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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Mamadou DIAMOUTENE,</b> <b>THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE AS PROTEST WRITING: A READING OF HARRIET JACOBS'S <i>INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL</i></b> .....	pp. 01 – 12
<b>Pither MEDJO MVÉ,</b> <b>ESSAI DE CLASSIFICATION INTERNE DES LANGUES BANTU DU GROUPE B20 A PARTIR DE L'ETUDE DE LEURS SYSTEMES DE NUMERATION</b> .....	pp. 13– 29
<b>Azoua Mathias HOUNNOU,</b> <b>ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' EXIT PROFILE IDENTIFICATION IN SEGBANA SECONDARY SCHOOLS (BENIN)</b> .....	pp. 30 – 43
<b>Armand Brice IBOMBO,</b> <b>REFLEXION SUR LA VIE ET L'ŒUVRE DE MONSEIGNEUR ANATOLE MILANDOU, ARCHEVEQUE EMERITE DE BRAZZAVILLE (1946-2021)</b> .....	pp. 44 – 56
<b>Mabandine DJAGRI TEMOUKALE,</b> <b>THE USE OF PIDGIN ENGLISH IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S <i>A MAN OF THE PEOPLE</i> IN THE CONTEXT OF A PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION READING</b> .....	pp. 57 – 69
<b>AHOUANGANSI Sènanckpon Raoul,</b> <b>CRITICAL PRAGMATIC AND SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL INVESTIGATION OF EXPERIENCE IN POLITICS: AN INQUIRY INTO PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN'S INAUGURAL SPEECH Y.....</b>	pp. 70 – 100
<b>Adama COULIBALY,</b> <b>EXPLORING TIMBUKTU MANUSCRIPTS' CHARACTERISTICS</b> .....	pp. 101 – 119
<b>Fousseni CISSOKO, Charles SAMAKE, Abdou BALLO,</b> <b>COMMERCIALISATION DE LA MANGUE : UNE OPPORTUNITE POUR LES PRODUCTEURS DU CERCLE DE YANFOLIL</b> .....	pp. 120 – 132
<b>Seydou MALLET,</b> <b>LE ROLE DES INSTITUTIONS PENITENTIAIRES DANS LA REINSERTION SOCIALE DES DETENUS TERRORISTES AU MALI</b> .....	pp. 133 – 149
<b>Gaousou SAMAKE,</b> <b>STRATEGIES DES AGRO-ELEVEURS D'AMELIORATION DE L'ELEVAGE BOVIN DANS LE CERCLE DE YANFOLILA</b> .....	pp. 150 – 162
<b>Gabou DIOP,</b> <b>LES MOYENS DE REVISION DES JUGEMENTS AYANT ACQUIS L'AUTORITE DE LA CHOSE JUGEE AU MALI</b> .....	pp. 163 – 179
<b>Konan Parfait N'GUESSAN,</b> <b>L'AFFAIRE DE LA TOUR DE NESLE : UN EXEMPLE D'UTILISATION POLITIQUE DU SCANDALE AU XIXE SIECLE</b> .....	pp. 180 – 200
<b>Pédiomatéhi Ali COULIBALY,</b> <b>LA LEGISLATION ALPHONSINE CONCERNANT L'INTERDICTION DES CONTACTS SEXUELS INTERCONFESSIONNELS : UNE BARRIERE HERMETIQUE OU PERMEABLE ?</b> .....	pp. 201 – 222
<b>Boubacar BOUREIMA,</b> <b>L'ENGAGEMENT UNILATERAL, UNE SOURCE VOLONTAIRE D'OBLIGATIONS EXCEPTIONNELLE</b> .....	pp. 223 – 243
<b>Bréhima Chaka TRAORE,</b> <b>TROUBLES DE FERTILITE FEMININE ET STIGMATE A BAMAKO</b> .....	pp. 244 – 257
<b>Aboubacar Sidiki COULIBALY, Bourama MARIKO, Alassane SIDIBÉ,</b>	

**RE-SPECIFYING THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN NOVELIST IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD* AND SEYDOU BADIAN'S *NOCES SACRÉES* IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROCENTRISM pp. 258 – 278**

**Ahmed SAMAKÉ,**

**LA POLITIQUE DE DEFENSE ET DE SECURITE A L'EPREUVE DE L'INSECURITE GENERALISEE AU SAHEL : CAS DU MALI..... pp. 279 – 314**

**Pierre KRAMOKO,**

**THE STATE OF THE UNION: ANOTHER ADDRESS IN ANGIE THOMAS'S *THE HATE U GIVE* pp 315– 334**

**Arnaud Romaric TENKIEU TENKIEU**

**ESTATUTO DE LAS ESTRUCTURAS NO ADVERBIALES DEL GÉNERO « CUANDO + SINTAGMA » EN LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LOS SINTAGMAS DEPENDIENTES : HACIA UNA TRANSPOSICIÓN CATEGORIAL Y FUNCIONAL ..... pp. 335– 346**

## RE-SPECIFYING THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN NOVELIST IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD* AND SEYDOU BADIAN'S *NOCES SACRÉES* IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROCENTRISM

Aboubacar Sidiki COULIBALY<sup>1</sup>, Bourama MARIKO<sup>2</sup>, Alassane SIDIBÉ<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Specialized in African Literature and Civilization-ULSHB, email :  
[aboubacarscouly@hotmail.com](mailto:aboubacarscouly@hotmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Candidate in African Literature and Civilization-IPU

