seen. For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen. (qtd. in Sartre 291)

Ever since the works of Michel Foucault—in this particular case I have in mind *Discipline and Punish* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*—we recognize that any discursive formation aims to appropriate for itself a space of power. African discourse on the West does not seek—and cannot seek—to have the same type of hegemonic power as its Western counterpart because of the peripheral position from which it elaborates itself and because of its deeply reflexive character: directed toward the Other, this discourse has no other target than its own source. The point, actually, through the apprehension of the Other, is to constitute one's own identity, to free one's self in face of the Other's discourse on the Self. It is in this idea that the power of the African discourse on the Other resides.

Aside from the perspective that our three authors have on America, it is to be noted that the concept of "race" determines to a great extent its representation, especially since the image of America developed by Senghor, Dadié, and Dongala is based on racial notions. I will attempt to show how the texts discussed in this article reproduce the most common myths of America, and yet illustrate in particular the relationships that Black African intellectuals have maintained with this country. In general, there are two positions that structure these relationships. For Senghor and Dadié, America is the Other, but an Other that is at the same time the Self due to the Black community of African descent. In contrast, for Dongala, any link in identity with America is flatly rejected: she is simply the Other. Essentially, as we will see, emerging beyond this representation of America will be a debate about Négritude between its partisans and its opponents. My discussion will thus embrace this dual aspect of the representation of America. First of all, I address texts that subscribe to the theories of Négritude through their portrayal of America, and then those that do not. To finish off, I will open my discussion to the current debate around the concept of "race": if it is epistemologically problematic, it does not remain any less operational, politically, psychologically, and culturally,

and must be, as Paul Gilroy wrote, “retained as an analytical category not because it corresponds to any biological or epistemological absolutes, but because it refers investigation to the power that collective identities acquire by means of their roots in tradition” (*There Ain't No Black* 247).

Without retracting the genesis of Négritude, a philosophical-literary movement whose kinship is commonly attributed to the troika formed by Aimé Césaire, Léon Gontrand Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor—to which many studies have been devoted¹—let us keep in mind that Négritude seeks to defend and bring recognition to Black civilization. It claims that all Black people, regardless of their historical or geographical situation, would share the same cultural values, defined in opposition to and distinct from those of the West. Furthermore, Négritude would aim at a *civilisation de l'universel* where the divergences between African and Western cultures would be reconciled—in short, it would envision a cultural *métissage*.²

Certainly, one of the most characteristic aspects of Négritude is the homage that its writers pay to the great figures of African history. Senghor above all stood out in this kind of panegyric. With regard to America, Senghor composed two poems devoted to African-Americans: “To the Black American Troops” and “Elegy for Martin Luther King.”³

On many occasions the Senegalese poet had to stress the theoretical influence exerted on the founders of the Négritude movement by the African-American authors of the Harlem Renaissance (see, e.g., Senghor, *Ce que je crois* 139).⁴ Yet beyond the acknowledgment of this intellectual debt, there also remains the fact that Black America plays a strategic role in the development of the concept of Négritude as suggested by Abiola Irele: without her, the all-inclusive racial project of Négritude would be impossible: “African cultural survivals in the New World have frequently been adduced as evidence of the persistence of an African nature in the New World Negro and this argument served black nationalists on both sides of the Atlantic as the emotional level of their reaction against the West” (72). This observation explains the African-American presence in Senghor's oeuvre, not only in his theoretical essays but also in his poetry. “To the Black American Troops” and “Elegy for Martin Luther King” eloquently illustrate the racial and historical link between Africans and African-Americans; they celebrate the pride of the race and highlight its contribution to the universal civilization as it is understood by their author.

In “To the Black American Troops” (*Black Hosts*, 1948),⁵ Senghor addresses the Second World War and the role that African-American soldiers played in this conflict. The poems in this collection are above all dedicated to the famous Senegalese soldiers of the French colonial army, soldiers whom Senghor presents as sacrificial victims, offered in redemption for the sins of the West. This idea is at least suggested by the unexpected and oxymoronic title of the collection. By putting the predicate “Black” next to “Hosts,” Senghor uses a reversal technique unique to the Négritude writers, which privileges the color black at the expense of the white, to emphasize the spirit of sacrifice of Black people, their altruism, and humanism, as well as to inscribe their place in History.

“To the Black American Troops” is divided into three narrative sections. At first, the poet fails to recognize the African-Americans because of their “prison of sad-colored uniforms” and because of the “calabash helmet without plumes,” the

"tremulous whinny of [their] iron horses / That drink but do not eat" (66-67). For the poet, the war is responsible for this state of non-recognition. It came to distort, so to speak, the image of Blacks in his eyes. But then, through physical contact, he recognizes his brothers and in them the African continent and its essence: "I just touched your warm brown hand and said my name, 'Afrika!' / And I found once again the lost laughter, I greeted the ancient voices / And heard the roar of Congo waterfalls" (67).⁶

By confronting the terms of non-recognition and recognition, the author elaborates upon a series of opposing images. In the first section of the poem (non-recognition), not only are the war and its attributes full of negative connotations, but "I did not recognize you," the formulated expression of unfamiliarity becomes a refrain. The second part (recognition), however, is exempt from all adverbs of negation in the construction of the image of Africa, which presents itself here as an ideal human and natural setting. The second part of the poem is therefore linked as an antithesis to the first. The mode of representation is manichean: the poet establishes a contrast between the sad, violent, and unnatural world of war and the natural and warm world of Africa. The syntagm that sums up this recognition is obviously "Afrika," used in a metonymical manner. Alone by itself, it symbolizes the origin, the ties of blood. In this process of non-recognition/recognition, there is definitely criticism of Western civilization and its war-like, quarrelsome, and violent qualities. Often, the celebration of the Black race and Africa goes hand in hand with a critique of Western values.

