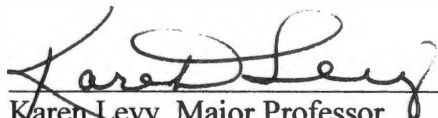


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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Tracy Scott Parkinson entitled "Reading the Colonial Christian Mission: Postcolonialism and Liberation Theology in Novels by Mongo Beti and René Philombe." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Modern Foreign Languages.

  
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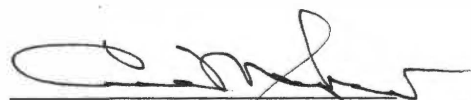








Acceptance for the Council:

  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate  
Studies

READING THE COLONIAL CHRISTIAN MISSION:  
Postcolonialism and Liberation Theology in Novels by Mongo  
Betí and René Philombe

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tracy Scott Parkinson  
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P39

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Pam. Without her love, patience, and support it would never have been completed.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines three Cameroonian novels written in French in the mid-twentieth century, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* and *Le Roi miraculé* by Mongo Beti and *Un Sorcier Blanc à Zangali* by René Philombe. Each of the three novels deals with the presence of European Christian missions in Cameroon during the colonial era and each one portrays a missionary priest as a principal character. Making use of insight from both Postcolonial literary and cultural theory and Liberation Theology, this work explores the representation of these priests, their relation to the colonial endeavor, and their relations with those whom they encounter. By way of such a reading, the dissertation also explores the often-ignored parallels between Postcolonialism and Liberation Theology. Furthermore, these readings underscore the continued relevance of the questions and challenges raised by the novels, the theory, and the theology.

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## INTRODUCTION

L'équivoque naît de la simultanéité de l'évangélisation et de la colonisation.

Le même pays nous a envoyé et le soldat et l'administrateur et le commerçant et le missionnaire apôtre. Parfois ils ont voyagé dans le même bateau.

- Archbishop Jean Zoa (qtd. in Philombe, *Sorcier* 5)

This study will explore, based on readings of novels by two Cameroonian authors, Mongo Beti and René Philombe, the simultaneous questions raised by the quote above, cited in Philombe's novel, *Un Sorcier blanc a Zangali*, and underscored by the content of the novels themselves. As do the novels to be studied, the quote (cited in preface to the text of the Philombe novel to be studied here) exposes a disturbing connection between the imperialism and oppression of the colonial movement in Africa and the mission of conversion on the part of Western Christianity. Using three novels by these two authors as points of departure (*Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* and *Le roi miraculé* by Beti and Philombe's *Un sorcier blanc à Zangali*), this study will examine, through a shared perspective of postcolonial theory and liberation theology, parallel movements of the late twentieth century, the relations and conflicts between the personal tasks of the soldier and the missionary, for example, as well as the relation of the broader tasks of evangelization and colonization. Perhaps, in fact, the goals and tasks, like the boat of the quote, tie the missionary much more closely to those others with whom he arrives than anything in his faith or mission that might distinguish him from them. In fact, it must be noted that the

stated policy of *association* of the French government of the early twentieth century, claiming that “colonizers and colonized would retain their separate cultural identities while collaborating for the mutual benefit of all concerned” (Hargreave 185), would seem completely at odds with evangelical goals of conversion.

## **WESTERN CULTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN AFRICA: THE *MISSION CIVILATRICE***

These novels from Cameroon make a particularly relevant choice for such a study not only for their obviously relevant content but also for the colonial history of Cameroon. Occupied by Germany prior to the arrival of the French, it has a particular colonial history as essentially having been colonized and then recolonized. German sovereignty over Cameroon was declared after the signing of a treaty between indigenous chiefs and the German government on July 12, 1884. After the First World War, administration of the Cameroon was designated by the League of Nations to France and, in some smaller areas, England in 1919, after almost 35 years of German rule. Thus 1919 saw the end of German colonization of Cameroon and the beginning of French (or, in certain areas, English) colonization; Cameroon is recolonized (“History of Cameroon,” screen 1).

Ruled essentially by a dictatorship of Ahmadou Ahidjo for the first twenty-three years of its “independence,” Cameroon serves also as a prime example of the continued effects of colonization even after independence. Ahidjo became Cameroon’s first president upon independence of French Cameroon in 1960 (The southern, predominantly

Christian, part of British Cameroon would join French Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961, with the predominantly Muslim northern part becoming part of Nigeria.) and managed to outlaw all political parties other than his own by 1966 (“History of Cameroon,” screen 1). Notably, this was a government vocally opposed by both Philombe, from within Cameroon, and Beti, living in exile in France. Beti himself referred to Ahidjo as a dictator, while Philombe was arrested on at least four occasions and charged with “endangering state security” (Beti, “Philombe” 22). Even following the resignation of Ahidjo, his successor, Paul Biya, overcame a coup attempt in 1984 and was re-elected in two single-candidate elections followed by a third re-election in an election “which was considered seriously flawed by international observers” (“History of Cameroon,” *Worldrover*, screen 1). Biya remains president, and 2002 parliamentary elections saw complaints of fraud filed by fifteen different opposition parties (“History of Cameroon,” screen 1).

Finally, the presence of the church in Africa is, of course, at the heart of the novels to be considered in the following chapters. It is also important to remember that African history does not begin with the discoveries of the lands by Europeans as Victor Wan-Tatah, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University and former Presbyterian minister, reminds his readers in *Emancipation in African Theology: An Inquiry on the Relevance of Latin American Liberation Theology to Africa* (16). “From archaeological evidence it is known that humans have inhabited Cameroon for at least 50,000 years, and there is strong evidence of the existence of important kingdoms and states in more recent times” (“History of Cameroon,” *Worldrover*, screen 1). Nor does the world’s colonial history begin in the Africa

considered in these novels. In fact, John McCleod, author of *Beginning Postcolonialism* notes in that, in fact, the period of decolonization during which Beti and Philombe live and write follows by centuries the beginning of the decolonization of the Americas (10). Wan-Tatah further notes that Cameroonians “had a highly developed culture and a religion that gave meaning to their existence” well before the arrival of any European missionaries (30).

Yet, the missionary, like the colonizer, often arrived with the sense of justification that his presence would foster the growth and development of otherwise primitive or pagan culture. This, of course, raises questions about “the assumptions, beliefs, and strategies missionaries used when they set out to Christianize Africans” (30). Wan-Tatah, strikingly sympathetic to the missionary cause, if not to all its methods and prejudices, presents the development of African religiosity as evidence that “the God of the missionaries was already working his way in African religion” (31). Others, of course, would legitimately question that any god who might have been working in Africa prior to the arrival of the missionaries (whether or not it be the God of the missionaries, and consequently the God of the colonialists), would not look favorably on the often destructive nature of the colonial enterprise or the complicity of the church in matters such as coerced labor for construction of roads.

Wan-Tatah also notes that “African institutions and religions were to have a profound effect on the ways in which Christian beliefs were understood and appropriated within the African context” (30). This issue is explored by prominent postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha in his discussion of missionary activity in India in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity”, for example, considers colonizer/colonized

relations and “stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities” (Ashcroft 118), the point of this construction being what Bhabha has termed the “third space”. Bhabha further notes that the relation of the colonizer and colonized is one of “ambivalence,” of both “attraction and repulsion” (12). Relating specifically to evangelism and missionary contact, Bhabha notes a missionary refusal to consider such contact as one of “mutual construction.” Rather, the evangelizing voice demands to be heard and accepted:

The narratorial voice articulates the narcissistic, colonialist demand that it should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed repeat its references and still its fractured gaze. (Bhabha 98)

The potentially devastating consequences of such (mis)understanding when combined with rigid interpretations of Christian dogma and Orientalist worldviews on the part of the missionaries play significant roles in each of the three novels to be explored.

There existed in Cameroon a Christian missionary presence as early as the eighteenth century with, for example, the Basel Missionary Society of Swiss-German origin (Wan-Tatah 37). According to Wan-Tatah, this was mission with a clear task, “to speak civilization and the Gospel to the pagan world” (39), and missionaries took an active part in colonization. Missionary undertakings not only evangelized and built churches, but they constructed and administered schools as well (49). By the mid-nineteenth century, several Christian groups had sought to establish such an evangelizing and educating presence in Cameroon:

Under the leadership of Alfred Saker, a Briton, and West Indians such as Joseph Merrick, a Baptist station was established in 1845 at Akwa Town (now Douala). Saker established a larger post at Victoria (now Limbe) in 1858. The American Presbyterian mission opened a station in 1871. The origin and denomination of the missions changed frequently, but the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Roman Catholics have been the most important. (“History of Cameroon,” screen 1)

Not surprisingly, Western education is treated in many African novels of the twentieth century such as Hamidou Kane’s *L’aventure ambiguë*. So, seeing an effective means for recruiting young Christians, the school established by the church played a key role in the arrival of Western-style education in the region, which, of course, would prove to act both as a means of assimilation and, in some cases, a source of questioning that would lead to resistance. In a similar manner, the protagonists of the novels to be treated, who are themselves “educated” by their experience in Africa, would at times come to resist or at least reconsider the nature of their mission. However, Wan-Tatah does not cite instances in this early period of colonial missionary activity when the mission or missionary comes into conflict with the colonialism of his home government. Such conflict, however, is addressed by both Beti and Philombe in these novels, the presentation and significance of which will be considered later in the study.

As previously noted, missionary presence expands through the nineteenth century; in fact this is the period which Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed of *A History of the Church in Africa* place as the beginning of a significant presence of the Western church in Cameroon. They characterize the movement as tentative and isolated prior to the

Great War. Then, with the war in Europe, brutal conflict among the same Christian nations that condemned tribal war was on full display. Albert Schweitzer, while likening the African population to questioning children, nevertheless recognized the destructive irony of the War in wondering, “can it be possible that the whites, who brought them the Gospel of Love, are murdering each other and throwing to the winds the commands of the Lord Jesus” (Groves 79). As we will see, the novels of Beti and Philombe underscore that violent behavior on the part of those bringing this Gospel of Love was by no means limited to European soil. In several instances we will see the presence of the missionaries lead to bloodshed and violence. We will see a priest order violent and painful punishment to parishioners who are not in keeping with rules he has sought to establish. In other instances, we will see bloodshed and violence resulting from conflict caused by the presence of missionaries.

In spite of the questions that might have been raised in light of the tragedy of the Great War, the 1920s and beyond saw great growth in Christianity in Cameroon, particularly in the south (the north remained largely Muslim). In fact, by 1961, 650,000 Catholics and 500,000 Protestants were registered in the south of Cameroon. (Sundkler and Steed 750) with the Catholic population growing nine times larger in the period between 1916 and 1939 (756), and in 2001 forty percent of Cameroon’s population of 16 million was identified as Christian (“Cameroon,” screen 1). Post-war, the ties between mission and colonialism were quite strong:

In 1930, shortly before the international colonial exhibition, Joseph Folliet, director of *Semaines sociales*, advanced a thesis on the right of colonization. He said that providence had placed no obstacle to the

acquisition of wealth. In modern times some Catholic clergy have even proclaimed that the wealth of so-called savage people is meant for the use of all, and by inference, capable Westerners. (Wan-Tatah 59)

Certainly the numbers of registered Christians as they relate to actual converts is a matter of question. The principal cause of a discrepancy in such numbers, the conversion of convenience, is a matter to be discussed in the second chapter of this work, focusing on African converts as presented in the novels. Nevertheless, the fact remains that hundreds of thousands of Cameroonians converted whether for reasons of faith, reasons of fear, or hope of personal gain.

According to Wan-Tatah, the Catholic Church openly favored colonialism until after World War II, with the belief that this would help “spread the Catholic religion”. From the perspective of the army and administration, the conversion work of missionaries represented the opportunity for both religious and cultural converts. With little church-state separation, exploitation through forced labor on colonial projects for men and in women’s schools known as *sixas* could easily be propagated by the church (60). As we will see in following chapters, Beti and Philombe use the novels to be studied to address both forced labor, particularly for the construction of roads, and these women’s schools. Furthermore, Wan-Tatah suggests that, well into the twentieth century, missionaries felt great confidence in the colonial undertaking and its ideology. Even as converted Africans gained positions in the missions, they were placed in subordinate positions to European leadership, as they were generally not considered capable of or meriting the priesthood. Sundkler and Steed’s work corroborates this assessment with their count that in 1939 the Yaounde diocese had sixty-four priests, all of

whom were Westerners. It should be noted, however, that Wan-Tatah's apologetic leanings regarding the missions are again evident in his presentation of these matters, since he suggests that Western priests and religious leaders were simply victims of colonial ideology, "destined to fall prey to the same racial sins of their countrymen" (64). Beti and Philombe will allow us to consider such an assertion in light of the three priests who serve as protagonists of the three works.

## CHOOSING THE WRITERS AND THE NOVELS

Although the novels in themselves justify such a study, the socio-political engagement of the authors themselves must be noted. Both Beti and Philombe certainly saw themselves as agents of resistance to oppression, colonial or otherwise. They were voices for the end of colonial oppression and, after the end of French rule, were voices against corruption at both social and political levels in independent Cameroon. *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* was, in fact, banned in post-independence Cameroon for implying that certain native Cameroonians were complicit in the suffering and oppression brought about by colonization. His pamphlet *Main basse sur Cameroun*, which criticized the rule of Ahidjo as a puppet leader defending neo-colonial interests was banned in France in 1972 (Mann 89). Beti later founded *Peuples noirs Peuples africains*, which served in part as a forum for critiquing Franco-African relations. Philombe, as mentioned earlier, was arrested on several occasions between 1960 and 1983 for publishing anti-governmental literature criticizing the Ahidjo regime, including his work on two periodicals, *Bebela ebug*, meaning "Truth", and *La Voix du citoyen* (Beti, "Philombe" 33).

These authors were engaged intellectuals writing not only novels, but also other works of resistance. Philombe, praised by Beti himself as “the living symbol of his people” (31), articulated his understanding of his role as a writer in a 1980 interview for the journal *Afrika*:

For me as a writer, commitment means attempting to define the problems of my people, to ease the suffering of my people, to draw attention to the misery of my people, to make the ruling classes aware of it. That is the basic mission of the African writer, otherwise he need not write. (38)

As for Beti, Fernando Lambert describes the resistance of his work by saying that “Beti wants to smash the benevolent image of colonization” (79). As further discussed below, it is this attitude which is clearly evident in the literary work of both Philombe and Beti that can be seen as directly connecting the novels (and perhaps the authors as well) to the Postcolonial movement in literary and cultural theory and the leftist Christian theological movement known as Liberation Theology.

Each of the three novels in question, written between 1956 and 1969, has as a central character a white, Catholic priest working for a mission in Cameroon. *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali*, set in 1915, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, which takes place in the 1930s, and *Le Roi miraculé* (the title has been translated as *King Lazarus*), in which the narration begins in 1948, allow insight into the thoughts, motivation, and reactions of these priests as they seek to civilize and save those whom they consider the barbaric and damned. In each case, the ideas and actions of these men and the churches they represent call into question the humanitarian value of their missions as well as the validity of the effort of Western Christianity to impose itself upon Cameroonian civilization, attached or

not to the colonial enterprise. Textually speaking, these questions are raised often on the part of many with whom the priests come into contact but also often on the part of the priests themselves. Through the novels, we will explore the ideology of the evangelization of Cameroon via the relations of these men with their colleagues, those whom they convert, and the skeptical who question their presence. The novels expose damage obviously done by the presence of the priests. As a key element of the novels, this damage, which remains relevant to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century world in which religions and cultures continue to negotiate the third space of their convergence, will be studied. These novels also provide a forum for examination of the priest by way of their reaction to and interaction with social constructs and mores as they encounter them in Cameroonian culture. For example, these priests must often deal with the social status and role of women in the culture(s) they encounter. In a broader sense, one may also examine the political, cultural, and religious apparati for and with which these men directly or indirectly work. But it is imperative to note that these authors and these novels do not simply expose wrongs done. Eventually, the experiences of the priests lead them to question the nature of the mission, as does Father Marius in *Un Sorcier blanc a Zangali*:

Il se demandait si, en voulant apporter la paix de l'évangile en Afrique, le missionnaire ne contribuait qu'à apporter en réalité, les horreurs d'une guerre latente, qui n'attendrait que la bonne saison pour germer et sévir?

Il lui paraissait désormais difficile de refuser aux colons blancs le nom de 'provocateurs barbares'. Chambarder les coutumes les plus sacrées d'un peuple constitue bel et bien un acte de provocation! (185)

It is in this sort of questioning that interdependence may be recognized and where we may begin to question the structures inherent to the colonial system.

As do the experiences of the priests in Beti's novels, the experience of this priest raises questions about the nature and consequences of both colonialism and colonial evangelization, both as they relate to a man of faith and what he has considered to be his noble mission and as they relate to those whom he has sought to proselytize. This study will explore such questions in light of the intersection of matters of religious faith and dogma and the colonial enterprise. In so doing, we will consider how postcolonial theory and liberation theology may contribute to the reading of these works.

The clash of culture, religion, and imperialism in the colonial setting of these novels lends itself to a consideration of various concepts related to postcolonial theory, including those mentioned above. The novels provide a particular context for examining the Western "othering" of the colonized through language, ideology, discourse, and institutions.

## **THEORY AND THEOLOGY: POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY**

A significant premise on which this work will be based is the strong tie relating the varied movements of literary and cultural criticism that are now encompassed under the term "postcolonial theory," and the Christian theological movement of the late twentieth century known as Liberation Theology, particularly as those ties are demonstrated in the novels to be studied. Furthermore, this study develops on the

premise that, per the previously cited statement by René Philombe, these novels seek to speak out against the oppressive nature of the colonial movement especially as it relates to its ties with Christian evangelism of the period. But, the novels do not seek only to expose wrongs and reveal injustices to their readers. Consequently, to stop at exposing such wrongs in this study would be to merely offer the self-evident. The works, in fact, do much more. These novels not only foreshadow the problems exposed by both postcolonial theorists and liberation theologians but also point toward the search for alternatives and solutions to the problems created by the encounters.

It is this same calling to speak out for those who cannot otherwise be heard that is at the heart of Philombe's stated theory of the responsibility of the African writer. Although the argument can be made that postcolonial thought existed well before its publication, for example in the work of Franz Fanon or Aimé Césaire, Edward Said's 1978 work *Orientalism* is generally considered the founding work of the postcolonial movement in literary and cultural theory. It should be noted that Said's vision of the role of the intellectual is not at all unlike the role of the African author as presented by Philombe. The intellectual as defined by Said is one who is perpetually at the margins and "belongs on the same side with the weak and unrepresented" (Said, *Representations* 22 ). The intellectual, says Said, must always seek to be a voice for those who otherwise would have no voice.

In a strikingly similar manner, Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez' *A Theology of Liberation*, the work that opened the door to the development of Liberation Theology, questions the evangelist's failure to consider the suffering and oppression of those whom he seeks to proselytize. Gutierrez asks how one can tell an oppressed and

impoverished person that he or she is a child of God. As he states in *The Power of the Poor in History*: “the question in Latin America will not be how to speak of God in a world come of age, but rather how to proclaim God as Father in a world that is inhumane. What can it mean to tell a non-person that he or she is God’s child?” (57). Similarly, American theologian Robert McAfee Brown defines Liberation Theology as beginning its understanding “with the world of oppression” and developing from “the position of the oppressed, the marginated, the exploited” (138). A question such as that posed by Gutierrez in consideration of Latin America is no less relevant when applied to Africa and matters of Christian presence in colonial Africa like those presented in the novels of Beti and Philombe. Indeed, they are questions that the protagonists of these novels must eventually confront, forcing them to consider what Christopher Rowland calls the “altered perspective” of liberation theology (3).

As we will see, the novels call into question the understanding of Africa from the Western perspective as exemplified in the persons of the three protagonists. Drawing from Said’s *Orientalism*, the moral authority presumed by the church, the mission, and the priest demonstrate a Saidian dominance of knowledge and power of West over East and North over South. It is a dominance that places the West and its institutions, which can easily be considered to include the mission, in a position to control discourse and knowledge in the manner described by Said’s *Orientalism*:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over

it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (3)

In the same manner, Liberation Theologians, like the African Englebert Mveng, assert that if Christianity is to have any integrity in Africa, it will have to become a religion that is truly African. It must not be, according to Mveng, simply a transplanted Western cultural ideology. “Le christianisme africain n’est pas seulement possible, il est nécessaire, car si en Afrique le christianisme n’est pas africain, que serait-il? Il serait un produit étranger” (13). So even for someone like Mveng, who sees Christianity as a reasonable part of developing African culture, the dangerous concept of “Orientalism” is to be called into question.

In spite of what seems to be an obvious and strong relation between Liberation Theology and Postcolonial Theory, one that will be further explored throughout this work, there has been little contact between these two lines of thought, particularly as might be related to literary criticism. Even in novels such as these, which, by nature of their content, are subject to theological readings, such a convergence seems to have been ignored. Although there has been recent study by biblical scholars applying postcolonial readings to Christian scriptures, this connection appears to have been largely unconsidered by other postcolonial scholars, hence the significance of that portion of this undertaking. For example, Ashcroft’s *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* makes no mention of liberation theology or theologians as having any sort of relation to the postcolonial movement.

Using the novels by Beti and Philombe as points of departure, the following pages will explore the relation of mission and colonization and how this relation may be

understood through the meeting of postcolonial theory and liberation theology. The priests will be examined in light of their experiences, their faith, and their questions. Subsequently, we will examine the experiences of those who choose to convert and those who refuse to do so. Finally, as it marks a particular point of encounter for Western and African cultural understanding, we will also explore the role of the woman as presented in each of the three novels, particularly as it relates to the presence of the mission.

## **NOVEL SUMMARIES**

The following pages are intended to provide the reader with brief, general summaries of the events of the three novels to be examined. I have intentionally limited each to a single page to allow for ease of reference for the reader. Many specific events and characters not mentioned in the summaries will be treated in this study, and these summaries are simply intended to provide a basic reference point for those unfamiliar with the novels to be studied.

### ***LE PAUVRE CHRIST DE BOMBA***

Father Drumont, who has made a career as a missionary priest at the Catholic Mission of Bomba announces that he will be leaving Bomba for a brief tour of the nearby Tala region. Because of their resistance to the Christian ways endorsed by the Father, he has chosen to leave them alone for the past three years. Now, he has determined the time is right for their “good shepherd” to return. Traveling with Drumont will be Zacharie, his cook, and Denis, one of the mission boys. Denis also serves as the narrator of the novel.

The events unfold from the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of February of an unspecified year in the 1930's.

Father Drumont visits several towns in the Tala region over the course of his travels. His encounters are varied and include, of course, many villagers who take the opportunity to speak with the priest and/or take confession while he is in each town. Drumont regularly warns women and men alike about the sinful nature of polygamy, while also seeking to discourage local traditions, such as dance, that he deems contrary to the Christian life. During this voyage, Drumont also encounters and confronts a regional witchdoctor named Sanga Boto, a significant meeting of opposing religious traditions.

Two key revelations affect Father Drumont over this period. He learns from the regional administrator, Vidal, of plans to build a road through the Tala region. Despite the fact that projects like this, and the forced labor that accompanies them, often lead to increased conversions for the local priest, Drumont begins to question the validity of such a project when it will depend so heavily on the forced labor of the native population. Secondly, Drumont learns that the women's school for young wives and brides-to-be run by his mission, the sixa, has been operating as a brothel. Shamed and dismayed, Drumont chooses to leave the mission field and return to France.

### ***LE ROI MIRACULE***

In 1948, Father Le Guen is the priest at the Catholic Mission of the Essazam tribe. Although he has made several converts, Le Guen has not succeeded in converting Essomba, the Essazam chief. Suddenly, the chief falls so ill that all expect him to die. As the chief is on his deathbed, Father Le Guen is out of town and unable to visit.

Essomba's aunt, Yosifa, who is a Christian convert, fears the fate of this unbaptised man whom she raised as her own son. In a desperate effort to save his soul, she performs an impromptu baptism. Although he has regularly refused baptism in the past, this time the chief is too weak to respond affirmatively or negatively to the efforts of his aunt.

Soon thereafter, the chief miraculously returns to health. Although Le Guen doubts both the validity of the baptism and the miraculous healing, he still seizes an opportunity to convince the chief otherwise. Aided by Yosifa, Le Guen manages to convince the chief that he now must take on a lifestyle in keeping with his baptism and healing. The chief must take one wife and renounce the other twenty-two.

The chief eventually yields and takes Anaba, his newest and youngest wife, as his Christian bride. At Le Guen's insistence, the remaining wives are ordered to leave and return to the clans they represent. Makrita, the first wife, actively resists. Eventually, this situation leads to violent conflict among the men and women of the clans and the destruction of the peaceful union of these clans. The colonial military arrives to restore the peace, and the administrator, Lequeux, expresses his frustration at the priest's refusal to follow administrative wishes that he refrain from seeking to convert the chief. As a result of both the disastrous conflict and his opposition to the administrative request, the priest is removed from his position.

### ***UN SORCIER BLANC A ZANGALI***

Father Marius, working as a missionary in 1915, is assigned the task of visiting and evangelizing the town of Zangali, known as an area especially resistant to Christian missionaries. In fact, the last missionary to Zangali did not return, believed to have been

murdered by the Zangali people. His mission boy, Etienne, wishes to go along, but his parents, fearful for his safety, convince Marius to leave him behind.

At Pala, along the route to Zangali, Father Marius encounters a group of men who appear to be very threatening. Although they think he might be a priest, who would be most unwelcome, they also suspect he might be associated with the colonial administration. It is the surprising appearance of Etienne, whose zeal has led him to follow the priest, that saves Marius. Etienne convinces the group that Marius is, indeed, a commandant and should be feared and welcomed as such. Although conflicted at times, Marius chooses to maintain this false identity at Pala. He also decides he will use the strategy of presenting himself with a false identity, this time as a teacher, when he gets to Zangali.

Marius arrives at Zangali with Etienne and Andela, a young woman from Pala who has been offered to the commandant as a gift. The elders at Zangali relegate Marius and the others to the jungle. In order to stay near Zangali, the three must fend for themselves and account for their own food and shelter. In this part of the jungle, they encounter diseased villagers who have been cast out of Zangali. Working closely with Etienne and Andela to survive as well as to care for the exiled leads Marius to reconsider the nature and goals of his work in Africa. However, his unwelcome intervention at a local ceremony provokes the wrath of the Zangali community. Soon after, the administration arrives to avenge Marius' treatment. Over the protests of the priest himself, the Zangali chief is killed.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PRIESTS

When Gustavo Gutierrez asks how one can tell a “non-person” that he or she is a child of god in *A Theology of Liberation*, he asks a question at the heart of the relation of the priest and his church with the community into which he has entered. It is a question that hinges on the supposed and assumed superiority of the West, its religion, and its culture. The “non-person” is inferior to the missionary not only in the assumptions of Orientalism but even more so in the literal sense of being part of an occupied territory, of being colonized. The ideological gap that creates the concept of the “non-person” is only widened by socio-economic factors such as the relative wealth of the priest in relation to those whom he wishes to convert and matters of cultural (mis)understanding related to a foreign religion brought by a foreign culture.

As previously discussed, the work of theorist Homi Bhabha emphasizes the “ambivalent” nature of the relation of colonizer/colonized with particular attention to the demands of the “evangelizing voice” to be heard and accepted. The relation is not one of mutual respect, but rather one in which the foreign ideas are imposed. Thus the words of the missionary may have little weight after passing to the ears of the colonized. Giving particular attention to the colonized as oppressed, Englebert Mveng makes note of this gap as it relates to Christian evangelism:

[N]ous ne rencontrons nulle part dans la vie l’homme en tant qu’homme.

Nous rencontrons plutôt des Français, des Allemands, des Congolais, des

Americains, des Noirs et des Blancs. C'est ça, l'homme concret. Par conséquent, si cette théologie a un sens pour l'homme, il faut qu'elle le fasse pour l'homme concret, celui que nous rencontrons tous les jours.

Or pour l'homme concret, le mot libération n'a pas la même signification selon la race, les traditions, la culture, la situation économique, politique et sociale de chacun de nous.

Quand vous rencontrez un brave paysan dans la rue et que vous lui dites: "Je suis venu vous annoncer la libération", eh bien dans son esprit, la libération peut signifier immédiatement sa libération des bestioles qui détruisent sa récolte ou bien sa libération de cette maladie qui l'afflige depuis des années et que les guérisseurs n'avaient pas à extirper. Vous remarquez que la libération prend toujours un sens concret chez l'homme qui vit son expérience.

Quand vous appartenez aux peuples opprimés comme nous l'étions sous le régime colonial, et que quelqu'un se présente pour vous annoncer la libération, vous pensez tout de suite à la libération par rapport à l'oppression que vous subissez. (49-50)

Speaking specifically about the missionary/evangelist who shares news of Christian salvation, Mveng makes the same points made by postcolonial theorists such as Said and Bhabha; that this gap of which we speak is wide, significant, and often ignored. In the case of these novels, the priests and their missions present both a cultural gap and a particular view of the culture they seek to change. Furthermore, they present a hierarchy of power that would seem contrary to their purported message of love and would also

seem to be a major impediment to their being accepted as messengers of a religion of service and grace.

This chapter will give specific attention to the priests and their church as represented in each of the three novels and explore the textual demonstration of the gap discussed above. It will examine the relation of the priests to the communities in which they work, the moral standing of the priests, the relation of the priest and the church to colonialism. Finally, the chapter will consider the moral development and change of the priests as it relates to their evangelizing mission.