<sup>3</sup> Specialized in African Literature and Civilization- USSGB

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### Résumé

L'article aborde la problématique de la spécification du devoir fondamental du romancier africain dans la promotion des anciennes valeurs africaines telles qu'évoquées dans *Arrow of God* de Chinua Achebe et *Noces Sacrées* de Seydou Badian. Le problème est que depuis de nombreuses années, l'Afrique a toujours été dépeinte comme le "cœur des ténèbres" où il n'y a ni civilisation ni histoire. Mais c'est l'Europe, par sa mission civilisatrice, qui a apporté la civilisation à cette dernière telle que prônée dans le discours de l'eurocentrisme. Pour déconstruire cette croyance eurocentrique, les données de l'étude ont été collectées, analysées et interprétées dans les contextes théoriques de l'Afrocentricité et du postcolonialisme. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent clairement que l'Afrique précoloniale avait toujours eu ses valeurs ancestrales et sa civilisation comme le montrent les textes sélectionnés des siècles bien avant l'arrivée des Européens. Ils révèlent aussi que l'eurocentrisme est enraciné dans l'idéologie et que l'idéologie n'est ni histoire ni science mais une pure construction humaine. L'article recommande enfin un retour aux anciennes valeurs africaines afin d'assurer une émergence et une indépendance réelles de l'Afrique postcoloniale.

**Mot clés :** Afrocentricité, valeurs anciennes, culture, déconstruction, indépendance.

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on specifying the prime duty of the African novelist in the promotion of ancient African values as coalesced in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Seydou Badian's *Noces Sacrées*. The problem is that for many years now Africa has always been portrayed as the "heart of darkness" where there is neither civilization nor history. But it is Europe, through its *civilizing mission*, that has brought civilization to the latter as embedded in the discourse of eurocentrism. To deconstruct the foregoing Eurocentric belief, the study's data were collected, analyzed and interpreted within the theoretical context of Afrocentricity and postcolonialism.

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The results of the study clearly indicate that precolonial Africa had always had its ancestral values and civilization as shown in the selected texts many centuries before the arrival of Europeans. They also reveal that eurocentrism is rooted in ideology and ideology is neither history nor science but a pure man construction. The paper finally recommends a return to ancient African values in order to ensure an actual emergence and independence of postcolonial Africa.

**Keywords:** Afrocentricity, Ancient values, Culture, Deconstruction, Independence.

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## Introduction

Africa, cradle of humanity and aged for millenniums, embodies a lot of stories and cultural reaches across many generations. The history of Africa is made up of ups and downs that need to be told to the new and coming generations. From Ancient Egypt to the last great kingdoms of the continent, the founders of precolonial Africa have developed the foundations of the first ancient civilizations that paved the way for the other cultures of the world to emerge. Early in the past, ancient Egyptians had understood that it was of paramount importance to set the pillars of existence in the precolonial civilization of Egypt.

In addition, the cornerstone of the long lasting history of mother Africa resides in the shades of her ancient values. Reflecting on better ways to allow people to live in harmony was thus made possible. Ancient African values represent African identity and without

them, there is no African and the African existence would be meaningless. The first elements of these values were developed in the 42 principles of Maat, which is considered by many scholars as the first constitution of humanity. It helped the pharaohs and their counselors to manage the daily issues in ancient Egypt and the hereafter.

Thus, it is then necessary right from here to stress the role of the African writers, mainly the African novelist in the promotion of ancient African values. As mirrors of society and keepers of social cohesion, African novelists are at the center of the stake. Their role consists of first of all, reflecting the history of precolonial Africa, the reality of post-colonial and contemporary Africa. That knowledge would then permit them to teach the post-colonial Africans their history and values. The aim of such a mission is to promote the African identity so that young Africans can regain pride in themselves and

then get rid of the multi-faceted effects of colonization and Imperialism.

The problem is that in many Eurocentric discourses, the history of Africa is falsified and summarized into the mere narratives of the European colonizer on the latter. This problem tends to portray Africa as lacking any elements of civilization before the arrival of Arabs and Europeans. Today, this thesis is ever deconstructed thanks to the works of many Afro-centrists such as the Senegalese historian and Egyptologist Cheikh Anta DIOP. In the same dynamics, several other African scholars and writers would stand up as one people to fight against the discourses of eurocentrism and colonialism on Africa in order to restore the African identity by promoting ancient African values. Among those African scholars we can refer to Chinua Achebe, Joseph Ki Zerbo, Theophile Obenga, Seydou Badian Kouyate, Camara Laye and the like.

Besides, the consequences of the falsification of the history of Africa is visible in the behavior of the post-colonial African. Young Africans totally ignore ancient African values because they have been uprooted. The content of the school programs does not reflect the sociocultural realities of the continent. The literary production that is assigned in the curriculum is inappropriate. It contributes in

denaturalizing and formatting them to love just what comes from the West. In short, even the kind of Western literatures taught in African schools and universities do not permit postcolonial Africans to get rid of their many psychological complexes. Thus, the current study attempts to find an answer the aforementioned problem.

Clearly, the objective of the study is to specify the role of the African novelist in promoting ancient African values in the midst of deconstructing the Eurocentric misconceptions and misrepresentations of Africa.

The literary theory used to gather data in the present paper is Afrocentricity. It is adopted here in order to deconstruct the Eurocentric misrepresentations and misconceptions about the history and the culture of African people and people of African ancestry. At this point, it is actually axiomatic to remind the definition of such a theory and its main pillars to ensure a better understanding of the theoretical context in which this study's data are collected and analyzed.