Once his *Négritude* is rediscovered—or rather, "felt"—in the African-Americans, the narrator will be confronted by the harsh reality of war, and thus their factual otherness. It will be necessary for him to resolve the apparent conflict of the identification of the Self in Otherness. First of all, he will question the responsibility of his brothers in the atrocities of the war: "Brothers, I don't know if it was you who bombed the cathedrals, / The pride of Europe, / If you were the lightning of God's hand burning Sodom and Gomorrah" (67). This doubt is purely rhetorical. The poet is conscious of the violence committed by his brothers, but how can he ideologically reconcile this with the nature of the "Black" (warmth, joy of life, the natural)? In the third line, there is already a shift in guilt: African-Americans, actors turning into instruments in the hands of God, a suggestion itself subject to doubt. In the following line, the poet absolves them across the board: "No, you were the messengers of his mercy, / The breath of spring after winter" (67).

The allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah suggests that violence was generated by Europe herself: God would have punished her for her sins. Thus the real violence of the African-American soldiers is ignored in order to focus only on its end: the liberation of the French. If there is in this poem an intention to criticize violence and aggressiveness, it seems to address Europe rather than the African-American soldiers who would not be engaged in the war except in altruism, a spirit of sacrifice and a desire for peace: "To those who have forgotten how to laugh . . . / Who know nothing more than the salt taste of tears / And the irritating stench of blood / You bring the springtime of Peace and hope at the end of waiting . . . / Black brothers, fighters whose mouths are singing flowers, / —O, the delight of life after Winter—I salute you / As messengers of Peace" (67).

At the end, the narrator has a positive image of the African-American soldiers, and commends their contribution to the institution of peace in Europe. Like their Senegalese brothers, they sacrificed their life for world peace: together, they contributed to the redemption of Europe. If this poem celebrates anonymous African-American figures, in another poem Senghor praises the glory of a particular person in his "Elegy for Martin Luther King" (*Major Elegies*, 1979). This elegy is comprised of five stanzas. In the first, the poet-politician expresses first of all his powerlessness with regard to the international political climate characterized by the antagonism between the Americans and the Soviets, the constant ghostly reminder of the atomic war, and the specter of drought that ravages the Sahel. It is only in the last line that one falls upon King's death:

Who said I was stable in my mastery . . . / Who said, who said in this century of hate and the atom bomb / When all power is dust and all force a weakness that the Super Powers / Tremble in the night on their deep bomb silos and tombs, / When at the season's horizon, I peer into the fever of sterile / Tornadoes of civil disorder? . . . / . . . but the words like a herd of stumbling buffaloes / Bump against my teeth and my voice opens on the void . . . / I lost my lips, threw up my hands, and trembled harshly. / And you speak of happiness when I am mourning Martin Luther King! (211-12)

Thus, the death of King comes back at a particularly critical moment in the life of the poet-politician. His happiness and his assurance are only appearances, and the death of King will serve to express his fragility. The death will also recover a symbolic aspect that the poet will let unfold in the rest of the poem.

In the second stanza, the coincidence of the death of King and the national holiday of Senegal gives Senghor an opportunity to develop the theme of seeming happiness and that of personal unrest. We are in the year 1969, and the poet remembers the commemoration of the eighth anniversary of the national holiday in his country. This joyful memory does not fail to evoke the memory of King's death: "I saw laughter stop and teeth become veiled with blue-black lips, / I saw Martin Luther King again, lying with a red rose at his neck" (213). The poet then recalls the deportation, the subjugation into slavery, and the discrimination against his Black brothers. He then sees the death of King as a heavy loss in the struggle for civil rights. Pain is deeply felt by the poet, who has become the confidant of the utter disarray of all African-Americans. His compassion for and identification with the African-Americans is all the more comfortable since the date of April 4 marks a double history: the victory of Senegal over colonialism—hence its death—and the death of King: "And I felt in the marrow of my bones voices and tears come down, / Ha! A blood deposit of four hundred years, four hundred million eyes, / Two hundred million hearts, two hundred million mouths, two hundred million useless deaths / Today, my People, I felt that April fourth, you are vanquished, / Twice dead in Martin Luther King" (213). The poet then crowns King as the king of peace and exhorts his people to mourn him, to pray to God, to double the prayers for King and for the end of the drought.

In the third part, three years after the death of King, the poet describes the scope of the drought and its economic and ecological consequences, then evokes the wars of Vietnam and Biafra, which he interprets as divine punishment. The

poet deplors the death of King, the intercessor of God for Man: "Lord, last year you were never so angry as during the great Famine / And Martin Luther King was no longer here to sing of your wrath / And appease it . . ." (213-14). At the end of the third part, the poet himself pleads for the mercy of God and wishes that the message of non-violence of King will be heard: "Lord let the voice of Martin Luther King fall on Nigeria and on Negritia" (215).