### **FATHER DRUMONT: *LE PAUVRE CHRIST DE BOMBA***

In beginning to study the Reverend Father Drumont, we must emphasize here that our observations are focused on approximately the final two weeks of a twenty year stay in Africa. These two weeks are principally spent traveling to “effectuer une tournée au pays des Tala” (14). The Tala are a people of the region whom the priest has not visited for three years. He has ignored them for such a long period because they resisted his evangelism and also because of what he sees as their sinful nature:

[J]e retourne parmi eux, pour leur offrir une nouvelle chance de se repentir, de renoncer à leurs vices et de revenir au Christ. Le châtement a été pénible, certes, mais il était nécessaire, il s’imposait du fait de leur mauvaise conduite, de leur manque de reconnaissance à l’égard de Celui qui est descendu sur terre, et qui est mort sur la croix pour les sauver de péché. Aujourd’hui, Il leur tend les bras et leur pardonne, à la condition

qu'ils renoncent à leurs erreurs passées et qu'ils prennent la ferme  
résolution de devenir bons chrétiens...

Le Bon Pasteur abandonne son troupeau pour aller à la recherche de la  
brébis perdue. (14-15)

So as the novel opens, Drumont announces that he will be leaving his mission in Bomba for two weeks. He will, for the first time in years, seek to reach and convert the Tala people whom he considers to be in a state of moral and spiritual crisis.

#### **PERCEPTIONS: SEEING THE OTHER**

As *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* opens, the gaps of understanding and perception between Drumont and his assigned flock are clearly evident. The narrator, Denis, who is a houseboy of the Reverend Father Drumont, tells us that “les gosses de mon village appellent le R.P.S. ‘Jésus Christ’” (11). Denis tells us that local boys, having seen a picture of Jesus surrounded by children, noted that his image in the photo bore a striking resemblance to Father Drumont. Upon assurance from Drumont that, in the words of Denis, “Jésus et le R.P.S., c’est tout un” (11), the local boys simply begin to refer to him by that name. Perhaps the confusion stems from Drumont expressing a Christian concept of having Christ dwell within him or perhaps the confusion relates to the Christian explanation of Trinity in which “father” and “son” are different and separate yet part of one single entity. Whatever the precise cause(s), this opening which portrays what could be interpreted as simple childish naïveté underscores two key elements of the relation of the priest to the community: that misunderstandings often come easily and that the priest can be seen as directly representing the whole of his religion.

If, then, Father Drumont represents Jesus Christ and the Christian faith, how is he perceived by the community in which we are told he has spent some twenty years?

Particular perceptions of the priest(s) will be further considered in chapters examining the converted and the non-converted among the native population, but some general concepts should be presented here in our specific discussion of the priests.

Father Drumont is seen by many of those whom he encounters as a man of power and, consequently, often seen as a source of protection. The power of a priest is evident in his wealth, in his following, and often in the respect paid him by colonial administrators and officers. Denis, for example, notes that seeing the regional administrator arrive to visit Father Drumont offers a good opportunity for the locals to see “un Blanc, un administrateur, [qui] aborde un prêtre avec tant de respect, presque de la vénération” (57), an opportunity that Denis sees as a chance to learn a lesson about the respect due father Drumont. If an administrator offers such respect, certainly commoners should do the same. Fernando Lambert notes also that some in Beti’s novels suggest that converts come to this Western religion as a manner of finding the “secret to your power”, making the priest primarily a source of power and prosperity rather than righteousness or spiritual salvation (82).

Father Drumont is one to be feared and obeyed when necessary, and Denis notes him to be most effective when he wields his power, saying, “c’est toujours quand il tonne, c’est toujours quand il les bouscule que les gens lui obéissent” (90). Thanks to his apparent power, Drumont is feared by many. Denis points this out on several occasions, noting children and adults alike who are afraid of the Father and see him as “coléreux” (19). When the Father and his entourage encounter a group of women on a road whom

they have heard singing in the distance, Denis notes that the mood of the group changes immediately upon seeing the priest. “En débouchant du coude de la piste, elles nous ont aperçus et aussitôt elles se sont tues: elles avaient peur du R.P.S. Une fois parvenues à notre hauteur, elles ont dit en chœur: Loué soit Jésus-Christ!” (166).

Even those who work with the Father often fear him. Denis notes the poor performance of a boy assisting Father Drumont at mass: “Mon ami se trompait beaucoup; je crois qu’il avait peur du R.P.S.” (132). Even Denis himself, despite being among those closest to the Father, also expresses fear of retribution. Denis’ narration shares this fear as he puts off confessing for several days during the course of the approximately two weeks covered in the novel. Denis feels he must confess having had sexual relations with a girl while traveling with the Father. Although he declares that he does not wish to disappoint Drumont with his behavior, Denis also admits he fears Drumont’s anger when he confesses to him (179). On a previous occasion, Denis had considered making a confession along with a group of townspeople who had arrived for confession, in the hope of completing his confession without being recognized, but as he admits “le courage m’a manqué” (156).

In addition to seeing the priest as a man of power whom they should fear, much of the population sees the priest as having a purely selfish motivation for his efforts in Africa. Rather than being seen as one who has come to help those in need, he is perceived by many as seeking to exploit the colonial situation for his own material benefit as well as for that of his church. In a conversation with Zacharia, the priest’s cook, Denis is chastised for his naiveté in failing to understand that the main motivation of a missionary, according to Zacharia, is money: “Mais, toi qui aimes tant la religion,

peut-être seras-tu un prêtre un jour; alors, tu comprendras ce que c'est que l'argent. Tu comprendras que nous courons tous après l'argent, les prêtres autant et peut-être plus que les autres" (36). The following day, Father Drumont asks a local catechist to tell him what people think of missionaries like him. The catechist responds with hesitation but shares with Drumont that "ils disent qu'un prêtre, ce n'est pas meilleur qu'un marchand grec ou tout autre colon. Ils disent que ce qui vous préoccupe tous, c'est l'argent, un point c'est tout: vous n'êtes pas sincères, vous leur cachez des choses, vous ne leur enseignez rien" (38-39).

As well as seeing him in the light of power and greed, people see this priest, who is one man among many who have arrived from a foreign land, in precisely the light of a foreigner. He is, above all, a stranger. He is clearly different from those whom he wishes to convert, and this often results in an obvious divide. In spite of having spent twenty years in Cameroon and expressing a desire to relate to the Cameroonians (in fact, Drumont on occasion makes known that believes he has a special understanding of the Cameroonians in the area around Bomba), this divide is often evident in the text. Denis notes, for example, that despite the twenty years Drumont has spent in the area, his linguistic ability to communicate remains very poor. Drumont is said to speak the local language "de telle façon que les gens affirment ne le comprendre que le lendemain, après avoir réfléchi toute la nuit sur ce qu'il a dit la veille" (19). It would seem, in fact, that Drumont generally keeps to speaking his native language, which, of course, is the language of the colonizer. Denis takes particular note of a moment when Drumont questions a pair of men who have witnessed a fight and speaks to them in "notre langue"

(229). Denis also suggests that he must continue to improve his French in order to better understand and communicate with the Father (265).

Certainly a linguistic gap only serves to separate the missionary from those whom he wishes to convert, but similar difficulty in understanding is also evident in other aspects of communication. For instance, Drumont refers to himself as a shepherd leading his flock when discussing his role with parishioners. Zacharia, however, notes that it is an analogy with little meaning for those who hear it:

Zacharie vient de commenter ce discours avec beaucoup de malveillance – et il avait beau jeu, puisque nous étions entre nous. Il prétend qu’il n’est rien de plus absurde que de tels propos. D’abord dit-il, les gens ne comprennent évidemment pas ce que c’est qu’un bon pasteur: ici, il n’y a pas de pasteur. Quand un homme possède trois ou quatre chèvres, il ne s’en occupe guère, assuré qu’elles broutent dans le champ du voisin. Ensuite, les gens, ici aiment bien éprouver de la pitié pour un étranger, mais ils supportent mal qu’on les prenne en pitié, ce que fait manifestement le R.P.S. lorsqu’il déclare: “Je dois vous avoir beaucoup manqué... Vous devez vous féliciter de me voir revenir, moi qui suis votre bon pasteur, moi qui n’ai d’autre ambition que de vous conduire aux meilleurs pâturages...” (47-48)

Thus, Drumont demonstrates a lack of cultural understanding on two distinct levels: he fails to comprehend why the analogy of the shepherd is inadequate in this particular social context, and he fails to see how his expression of “pity”, as Zacharia calls it, might not be welcomed.

Homi Bhabha suggests that this sort of misunderstanding, based in large part on the presumptions of the missionary, is longstanding enough to have existed well before the presence of French missionaries in Cameroon. Writing about 19<sup>th</sup> century India, Bhabha contrasts the perspectives of two missionaries writing in the early part of the century. While one expressed his pleasure at how many natives were willing to take copies of the Bible, another writes, “Still everyone would gladly receive a Bible. And why? That he may store it up as a curiosity; sell it for a few pence; or use it for waste paper” (Bhabha 122). In other words, Drumont’s assumption that the image of the shepherd will be understood as that of a kind leader, or that the image will even be understood at all, is not unlike the assumption of the English missionary in India that the Indian who takes the offered Bible will see it as a holy book.

That Drumont sees himself in the role of shepherd to the Cameroonians who are his sheep demonstrates his understanding of his position in relation to the native population. His sense of isolated superiority also reveals itself in other ways. Denis notes on several occasions that, when traveling, it is his custom to go ahead on his bicycle while the others walk behind. Traveling from community to community can be difficult for all involved with the exception of Drumont, according to Denis: “[L]’alimentation varie un peu trop, sauf pour le R.P.S. qui mange une cuisine spéciale” (67). When Drumont determines that a young woman of the sixa should be physically punished, he calls for a local catechist to actually carry out the thrashing (213). Even when it comes to enforcing the rules of the religion he is seeking to establish, Drumont has the privilege of separating himself from the most unseemly of tasks.

The most telling example of Drumont's separation from the actual lives of those with whom he ostensibly lives is a report given by a medical doctor of the condition of the mission's women's school, the sixa. Learning that the sixa has functioned as a brothel for some time, Drumont calls upon this doctor to consider the state of sexually transmitted diseases among the women of the sixa. However, the doctor cannot help but first notice the squalid living conditions of the sixa, which he includes in his report. Although the amount of time the sixa has operated in this manner is unclear, the state of disrepair of the grounds as described by the doctor indicates that Drumont has likely ignored its management for years.

Dès mon entrée dans le camp, j'ai été aussitôt frappé par l'aspect sordide de l'endroit, tout autour duquel la brousse croissait follement. Ni la cour ni les abords des cases n'étaient nettoyés. Toute la place était jonchée de détritux: immondices, restes des repas, chiffons, etc.

De l'enquête forcément sommaire – étant donné l'immensité de la tâche, d'une part, et brièveté du temps qui m'était imparti pour l'accomplir d'autre part -, de l'enquête donc forcément sommaire à laquelle j'ai pu me livrer à l'intérieur des cases de ce camp il ressort que leur disposition générale ainsi que leur entretien non seulement heurtent le bon sens le plus élémentaire, mais encore – et ceci est plus grave – contreviennent d'une façon caractérisée aux règlements édictés, en cette matière, par l'autorité compétente du Territoire, je veux dire: le Service d'hygiène mobile et de prophylaxie. (318-319)

Upon hearing this report, Denis tells us that Drumont and an accompanying priest “restaient prostrés dans leur fauteuil, l’air consterné” (324). The implication, of course, is that, despite being the highest authority at the mission, the Father had been completely unaware of and unconcerned about the living conditions of the women in the sixa.

By nature of his understanding of the shepherd/flock relation as well as his acceptance of a relation in which he goes ahead of those with whom he travels and receives food specially prepared for him, we see evidence of Father Drumont’s understanding of his position of religious and cultural superiority. Drumont also expresses ideas of superiority regarding both intelligence and morality. He tells one boy that he is “vraiment plus intelligent qu’on ne pourrait s’y attendre dans ce pays” (117) and later remarks that he knows those of the country “ont mauvais coeur” while agreeing with Vidal’s assertion that “ils ne savent pas ce qu’ils font” (235). In fact, Drumont ironically notes how easily he believes the people can be misled by regional witch doctors because they are “une population naïve et superstitieuse” (68).

American theologian Robert McAfee Brown suggests that this sort of understanding of superiority and inferiority is one which liberation theology seeks to counter. In comparing what he refers to as “dominant theology” with liberation theology, Brown states that dominant theology “is developed from above – from the position of the privileged, the affluent, the bourgeois”, that it is “largely written by those with white hands,” and that it is “linked to Western culture, the white race, the male sex, the bourgeois class” (138). Although Drumont’s story is a fictional work, Beti asserts in the preface to the novel that “il n’est ici anecdote ni circonstance qui ne soit rigoureusement authentique” (8). By exposing the perspective of Father Drumont, Beti’s work

demonstrates this position of Brown's "dominant theology" and suggests the counterbalances presented by liberation theology well before the theological movement itself begins to take shape.

## THE PROBLEMATIC OF MORAL AUTHORITY

With particular consideration to a dubious connection with colonialism, the presumed position of the priest as one of spiritual and, consequently, moral authority is one filled with contradiction and ambiguity, especially within the mission's efforts to claim a position of authority within their different communities or regions. As he would in any parish or missionary setting, the priest seeks to encourage and establish a particular moral order. His position as religious leader supposes a moral authority on his part, yet such presumed moral authority is questionable on at least two fronts: the manner in which it at times conflicts with mores of the native culture and religious practice and the aforementioned relation of the mission to the colonial undertaking.

William Hart, Professor of Religious Studies at Duke University and author of *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, notes Said's likely suspicion of such authority, stating that Said finds "religion and culture are similar in that both provide 'systems of authority' and 'canons of order' that coerce and seduce a large following" (10). Drawing from Said's *Orientalism*, which might be considered the work that opened the door to postcolonial studies in the academy, the moral authority presumed by the church, the mission, and the priest demonstrate a Saidian dominance of knowledge and power of West over East and North over South. It is a dominance that places the West and its arms (which, as we have established, can easily be considered to include the

mission) within the structure of these novels in a position to control discourse and knowledge in the manner described by Said's *Orientalism*:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

Western values not only have authority but are also presented as being inherently superior. Speaking of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial perspective, Said also states: “Our values were (let us say) liberal, humane, correct; they were supported by belles-lettres, informed scholarship, rational inquiry” (*Orientalism* 227-28). This is a fundamental perspective that remains unchanged as we move toward the 20<sup>th</sup> century and African colonization. Even when some or many of the values of the West might be integrated, by religious conversion for example, he or she who converts might continue to be seen as inferior, much in the way that Homi Bhabha suggests in “Signs Taken for Wonders” as found in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha, referring to colonial India in this text, presents a perception of converted native Christians as second-class members of the faith community who might, for example, fail to fully give up the “superstitions” of indigenous culture (121).

This relationship is also essential to the view of Englebert Mveng, the Cameroonian theologian whom we have already mentioned, who suggests that, if Christianity is to have any integrity in Africa, it will have to become a religion that is

truly African. He states in *Théologie, libération, et cultures africaines*, “Le christianisme africain n’est pas seulement possible, il est nécessaire, car si en Afrique le christianisme n’est pas africain, que serait-il? Il serait un produit étranger (13).” Unfortunately, the priests of these novels, by virtue of their status as “men of God” in the church of the occupying West, find themselves with what Said refers to as “positional superiority” (*Orientalism* 7). Thus, the nature of the position both separates the priests from their communities and propagates an understanding of the priests as morally and culturally superior. Consequently, a sense of cultural superiority and separation as that of Drumont, is certain to undermine the realization of the hopes expressed by Englebert Mveng.

As for Father Drumont of *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, his sense of the superiority of his moral system is evident even by his simple presence as a missionary in the colony. He wishes to bring Africa to a new religious and moral understanding. Drumont states that “j’étais venu pour évangéliser les Noirs” (19), that is to convert them to his religious moral system. Through this conversion endeavor, Drumont tells us that he sees himself as spreading the Kingdom of God: “Je suis parti de la France, animé par une ardeur d’apôtre. Je n’avais qu’une idée en tête, qu’une ambition dans mon coeur: étendre le règne du Christ” (249). Using Biblical imagery that best suits his understanding of his role in the Cameroonian mission field, Drumont, as we have seen, describes himself as the good shepherd and Cameroonians his lambs (47). In leading those whom he considers his lambs, he seeks to change those aspects of local custom and mores he deems immoral, regardless of the standing of such customs in local life and tradition. One of the most egregious examples of such an effort occurs when Drumont and his entourage encounter a traditional dance. As they pass through the town of Evindi, they

hear the sounds and music of the dance in the distance, and Denis imagines what the scene must look like:

Et moi je voyais la jeune fille qui venait d'entrer dans la danse. Je voyais ses seins nus se dandiner et sa croupe exécuter des contorsions dégoûtantes. Je voyais les femmes qui, autour de la petite fille, claquaient des mains pour appuyer le rythme frénétique des xylophones. Je voyais les hommes vieux ou jeunes, assis à l'écart et qui contemplaient et appréciaient avec des commentaires de connaisseurs. Je voyais tout cela comme si j'avais été là-bas, exactement comme si j'avais réellement assisté à la scène. Je pensais que c'était tout cela contre quoi le R.P.S. avait lutté depuis qu'il était chez nous, depuis une vingtaine d'années. Je pensais que c'était tout cela qu'il détestait et qu'aujourd'hui on lui lançait brutalement au visage. (86)

It is of particular significance here to note the image given of Drumont's relation to such customs. In twenty years of seeking to convert and save those whom he has encountered, his efforts also take on a confrontational tone, as expressed here by Denis. The work Drumont sees himself as doing *for* the people of Cameroon, *for* Christ, and *for* the Christian Church, is in large part a fight *against* particular elements of the culture, which include many social, religious, and family customs, in addition to the pastime described here.

Eliminating any doubt that Denis might be exaggerating the Father's position, we see Drumont react with anger and violence as he seeks to put an end to the dance:

Et soudain, ils ont réalisé. Les femmes et les enfants se sont égaillés avec des cris de poussins effrayés. Sur la véranda, les hommes n'ont pas bougé. Ils nous regardaient . . .

Le R.P.S. n'a pas hésité; il s'est précipité sur les xylophones rangés un peu à l'écart; il les a mis en miettes. Ensuite, il s'est pris aux tam-tams; mais ils sont difficiles à briser. Le R.P.S. saisissait un tam-tam à pleins bras; il le soulevait et le laissait retomber avec un cri terrifiant. (94)

Indeed, it is a reaction that clearly demonstrates a complete disregard for the customs and culture of the people with whom he has come into contact in this town. Here we have an image of the Father literally and figuratively seeking to destroy part of the local cultural landscape because he deems it to be in conflict with the moral code he wishes to instill in the people of the region. As part of his mission Drumont, then, must find a way to instill his moral code, to ensure its triumph.

Fear coupled with invisible, intangible heavenly rewards are key weapons in Drumont's effort to convince those he would convert that their moral code should indeed change. And, in his efforts to motivate the people to change their ways, fear takes center stage. As the novel opens, we see Drumont dragging women by the arm down the aisle of the church just before the beginning of Sunday Mass. Her misdeed is unclear, but she is dragged down the center aisle and forced to drop to her knees at the front of the church (12). Immediately afterward, Drumont begins his sermon for the day in which he warns the congregation that failure to repent and "rénoncer à leurs vices" will only lead to punishment from God that he describes as "pénible" and "nécessaire" (14), as has been the fate of the Tala. Later, responding to a man who expresses displeasure at the priest's

twenty-minute conversation with his wife, Drumont indicates that his resistance will be punished: “Un jour tu verras. Tu brûleras en enfer: tu me diras si c’est drôle.” (35)

In a later episode, Father Drumont discusses with Vidal, one of the region’s administrators, a proposed project that would construct a road through the area served by his mission. Such a project would lead to many of the local population being forced to work on its construction. Vidal makes it quite clear in the conversation that, in this and any other similar situation, the local missionary would preach: “Mes chers enfants, acceptez les souffrances de cette vallée de larmes. A votre mort, vous serez largement indemnisés” (63). Thus the missionary’s task is to encourage acceptance of the work by presenting it as a necessary sacrifice of Christian faith that would be rewarded in the afterlife. If unmotivated by fear of Hell and God’s punishment, the population will perhaps be motivated by the prospect of Heaven and heavenly reward. The missionary, then, is complicit in producing what Fanon identifies as a weakened image of the self in the African which both makes it possible for the mission to gain converts and also maintains that willing, passive workforce necessary for colonial projects.

When he accepts an individual convert into the fold, Drumont also essentially asserts the newly established superiority of the African convert to his/her family and friends who have not themselves converted to Christianity. The African Christian, according to Drumont, should have nothing to do with the African “pagan”. A catechist in the village of Timbo shares with Drumont the impression this gives to the native population:

Et cependant tu voudrais qu’après le baptême, les Noirs cessent de fréquenter ceux de leurs qui ne sont pas chrétiens. Tu es même un homme

très dangereux, car si l'on t'écoutait, les femmes quitteraient leurs maris, les enfants désobéiraient à leurs pères, les frères ne se regarderaient plus et bientôt tout serait sans dessus dessous. C'est ce qu'ils disent, mon père.

(39)

The reader sees this assertion demonstrated by Drumont later in the novel when he instructs a mother (a Christian) to stop visiting her daughter who has refused to convert. When the devastated mother asks through her tears that the Father reconsider, “Le R.P.S. a dit qu’il ne pouvait rien, qu’une mère chrétienne doit pouvoir se résoudre à cesser de fréquenter sa fille, épouse de polygame” (107).

Thus, this novel seems to ask a key question regarding the mission’s efforts to convert these “non-persons” of the implied inferior culture: Does not the mission propagate the colonial effort to, as Frantz Fanon states in *L’an V de la révolution algérienne*, “maintenir identiques l’image qu’il [le colonialisme] a de l’Algérien (or the Cameroonian) et l’image dépréciée que l’Algérien avait de lui-même” (12)?

Furthermore, one might also observe a phenomenon articulated by Ashcroft in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*: “Colonial discourse constructs a particular kind of subject with which the subject itself can and often does concur because of its powerlessness” (225). In other words, colonialism thrives on the image it creates of the colonized and on convincing the colonized to accept that same image. In the context of these novels, the position of the colonial priest allows him to both reinforce and benefit from such images. As indicated earlier, an administrator like Vidal consequently sees a mutual benefit for the mission and the colonial project, as is evident in a conversation with Drumont.

- Ecoutez, mon Père, le voyage que je fais ici en ce moment précède de peu la mise à exécution d'un très grand project. Nous nous préparons à creuser une route à travers le pays des Tala. . . Intéressant, n'est-ce pas?
- Oui, très intéressant. . . Vous avez beaucoup de machines?
- Des machines, ah, ah, ah!. . . Des machines, pour quoi faire, mon Dieu? Et avec quoi les paierions-nous?
- Autrement dit, vous allez procéder à une espèce de Congo-Océan de petit développement. (Gerald Moore notes in his English translation of the novel that this is a reference to labor practices of rubber companies in the Congo.)
- Nom de Dieu, qu'est-ce que ça peut vous foutre? Vos gars vont rappliquer, vous aurez beaucoup de fidèles, ça ne vous suffit donc pas?
- Il est aussi mon devoir de les protéger, non?
- Tout à fait d'accord: vous les protégerez spirituellement. (63)

By virtue of such "spiritual" protection, Vidal assumes the locals will accept the order of things as the will of God. Converts are sure to feel they will gain heavenly rewards for their earthly suffering and will therefore be unlikely to question the further suffering of those who have not joined the faith. In much the same way that Fanon sees the colonized pacified by his/her "depreciated" self-image, such a religious understanding on the part of the colonized convert guarantees his/her passivity.

At the foundation of this hierarchy, it is important to consider what Fernando Lambert sees in Beti's work as a conflict of the Church (Western, Christian, European, French) and fundamental values of traditional Cameroonian society (78), a conflict

squarely set on opposing binaries, with the elements of the Christian west in the privileged position. Even Susan Gasster, whose work is generally very sympathetic to the priests, asks whether proselytizing is meant to imply moral superiority (“Good Men” 104). The priests themselves must face this question in each novel, combining it with questions of racial and cultural superiority. Even Denis, Drumont’s own houseboy demonstrates this sense of Western moral superiority, presumably developed through his experience with the priest. His view of the non-Christians of his own culture can come across in this manner that characterizes them as barbaric and pagan. Gasster considers the priests’ apparent desire to replace the native gods as particularly representative of the sense of moral superiority inherent in the mission (107).

In *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, we also see the sixa, the training school for wives supported by the mission, as representative of the moral ambivalence of the presence of the mission and the missionary. Created as a means of instilling Christian ethics in native young women, the sixa has, in fact, developed into a brothel run by those to whom the priest has entrusted the administration of the school. This revelation, it should be noted, comes after the narrator’s introduction of the concept of the sixa as an institution whose merits are debatable:

Les défenseurs de l’institution proclament son utilité, sinon sa nécessité: ne prépare-t-elle pas les femmes à leur rôle de mères de famille chrétiennes? Cette justification est, bien entendu, contestée par d’autres. Ce qui est certain, c’est que les pensionnaires de la sixa sont astreintes chaque jour à des travaux manuels de plus de dix heures. (15)

The Christian school serving such purposes is emblematic of the ambiguity of the connection of the missionary endeavor with many elements of the colonial situation. This ambiguity is underscored when combined with the reaction of Drumont upon discovering that “his” sixa has been a home for prostitution. The punishments he doles out to the girls he deems guilty and responsible are often violent and without consideration of mercy. All this, of course, comes despite Drumont’s assertion to Vidal that it is “aussi mon devoir de les protéger” (63).

Fernando Lambert suggests that, for his part, Beti wants to smash the “benevolent” image of colonization (79). One could, of course, very effectively do so by smashing the benevolent image of Christian mission as it relates to the region and its relation to colonization, thus revealing the missionary endeavor as “a veritable spiritual imperialism” (79). Certainly, the harsh, violent punishments doled out by Father Drumont to the women of the sixa, for example, seem anything but benevolent, as he commands physical beatings for the young women whose interrogation implicates them in the prostitution ring. In fact, as we have seen, this is one of many of Drumont’s actions and attitudes that call his work into question. Thus, the reader’s simple observation of this single priest, one who actually appears to be reconsidering the value and methods of his work, can still “smash the benevolent image” of the missionary.

## **CONNECTION TO COLONIALISM: ILS ONT VOYAGE DANS LE MEME BATEAU**

Each of these three novels addresses this most difficult relation between the mission, the Church, and the nation and culture from which the colonizers come; in short

the relation between the mission and colonialism. Speaking with Father Drumont, the Administrator Vidal both underscores the connection between the religious mission and the colonial mission and also presents Christianity and French civilization as inseparable. “A mon point de vue, il suffirait que nos Bantous comprennent que notre civilisation, à laquelle ils aspirent tant, ce n’est pas seulement les bicyclettes, les machines à coudre, c’est surtout notre christianisme” (61). Furthermore, native interest in Christianity often is presented in relation to interest in the power that dominates in Cameroon, with the priests owning a privileged position within this dominant culture.

In other cases, the priests are seen as attached to the same preoccupations of conquest and dominance that motivate other colonizers. As indicated earlier in another context, for example, when asked what people say about Christian religion, a catechist responds to Drumont and points out that many of the people see little spiritual merit in the key representatives of the religion, the priests, “Mon père, ils disent qu’un prêtre, ce n’est pas meilleur qu’un marchand grec ou tout autre colon. Ils disent que ce qui vous préoccupe tous, c’est l’argent” (20). Later a catechist in the village of Ziba confirms the same perception among the men of his town: “Ils disent qu’il n’y a pas de différence entre un commerçant grec et un prêtre, même pareil au R.P.S. Ils donnent comme preuve les richesses de la mission catholique, par exemple, les présents que le R.P.S. accepte et le denier du culte. Ils disent que le R.P.S. perçoit l’impôt tout comme l’administrateur” (164). The catechist continues to speak of Sanga Boto, a local witch doctor: “Ici ils croient beaucoup en Sanga Boto. Il prétend qu’un Blanc, commerçant grec ou prêtre, c’est toujours un Blanc. Tous les Blancs visent au même but, affirme-t-il” (164-165). Even Drumont’s own cook, Zacharie, would seem to see little difference between the

priest and the colonial trader. Before beginning work for the priest as a cook, Zacharie worked as a cook for a Greek trader, indicating that his work for Drumont is simply that of working as a cook for a white man. Zacharie's work for Drumont is no more related to Christian mission than his work for the trader.

Even those who might seem to respect the priest and his missionary efforts see him as linked to the nation from which he comes and, consequently, to its colonial endeavor. When the children see Drumont and his group approach the town of Timbo, they react by acknowledging this connection: "A peine avions-nous été aperçus de Timbo que *La Marseillaise* a éclaté, chantée par les voix claires et innocentes des petits enfants" (46). Later, arriving at a school in Kouma, Drumont's group is received in much the same way:

Les enfants de l'école – Kouma est notre deuxième grande étape, avec une école – nous ont accueillis par *La Marseillaise*. Lorsqu'ils ont eu fini de chanter, le R.P.S. est allé toucher la tête de quelques-uns d'entre eux; puis il leur a fait un petit discours pour les féliciter. Les moniteurs paraissaient contents et, comme pour remercier le R.P.S. des bonnes choses qu'il venait de dire, ils ont fait chanter à leurs élèves:

*La France est belle,  
Ses destins sont bénis.  
Vivons pour elle,  
Vivons, vivons unis.* (230)

In other words, regardless of the content of their sermons, the priests are represented here as no different from any of the others seeking to take advantage of the

colonial situation for personal gain and wealth. Gasster suggests that church members in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, those who would be among the thousands of “registered” Christians in Cameroon, think of their tithes to the church in the same way they see taxes paid to the colonial government (105), and the words of the catechists above indicate just that. Consequently, as indicated earlier, they would see the priest in much the same way they would see the administrators who deal with tax collection. To cite Fernando Lambert, Drumont’s religion is understood by few, and the mission is often seen “above all in the perspective of material power” (81). Furthermore, the mission and the priest are seen as directly related to colonialism and the colonial administration.

