

Dictatorship in West-Africa: The West and African Intellectuals as Collaborators in Ahmadou Kourouma's *En Attendant Le Vote Des Betes Sauvages*

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Abstract

The role played by the Western world in dictatorial politics in francophone Africa is a subject that has occupied a central position among French-speaking African writers. Previous researches have highlighted the influence of the capitalist and socialist bloc as a factor responsible for the dictatorship characterizing African politics by sparing African intellectuals. The present research, therefore, evaluates the collaborative role that African intellectuals play with the political elites in their footsteps to dictatorship. Based on *sociological* theory, *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* of Ahmadou Kourouma serves us as a literary tool with which, in an explanatory way, the role of the main characters is underscored. African intellectuals are implicated in the dictatorship slowing down Africa's development; the policy of silence and collaboration in the face of oppression are the delaying factor in the continent's progress. In conclusion, we submit that African intellectuals must engage in active politics towards the total emancipation of Africa people..

Keywords: African intellectuals, Ahmadou Kourouma. Dictatorship, one-party, the West.

Résumé

Le rôle joué par le monde occidental dans la politique dictatoriale en Afrique francophone est un sujet qui a occupé une place centrale parmi les écrivains africains de langue Française. Des recherches antérieures ont mis en évidence l'influence des blocs capitaliste et socialiste comme facteur responsable de la dictature caractérisant la politique africaine en épargnant les intellectuels africains. Cette recherche actuelle évalue donc le rôle collaboratif que jouent les intellectuels africains avec les élites politiques dans leurs pas vers la dictature. Basé sur la théorie sociologique, *En Attendant le Vote des Bêtes Sauvages* d'Ahmadou Kourouma sert d'outil littéraire dans lequel, de manière explicative, le rôle des personnages principaux est mis en évidence. Les intellectuels africains sont impliqués dans la dictature qui freine le développement de l'Afrique ; La politique du silence et de la collaboration face à l'oppression est le facteur retardateur du progrès du continent. En conclusion, on affirme que les

intellectuels africains doivent s'engager dans une politique active en vue de l'émancipation totale des peuples africains.

Mots-clés : Intellectuels africains, Ahmadou Kourouma. Dictature, parti unique , L'Ouest.

1. Introduction

Dictatorship is a political regime established by the military, monarchical or civilian dictator who relies on weapons. According to Marxism, the dictatorship of the proletariat is the transitional period during which the representatives of the proletariat must exercise all powers to destroy the bourgeois state and allow the transition to a classless society. It is an absolute power exercised by someone, a group; tyranny (Garnier & Vinciguerra 2007: 364). Politics in Africa is characterized by dictatorship and this, in a systematic way, undermines the progressive steps taken by the fathers of African nationalism at the dawn of independence. Like their English-speaking, Arabic-speaking and Portuguese-speaking colleagues, Ahmadou Kourouma, Sembène Ousmane, Cheik Hamidou Kane, Camara Layé, Aminata Sow Fall, Jean Pliya, Mariama Bâ, Sony Labou Tansi, Calixthe Beyala, Alain Mabanckou, Guillaume Oyono Mbia to name but a few, have fiercely condemned every form of dictatorship related to the collaborating role of the West and African intellectuals.

Ngandu (1985) analyzed the myths in *Les soleils des indépendances*, Boka (1991) appreciated historical reality and the novel creation in *Les soleils des indépendances*. As for Borgomano (2001), the place of knowledge in Kourouma's works was his preoccupation, while Laditan (2000) examined the school of dictatorship in its practice in *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*. Kapanga's (2002) focused on the failure of African youths in *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (hereinafter EAVBS). And Osunfisan (2002) carried out an idiolectal study of *Revolt*, Ouédraogo (2002) explored the scriptural space or tragicomedy in Kourouma. Tegomo (2002) saw Kourouma's works as children's and youth literature. Folorunso (2007) questioned the passivity or'activity of Allah in human affairs in *Allah nest pas obligé*, Wosu (2006) examined violence in *Les Soleils des Independences* and *Allah n'est pas obligé*. More recently, Abiodun-Eniayekan (2013) undertook a historical study of the works of Kourouma, Ajah (2014) treated the game of masks: narrative and thematic structure in Kourouma's works, Ajewole (2016) looked at conflict and its cultural values in *Les Soleils des Independences* while Wende (2016) appraised the semantic implication and proverbial idiolect of the Ivorian writer's works.

Methodically, *the sociological literary theory* and the novel are deliberately chosen because of their relevance to the explanatory method employed in the analysis of this study. It should be noted that the political structure built on the foundations of dictatorship by the West has not yet been demolished by post-independent African leaders and African intellectuals. This is for the reason of their culture of silence in the face of oppression and their collaboration with dictatorial and corrupt leaders which hinder development and delay the progress of the African continent. Accusing the capitalist and socialist blocs for dictatorship and underdevelopment, of the independence of African countries, is no longer acceptable among African writers. Thus, this research emphasizes the need for African intellectuals's active participation and collaboration toward the mitigation of dictatorship in West African politics.