In these first three sections, it is thus the national and international context, in which the poet marks King's death, that seems important. Yet the punctual return to King himself, especially at the end of these sections, refreshes our memory of him and allows the poet to stress the impact King has had on the history of his time. The poet presents him simultaneously as the apostle of peace, the hope of all African-Americans, and the Christ of modern times. And lastly, the date of King's assassination ties his destiny more than ever to that of the Senegalese.

The fourth part of the poem describes the assassination itself. The Biblical inspiration of the poet is at its paroxysm here. The assassin is compared to the messenger Judas, and King implicitly to Christ. It is the month of April, and the calendar undoubtedly lends itself to this parallel. In a dramatization of the scene, the poet describes in minute detail the gestures of the assassin while he has King dream his famous dream of a non-racist America: "He [King] sees curly, blond heads, dark, / Kinky heads full of dreams like mysterious orchids, and the blue lips / And the roses sing in a chorus like a harmonious organ. / The white man looks hard and precise as steel. James Earl aims / And hits the mark, shoots Martin, who withers like a fragrant flower / And falls" (216).

In the last part of the poem, the poet has a vision. Martin Luther King is resuscitated, and the drought has ended in Africa. In heaven, the chosen whites and blacks, coming from all levels of society, are seated around God the Father to whom the poet pleads: "Mix them so, Lord, / Beneath your eyes and white beard" (217). The poet then draws up a long list of White and Black American heroes, among whom we find, of course, Martin Luther King.⁷ For the poet, they are the milestones along the road toward racial peace. America appears to him as a paradise where Whites and Blacks live peacefully side by side. King's dream is confused, though, with the poet's vision, which praises the coming of a harmonious American society: "I sing with my brother, *Rise Up Negritude*, a white hand / In his living hand, I sing of transparent America where light / Is a polyphony of colors, I sing a paradise of peace" (218). The elegy then finishes with a positive vision transcending the drought and the discrimination against African-Americans. As Janice Spleth noted, death is the principal theme of Senghor's elegies (123). Yet, it is never experienced as an end in itself, but rather as the possibility of regeneration, the possibility of better tomorrows. If Spleth attributes this positive note of the Senghorian elegy to an influence of African values, it is clear that in this case the influence is rather biblical. It is in this sense that King, whose departure is mourned by Senghor, becomes the redeemer of the evils conjured up in the poem.

Senghor often said that his movement was about affirming the values of Negro-African culture, letting the value of Blacks flow into the universal culture, while establishing a fruitful dialogue between the culture of Black people and the cultures of other people in the world. The poems presented here are a poetic

illustration of this agenda. The poet puts his art in the service of his ideology in his representation of African-Americans.

Senghor's desire to account for the American Blacks in his elaboration of the concept of Négritude and its illustration is found again in the poem titled "To New York" (*Ethiopiennes*, 1956). In the beginning of the poem, the poet finds himself in Manhattan. The fascination aroused by the beauty of the city and his confusion in face of the height of the buildings are doubled by feelings of total displacement and spiritual discomfort provoked by the not-so-friendly setting:

New York! At first I was bewildered by your beauty, / Those huge, long-legged, golden girls. / So shy, at first, before your metallic eyes and icy smile, / . . . And full of despair at the end of skyscraper streets / Raising my own eyes at the eclipse of the sun / Your light is sulfurous against the pale towers / Whose heads strike lightning into the sky, / Skyscrapers defying storms with their steel shoulders / And weathered skin of stone. (87)

Manhattan is a cold place. It can fascinate the visitor but is devoid of any human or spiritual dimension. The poet is exasperated at the end of a couple of weeks: "But two weeks on the naked sidewalks of Manhattan—Two weeks without well water or pasture . . . / No laugh from a growing child . . . / No mother's breast, but nylon legs. Legs and breasts / Without smell or sweat. No tender word, and no lips, / Only artificial hearts paid for in cold cash" (87). What is lacking in Manhattan is Nature and the emotional and natural presence of Mankind, both sacrificed on the altar of materialism. Everything here seems artificial; even love is distorted and impersonal. Manhattan is a dehumanized place, ruled by stress, noise, and a total absence of emotions.

In the second part of the poem, the poet finds himself in Harlem where he discovers a completely different world, full of colors and smells, sensuality and love, and a *joie de vivre*. Harlem is the temple of music and dance, the ruler of the night. Yet the poet finds that Blacks suffer there as well. At the end of the second part of the poem, he calls upon the city of New York to hear the rhythm of its African-American area. The beginning of the third part reiterates this calling but in a much more urgent and imperative manner: "New York! I say New York, let black blood flow into your blood. / Let it wash the rust from your steel joints, like an oil of life / Let it give your bridges the curve of hips and supple vines" (88). In this appeal, the poet not only pleads for a cultural *métissage* and the recognition of the Black culture of Harlem, but also insists on the regenerating role that the latter could play in the highly modern and technical American culture. The image of New York that Senghor presents is rather a kind of face of Janus, a city with two quite distinct features: on one side, the white city, on the other, the black city. The poet faces two contradictory realities that seem to define New York, and he seeks to transcend them in his appeal. He wishes to go beyond the differences in a dialogue, in an interpenetration of different cultures, in a bringing together of the Self and the Other. This poem, apparently inspired by a visit to New York (Speth 121), illustrates better than any other the ideology of Négritude according to Senghor.⁸