This connection is particularly evident in the fear of reprisals for any form of resistance. A man angry with Drumont and his work attempts to attack him but is stopped by a group of local townspeople. Denis suggests that their reason for stopping the confrontation is born of fear of the administration: “J’ai surtout compris qu’ils lui reprochaient de vouloir provoquer de sanglantes représailles sur le pays en tuant un Blanc” (160). Earlier, after the indecent in which Drumont breaks up a dance and destroys the musical instruments, the angry chief of the village confronts him. Local men hold the chief back while Drumont taunts “avance et frappe-moi” (96). Further angered, the chief struggles to be set free:

Mais ses hommes ne le lâchaient pas.

A la fin, un homme est arrivé, vieux, courbé, maigre, toussotant, et il a dit au chef:

- Ecoute-moi, fils, écoute-moi donc. Est-ce que tu oublies que tu as affaire à un Blanc? Est-ce que tu oublies, fils? Que veux-tu, il n’oserait pas nous

provoquer ainsi, s'il ne se sentait appuyé derrière lui par tous ses frères.  
 Avec ça qu'ils sont solidaires. Va te coucher, fils. Laisse-le passer son  
 chemin; ne l'affronte pas. Avec eux, on ne sait jamais. Va te coucher, fils.  
 (96)

Such a connection is also clear in meetings between Drumont and the regional administrator, Vidal. After announcing the planned road project through the region, Vidal offers to exempt all Christians from work on the road project, suggesting that such an exemption will benefit the priest in his effort to gain converts. Although this would free the converts from work on a colonial project, it nonetheless is a freedom gained from a close relation between the missionary and the colonial administrator. Ironically, this implied strategy of converting for the possibility of avoiding forced participation in labor projects might not necessarily mean that coerced labor would be avoided. In much the same way that roads were built with local labor, Denis notes that Drumont's church was also built by the hands of the Christians he converted.

Il fit battre les briques et les tuiles par les femmes de la sixa; chaque semaine, il convoquait les villages chrétiens, qui venaient travailler à tour de rôle; mais, en dépit de cela, la main-d'oeuvre masculine n'était ni permanente ni suffisante. Alors, il mit une femme de la sixa partout où manquait un homme et révéla aux gens de chez nous que les femmes étaient aussi aptes à des travaux que personne auparavant n'aurait eu l'idée de leur faire accomplir: tels de scier le bois en planches. (30)

The similarity between the projects underscores the similarities and connections between the work and goals of the administrator and those of the missionary. In fact, Vidal

himself sees little difference between the two and their work. “D’ailleurs, je continue à soutenir envers et contre vous que la mienne (vocation) et la vôtre n’en font qu’une...,” he tells Drumont (58). In a later encounter with the priest, he adds, “Je vous ai toujours dit que nous étions embarqués dans le même train, vous et moi” (174). In fact, Vidal even seems to threaten the security of Drumont’s position if he continues to question the role his mission plays in the colonial enterprise:

-Mon Père, a dit l’administrateur sur le seuil, quant on se met à douter de sa mission, est-ce qu’on n’est pas un homme fini ou tout au moins en passe de l’être?

-Possible, pourquoi?

-Vous devriez y réfléchir, mon Père. (64)

For Vidal, Drumont’s doubts are clearly a threat to the work he seeks to accomplish. If Drumont wishes to continue as a missionary in this field he will have to support Vidal’s assertion that “nous étions embarqués dans le même train”.

If the priests are seen as essentially being no different from the rest of the colonial administration, it would logically follow that the religion they represent and seek to propagate in the area would also be seen in the same manner. This perception is most evident in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* when Father Drumont has a public confrontation with a man who extends such conclusions about the priests to the religion as a whole, in fact to Jesus Christ himself. When Drumont invokes the name during their conversation, he receives a most scathing response, “Jèsus Christ, Jèsus Christ...encore un Blanc...Si seulement tu savais comment je m’en moque, de ton Jèsus-Christ ” (97).

As we have seen, local Tala consider the tithe they pay to Father Drumont and his mission as a form of tax, such as that paid to administrators or a tribute offered to businessmen. When thinking of Jesus Christ or a missionary like Drumont, they see “encore un Blanc” and will see them with “the same resignation and rage of the oppressed who see no need to distinguish the nuances in the masks of the oppressors” (Gasster 105). From this point, it is a small step to consider the proclamation of a Christian god as no different than any other Western cultural imposition, to see mission, especially evangelistic mission, as a form of colonization. As Drumont becomes more acutely aware of the suffering around him and his longstanding blindness to it, he, too, will begin to consider the same things.

## **MORAL DEVELOPMENT: (RE)CONSIDERING THE NATURE OF THE MISSION**

Even if, as we will see in the case of Drumont, the missionary begins to recognize the manner in which his evangelizing mission may actually demean or even discount the validity of the culture and persons with which he is coming into contact, he may remain convinced that his task is based on a common, or universal, element of human need and experience that is significantly more important than any cultural differences. However, as Homi Bhabha suggests in *The Location of Culture*, even the concepts of universalism, which seek to establish the existence of common elements of the human experience that transcend culture, must be called to question. Thus, in seeking a common human spiritual need that might justify the evangelical aspect of his mission, the priest may in fact still be imposing a “hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values

and expectations of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity” (Ashcroft 235).

In the case of *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, we meet Father Drumont as he is entering what will prove to be the final two weeks of his twenty-year tenure in West Africa. The fact that, at this particular point in his career, Drumont is beginning to reconsider some of the assumptions of the nature and goals of his mission becomes evident in a conversation with Vidal early in the novel. Vidal acknowledges the long tenure of Drumont’s work in Africa while also expressing his understanding of the evangelizing mission as a benevolent one: “Eh bien, Révérend Drumont, l’évangélisation est déjà en soi tout un drame: rassembler un troupeau, le conduire à la bonne destination, sans en perdre une seule tête... Mais ce drame-là, vous en avez conscience depuis toujours”. Vidal continues to compare the work of the missionary to that of an artist who seeks “modeler une race, comme on fait d’un vase, lui imposer la forme que l’on désire...” (60).

Yet Drumont responds by stating that a centuries-old culture cannot be so simply changed, or one might say converted, to a new form any more easily than one could change the form of an old vase. “Vous qui êtes amateur d’art, prenez donc un vase déjà cuit, essayez de lui imposer votre forme à vous et venez m’en dire des nouvelles” (60). The priest continues to consider the inherent status to its adherents of an established religious tradition such as those in Cameroon before the arrival of the Christian missionary: “Mais, cher Vidal, une religion, pour n’avoir ni Bible ni Coran, pour n’avoir inspiré aucune politique de conquête, peut n’en être moins” (61).

Drumont’s comments here are significant in two ways. First, he acknowledges the validity of the spiritual traditions existing in his mission field before the arrival of

Christian missionaries. Consequently, the “annihilation spirituelle qu’apportait le système colonial” (*Théologie* 65), to use the words of Father Mveng, constitutes an act of destruction and an act of aggression. Secondly, Drumont’s reference to religions that have “inspired a policy of conquest” demonstrates his developing skepticism of the relation between Christian mission and colonial conquest. Drumont’s statement indicates that he is beginning to understand why many would see the Christian movement in Africa, to quote Mveng again, as “une des plus redoutables machines de la domination étrangère” (*Théologie* 66).

Noting that converts are most numerous along the main roads that have been built by forced labor projects, Drumont questions whether those who have converted have even done so of their own free will. To Vidal’s comment that Drumont appears to have a very large following, the Father responds:

-Enfin, nous voici au coeur du problème! Détrompez-vous, mon petit Vidal, je n’ai pas une si belle clientèle. Voyez-vous, le problème qui me tourmente est celui-ci: les quelques Noirs qui ont adhéré au christianisme l’ont-ils vraiment fait de leur propre gré?

-Qu’est-ce que c’est que cette histoire?... Qui donc les aurait contraints à adhérer à une religion?

-Tiens, c’est peut-être vous M. Vidal, ad-mi-nis-tra-teur des co-lo-nies? Non, je vous en prie, ne nous querellons pas aujourd’hui. Je vais vous faire une confiance: il n’y a que les gens de la route pour être bons chrétiens; ceux d’ici sont absolument réfractaires. (61-62)

Drumont seems to be saying that those who have chosen Christianity really had much less choice in the matter than he might ever have imagined. Having just recounted the conversation between Vidal and Drumont, Denis notes that the Father's attitude seems quite different from that which he has been accustomed to seeing from the priest. Denis describes him as "triste et découragé" and notes that he "n'est pas comme autrefois" (66).

In terms of Christian understanding, Drumont appears to be developing a perspective not entirely unlike that expressed by Englebert Mveng in *Théologie, libération, et cultures africaines*, published in 1996. Key to Mveng's understanding of a legitimate presence of a form of Christianity in Africa is that it must adapt to Africa rather than asking Africa to adapt to it: "La question primordiale est de savoir si l'Eglise peut réellement devenir africaine si elle n'accepte pas de s'africaniser" (15). Furthermore, Mveng also expresses Drumont's developing understanding of the connection between colonial domination and Christian evangelism:

Le Christianisme, pour beaucoup, représente une des plus redoutables machines de la domination étrangère: domination culturelle par l'imposition rigide, voire sectaire d'une vision du monde qui ignore ou condamne totalement l'humanisme africain plusieurs fois millenaire; domination politique par un système de gouvernement europeocentrique, intransigeant et totalitaire. (66-67)

Father Drumont's actions and words over the course of his final two weeks as a missionary in Cameroon are still often contrary to his developing insight, keeping with the worldview that has guiding him for the preceding twenty years. Yet, it is this development that foreshadows the ideas that both postcolonial theorists such as Said and theologians such as Mveng will express years after the publication of this novel.

It is also important to note that, in a later conversation with Vidal, Drumont vigorously objects to Vidal's use of pejorative terms in referring to Africans. And, in response to Vidal's offer to exempt Christians from work on the upcoming road project Drumont responds simply; "Vous me faites honte, mon petit Vidal" (169). Certainly it is a proposal of the sort that has benefited many missionaries with many converts. Now, however, Drumont is finally questioning the authenticity of conversions under such circumstances and, even more importantly, he is beginning to understanding the injustice of the work conditions that lead to the conversions. When Zacharie suggests to Drumont that the people of the region deserve the riches that will surely follow the construction of a new road, Drumont responds:

Tu ne comprends donc pas? a répondu le R.P.S., on les extirpera de leurs cases, on les conduira attachés ensemble comme un troupeau de bêtes, on les mènera sur les chantiers, et là ils travailleront du matin au soir courbés sous le soleil. (73)

Rather than good fortune for the people or the missionary, the road built under such circumstances will be a derisive "malheur" (73).

Gasster contends that Father Drumont is motivated "by a sturdy faith" (106), but near the end of the novel we see him call into question everything that has occurred under his leadership. He is beginning to question the basis for that "sturdy faith" and to recognize how not only the hypocrisy of colonial enterprise in general, but specifically of his particular role in the enterprise. He now begins to consider that his own work may have contributed to the oppression and suffering of a people. If the faith that motivated him has been sturdy, Drumont finally begins to understand, it has also been sorely

misguided. Shaken by the revelations that the sixa established and sponsored by his mission has for years operated as a brothel, Drumont admits, “Il y a des tas de choses que j’aurais dû voir plus tôt, si je m’étais seulement donné la peine de regarder...” (187). It is a key moment of insight for the Father that also underscores the tragedy of his complicity. Drumont begins to understand that his mission has profited from and has even contributed to the suffering of a people, and he shares the responsibility of the methods and results of this undertaking. After twenty years in the mission field in Africa, Drumont proclaims “Je ne veux pas tirer profit de leur malice” (189) and later tells Vidal “je préfère n’avoir jamais à rendre compte à Dieu de la colonisation” (248).

As he announces his departure in his final sermon, Drumont asserts, perhaps for the first time from the pulpit, that “un homme est un homme; tout homme peut être bonne chrétien, pourvu qu’il s’y efforce. Qu’importe les mœurs, les coutumes qui varient?” (340). Even here, his words imply an inherent superiority of Christianity to other faith systems of the region, and his actions, such as doling out harsh and violent punishments to women of the sixa indicate a persistent sense of moral superiority. Yet, as discussed in the preceding pages, we see the beginnings of a sort of liberation of thought for Drumont over the course of his final two weeks in Cameroon. Seeing himself as an accomplice in colonial domination, Drumont claims that he cannot bear to watch the suffering that will be caused by the newest labor project. He is shamed and guilt-ridden by the corruption in his sixa. After twenty years, we could say that he is experiencing a sort of liberation of thought.

In fact, the theological liberation that may be beginning for this priest as the novel closes seems to mirror the intellectual liberation suggested by Edward Said when he

establishes that the aim of *Orientalism* is to “liberate intellectuals from the shackles of systems of thought like Orientalism” (337). Drumont is no longer willing to accept a system of thought that justifies the mission’s role in colonial domination. Unfortunately, however, Drumont is incapable of taking the next step. He is unable or unwilling to speak out as a voice for those he now recognizes as oppressed. His contemplation of the situation begins to consider colonialism and colonial mission “from the bottom up”, a perspective we have already seen to be fundamental to both postcolonial and liberation thought. Edward Said, in the collected lectures of *Representations of the Intellectual*, defines the intellectual as one “whose *raison d’être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (11) and continues to say, “There is no question in my mind that the intellectual belongs on the same side as the weak and underrepresented” (22).

Although freeing himself in many ways from the constraints of narrow Orientalist thought developed only from the top down or from West to East, Drumont is unable to speak out on behalf of those he now understands to be oppressed. He shares his nascent feelings in conversations with Vidal and, occasionally, Zacharia, but his sole act motivated by these feelings is to leave. Thus the hope engendered by Drumont’s moments of epiphany is tempered by his inability, or unwillingness, to confront the oppression he finally recognizes and attempt to construct somewhere in the liminal space an authentic relation between the European missionary priest and the African. Nevertheless, his new understanding, however undeveloped, represents a significant change in this particular missionary, and one that Beti, it would seem from the opening pages of the novel, would have welcomed even with its shortcomings: “De mémoire

d’Africain, il n’y a jamais eu de Révérend Père Supérieur Drumont; il n’y en aura probablement jamais, autant du moins que je connaisse mon Afrique natale: ce serait trop beau” (8).

### **FATHER LE GUEN: *LE ROI MIRACULE***

In *Le Roi Miraculé*, as in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, we witness the events that lead to a priest’s departure from the mission field. Shamed and confused, Drumont chooses to return to France rather than confront the continued destruction and oppression of which he has become most acutely aware. Father Le Guen of *Le Roi miraculé*, who appears in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* as a minor character, will actually be removed from his duties after the disastrous turn of events that leads to violence, conflict, and bloodshed among tribes of the region. Ironically, it is Le Guen’s insistence on dogma, evangelism, and a particular aspect of his moral system that will lead to his dismissal. Nine years after the departure of Drumont, Le Guen’s story demonstrates that the connection of the mission and missionary to the colonial project remains strong.

Since his desire to convert a local Chief has led to a disruption of peaceful relations among tribes of the region, we will see that Le Guen’s evangelism is perceived as actually hindering the work of the colonial administration and, therefore, as breaking the bond between the two enterprises. Certainly, the work of the colonial administration is much easier when the natives are passive and peaceful. Consequently, Le Guen’s failure to maintain the passivity of his region is, according to a letter received from the French High Commissioner’s office, is a result of his “contraignant . . . un chef de tribu à renoncer au mode de vie de ses ancêtres” (253). Essentially, Le Guen has been expected

to refrain from asking a converted chief to make all of the same lifestyle changes that would have been demanded of another, less politically significant, convert. While Father Drumont's difficulties with colonial administration are primarily founded in his developing understanding of the abuses of colonialism, Le Guen is mostly concerned with imposing certain elements of his particular moral system. In the eyes of the administration, this insistence is a breach of trust that creates a major obstacle in the progress of their work.

Le Guen's stubbornness regarding such matters is sustained and encouraged by his focus on such aspects of dogma as evidence of strong faith and dedication to the Church. The administration, although out of no sense of cultural respect, of course, wishes that he allow the Chief to maintain his customs; whereas Le Guen, interpreting the healing of the chief as evidence of the presence of God in the matter, feels he must insist that the chief strictly adhere to his rules of conversion. If Le Guen is to be a missionary of good faith, he must not allow the chief to consider himself a convert without renouncing his polygamy. Susan Gasster notes that Le Guen's personal faith and its impact on his work are clearly evident in an early episode of the novel when an ill, but unconverted, Chief requests one of the scapulars he sees the priest holding. Le Guen chooses to lie and tell him that they have all been promised to others because he does not want to give a blessed object to a non-Christian.

We learn from a letter that Le Guen writes to his mother that he yearned to give to the king a scapular he asked for. But Le Guen fears to give a blessed object into possibly irreverent use. Thus Beti makes it clear that this priest profoundly believes the power of the sanctified. The point is

important. Beti has found a narrative device (the letters) and a plot device (the request for the scapular) to illuminate the inwardness of Le Guen's faith. This opening incident reveals in miniature how Le Guen will view the "miracle" of the king's recovery. ( "Priests" 293)

It is possible to interpret Le Guen's reaction as motivated by an inwardness of faith and a belief in the "power of the sanctified." Le Guen may also be seen here as motivated by simple strict adherence to dogmatic rules. But we may also see a sense of religious and moral superiority that holds that a non-Christian does not merit such an object. Nevertheless, this initial scene does set the stage for Le Guen's later reaction when the Chief seems to spring back to life and regain his health soon after his (unrequested) baptism.

Le Guen did not want to share with the chief a symbol of faith like the scapular without feeling he was giving it to a legitimate convert. Consequently, his strict adherence to rite and dogma would make him unlikely to assume that the conversion and baptism of the ailing and incoherent chief, occurring in the absence of the priest, to be legitimate. With the apparent miracle of the chief's healing, however, Le Guen has not only a sign for himself that the conversion is blessed, but also a divine event to use as a point of leverage with the chief. While *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* presents a missionary whose faith in his mission is wavering, *Le Roi miraculé* presents a priest who appears to have received a sign directly from heaven that solidifies his belief that he is doing sanctified work in Cameroon. Yet this sanctified work will lead to the destruction of all tribal alliances developed through the chief's multiple marriages. Furthermore, Le Guen

will learn that even the work of God, as he sees it, must answer to the colonial administration.

Le Guen, in fact, reflects on the “crisis of faith” of Father Drumont. In a letter to his mother in France, Le Guen responds to a visit she has apparently received from the former missionary.

Le Révérend Père Drumont! Tu sais quelle fut mon admiration pour cet homme – pour ce vieil homme. Aujourd’hui encore, mon estime pour lui n’a point faibli et je ne laisse pas de me flatter que l’âge lui ait fait tout le bien que tu m’en dis, ait pu lui apporter une humilité dont il avait bien besoin.

Peut-être suis-je un peu dur pour lui. Ce n’est pas que, nanti maintenant d’une longue expérience missionnaire, je me permette de juger notre bonhomme avec je ne sais quelle supériorité. Te souviens-tu de mes lettres d’il y a dix ans – au moment de sa crise? Te rappelles-tu que j’ai alors douté de sa foi – point longtemps il est vrai? C’était un homme orgueilleux, violent, prompt au découragement et à la révolte. Je pensais qu’aucun chrétien ne pouvait être fondé à s’arroger une telle importance – et encore moins à prétendre incarner le destin de l’Eglise. Maman, rappelle-toi donc comment le Père Drumont étendit abusivement un échec personnel aux dimensions cosmiques. (30-31)

For Le Guen, we see that Drumont’s reaction to the affair of the sixa at Bomba reflects a weak faith, a failure to stay true to his cause and his mission in the face of difficulties. In Le Guen’s view, Drumont’s refusal to continue at Bomba is his greatest mistake. Even

worse, it is a demonstration that Drumont did not sincerely care for the people in and around Bomba in the same way that Le Guen cares for his flock.

Ce dont je me souviens avec le plus d'amertume au sujet du Père Drumont, c'est qu'il tenta, inconsciemment, je veux bien – en tout cas à tort – de nous faire endosser, à nous autres jeunes, l'échec d'une génération qui fonda son action sur une vision erronée et peu chrétienne du monde. Je n'étais en rien tributaire de cette génération – ni tous ces jeunes de plus en plus nombreux en Afrique, chez qui un sentiment de sincère fraternité pour le Noir précède le désir de le baptiser... (31)

We learn two key things about Le Guen from this letter. As Le Guen reflects on and reacts to his experience in Africa, we see that his primary sounding board is his mother. This is particularly significant because his mother is a continent away and informed of the people and events around her son only by Le Guen himself. In other words, he has chosen a necessarily unquestioning recipient with whom to share his thoughts. Secondly, we learn that he deems himself very different from Drumont who, in his view, was both unfaithful to the Africans and the Church, unfaithful to Africans by failing to care for them genuinely and unfaithful to the Church by retreating from his mission. The following pages will examine Le Guen's relationships and personal development in the same manner that we have explored Father Drumont's situation.

## **PERCEPTIONS: SEEING THE OTHER**

Despite the difference he sees between himself and Father Drumont when claiming that his generation of missionaries is much more genuinely concerned with its

African proselytes, we still see a significant chasm between Le Guen and the people he wishes to reach. It is evident that the Chief, for example, tolerates Le Guen's presence, but he does so to help keep the peace between the village and the administration. As Le Guen approaches the home of the Chief for their first encounter in the novel, the Chief swears to himself as he watches the missionary march into the village "à grands pas autoritaires" (16). The narrator then continues to comment on Le Guen's march through the village "avec une sorte de brutalité que justifiait imparfaitement sa stature" (16). (Frederick Muller's English translation tells us that his "violent strides were inappropriate to his diminutive stature" [14].)

Le Guen's "stride" here can be read as symbolic of his presence in the region. His steps are described as both authoritative and violent. Through this simple description, we have a symbol of Le Guen's self-perception as one in a position of particular authority. Therefore, he carries himself in this authoritative manner. Yet, rather than fluid, his strides are also described as "très grands" and having an air of "brutalité," perhaps somehow out of step with what might be considered a normal, fluid stride. Finally, a third element combines with authoritative and unusually long in the presentation of the missionary's stride – violent or brutal. So, not surprisingly, even this short description conveys a sense of violence, if in a symbolic manner, through the somewhat awkward authority of Le Guen's stride. It is also important to note one further reference, which informs the reader that these strides "justifiait imparfaitement sa stature." We might say here that Le Guen's strides, representing his perceived air of authority, are inappropriate not only for his physical stature but also for his status as an outsider who has arrived with the colonizers. We may see this missionary, then, as emblematic of the

presence of the any European missionary in the African village, arriving and working with an awkward, seemingly inappropriate air of authority.

Much like Drumont, Le Guen is associated with the colonial desire to gain wealth from the Africans. The connection is made more subtly than the direct accusations seen in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. However, the connection is evident in the same walk through the village that describes the priest's strides. We are told that as he makes his way through town to make periodic visits to his parishioners, his route is the same as that of the tax collector. In fact, the narrator tells us that the tax collector and the "évangéliste des Essazam" shared "les mêmes soucis d'efficacité et de rapidité" (16). Here, not only is the priest's work directly compared to that of the tax collector, but it is also stripped of any humanitarian element. Rather, his work appears impersonal and routine. The priest's preoccupations are those of a man seeking to complete an assigned task rather than those of a man passionately seeking to save souls. Later, the narrator describes him as a "convertisseur professionnel" (25), again emphasizing the perception of the missionary as a sort of businessman. Le Guen, then, is no different than a merchant or a tax collector. As we have seen asserted about Drumont, Le Guen is merely another colonialist who has found in Africa a prosperous area in which to conduct his business.

Regarding Le Guen's relationship with the natives of the region, it is no less conflicted than what we have already seen with Father Drumont. During his ten years in Africa, Le Guen has clearly made a certain effort to understand the customs of the land. The narrator tells us that his ten years at Essazam had made him very familiar with local customs to the point that the narrator describes him as "trop indigène maintenant" (20). Despite this claim, however, a sense of division is far more evident than one of

connection as we observe Le Guen's interaction with and understanding of those around him. Writing to his mother, Le Guen refers to them as "ces gens que la lumière commence enfin à éclairer" (29) and says that their turning to God would be "la mort de la superstition trompeuse" (30). So, even if we take the narrator at his word and assume that Le Guen has a deep understanding of the ways of this people, the words of the priest himself indicate to us the level of validity he actually ascribes to such customs.

Furthermore, Le Guen's efforts at understanding the ways of the Essazam culture are undermined by his concurrent perception of his culture and his religion as inherently superior. Never is this more evident than in the description of Le Guen delivering a sermon to his congregation. From his pulpit in the church, Le Guen "qui venait de monter en chaire et qui surplombait son auditoire" (181) stands high above the congregation, a poignant symbol in which the white, European Christian literally looks down upon a congregation of Africans. Indeed, the image brings to mind Robert McAfee Brown's description of "dominant theology" as one that is developed from above, contrasting Liberation Theology's development from the ground up, or from below. Perhaps not coincidentally, in *Les damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon also declares that liberation and autonomy for the colonized can be achieved only when the social systems imposed by colonial domination are changed "de fond en comble" (63), or, according to Constance Farrington's translation, "from the bottom up" (35).

Yet, the European missionary portrayed here appears unable to place himself in a position to see from such a perspective. In fact, the missionary's concept of his superior standing in relation to the Africans is similarly notable elsewhere in the novel. As Le Guen arrives to pay a visit to the chief early in the novel, he "tira une chaise et s'assit à

côté du Chef, mais sans lui faire face” (19). Le Guen fails to sit across from the Chief as one would do to express respect for his authority. Even if Le Guen has developed a relatively broad understanding of local customs, it is clear that he does not necessarily respect them. Such a lack of respect would appear to be a trait that manifests itself on a regular basis. Speaking of this incident with the chief, the narrator tells us “cette déinvolture lui était caractéristique” (19). Not only, then, does Le Guen refuse to take a traditionally respectful seat across from the chief, but his lack of respect is obviously common behavior on his part.

By developing a certain level understanding of the culture, the priest could be described as opening the door to what Bhabha calls the liminal, the space within the figurative cultural gap. It is in this space that discourse and change may occur because, in the liminal, “passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, *Location* 4). Yet Le Guen’s “lack of deference” and his symbolic position in the raised pulpit, demonstrate that the assumed hierarchy mentioned by Bhabha remains fixed in the missionary’s attitudes and actions. Such acts on Le Guen’s part emphasize his status as part of the colonizing group, or, as Fanon says in *Les damnés de la terre*, part of the governing race. As Fanon affirms, the “*espèce dirigeante est d’abord celle qui vient d’ailleurs, celle qui ne ressemble pas aux autochtones, ‘les autres’*” (71). Despite his “familiarity” with the customs of the native population, Le Guen cannot overcome his adherence to the hierarchy between the colonizers and the colonized that affirms his understanding of cultural superiority.

These attitudes likewise reveal themselves in other ways. Like Drumont, Le Guen, resorts to European modes of transportation, his bicycle (91) and his motorbike (110), reinforcing his otherness. The colonial hierarchy is also presented, for example, as Le Guen converses with a group of administrators. The native help is clearly not trusted to hear even bits of the discussion as the “la conversation s’interrompt lorsque le cuisinier vint débarasser la table et reprit aussitôt qu’il fut parti” (233). When a fight breaks out among clans disputing the chief’s recent repudiation of his wives, the following occurs:

Descendu de son palais pour exhorter à la paix, le Chef hurla, vociféra, tempêta, maudit, il ne put se faire entendre ni tempérer l’ardeur des combattants. Le Guen informé par l’enfant, arriva précipitamment de la mission catholique, tenta de s’interposer, et, par un engrenage qu’il ne sut pas éviter, se jeta dans le combat et se vit gratifier de maints horizons venant pour la plupart des Ebibot et surtout d’Azombot qui ne lui pardonnait pas son intransigeance – Le Guen ne tarda pas à regagner la mission et à s’aliter. (199)

When Le Guen becomes directly involved in a conflict among those with whom he is so “familiar,” he does not see the end of the fight, nor does he remain determined to end it. Unable to effectively diffuse the conflict, he flees when he is able to escape the tussle. While we see that his supposed authority is ineffective in such a crisis, we also see his sense of merited separation. Rather than have to deal with his inability to break up the fight or continue to feel threatened by the violence, he has an option not available

to the rest of the village. Le Guen heads to his sanctuary, the Mission, and, safely removed from the conflict, goes to bed.

Despite such evidence to the contrary, Le Guen bristles at the suggestion that he is different from others in the community. An exchange between Le Guen and Lequeux, the regional administrator, clearly demonstrates how Le Guen's own understanding of his relation to the people contradicts many of his actions. Lequeux suggests that those who struck the priest during the aforementioned fight must be punished, most significantly, because they have committed the crime of hitting a white man, a Frenchman: "J'espère bien, marmotta sombrement Lequeux, j'espère bien que vous reconnaîtrez les impertinents qui ont eu l'incroyable audace de lever leur patte sur un Français" (203).