In regard to the above, Asante published in 1980 his seminal book entitled: *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. The latter has initiated a discourse around the issue of

African agency in history and in culture contrary to the pretensions of Eurocentrism. As a matter of fact, he maintained that Africans have been moved off-center in terms of most questions of identity, culture, and history. Afrocentricity seeks to place Africans at the center of their own narratives and to reclaim the teaching of African history from where it had been marginalized by Europeans. According to Asante (1991): "Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person." (p. 4). It is indeed from this perspective that this paper has struggled to re-specify the role of the African novelist in promoting ancient African values as a way to reveal that Africans did not hear of culture or civilization for the first time from Europeans but they had all the foregoing many centuries before the arrival of Arabs and Europeans.

In talking about the main pillars of Afrocentricity, Maulana Karenga (2007), in *Molefi Asante and the Afrocentric Initiative: Mapping His Intellectual Impact*, sums up Asante's foundations of Afrocentricity as follows:

Asante, in crafting the conceptual foundations of Afrocentricity, focuses on five central concepts: (1) centeredness in one's own

culture; (2) orientation towards the good of one's people and humanity; (3) perspective as an Afrocentric way of understanding and approaching the world from a centered and correctly oriented position; (4) victorious consciousness; and (5) agency, which is the capacity and will to act as self-conscious agents of cultural and social change. (p. 1)

The above excerpt presents the constitutive components and key pillars of Afrocentricity. Based on these principles, Africans would be at the center of the process. They should therefore understand and perceive the world from their own perspective. By doing so, they would become the agents of their development.

Structurally, the present paper is divided into three main sections. The first one constitutes the introduction which introduces the study, states the problem and the objectives of the study. The second section defines the concept of Eurocentrism with an illustration of some scholarly definitions. The third one deals with the role of the African novelist in the promotion of ancient African values. The last section concludes the entire work.

### **1-Eurocentrism: An Ideological Propaganda**

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, racism and the desire to dominate others have characterized

and conditioned the European attitude toward Africans. Eurocentrism as an ideological propaganda represents a racist, divisive, historical and dysfunctional view of world history. It primarily aims at promoting and maintaining European supremacy, invincibility and authenticity in opposition with the myth of the inferiority of the so-called Third World Countries. It is not rooted in any true cultural, historical or scientific ground.

Eurocentrism as an ideological term was first coined by Samir Amin in the 1970s. In one of his books A. Samir (1988) defines Eurocentrism in the following terms:

Eurocentrism is a culturalist phenomenon in the sense that it assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different peoples. Eurocentrism is therefore anti-universalist, since it is not interested in seeking possible general laws of human evolution. But it does present itself as universalist, for it claims that the imitation of the Western models by all peoples is the only solution to challenges of our time. Eurocentrism is a specifically modern phenomenon, the roots of which go back only to the Renaissance, a phenomenon that did not flourish until the nineteenth century. In this sense, it constitutes one dimension of the culture and ideology of the modern capitalist world. (p. 7)

The above quote clearly states the true purpose of Eurocentrists. Their aim has always been to impose European models to other peoples. The paradox in Eurocentrism is that they present it as a Universalist model whereas the existence of a European civilization is recent. For instance, Max Weber, one of the fiercest Euro-centrists asserted that it is in Europe that Science had reached its peak of evolution. He was quoted by J. Chidozie Chukwuokolo (2009) in *Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism: The Dilemma of African Development* in the following words:

...we recognize today as valid. Empirical knowledge, reflection on problems of the cosmos and of life, philosophical and theological wisdom of the most profound ... the full development of a systematic theology must be credited to Christianity under the influence of Hellenism. ( p. 7)

The foregoing thought as embedded in the excerpt has been deconstructed by African scholars since then. It is not rooted in any cultural or scientific works. In sum, Eurocentrism should be seen as an imperialist ideology that pretends the European hegemony and superiority over the rest of the world.

### **1-1-Eurocentric Discourse on Africa**

Eurocentrism developed all sorts of discourses and philosophies in order to dismantle and falsify the foundations of precolonial civilization of Africa. Among them, we have Hegel who once portrayed Africans as being unable of achieving any worthwhile things in humanity in terms of development. According to him, Africans have no historical movements or development. As a revealing example, Chukwuokolo (2009) cited the description of the African by Hegel as follows:

I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, these NEGRO slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom non ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education; will start up amongst us and distinguish themselves in any

profession. In JAMAICA, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly. (p. 7)

Besides, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is another striking Eurocentric discourse on Africa. In this novel, Conrad also describes Africa as "dark" land inhabited by savages who need to be civilized by Europeans. Chukwuokolo cited Hugh Trevor Roper's assertion as an illustration in the following words:

It is fashionable to speak today as if European History were devalued: as if historians in the past, have paid too much attention to it, and as if nowadays; we should pay less. Undergraduates seduced as always by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history. (p. 6)

### **1-2-Why Eurocentrism was devised?**

Eurocentrism was devised to justify the European "civilizing mission" in Africa and the other Third World countries. Unable to bring counter evidence to the primacy of the

precolonial civilization of Egypt, many Europeans through the works of their scholars developed this concept. The aim of the mission assigned to these scholars was to invent fallacious concepts like Eurocentrism in order to justify slavery, colonialism and today neocolonialism.

Moreover, they dominated the sphere of research, education and sciences to achieve their goal. They invested huge amount of money to write about Africa, to invade the continent with inappropriate literary narratives to control the minds of people. In short, we may retain that Eurocentrism as an ideology of European hegemony and superiority in everything good was devised to construct and maintain the superiority of the white race over the other human races. The Eurocentrists have done so because they have always struggled to hide the fact that Africa could own the ancestry of world civilization.