Bernard Dadié, who is probably among all African writers the most prolix observer of Western societies,⁹ also went to America, as is seen in his book

One Way. From the first page of his narrative, Dadié conveys the critical intention that is his. His narrator will not discover America, he knows what awaits him. He already "knows" her. He goes there to seek confirmation for his preconceptions. He is "informed":

I'm leaving for fabulous America, country of trigger-happy cowboys, continent from which there often rises a clamor about a black man lynched for having dared to look admiringly at a white woman or about a black man forced out of a university, the Mecca of intelligence—a marvelous country of backward pioneers. I will often have occasion to . . . realize that two rivers can share the same bed for centuries without ever mixing—a mysterious country where devils easily assume an angel's face. (3)

Once in America, the narrator has the opportunity to examine the country, to observe its morals and its inhabitants, and to judge them severely. First of all, the criticism concerns materialism, which for the narrator is characteristic of American society; it is then directed against robotization of Mankind and mechanization of life. Here, the author evokes the images of mass-produced work and distributors of coffee and Coca-cola.

For the narrator, America is a barbarian country, insensitive to activities of the mind, too preoccupied by the frantic race to the dollar, too obsessed by output; it is also an arrogant country, immersed in feelings of military and economic superiority, a complex suggested by the "Patron" in the original French title. The clichés can go on, from those of a homogenous society and the standardization of the individual¹⁰ to the fast consumption of culture under the form of *Reader's Digests*. These stereotypes of America are widespread. I will return later to the intertextuality between this African text and others, especially those in French.

In my opinion, the narrative is more original when the author addresses the racial question. What is first called into question, in general, is the depreciatory look that the White has on the Black. Through the use of irony, Dadié comes to disclose the ethnocentrism inherent in all racial prejudices. One of his approaches consists in speaking about American civilization by using Western colonial discourse normally reserved for African civilization. In fact, this formula is not new. It has already been seen at work in *Un nègre à Paris*. Jean Derive names this type of irony that only the colonial discursive context can render intelligible "principe de la paille et de la poutre," meaning that we do not see the wrong in our own culture, but are eager to see it in another's. The narrator of *One Way*, for example, finds Americans superstitious because they fear the number 13; immature and naive because their War for Independence would have burst out after a banal episode involving tea. They are simple minds, with only two political parties; animist because they love the Christmas tree; cannibals because they drink a wine branded Victor Hugo, etc.

The racial question is better developed when the author looks into the fate reserved for Blacks in the country. Here, criticism of racism, discrimination, and exploitation of Blacks is direct, but it is sometimes through humor that the author chooses to denounce them. Dadié, like Senghor, dreams of the end of this condition imposed on Blacks, and demands on their behalf a complete integration, a recognition of their exceptional contribution to the construction of American

society, which should become materialized, as he proposes, by the addition of a black star to the flag (20).

Dadié's narrator also goes to Harlem, the "African village in the heart of New York" (81). Given that it is winter, the trees have already shed their leaves and turned black. This natural phenomenon leads the author to a reinterpretation of colors. In his view, the trees take the color black as they hibernate. This color would thus not at all be the sign of death as interpreted by Western civilization, but that of endurance, the will to resistance, the reflex of survival. The author demonstrates—with a good dose of humor—the soundness of his interpretation by applying other examples taken from the western world itself:

What do Americans know about symbolism? What do they learn from all those books? What do they observe in nature? . . . Don't their priests put on black vestments to pray for eternal life? Doesn't the bride dress in white to mourn her lost freedom? And the groom strut around in black to crow about his victory? . . . They don't know that black allows life to be self-perpetuating. But it's true that the dead themselves turn pale, not black. (152)

We have here a concrete example of the principle of reversal. Dadié reverses the interpretation of colors by bestowing the color black with positive connotations and white with negative ones: white is death and defeat, and black is the opposite—life. Beyond this opposition, it is in fact an implicit contrast in nature between Blacks and Whites that is suggested by the passage. The colors are only a synecdoche, as proved by the following passage:

Nature thus prepares to put on her annual shroud just as we cover our dead with white. White represents the rest that comes when life takes refuge under the color black. Is it really surprising that rhythm is essentially black? Black people boil with life, hang on to it, explode with vitality—distill it. That's why Harlem makes America live, makes her live a life that visibly sings and dances when Blacks get out their drums. And this profound, fundamental ability to carry people away by the voice and magic of the tam-tam makes American blacks African. (152-53)