The article is structured in a systematic order including the introduction to the general idea, the problem, the importance, previous studies, the conclusion and the organization of the study. The *the sociological literary theory* adopted allows the researcher to analyse the personality of the characters through moral history, in order to explain the behavior of man in the face of life and reality with excerpts from EAVBS and other sources. The first part of the analysis and discussion focuses on dictatorship of Eyadéma Gnassingbé in Togo politics while the second part is concerned with the capitalist process of the West. As for the third part, it analyses the collaborating roles of African intellectuals in the dictatorship and how this threatens the development of African countries. Based on the analysis, this article recommends that African intellectuals should be patriotic enough to shun the tendency to invest their technical and intellectual know-how in the service of dictators.

2. Biography of Ahmadou Kourouma

Ahmadou Kourouma was born in 1927 in the small town of Boundiali in Ivory Coast. His father, a nurse, belonged to the elite of the colonized. He was called “doctor” and his rank gave him the right to dispose of the services of natives subjected to forced labor. A protest student at the Ecole Technique Supérieure in Bamako (Mali), he was called up for military service and sent to Ivory Coast to participate in the repression of the nascent liberation movement, the African Democratic Rally. He refused and, mobilized in the colonial army in Indochina, he returned to his post only because Bernard Dadier, the most famous writer in the country at the time, encouraged him to go and acquire military training to prepare for the anti-colonial war that he believed inevitable. And it was as an insurance technician that he returned to Côte d’Ivoire the day after its independence. Not for long: he refuses to “give in to the magic of the single party, which wanted it to represent the only form of power to develop the country”. He was thrown into prison for a few months and finally went into exile.

His second return to his country, in 1970, was almost as brief. His play, “The Truth-Teller,” published in 1974, was deemed “revolutionary.” He returned to Togo for ten years, then to Cameroon until 1993, while continuing his professional ascent in private insurance companies. At seventy-two, he believed that “his generation was first wrong and then failed.” Everyone was going to sacrifice themselves for Africa. But we had not taken into account his reality, his psychology. Crowned by La France with several literary prizes, including the Renaudot and Goncourt prize for high school students in 2000 for “Allah n’est pas obligé” and the 1999 inter book prize for “En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages” he was deeply marked by the renewed violence in Ivory Coast and said about his last novel “Quand on refuse on dit non” Alas, He died before finishing this book and the year 2006 unfortunately proves that democracy is not at the end of its troubles in a country still plagued by dictatorship. So we can only hope that – as Ahmadou Kourouma said about the future of Africa. Let us therefore dream that – from where he is now – Ahmadou Kourouma will one day see a true democracy of law bring its benefits to his beautiful country of Côte d’Ivoire.

3. *Sociological Theory*

The sociological theory sees the process of aesthetic production as a social practice by which a literary work and real life are juxtaposed. It is a theory in which socio-economic, political, cultural realities mingle with the fictitious form which Atiládé (2006: 55) calls “*faction*”. *Faction*, according to him, consists of a fusion of fact and fiction in a literary work. This means that there is an application of contemporary as well as imaginary reality in art production with the aim of educating, entertaining and informing readers. This approach essentially allows a social artist -writer, speaker or musician- to establish a rather remarkable influence in the reformation of his environment by exposing the plausibilities of actions and events.

Thus, *faction* becomes a sociocritical instrument to question the development of a human society and to reform it in time and space. Writing requires certain skills on the part of the writer who sees more than others and hides nothing ; a visionary who fears nothing, but, converts social problems to opportunity and suggests concrete solutions. The theory sees an artist as an analyst whose task is to dig into the heart of the individual in search of his personality through moral history, explaining the behavior of man in the face of life and reality. Ahmadou Kourouma is a realist novelist and according to Zola (1976: 63):

Le réaliste est avant tout un savant de l'ordre moral. J'aime à le représenter comme l'anatomiste de l'âme et de la chair. Il dissèque l'homme, étudie le jeu des passions, interroge chaque fibre, fait l'analyse de l'organisme entière. Comme chirurgien, il n'a ni honte ni répugnance, lorsqu'il fouille les plaies humaines. Il décompose les actions, en détermine les causes, en explique les résultats.

The realist is above all a scholar of the moral order. I like to portray him as the anatomist of the soul and the flesh. He dissects man, studies the game of passions, questions each fiber, makes the analysis of the entire organization. As a surgeon, he has neither shame nor repugnance when he examines human wounds. He breaks down actions, determines their causes, explains their results. (Our translation).

In short, in EAVBS, Kourouma takes advantage of oral literature, making the griots his spokespersons to present his point of view on the negative effect of dictatorship in African politics. Dictatorship in Africa thrives through the collaboration of the West and African intellectuals.

3.1 Dictatorship in African politics

From the analysis of Kourouma's first two novels, it is evident that the nationalism of the African ruling class is divided into two political tendencies: one supported by the capitalist West, and the other influenced by socialism. EAVBS is no exception to these divisions. The fictional context of the novel is one marked by the Cold War, the nationalist discourse of the hero 'Koyaga' is officially supported by Western leaders; unlike the nationalism of Nkoutigui Fondio, the dictator of the Socialist Republic of the Mountains is close to the communist bloc. The critique of the discourse of political nationalism focuses first on the evaluation of the mode of management of power by a number of African political leaders from independence to the suns of multiparty politics and democracy. This criticism is initially aimed at the first president of the Republic of the Gulf, Fricassa Santos, whose complex career is strewn with contradiction and even the involvement of African leaders in slavery and the slave trade. His father's wealth acquired from the slave trade, looting and terror, allowed him to live a happy childhood and to undertake brilliant studies in economics in Europe.