### **2-1- The Role of the African Novelist in Promoting Ancient African Values**

The role of African novelists is of paramount importance in the restoration and promotion of ancient African values. This is due in part to the fact that they write about issues related to social life and people in society. Be it inside or outside the continent, writers' contribution in promoting indigenous

values is of paramount importance. Besides, they diagnose to identify the diseases of their societies and propose medicine in order to cure them. Through their literary works, one should observe that social issues pertaining to the life of the community are tackled. African novelists are agents at the service of the society. Their novels are mirrors through which people see good models and exemplarity. Therefore, they should be perceived in society as references because of the social burdens that they are expected to bear.

Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Seydou Badian, Amadou Hampaté Bah and the like, at many occasions, had emphasized the role of the African writer in defending Africa and promoting her ancestral values. For them, the social role of the African writer is crucial and he/she has to live in the same pace with his/her society. Writing about Africa and her people should be his/her main concern. In their endeavor to promote African social values through valorizing and protecting African languages in African literature, two antagonistic groups of authors have emerged over the choice of the language of African Literature. The first, led by Achebe, believes that the African writer can write in the colonizer's language by Africanizing it to get his/her message across. He therefore sustains

this position by saying : “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (cited in Ngugi, p. 8). The second, led by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, believes that the African writer should write in African languages. For Ngugi, the language of the colonizer is still a determining factor and instrument used by Africa’s enemies to destroy the foundations of African culture. He maintains his position by stating in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986): “the enrichment of African Literature will never take place if African writers write in English.” (p. 28)

Each of the above groups has its own view on the choice of the appropriate language to write as an African writer. Each of them has gotten its own reasons that are understandable too, especially in their endeavor to comprehensively define African literature. For each camp, the appropriate definition of African literature would enable that literature to protect and convey African civilization and values. Therefore, to put an end to the everlasting debate, A.S. Coulibaly (2019) in his book entitled *Defining African Literature in the Era of Globalization* writes:

African literature is the particular kind of literature written *by Africans, about Africa and for Africans* regardless of the color of the author or the language in which it is written or produced provided that *the setting, and the focus* are Africa and it is written *to serve the African Man.* (p. 30)

The foregoing definition of African literature closes the debate over the definition of African literature for different reasons. First, it takes into account an aspect of each of the groups’ position. Second, it does not discriminate against any African writer. Last, it includes all the aspects related to a pure definition of African literature; be it linguistic, skin color, setting, focus and the benefit for Africans as a whole.

In the same scope, the task of the African novelist is also to contribute into the reeducation and regeneration of the Post-Colonial African through promoting ancient African values. To do so, the African writer must first have a deep knowledge of the African History and Culture. Second, he should write about the Pre-Colonial Africa, the Colonial Africa and the Post-Colonial Africa so that his audience would know what really happened. Finally, he should also write about contemporary issues related to Africa, issues like Neocolonialism and Globalization in order to deconstruct the misconceptions and misrepresentations about Africa. Without such

an approach, it may be difficult for the Post-Colonial African to be re-educated and regenerated. It is a way for him/her to get rid of the psychological burdens of centuries of Slavery and Colonization. On the role of the African novelist, A.S. Coulibaly (2019) states:

I have noticed that certain works written by some Africans are automatically considered African without even judging them in light of typical African literary norms and criteria... a work written by an African does not necessarily make it African. (p. 98)

What the above quote teaches us is that a writer should not be classified as an African writer simply because he/she writes about Africa. Some literary works produced by some African writers are deprived of allusions and social norms of Africa. Consequently, they should not be considered as true African writers. Further, A.S. Coulibaly says that to be called true African writers, "They have to know Africa, have Africa in their minds while writing and for serving Africans." (p. 98). To elucidate this quote, it indicates that the African novelist must be historically and culturally knowledgeable about Africa and be at the service of African people. Africa should therefore be at the center of his/her writings. Otherwise, he/she would stop being the

teacher that has failed in his/her mission of reeducating and regenerating the Post-Colonial African.

Although, the task of the African novelist is not easy but he/she should always remember that he/she is a model for many. Besides, he/she is a mirror in which the others perceive themselves and reach a better version of themselves. The African novelist, as a teacher, can also contribute in decolonizing the minds by teaching African History and values through the novel as well as during lectures in schools, festivals of art and workshops on Africa and her people.

To textually illustrate what we have written about the role of the African novelist in the above, Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Badian's *Noces Sacrées* are good examples. For instance in Badian's *Noces Sacrées*, « L'art nègre représenté ici est la forme majeure du langage sacrée... Tous ces masques s'adressent à toi. Ils t'invitent à une autre vie. Ils t'expliquent un autre monde, mais seuls les bienheureux sauront les entendre. »<sup>1</sup> (p. 13). Through the preceding lines, the strength of African tradition and its mystery are highlighted. The author entails through the preceding words that only those who are

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<sup>1</sup> The African art depicted here is the major form of sacred language... All these masks are addressing you.

They invite you to another life. They explain to you another world, but only the blessed will hear them.



initiated can understand. Besides, the African art is full of mystery and knowledge. By analyzing this text, we would understand the extent to which Seydou Badian had understood his role as an African novelist in the promotion of African past, ancient values, knowledge, etc.

Badian further promotes African values through the following: « Prépare-toi à faire des offrandes aux âmes que tu as offensées par tes attitudes de suffisance, trouve-moi un taureau, un bouc et un coq rouge, je vais tenter d'intercéder en ta faveur. »<sup>2</sup> (p. 100). This quote implicitly means that any form of sacrilege into African gods and spirits is punishable. But they do forgive if the person recognizes his/her act. Then, he/she should conform in order to repair the misdeed. It also shows that mediation to get peace has always existed in Africa.