Le Guen's response reveals the level to which he feels he has integrated himself with the native community while also underscoring his actual disconnect: "Ecoutez, fit Le Guen en se dressant a moitié dans son lit et en parlant avec calme; Monsieur le Chef de la région, ne le prenez surtout pas ainsi. A Essazam, je veux dire chez nous autres, il n'y a ni Français ni impertinents, il n'y a que nous les Essazam" (203). Le Guen, we see here, not only considers himself as one who has both the caring and understanding lacking in the generation of missionaries who preceded him, but he also perceives himself as so effectively integrated into the Essazam society that he may consider himself one of them. Meanwhile, the administrator clearly sees this as a ridiculous assumption on the part of the priest, if only for the simple fact of Le Guen's origin:

Eh bien vous vous trompez, Père. Je comprends que dans votre métier, il faille se mettre le plus possible au niveau des indigènes! Très bien, très bien. Mais de là à vouloir sérieusement passer pour un de leurs.

Extravagant, tout à fait extravagant! Père, la stricte et seule vérité, est que vous êtes Français d'abord. . . (204)

An attempt to have one's presence accepted in the region seems a reasonable, even necessary goal in Vidal's eyes. But, as the administrator attempts to remind him, Le Guen cannot escape a simple, fundamental aspect of his identity, that he is a foreigner. It is, however, an aspect that Le Guen refuses to recognize. "Monsieur le Chef de la région, si j'osais me permettre de vous suggérer un conseil, voici ce que je vous dirais: 'N'abordez jamais nous autres les Essazam avec ces dispositions,' voilà ce que je vous dirais et ça serait tout. Oh, et puis pourquoi nous échauffer?" (204).

Le Guen clearly does see himself as on the same "level" as the natives. Beyond that, as Lequeux notes, he actually imagines himself as one of them. Yet, as we have seen, his actions belie such an assertion. Earlier in the novel, when a truck in which he was traveling breaks down, Le Guen jokes with his companion about being lost "au coeur de la forêt africaine" (94). Although the remark is delivered "sur le mode mélodramatique", it still reveals that, even after ten years in Cameroon and despite his self-proclaimed assimilation, Le Guen still sees himself as being on an exotic adventure in the far-off, mysterious continent of Africa. Even while claiming himself to be practically one of the natives himself, Le Guen cannot understand those who dare resist the results of the Chief's conversion (specifically, his renunciation of polygamy). Unable to demonstrate any understanding of their perspective, Le Guen refers to them as "poussés par Satan" (184).

Indeed, the local population surely does not see Le Guen as part of the tribe, despite his expressed belief to the contrary. Later in the conversation with Lequeux cited

above, the administrator points this out to the missionary: “Je viens de m’entretenir longuement avec les gens du village. Savez-vous à quel point ils sont montés contre vous? Quand je pense que vous vous prenez pour un de leurs! Pour eux, vous êtes un étranger, figurez-vous” (215). Despite his illusions to the contrary, Le Guen is still a European, a white man, a colonizer. His “whiteness” is so evident that it is even noted early in the novel in the simple context of a casual joke made by Mekanda, brother of the Chief, when asking that a glass of water be brought for their guest, the priest. “Nettoie soigneusement le verre,” he says, “Ces Blancs sont si fragiles” (20). In another instance, the difference is stated much more bluntly: a hunter Le Guen meets alongside a road tells him bluntly “je ne suis pas dans *votre* religion” (98, emphasis added), underscoring with the simple use of a pronoun the association of Christianity with the white European. After ten years, Le Guen is still a fragile white man and still intimately associated with the religion of the West. He envisions himself as having entered Bhabha’s liminal space yet remains on the edge with the rest of the colonizers.

## **THE PROBLEMATIC OF MORAL AUTHORITY: THE CONFLICTED MESSAGE**

As we have already seen with Father Drumont in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, Le Guen’s dual status as religious leader and colonizer conflicts with his proclaimed religious message of peace and love. For the missionary, the message and the supposedly humanitarian nature of the mission are in inevitable conflict with the imposition of an invading culture through the colonial presence. As Archbishop Jean Zoa pointed out, the missionary and the administrator arrived on the same boat. Thus the priest who arrived

on the same boat as the rest of the colonizers seeks to establish himself and his religion as a source of moral authority and guidance in spite of being part of an invading, foreign entity.

In the case of *Le Roi miraculé*, Le Guen's efforts to establish himself as a moral authority and to put into place a European Christian moral system are most evident in the central event of the novel. In light of the "miraculous" healing after the chief's baptism, Le Guen is insistent that the village chief repudiate all of his twenty-three wives, save one whom he may keep in Christian marriage. In so doing, he will enter into a marriage that can be considered appropriate under a Christian moral system. In order to be a good Christian, a true Christian, the chief needs to embrace the Christian concept of marriage. It might seem on the surface that Le Guen in this case is a champion of women's rights in relation to polygamy, but he expresses no concern for the women themselves. The priest's focus is dogmatic, not humanitarian.

This is not to say that women's issues are not important to Beti and Philombe, and we will explore them further in a later chapter. Indeed, both Beti and Philombe were keenly aware of social problems established before and/or independently of the arrival of the colonizers. That problems of oppression, including that of women existed before the arrival of the colonialists is, in fact, an element shared with founding postcolonial thought. Postcolonial scholar Bill Ashcroft demonstrates this in *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*. He notes, for example, that Fanon "did not advocate a naïve view of the precolonial" (99-100). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said defines Fanon's sense of nationalism as "critical nationalism" because it is "formed in an awareness that pre-colonial societies were never simple or homogeneous and that they contained socially

prejudicial class and gender formations that stood in need of reform by a radical force” (100). Thus, the chief’s reconsideration of polygamy might fall into just such a category of critical nationalism as certainly might the literary portrayal of such, but, in the case of this missionary, it is clearly not his goal for the chief.

Rather, Le Guen’s insistence on this issue seems to be based purely on rigid, dogmatic rules of Christianity rather than any concern for the possible oppression of women in such a social system. In fact, the dissolving of un-Christian marriages seems to be the obsessive focus of the priest, despite the fact that the actual conversion of the chief is quite obviously insincere. Sincere or not, the missionary “l’adurait d’adopter une conduite qui fût en conséquence avec son baptême” (137). In this case, the imposition of a moral system would appear to be significantly more important to the priest than the spiritual “well-being” of the chief or the social well being of his wives. Furthermore, as becomes painfully evident, Le Guen’s insistence never takes into consideration the possible consequences of such an abrupt change on the part of the chief, especially given the political nature of many of his marriages.

We should recall here the meeting of Le Guen and the chief in which the chief requests the “*objet de piété*,” one of the scapulars that Le Guen holds in his hand. Le Guen refuses on the grounds that all of these devotional objects he has with him have already been purchased by others, but it becomes clear that Le Guen has lied to the chief to avoid saying that he considers him unworthy to receive such an object.

Quel autre convertisseur professionnel eût, à ce prix, éludé le brutal aveu d’un precepte? Tout autre eût répondu, sans hésiter: “Je ne puis, délibérément, mettre entre tes mains, Chef, un objet de piété qui a reçu la

bénédiction du prêtre. Tu n'es pas seulement un païen, tu es aussi un homme fondamentalement impur. Car, tu pratiques la fornication plusieurs fois chaque nuit et avec plusieurs femmes successivement." Au lieu de cet énoncé en quoi il eût pu se soulager, il se surprit de débattre, déjà, avec lui-même, d'un problème qui lui parut plus grave, se demandant si, sous prétexte de fidélité, à la lettre de la loi, il n'était pas en train de faillir d'une sorte impardonnable, en manquant d'amener à Dieu une précieuse entre toutes. (25)

In this early scene, as in his insistence that the chief immediately choose only one wife, Le Guen demands the "letter of the law" regardless of its potential consequences. In the case of the scapular, Le Guen clearly contradicts a fundamental aspect of the Christian moral code in lying to the chief. Furthermore, he does so with full knowledge that he may be missing a chance to make a convert and save a soul. With the marriages, Le Guen's legalism will have immediate and disastrous consequences both for the local population and for his career as a missionary at this post.

Le Guen persists with the chief until finally convincing him to renounce his marriages. The reader is not informed of the details of the meeting between Le Guen and the chief that eventually leads to the announcement that he will keep only one wife, so the specific argument that sways the chief is unknown. However, like Drumont before him, Le Guen is known to use fear of retribution, rather than an ethical argument, to motivate converts to change behavior. In an earlier discussion with the chief, discussing his baptism, Le Guen "le menaçait de la colère de Dieu, agitant l'épouvantail du feu éternel; le mettait en garde contre le péché, les milles façons qu'avait le diable de tenter

un âme aspirant à Dieu” (137). In another instance, a group of young people laughs aloud during a sermon, and an angry Le Guen threatens the wrath of God: “Craignez, leur dit-il, craignez que par votre faute, par votre sottise, par votre orgueil, par votre entêtement, craignez, jeunes gens, qu’un irréparable malheur ne tombe sur la tribu” (184). In the absence of a moral argument that resonates with the public, the priest uses fear of punishment as a catalyst for changed behavior much in the same way that fear of punishment from colonial forces encourages the public to accept their lot.

So, despite his position as the moral voice of the religion and culture of the West, Le Guen is relegated to seeking to motivate adherence through fear. All the while his own moral integrity is called into question not only by his relation to the colonial enterprise but also by his own actions as clearly demonstrated in the two key encounters with the chief. In the first, Le Guen not only lies but also puts the possible salvation of a man at risk simply for the sake of strictly obeying “the letter of the law”. Later, Le Guen is willing to use the questionable conversion of the priest and a miraculous healing that even Le Guen himself doubts for the purposes of gaining converts. Le Guen does struggle, however, with the fact that these converts will be won on the merits of lies, but chooses to proceed:

Le Guen qui n’était pas tombé de la dernière pluie, savait ce qu’ils attendaient de lui et qu’il lui suffirait de le dire pour gagner des centaines et même des milliers d’entre eux au baptême. . . En ce maudit siècle où le temps était mesuré aux apôtres du Seigneur, quelle excuse eût-il eue de négliger ce qui était certainement une aide de la Providence, même si, pour son compte, il n’eût pas cru au miracle? (182)

To take advantage of this opportunity, Le Guen embraces the miracle without ever having to indicate explicitly whether he believes in its authenticity. Rather, he announces that, for his Christian name, the King will be called Lazarus. Lazarus, of course, is the Biblical character raised from the tomb by Jesus Christ. The name implies the miracle, and Le Guen uses it to his full advantage:

Il se lança dans un interminable laïus au bout duquel il s'aperçut, à la fois fier et perplexe, qu'il n'avait pas parlé de miracle à propos du Chef précisément, mais en rapprochant la légende de Lazare et la maladie du Chef, il avait du moins établi une similitude incoercible dans l'esprit des gens. (183)

Clearly, his deceptive words and actions call into question the position of moral authority from which Le Guen purports to speak. Although he appears at times conflicted by his deception of his parish, Le Guen continues nonetheless to take advantage of the chief's healing for the purpose of converting the masses.

## **CONNECTION TO COLONIALISM: ILS ONT VOYAGE DANS LE MEME BATEAU**

Even considering his conflicted behavior, the priest is most obviously in a questionable position by the very nature of his connection to the colonial enterprise. As much as he wishes to be, indeed considers himself to be, different from the other Europeans inhabiting the region, his connections to Europe and the colonizers are repeatedly underscored. In fact, the only distinct conflict between them occurs when the administration, not the Africans, determines that Le Guen's philosophy is not enough in

keeping with dominant colonial thought and practice. Despite a strong command of the local language and a deeper-than-usual understanding of local custom, Le Guen is still a colonizer.

When Le Guen and Joseph Schoegel, another missionary, meet a native hunter along the road, the narrator tells us that the scene “ressemblait de plus en plus à une véritable histoire des explorateurs” (95). As the white missionaries meet the native hunter, who is carrying his machete and crossbow, the image of Le Guen and his colleague is merely that of the white explorers meeting the native on his soil. In this scene, Le Guen surely appears no different than any European adventurer might be portrayed, a civilized European encountering a savage African. In fact, locals themselves often see Le Guen as a white man no different from all the other colonizers. For example, we have mentioned the scene in which the chief’s brother suggests extra cleaning for the priests drinking glass since all Europeans are rather fragile creatures. Later, the narrator notes that Le Guen’s “nervosité” that they found “inhérente à tout Européen” (109).

Not only is Le Guen associated with Europeans in general; he is also often directly associated with the colonial administration. When Le Guen seeks medical care for the ailing chief, we see him head to the home of the regional administrator to make his request. It is significant to note that visiting this administrator to seek assistance from a man of “toute-puissance” (111) is surely a privilege not available to all, and certainly not one available to the average member of the Essazam tribe. By the simple fact of his status as a Frenchman and a priest, Le Guen is able to make the visit. Soon thereafter, the doctor assigned to assist Le Guen reminds him of what the administration expects of him

regarding his relation with the chief: “Veillez quand même sur lui, mon Père. Enfin, essayez. Lequeux le préfère vivant; il dit que, mort, votre Chef lui donnerait bien des soucis. Sa succession ne serait pas facile, en l’état actuel des choses, par exemple” (141).

Keeping the chief in power is clearly of utmost importance to the administration.

Regardless of the degree to which Le Guen might have previously been aware of it, he is expected to make every effort to keep the chief in power, to help keep him alive and consequently maintain the status quo. Therefore, in seeking medical care for the chief, Le Guen is helping the colonial administration maintain order.

When anger and violence swell after the chief renounces his wives, the missionary’s connection to colonial power becomes even more evident. As many of the locals determine that Le Guen is to blame for the disruption of peace, they begin to consider challenging him. However, just as many feared challenging Father Drumont, they understand that challenging the priest could come with serious consequences directly from the colonial administration:

Convenant cependant du danger qu’il y eût eu à lui déclarer une guerre ouverte, de crainte que les autorités ne déchaînent de sanglantes représailles contre la tribu entière ainsi qu’il en était allé jusque-là chaque fois qu’un missionnaire avait été victime de violences. . . (163).

Raising a voice or a hand against the priest would, then, come with the possibility of very serious consequences due to his connection with colonial authority.

When fighting breaks out among the tribes as a result of the dissolution of political alliances related to the marriages (and Le Guen has tried to intervene and then fled), Le Guen’s colleague, Joseph Schloegel, leaves town “avec hâte” and “prévint les

autorités,” the authorities, of course, being the colonial administration (199). Shortly thereafter, Lequeux arrives and imposes an “opération d’encerclement du village” run by a French sergeant (202). The fighting that Le Guen could not stop is broken up by colonial military power. Then, as if the relation of the mission and military were not already clear enough on this day, “Quant aux Européens, après avoir inspecté le dispositif d’encerclement et l’avoir approuvé, ils gagnèrent la mission catholique. . .” (202). Later, we will again see that the Europeans who arrive on the heels of the conflict will head to the mission where they will take their meals (221). When the European arrives, his/her logical destination is Le Guen’s mission, the most European of destinations in the village. Not surprisingly, it is upon the arrival of the administrative forces that Lequeux and Le Guen discuss his relation to the natives; a conversation leading Lequeux to question the priest’s assertion that he is one of the Essazam and to remind him that he is a Frenchman before all else (204).

Le Guen’s departure does actually revolve, in part, around disagreement with the will of the administration, but what does this mean? Le Guen questions the administration’s desire to limit those whom he would seek to convert, but, unlike Drumont, he does not otherwise question the methods or consequences of the colonial presence. Susan Gasster suggests their questions present Le Guen and Drumont as good men in contrast to the colonial oppressors, but we have already seen that, if the local population sees him as different from the colonial administration, it is perhaps because he causes more trouble. As they see it, Le Guen is the cause of the conflict and, consequently, the cause of the arrival of the colonial administration. As for the administration, they first make the determination that Le Guen has been “sous-

administré” and should be more closely supervised (231). Soon thereafter, he is completely removed from his duties at the mission. According to the letter he receives from regional administrators, he has ignored “l’unicité fondamentale de la mission dont nous avons été chargés, vous et nous, par la douce France, notre mère incomparable, au milieu de ces peuplades déshéritées” (253).

### **MORAL DEVELOPMENT: MOVING TOWARD IDEOLOGICAL LIBERATION**

In the first letter to his mother, Le Guen makes it clear that he considers himself to be a different sort of missionary from those who have preceded him in Africa. Le Guen believes he is a Westerner who has moved beyond Eurocentric modes of thought and who exhibits a sincerity of humanitarian motivation lacking in most colonizers. He seems to genuinely think he has transcended the “construction of the other” (Ashcroft 168) that is fundamental to Orientalism’s thought. Le Guen, as we have seen, has learned the language and gained an understanding of the customs and values of the native population. Le Guen’s desire to find a point of mutual understanding and exchange between the cultures could demonstrate a cultural respect that steps beyond certain binaries that are central to Orientalism and to colonial thought, but he continues to understand his heritage and culture to be in many ways superior. As is most clearly seen in his interaction with the Chief, Le Guen still hopes to instill his way of thinking.

Still, Le Guen demonstrates a cultural understanding that may be more developed than that of his colonial colleagues during his first encounter with Lequeux. The administrator is astonished that the chief’s people had not taken him to a hospital because they lack confidence in this European institution. Lequeux clearly finds this preposterous

and responds, “Voulez-vous dire, Père, qu’ils ne croient pas à la médecine européenne?”

(111). Le Guen then attempts to explain to his colleague why the environment of a European-style hospital might be off-putting to these people, despite the medical treatment it could provide:

-Non ce n’est pas tout à fait cela, je veux dire que ce sont les hôpitaux eux-mêmes, du moins les hôpitaux civils, en tant qu’institutions ayant certaines méthodes, services dotées d’une certaine organisation, qui les rebutent. Oui, c’est très difficile à expliquer. Un hôpital civil, c’est très administratif, vous savez...

-Administratif, mais forcément.

-Oui, forcément comme vous dites, alors, ça manque un peu d’aménité, c’est même plutôt rude parfois et puis, c’est terriblement paperassier, et les Essazam n’aiment pas cela. (112)

Although the narrator provides no comment on Le Guen’s assertions, we can assume them to be accurate if we accept the narrator’s previous claims about Le Guen’s significant familiarity with the ways of the people to the point of being “practically a native” himself.

Yet in this dialogue, Le Guen could be challenged as the Westerner who seeks to tell about the Other and consequently makes statements and judgments in the context of Western standards, an Orientalist in the simplest of terms. His presentation of a generalized picture of the Essazam, that they, collectively, “n’aiment pas cela” could be criticized as an example of essentializing Orientalist thought. However, Le Guen’s motivation in making such a statement must also be taken into account. As one who has

lived among, if not with, this people for several years he wishes to convince the administrator that they actually have legitimate reasons for avoiding the hospital and wishes to see Lequeux send a doctor directly to the village to treat the chief. Le Guen understands that the European hospital in the African culture is potentially ineffective despite the medical treatments to be offered there. If a man as ill as the chief does not wish to visit such a hospital, its presence is of no health benefit to him. Where Le Guen sees a significant cultural gap to be bridged, Lequeux sees only a “grave” insinuation and “critiques décisives” against the Public Health Service (112).

After the arrival of the European officials to squelch the outbreak of fighting in the village, the fact that the chief was never taken to a hospital is again questioned. The officials wonder if the tribe as a whole might have hoped that the chief die from his illness and ask Le Guen about such a possibility. The priest responds that such an accusation is “absolument exclu” (225), but Giovanni Palmieri, an administrative official presses, “Eh bien, ne trouvez-vous surprenant qu’ils l’aient lassé mourir et quasiment pourrir dans son coin?” (225). Palmieri believes that refusal to take the chief to the hospital constitutes leaving him to die as “personne n’a eu l’idée de le porter à l’hôpital” (226). Discussion ensues that if they do not believe in hospitals, “qu’y pourrions-nous [the Europeans] ?” (226). Thus, if their “failure” to take the chief to the hospital when they feared he might die does not constitute an act of aggression against the chief, it must at least constitute an ignorance or, worse still, outright dismissal of the value and efficacy of European medicine. The Africans, consequently, are victims of their own ignorance, of their inferiority.

In the face of these accusations, it is again Le Guen who seeks to defend their actions:

Je vais dire là une chose qui, l'autre jour, a beaucoup irrité Monsieur le Chef de la région et qui vous scandalisera peut-être aussi, mais ce qui leur manque le plus, c'est bien moins la foi dans la médecine européenne que la confiance dans les services hospitaliers d'Ongola. (227)

In other words, taking the chief to this hospital did not represent a reasonable possibility for his care. To further support his point, Le Guen calls his houseboy, Gustave, to describe the kind of treatment the tribe sought for the chief:

L'enfant conta longuement combien de praticiens et de guérisseurs fameux s'étaient succédés au chevet du Chef, quelle avait été la thérapeutique de chacun – autant du moins que pût en savoir un observateur profane. Et du récit de l'enfant, il ressortait que la tribu n'avait rien négligé pour sauver le Chef, n'hésitant pas à recourir aux sommités, acceptant ainsi de subir les frais qui, dans ce cas-là, étaient toujours considérables. (228-229)

Le Guen wishes to establish to his visitors that the hospital was simply not an option for the tribe, that “il n'a pas été question une seule fois de transporter le Chef à l'hôpital” (230). Le Guen's point, much like Englebert Mveng's assertion regarding the church in Africa, is that the hospital never presented a legitimate option. It was a purely foreign institution that had no reasonable place in the thinking of the tribe. The hospital, for reasons unrelated to the possible effectiveness of the treatment it could offer, provided no more an authentic experience than the European church. For the church to have a place

in Africa, says Mveng, it must provide a truly African experience. So too must the hospital, says Le Guen.

That Le Guen's thought in this area has freed itself from the shackles of Orientalist thought, as Said might say, is evident in the reaction of his counterparts. Upon hearing explanations from Le Guen and Gustave that the tribe did everything they would have considered possible in treating the chief, Lequeux turns to Palmieri for his (a European sociologist's) explanation of this "incroyable conduite" on the part of the tribe (230). Palmieri's response would have made a striking example for Said's *Orientalism* nearly three decades later.

Palmieri, ainsi apostrophé, commença par une moue, cette sorte de rictus dont les universitaires sont coutumiers lorsque quelque circonstance les contraint à s'expliquer devant les profanes inaptes à saisir la complexité du problème et les diverses nuances de leur pensée . . .

Oh! fit-il enfin sans se départir de ce rictus, après tout, vous savez, rien n'empêche que nous nous trouvions en présence d'un phénomène somme toute banal dans l'histoire de l'Humanité. (230)

These people, Palmieri seems to say, are at a particular stage of human development and simply have not progressed to the point that they can be expected to believe in hospitals and consider hospital treatment as an option. Their behavior, he will later say, is different from that "dans nos pays civilisés" (236). They have not developed to the level of the Europeans, says the European. Le Guen's explanations have fallen on deaf ears, explained away by the theories of the Western scholar.

So Le Guen does, indeed, represent a sort of development of thought unlike, perhaps beyond, that of many of his European predecessors and colleagues. In fact, Lequeux comments that the priest has developed a reputation for beliefs and ideas that would be considered unorthodox (204). Le Guen desires to see himself on par with the people whom he lives. As we have seen him state to Lequeux, he considers himself one of them and wishes that they see him in the same way. For this reason, Le Guen vocally challenges Lequeux when he distinguishes between Frenchmen and “ces impertinents qui ont eu l’audace de lever leur patte contre un Français” (203). The priest refuses to accept the administrator’s views of the “sauvage” and even demonstrates the courage to say so directly, stating that there is no distinction between Frenchman and the “impertinents” at Essazam. Furthermore, Le Guen will not allow his mission to be fully complicit in the work of the administration, refusing to compromise his evangelical work for the sake of maintaining the local political status quo. Lequeux admonishes the missionary “que vous abandonnez dès cette heure l’entreprise insensée que vous avez conçue de convertir le Chef” (239) for the sake of “la pérennité de notre présence ici” (241). To this suggestion, Le Guen’s response is emphatic and uncompromising: “NON! Je répète: NON! Ce que vous me demandez est absolument impossible” (241).

Unfortunately, Le Guen is never able to achieve the same sort of development of thought regarding Christianity and evangelism that he demonstrates in other areas. He seems to take solace in feeling that there was no coercion in his sermon implicitly linking the chief’s healing to the miracle of Lazarus (183), and he cannot keep himself from using the chief’s healing for the sole purpose of gaining converts “même si, pour son compte, il n’eût pas cru au miracle” (182). Le Guen will essentially force the idea of the

miracle upon the village for the sake of bringing them to his religion. Even worse, Le Guen brings political chaos and brutal violence on this people all for the sake of the establishment of his religion in the region. His flexibility of thought relative to his European colleagues is never seen in the religious domain. Even as he stands up to the bullying of the administration, seeing how the mission is expected to be at its disposal, he does not sway from his understanding of his mission as being to convert as many as possible in Africa. Le Guen expresses this in another letter to his mother:

Après tout et du moment que le baptême est une marque indélébile, mon devoir n'est-il pas tout simplement d'imposer mes mains le plus que je peux, sans me laisser torturer par toutes sortes de préoccupations, somme tout étrangères à mon apostolat? (245)

Although he suggests that the Chief's conversion decisions will be made of his own free will, Le Guen otherwise never shows any evidence of considering that the church, like the hospital, might be an unreasonable, even implausible, option for those whom he seeks to convert. Thus, they will only be converted out of fear or out of awe when presented with a miracle.

Outside the religious realm, Le Guen seems to have developed a certain level of understanding of and appreciation for a diversity of cultural realities. Speaking about poverty in Africa, Mveng suggests that an often ignored, yet key, element of African poverty is that which he terms anthropological poverty, the destruction of and loss of distinct cultural identity: "La première réalité, c'est la culture. Et l'identité d'une culture consiste dans la vision du monde, dans la conception de l'homme et dans la conception de Dieu ou de l'au-delà propre de cette culture" (143). Father Le Guen demonstrates a

developing understanding of and respect for cultural identity as it relates this colonized people. Yet, to the point of contributing to a disaster at Essazam, he is unable incorporate this understanding into his vision of religious evangelization.

### **FATHER MARIUS: *UN SORCIER BLANC A ZANGALI***

René Philombe's *Un Sorcier blanc a Zangali* follows Father Marius in what appear to be the final months of an approximately sixteen year tenure as a missionary. In terms of historical setting and chronology, *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali* and its protagonist actually represent the first of the three. We learn over the course of the novel that Father Marius arrived in Africa in 1899 with the action depicted in the novel taking place in 1915. Marius has been designated to visit the village of Zangali, an area known to have resisted evangelization where up to this point "toute tentative d'évangélisation était vouée à l'échec" (106). In fact, the residents of Zangali are even alleged to have killed the last missionary to come to the village. Marius, one might say, is headed for the darkest corner of the alleged Dark Continent.

### **PERCEPTIONS: SEEING THE OTHER**

Early in the novel, a discussion between a young couple in a village to which Father Marius is apparently assigned tells us much about the perception of priests such as this missionary. Kuya and his wife Tumbé have just received two unexpected surprises upon the birth of their son. The couple does not belong to the tribe with which they live, rather they are slaves. The narrator tells us that discussion of their native tribe, village, or family is not merited as they have been "vendus dès leur jeune âge par un maître à un

autre” (17) like “un chien et une chienne” (18). Upon the birth of their son, they expect to have to give him up to their master who will name him. Instead, their master surprises them both with the right to name, and keep, their own son and also with an elevated status within the tribe.

Cependant, contre toute attente, et faisant entorse à une coutume jusque-là inviolée, il delaisa à ses deux esclaves le soin de donner un nom de leur choix à l’enfant. Mieux, il les proclama sur-le-champ dignes d’être comptés dorénavant, parmi les membres de sa tribu Mvog-Atemenguë.

(20)

In the context of this newfound hope for building a family, the husband, Kuya, discusses his fear of one day being separated from his wife and son for some new sort of forced labor. This leads Kuya to share his thoughts on who might actually be the most powerful among all white men. Based on his observations, Kuya has determined that the priest is actually the most respected and most feared of all the colonizers. Consequently, the priest is the white man most likely to be able to protect a family like theirs.

Kuya’s remarks early in the novel focus on power as the primary attribute of the priest as seen through the eyes of a poor African man. Kuya asks his wife whom she would consider the most powerful of the whites. He offers his answer before receiving her response: “Quels sont, d’après toi, les blancs les plus forts et les plus redoutables? Tu me diras certainement que ce sont les Commandants d’Onglola, n’est-ce pas? Eh bien, pas du tout. M’est avis que ce sont les Fada de Mvolyé!” (23). (Philombe’s text notes that *Fada* is an “altération locale du mot anglais *Father*, père missionnaire”.) Kuya continues to make note of an image also seen in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, that of

colonial administrators and commanders kneeling in the presence of priests (24), a sure sign of their deference and fear: “En vérité, en vérité, Tumbé, ma sagesse d’homme me donne la conviction que les Fada restent de loin les blancs les plus redoutables. N’ai-je pas vu un jour à Mvolyé des Commandants s’agenouiller devant le Chef des Fada?” (24). Just as the military leaders would seem to fear the *Fada*, so do their soldiers, even including those of African origin, as Kuya also points out in his conversation with his wife: “Quel mvulmetara, dis-moi, oserait mettre la main sur eux?” (26). (The narrator explains that mvulmetara are feared, armed soldiers who work for and protect the colonial administrators.)