Yet, the narrator tells us that his success is not only due to his Western upbringing, nor to his anti-colonial positions, but to his magical practices. From his status as a freedman, the legitimacy of Fricassa Santos' power arouses mistrust on the part of the former colonial power. This feeling of illegitimacy is reinforced towards the end of the story by the attitude considered selfish and arrogant of the descendants of Brazilian slaves at the time of the socio-political crisis that the Gulf Republic is going through as in the excerpt below

Les descendants des affranchis brésiliens (...) n'avaient d'abord pensé qu'à eux, à leur confort. Ils étaient français, avaient le niveau de vie des développés. Ils se fixèrent, en tant que membres de l'assemblée provisoire, des indemnités d'Européens : soixante mille francs par jour. Dans un pays où le SMIG mensuel était plafonné à trente mille francs et la solde du soldat à vingt mille ! C'était scandaleux ! (344).

The descendants of the Brazilian freedmen (...) had at first thought only of themselves, of their comfort. They were French, had the standard of living of the developed. As members of the provisional assembly, they set themselves allowances for Europeans : sixty thousand francs a day. In a country where the monthly Minimum Wage was capped at thirty thousand francs and the soldier's pay at twenty thousand! It was outrageous! (Our translation).

This criticism reflects the suspicion that weighs on the descendants of the freedmen of America whose sectarian and segregationist behaviors have destabilized some nations in this part of Africa. Fricassa Santos' refusal to integrate the former warriors into the new national army and

his exaggerated practice of occult sciences contrast with his attributes as the father of the nation. The narrator points out that this head of state was not only different from other French-speaking heads of state but also:

Avait lutté pour l'indépendance et avait été chef de l'État en triomphant du candidat du général de Gaulle au cours d'une consultation supervisée par l'ONU. Il n'était pas un père de la nation et de l'indépendance inventé et fabriqué par la France et le général de Gaulle (76).

Had fought for independence and had been head of state by triumphing over General de Gaulle's candidate during a consultation supervised by the UN. He was not a father of the nation and independence invented and manufactured by France and General de Gaulle . (Our translation).

The excerpt suggests the underlying rivalry between Fricassa Santos and the other African leaders who have enjoyed the support of France. Fricassa Santos's overthrow by Sergeant Koyaga seems to be implicitly linked to his opposition to General de Gaulle and his refusal to align himself with the French Cold War policy. Moreover, the interrogation of political nationalism is reflected in this text by the critical judgment of the griots responsible for telling the truth about the atrocities, lies and numerous crimes of the president, the general and dictator Koyaga and some of his African peers are thus denounced, the methods of accession and management of power by a number of African autocrats including the particularly bloody one of the former warrior Koyaga, the hero of the story. The seizure of power by the latter with the assassination of the legitimate president, Fricassa Santos is done in an almost beastly carnage as indicated below:

Deux [soldats] se penchent sur le corps. (Our translation). Ils déboutonnent le président, l'émasculent, enfoncent le sexe ensanglanté entre les dents. C'est l'émascultation rituelle. (...) Un dernier soldat avec une dague tranche les tendons, ampute les bras du mort. C'est la mutilation rituelle qui empêche un grand initié de la trempe du président Fricassa Santos de ressusciter (94).

Two [soldiers] lean over the body. They unbutton the president, emasculate him, push his bloody manhood between the teeth. It's the ritual emasculation. (...) A last soldier with a dagger slices the tendons, amputates the arms of the dead. It is the ritual mutilation that prevents a great initiate of the caliber of President Fricassa Santos from being resurrected. (Our translation).

This ritualized scene (which is often repeated to eliminate opponents of the regime) shows the cruelty of the future dictator Koyaga. The latter does not hesitate to kill or make his enemies disappear without the slightest scruple. The cruelty of the scene is reinforced by the mystical

ceremonial activity that surrounds the killing of the tortured one. As after a hunting party where hunters share and dissect their game together, the assassination and dismemberment of President Fricassa Santos takes on an almost sacrificial character.

By treating his enemies like animals, Sergeant Koyaga himself passes the limits of bestiality, bringing with him his pack of wild dogs, his former comrades-in-arms from Indochina and Algeria. From this assimilation to animals, Koyaga and his guard seem to derive honor and glory from it by competing throughout the narrative of ferocity and aggressiveness whenever the regime is threatened or challenged. The elimination of the legitimate president is followed by that of the other three members of the Committee of Public Safety who temporarily shared power. Here too, the barbaric methods applied to President Fricassa Santos are reproduced with the same beastly cruelty by Koyaga and his personal guard. Previously, the account specifies the ranks of the two soldiers instigating the coup: Koyaga is only sergeant and then captain after the assassination of the president; the second was a warrant officer who would later rise to the rank of infantry colonel. The other two members of the committee are more educated civilians and, according to the narrator, imposed by the West and receive positions emptied of any content.