Then, « Chaque fois que j'avais surpris Soret dans une de ces cases sacrées [...], il priait face au même masque, un masque humain surmonté de cornes, c'était N'tomo. »<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Prepare to make offerings to the souls you have offended by your self-sufficiency attitudes, find me a bull, a goat and a red rooster, I will try to intercede in your favor.

<sup>3</sup> Every time I had caught Soret in one of these sacred huts [...], he prayed in front of the same mask, a human mask topped with horns, it was N'tomo.

(p. 14). The power of ancient African values is recognized in the previous passage. The supremacy of N'tomo is omnipresent. This shows how important it is in African societies. It is highly solicited and respected as a protector. “Pas d'accord, Monsieur. Evidemment, je n'ai de leçon à donner à personne ici, au contraire. Cependant, il me semble plus sage de chercher avant de décréter « il n'y a rien ». Et je maintiens qu'un peuple, quel qu'il soit, ne peut vivre des siècles sur « rien ». Nous pouvons apprendre des plus arriérés... »<sup>4</sup> (p. 91). The foregoing assertion reveals the significance of ancient African values and past in the renaissance of postcolonial Africa because we can always learn from the past. It also implies that others such as Europeans have much to learn from Africans. The preceding quote is actually an expression of wisdom that criticizes western arrogance vis-à-vis other races. « Tout cela s'évanouira un jour, le pays et les ancêtres reprendront leur monde. »<sup>5</sup> (p. 99). The latter shows the optimism of the author and it indicates that Africa will recover from the

<sup>4</sup> I do not agree, Sir. Obviously, I have no lesson to teach anyone here, on the contrary. However, it seems wiser to look before decreeing "there is nothing." And I maintain that a people, whoever it is, cannot live for centuries on "nothing." We can learn from the most backward...

<sup>5</sup> All this will fade away one day, the country and the ancestors will take back their world.

years of denigration thanks to its glorious past and culture. In the next lines, Badian actually tries to make us understand the invincibility of African values and the importance of African elders and ancestors as follows: « Te voilà, après tes études et ton diplôme, aux pieds de nos pères. Je te l'avais dit. Leurs vérités savent attendre, elles ont confiance en leur force, et te voilà, après des années d'errements, converti à la sagesse, cette sagesse que j'essayais de te faire admettre. »<sup>6</sup> (p. 100). The passage shows that African wisdom is incontestable. It is everlasting. Besides, « Les Blancs sont tenaces et rusés. Nous aussi savons marcher sur nos jambes. »<sup>7</sup> (p. 141). It means that Africans also possess knowledge. Thus, they can be wiser than some Whites in their use of knowledge. Last, the power of Africa as a whole is demonstrated as follows: « M. Mornet nous disait qu'en Afrique, on ne pouvait rien cacher aux Africains. »<sup>8</sup> (p. 131). It means that Africa is full of people and spirits that possess outstanding secret knowledge to protect Africa and Africans.

Likewise, Badian, Chinua Achebe, in *Arrow of God*, also promotes ancient African values mainly through the use of proverbs:

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<sup>6</sup> Here you are, after your studies and graduation, at the feet of our fathers. I told you. Their truths know how to wait, they trust in their strength, and here you are, after years of wandering, converted to wisdom, that wisdom that I was trying to get you to admit.

“When two brothers fight, the stranger reaps their harvest.” (p. 74). The latter symbolizes union. If the people of Umuaro had stayed united, the white man would have not been able to endanger their culture and kinsmen. In the same token, he employs the following proverb to emphasize the power of wisdom as an ancient African value through the existence of elderly people: “When an adult is in the house the she-goat is not to bear its young from the tether.” (p. 15). It means that the presence of an adult is symbol of wisdom. He/she is present in order to advise his/her youngsters to avoid errors. Further, the author amplifies this through this intervention of Ezeulu during an assembly:

When I spoke two markets ago in this very place I used one proverb. I said that when an adult is in the house the she-goat is not left to bear its young from the tether. I was then talking to Ogbueri Egonwanne who was the adult in the house. I told him that he should have spoken up against what we were planning, instead of which he put a piece of live coal into a child's palm and asked him to carry it with care. We have all seen with what care he carried it. I was not then talking to Egonwanne alone but to all the elders here who

<sup>7</sup> White people are tenacious and cunning. We also know how to walk on our legs.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Mornet told us that in Africa, we could not hide anything from Africans.

left what they should have done and did another. They were in the house and yet the she-goat suffered in her parturition. (Achebe, 1964, p. 15).

To shorten this passage, we say in Bambara: “when a man is aging, he should become wise” or “an old man should be wise.” It means that one becomes wise with time. The older you become, the wiser you should be. In addition, when a person becomes old in Africa, he/she does everything with witticism, especially when he or she is knowledgeable of the African past and has been raised following the standards of African ancient values.

In his role of promoting ancient African values, Achebe points out the social and cultural richness of ancient Africa in contrast with modern Africa in the like words: “No, the man is not dangerous. Rather he acts like a man of olden times, when people liked themselves. Today there are too many wise people; and it is not good wisdom they have but the kind that blackens the nose.” (p. 96). The preceding shows that people in the past and those of today are different. They differ in terms of values and behavior. Today, many people pretend to be wise but they show something that is not true wisdom.