This passage is typical of Négritude and recalls in many places "A New York" by Senghor, discussed earlier.¹¹ The reinterpretation and reevaluation of the color black, and hence that of the Black man and his role in American civilization from the viewpoint of the Black, operates on a mode of reversal of values. J. Austin Shelton, in a study devoted to Camara Laye and Bernard Dadié, stressed that the function of this stylistic procedure found in African writing was precisely to reveal, in a humanistic manner, a cultural relativism. Essentially, *Un nègre à Paris* and *The City Where No One Dies* testify to this comparative perspective, to the permanent alternation between the original culture and the foreign culture. In *One Way*, the approach is much more rare. It is hardly outside the first few pages that the author develops the theme of the voyage or the condition of foreignness of his narrator in America and, consequently, rare are the references to the culture of origins, rare are the contrasts between the homeland and the foreign country, between the Other and the Self. The comparative perspective that most often

structures the narrative of voyage is practically absent here. This absence reveals the fact that the narrator was well informed about his place of destination before departure.¹² Thus, *One Way* lends itself to a (counter)-ideologizing discourse and never abandons the caustic critical tone and the moralizing tone which characterize it: "America throws a harsh light on both the strength and weakness of Western civilization, which uses men as fodder for voracious machines and cannons. It's quite possible, as seen here, to build up without evolving, without giving man his full value, without resolving a thousand and one pressing problems" (71).

One Way is without a doubt the least original travel narrative written by Dadié. Not only is his reading somewhat daunting but, as already mentioned, it hardly lets one catch sight of the African voyager and his own culture. It is perhaps for this reason the most "universal" of all. There is no doubt that Dadié exhausted the fertile reserves of myths about America existing since the 19th century in French literature. One should reread texts like *Voyage au bout de la nuit* by Louis Ferdinand Céline or *Scènes de la vie future* by Georges Duhamel, or even the comic strip *Tintin en Amérique* by Hergé to realize this observation. Dadié's narrator, as already suggested, does not discover America, but sees her through an imagination already old and fertile, not at all African, but truly French: this phenomenon explains the emotional distance of the observer with regard to the observed object. The anti-materialistic and anti-American intellectual climate that reigns in France after the Second World War (see Mathy) has undoubtedly influenced Dadié. The image of the Other that one creates for oneself can in effect be borrowed from a third party for whom one feels an affinity. In our case, it is not erroneous to bring out the thesis of "cultural" affinity born of the common use of a language, French. Thus, what I would call lack of originality in *One Way* belies in an interesting manner the influence of French intellectuals on the francophone African writers of the first generation.¹³

The texts of Dadié and Senghor, aside from their critique of American civilization, attempt mainly to underline the importance of African-Americans in global history, to forge links between Black Africans and Americans. The feeling of fraternity has in other respects been illustrated by Lamine Daikhaté in his novel *Chalys d'Harlem*. This time, the African protagonist arrives in Harlem and stays there. The Black community integrates him and accepts him as a brother and a political leader in the struggle for civil rights. He himself declares: "J'étais considéré par mes frères noirs américains comme une manière de symbole sur la route des retrouvailles d'un peuple séparé" (35) 'I was considered by my American Black brothers as a symbol on the road toward reunion of a divided people.' When he returns to spend his vacation in Senegal, he does not at all feel at home and quickly returns to Harlem, which has become his homeland.

I will not linger over this novel, since it falls into the category of the writings of Négritude. But *Chalys d'Harlem* is interesting insofar as the life of Daikhaté's protagonist can be considered as the opposite (fictional) experience of that of Blacks of the Diaspora who went "back to the roots" in choosing to go live in Africa. The temporary or permanent return to Africa, real or imagined, certainly constitutes one of the most determinant elements in the construction of "African" identity among the Black of the Diaspora. But very often, the return, in literature, ends in failure, as attested by several works of Black writers of the postcolonial period (see Condé, Schwarz-Bart, and Warner-Vieyra): the objective of these

writers being especially to fight against the Negritudian theses on a universal Black identity.

The advent of the independence of African countries certainly marks a turning point in the history of the concerned societies. In a most interesting way, the new sovereignty made the revision possible, the recalling into question of philosophical and cultural concepts that until then dominated intellectual life, notably that of Négritude (for the francophone sphere). It was not that the criticism of Négritude started only after independence, but it seemed to have crystallized and become more rigorous and iconoclastic toward the end of the '60s. The philosophy of Négritude, confronted by reality, was incapable of standing up to the challenge of the construction of postcolonial Africa, and the necessity was felt to explore other theories. A new generation of intellectuals attacks Négritude in some essays that have remained well-known (see, e.g., Towa and Adotévi). For these writers, the movement of Négritude was a movement that was racist, reactionary, and mythical.

This new wave of thought evidently had its consequences in the matter of literary creation. In 1968, the Malian Yambo Ouologuem publishes his scandalous novel *Bound to Violence*, in which a certain Shrobénius (in fact, Frobénius, who as we know played a very important role in the genesis of the Négritude movement) passes before a critic.¹⁴ It is in this intellectual climate that *Un fusil dans la main, un poème dans la poche* (1973) by Dongala appeared and toward which I will finally turn to illustrate the anti-Négritude current in the representation of America.