After the elimination of his rivals, Koyaga, drunk with the smell of blood, proclaimed himself head of state with the collaboration of the journalist, Maclélio, who would become his Minister of Orientation. At this stage, Koyaga's seizure of power is indisputably reminiscent of the many coups d'état that, from the first years of independence, characterised the African political scene. The scenario was almost immutable: a legitimate head of state set up at the time of independence, weakened by internal dissension and economic problems, is overthrown by the military; a military junta or a provisional government is set up, grants itself full powers and promises to put an end to tribalism, to anarchy, until it is in turn overthrown by another coup. Moreover, in the fictional setting of the novel, the long reign of the dictator is dotted with multiple attempts at overthrow and assassination, as indicated below:

Depuis trente ans, au rythme de deux à trois fois par an, des attentats étaient perpétrés contre le Guide suprême. Les conjurés chaque fois annonçaient la mort du dictateur. Des imprudents sortaient dans les rues, affichaient leur joie, exprimaient haut leur haine. Koyaga ressuscitait, réapparaissait. Et ceux qui s'étaient ainsi découverts (...) payaient très cher leur précipitation (352).

For thirty years, at the rate of two to three times a year, attacks have been perpetrated against the Supreme Leader. The conspirators each time announced the death of the dictator. Reckless people went out into the streets, displayed their joy, expressed their hatred loudly. Koyaga resurrected, reappeared. And those who had thus exposed themselves (...) paid dearly for their haste. (Our translation).

The narrator testifies that Africa is the continent with the highest poverty and dictatorship index. The author makes Koyaga in EAVBS a kind of model of African dictatorship, which has existed

everywhere in this region of the world. Its power, conquered by force, is far from attracting the support of all if one takes into account the high number of attacks to which it is subjected; so much so that a monument, a memorial was built in all the places where he had escaped an attack (288). Koyaga's management of power is severely criticized by the narrator griots; they denounce the contradictions and authoritarianism of his regime. But the narrators' account addresses two episodes that serve as inserts for the criticism of African dictatorships, it is first the journey of the journalist Maclélio through Africa and his stay in the Socialist Republic of the Mountains of the dictator, Nkoutigui Fondio, the man with the hare totem.

The initiatory journey of the apprentice dictator Koyaga during which he must meet and listen to the masters of absolutism and one party system; the most prestigious of the heads of state of the four cardinal points of oppressive Africa (171) suggests the existence of a brotherhood of dictators who seal the fate of Africa and its inhabitants. The initiation of Koyaga and to a certain extent that of his Minister of Orientation Maclélio by means of the man in white thus offers the pretext for an extension of the criticism of the dictatorial systems in place in Cold War Africa, beyond the simple framework of the Gulf Republic. The critical evaluation of the narrator griots focuses on four heads of state chosen for the historical and political or geographical dimension of their countries; they are Tiékoroni of the Republic of Ebony, Bossouma the emperor of the land of the two rivers, the king of the land of the Jebels and the dictator with the leopard totem. These four autocrats are most often identified by their totemic names, which indicates in a certain way the characteristics of the respective leaders:

Un potentat de l'Afrique de l'Ouest dont le totem serait la panthère ou qui serait aussi féroce qu'une panthère. Le charognard, un dictateur de la forêt centrale de l'Afrique ; totem charognard ou aussi glouton qu'un charognard... (171-172).

A potentate from West Africa whose totem would be the panther or who would be as fierce as a panther. The scavenger, a dictator of Africa's central forest; totem scavenger or as gluttonous as a scavenger... (Our translation).

Through the use of totemic names, these politicians are assimilated to ferocious and carnivorous animals; the symbolism of the animals chosen is also striking: the totem of the dictator of the Ebony Republic is the caiman, recognized as the oldest of the beasts. (this is no doubt an allusion to the longevity of the dictator and his historical model as the head of the country); the leopard totem (bloodthirsty animal); the jackal totem (cunning animal) or the hyena totem (despicable and stinking animal). Among these figures of autocracy, two are named, Tiékoroni of the Ebony Republic and Bossouma, emperor of the land of the two rivers; the name of the latter is pejoratively translated in the story since it means in malinké language 'stench of fart'. The discerning reader will have recognized the model from which the narrator griots are inspired because he was the only African emperor of the postcolonial era. The four chapters of Vigil 4 are entirely devoted to the portraits made by the narrator griots where both brutality and irony mingle, according to the personality of each dictator. Thus, in the President of the Ebony Republic, the account highlights the ambiguities and ambivalence of Tiékoroni:

Le dictateur au totem caïman était (...) un homme extrême dans la vertu et le vice, un sac de contradictions. Un homme à la fois généreux comme le fondement d'une chèvre et rancunier, mesquin, méchant comme un pou, un pian ; menteur et fabulateur comme une femme adultère et véridique et entier comme un chasseur de fauves ; cruel comme un chat rassasié (...) et tendre comme une poule avec les pintadeaux qu'elle a couvés (191).

The dictator with the Caiman totem was (...) an extreme man in virtue and vice, a bag of contradictions. A man both generous as the foundation of a goat and resentful, petty, wicked as a flea, a yaws; liar and daydreamer as an adulterous and truthful woman and complete as a hunter of beasts; cruel as a satiated cat (...) and tender as a hen with the guinea fowl it has incubated. (Our translation).