Attending services officiated by Father Marius, Kuya and Tumbé have observed the priest’s exotic dress and “gestes magiques”, and, based on such observations, believe him to be “un sorcier de haut calibre” (24). Indeed, the *Fada* along with European medical doctors, is considered to be a *sorcier blanc* (58). The perceptions of this couple are clearly not unusual, as the priest’s religious status combined with his social status lead the narrator to describe his standing in the following manner:

Le prêtre missionnaire jouissait ainsi d’une estime plutôt mêlée d’une crainte mystique. Peut-être même était-il plus redouté qu’estimé, encore que préféré au Commandant brutal. Son nom même, Fada, laissait des esprits rêveurs! (25)

Even the term *Fada* invokes fear. The narrator explains that the word is very similar to a word in the local language which means “s’accarper, ravir, prendre de force” (25). Furthermore, the missionary’s apparent power and authority over colonial administrators

and soldiers clearly makes for a large part of the appeal of his religion. Since he is a man of great power among the Europeans, he may also be a source of protection from them: “aussi les indigènes en se rendant à la messe, espéraient-ils que le Fada pouvait les protéger contre l’indigenat” (25). As we have seen, that which might appear to be a sincere opening to religious conversion (like Indians accepting Bibles in Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*) may in fact be primarily motivated by simply practical factors. In this case, the priest is clearly a powerful man, and, in light of the brutality of the colonial presence, he is also clearly a white man with whom it might pay to be associated. Thus, a missionary like Marius might gain many converts without ever realizing or understanding the nature of their conversions: “Le fait est que ces foules écrasantes qui, à cette époque, s’en allaient bêler des oraisons et des cantiques latins, berçaient tranquillement une toute autre conviction religieuse dans les fibres profondes de leur chair spirituelle” (25).

So the missionary priest brings a religious message that, thanks to his apparent position of power within the colonial community, is often received with consideration to such practical matters. Thus, the missionary’s message might be considered for the sake of how he might be able to save the local people from suffering at the hands of the colonial administration, not for the spiritual salvation he offers. Here we are reminded of Father Drumont’s concerns over the motives for the conversions of those living along the road construction routes in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. Drumont suspects that the high number of conversions along the route is directly related to the fact that a convert may avoid the labor project. According to the narrator, it appears in fact that most are keenly aware of the conflict in the missionary’s message and his relation to the colonial enterprise. The crowds “ne comprenaient pas pourquoi cet homme blanc, qui s’abîmait

les cordes vocales à prêcher l'amour du prochain et la crainte de l'Incrée, s'acharnait tant contre leurs dieux . . ." (25). While the missionary himself is blind to this contraction of word and deed, those to whom his sermons are directed are keenly aware of it.

In fact, this contradiction of message and action leads most to believe that, in reality, the priest seeks to dominate just as the other Europeans do. Only, the missionary seeks religious rather than military domination:

Quelques rares zélateurs avaient beau argumenter, mais presque toutes les têtes ne s'empêchaient pas de réfléchir: "Quoi qu'on dise, tous les blancs sont les blancs. Ils sont venus ensemble de leur pays pour nous réduire à l'esclavage, les uns physiquement et les autres spirituellement, en assassinant nos dieux protecteurs!" (25)

It is this attack on the religious heart of the society that leads Kuya to affirm that no white man should be feared more than the missionary priest, in this instance, Father Marius. He asks his wife, "Dis-moi quels sont les blancs les plus redoutables, Tumbé, de ceux qui luttent contre les hommes noirs ou de ceux qui luttent contre leurs Dieux?" (25). Thus, the two primary characteristics of Father Marius, as seen through the eyes of the African, are based on power and fear: power as evident in his relation to other colonial authorities and fear based on that power as well as his evident attack on the religious heritage of the continent.

By virtue of the power the priests seem to hold among the colonizers, the missionary is clearly a man of high social status. This social standing is clear to Kuya and Tumbé who have their son, Etienne, baptized in the Church and even name Father Marius as the child's godfather. Years later, when, "par la suite de longues et obséquieuses

sollicitations formulés par les deux époux”, the boy is chosen to live with the father, we are told that this represents “une véritable affaire d’or”. With a son selected to be a houseboy to the priest, “leur rang social s’en trouvait rehaussé de plusieurs degrés”. The narrator continues to explain that Kuya and Tumbé benefit from a close relationship with a white man. That the white man happens to be a priest only improves their gain: “Ils émergèrent de la basse lie populaire. Ils se voyaient exceptionnellement intégrés dans le cercle familial d’un homme blanc qui, de surcroît était un Fada!” (29). Through this episode we see the elevated status of the white man in the social hierarchy in colonial Africa, and we furthermore see that the priest is perceived to be at the top of the hierarchy among the whites. Meanwhile, Kuya and Tumbé not only improve their social standing but gain materially as well as “d’un moment à l’autre, ils s’émerveillaient devant quelques cadeaux” (29). In addition to such gains for themselves, the couple surely hopes that their son will benefit even further.

When Father Marius delivers news that he will soon be leaving his parish, the family is briefly elated, believing that the priest is returning to France and will take Etienne with him to this land of great wealth. The parents express an attitude here much like the “image dépréciée” of the self condemned by Fanon in Algeria. Their joy comes from the prospect of an escape from Africa for their son, who could then enjoy the wealth and privilege of France:

Savoir que leur fils unique partait pour le pays des hommes blancs, c’était pour eux un sujet de ravissement. Ils se voyaient en même temps riches dans un proche avenir! Il y avait d’innombrables richesses au pays des

hommes blancs; et Azombo [Etienne] leur enverrait régulièrement des colis qui feraient l'envie de tous! (35)

Soon, however, they learn that Marius is actually not going to France, but rather to Zangali, this savage place known to murder missionaries. That her son might be going to Zangali rather than France is such devastating news to Tumbé that she appears to have no more use for the priest or for his religion:

Maria Tumbé n'avait plus d'oreilles pour le R.P. Marius. C'était comme si un grand fleuve aux mille chutes s'était mis à couler entre elle et lui. Elle ne voulait plus le reconnaître comme un bienfaiteur. Reconnaissance, amitié, fraternité chrétienne, tout cela était fini pour elle. Son fils unique au pays des hommes blancs, oui! Mais à Zangali, non et cent fois non! (37)

This reaction confirms that, even for the parents of his godson, acceptance of the missionary's message is a practical rather than a spiritual matter. One benefits from a relationship with the priest because of his power, his social standing, and his wealth. This particular family had an immediate gain in social status when Etienne was chosen to live with Father Marius, and Kuya, of course, makes it quite clear that, in his opinion, there is no white man more powerful than the missionary priest.

Finally, the brief illusion that Etienne would be going to France with Marius demonstrates that a relationship with the priest is seen as a possible path to wealth. Here we are again reminded of the missionaries examined in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, who themselves may not always be aware of the actual motives of those who convert and join their flocks. In other words, the missionary is often unaware of the

distance between himself and his parishioners. We have seen both Drumont and Le Guen often unaware of the gap separating them from the Africans with whom they live, and *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali* reveals such a separation as well.

Like Drumont, Marius' distance from those whom he wishes to convert is evident in his linguistic difficulties in coping with native languages. The narrator tells us that he spoke a "douteux" (112) and "mauvais" (127) form of the local language and "cela faisait toujours rire les indigènes quand ils entendaient le curé de Mvolyé parler leur langue" (31). We learn that his efforts to say "comment allez-vous?" often come across as "êtes-vous des antilopes?" (33) and also see how language problems directly hinder his efforts to evangelize in a particular story recounted by the narrator regarding a woman of the village.

In this encounter, Marius is questioned by a young mother whose child has been regularly refused for baptism for over a year. As she understands it, she risks being "brûlée éternellement en enfer" if she is not properly baptized. Therefore, she has attempted to do all that would seem necessary to allow her to be baptized: "elle s'est faite inscrire à la doctrine . . . elle a toujours payé son denier du culte et aidé la femme du catéchiste dans ses travaux champêtres . . . elle a toujours parcouru à pied les vingt kilomètres qui séparent Afann-Oyo de Mvolyé, pour assister à la messe du dimanche. . . elle connaît par coeur son cours de catéchisme" (32). Yet, she is still refused baptism and confronts the priest to learn why. The narrator here recounts how Marius' command of the local language fails him when he attempts to ask her about her fiancé, since he is refusing her baptism on the basis that she is an unwed mother. However the narrator reveals that the term used by Marius to mean "fiancé", when mispronounced, may then

mean “le sexe d’une femme”. So Marius’ request to see her fiancé leads to a most unexpected result: “La pauvre femme, toute éplorée et consumée par l’ardent désir de devenir chrétienne à n’importe quel prix n’hésite pas! Elle confie sans tarder son bébé à une voisine, puis elle se place devant le R.P. Marius les jambes largement écartées” (32). The priest, surely, is shocked at the reaction of this woman. On the other hand, the woman who was simply responding to Marius’ question about her fiancé “ne comprend pas surtout pourquoi le catéchiste la chasse à coups de bâton en l’affublant de l’étiquette de ‘satan’!” Meanwhile, of course, the confusion is not limited to the young woman:

De son côté, au milieu des rires effrénés des spectateurs, le curé de Mvolyé devient rouge de stupeur; il ne comprend pas pourquoi sa paroissienne s’est ainsi conduite devant ses vénérables yeux, alors qu’en réalité, il a demandé qu’elle lui présente le père naturel de son bébé... (33)

This encounter, presented early in the novel, powerfully expresses the level of separation between the missionary and the people. His literal inability to communicate combined with his ignorance of his own shortcoming leads to a situation in which both parties are angered and grossly offended, and the reaction of those who observe the scene is a mixture of laughter and “cris scandalisés”. In a situation like this encounter with the mother, Marius’ language fails him completely. Thus, even in less serious circumstances, the priest’s difficulty of communication is sure to brand him as a stranger. Even people like Kuya and Tumbé, who, we are told, cannot help laughing when Marius misspeaks upon greeting them, will inevitably see the priest as a complete outsider whose only effective language is the language he calls “la langue des hommes blancs” (127).

It is also important to note that Marius himself also perceives a level of separation between himself and the people he has come to evangelize. He is quick to chastise Kuya for speaking “comme un païen” when referring to the priest as “mon meilleur Dieu” (36), demonstrating a sense of Christian/pagan opposition that motivates the missionary’s work and message. Marius’ perception of the region itself further expands the Christian/pagan binary to include the contrast of civilized and uncivilized. Marius himself describes Zangali as “un pays totalement fermé aux bienfaits de la civilisation” (172). The colonial conquests, he later asserts, must be considered justified based on these binaries.

Colonialism has taken civilization to the jungle and seeks also to bring Christianity to those of the region even including the “miserable troupeau d’âmes” at Zangali (174). Finally, this binary logic of colonialism and imperialism is also seen in terms of race, and this attitude is also directly expressed by the Father. Seeking to justify the colonial and missionary enterprise, Marius notes that “(l)es blancs ont été les premiers à recevoir la grâce de Dieu! Ils ont été les premiers à posséder la clé de la civilisation!” (174).

It is this binary understanding that shapes the view of Father Marius, just as it shaped the view of the west in rationalizing its desire to colonize. It allows the Father not only feel superior to the Africans, even if only for having the good fortune to be among those whites who first received God’s grace, but also to feel completely justified in his participation in the colonial undertaking. The dynamic of these binaries is fundamental to the self-justification of the priest and of colonial expansion itself. Consequently, binary relationships like Christian/pagan, white/black, civilized/uncivilized easily expand to include many that would initially appear to be more benign. Bill Ashcroft notes that, in addition to the binaries just mentioned “we may also find that colonizer, civilized,

teacher and doctor may be opposed to colonized, primitive, pupil and patient as a comparatively effortless extension of the binary structure of domination” (25). Clearly, in the case of a missionary like Father Marius, one may just as easily add evangelizer/evangelized or priest/parishioner which, particularly in a colonial context like that of *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali*, serves to underscore this ideology of domination inherent to both the colonial undertaking and the missionary enterprise in this context.

### THE PROBLEMATIC OF MORAL AUTHORITY

In addition to “civilizing” the native population through his mission, Marius understands his work to be part of a holy mission. When Mgr Grottel, who is assigning Marius the task of visiting Zangali, offers to perform a special blessing, Marius assures Grottel (and surely himself as well) that he will travel to Zangali “avec Dieu” (45). It is a simple, yet telling statement. Marius believes that God will accompany him on his mission to Zangali and that his undertaking is surely divinely ordained. Marius later confirms this sense of divine calling by insisting that, “Seigneur Jésus Christ a voulu que je devienne le premier berger” (174). By virtue of his divine calling, the civilizing mission of colonialism, and the moral authority of his position within the Christian religious structure the missionary priest seeks to save and convert, his own privileged and authoritative status is confirmed.

From such a position, the missionary then may seek to impose his moral-religious agenda. Marius, it appears, is actually quite successful in gaining converts to the Christian religion, at least on the surface. However, the narrator makes it clear that although great numbers participate in the rites of the Church, they remain committed to

their own religious understanding and heritage: “Le fait est que ces foules écrasantes qui, à cette époque, s’en allaient bêler des oraisons et des cantiques latins berçaient tranquillement une toute autre conviction religieuse dans les fibres profondes de leur chair spirituelle” (25). Thus, Marius may have a certain amount of success in numbers of converts, although not in genuine religious conversions.

For Marius, however, such nominal devotion is unacceptable and must be overcome. “False gods” must be renounced, as he emphatically demands while visiting the home of the parents of his Godson, Kuya and Tumbé. (It should also be noted that Marius, of course, calls them by the Christian names given at their baptism.) Upon seeing idols to other gods, he tells them they must renounce “définitivement aux fétiches” and serve “le seul vrai Dieu tout puissant, et son fils unique Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ!” (34). It is at this moment that Marius’ actions become both violent and symbolic of the upheaval the colonial evangelizer is capable of creating. As the narrator indicates: “Puis le RP Marius se leva et, d’une main chargée de haine et de blasphème, il arracha tous les fétiches qui ornaient l’intérieur de la case” (34). Within the confines of one particular home belonging to a couple that is especially close to him and his mission, Marius demonstrates the cultural havoc the missionary can create.

It is an act referred to by the narrator as “l’assassinat de ses dieux” (34), and one that is emblematic of the irony of a missionary message of love juxtaposed with such disdain for the religious heritage of the region. To use the words of the narrator, we might say that it is an expression of “haine” and “blasphème.” Furthermore, this ambiguity of message is as fundamental to the lack of understanding between the missionary and the people as is cultural or linguistic difference. We have earlier noted

that even the crowds who seem to be following the preaching of Father Marius “ne comprenaient pas pourquoi cet homme blanc, qui s’abîmait les cordes vocales à prêcher l’amour du prochain et la crainte de l’Incrée, s’acharnait tant contre leurs dieux” (25).

Almost everyone, we are told, suspects that the work of the missionary is not at all an authentic expression of concern for the well-being of the people of the region but rather simply another form of domination. Certainly this is not surprising given that we have already noted the perception that, in the eyes of most: “. . . tous les blancs sont les blancs. Ils sont venus ensemble de leur pays pour nous réduire à l’esclavage, les uns physiquement et les autres spirituellement, en assassinant nos dieux protecteurs” (25).

The image of assassinating the native gods presented in this passage is particularly significant because, as cited above, it is the same imagery used in direct reference to the actions of Father Marius at the home of Kuya and Tumbé. Clearly, we may see the “small” acts of the individual missionary like Marius as part of a much larger colonial presence.

Yet, Marius sees the upheaval he causes as a necessary, inevitable, and an even ordained part of his work. The reader is told that certain Biblical phrases tend to appear “presque toujours” in his sermons, and all of the verses mentioned seem to justify the social and cultural upheaval caused by the evangelist:

“Je ne suis venu pour unir mais désunir. Je suis venu jeter le feu, et non pas, la paix dans les familles! Je suis venu dresser la femme contre son époux, et l’enfant contre sa mère! Personne ne pourra donc entrer dans le royaume de mon Père qui m’a envoyé, sans me suivre, et personne ne peut

me suivre s'il ne consent à abandonner son frère et sa soeur, son père et sa mère!" (68)

These key passages both demonstrate the problematic of his presence while giving insight into how his understanding of his mission could contribute to the eventually disastrous results of his work. The priest feels biblically justified in causing conflict among communities and families and, through the content of his sermons, clearly wishes to convince his converts of the same. Christian people and Christian customs simply must not cohabitate with the pagan.

We learn, for example, that Marius committed considerable energy to his effort to put an end to indigenous dances, which he clearly deemed immoral by his Christian standards: "Naguère au cours de ses tournées effectuées, à travers les villages de sa paroisse, il menait une inlassable croisade contre les danses indigènes. Il y consacrait la plupart de ses sermons" (74). Ironically, the narrator shares this information just as Marius is about to witness a local dance to which he has been invited. During his stay at Pala, he will have to watch the dance in silence in order to maintain his false identity as a Commandant. Later, at Zangali, his observation of a "pagan" ceremony will be the scene which reveals his charade. As the novel is nearing its conclusion, Marius chooses to attend a ceremony intended to rid the village of the plague of illness from which it has been suffering, the same illness that has led to the exile of the afflicted, several of whom were taken in by Marius, Andela, and Etienne. Marius is "scandalisé" (165) by the "paganisme noir" (168) that he observes at the ceremony. Unlike at the dance at Pala, Marius is unable to maintain his silence and steps forward and interrupts:

O mes frères noirs! Ouvrez vos oreilles et écoutez! Je vous avais promis mon amitié! Et comme je vous l'avais promis, je suis prêt à vous aider! Confiez-moi vos maux et vos peines, je les soulagerai! Vous aurez beau vous lamenter dans vos cérémonies impies, cela ne vous guérira pas de la maladie des fantômes! (165)

In this incident, the audacity and insolence of the “sorcier blanc” appears to be leading to his death, since many among the gathered crowd are outraged and cry out “à mort, à mort” (165). Despite having been relegated to the jungle, Marius, Etienne, and Andela have forged a place to live, where they have taken in several of those who have been exiled from the village and left to die. It is only the arrival of Mekula, one of the exiled ill taken in by Marius, that saves the priest: “Grâce a ce sorcier blanc que vous alliez tuer, je suis encore en vie, moi, Mekula de Ndongo!” (169-170). Still, Marius’ crusade against the “pagan” and “uncivilized” overwhelms him to the point that he risks revealing himself, risks his life, and risks undermining the care that he and his friends had been providing to the condemned sick of the village. Witnessing a people who “pour lui, faisait l’apologie de Satan” (167), Marius feels he must, at this moment, speak out and counter “le paganisme noir” of the village.

Yet, with his outburst at the ceremony, Marius does not gain an opportunity to evangelize and try to make converts despite his claims that he can save those who have fallen ill. As we have seen, when Marius does evangelize with success, his converts often lack the sincerity he desires. His message of salvation is often only nominally accepted by those, who, while participating in the rites of the Church, maintain their native religious traditions as well. Yet, as far as simple numbers are concerned, the

missionary has gained many converts, just of varying sincerity. As previously discussed, many are likely motivated by the power and wealth represented by the priest and the potential benefits of associated with him and his Church.

Those who do wish to convert may also be motivated by a message of fear from the pulpit. This is, of course, much like the situations we have already seen with Beti's priests. It is evident that Marius plays on such fear in the previously discussed encounter with the young mother who questions why she may not be baptized. This young woman has participated in all the rites of the church in hopes of being baptized but has been refused for being an unmarried mother. Yet, her desire to be baptized is not motivated by a spiritual desire to become fully a part of this religious community. Rather, she simply fears being condemned to hell when she dies: "Si je mourais aujourd'hui et que j'étais condamnée à être brûlée éternellement en enfer, qui est-ce qui en serait responsable?" (32). Thus, this young woman, surely like many others, hopes to avoid eternal punishment from this God that she has learned of through the missionary. Turning to God, one can find protection. However, as Marius later tells Kuya, God will protect, but only "à condition de le prier souvent" (36). In other words, conversion and participation in the rites of the church will be necessary for he or she who hopes to benefit from that protection.

Central to the question of the moral authority and authenticity of the priest in this novel is the question of his identity. Seeking to create an opening with those whom he encounters along his mission to Zangali, Marius determines deception to be a reasonable tool. Marius comes to this conclusion at Pala after a misunderstanding concerning his identity appears to save his life. When Marius encounters a group of well-armed (55)

men along the route to Zangali, their first impression is that they must have encountered a commandant of the colonial occupation:

Tous ces campagnards ignares, tremblant[s] de crainte autant que de respect, voyaient un représentant de l'Administration en la personne du R. P. Marius. Même casque colonial, même chemise à épaulettes, même pantalon à la hussarde, mêmes brodequins. Pour eux ce ne pouvait être qu'un commandant blanc. (59)

They have already discussed the possibility that they might be encountering a “un de ces sorciers blancs qu'on appelle Fada!” (58). In fact, the simple fact that they suspect he may be a priest “terrifiait” Marius, who, of course, knows the fate of the last priest who took the trip to Zangali. When the group determines that it would be impossible for another “Fada” to visit the area again, it is “à la grande satisfaction du missionnaire” (59). Instead, they then turn to what seems to be a much more logical explanation; that this must be a commander in the colonial administration. However, the group as a whole is by no means convinced until Etienne, brandishing a rifle, appears and vocally claims what Marius has been allowing the men to consider. Etienne's command “allez annoncer au Chef de Pala qu'un Commandant blanc arrive” sends the group running in fear (61):

Affolés, les hommes s'ébranlèrent dans un sauve-qui-peut général, où, sans trop savoir comment, chacun courait, tombait, se relevait, bousculait le voisin, se blessait avec sa propre arme, puis courait toujours vers le village... sans trop savoir comment. (61)

With the unexpected aid of Etienne, the misconception that Marius is a military commandant may have averted his murder.

Knowing the fate of the last missionary to follow this particular route, Marius finds himself in a position in which deception might guarantee his safety. He chooses not to introduce himself as a priest, but rather to allow the people to continue to believe he is actually a commandant. Marius is not only willing to deceive but also willing to compromise other aspects of his moral code for the sake of maintaining the facade. When the local chief arranges a dance in honor of the newly arrived commandant, a dance precisely of the sort against which Marius “menait une inlassable croisade”, the missionary in disguise allows himself to be so honored in order to maintain his new identity. Later in the evening, the charade will again put Marius in conflict with the regional customs he despises. Waiting in his room will be “la princesse Andela, la plus belle beauté de Pala” (84). It is only the diplomacy of Etienne who, in speaking with both the town elders and with Andela herself and in claiming that Marius is not quite like all the other commandants, prevents another potentially disastrous conflict. Thus through his own efforts and the efforts of Etienne, Marius is able to establish and maintain this false identity.

Although he does debate the merits of such deception (a scene we will discuss in a later section), Marius nevertheless accepts his deception as a reasonable weapon in his evangelistic battle. The narrator will even come to refer to him as “notre petit imposteur” (96). But Pala is only a stop along the way to Zangali, and his experience there leads him to contemplate the approach he will take upon arriving at his final destination. Consequently, Marius asks himself how he should approach his evangelical effort at Zangali:

Pour abattre ce baobab du paganisme, quelle hache allait-il utiliser?

Depuis la pénétration des hommes blancs à l'intérieur du pays, toute tentative d'évangélisation était vouée à l'échec. . . Quelle hache devait-il utiliser pour abattre ce baobab du paganisme? Il savait qu'il avait le choix entre la sincérité qui l'exposerait à de bien tristes tragédies, et l'astuce qui lui assureraient un triomphe plus honorable. (106)

It is notable here that Marius appears to see the deception he is considering as “astuce”, a sort of craftiness or finesse. Furthermore, images such as “abattre”, “hache”, and the “baobab du paganisme” reinforce an oppositional sense of conflict in Marius’ view of missions. Consequently, sincerity is sure to lead to tragedy, while the cleverness that will hide his true identity is, in the mind of the missionary, the path that will actually lead to a “triomphe plus honorable”. Hence, Marius decides he will “se faire passer pour un instituteur” (107). Marius never explicitly identifies himself as an “instituteur” and is actually assumed by most to be some sort of doctor, a “sorcier blanc” (116).

Previously, he has followed along when taken for a commandant, but Marius has now decided that when he arrives in Zangali, he will initiate the next masquerade himself, both for his personal benefit and the eventual benefit of his mission,. As we watch him meet with the “Grand Chef” at Zangali, the priest reaches a new level of audacity in his deception. He proceeds to establish his honesty and good faith by making a confession: “Vénérable Chef, rententit sa voix nazillarde, contrairement à ce que vous avez cru, je ne suis pas . . . un commandant blanc!” (110). Marius continues by seeking to reinforce the value and dignity of his supposed honesty, making use of a local proverb to make his point: “Entre deux amis, dit un proverbe ewondo, la tromperie n’a pas de place” (112).

One might say here that Marius either believes that the proverb does not apply when in the context of evangelism, or that he simply does not count the chief as a friend.

At this point, the missionary's deception becomes multi-faceted. His confession under guise of good will, "Je suis plein de bonnes intentions," is structured purely for the purpose of endearing himself to the Chief and gaining his trust. Marius actually has no intention of revealing himself. Rather, he plans only to establish a new false identity as a teacher. This will not only emphasize his honesty but will also allow him to attempt to take on an identity that might be seen as more benign than that of the commandants whose "comportement barbare," he tells the chief, gives a false impression of the white race. Most revealing is Marius' choice and use of the proverb as a manner of authenticating his supposed confession. If "la tromperie" has no place among friends, it clearly has an important and justifiable role for Marius in this relationship.

Noting its protection and the entry it has provided into communities, both at the pit stop at Pala and then at Zangali, Marius determines that the deception is a necessary, even blessed, aspect of God's will. In fact, seemingly confirming his previous rationalization that deception rather than sincerity is most likely to lead to a victory "plus honorable" in his quest, Marius considers that "Dieu permet certains péchés aux hommes pour la réalisation de ses mystérieux dessins" (140). Yet, Marius never accomplishes anything in the way of conversions at Zangali. Rather, he is sent to reside in the jungle, with the expectation that he, whoever he is, will either die or give up and leave: "En t'assignant cet endroit malfamé, Seigneur Angula et ses gens savaient que toi, et ton épouse, et ton boy, n'alliez pas y vivre longtemps" (159). Unaware of the subtle plot against him until it is revealed by Mekula, Marius maintains his false identity in hopes

that it will provide the opening to the community he desires. Through this deception, he hopes, of course, to eventually ingratiate him to the community and be accepted by them. From successful deceit, he can then seek to convert them to his religious and moral system.

### **CONNECTION TO COLONIALISM: ILS ONT VOYAGE DANS LE MEME BATEAU**

Marius' words to the Chief at Zangali, when making his confession that he is not a commandant, reveal his understanding of the image of colonialism, particularly as it relates to the military occupation. For this reason, he wishes to distance himself from the reputation of the commandant in favor of what he hopes will be a less suspicious and less dubious identity. However, like Drumont and Le Guen, Marius cannot remove himself from the colonial enterprise. Regardless of their individual professions or vocations, all of the Europeans came across on the same figurative boat, as Philombe indicates in the opening pages of the novel. We have already seen the narrator indicate that the general feeling of those in Marius' parish confirms such a perception: "Quoi qu'on dise, tous les blancs sont les blancs. Ils sont venus ensemble de leur pays pour nous réduire à l'esclavage . . ." (25). Later, as town elders at Zangali discuss what to do with this white man who has mysteriously appeared offering his friendship, we see that doctors and priests are subject to the same suspicion as one who might be directly related to the military occupation:

Plus désastreuse encore me paraît l'action de leurs sorciers. Les uns armés d'aiguilles empoisonnées et d'instruments magiques, nous extorquent le

sang, les urines, les excréments, quand ils ne nous inoculent pas dans le corps de dangereux produits! . . . Les autres, emmitouflés dans d'étranges boubous, nous obligent cyniquement à chasser nos épouses pour n'en conserver qu'une seule, à renier nos dieux pour n'adorer que les leurs! . . Ces étrangers, couleur de fantômes prétendent dans leur impiété qu'ils seraient venus ici pour nous tirer de la misère! De quelle misère? (117)

Thus they are all strangers, all pretending to come out of good will, but all very dangerous to the well-being of the native peoples and their cultures.

Marius is clearly very aware of the reputation of many Europeans, particularly military officials and physicians. Yet, he is ignorant of the depth of their suspicion, indeed disdain, of Europeans as a whole. Ironically, then, when Marius meets with the Chief in Zangali and introduces himself as a representative of all white men, he is clearly unaware that doing so only reinforces his connection to colonial invasion: “. . .car je vous apporte mon amitié; l'amitié de tous les hommes blancs!” (109). There are indeed some bad whites, Marius concedes, in particular the colonial commandants. However, he wishes to demonstrate to the chief that there are also many good whites, himself among them. But, to establish himself as a “good white”, he must distance himself from the reputation of the commandants. This identity served him well at Pala thanks to people's fear, but at Zangali he wishes to present a more benevolent image.

In contrast, of course, we have already seen the missionary take full advantage when mistaken for a commandant himself. In the situation at Pala, where the image and reputation of the white commandant works to his benefit, Marius takes full advantage of the opportunity. He even goes so far as to have Etienne announce to the Pala chief that

he is indeed a commandant: “Allez annoncer au Chef de Pala qu’un Commandant blanc arrive, et vite!” (61). Without a priest’s attire, Marius may be a teacher, missionary, Commandant, doctor, or other. His specific identity is fluid, but in all cases he is a colonizer. Fear and suspicion surround his presence regardless of the specific identity he assumes. Without actively fighting on the side of the colonized, as Fanon would suggest, Marius remains a colonizer.

Even the road Marius must follow in order to make his trip to Zangali is directly and shamefully attached to colonial domination. Much like the proposed road in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, it is a road built with the sweat of forced labor and at the whim of the colonizer:

La route de Zangali! . . . Les indigènes l’avait construite sous l’occupation allemande, dans des conditions impossibles à croire. Elle serpentait orgueilleusement à travers le pays, violant, profanant, détruisant arbres fétiches et lieux tabous sur son passage. Une route sacrilège! (48)

The narrator leaves no doubt as to the perception of this route, symbolic of the colonial “contributions” to progress, as it is also described as “une route odieuse”, “homicide,” and “inutile”. Most telling, perhaps, is the description of the road as being that of the white man: “Homme blanc, voilà ta route! murmuraient enfin quelques voix” (49).