In contrast to other works mentioned in this article, this novel takes place in Africa, where the hero, Mayéla, meets an African-American in the Zimbabwean maquis. Meeks Wendells, through whom Dongala offers us a rather realistic idea (see Weisbord, esp. ch. 6) of the ideological evolution of African-Americans. The life of Meeks is comprised of three important phases. The first one can be called the "assimilation phase" during which young Meeks seeks to identify himself with the dominant White culture. His image of Africa is determined by the most widely known African clichés. At the beginning of the '60s, with the accession of African countries to independence, a change of attitude takes place with regard to Africa. She is no longer barbaric, exotic, but revolutionary, capable of showing the way of political and cultural emancipation to Black Americans. It is during this period that African-Americans develop an "African conscience" that manifests itself especially through the borrowing of African names and African clothing styles: that is the second phase. The last phase in Meeks's evolution takes place when he enters college as the struggle for civil rights intensifies for African-Americans. With some friends, he founds a radical party that is short-lived. With the dissolution of the party, Meeks decides to rejoin the maquis in Zimbabwe, considering the liberation of Africa and the struggle for civil rights in America as the same revolutionary and emancipating experience. But Dongala suggests that this engagement in the maquis covered up a mystic will to "return to the roots."

In the maquis, Meeks takes notice of the true distance that separates him from Africans. When he complains about it to Mayéla, the latter responds: "L'Afrique est une réalité pour moi qui suis Africain, mais un mythe pour toi qui est [sic!] Noir Américain. Ce mythe est peut-être utile, sinon tu ne serais pas ici, quand chez toi le combat est aussi dur: les assassinats de Malcolm X., Martin Luther King et

George Jackson sont là pour en témoigner” (25) ‘Africa is a reality for me, who is African, but a myth for you, who is Black American. This myth is perhaps useful, if not you would not be here, when in your country the fight is just as difficult: the assassinations of Malcolm X., Martin Luther King, and George Jackson are there as evidence.’

Mayéla cannot understand why Meeks abandoned his country while he could have headed a fight here that is just as important. He sympathizes with African-Americans, but refuses to identify himself with them for the simple reason that history and geography have separated them, which Meeks himself realizes when he says, “Il y a trop longtemps que j’ai quitté l’Afrique . . . Ce continent me sera toujours étranger” (23) ‘It has been too long since I left Africa . . . This continent will always be foreign to me.’

For Senghor and Dadié, rhythm and emotion were important elements of Négritude, whereas for Meeks, it is the “gift of the word” that characterizes the Black, and he cites as example Patrice Lumumba and Malcolm X., who are his personal heroes. Although his experience in the maquis made him aware of the divergence that exists between Africans and himself, Meeks still dreams secretly of his mythical encounter with Africa. The opportunity is offered to him just after the capture of a strategic city by the rebels. When the jubilant crowd celebrates the Nationalists, Meeks, seized with emotion, cries tears of joy. His encounter with Africa is symbolized by an old woman who embraces him, and he comments: “Non seulement j’ai retrouvé l’Afrique, mais l’Afrique m’a retrouvé” (43) ‘Not only have I found Africa again, but Africa has also found me again.’ This moving reunion only lasts a while; Meeks finds death in a heroic combat against the colonial forces that take over the city. For Meeks, this death—in fact, desired, hence a suicide, since he could have deserted, like his companion Mayéla—renders his definitive return to Africa symbolically concrete. Yet in the logic of the narrative, this death constitutes, rather, a failure.

The image of America in the novel of Dongala is especially based on the socio-political climate of the '60s and Meeks's experience. Obviously, the racial discrimination and the reaction on the part of Blacks facing it are at the center of Meeks's narrative. He often refers to historical figures such as Malcolm X., Martin Luther King, and George Jackson, whose assassinations are interpreted as the beginning of a crisis in the African-American conscience. This situation serves to explain the fact that Meeks looked for another type of political involvement outside his country. He dies in Africa, and Dongala suggests that his commitment did not in any way constitute a solution to the ideological and identity crises that he knew. It was only an escape. Meeks is the “soldier of positive desertation.” One could cite to him the words of a character in *Lone Sun* by the Guadeloupean writer Daniel Maximin: “. . . [T]here are solidarities that are just alibis for escape . . . I mistrust our capacity to forget ourselves in giving of ourselves to others. Here in the Antilles we are too often the soldiers of positive desertation: Garvey, McKay in Harlem, Padmore with Nkrumah, Roumain in Spain, Fanon in Algeria” (280-81).

Mayéla cannot understand why Meeks fled his country to come fight in Africa, and he suggests that the socio-political problems should be resolved where they are born. The Negritudian ideology and its avatars appear to him as a dead-end. Mayéla admires Malcolm X, George Jackson, Patrice Lumumba not

because they are Black, but because they present a revolutionary vision of the world that he claims as his own. Besides, it is for this reason that he includes Che Guevara, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh among his personal heroes. Mayéla admits that the struggle of Africans for independence can inspire Black Americans in their own fight for civil rights, and vice-versa, but he refuses to consider them as two aspects of the same fundamental struggle. For him, the Black American is not an alter-ego, but an Other.

The image of America for these three authors, beyond its content, depends largely on the discussion of Négritude, notably whether Black America should be included and accounted for in the construction of (Black) African identity. The concept of "race" thus remains operational in taking into account certain aspects of cultural expression in Africa. In fact, it comes as no surprise that it seems to determine African-American literary relations—at least from the standpoint of francophone literature. Not only has the latter incurred a debt to the authors of the Harlem Negro-Renaissance (see, e.g., Kesteloot 63-67 and Mudimbe-Boyi), but, in addition, the African imagination, precisely in this case, can neither undo itself nor escape the determinism of the abominable memory of the slave trade, a racial and racist phenomenon *par excellence*.