This incriminating portrait is tempered by the judgment of the griot who concludes that the African sage was undoubtedly a great among the great. This is much the same point of view of the griot about the ruler of the land of the Jebels whose cunning and political skill contrasts with his medieval, barbaric, cruel, lying and criminal behavior. The dictator with the hyena totem of the land of the two rivers is presented from the outset very negatively; he is a former warrior with a chest covered with decorations, very fixated on sex and drink (he is also called the big red wine); his crude manners contrast sharply with his official status, prompting taunts from a neighboring dictator:

Empereur ... Empereur ! Une vraie honte pour l'Afrique entière ! Un soudard ! Ses conneries font du tort à la fonction de chef d'état africain ! Un salaud qui prétend être le chef d'état ayant le grade le plus élevé parce qu'il s'est proclamé Empereur. C'est un simple d'esprit (225).

Emperor... Emperor! A real shame for the whole of Africa! A brute! His follies were an offense to the office of African head of state! A bastard who claims to be the head of state with the highest rank because he proclaimed himself Emperor. He is dumb-witted (Our translation).

But the award of the worst dictator is reserved for the man with the leopard totem who was a potentate of the worst criminal species, (212). In addition, the narrators question a number of the practices of the dictatorships. Thus, among the lessons learned by Koyaga from his four colleagues, the question of financial resources and their use is at the center of the concerns of the dictatorships. In his stay at the Republic of the Ebony, it is around this question that the disclosures of Tiékoroni in Koyaga begin:

La première méchante bête qui menace au sommet de l'état et en tête d'un parti unique s'appelle la fâcheuse inclination en début de carrière à séparer la caisse de l'état de sa caisse personnelle. Les besoins personnels d'un chef d'état et président d'un parti unique servent toujours son pays et se confondent directement ou indirectement avec les intérêts de sa République et de son peuple (181).

The first evil beast that dangles at the top of the state and at the head of a one-party system is called the unfortunate inclination at the beginning of career to separate the state coffers from personal coffers. The personal needs of a head of state and president of a one-party system always serve his country and are directly or indirectly mixed up with the interests of his Republic and his people. (Our translation).

The dictator of this country diverts for himself, all the revenues of the stabilization funds of agricultural products that he redistributes to those who love him and even to those who hate him without having to answer to anyone. Never will an African be petty enough to seek to know what is in the accounts of the leader whom universal suffrage has appointed (182). In the land of the two rivers, Emperor Bossouma built his fortune in the diamond trade and by claiming all the monopolies:

Le monopole de la photographie des cérémonies de l'empire, celui de la gestion des hôtels de passe et des bars des quartiers chauds, celui de la production de la pâte d'arachide, ceux du ravitaillement de l'armée (...), de l'administration en papier hygiénique ... (209).

The monopoly of photography of the ceremonies of the empire, that of the management of hotels and bars of the red light districts, that of the production of peanut paste, those of the army supply (...), of the administration of toilet paper ... (Our translation).

The man with the leopard totem of the land of the Great River does no better since the text specifies that he is one of the richest men in the universe (240) by widespread corruption thanks to the enormous gold and diamond resources of his territory. And yet, the narrator points out :

Le pays n'a ni routes, ni hôpitaux ni téléphones, ni avions, ni..., ni... Les médecins ne soignent plus faute de médicaments et parce qu'ils ont de nombreux mois d'arriérés de salaires (236-237).

The country has neither roads, nor hospitals, nor telephones, nor planes, nor..., nor... Doctors no longer care for patients for lack of drugs and because they have many months of unpaid salaries. (Our translation).

The wealth of these countries serves to increase the prestige and power of the presidents not only through generosity and corruption but also through pharaonic and megalomaniac constructions, far removed from the real needs of the populations and the stakes of the development of their states. Thus, in the land of the Great River, the symbol of this excess is the city of Labodite, the native village of the dictator with the leopard totem, appearing from nowhere, in the middle of the forest. Labodite is a ghost town, which cannot be seen when the dictator with the leopard totem does not reside there. Schools, hospitals, cinemas, the dam, the airport, supermarkets no longer function, no longer exist (235). With Emperor Bossouma, the project of his life is to make the imperial park of Akwakaba, in addition to being the largest and most bundant game park in the world, the headquarters of the UN! As for Tiékoroni, it was in his native village of Fasso, like the dictator with the leopard totem, that he had amused himself in the middle of the inhabitants' poor low huts covered with corrugated iron, splendid and immense works financed by the state budget. Palaces with gilded pediments, splendid marble hotels and even a basilica. Magnificences lost in the village skies, which are used and haunted only by the flutterings of swallows and gendarmes as well as the sounds of bats.

While mocking the whims of these autocrats, the severity of the comments of the narrator griots seems to vary depending on the actions of these masters in dictatorship. The escapades of Tiékoroni are described as sweet folly; the economic success of his country is presented as a model of development. His country became the only one in the region to feed its people, to build roads, to welcome those who were driven out of the Sahel savannah by drought. A success! A miracle! The West decided to make it a showcase... (178).

The economic success of this country, although relative and momentary, has nothing to do a priori with the tragic and sinister farce of the land of the Great River and the appalling poverty that overwhelms its inhabitants. The mismanagement of the regime of the man with the leopard totem reaches its peak in fiction with the total liberalization of mining (237), in other words, there is a democratization of corruption and looting, which ultimately does not benefit many people, except the military, the police, and senior officials. It is also this observation of failure that the griots make about the Progressive Republic of the Mountains and its dictator Nkoutigui Fondio who wanted to be the champion of the dignity of Africa and the black man. The bankruptcy of scientific socialism provokes the somewhat cynical comments of the griots:

Tous les affamés de la République des Monts (...) se dirigèrent vers la République des Ébènes de Tiékoroni, terre de paix et d'accueil des réfugiés. On ne vit aucun homme de la République des Ébènes voulant rallier la République des Monts, le pays de la dignité du Nègre (163).