Arriving as missionary, commandant, or doctor, Marius still arrives by way of this “route sacrilège.”

Just as we have already seen in Beti’s novels, there is also a literal and direct connection between the missionary and the colonial military. Soon after Marius’ outburst at the ceremony to defeat Zangali’s epidemic (a scene which nearly leads to the execution

of the priest), the military arrives. With the arrival of Commandant Doubi, Marius becomes aware that the administration has been actively following his presence in Zangali. Doubi declares that “je savais même que vous vous trouviez ici en mission depuis le mois de janvier et que vous aviez des ennuis” (176). Doubi has come to avenge the treatment of the missionary by executing the Chief. The sort of “comportement barbare” of the French Commandant criticized by Marius in his initial meeting with the Chief is now what will “protect” the missionary. The line separating Orientalism’s binaries is clearly drawn, and the white colonizer will be protected from the black native. As Doubi explains to Marius the necessity of such action, he draws precisely upon that distinction: “les nègres ont osé vous torturer comme jamais un blanc ne fut torturé” (180).

As the novel comes to a close, the connection between colonial officials and priests is made clear through both the words and deeds of Commandant Doubi. The work of the missionary and the military are necessarily complementary, Doubi states, as he speaks of “notre oeuvre”, that of “tous les blancs, commerçants, missionnaires-apôtres et administrateurs” (180). After military intervention and conquest, the continued process of colonial domination requires the cooperation of the missionary: “Nous l’avons conquis par la force de nos armes! Notre oeuvre est donc maintenant une oeuvre de pacification! Nos efforts devraient se conjuguer, se compléter.” (180-181). Therefore, it is by serving the national interests and by working alongside colonial administration that a “climat favorable à l’évangélisation” (184) may be created. The goals of “pacification” and “evangelization” are practically one and the same, claims the commandant, and the cooperation of the missionary and the military are essential to the accomplishment of these mutual goals.

## **MORAL DEVELOPMENT: (RE)CONSIDERING THE NATURE OF THE MISSION**

Marius demonstrates a sense of divine mission similar to that which we have already seen in Beti's priests. He is certain that he is doing the work of God. However, we also learn that Marius came to his mission via a particular set of circumstances. In the case of this missionary, we see a man seeking a new source of fulfillment after the death of his wife: "Inconcevable lui parut la notion d'un nouveau mariage. Se remarier? avec qui? Il ne pouvait même se refaire à la vie qu'avec Wanda . . . La terre entière sans cette Wanda-là était devenue un immense cimetière!" (130). He finds a chance at a new life in the priesthood. In a sense, Marius himself has been saved by the priesthood, and it will provide him an escape from his own suffering. Marius, we are told, "avait horreur de vivre en société" after the death of his wife (134). So, when Marius completes his studies, the seminary director offers him the opportunity to serve while separating himself from the society he knows.

It is an opportunity presented to him in a manner that underscores both the divine calling of the mission and the exoticism of the opportunity: "Là-bas chez les nègres sauvages, vous rendrez beaucoup plus de services à Dieu, à l'église. . . et à vous-même!" (134-135). Indeed, this description of the mission placed before Marius exemplifies William Hart's interpretation of the Orientalist as "both missionary and pilgrim" (64) by combining exotic Africa with the civilizing, or evangelizing, mission.

In fact, we learn that Marius himself has both a vision of "la gloire des missionnaires" (53) and a feeling of himself as possible martyr for his cause (112). His personal understanding of his mission mirrors that of the seminary director who

suggested the undertaking. Even in his own eyes, Marius is a both pioneer and savior discovering and saving a romanticized African jungle, “cette jungle africaine dont on parlait tant,” the Africa found in “des récits et des films plus ou moins romancés” (135). Marius can be among those bringing light to the Dark Continent: “Il se dit que le missionnaire-apôtre, dans la brousse africain, est un éclaireur chargé d’amener tout à la lumière . . .” (122). Marius, then, can consider himself an Orientalist hero of the sort described by Hart, “a hero who saved the Orient from obscurity, alienation, and strangeness, who restored a paradise lost” (64). In Saidian terms, he can place himself in a “celebrated” position as one who, as a result of his mission, “transported the Orient into modernity” (*Orientalism* 121).

Even as the end of his time in Africa approaches, Marius continues to see his mission, as well as the entire colonial enterprise, to be justified as a manner of sharing with the African world the “grace of God” that was first given to the whites. It remains, in the eyes of Father Marius, a humanitarian mission misunderstood by those who question Europe’s “ambitions coloniales.” For Marius, the shelter he, Etienne, and Andela have provided to those exiled from Zangali is tangible evidence of such humanitarian concerns. They have taken in and cared for those who were so ill that the village exiled them to the jungle to die. This, for Marius, is clear evidence of the value of the colonial missionary presence:

Au nom de quel Dieu, au nom de quelle civilisation devraient-ils refuser la jouissance de ce bonheur spirituel et matériel à d’autres races humaines moins partagés? A mon avis, c’est dans ce sens que se justifient pleinement les conquêtes coloniales! Les détracteurs de notre oeuvre

missionnaire en Afrique ne me diront jamais au nom de quel humanisme dont ils se réclament, j'aurais eu le droit d'abandonner à leur triste sort, tous ces êtres humains jetés systématiquement en brousse, sur l'ordre des devins et des sorciers indigènes? (174)

To renounce his mission in Zangali would be to turn his back on this "misérable troupeau d'âmes dont notre Seigneur a voulu que je devienne le premier berger" (174). Marius' perspective is one entrenched in the binary vision of Orientalism, and one that sees religious conversion of the region as an act that will go hand in hand with the civilizing of the region. "Il ne lui vint jamais dans la tête l'idée de reculer. Il jurait de transformer ce coin de brousse en un hameau ouvert aux lumières de la civilisation chrétienne" (137). Not only will his missionary work make the pagan Christian, but it will also make the barbaric civilized.

In fact, Marius is not only portrayed as determined and justified in his mission, but also quite content in it and decidedly unaffected by the oppression of the colonial presence:

Qu'il était bien à Mvolyé! La formation des catéchistes et des moniteurs indigènes, la confession, la collecte des menses, de l'écolage et du denier du culte, les tournées à travers des villages déjà 'pacifiés', suivant la terminologie coloniale, voilà quelles fonctions il remplissait habituellement, aidé par plusieurs confrères et n'ayant d'autre souci que de faire chaque jour un nombre plus grand des nouveaux prosélytes! Avec elles, toutes les portes du ciel s'ouvraient devant lui à l'heure de sa mort! (136)

The noble goals of evangelisation and civilization justify the brutal means of which Marius, we are told, is fully aware. With this sense of justification, Marius endorses the oppression of the colonial occupation without any sense of guilt. In fact, Marius anticipates heavenly rewards for his work in what he sees as a divinely ordained endeavor:

Sa conscience était tranquille et exempte de problèmes. A son arrivée, ses confrères lui avaient formellement recommandé: ‘En Afrique noire, l’évangélisation ne va pas sans quelques engueulades et brutalités bien dosées’. Et le nouveau venu, assuré d’une absolution anticipée et permanente, engueulait et brutalisait innocemment! (136)

Thus, Marius is by no means ignorant of the brutality of the colonial occupation. On the contrary, motivated by the seemingly desirable results, he is quite willing to accept such brutality as a necessary part of colonialism and mission.

Yet, despite such a disturbingly enthusiastic acceptance of such “engueulades et brutalités,” we also see a Marius who internally struggles with the morality of his participation in such an endeavor. This struggle is most clearly seen when, attending dinner at Pala for the newly arrived commandant, Marius falls into a sort of dream-like state, “transporté dans un univers inconnu” (77). It is in this daydream that Marius encounters two strange men who debate whether the missionary should continue to falsely play the role of commandant. While one commands “démasquez-vous volontiers,” the other exhorts, “estimez-vous heureux sous ce masque de ‘commandant blanc’” (77). As the debate develops, it follows lines easily applied beyond this particular act of deception.

The arguments of the man favoring Marius' masquerade greatly resemble those that would also justify brutality as a necessary means to civilizing and saving the native population. "Il faut que la Croix du Christ soit plantée parmi les païens de Zangali et que se réalisent les mystérieux desseins de Dieu!" (77), he proclaims, underscoring the idea that the ultimate goal of conversion merits whatever means necessary. Similarly, we have already seen Marius consider that God most likely permits certain sins for those who sin while seeking to make converts. The "apparition" continues to affirm such thoughts, noting that Marius is sure to be rewarded for the converts he makes rather than punished for any deceit along the way and telling him that "en christianisant ces peuplades par tous les moyens, vous feriez entrer plus d'une âme au Paradis! Il est écrit: *la fin justifie les moyens!*" (78).

But another line of thought also continues in Marius' dream as the other apparition counters such arguments. Gaining converts by virtue of his own deception will only sacrifice his integrity. Rather, Marius should only seek those converts he can gain honestly: "Au prix de la vérité, oui! Au prix du mensonge et des ruses, non! déclara le barbu qui, en regardant le R.P. Marius dans les yeux, questionna: Etes-vous vraiment un commandant blanc?" (77). He will continue by citing Christian scriptures to support his position, admonishing the missionary that he should enter by "la porte étroite" (78) and warning "malheur aux pharisiens, qui portent un coeur de lion sous une peau d'agneau" (79). It is a stark contrast with Marius' habitual citing of scriptures intended to justify the upheaval of his presence.

Meanwhile, the argument of the other "apparition" makes for a stark contrast of its own. While thought like that of the Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng

contends that liberation must first come from whatever social or economic oppression that might be suffered, we see argued here the same theory under which Marius and others justify themselves, namely that oppression and suffering are simply a necessary part of the process toward civilizing and converting. Even those who kill as part of the larger mission of God and the Church are sure to be rewarded according the man in Marius' dream, who says he has seen "les portes du Ciel s'ouvrir largement à ces braves catholiques qui avaient pieusement assassiné des millions de musulmans sur la tombe de Jésus-Christ!" (80). Such brutality, like any methods Marius might himself use, is simply a part of achieving God's plan and the spread of the Christian faith.

As the dream comes to an end, the young man who argued for Marius' honesty hangs himself from a tree. Marius will choose to maintain his guise of being a commandant rather than revealing his true identity and will not introduce himself as a priest upon arriving at Zangali. Although not yet visible in the words or deeds of the priest, we have seen here the beginnings of a debate in the heart and mind of Father Marius. In fact, as his voyage progresses, certain statements from Marius himself indicate an underlying, if undeveloped, questioning of his own position.

For instance, we have seen that when Marius is in the midst of falsely presenting himself as an honest man to the Chief at Zangali, he makes a concerted effort to separate himself from the colonial commandants and their reputation for brutality. Although it is an admission made for his own benefit and protection, Marius still does recognize the "comportement barbare" (112) of such people. Furthermore, Marius suggests that his reasons for wanting to see the rite that eventually leads to his outburst are grounded in a desire to better understand the people of Zangali. Indeed, this expressed desire for

mutual understanding may be influenced by Marius' experience living in the jungle with Etienne and Andela. Essentially exiled by the town leaders to a part of the jungle in which they were not expected to be able to survive, the three were forced to work and live together on a level of mutual assistance and benefit. They have constructed their own shelter and gathered their own food in "cette entreprise commune" (140), while comforting one another and trying to temper their own fears. We even see the relationships among the three transcend the implicit hierarchy of a colonial priest, his boy, and a woman to the point, for example, that Andela even "taquinait plaisamment le missionnaire européen ou Azombo pour leur arracher un sourire" (141). In the context of this small community of three, we might say that they have met in the liminal space of the interdependence. Perhaps, then, this experience influences Marius' desire to observe the ritual to rid Zangali of its epidemic. In observing the rite, Marius claims he sees an opportunity to better understand the villagers of Zangali:

Sur un ton neutre mais persuasif, le missionnaire européen leur avait expliqué que, séparés par la couleur de leur peau et leurs coutumes, les races humaines ont le devoir de se mieux comprendre, si elles désirent vivre fraternellement sur la terre. (166)

Such statements are significant because they counter the simplistic binary viewpoint that has dominated the work of the priest. By condemning certain behavior on the part of the Europeans and recognizing the validity of African culture, if only in word, Marius steps toward transcending the otherwise black and white nature of binary Orientalist thought.

However, it is through his actions that Marius comes to another significant change in thought, revealing a deeper transformation. He, along with Etienne and Andela,

having taken in several of the ill who are exiled from the village, managed to save eight from the certain death to which they have been condemned (173). This aid given to those who are ignored and exiled brings to mind the Biblical parable of the good Samaritan. Here we see Marius working with and for those who are literally marginalized due to their illness. As he, Etienne, and Andela, take in the sick who have been cast out of the village for having “la maladie des fantômes,” Marius’ longstanding priority of making converts changes. Rather, Marius now determines that their physical well-being must take priority and tells Mgr Grottel he determined it “urgent et plus important de leur sauver la vie” (173). Marius determines that his actions in caring for the ill, are a tangible demonstration of good will. “Je leur prouve chaque jour, par mes actes, que les ‘sorciers blancs’ veulent le bonheur des hommes noirs,” Marius continues in his letter to Grottel (173). His experience of seeking to help those who suffer, the ill and exiled in this case, rather than proselytize, has created a certain change in perspective.

Unfortunately, his outburst at the ceremony to counteract the plague of illness demonstrates that he continues to struggle with his primary devotion to the mission of conversion and his continued sense of cultural and religious superiority. Nevertheless, his actions toward the ill demonstrate a visible turning of Father Marius’ understanding of his role as a missionary in Africa.

In this act of actively siding with the marginalized in the native population, we may say that we see Marius actually undertaking the beginning of what could lead to authentically “doing” liberation theology. Many liberation theologians note that liberation theology cannot simply be thought, but must be actively “done”. Through this particular experience, Marius gains what theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff call a

“solidarity with the oppressed and their liberation” by gaining a “direct knowledge of the reality of oppression/liberation through effective engagement in solidarity with the poor” (23). Then, in his engagement on behalf of these exiled people, Marius demonstrates a “commitment to the poor” (Boff 23). In so doing, Marius takes on a key task of liberation theology, a preferential option for the poor above all else. At the same time, he is also taking up Said’s call in *Representations of the Intellectual* to be first and foremost on the side of the marginalized.

After the incident at the Zangali, the colonial military, somehow well-informed of the events at Zangali, will descend to “protect” the missionary. When Commandant Doubi arrives to punish the village and especially its Chief for the treatment of the missionary, Marius articulates a new vision as he seeks to have the chief spared:

Il se lança dans un long sermon, condamnant certains missionnaires qui se servaient de l’autorité temporelle pour introduire la religion chrétienne en Afrique. Il jugeait leur action anti-apostolique. En imposant la foi chrétienne, faisait-il observer, elle serait rejetée tôt ou tard par les indigènes. Il préférerait amener ceux-ci à la nouvelle Eglise par la persuasion, plutôt que par la terreur d’intimidation. (180)

Doubi, however, considers Marius’ thoughts to be blasphemous in their own manner, and also insists that the way in which the Africans treated and threatened must be avenged. If Marius dares counter such vengeance, then, Doubi tells him “vous n’avez pas de place en Afrique noire!” (180). Furthermore, Doubi continues, the administration not only expects missionaries not to contradict or impede colonizing work, but they must also collaborate, and thereby actively help the administration to achieve its goals (183). In so doing, that

is by placing national interests first, the missionary will of course also benefit: “Car, ajouta-t-il, en servant les intérêts supérieurs de sa patrie, le missionnaire contribue activement en même temps à l’instauration d’un climat favorable à l’évangélisation!” (184). Doubi’s thoughts would indeed seem to parallel those of Marius through most of his experience in Africa, but in this case Marius does not accept them.

With the arrival of Commandant Doubi and his forces, Marius determines two key things. He must try to stop the execution of the chief, for “si le vieux chef Angula est exécuté, sa conscience ne le laissera jamais dormir en paix” (180). Furthermore, the priest puts himself at the heart of the problem by virtue of the ties of his work to the colonial enterprise, his dogmatic reaction to the ceremony he observed, and the deceit he suddenly chooses to reveal: “Car après tout, c’était lui qui se trouvait à l’origine de l’incident” (180). With the catalyst of this experience at Zangali, Marius now contends directly to Commandant Doubi that the mixing of religious service with nationalistic and colonial motives “n’est pas là le rôle d’un missionnaire apôtre!” (183).

As Marius continues to think and react in this dialogue with the Colonial Administrator, the narrator presents an image of illumination or revelation, stating that “une profonde mystique religieuse l’animait” (184), and in the final paragraphs of the novel, Father Marius, some 16 years after arriving in Cameroon and beginning his mission work asks himself many of the same questions raised in work now defined as postcolonial as well as questions raised by many identified with liberation theology:

Avait-il vraiment le droit de saccager le cagibi de tel ou tel sorcier; de démanteler tel ou tel harem, de rompre telles fiançailles au détriment d’un polygame; de confisquer ou de détruire les instruments de musique de tel

Notable qui n'avait pas cru devoir observer une saison de deuil pendant le Carême? (184)

Ironically, in this list of acts committed by Father Marius over the course of his time in Africa, we see the many of the acts of Drumont and Le Guen as well. We see Father Drumont destroying the musical instruments encountered along his route, and we see Le Guen's disastrous dismantling of a delicate polygamous union. Such acts, Marius has come to determine, are not acts of a civilizing mission at all:

Il se demandait si, en voulant apporter la paix de l'évangile en Afrique, le missionnaire apôtre ne contribuait qu'à apporter en réalité, les horreurs d'une guerre latente, qui n'attendrait que la bonne saison pour germer et sévir? Il lui paraissait désormais difficile de refuser aux colons blancs le nom de "provocateurs barbares". Chambarder les coutumes les plus sacrées d'un peuple constitue bel et bien un acte de provocation! (185)

Despite his dramatic change in perspective, Marius' story, like those of Drumont and Le Guen, has a tragic ending with the sound of a "détonation" that surely indicates the assassination of the chief.

We do not learn how Marius acts on his new understanding, knowing only that he now understands that he no longer has "l'étoffe d'un missionnaire colonial" (185). Yet, his articulation of his personal revelation as the novel closes indicates a new understanding of both the physical destruction and suffering he has endorsed, supported, and even caused. Furthermore, in the case of this particular priest, we also see an understanding of Mveng's concept of anthropological poverty. The colonial presence has not only engendered physical suffering, but it has also caused the native population to

“sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person”

(Mveng, “Impoverishment” 156). This is the poverty that Mveng identifies as anthropological poverty, and, through the very thoughts of Father Marius, we see how it has been caused and encouraged by the action of each of the three priests in these novels.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NATIVE POPULATION: COLONIZED AND EVANGELIZED

As we consider the Christian mission and its presence in the colonial endeavor, we logically turn now from the priests, representative of both the West and the Church, to the native population that the missionary encounters and seeks to convert. These are the “autochtones,” who are unlike those of the new governing race who “vien[nent] d’ailleurs” (Fanon, *Les damnés* 71). They are the “non-persons” identified by Gustavo Gutierrez’ theology, those whom Englebert Mveng identifies as being offered a spiritual liberation that seems irrelevant to their position as part of an occupied and dominated race. They are the exotic Oriental of a Western-created identity. Perhaps most significantly, they are those of the race that is seen as inferior and in dire need of the *mission civilisatrice*. Indeed, for Fanon in *Les damnés de la terre*, their race is at the heart of their oppression by the entire colonial system, including the Church: “Quand on aperçoit dans son immédiateté le contexte colonial, il est patent que ce qui morcelle le monde c’est d’abord le fait d’appartenir ou non à telle espèce, à telle race” (70).

Both Beti and Philombe present a wide range of reactions to and interactions with the colonial missionary presence on the part of the native population. Some are moved and converted by the missionary message, others also convert but with less sincerity, whether it be out of fear of suffering or out of a desire to reap personal benefit from an integration into one of the establishments of the colonial empire. Just as we have seen

evidence of the priests' skepticism at the sincerity of many conversions, we also see in the native populations examples of skepticism concerning the sincerity of the missionary's message and motives. Through many of the characters in these novels, we may explore the interactions of the native population with this particular arm of the colonial occupation, the mission.

### ***LE PAUVRE CHRIST DE BOMBA***

#### **DENIS: MISSION BOY TO FATHER DRUMONT**

Father Drumont's mission boy is ever present as the narrator of this novel and, therefore the source of all our information. It becomes clear quite early that if we should suspect any bias in the information provided by this narrator, we should expect it to be a bias that favors the mission and Father Drumont. Denis is so closely associated with Drumont that one of the women from the sixa refers to him as "le fils du R.P.S." (83), but this intended insult is unlikely to be perceived as such by Denis. Rather, Denis states on multiple occasions that he considers Drumont to be like a father to him and that he loves him as such. Denis also seems convinced that the admiration is mutual: "Je crois bien que le R.P.S. se rend compte combien je l'admire; autrement pourquoi aurait-il tant d'indulgence pour moi? Pourquoi serait-il avec moi comme un père?" (29). Thus, Denis quickly establishes himself to the reader as a most loyal friend and supporter of the priest and his mission.

This loyalty to Drumont also colors how Denis sees those of his own community, those of his own race. For example, those who do not conform to the behavior expected

of them seem to Denis as if they do so simply because they wish to “mettre le R.P.S. en colère” (12). Those who question the Father or who resist his commands are categorized by Denis on various occasions as insolent, irreverent, and arrogant. For example, Denis tells of a young man at the village of Timbo who requests that his fiancée be released from the sixa and returned to him, suggesting that the mission has taken her from him. As described by Denis, this man is little more than a “jeune insolent” whom Drumont is quite justified in sending away without giving serious consideration to his complaints.

We have previously cited theologian Englebert Mveng’s assertion that a viable presence of Christianity in Africa must be separated from European religion and culture and be “truly African.” Yet Denis, as the most loyal and prominent convert in the novel, has clearly developed an understanding that is to the contrary. He even appears to have developed the same attachment to Western amenities that we have previously discussed as representing a separation between the priests and the native population. When Denis learns that he will be accompanying Drumont on a tour of the isolated Tala country, he expresses apprehension at leaving the comforts afforded him at the mission. Calling to mind a noble European leaving the Continent for the dark jungle of Africa, Denis laments his own voyage into the jungle:

Pendant quinze jours, ce sera la forêt. A perte de vue, rien que la forêt, rien que les arbres. Au lieu de notre nouvelle église magnifique, des clochers géants, de vitraux multicolores, des cloches dont le tintement harmonieux s’accorde, à midi et à la tombée de la nuit, au chœur mélodieux de femmes de la sixa récitant l’Angélus. Au lieu de la haute et longue mission des pères, entourée de parterres de fleurs et dont les murs

blancs sont encore rendus plus blancs par l'éclat métallique du soleil. Au lieu de ce vacarme familial que font les écoliers quand ils sont en récréation... La forêt, rien qu'elle; le long de chaque jour. (23)

Denis' description of what he will be leaving, with terms such as "magnifique", "harmonieux," "mélodieux," and, most significantly, light and white, is strikingly opposed to the dark forest he says he will be entering. This short description, underscored by his views of those who dare question the Father, demonstrates that Denis himself has taken on the binary, Manichean thinking that places the mission clearly on the side of good and light and the jungle on the side of evil and darkness. He has taken on what Fanon describes in *Peau noire, masques blancs* as the "phénomènes nauséux" of incorporating the ways and views of the dominating white race (38).

Indeed, Denis feels a definite sense of separation from the local population, speaking frequently of them as others, for instance, referring to "des gens tels que le Tala" who fall short of the Christian moral code (102). Such a statement could easily come from any colonizer who speaks of this "other" people. Denis even appears to fully accept the idea that any suffering brought about by the colonial presence will justifiably serve to push the natives to convert: "A mon avis, Dieu lui-même devrait envoyer un signe à ces gens pour les remettre dans la bonne voie, un malheur collectif... Je ne sais pas, moi, quelque chose d'exemplaire" (26). In contrast to the African villages in need of a misfortune sent by God to coerce their conversion, Denis dreams of Provence, a land that takes on an exotic glory in his mind. In his view, it is a land free both of sin, as men marry one woman and stay with her for life, and of jungles, as one can always see for miles around the countryside speckled with churches. Furthermore, it is the land of all

the luxuries missing from Denis' homeland: "Les automobiles, les trains, les avions, on ne les compte même plus" (83). For both its luxury and its purity, this land of the white man from which Father Drumont comes is like a paradise, and Denis longingly imagines: "Comme ce doit être bien, là-bas!" (83).

Later, when Denis learns that the sixa at Bomba has become a corrupt brothel and that the women are suffering from an epidemic of syphilis, he is sure that such a scandal would never occur in France. On the contrary, it is the kind of disaster that could only be created by Denis' own race: "C'est vrai, ça, nous sommes une drôle de race, nous! Et peut-être bien que nous sommes maudits, comme dit la Bible? Il ne se produit certainement pas des histoires comme celle-ci dans le pays du R.P.S." (302). Here, Denis articulates the "image dépréciée" of his own race that Fanon claims colonialism seeks to establish. The revelations of scandal at the mission are, to Denis, evidence of the lack of sincerity of the faith of those who live near Bomba and surely have nothing to do with those directly associated with the mission. Ironically, Drumont questions the conversions and faith of many near the mission at Bomba because the proximity of a road has likely led them to convert in order to avoid forced labor, but Denis judges them even more severely and simply finds them weak of faith and unable to handle the moral rigor of Christianity (304).

In her article "Mongo Beti's Priests in Perspective," Susan Gasster notes that "Denis sides with Vidal, the colonial administrator who suggests to Drumont that subjecting the Tala to the horror of a road-building *corvée* would win them to the Catholic cause" (292). When he hears Drumont protest to the administrator Vidal concerning the native population's participation in the road project, Denis is unable to

grasp the significance of these protests even though they come from the man he most admires and despite the fact that he has actually witnessed such forced labor:

Tiens cette histoire de route... J'ai cru comprendre qu'on viendra les extraire de leurs cases, qu'on les courbera sous le soleil, qu'on les fera travailler du matin au soir à piocher, à remuer la terre sans arrêt. Ouais! Je crois que j'ai bien compris; c'est certainement cela. Je savais bien qu'un jour Dieu les frapperait. Ouais! je commence à comprendre. Un malheur devait bien finir par leur arriver tôt ou tard. J'ai vu creuser la route Manding-Zomba; c'était terrible! Les gens travaillaient attachés à une corde qui s'enroulait autour de la taille du premier, allait s'enrouler autour de la taille du suivant et ainsi de suite. (66)

Indeed, for Denis, this is exactly the sort of event that could only benefit the work of Father Drumont and lead the people to their conversion.

On verra les Tala pleurer d'humiliation de fatigue et de désespoir, comme pleuraient ceux qui ont creusé la route Manding-Zomba; on les verrait pleurer de douleur comme de pauvres femmes. On les verrait accourir vers le R.P.S., même ceux d'entre eux qui n'ont jamais voulu recevoir le baptême, exactement comme c'est arrivé parmi les hommes qui creusaient la route Manding-Zomba. C'est étonnant combien les hommes peuvent avoir soif de Dieu quand la chicote leur strie le dos. (67)

So, not only is Denis willing to accept the suffering caused by such a project in exchange for the material benefit he perceives for the mission, but he also hopes to see it as a necessary means of "leading" the people to God. Contrary to the humanitarian impetus

of liberation theologians to free people from oppression and contrary to the postcolonial theme of speaking for those who have no voice, Denis “is clearly more seduced by the glory of his relationship with Drumont than moved by compassion for the flock” (Gasster, “Perspective” 293).

Similarly, Bernard Mouralis notes that Denis’ perspective is clearly influenced by his experience with Drumont: “le narrateur a subi largement l’influence du milieu dans lequel il vit . . . intériorisant toutes les leçons dispensées par le maître, voyant le monde à travers le regard de ce dernier” (42). In this incident with Vidal, we see that Denis has accepted the views of the priest to the point that he is unable even to follow when Drumont himself begins to question the validity of some of these beliefs. In fact, on several occasions, Denis expresses his frustration that the missionary appears to be becoming less rigid and less demanding in his dealings with the people of his parish. For Gasster, Denis becomes full of “impatience and frustration that the aggressive, self-assured priest has become so flaccid in his responses toward the Tala” (Perspective 292). As an African convert working with the mission, Denis has so fully incorporated an ideology of Western and Christian superiority that he cannot detect or understand changes in Drumont’s perspective.

Although Denis sees nobility in his work for the church, noting, for example, that his work “est certainement plus noble que celui de Zacharie” (110), he also clearly manifests the guilt and fear that we have seen the missionaries seek to instill in their proselytes. This is most evident in his reaction to his sexual encounter with Catherine, a woman from the sixa (139). His sense of guilt is so profound that Denis cannot help trying to place blame beyond him and to convince himself and the reader of his noble

efforts to resist temptation. Consequently, Denis cannot help but place the blame fully on Catherine herself: “Et tout ça à cause de cette maudite femme, cette Catherine de malheur. Ah! Celle-là, est Satan en personne” (139), and it is an encounter which, at least as he recounts it, Denis attempts to resist, begging her to leave: “Je t’en supplie, va-t’en dans ta chambre. Pour l’amour de Dieu, va-t’en hors d’ici” (143). When he can no longer resist the temptation Catherine poses, Denis blames his ignorance, “si seulement j’avais su comment cela se passerait, sûr que je me serais méfié” (145). After the fact, however, Denis is infatuated by Catherine, speaking often of her beauty and hoping for any opportunity to be alone with her: “Et je souhaitais qu’il arrive encore un accident ou n’importe quoi, pourvu que je sois seul avec Catherine et à nouveau, nous ferions ça” (155). However, his infatuation remains profoundly conflicted, since Denis struggles with guilt about his feeling for Catherine: “je ne devrais pas penser à cette femme” (156). This omnipresent guilt clearly indicates that, even as a most loyal convert, Denis remains very much controlled by fear of retribution for actions that are not in keeping with the Father’s commands and teachings.