As such, the near total¹⁵ of the other texts on America, as I have been able to know them, show more or less a particular interest in the condition of African-Americans (slavery, fight for civil rights, discriminations, etc.) in the name of racial solidarity.¹⁶ Interestingly enough, all of these writers are Senegalese. The influence exerted by their elder, Léopold Sédar Senghor, is evident in the archeology of the representation of America. Thus, the racial question counts as one of the most prominent aspects of this representation of America.

Compared to the image of Europe that is offered by Black African francophone literature, and the image of France in particular (see, e.g., Schipper-De Leeuw), I believe that the image of America does not show many great differences: the content of the images and their functions are generally the same, but the criticism of American society definitely stings more: it seems that America is this "super-European monstrosity" that Sartre speaks about in his introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth* (22) by Frantz Fanon.¹⁷ Consequently, one understands the rarity, if not the non-existence, of an image of America as an Eldorado.¹⁸ This is explained not solely by the profoundly tragic nature of the images tied to this country, but also by the fact that the historical bond and the cultural exchange that have contributed to the forging of the image of paradise in the case of France, for instance, are absent in this case. Moreover, the human contact generating this type of image is limited.

Finally, we must note that the texts cited, with very few exceptions, are written prior to 1960. How can one explain the absence of the theme of America in francophone literature in the last three decades? This phenomenon, in my opinion, is not foreign to the history of Négritude. The Pan-Negro discourses having lost their vigor in Africa, the need to identify oneself with the Blacks of the Diaspora and to take interest in their problems becomes less and less felt. The period of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and George Jackson seems to have passed. Since their deaths, would Black America have no longer produced any political and cultural figures of the same caliber of these heroes to raise the recognition, the

respect, and the pride of the Black race? The preoccupations of African writers seem simply to be elsewhere.

In effect, since the end of the '60s, they concentrate instead on the socio-political conditions of postcolonial Africa, as Dongala does in *Un fusil dans la main*. Yet if it is true that this novel is critical of the theories of Négritude, it tends at the same time to formulate an "authentic" discourse on Africa, and in this sense aims toward an ideological end similar to that of Négritude (see Anyinefa). However, the epistemological and philosophical approach underlying this identity project is different.

The writers of Négritude locked (Black) African identity into a racial essentialism, which presents itself in opposition to a Western discourse on Africa, yet partakes of the dualistic structure and the same discourse it seeks to negate. Different critiques of Négritude have insisted on the mimetic character of the movement (see, e.g., Mudimbe and Diawara) and have reproached, from a Marxist perspective (see, e.g., Adotévi and Boukman) its racist and conservative character, its lack of historical perspective. As for Dongala, he places his novel completely in the context of the contemporary history of Africa in a struggle against Western imperialism. It must be emphasized, however, that the discourse in *Un fusil dans la main* does not escape a certain racial determination.

It is a truism to say that "modern" African history was widely constructed in accordance with some racialist presuppositions (slavery, occupation, colonization, and its aftermath). This is reflected in *Un fusil dans la main*. Mayéla, the hero of the novel, believes, for his part as well, in *one* African identity, from which he excludes African-Americans. It can be said that in place of the Pan-Negro identity of Négritude, he endorses a Pan-African identity (in a restrictive sense of the word, limited to Black Africa, as must precisely be said). If not, how does one explain the engagement of numerous non-Zimbabwean Africans such as Mayéla in the maquis? Furthermore, one will note that not only was his ideological and political development exclusively influenced by various Black intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora, but in addition that the ideologies of Pan-Africanism and African Socialism that he makes his own do not disregard African particularities.

There is thus in Mayéla a "natural" disposition to identify himself with Africa and with Blacks, as much African as American. This racial solidarity is close to what Anthony K. Appiah calls *intrinsic racism*. He qualifies *intrinsic racists* as "people who differentiate morally between members of different races because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence" (14). This category is certainly far from explaining Dongala's hero's racial "solidarity," but the analogy becomes precise when Appiah compares *intrinsic racism* to the moral interest that makes us prefer, say, a brother or a sister to anyone else, without any regard for their moral qualities. Is Mayéla racist? Yes, Appiah would say, as he condemns this form of racism just as much as the other, which he calls *extrinsic*, that disposition of mind which "make[s] moral distinctions between members of different races because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities" (13): "It is the assimilation of 'race feeling' to 'family feeling' that makes intrinsic racism seem so much less objectionable than extrinsic. For this metaphorical identification reflects the fact that, in the modern world (unlike

the nineteenth century), intrinsic racism is acknowledged almost exclusively as the basis of feelings of community" (17).

Mayéla's racism would thus consist in his identification with a group (the Africans), sharing the same history, the same experience. It is a *Weltanschauung* determined by the fight against colonialism and neocolonialism imposed on Africa by the West. It is this discriminating position of Africa, lived as different, as well by Westerners as by African themselves, which engenders this type of "moral error," to take up again another expression by Appiah, that is *intrinsic racism*.