All the hungry people of the Republic of the Mountains (...) headed for the Republic of the Ebony of Tiékoroni, land of peace and reception of refugees. No man of the Ebony Republic was seen trying to leave for the Republic of the Mountains, the land of the dignity of the Negro

(Our translation).

Another subject taught Koyaga during his initiatory journey is the constant use of violence and terror to establish a dictatorial regime. Hence, the importance given to prison institutions. Indeed, in all the places he is hosted, Koyaga visits prisons. In the Ebony Republic, the prison of Saoubas adjoins the residence of the dictator, and the latter boasts to the novice Koyaga:

Vous voulez sûrement savoir ce que représente cet enclos au milieu de ce parc. Eh bien ! C'est (...) la prison où sont détenus mes vrais amis (...) et mes plus proches parents (187).

Surely you want to know what this enclosure in the middle of this park represents. Well! It is (...) the prison where my true friends and my closest relatives are held . (Our translation).

This private prison, surrounded by crocodiles and with its torture room allows the dictator to get rid of individuals who stand in the way of a president, regardless of the emotional or family connection. According to Malinke adage <<there can't be two male hippopotamuses in a single cage>>. The president's enemies are given the treatment they deserve. They are tortured, banished or murdered. For the dictator with the Cayman totem, distrust of man's word justifies all punishments. This is also the point of view of his counterpart in the land of the Two Rivers when the latter says that it is necessary to fill Africa with prisons or to recruit experienced prison managers (205). In this country, the emperor with the hyena totem has made the tiny prison of Ngaragla, a real extermination camp for political prisoners under the control of a Czech torturer who fights the overstaffing of cells by mass disappearances of prisoners. The same concentration camp vision in the land of the man in white where the dictator Nkoutigui Fondio through terror, arbitrariness of false plots and purges, tortures the opponents of the African revolution in the sinister Kabako camp, a veritable factory for torture and murder.

3.2 The Capitalist Process of the West

The critique of the discourse of the capitalist West in EAVBS focuses on the support and aid given by Western countries to corrupt dictatorial African regimes, especially during the Cold War period. To this end, the narrative of the griots highlights the cynicism of the capitalist West which, in the name of the struggle against communism, has supported criminal regimes. Based on historical facts, the text recounts the ideological conflict that from the end of the Second World War until 1989 has divided the world into two rival blocs: the Western and capitalist worlds in the face of the communism of the Eastern bloc. The repercussions of this confrontation on the African continent will permanently destabilize this part of the world. In the fictional setting, Tiékoroni, the dictator of the Ebony Republic is thus designated as the spearhead of the Cold War, the leader of West Africa in the anti-communist struggle (178). The story thus reveals the privileged relationship between the dictator and the Cayman totem in the West and his role in the anti-communist struggle:

L'Occident lui prêta d'importants moyens financiers pour se développer et payer en sa place les forces qui combattaient pour défendre les positions du camp libéral. Il finança des forces

favorables à l'Occident dans tous les conflits : Biafra, Angola, Mozambique, Guinée, République du Grand Fleuve etc. (179).

The West lent him significant financial means to develop and pay in his place the forces that fought to defend the positions of the liberal camp. He financed forces favorable to the West in all conflicts: Biafra, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, Republic of the Great River etc. (Our translation).

It is the same role that is devolved to the ruler of the country of the Jebels, chosen to lead the Cold War in the African states. And it was these two masters in dictatorship who revealed to Koyaga that he had succeeded in his coup because the West had preferred him to President Fricassa Santos and also because the West had not judged him to be opposed to the interests of the Western camp (179). In the anti-communist fervor of the Cold War, the major Western powers spare no effort to support dictatorships to such an extent that this support itself becomes almost as grotesque and caricatural as the autocratic regimes called into question by the narrators. Indeed, in the episode of the thirtieth anniversary celebration, the story displays the titles of doctor honoris causa, and a myriad of decorations and prizes awarded to Koyaga by Western universities and organizations whose credibility may seem very suspicious in the eyes of the readers. These distinctions are a recognition of the importance of Koyaga in the eyes of the West in the face of the upsurge of international communism in Africa.

In this regard, like his counterpart in the Ebony Republic, the dictator enjoys boundless benevolence, since his person and his system were fiercely defended by the Western media. The President of the Gulf Republic will thus benefit from the honors of the Western press and anti-communist organizations whenever his power is threatened. This is repeated almost systematically after all the plots and attacks against the dictator, which are immediately attributed to Moscow as the US ambassador strongly assumes:

Toute la presse de mon pays est unanime, ce qui est intervenu ici est un complot communiste. Nous sommes en guerre froide et Moscou veut vous abattre. Tout le monde le sait, tout le monde en est conscient (253-254).

The whole press in my country is unanimous, what has happened here is a communist plot. We are in the Cold War and Moscow wants to shoot you down. Everyone knows this, everyone is aware of it.(Our translation).