This fear of the Father does, in fact, seem to dominate Denis’ decisions in many cases. On one of several occasions when Denis suspects Zacharie of being with a girl, he considers telling the priests but withdraws because of his fear that he might somehow be implicated: “Il ne faut surtout pas que je me mêle de cette sale histoire. Pourvu que le R.P.S. n’en sache rien: il s’imaginerait peut-être que je suis la complice de Zacharie” (100). Denis later tells the reader that he is especially afraid to confess his liason with Catherine because it is a sin for which the Father surely will not forgive him (152). His fear and shame become so overwhelming that they overcome his thoughts for days (180).

When Catherine, who is also Zacharie's mistress, comes into conflict with Clémentine, Zacharie's wife, Denis, once again motivated by fear of retribution, seems most concerned with his own interests. He is particularly concerned that his "sins" with Catherine not be revealed (193). His sense of self-preservation is underscored when Clémentine confronts him and then bursts into tears at her own plight as an abandoned wife. Denis remarks that he wanted to cry as well, but only because of his own situation: "Moi aussi, j'avais envie de pleurer, non sur elle, mais sur moi-même" (195). Later, Denis expresses his fear that "Catherine n'aurait aucune peine à me mettre en cause si elle le voulait" (205). The same fear that encourages Denis to adhere to the teachings of "his" church also moves him to fear for his own safety above that of all others, even as he witnesses women from the sixa being beaten. Gasster notes in her study that "when Denis reports on the beatings of the women in the sixa, he himself is in terror of being denounced by Catherine, the woman from the sixa who has deflowered him" (Gasster "Perspective" 292). Despite the fact that he enjoys a privileged position in a colonial establishment, one that might be considered a position of special freedom from colonial domination, Denis' comforts at the mission pale in comparison to the mental shackles that hound him with guilt and push him toward self-preservation at the expense of concern for others. As such, Denis is hardly less oppressed than those of his own race whom he looks down upon. As Fanon suggests in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, physical freedom has little significance when it is not coupled with mental freedom.

Thus Denis appears to have gained little from his special position at the mission beyond a sense of superiority of the Christian religion, Europe, and the white race. To a great extent, he has lost his connection with his own heritage and its values. For

example, we have already noted Denis' "image dépréciée" of Africa and its people. When Denis tells of visiting homes with Drumont, it is clear that he is now personally distanced from his own traditions, for, as he admits: "Nous ne pouvions pas rester longtemps dans les cases à cause de la fumée qui les emplissait et qui causait une sensation d'étouffement extrêmement désagréable pour qui n'y est pas habitué, ou pour qui en a perdu l'habitude comme moi" (111). Sadly, Denis now lacks the ability to interact with the people of his community and can only think of fleeing for another place. Rather than having become part of the Africanization of the church that Mveng calls for, Denis has instead become separated from his own African identity.

Yet, bound by race, Denis cannot fully identify with the church for which he works. Denis closes the novel, after the departure of Drumont for Europe, by telling the reader that he is thinking of leaving town before a new labor project comes near his village for which "ils me prendraient certainement aussi, malgré mon jeune âge" (349). So Denis, without any real place of identity, considers neither remaining in his native village nor seeking a way to maintain a relationship with the mission and the Church. Rather, he plans to "aller à la ville chercher une petite place de boy" with a European merchant (349). He will leave the church, but remain an African boy working for a white colonizer, surely still dreaming of paradise in Europe.

## **ZACHARIE: THE MISSION COOK**

Zacharie, who has worked for the mission for twelve years (270), presents a significant contrast to Denis. According to Denis, he is Drumont's constant companion,

yet is always betraying the Father (22). While Denis is completely taken in by the ideology of the colonial mission and its relation to the church, Zacharie is the voice of cynicism in the mission, having feigned conversion for the sake of gaining and maintaining a lucrative job. Zacharie is significant to the novel for precisely these two reasons, his questioning voice and his abuse of his position for personal gain.

While Denis sees the Tala people desperately in need of the salvation that Drumont offers, Zacharie counters that they are surely quite content that the Father has not visited them in over three years: “Il dit que ces gens doivent être plutôt heureux que personne n’aille plus les embêter chaque année” (16). For his part, Zacharie certainly doesn’t see the Father as a representative of God (29). Furthermore, he questions the value of Christianity for the native population and wonders why Denis would be surprised by their “un-Christian” behavior. When Denis speaks of “leurs iniquités” he interrupts, “C’est normal, non? Qu’est-ce que tu veux que ça leur foute, vos histoires de confesse, de communion, de... je ne sais plus quoi, hein? Je te le demande, qu’est-ce que tu veux bien que ça leur foute? Ils sont occupés d’autre chose, mon petit père” (36).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Zacharie points out Drumont’s position as an outsider with his commentary on the inappropriateness of Drumont’s allusions to the concept of a “good shepherd” (47). Zacharie clearly sees what is never apparent to the missionary himself, the fact that his cultural presumptions hinder his own communication with the people whom he wishes to reach and even goes so far as to alienate him from them. Although he sees no particular reason for the European church to be in Africa, Zacharie appears to recognize more readily than the missionaries themselves the complications of the cultural divide between the missionary and the African.

Zacharie understands, then, that the missionary is no different from any other colonizer, motivated by the desire for power and wealth. However, the cultural gap hinders the missionary's effort to gain and maintain power. Zacharie challenges Drumont's assertion that the new road to be built through Tala country will be a great "malheur" (72) on two counts. First, according to Zacharie, the completion of the road might lead to more wealth for the people of the area: "Père, tu crains qu'ils ne deviennent plus riches, hein? Parce que, avec une route, ils deviendraient certainement plus riches" (72). Secondly, Zacharie asserts that, in reality, the Father must be pleased to see such a project coming: "Mon Père, tu dois être content, très content, hein? Tu as obtenu ce que tu voulais, n'est-ce pas? On les traitera comme des bêtes et ils seront très malheureux. Alors, ils viendront à toi et ils diront: 'Mon Père, toi seul es bon, tu es vraiment notre père. Pardonne-nous de ne pas t'avoir écouté plus tôt.' (74). Consequently, Drumont will gain the converts who can provide him with both income and labor at the Bomba mission. In other words, Zacharie is keenly aware that projects such as their road construction effort, are not necessarily seen as "malheur" by a missionary who can directly benefit from its presence.

Zacharie also acts as a voice that contests Drumont's sense of moral superiority. This is most evident when Zacharie questions Drumont's desire to stop a "pagan" dance at the village of Evindi: "Pourquoi veut-il les empêcher de danser, du moment qu'ils ne sont pas chrétiens?" (88). In other words, Zacharie seems to be asking on what grounds can Drumont claim authority over those who do not even adhere to his faith. "Je croyais qu'il s'était assagi" (88), says Zacharie, believing that Drumont should by now be wise enough to avoid situations that will put his authority in question. Unlike Denis, Zacharie

does not accept the concept that Drumont and the Church bring a moral code appropriate to be directly instilled in the African culture. Not surprisingly, the reaction to Drumont's effort to stop the dance is just what Zacharie expected. Matthieu, a catechist sent to deliver the priest's demand, returns after having been turned away: "Naturellement, les gens qui faisaient la fête l'avaient envoyé promener" (88). In this situation, both Zacharie and Matthieu stand in stark contrast to the moral universalism that Drumont presents and wishes to impose. Matthieu himself questions Drumont when the priest asks him to deliver the message that the music and dancing are immoral and must stop, noting that "ce ne sont pas les nôtres qui dansent; ce sont les autres, les païens" (87). These people, Zacharie and Matthieu seem to be saying, have no reason to be expected to alter their behavior based on Drumont's commands.

Even those associated with the church are not necessarily likely to turn completely from their heritage, as Zacharie himself demonstrates. While Drumont is visibly troubled by the sounds of music he hears in the distance, Zacharie "continuait à siffloter avec eux, en battant le sol des pieds" (86), demonstrating a connection with those who dance even when he is in the presence of the priest. Later, he laughs at the concept of exorcism as "il [Zacharie] prétend que ce n'est pas possible, aucun diable ne séjourne dans aucun homme; les gens font ce qu'ils veulent" (129). The exorcism, of course, would be intended to elicit a dramatic change in behavior in the individual, not unlike the change Drumont hopes to bring about in the entire region. Zacharie offers himself as an example that such an endeavor is destined to fail: "La preuve, c'est que moi, on pourrait m'exorciser pendant dix ans, je continuerais quand même à faire ce que je veux" (129). This, of course, not only demonstrates Zacharie's thoughts regarding the validity of

exorcism, but also his general relation to the religion of the man for whom he works. Zacharie certainly feels no compulsion to change his personal behavior based on the tenets of the religion with which he has affiliated himself. For Zacharie, his personal situation is not at all unlike that of the vast majority in the region, but Drumont, just as he is unaware of Zacharie's position, is blind to the fact that the people do not wish to change their way of life based on the commands of a missionary. Speaking of Drumont, Zacharie notes that "il ne voit pas qu'il les exaspère" (164), and indicates that even the people who have been converted are becoming less and less interested in practicing their new faith: "Ils se laissaient tous baptiser et traiter comme ci ou comme ça: ils voulaient voir ce que c'était. Maintenant, ça ne les intéresse plus" (164).

Yet, despite his clear dismissal of the religious dogma put forth by Drumont and his church, Zacharie continues to work for the priest and refrains from directly questioning him. Zacharie, rather, presents an example of the native who is seduced by the power and wealth of the colonial empire and fixes his attention on it with a "look of lust". This power and wealth, says Fanon, is very appealing to the native: "Il n'y a pas un colonisé qui ne rêve au moins une fois par jour de s'installer à la place du colon" (*Les damnés* 39). While Denis sacrifices his connection with his native culture for the priest's ideology, Zacharie places himself in the mission for its wealth and power.

Denis notes that people say that Zacharie has grown very rich since coming to the mission (22). The houseboy likewise laments "les hypocrisies de Zacharie" (53), who maintains his position by keeping the priest fooled. In this particular case, Zacharie asks Drumont his opinion of what the cook calls "ma cuisine" when, as usual, he has actually done no work in preparing it: "Bien sûr, ce n'est pas lui qui avait préparé le repas, mais

des gosses . . .” (53). In other words, Zacharie is simply an example of one who seeks personal gain and power from his relationship with the priest while believing none of what the missionary says or does, and, in fact, completely distrusting the actions and motives of the priest himself.

Zacharie’s selfish motives manifest themselves in many ways. For example, Clémentine, his mistress, confirms that Zacharie does little work at the mission, “ne travaillant guère, laissant faire tout le travail par le cuisinier adjoint ou par les gosses de l’école” (195). Furthermore, Zacharie benefits financially from his relation with Drumont, receiving a portion of all the gifts the Father receives (134) and possessing a house that Denis describes as so luxurious “qu’elle provoquait l’envie même des moniteurs, sans parler des autres employés” (270). In a situation Denis likens to robbery, Zacharie arranges to keep many gifts that had otherwise been refused:

Tiens, au cours de la dernière tournée, j’ai été témoin d’une combine atroce. Le vicaire, qui est un nouveau venu, ne sait rien et il refusait les présents qu’on lui faisait. Zacharie, qui s’était douté que cela se passerait ainsi, s’était entendu avec le cuisinier adjoint, lequel accompagnait le vicaire en tournée, pour qu’à l’insu du vicaire, le cuisinier adjoint prenne tous les présents refusés et les expédie rapidement à Zacharie qui était resté à Bomba. A notre retour à la mission, ils se sont partagé leur butin.

Naturellement, Zacharie a eu la meilleure part. (134-135)

In Zacharie’s opinion, even Father should take advantage of his own opportunities for financial gain rather than risk himself in the Tala country:

Mais le R.P.S. n'a pas l'air de se rendre compte combien sa mission est riche et importante. Les gens croient beaucoup, partout sur la route; il n'y a qu'ici que les choses vont plutôt mal. Avec les seuls chrétiens de la route et les ressources de leur denier du culte, le R.P.S. pourrait aggrandir sa mission tant qu'il voudrait: construire une nouvelle école en briques; acheter un orgue, des camions, un tracteur, une machine à extraire l'huile d'arachide, etc. (165)

Drumont already has the means to develop a very successful presence in the region, claims Zacharie. He can make himself and his mission quite wealthy without risking conflict with those who are much more likely to resist. Clearly, Zacharie finds the missionary to be motivated by the pursuit of power and wealth, but Zacharie demonstrates no particular desire to resist such an imposing presence. Rather, the cook is quite willing to participate in the work of the mission for the sake of his own personal gain.

However, after years of very comfortable living, Zacharie's personal endeavor will also have a disastrous outcome. The situation begins to fall apart for Zacharie when his wife arrives to confront him about his affair with a woman from the sixa. Drumont, ignoring any role he and his sixa may have played in the development of such circumstances, blames Zacharie for the often violent conflict between his wife and his mistress, telling him, "cette histoire, ce scandale, c'est toi qui l'a provoqué" (206). But Zacharie refuses to assume any responsibility, claiming that "cette histoire ne le regardait pas et que lui ne l'avait pas cherchée" (206). In addition to a confrontation with the Father, who accuses Zacharie of falsely claiming to be a "good Christian" (217),

Zacharie's comportment with Catherine also leads to a violent conflict with a local man, her fiancé. Well aware of Zacharie's behavior, Catherine's fiancé seeks him out to confront him. The resulting fight leaves Zacharie brutally beaten, sobbing, and humiliated (228). Clearly, his standing with the local population is destroyed. Later, Zacharie will flee the mission at Bomba when Drumont becomes aware of the key role he has played in the scandal at the sixa and of further accusations of mistreating his wife (270).

Clearly, Zacharie's very most lucrative job of a dozen years is lost, as is his dignity in the village. Although for very different reasons, he, like Denis, is isolated from both the culture of the mission and the local culture. His pursuit of personal gain provoked the anger both Drumont and the fiancé of his mistress, of the white priest and the African alike.

### **RAPHAEL: DIRECTOR OF THE SIXA**

Like his friend Zacharie, Raphaël represents an African who manages to take full advantage of his position with the mission for his own personal gain. As catechist and director of the sixa, he holds a much more prestigious and respected position than Zacharie. He is able to take full advantage of his position without being discovered by Father Marius. For Thomas Melone, Raphaël is "le tartuffe de Bomba qui sut pratiquer la religion avec constance et onction au point de mystifier complètement le Père Drumont"(165). "[S]urmontant tout scruple" (Melone 155), Raphaël is able to exploit of his position of authority, especially his control over the distribution of work assignments at the sixa, to establish and maintain control over the women residing there (280). When

one of the women describes the level of power assumed by Raphaël, she explains to Drumont: “Mais, Père, il y a une chose que tu ne sembles pas avoir bien comprise: en donnant la sixa à diriger à Raphaël, tu lui as dit par le fait même: ‘Voilà tes femmes: elles t’appartiennent. Fais-en ce que tu veux’” (291).

We learn that Raphaël even undermines the Father’s supervision by directing the sixa women as to how they should respond to any questions posed by the missionary (290). Since Raphaël is both capable and willing to make life miserable for the women (the conditions at the sixa will be further discussed in the following chapter), they naturally tend to follow his wishes (291). As a result of this sort of control, Raphaël gains his own profit, manipulating all of the liaisons of the sixa women: “Et le catéchiste Raphaël provoquait, nouait, dénouait des liaisons à son gré, parce qu’il en tirait profit. Parce que les gens qui avaient des petites amies à la sixa lui payaient de l’argent” (296). After Drumont begins to discover how Raphaël has run the sixa, Raphaël flees. Like Zacharie before him, he avoids all responsibility (305).

Beti’s presentation of the disturbing greed and lack of concern for others embodied in these two natives, Zacharie and Raphaël, is particularly important because it demonstrates that the integration of the African into an aspect of the colonial power structure does not necessarily lead to significant change for the better in the nature of that structure. Furthermore, Beti refuses the temptation to simply reverse the binary power structure of colonialism. According to Fernando Lambert, “[h]e goes so far as to break the simplistic antithesis between the good black and the evil white. Beti’s Africans are indeed normal men, capable of the best as of the worst, and responsible, in spite of everything, for their acts” ( 79). Through both Zacharie and Raphaël, the abusive nature

of the colonial structure itself is called into question, whether the oppressor be European or African.

### **SANGA BOTO: SORCERER**

Through Sanga Boto, the reader witnesses a direct confrontation between the priest, representative of the colonial religion, and the “sorcerer,” representative of a local religious option. Before having personally encountered Boto, Drumont has nevertheless been aware of him, and he is, according to a local woman, a man against whom Drumont has often preached (79). Through Denis, we gain a clear idea of how Drumont has spoken of Sanga Boto. Denis refers to him as “le suppôt de Satan, l’homme qui prétend travailler contre Dieu Tout-Puissant” (109), surely repeating much of what he has heard Drumont say from the pulpit. In fact, the priest and the sorcerer are clearly both seeking the religious loyalty of the population. Denis tells us that the village chief at Evindi is “bienveillant” toward Drumont but goes on to say that “il est surtout bienveillant pour Sanga Boto” (115). Here we see a clear example of the missionary and the sorcerer being in direct competition, to the point that Drumont wishes to catch Boto. Denis tells us that Drumont “avait donc décidé de prendre Sanga Boto” (115), as if the sorcerer’s influence must be physically stopped.

Boto, we learn, has gained great personal wealth and influence by virtue of the rather questionable sort of religion he offers. It must be noted that he is most often referred to as “the man with the mirror” because of the way in which he receives his visitors:

Lui est assis devant un grand miroir, tournant le dos à la porte: en général, il fait noir autour de lui. Il a à sa droite une marmite pleine d'eau de pluie. Eh bien, un client entre et s'approche jusqu'à ce que Sanga Boto qui, en principe, ne le voit que dans son miroir, lui dise de s'arrêter. (116)

As we learn more about Sanga Boto and his methods, the fact that he is associated with a mirror becomes more and more significant, for it is as if we see a reflection of the methods of his counterpart, Father Drumont, the man who sees Boto "comme son pire ennemi" (117). Offering "conseils médiocres" surrounded by an air of authority and knowledge, Boto endears himself to the people who come to trust him. Certainly, this calls to mind our earlier analysis of the priest's efforts to assert his own moral authority while seeking to make converts of the natives. In both cases, we see such supposed authority used as a pretext for efforts to coerce adherence to a particular religious path. Furthermore, we know, through Denis, that Drumont often receives gifts from his parishioners, while Boto finds himself so showered with gifts that "il ne peut plus compter son argent" (118).

Underscoring how very much alike these two may be, Denis actually thinks for a moment that Drumont must be impressed after learning about Boto's methods: "Le R.P.S. hochait la tête en admiration. Je me suis demandé s'il n'allait pas soudain se mettre à admirer Sanga Boto," he says before determining that the gesture of admiration is intended for the local catechist recounting the story. Nevertheless, it is significant that such admiration is at least briefly plausible in the eyes of Drumont's loyal companion. Finally, the words of Father Drumont himself ironically speak of exactly how dangerous a man like Boto can be: "Des gens comme Sanga Boto sont extrêmement dangereux. Ils

arrivent comme ça parmi une population naïve and superstitieuse; ils se mettent à la bonimenter en faisant des simagrées, en s'entourant de mystère. Après quoi, ils l'exploitent" (117-118). To this admonition, the catechist reassures Drumont that the people eventually open their eyes to such deception under the guise of religion:

Oh! nous en avons vu bien d'autres qui ont eu autant de popularité que ce Sanga Boto et autant de faveur. Mais les gens finissent toujours par découvrir tout le vide qui cachent leurs simagrées et leurs incantations; alors, ils les abandonnent, ils les narguent même; ils font des chansons dans lesquelles ils les raillent. Sanga Boto aussi, la même chose lui arrivera. (118)

Drumont, of course, does not see a mirror image of himself in Sanga Boto, but rather sees his antithesis. In fact, the missionary seeks out the sorcerer in order to confront Boto about his efforts, in Drumont's own words, to "tromper les chrétiens, les enfants de Dieu" (129).

Their meeting is a very public encounter, observed by most inhabitants of the village of Ekokot. When the missionary confronts Boto, we witness an encounter between a Christian missionary and the novel's representative of indigenous religion. Symbolic of the broader encounter between the native tradition and the colonial religion, the meeting of Father Drumont and Sanga Boto paints a brutal picture of a dangerous man, Father Drumont. Drumont's treatment of Boto is both violent and humiliating: "le R.P.S. a saisi le suppôt de Satan par le bras et il l'a tiré violemment hors de la case . . . Et tout à coup je me suis aperçu que ses pieds étaient nus: l'homme avait perdu ses babouches. Visiblement, cela lui faisait mal de marcher pieds nus mais le R.P.S. ne s'en

souciait pas” (126). Drumont demonstrates no concern or respect for Boto’s pain or shame as he drags him through the village to be mocked by all of the residents:

Sanga Boto a traversé le village en court caleçon blanc et il avait honte. Il criait au R.P.S. qu’il était nu, qu’il ne pouvait traverser le village comme ça. Mais le R.P.S. n’arrêtait pas de le tirer par la main et Sanga Boto courait presque, alors que le R.P.S. faisait tout simplement de grands pas. Des enfants et des femmes nous suivaient en riant: ils riaient très haut.  
(126)

Even Sanga Boto’s family is tormented. One of his wives arrives in tears, “elle pleurait très haut” (127), bringing clothes so that Boto might at least dress himself. She is told to leave almost immediately upon arriving and obeys out of fear: “Elle est sortie rapidement, presque en courant: elle avait peur” (127). Thus the initial encounter between the colonial and native religions is both violent and humiliating toward the local representative, while the European demonstrates his power.

Even more striking, Drumont then literally forces the Christian religion upon Sanga Boto: “Il s’est précipité dans l’église: il a fait mettre Sanga Boto à genoux devant la Table sainte et il est entré dans la sacristie pour mettre les ornements” (127). Shamed and full of fear, Boto is unable to resist: “Sanga Boto n’a pas opposé la moindre résistance” (126). Rather, Boto only points out that he has not sought any sort of conflict with the Father but has only gone about practicing a form of religion that appealed to many in the area: “Père, Père! Qu’est-ce que je t’ai fait? Pourquoi me maltraiter ainsi? Que t’ai-je fait?” (126). Yet Drumont, under the guise of the *mission civilisatrice*, resorts to violence and force to rid the area of this “extremely dangerous” man. Hiding

behind what Said calls an “illusion of benevolence” (*Culture* xvii), Drumont is willing to resort to these means in order to remove Boto’s influence. Yet, in so doing, he also removes Boto’s dignity: Denis tells us that “Sanga Boto était à genoux et il pleurait” (127) and mentions on at least four occasions that he “baissait la tête” (128) throughout the ordeal.

Boto’s confessions of the falsehoods surrounding his reputation underscore the manner in which one, as previously discussed, might mislead in order to bring converts to God. Boto confesses, under duress, that his seemingly magical mirror was no different from any other mirror and admits that the questions he asked of those who approached him were always intentionally vague (130). Ironically, Denis contemplates those who followed Boto and wonders “comment ils se sont laissé abuser ainsi” (130). Yet, we have already seen the priests of these novels resort to deceitful tactics themselves in order to win converts. We have discussed in the previous chapter the manner in which, for example, Drumont and other priests resorted to instilling fear, to claiming false miracles, and to assuming false identities in their efforts to entice the people to follow their religion.

Following Sanga Boto’s coerced confessions, Drumont tells him that “Dieu te pardonne,” commands that he give up his wives and his “sorcelleries,” and compels him to recite a prayer (131). On the basis of these events alone, Boto is considered a convert (133), although the willingness of his conversion is obviously quite questionable, to say the very least. Then, having gathered a large crowd in the church to witness the confrontation, the priest forces them to stay for the Mass that follows the “conversion”. When people begin to leave the church, “Le R.P.S. s’en est aperçu, il s’est retourné et il a

crié haut qu'on ferme les portes" (132). While Boto has just confessed attracting people with the false powers of his mirror, Drumont now uses this incident, in all its brutality, to literally trap the people in the church.

A conversion influenced by the burden of any sort of poverty or oppression, Englebert Mveng would surely tell us, is unlikely to have any profound effect. Thus it is very important to note that the "victory" of Boto's supposed conversion is very soon contested by rumors of Boto's motivations for accepting the humiliating behavior of the priest. According to Boto, he was not at all frightened of the Father himself since he "n'est qu'un sorcier tout comme lui-même" (152). Rather, Boto "s'est laissé malmener et humilier uniquement parce que le R.P.S. est un blanc et son frère – l'administrateur Vidal battait le pays" (152). Boto's fear is of possible retribution from the colonial administration, not from Drumont or Drumont's god. In essence, his conversion is no different from those conversions that Drumont himself has questioned. Drumont worries that those near road projects who have converted have done so only out of fear of how they might otherwise suffer at the hands of the colonial administration, and Boto's conversion is much the same.

It should be noted that it is only after this encounter that we see Sanga Boto take a threatening tone toward the priest. Clearly, Boto had been content, in a manner of speaking, to co-exist with the presence of the Christian missionary in the region. After an incident in which the priest nearly drowns in a river, word spreads that the accident was a result of Boto's sorcery against Drumont and "depuis cet accident, Sanga Boto ne s'était appliqué à rien tant qu'à répandre des rumeurs dans ce sens" (186). Furthermore, Drumont's adversarial stance appears to have gained him no advantage. Despite

Drumont's "conversion" of Boto, a catechist at the Akamba parish reports to Drumont that the people generally see the two on equal footing, "si le R.P.S. et Sanga Boto s'étaient livrés un match de ce sport de la balle ronde qui est pratiqué à la ville (le football), ils devaient se considérer comme 'à égalité'" (186).

### THE CHIEF AT EVINDI: RESISTANCE CULTURE

Drumont encounters the chief of the village of Evindi when he disrupts a town fête, a confrontation mentioned in the previous chapter. In this case, Drumont, in a fit of rage, destroys the people's musical instruments. Consequently, to the chief of this village, Drumont is quite literally an invader, seeking to cause trouble and destruction. His reaction to Drumont's presence and behavior presents a striking image of the missionary effort to impose its moral code. Far from being considered a benevolent missionary, Drumont is an audacious colonial adversary: "Quel homme ose me porter la guerre jusque dans mon village?" the chief asks, all the while suggesting that he would like to kill "cet homme qui vient troubler la paix de ma maison" (94). When he is restrained by his own people, he begs for the opportunity once and for all to free them from the trouble that is the priest: "laissez-moi vous débarrasser de cette peste de prêtre, de ce malheur de Blanc" (95). The chief uses the same term to describe the priest, "malheur," that Drumont himself had used when speaking of the forced labor of colonial road projects. Here, the "malheur" from which the people need to be liberated is the white man himself.

In the chief's view, Drumont has taken advantage of the local hospitality and in return brought nothing but suffering:

Il crevait de faim dans son pays, il s'amène, nous le nourissons, nous le gratifions de terres; il se construit de belles maisons avec l'argent que nous lui donnons; et même nous, lui prêtons nos femmes pendant trois mois. Mais il n'est pas encore content: ne voilà-t-il pas qu'il se met à nous empêcher de danser. . . Son échéance est arrivée enfin: aujourd'hui, il paiera pour tous les malheurs dont il nous a affligés depuis qu'il traîne sa robe de châtré à travers le pays. (95)

It is a stark contrast to the colonial illusion of "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (Said, *Orientalism* 7) that will bring about the civilization of the colonized people. On the contrary, the chief's reaction and words are those of what Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, calls a "resistance culture" that will "respond to the humiliations of colonialism" (210), a response that will resist both the "intrusion" of the colonizer and will also act as an "ideological resistance" (209). Furthermore, it is also a sharp contrast to the reactions of those like Zacharie and Raphaël, who seek their own gain from colonial domination, as well as to the naiveté of Denis, who accepts and adopts the ideology of the colonizer.

### ***LE ROI MIRACULE***

As we have discussed, this novel revolves around Father Le Guen's longstanding effort to convert Essomba, the chief of the Essazam. More specifically, the novel focuses on the unlikely circumstances of the chief's baptism and Le Guen's subsequent efforts to convince him to assume the Christian moral code, specifically as it relates to polygamy. Clearly, then, the chief's relation to Le Guen and his religion is central to the novel.

However, as we shall see, there are also several other characters affected by the arrival of the European church and its missionaries.

### **ESSOMBA: THE VILLAGE CHIEF**

The status of Essomba, chief of the Essazam tribe, is evident early in the novel. As he looks out over Essazam, it is described as “son village” (12), a term repeated several times over the next three pages. This village is clearly Essomba’s domain, and he is a leader who, according to Le Guen himself, is adored by his tribe (225). In fact, he is so adored by the people of Essazam that his unexpected illness causes a desperate and widespread panic among the citizens:

La panique secoua Essazam. Les hommes accroupis sur des tam-tam qu’ils battaient avec une application triste, jetaient par-dessus les masses butées de la forêt, d’innombrables messages qui suppliaient sorciers et praticiens de toutes sortes, quelles que fussent leurs tribus et leurs méthodes, de venir sauver le Chef des Essazan d’agonie. (51)

The arrival of an “orage interminable, apocalyptique” (52) at the time of this panic further emphasizes the elevated status of the chief by underscoring the sense of disaster surrounding his illness. The unity and stability provided by his presence and leadership is further indicated by the local reaction to his illness and recovery, including the gathering of “les Essazam de toutes confessions et même ceux qui n’en avaient aucune” (182) to hear about the circumstances of his unexpected recovery.