## **2-2- Ancient Values in Reshaping the Personality of the Postcolonial African Youth**

Today, all the scholars from all the fields of Human Sciences agree without any exception that Africa is the cradle of Humanity. For centuries, Africa has contributed to strengthen the world civilization contrary to Eurocentric misconceptions of the African history. From Babylon to Egypt, ancient Egyptians built the foundations of what is called today Western Civilization. So, one of the tools they had used to pave the way for the rest of humanity is Maat’s 42 principles. The 42 principles of Maat, which could be considered as the first constitution of humanity, embody certain values that permitted Africans to live harmoniously. That later fathered the other constitutions of the world such as the Kurukan Fuga Charter, the Magna Carta and the like because of its ancientness.

In « La dictature de la violence dans le désaccord entre le sacré et le profane dans le roman africain. Le cas de *Noces sacrées* de Seydou Badian, *Le Chant du lac* d’Olympe Bhêly-Quenum, et *Ceux qui sortent la nuit* de Mutt-Lon », Pierre Martial Abossolo stresses the necessity for postcolonial Africa to return to its ancient values:

« Je pense que le moment est venu de plonger dans les profondeurs de nos coutumes ancestrales, d’aller chercher les trésors qui y sont restés trop longtemps enfouis et de venir les poser sur la balance. (...) Un

continent n'a pas le droit de receler tant de richesses de toutes natures, visibles et invisibles, et de rester à mendier, se traînant poussivement à la queue du mouvement mondial, consommant honteusement le produit de la science des autres sans daigner fouiller dans sa besace... »<sup>9</sup> Mutt-Lon (p. 1).

In other words, the above quote calls for an immediate restoration of ancient African values. That is the only way for Africans to recover from the wounds of slavery, colonization and many others. It also shows that Africa possesses values that constitute medicine to overcome many challenges. To do so, Africans should go back to their sources, ancient Africa, values and practices. In the same scope, the permanence of these values has always been at the heart of the two literary giants of African Modern Literature, Chinua Achebe and Seydou Badian. The first, considered as the father of Modern African Literature, portrayed some of ancient African values in his referential and prophetic work, *Arrow of God*. The latter, considered as a fierce defender of African traditions, also portrayed the strength of ancient African values in his best-seller, *Noces Sacrées*. In

these two novels, there are many ancient African values, but we have taken the following for the sake of illustration:

### 2-2-1- African Sense of Humility

Humility embodies a certain number of values. Among them, we have: indulgence, peacefulness, modesty, truthfulness, correctness, exemplarity, etc. In *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu, the protagonist of the novel and symbol of wisdom, embodies humility. Through his actions in the novel, he shows it in his speeches as well as his decisions. For instance, he advises his people not to go to war against the neighboring village, Okperi. He knows that in a war, there is no winner and loser, but only losers. This is illustrated in the following words: "When two brothers fight, the stranger reaps their harvest." (p. 74). It means that people within the same community should avoid any form of crisis. When they fight or they are not united, their enemies may exploit it to destroy them.

In addition, Ezeulu is humble when Nwaka constantly attacks him. We observe his humility when the narrator says: "Ezeulu stood up again. The big fire which had been lit

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<sup>9</sup> I think that time has come to dive into the depths of our ancestral customs, to fetch the treasures that have remained there too long buried and to come and lay them on the scales. (...) A continent does not have the right to receive so many riches of all kinds, visible and

invisible, and to remain begging, dragging itself pushing to the tail of the world movement, shamefully consuming the product of the science of others without deigning to dig in its bag...

some distance away shone in his face. There was complete silence when he spoke. His words did not carry the rage in his chest.” (p. 82). This passage sustains that Ezeulu is the best illustration of an African elder. Through his behavior, one can observe wisdom, humility in dealing with social issues. In Africa, an elder should be careful and take time to assess before doing anything. Likely, the same attitude is true of Tiemoko-Massa in *Noces Sacrées*. As illustration, he teaches us : « Posséder le visible ne rend ni grand, ni heureux. Posséder, c’est entrer en conflit avec soi-même, c’est se placer sous la loi de tout ce que l’on a désiré pour mieux saisir la vie. »<sup>10</sup> (p. 157). This means that one should be humble. Arrogance does not signify power. It is a weakness. One reaches greatness through humility and witticism.

Moreover, another expression of humility by the gendarme says: « Je souhaite plein succès à votre entreprise, mais voyez-vous, tout serait tellement simple si nous autres, Européens, savions apprendre à marcher au rythme des autres. Non pour leur faire plaisir, mais simplement pour bien nous comprendre nous-mêmes. »<sup>11</sup> (p. 144). The preceding teaches us

<sup>10</sup> Possessing the visible does not make you great or happy. To possess is to enter into conflict with oneself, it is to place oneself under the law of all that one has desired to better understand life.

more about life in general. But most importantly, it teaches us that one does not have the monopoly of knowledge. We can always learn from others, especially when we know how to listen carefully.

As a matter of fact, humility is characterized by self-respect and respect of others. It should be nourished in African families as the backbone ingredient in the upbringing process of young African people. But, this is fading away nowadays. It is regrettable today that many postcolonial Africans substitute this value with fakeness, wrong doings, etc. If it were praised in the upbringing process of the postcolonial African as it has been the case in the past, vanity would not have any place in the attitudes of the postcolonial African. That is why , Achebe and Badian promote it through their works as a way to educate.