Beyond this strategic support of the Western super powers to African dictatorships, the novel shows through a funny scene. All the ambiguities of the dangerous liaisons in the episode of the thirtieth anniversary festivities, where Koyaga was able to invite official representatives of communism and enemies of the free world as well as the West to which he is allied. The official representatives are: the ambassadors of Kim Il Sung (North Korea), Nicolae Ceausescu (Romania), Mengistu Haile Mariam (Ethiopia) and to a lesser extent Muammar Gaddafi (Libya).

This rather explosive diplomatic amalgam tolerated by the West indicates in a sense a form of duplicity of the Western powers for which Africa was only a secondary and less decisive issue and yet more deadly than Western Europe. For how can we understand the unconditional support given to Tiékoroni, the liberal president of the Ebony Republic, when his dictatorial system is not much different from that of the man in white of the Socialist Republic of the Mountains?

This example reflects the complicity of the Western powers with the African dictatorships and the crimes committed in the name of the fight against the red peril. It also shows the lack of interest shown by the West in the emergence of a more responsible Africa that is more respectful of freedoms. Moreover, the text abounds in ample explanatory extracts on the decolonization tailor-made by France and its president, General De Gaulle:

De Gaulle parvint à octroyer l'indépendance sans décoloniser. Il y réussit en inventant et en entretenant des présidents de la république qui se faisaient appeler pères de la nation et de l'indépendance de leur pays, alors qu'ils n'avaient rien fait pour l'indépendance de leur république et n'étaient pas les vrais maîtres, les vrais chefs de leurs peuples. (76-77).

De Gaulle managed to grant independence without decolonizing. He succeeded in this by inventing and maintaining presidents of the republic who called themselves fathers of the nation and of the independence of their country, when they had done nothing for the independence of their republic and were not the real masters, the true leaders of their peoples. (Our translation)..

It emerges from this example that despite the independence granted to its African colonies, French hegemony is perpetuated through ties of political domination and the choice of African leaders subservient to the West. With the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the attitude of the capitalist West is equally decried in the novel. Referring here too to proven historical facts, the account of the griots underlines the brutality of the political and especially economic reforms imposed on African states by international financial institutions. President Mitterrand recommends that African heads of state change their policies, stop being dictators and become angelic democrats. As for the structural adjustment programme demanded by the International Monetary Fund, it requires drastic measures, including:

Réduire le nombre d'instituteur, (...) Arrêter de subventionner le riz, le sucre, le lait aux nourrissons (...). Sacrifier les constructions des écoles, des routes, des ponts, des barrages, des maternités (...). Compresser les effectifs, fermer des entreprises etc. (323-324).

Reduce the number of teachers, (...) Stop subsidizing rice, sugar, milk to infants (...). Sacrifice the construction of schools, roads,

bridges, dams, maternity wards (...). Downsizing, closing businesses, etc. (Our translation).

These are the binding economic reforms, since they bring about closure and restructuring of companies and throw into the streets of protest the victims of staff cuts. By making a leap into the African news, some voices are now being raised to relativize the relevance of these reforms in certain states.

3.3 Collaborating Role of African intellectuals

As we pointed out above, a character essentially representative of the novel is subject to the critical judgment of the griots. This is the Minister of Information Macléδιο, who appears in the narration as the second official personality of the Koyaga regime. The vigil dedicated to him demonstrates the crucial role he holds in the dictatorial apparatus of the Republic of the Gulf and in the Republic of the Mountains where already his position as head of ideology on the radio placed him above the Minister of Information.

After a life of wandering in Cameroon and Niger republic in search of his master's destiny, Macléδιο interrupted his thesis on the Paleonegritic civilization in France to respond to the call of African leaders in need of cadres for their new administrations, especially to those in the Republic of the Mountains, the first independent French-speaking African state. Alongside the man in white, Macléδιο participated in the establishment of socialist terror, before being in turn, a victim of the authoritarian regime he defended. Back in his country, he seduces Koyaga when the latter takes power. Presented as the only intellectual in the dictator's entourage, he is in charge of propaganda, the dissemination of the ideology of the single party and the cult of the personality of the president.

But, beyond this character and the judgment of the griots, Ahmadou Kourouma denounces African intellectuals who have, without qualms, brought their intellect to the most bloodthirsty regimes to satisfy personal ambitions. The novel also spreads the prowess of the Minister of Information of the Land of the Great River, Sakombi Inongo, with the dictator with the leopard totem; in reality, the latter continued his career well beyond Mobutu's reign. After his initiatory journey, the critic of the griots dwells on Koyaga's implementation of the lessons received from the masters of African autocracy. The culmination of the dictator's reign is symbolized in the fictional novel by the ceremonies of the thirtieth anniversary of the seizure of power by the Father of the Nation; and to describe this feast, the story is very ironic about the excess and grotesque of the situations.