Dongala condemns racial essentialism, but his novel hardly escapes from the influence of racial discourses, testifying to their effect on historical, cultural, and political contexts and vice-versa, as was very well noted by Paul Gilroy:

Race may provide literary critics (and writers) with "the ultimate trope of difference" but the brain-teasing perplexities of theorizing about race cannot be allowed to obscure the fact that the play of difference in which racial taxonomy appears has extradiscursive referents. At different times, economic, political and cultural factors all play a determining role in shaping the character of races

Races are not, then, simple expressions of either biological or cultural sameness. They are imagined—socially and politically constructed—and the contingent processes from which they emerge may be tied to equally uneven patterns of class formation to which they, in turn, contribute. Thus ideas about race may articulate political and economic relations in a particular society which go beyond the distinct experiences or interests of racial groups to symbolize wider identities and conflicts. (*Small Acts* 20-21).

This is essentially the case in Dongala's novel. The difference there is only contingently racial: it is rather structural, of a politico-economic nature. In a very interesting way, it embraces other solidarities (Third-Worldism in this case): it is this which justifies Mayéla's admiration not only for Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon but also for Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Julius Nyerere, and Kwame Nkrumah.

The thematization, the celebration of the race is no longer common practice today in Black African francophone literature, but the problem of difference is not, for all that, over. It is posed in a different way, no longer in essentialist terms, but in cultural terms. The cultural and the racial intersect, as Walter Ben Michaels proved in a study on cultural identity in the United States: "Our sense of culture is characteristically meant to displace race . . . but culture has turned out to be a way of continuing rather than repudiating racial thought. It is only that appeal to race that makes culture an object of affect and that gives notions like losing our culture, preserving it, stealing someone else's culture, restoring people's culture to them, and so on, their pathos" (684-85). Besides, how would this difference be able to disappear from a literary tradition that is expressed in the language of the former colonizer, this Other in the first place? Even the linguistic frame of this literature betrays this difference forever, as is suggested by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.:

Black writing . . . served not to obliterate the difference of race; rather, the inscription of the black voice in Western literatures has preserved those very cultural differences to be repeated, imitated, and revised in a separate Western literary tradition, a tradition of black difference.

We black people tried to write ourselves out of slavery, a slavery even more profound than mere physical bondage. Accepting the challenge of the great white Western tradition, black writers wrote as if their lives depended on it—and, in a curious sense, their lives did, the “life of the race” in Western discourse. (12-13)

—trans. by Grace E. An

NOTES

1. In effect, if there is one aspect of Black African francophone literature that has been the most studied, it is definitely Négritude. See, e.g., Kesteloot. However dated this study may be, it still constitutes one of the best on the movement.
2. One will especially find these major traits of the definition of Négritude in *Liberté 1* and *Liberté 3* by Senghor, the most important theoretician of the movement.
3. For this article, I used *The Collected Poetry*, translated by Melvin Dixon.
4. For an essay on this literary influence, see both Brière and Cook.
5. The Senegalese writer Cheik Aliou Ndao also portrayed the American soldier in his poem “Hello Joe” (*Mogariennes*). But here he is White, and his image is rather negative.
6. “La raison est hellène comme l’émotion est nègre” ‘Reason is Hellenic as emotion is Negro,’ according to Senghor. In the recognition of his American brothers, in their metamorphosis from the Other into the Self, does the poet illustrate this maxim? In any case, we must recognize that identification here is all instinct and emotion.
7. In his poem “Sur le tombeau de John Kennedy” (*Temps de mémoire*), Diakhaté constructs, on the same mode, a genealogy of American pioneers of liberty.
8. As one could expect, this poem has not failed to raise many criticisms. S. Odechukwu Mezu, for example, finds that it reeks of racism à la *Gobineau* in its essentialist representation of racial characteristics and condemns its sexism. Alain Baudot compares it to a fairy tale, and even to a myth because of its simple tertiary structure and utopian message.
9. Essentially, besides the text which interests me more particularly in this article, he published *Un nègre à Paris* and *The City Where No One Dies* (about Rome).
10. The title of the book, beyond the aforementioned superiority complex, suggests this standardization, which is furthermore well rendered by the title in the English translation, *One Way*. Dadié indulges here in a fine play of words. In French, “patron” means both “boss” and “pattern.”
11. The same vein of Négritude runs in the poems “Harlem” and “Jour sur Harlem” (*Hommes de tous les continents*) by Dadié.
12. In a study of Dadié’s travel narratives, E. P. Abanime stresses the falsely naive perspective of the voyagers in Dadié’s works. In fact, they know too well the countries they visit. Their erudition in this regard is enlightening, but sometimes misleading as well.
13. Without counting Sartre’s famous “Black Orpheus,” it is noteworthy that *Présence Africaine*, which was going to become the forum for the first francophone African

- writers, counted, at its founding, some important French intellectuals on its editorial board.
14. For the Antillean side, see, e.g., Daniel Boukman.
 15. In fact, aside from the novel by Dongala, I was not able to track down any other literary text that could join this one in this anti-Négritude aspect of the representation of America. This underlines once again the importance of the theory of racial solidarity in this representation.
 16. For poetry, see *Temps de mémoire* by Diakhaté, *La génération spontanée* by Ibrahim Sall, *Sahéliennes* by Youssouf Guèye. For theater, see *La décision* by Ndao and *Le prophète sans confession* by Sall.
 17. Compare with Fanon himself: "Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions" (253).
 18. To a lesser extent, an exception is made, for example, for *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Bâ and *Le Zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui* by Williams Sassine.

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