### **2-2-2-Kelenya/Ubuntu/Ujammah: An African Philosophical Value**

*Kelenya*, a Bambara word, stands for the African Sense of Socialism. Its equivalent is Ubuntu (I am a person through other people). Then, Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanganyika, developed a similar concept

<sup>11</sup> I wish your company a lot of success, but you see, everything would be so simple if we Europeans knew how to learn to walk to the rhythm of others. Not to please them, but simply to understand ourselves.

called Ujammah. It is the basis of the African Socialism together with *Kelenya* and Ubuntu. Nelson Mandela describes Ubuntu as “a philosophy constituting a universal truth, a way of life, which underpins an open society.” (p. 4). In addition, his countryman, Desmond TUTU defines Ubuntu as follows:

A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. (2004, p. 25)

In both *Arrow of God* and *Noces Sacrées*, this value is portrayed through the actions of the two protagonists because they are the symbols and representatives of social and religious systems of Africa that are centered on *Kelenya* and Ubuntu. For instance, in *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu says, “If you choose to fight a man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him I shall have no hand in it.” (p. 9). By saying so, Ezeulu is not only seeking for peace, but also to avoid an injustice. In addition, he takes this position to show to his people that Umuaro and Okperi are one and that they should avoid this war to maintain and perpetuate their *Kelenya* (oneness, unity and peace).

In ancient Africa, there was no room for individualism. Community life was based on collectivism, sharing with one another because no single person exists alone, he belongs to others. In *Caught in the Storm*, Seydou Badian best illustrates this in the following passage: “Man is nothing without men; he arrives in their hands and dies in their hands.” (p. 10). Through this excerpt, Badian teaches and underlines that the foundation of African civilization is the value of solidarity and unity in every aspect of the African life from birth to death.

Another example of Ubuntu or *Kelenya* is expressed in *Arrow of God* as follows: “It is not our custom, he told the policemen, to show our neighbor’s creditors the way to his hut. So I cannot enter with you.” (p. 86). This shows solidarity between precolonial and ancient Africans before westernization. It also envelops the true sense of the know-how-to-be and know-how-to-do of Africans. *Kelenya* or Ubuntu should be taught and preached in contemporary African families, schools, mosques and churches to permit the post-colonial African to bear it. This may eventually enable the postcolonial African to become humanistic and avoiding at the same time some of the brotherly conflicts that burst out between and among Africans because of western individualism rooted in self-interests

instead of collective ones as advocated in the value of Ubuntu and Kelenya. This is implicitly what both authors have attempted to do by written these two didactic novels.

### **2-2-3- Decoding African Wisdom**

Wisdom is one of the main values of African traditions. It is highly praised in Africa. It is defined by *The Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (2008, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) as “the ability to use your knowledge and experience to make good decisions and judgments.” In ancient Africa, the first characteristic of a leader or chief was wisdom. Once again, Ezeulu incarnates this value in *Arrow of God*. He would not take any decision without first thinking about it wisely. As a matter of fact, he sent his son, Oduche, to be his eye and ears at the white man's service. By doing so, Ezeulu would wisely know the plans of the white man. Then, he would get ready to react. Such a wisdom always pays off because one is able in advance to discover the unknown. The white man comes from elsewhere and the people of Umuaro do not know him yet. So, Oduche will be their spy in order to inform them about everything that happens in the white man's house. They would thus be able to anticipate eventual problems. Unfortunately, Ezeulu's clansmen did not understand this wisdom.

Furthermore, he gave this wise advice to the elders of Umuaro at the assembly during which they had to send emissaries to Okperi. Here, it says, “When an adult is in the house the she-goat is not to bear its young from the tether.” (p. 15). As explained earlier, this emphasizes the role of an elder as adviser to youngsters. Moreover, wisdom is expressed in these words of Ojiugo's mother, “When a woman marries a husband she should forget how big her father's compound was.” (p. 6). Nowadays, it is shameful and regretful to notice that Africans are losing the importance and practice of wisdom in their daily life routine. The above quote means that a woman should accept and honor the living conditions of her husband. Besides, she should not require everything she had in her father's house. Both the father and the husband may not have the same means to fulfill the needs of their families.

Another expression of wisdom is conveyed in the story when Ezeulu says, “When I called you together it was not because I am lost or because my eyes have seen my ears. All I wanted was to see the way you would take my story. I have seen it and I am satisfied.” (p. 82). This entails that one does not have the monopoly over everybody on issues related to the life of the community. Furthermore, one may be intelligent and even wiser but still

he/she needs other people's opinions in order to wisely make decisions. In *Noces Sacrées*, wisdom is expressed through the following assertion: « Et je maintiens qu'un peuple, quel qu'il soit, ne peut vivre des siècles sur "rien". Nous pouvons apprendre des plus arriérés...»<sup>12</sup> (p. 91). Once again, the preceding extract teaches that no single race possesses the monopoly of knowledge over other races. We learn from one another. It is also a recognition of the richness of African traditions wisely expressed. Wisdom is one of the values of the African identity. It has always been praised in African traditional institutions up till today. Another example is expressed as follows: « Te voilà, après tes études et ton diplôme, aux pieds de nos pères. Je te l'avais dit. Leurs vérités savent attendre, elles ont confiance en leur force, et voilà, après des années d'errement, converti à la sagesse, cette sagesse que j'essayais de te faire admettre. »<sup>13</sup> (p. 100). As explained earlier, the above assertion proves that African wisdom is ever dominant. It exercises its influence on everybody and one comes back to it after having committed errors.

<sup>12</sup> And I maintain that no people can live for centuries on "nothing." We can learn from the most backward...