Thus, the participation of all the inhabitants, including the prisoners who had given up a day of meals to the success of the festival, is almost laughable. The excesses of this manifestation are abundantly listed by the narration as if to emphasize its ridiculousness, excess and insolence. The story immediately specifies the fifty decorations given to the dictator at the very beginning of the great parade; then follows a long list of a dozen distinctions and prizes awarded by international organizations and universities in Koyaga. This is followed by the second part of the decorations by the Supreme Leader to more than two hundred people including a brave peasant, since the interpretation of his dream had allowed the sorcerers and magicians of the president to thwart a

plot. This is probably an ironic allusion to the hero of the Sun of Independence, Fama, who neglected to report his dream to the authorities and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The highlight of these festivities is the endless parade of children, legitimate and bastards of Koyaga, wild dogs, commandos and army corps, a hundred heroines of the revolution in reality, who are former mistresses, fetishists and wizards of the president and delegations from all provinces. We are not far from this aesthetic of the grotesque and the buffoonery of which the Congolese critic Georges Ngal speaks in the denunciation of African dictatorships. The excesses of the parade in time are reported :

Depuis quatre heures, cinq heures, le défilé continue (309), depuis huit heures, le flot coule sans interruption (288) ; tout comme la résistance inouïe de Koyaga toujours haut et immobile comme un rônier, silencieux comme un fauve à l'affût ... (313).

For four hours, five hours, the parade continues (309), for eight hours, the flow flows without interruption (288); just like the incredible resistance of Koyaga always high and motionless like a rowler, silent like a fawn on the lookout ... (Our translation)

Such a carnival excess is reminiscent of the fictional universe of the Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi, in particular in *L'État honteux* or *La Vie et demie* or *La Parenthèse de sang* or in *Le Pleurer rire* by Henri Lopes which show the caricatural description and the ubuesque functioning of African dictatorships. After the caricature of the sumptuous thirtieth anniversary ceremonies, the narrator griots become more serious and draws up a very disastrous assessment of the financial and economic situation of the Gulf Republic; one sentence sums up this debacle: "no money to pay wages" (290). To the failure of the stabilization fund for agricultural products, the dictator's cash cow, is added the refusal of financial aid from the France and the demand for a Structural Adjustment Program with the International Monetary Fund which denounces in a long litany the excesses and dysfunctions of the Koyaga regime. The latter must stop subsidizing (...), reduce the workforce and close companies (319).

It was in this climate of social and economic crisis that the first manifestations of hostility to the dictatorship began. They crises are led by the out-of-school, the unemployed, who take advantage of the first winds of democracy to throw themselves into the revolution and hasten the fall of the dictatorship and the advent of democracy. The group of youths called 'bilakoros', that is to say 'not yet circumcised and therefore unfinished' formed a heterogeneous group matured by trials, injustices and lies. The objective of the group is to jump from dictatorship to democracy. Thus challenged, the Koyaga regime is subject to the injunctions of the IMF to which it cannot postpone, and which causes a generalized uprising of the out-of-school and strikers. The dictator is forced to accept the holding of a National and Sovereign Conference:

Elle se donna pour mission de faire le procès de trente années de dictature et d'assassinats. Exorciser le pays, ses hommes, ses animaux, ses choses (...). Elle voulait construire un nouveau pays sur un nouveau socle. Un socle ferme, propre et sain (342).

Her mission was to put on trial thirty years of dictatorship and assassinations. Exorcise the country, its people, its animals, its things (...). She wanted to build a new country on a new foundation. A firm, clean and healthy base. (Our translation).

The national and sovereign conference then became the place of contestation and sharp criticism of the dictatorial regime of Koyaga:

Pendant six mois entiers, les délégués se défoulèrent en mensonges vengeurs les premiers intervenants dénoncèrent les camps de concentration où les prisonniers enchaînés mouraient de faim et de soif (343).

For six whole months, the delegates let off steam in vengeful lies the first responders denounced the concentration camps where the chained prisoners died of hunger and thirst . (Our translation).

The questioning of the system of terror erected by Koyaga led the delegates of the conference to proclaim the demise and removal of the dictator. This decision, which comes at the end of the story, is interrupted by a coup by the army that temporarily restores the dictator to his attributes, and by a new attack against Koyaga who escapes in a vision of apocalypse and the end of the world. A spectacle similar to those that occurred at the end of the reign of all the great master hunters of yesteryear: Ramses II, Alexander the Great and Soundiata Keita (354). In the general confusion of this final scene, Koyaga gets away with it, but he has lost his fetishes (his mother, the sorcerer Bokano, the Meteorite and the Koran).

However, the text does not specify if he retains his power. At most, we learn that he can regain his power after his purification by the *donsomana*, and that he has nothing to fear from elections, since: "If by chance men refuse to vote for you, the animals will come out of the bush, bring ballots and vote for you" (358).

4. Conclusion

In the end, the discourse of political nationalism carried out by Koyaga and some of his peers is severely criticized in the enunciation of the narrator griots. The latter denounce the abuses and crimes of dictatorial regimes that have ruined the feverish expectations of the African masses in the aftermath of independence. However, the purifying narrative of the griots also calls into question the role of the West in these excesses without sparing African intellectuals who offer their know-how to the services of dictators.

The story seems to lead the readers to a vicious and infernal circle from which Africans would not not be able to get escape. Additionally, this suggestion also foreshadows from a historical point of view, the democratic impasse in which many African states find themselves despite the end of the Cold War and the return to democracy. Some autocrats thus remain in power using violence and the mobilization of the state apparatus for their benefit. Finally, Ahmadou Kourouma closes his text on a note of hope taken from proverbs: “At the end of patience, there is heaven. The night lasts a long time but the day eventually arrives” (358). This means that if African intellectuals engage in popular democracy rooted in patriotism, they would gain the support of the people through and momentary the absurdities would fade away.

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