<sup>13</sup> Here you are, after your studies and graduation, at the feet of our fathers. I told you. Their truths know how to wait, they trust in their strength, and here, after years of

#### **2-2-4-Kankelentiguiya: an African key Element of Integrity**

*Kankelentiguiya* is an element of Integrity that comes second after wisdom or the other way round. Anyway, it is one of the cornerstones of African social life. Integrity is the attitude of having principles and respecting them. It embodies several moral codes making it a value highly required and praised in Africa. In *Noces Sacrées* as well as in *Arrow of God*, integrity is portrayed by the authors to highlight its importance for Africans. As illustration, Fotigui incarnates *kankelentiguiya* in *Noces Sacrées*. He told Besnier that he would intercede in his favor to appease the gods Besnier offended. He did it, and this is an act of integrity. When you say you will do something, you have to do it. That is also called in Africa, respect of a given word or *Kankelentiguiya*. Speech is sacred in Africa. Fotigui fulfilled his promise and it is conveyed in the like manner: "Demain, nous irons porter N'tomo. préviens tes amis."<sup>14</sup> (p. 139). One of the characteristics of integrity is truthfulness. We encounter it in the following words of Ezeulu too:

wandering, converted to wisdom, this wisdom that I was trying to get you to admit.

<sup>14</sup> Tomorrow we will carry N'tomo. Inform your friends.



Some people are still talking of carrying war to Okperi. Do they think that Ulu will fight in blame? Today the world is spoilt and there is no longer head or tail in anything that is done. But Ulu is not spoilt with it. If you go to war to avenge a man who passed shit on the head of his mother's father, Ulu will not follow you to be soiled in the corruption. (Achebe, 1964, p. 15).

What the foregoing teaches us is that no matter how hard a situation is, one must tell the truth. Today, this value has been turned upside down. Young Africans are getting away of the good deeds of this value. They have to be remembered every day at home, school and in novels so that they could bear them. It entails that the popularization of this ancient African value would likely alter the bad behavior of the African youth positively. That is why it is highly advocated in both novels selected for the purpose of the current paper.

### **2-2-5- The African Sense of Self-Control and Restraint**

Right at the heart of African traditional upbringing lies self-control and restraint. Faced with any situation, one must be able to control his/her composure and inner self. In traditional African families, Africans are educated and brought up not to show off or jump to abrupt conclusions or reactions

wherever they go. They should not be *A Man of the People* because bad eyes are everywhere. However, the white man and even some postcolonial Africans consider this as a weakness or qualify it as shyness. For instance, when someone contradicts Ezeulu, he never rushes to speak. He always takes his time and controls his anger first before speaking. In Bambara, we say : "When your foot puts you in trouble, you can escape. When your hand puts you in trouble, you can still escape. But when your mouth puts you in trouble, you cannot escape." This African wisdom enshrined in their social values is a testimony that Africans have always been thinking people with a great sense of wisdom.

In addition, when Ezeulu was criticized by Nwaka of being accomplice of the white man or by siding with Okperi, he shows restraint and wisely managed the situation. This also reminds us of another quality that is praised in Africa, patience. Patience goes hand in hand with restraint. One has to learn to be patient in order to reach fulfillment and satisfaction. But in *Noces Sacrées*, we have seen that Besnier and his fiancée, Mlle Baune were impatient to see the end of her husband's suffering. The Docteur tried to tell Mlle Baune to adopt self-control through the following, "Sois patient, il y arrivera; et surtout méfie toi, ne sois pas

incorrect avec lui.”<sup>15</sup> (p. 139). This passage reflects the cultural discrepancy between Africans and Europeans in terms of patience.

Although we can still notice today the European influences on the postcolonial African through diverse means of communication and education, what most Westerners have forgotten is that the wisdom of African traditions does not allow an attitude of impatience and sudden reaction without deep thinking and self-restraint. As illustration, Ezeulu teaches us that patience and self-control always pay off at the end of the day in the like words:

I am not so sure, said Ezeulu. But whether you do or not you must not forget one thing. We have shown the white man the way to our house and given him a stool to sit on. If we now want him to go away again we must either wait until he is tired of his visit or we must drive him away. Do you think you can drive him away by blaming Ezeulu? You may try, and the day I hear that you have succeeded I shall come and shake your hand. I have my own way and I shall follow it (Achebe, 1964, p. 74).

The aforementioned passage emphasizes the role that some Africans played in opening the doors to colonizers. It also underlines the

highly important role that oppressed and exploited people can do in their liberation, especially when they stick to the values of unity and courage. To do so, everybody has to join hands not only African leaders but also the populations. It is generally believed in Africa that when there is a split in the wall, reptiles enter. Thus, we should mend the wall so that it becomes impossible for them to penetrate the house.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, the above values are interrelated. They have practically in common the same principles and norms. In fact, they constitute the backbone of the African identity which is *Africanity*. Unfortunately, we are witnessing the gradual disappearance of them and the falling apart of contemporary African nations due to the storms of Westernization, also known as Globalization. The West, by obliterating African ancient values embedded in African traditions, customs, rites, practices and systems of education, has consequently damaged the pillars of African societies. Thus, the task of the African novelist has therefore become a Herculean one. First, he should be involved in the promotion of African values and the sensitization of Africans for awareness

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<sup>15</sup> Be patient, he will succeed; and above all beware, do not be rude with him.

raising about their glorious past and rich ancestral values. Second, he should always write about the everyday reality of his/her society from the Pre-Colonial period to the Post-Colonial Africa. This would likely permit the postcolonial African to be knowledgeable about his history, culture and contributions to humanity as an efficient way to ensure the reemergence of Africa and the regeneration of the African youth. As we say in Bambara, “So don, jiri don, yèrè don de niogontè.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Learn to know yourself before you learn to know others.

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