In addition to his vital importance to his tribe, Essomba is also very important to the Europeans, to both the missionary and the administrator. We know, for example,

that, thanks to the esteem in which he is held among the Essazam, the chief's authority in the region is very significant to the colonial administration. With this chief in power, the administration feels it can depend on continuing stability in the region: "Lequeux le préfère vivant; il dit que, mort, votre chef lui donnerait beaucoup de soucis" (141). The same respect and admiration that the people have for the chief and make him so important to the administration also make him very important to Father Le Guen. The chief can play a key role in the success or failure of the missionary's work. Clearly, the conversion of the chief would have a great influence on the people of the region. A highly respected Christian chief could help facilitate religious conversions among the villagers. Furthermore, any resulting change in the chief's behavior might also encourage similar sorts of changes among the people, changes in keeping with Le Guen's moral code. Indeed, in addition to the primary issue of his polygamy, the chief is well known for personal behavior condemned by Le Guen's religion. For example, the narrator suggests that long nights of drinking were quite common for the chief and speaks of palm wine as "le plaisir le plus profondément enraciné dans sa chair" (51). Also, a physician asserts that the Chief drinks and gorges himself like "un vrai cochon" (141).

In addition to maintaining a lifestyle contrary to the edicts of the missionary, Chief Essomba has clearly resisted Le Guen's proselytizing advances for some time. The narrator notes that the chief had little interest in religion in general, "ce n'était pas une âme religieuse" (23). As for Le Guen's efforts to bring him to the Christian faith, we learn that the chief has heard some Biblical legends more times than can be counted: "que de fois lui avait-on conté l'histoire du prophète jeté aux lions" (15). Furthermore, the opening pages of the novel establish a sort of antagonism on the part of the chief

toward the missionary. “Oh, pitié,” the chief swears to himself as he watches Le Guen make his way through the village. As the chief observes Le Guen in the moments that follow, the text indicates that the missionary walks through the village with an air of “brutalité” that contradicts his diminutive stature (16). As discussed earlier, the description underscores the awkward nature of Le Guen’s presence in the village, and here we should note that this description comes to the reader as the village chief himself observes the missionary’s gait.

Yet, despite the chief’s obvious resistance to Father Le Guen’s conversion efforts, the text also reveals certain characteristics of self-doubt and guilt over past errors that nonetheless make the chief vulnerable to Le Guen’s advances:

Mais des contrariétés éprouvées ces dernières années avaient exaspéré des doutes, ses sentiments de culpabilité, ses secrètes frayeurs, ses rancœurs envers les circonstances qu’il jugeait plus coupables que lui-même. Il ne se pardonnait pas, entre autres fautes, commises pendant la dernière guerre, d’avoir, ainsi qu’on lui demandait, livré des hommes de la tribu qui avaient été emmenés ensuite sur des chantiers dont certains n’étaient pas revenus – c’était pendant la période des travaux forcés. (23)

The chief’s regrets are presented along with “la promptitude à croire le pire” (23) and an “adhésion dirait-on préventative et rassurante à la fatalité de ce qui, sans faute, allait certainement le frapper” (24). Together, they present the image of a strong and respected chief who nevertheless also in a potentially vulnerable emotional state. This is a significant counterbalance to the air of power and stability that surrounds the chief, demonstrating how, despite his resistance, he might be led to convert. Most importantly,

these revelations about the village leader's conflicted emotions come just before the defining moment in which he appears to ask Le Guen for a scapular.

At the moment when the chief appears to request this scapular, he is already beginning to feel ill and feverish (22). At this moment, the reader is well aware of Essomba's sense of "fatalité" and has also just witnessed the chief's musings as he stared at the scapulars in Le Guen's hands: "Peut-être évaluait-il, avec regret, l'étendue des révélations auxquelles l'eussent introduit ces objets si, leur faisant confiance, il les avait adoptés à temps" (22). In these same moments, the chief convinces himself that he is "au bord de la tombe" (24), fearing that death may be upon him. It is at this particular moment, perhaps one that could be considered a moment of weakness or desperation, that "on le vit pointer un tremblant index sur la grappe d'objets de piété qui pendaient au bras du missionnaire et dont il n'avait pas détaché les yeux depuis de longues minutes" (24). Here, we must again consider Englebert Mveng's assertion in *Théologie, libération et cultures africains* that one is apt to seek liberation from the oppression or suffering one most immediately perceives and that this must not necessarily be confused with a direct interest in the religion that might claim itself as a source of liberation. In this particular case, the subject is not moved by desperation to be liberated from poverty or political oppression as he has both power and wealth. Rather, his gesture toward the priest is clearly motivated by an overwhelming fear of death.

This gesture of desperation, which, as we know, is refused by Le Guen is later followed by a baptism conducted by Essomba's aunt, Yosifa. (Yosifa also raised Essomba, and is therefore at times referred to or refers to herself as his mother.) The baptism takes place when Essomba's illness has reached its most grave state, at the

moment when he is “plus immobile, plus absent, plus insaisissable que jamais” (62).

These two moments, neither of which sees the chief utter a word, constitute his “conversion.” It is not surprising, then, that soon after regaining his strength and his health, he is described as regaining his former spirit. This leads Le Guen to undertake a “besogne évangélisatrice,” seeking to “faire un vrai chrétien de ce sauvage qui ne savait se retenir ni s’absentir” (137). If illness opened the door, it has not yet lead to a lasting conversion of faith and ways, so now Le Guen must take advantage of the opportunity to convince the chief to begin to conduct himself in keeping with his baptism:

Il [Le Guen] l’entretenait de son baptême sur un ton oscillant perpétuellement entre l’enjouement et le pathétique; lui décrivait sa nouvelle famille, l’Eglise; s’étendait sur la chance qui, par le truchement de sa maladie, lui était échue de recevoir le baptême de la main même de *sa mère*; l’adjurait d’adopter une conduite qui fût en conséquence avec son baptême; le menaçait de la colère de Dieu, agitant l’épouvantail du feu éternel; le mettait en garde contre le péché, les mille façons qu’avait le diable de tenter une âme aspirant à Dieu. (137)

However, the chief again proves to be resistant to Le Guen’s efforts and “ne semblait pas aller vers un renoncement aux joies de ce monde” (137).

In addition to Le Guen’s zealous, but apparently fruitless efforts to convince the chief to change his ways, Yosifa also attempts to convince Essomba of the same:

“Yosifa, elle aussi, paraissait au Palais avec une touchante assiduité, montrant de son côté une admirable ardeur à sauver du péché son fils ressuscité, admonestant celui-ci avec

infiniment plus de persuasion” (138). In fact, it is actually Yosifa who convinces the chief that he should “tire[r] la conséquence de son baptême” (139). She succeeds in convincing him to accept the consequences of this questionable baptism on the basis of a dream in which the family’s ancestors tell her that the chief was returned to the living to begin again as a Christian: “Car, si Dieu t’a renvoyé sur terre, c’est pour commencer une nouvelle vie, une vie de chrétien” (139). Here, it is very important to note that the narrator questions the veracity of the vision described by Yosifa: “Yosifa provoqua un ébranlement décisif chez son fils, lorsqu’elle eut inventé . . . un songe au cours duquel lui étaient apparus des aïeuls morts . . . qui lui recommandèrent d’aller auprès du Chef et de lui parler ainsi” (139). Fabricated or not, it is a story the chief is likely to take seriously: “pourquoi d’ailleurs n’aurait-elle pas eu réellement cette vision?” (139). Thus, the most significant and influential of Le Guen’s converts is gained as a result of panicked desperation at a time of illness and the ruse of the woman whom he is sure to trust; the woman who raised this chief as if he were her son, making his most significant convert surely his most dubious as well..

This conversion changes the formerly jovial chief into an especially stern leader: “La fermeté de cet homme jusqu-là plutôt débonnaire, sa dureté même, consternèrent le village” (158). Furthermore, it is a conversion on which the chief’s decisions regarding the fate of his wives are made. On the basis of his baptism, Le Guen convinces Essomba that he must not only renounce all except one of his wives but that he must also send the others back to their native clans, evicting them from their homes while leaving them shamed and humiliated. So, not only does the conversion of Essomba lead to chaos in the

community, but it is also very clearly a conversion that, without the circumstances surrounding his illness, the chief likely would have never made on his own.

### **THREE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS: YOSIFA, EZOUM, GUSTAVE**

In addition to the central event of Essomba's conversion, the text also describes the situations of three other important converts, each of whom calls into question the legitimacy of his or her conversion.

#### **Yosifa: Chief Essomba's aunt**

Yosifa, the chief's aunt, will be further discussed in the following chapter on women in the novels. However, her specific role as a convert and as the one who baptizes the chief merits consideration here. We have already mentioned that, in the absence of Father Le Guen, Yosifa takes it upon herself to baptize the apparently dying chief and that the chief is evidently too weak either to accept or decline, offering no response when she asks if he wishes to be baptized. Rather than an expression of compassion, Yosifa's act is portrayed as the undertaking of a madwoman overcome by grief, anger, and religious frenzy. Upon learning that the chief has never been baptized "Yosifa hurlait, trépignait, criait et rien ne semblait pouvoir l'apaiser jamais. Elle en vint même à montrer les dents comme si elle allait mordre, à se rouler par terre" (62). She also furiously accuses both the village elders and the chief's wives of having attempted to murder him. In her eyes, they are all "assassins" (61) against whom she does not hesitate to "distiller son venin" (59). The baptism itself, which Thomas Melone refers to as "un rituel bien démentiel" (176), only underscores this image of derangement:

Le malade restait raide et lointain, les yeux toujours grands ouverts, mais perdus dans le plafond. La vieille femme continuait fébrilement de remplir et déverser gobelet d'eau sur gobelet d'eau, criant toujours la formule sacramentelle et peut-être se fût-elle ainsi conduite jusqu'à son propre épuisement si un homme de sang-froid n'était venu l'arracher de force au champ de son exploit et, tandis qu'on éloignait la vieille femme, l'assistance l'entendit chuchoter tout bas, sans arrêt: "Au moins je l'aurai baptisé..." (63)

It is a scene in which Yosifa demonstrates no clarity of thought, only anger that her adopted son has not been baptized and overwhelming fear that he might die without having been baptized: "Comment! comment! comment! Assassins! criminels! vous ne l'avez pas baptisé! Mais c'est un complot!" (61). Thus, the chief's baptism occurs at a moment when both the one to be baptized and the baptizer appear to be incoherent.

The one who succeeds in baptizing the chief of the Essazam does so in a fit of rage and madness and without any sign of consent from the chief himself. She literally forces the baptism upon him, and then, as we have already seen, determines deception to be a reasonable tool in her efforts to keep him in the faith and to have him behave as she and the priest would like. If the chief will not accept the arguments of the priest that he must change his ways, then Yosifa will convince him that his ancestors will do as well. Whether the miracle of the chief's healing or Yosifa's vision of the tribal ancestors be fictional or genuine seems to be of no more concern to her than it is to Father Le Guen.

### **Ezoum: Catechist**

Ezoum offers yet another questionable example of the Christian convert in the village. Ezoum is the only convert among the elders of the tribe and consequently acts as the “représentant de Le Guen au sein du clan” (34). When introduced in the novel, he is ominously described as a tall, ugly man “dissimulé dans un coin obscur” (34). Indeed, it is a striking image of alienation to see Le Guen’s representative tucked away in a dark corner. Further descriptions are equally unflattering, presenting him as the “vrai tartuffe du village” (34) and as an “homme pincé aux moeurs apparemment austères, mais doué d’une parole mielleuse et persuasive” (58). The narrator seems to criticize Ezoum’s failure to stop Yosifa when she berates Essomba’s wives for their supposed complicity in his illness, noting that “l’homme de Dieu n’intervint pas” (59). As for his own reaction to the illness, Thomas Melone suggests that Ezoum offers little more than “prières cérémonieuses” (175). It is almost as if Le Guen’s primary representative to the leadership of the tribe is molded from a stereotypical television evangelist of later in the century, concealing his hypocrisy with haughty self-righteousness, and polished rhetoric.

Yet, this representative is nevertheless clearly not well accepted by those around him. Ezoum clearly has had little influence on the chief. He has for years attempted to baptize the chief with no success, each time Ezoum “s’est heurté au refus du Chef” (110). In a revelation that calls into question the Christian moral code he claims to represent, we learn that he has, at one time or another, propositioned all of the chief’s wives. However, his advances toward the chief’s wives have had no more success than his attempts to baptize the chief himself: Ezoum “a fait à chacune d’elles des avances toujours

repoussées” (59). Finally, we learn that Ezoum also receives little respect from parishioners. He plays the role of enforcer of proper behavior at mass, brandishing “son immense canne” (185) to encourage cooperation, a role that leads to his being beaten by several young men.

So, in addition to the madwoman Yosifa, the Christian convert at Essazam is represented by the self-righteous and sanctimonious Ezoum. While Yosifa commands a certain amount of respect based on her age and her relation to the chief, Ezoum clearly is held in very low esteem. Neither, however, offers a positive or reassuring image of the convert. Rather, both only underscore many of the same questions raised by the missionaries themselves.

### **Gustave: The Mission Boy**

Much like Father Drumont’s Denis, Gustave is Le Guen’s mission boy and has been educated and trained by the missionary himself. Twelve years old at the time the novel takes place, he has already been at the mission for several years (39). Le Guen takes as his greatest source of pride the manner in which he has been able to nurture and develop the boy:

Si jamais il avait eu bonne conscience, c’était le plus souvent en vérifiant les progrès de l’enfant qui, lorsqu’il le prit auprès de lui il y avait quelques années déjà, n’était alors que foetus ou peu s’en fallait – à qui il avait enseigné sa propre langue, avec un insigne bonheur, fallait-il croire, puisque l’enfant parlait aujourd’hui avec son accent à lui, ses inflexions et même ses propres tics. (39)

Here we see evidence of the great level of influence Le Guen has had on his houseboy, molding this “vraie plaque sensible” (39) into an African replica of himself. Much like Denis at Bomba, we see in Gustave a young native boy developing under the influence of the mission and the missionary. The scope of this influence is indicated here by Gustave’s learning French to the point of reproducing the Father’s own accent. This unique, yet powerful example in the text evokes Fanon’s assertion in *Peau noire, masques blancs* that taking on the colonizer’s language reinforces ideas of superiority of the colonizing culture. “Parler une langue, c’est assumer un monde, une culture” (30), says Fanon, and Gustave is noted for his exceptional command of the French language.

Gustave has come to accept his separation from his family, which at one time was clearly very difficult to endure: “La nuit dans ma chambre, je pleurais de frayeur et je voulais retourner au village, auprès de maman” (41). In fact, we discover that Gustave is so removed from his family’s life that he only learns of the birth of a younger sister upon going to visit them (42). In place of this connection to the family, the boy reveals an intense attachment to Father Le Guen. Gustave expresses a sense of exotic wonder whenever Le Guen leaves the mission, similar to that which Denis expresses in his vision of a France free from the troubles of Africa. To quote Frederick Muller’s translation, each time Le Guen leaves, “the boy [Gustave] felt an uncontrollable wanderlust” (31). Each week the Father is away leaves Gustave “triste une longue semaine” (40), longing to be part of the missionary’s adventures. Thus, Gustave presents an attachment to the perceived glory of the missionary and his work, longing to accompany Le Guen on his travels, while, at the same time taking on the missionary’s cultural nuances, as symbolized through the French language.

Again much like Denis, we see in Gustave an identity in flux. The interplay of his native culture and the culture he assimilates from the priest is evident in his role as a sort of intermediary between the missionary and the villagers. Le Guen knows he can depend on Gustave to “plaider sa cause” (44) with the natives. At the same time, Gustave serves as Le Guen’s primary source of information regarding the news of the tribe, especially that information which might not otherwise be available to a white man: “il lui rapportait ce qui se disait au village parmi les Noirs” (43). In so doing, Gustave also demonstrates the ability to “reproduire au besoin” (43) the words and style of the natives in the same manner he reproduces the inflections and accent of Father Le Guen. In other words, whether it be the European priest or the African locals, Gustave is perpetually imitating, with no authentic voice of his own.

#### **KRIS: CHIEF ESSOMBA’S NEPHEW**

Kris is the chief’s nephew, although his family lives in another village. A student in the city, Kris expresses a cynicism about the mission and the Christian religion that contrasts with a clear influence from his European style education. When we meet him, we learn that he has been discussing the exotic at school, which his professor of literature has defined as “ce qu’on trouvait au terme du voyage ou qu’on s’attendait à trouver” (72). As Kris returns home to his home village for vacation, we are told that, although he looks forward to certain things upon his return, nothing about his home village “lui semblaient nullement exotique” (73). In other words, Kris has his mind set beyond his village, which seems to strike him as boring and ordinary. Upon arriving home, Kris immediately expresses a certain aversion to “l’hygiène plus que relâchée de Grand-mère”

(74). It is an interesting consequence of his Western education, indicating that he has come to view the “hygiene” at his school to be vastly superior to that of the place in which he was raised. It is the first sign of conflict between Kris’ education and his heritage.

Soon after arriving home, Kris learns that he will be sent to Essazam because of the illness (and presumed death) of Chief Essomba, his uncle. Kris immediately resists the idea and suggests sending his older brother, Melig. He will not, however, be allowed to discuss the matter with Melig whom, according to his mother, he must “vénérer comme [s]on père” (78). This is an assertion that Kris immediately questions, while his mother retorts, “ce sont nos ancêtres qui nous l’ont enseigné. C’est ainsi qu’ils se conduisaient eux-mêmes” (78). In response, Kris maintains the Fanonian concept that refuses to accept past behavior on the part of the native population without question. He reacts to his mother’s statement by sarcastically pointing out that all of the ancestral traditions need not necessarily be blindly accepted, sarcastically making note of one particular tradition, polygamy, that his mother had spoken against just moments before: “Et ils ne s’en portèrent que très bien! raillait Kris. Une des raisons pour lesquelles j’ai toujours en un grand respect pour la polygamie, vu qu’elle nous vient de nos ancêtres...” (79). Later, Kris expands on this concept. He criticizes the contradiction of those who resist the colonial occupation but blindly see nothing but good, nothing to resist or change, in the ways of the native land:

Non, voilà, Maman dit: “Il faut honorer et vénérer le frère aîné, nos ancêtres ont toujours fait ainsi et c’était très bien.” Un moment après, elle te dit à propos du Chef: “Ce vieux cochon de polygame.” Comme si la

polygamie n'était pas un héritage ancestral. Tu trouves ça très cohérent comme pensée? Du même, tu es révolutionnaire et en même temps tu admires les vieillards qui sont ce qui subsiste de plus honteux, de plus révoltant de notre passé. . . (130)

As we have discussed earlier, Beti's flawed African characters such as Zacharie and Raphaël in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* remind the reader that the fault for the suffering, for example, of the women at the sixa is not entirely caused by the European mission. In the same manner, Kris' voice in *Le Roi miraculé* reminds us that resistance and revolution cannot stop at simply removing the outside oppressor but must also confront the systems of oppression and exploitation in the native culture as well.

Just as Kris acts as a critic of both the native and the colonial, he also demonstrates a personal combination of assimilation and resistance. Like Gustave, Kris demonstrates a strong command of French, to the point that he is described as the "jeune homme qui parlait si bien" (107). While talking with his family, Kris begins speaking French "sans trop se rendre compte qu'il venait de changer de langue" (83). While Kris presents this same symbol of cultural assimilation, he has clearly not become enamored with Europeans and their culture. In addition to his criticism of blind adherence to a native tradition such as polygamy, we also see Kris come into conflict with representatives of the French presence. He has recently been punished for confronting a white teacher at his school (81). This is another point of contention with Kris' mother, who would much prefer that he avoid such confrontation: "Après tout, ces Blancs, ils ne sont déjà que trop bons comme cela. C'est eux qui vous instruisent, non? Alors, quoi! soyez déférents avec eux au lieu de leur parler insolamment" (82). Thus, it could be said

that Kris initially appears at least somewhat aware of the complex interplay between the native and the colonial. He will not automatically accept all things passed down to him as tradition, nor will he acquiesce to whites in positions of authority.

However, Kris fails to incorporate his vision into his actions. This point is all the more powerful when we also see Kris himself, much like Zacharie and Raphaël at Bomba, place personal profit ahead of the well-being of those around him. Almost immediately after his arrival in Essazam, Kris begins distilling alcohol and selling the product for his own benefit.

While talking with an acquaintance at the village, Kris bristles at the suggestion that his distillery is making the villagers more vulnerable to the colonialists: “Ils se lancèrent dans une discussion vertigineuse sur l’alcoolisme, Bitama prétendant que Kris, en fabriquant l’alcool à boire faisait le jeu des colonialistes, Kris, riant très fort, en affirmant qu’il se moquait bien des colonialistes du moment qu’il se faisait de l’argent pour lui . . .” (129). In fact, Kris is able to make an especially large profit from the “folie collective” surrounding the celebration of the chief’s recovery. Yet his profit earned on this day will also later lead to him being sought for charges of having been complicit in inciting the riot that transpires. Again, like Zacharie and Raphaël at Drumont’s mission, Kris will flee and abandon all responsibility.

In these key characters of *Le Roi miraculé* the nature and sincerity of conversion in a colonial village served by a European mission are again called into question. The chief’s conversion is coerced and disastrous, the woman who baptized him does so in a fit

of madness, the leading convert in the village is of duplicitous character, the mission boy stripped of identity, and even the African who seems to understand the complexity of the situation succumbs to the temptation to seek personal profit first, ignoring the consequences of his actions with regard to his own people.

## ***UN SORCIER BLANC A ZANGALI***

### **KUYA AND TUMBE: A YOUNG, NATIVE COUPLE**

Rather than Father Marius himself, the first characters presented in *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali* are Kuya and Tumbé, a slave couple, and hence of especially low social standing. The narrator tells us that they are “un des couples les plus obscurs” (17) in their village. Thus, in addition to being of the colonized race, they hold a low status within the African village itself. Their heritage is such that, according to the narrator, it does not even merit discussion: “Leur tribu? Leur village? Leurs parents?... Pas la peine de trop insister” (17). They are without a sense of identity even in relation to the tribe, having been sold “dès leur jeune âge par un maître à un autre” (17). Irregardless of the presence of the colonial occupiers, Kuya and Tumbé represent an oppressed and nearly defeated couple resulting from “tous les coups de l’indigénat” (18) from which they have suffered. Equally significantly, Kuya and Tumbé are presented as people who have essentially come to accept and expect the treatment they receive: “Ils s’y résignaient avec la placidité des moutons à l’abbatoir” (18).

This resignation extends to their view of the colonial administrators as well: “Invariablement, leurs jours se levaient et tombaient dans la crainte malade de leur

maître, après celle de tous les représentants de l'Administration" (18). The situation of Kuya and Tumbé presents a striking image of oppression from a "native" source combined with oppression from a colonial source as well. The following paragraph of the text underscores their position, their perceived reality, as people in no position to resist or question the master or the administrator.

D'ailleurs, qui étaient-ils, eux, pour murmurer, pour ne pas toujours obéir et se taire?... Ils n'existaient pas dans le monde iréel des fables, où la faible Tortue, avec sa tête bourrée de malices, triomphe toujours du Porc, de la Panthère, de l'Eléphant, du Lion même!... Mias ils existaient à Nsimeyong, dans un monde de réalités. Qui étaient-ils, eux? (18)

Furthermore, the narrator tells us that, along with their fear and resignation, the couple leans on "la confiance aveugle en leurs dieux" (18). It is a sort of faith that leads them to passively accept their lot, while at the same time hoping for something better.

They hope to escape their "terre de malédiction" (23) by way of their relationship (and their son's relationship) with Father Marius. This hope is exemplified in their dreams of France, much like those expressed by Denis in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*. In this case, however, Kuya and Tumbé hope through their son's relationship with a Frenchman, the priest. Their desires are revealed in the way in which they react when they believe Marius will be taking their son to France and their disappointment when they learn this is not the case: "Savoir que leur fils unique partait pour le pays des hommes blancs, c'était pour eux un sujet de ravissement" (35). This joy stands in stark contrast to their disillusionment when they discover that Marius is actually going to the village of Zangali, not to France: "Ce dernier mot [Zangali] tomba, lourd comme un

assommoir. Les deux visages qui, tout à l'heure, s'éclairaient d'un soupçon de joie, s'obscurcirent soudain, arborant deux paires d'yeux horrifiés" (36). Much like the desire for liberation we have earlier seen described by Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng, Kuya and Tumbé have seen in Father Marius the possibility of a liberation from the oppression they immediately experience. As Mveng emphasizes, any hope for liberation gained from the message of the Christian missionary is most likely to manifest itself in just this way, a hope to be literally freed from one's poverty and suffering.

This couple's relation to the priest is clearly one that is principally motivated by their desire to overcome their situation. As we have discussed regarding Father Marius, Kuya has come to believe that the priest is clearly the most powerful of all the white men (23-24). Although his wife, Tumbé, counters by expressing her personal fear of the power of the administration (24) and maintains an "attitude sceptique" towards Kuya's assertions regarding the priests (26), Kuya holds fast to his opinion. He supports his determination by noting all the natives who work for the mission. They seem to benefit from a special sort of protection as though they were "petits oiseaux tranquilles sous l'orage" (26), a sort of protection from which other natives do not benefit. On this basis that has nothing to do with spirituality, Kuya suggests that he and his wife attempt to develop a relationship of their own with the priest: "Que ne devenons-nous pas, nous aussi, des gens à eux, femme mienne?" (26). Upon reflection, Tumbé agrees that the idea merits attention: "Je vois, je vois!... s'écria Tumbé en écarquillant ses yeux avec satisfaction" (26).

Consequently, the couple has their marriage consecrated in a Christian ceremony and takes on Christian names, "fort heureux de s'entendre appeler respectivement 'Yosef

Kuya et Maria Tumbé” (29). The couple has their young son baptized, with the missionary priest Marius as his godfather (29), and learn rituals such as praying the rosary (33). They do all of this despite a minimal understanding of the rites of the Church: : “ils avaient quelquefois assisté à la messe sans rien y comprendre” (24). As a result of their relationship with the priest, Kuya and Tumbé gain precisely the rewards they had hoped for. As discussed in an earlier section, their relationship with the priest and their conversion do indeed succeed in elevating their social status. Indeed, their conversion proves to be “[u]ne véritable affaire d’or!” (29) as they benefit from “les preuves pratiques de cette nouvelle parenté” (29). Significantly, there is no mention of any sort of “preuves spirituelles.” The benefits gained (30) are purely social and material.

Their relationship to the actual religion they have embraced seems ambivalent at best. It should be noted that Kuya and Tumbé are cited by the narrator as an example of locals who laugh at Marius’ inability to effectively communicate in the language of the region (31). They are also the victims of Marius’ outburst against symbols of non-Christian faith. It is during a visit to their home that he “arracha tous les fétiches qui ornaient l’intérieur de la case,” a gesture described as “l’assassinat de ses dieux pénates” (34). Later, after learning that her son might be going to Zangali, Tumbé reacts with a similar sort of anger against the symbols of Marius’ religion; Etienne tells Marius that “elle a osé arracher de mon cou mes médailles et elle a osé déchirer les images que tu leur avais offertes” (65). Furthermore, Etienne describes his mother as having many gods and calling on them all (65). Thus, for Kuya and Tumbé their turning to the

Christian missionary is clearly motivated by their desire to overcome their lot and has nothing to do with an authentic spiritual conversion.

### **ETIENNE AZOMBO: SON OF KUYA AND TUMBE**

Etienne's position as a mission boy, as we have just seen, is born out of his parents' desire to improve their standing as well as that of their young son (26). Certainly, it is not born of a religious conviction on the part of his parents. Nevertheless, Azombo is baptized at four months of age and given his Christian name, Etienne, by Father Marius, his godfather (29). It is at this same time that his parents have their marriage consecrated and take on Christian names of their own. As a result of these actions on the part of his parents, Etienne is taken in at the mission and grows up in the shadow of the missionary.

Etienne had previously accompanied Marius on several previous trips, and it is only due to the resistance of his mother that Marius decides that Etienne will not accompany him to Zangali (37). This, however, is devastating news to Etienne: "Le coeur d'Azombo débordait de chagrin. Au fond de ses yeux, des larmes crevaient et venaient ruisseler sur ses joues" (37). Etienne has developed a very different understanding of the missionary's religion from that of his mother and father. In fact, the narrator repeatedly portrays Etienne as a particularly apt pupil, noting that, at the mission, Etienne "se nourrissait de bonne soupe et la bonne parole de l'Évangile" (66). As for his assigned tasks at the mission, he took them on "avec joie et enthousiasme," and "on le voyait tout sourire quand il servait la messe" (66). In fact, Etienne so thoroughly adopts the ways of the priest and his mission that the narrator refers to him as a "perroquet

docile” a “néophyte exemplaire” (67), and as a “chien fidèle autour de son maitre” (68).

Thus, Etienne grows to be more and more like the missionary while at the same time distancing himself from the native population. The education and language skills he develops clearly reveal, “la différence qui le séparait désormais de la tourbe des illettrés (66).

Etienne’s own actions demonstrate his acceptance of this “separation” and his developing perspective that Christianity is inherently superior to the traditions of his ancestors, a perspective underscored by his preference for symbols of the Christian faith:

Un jour, il n’hésita pas à détruire sur l’ordre de son parrain la dent d’iguane qu’il portait jusque-là précieusement. Que ce talisman de famille possédait les mêmes pouvoirs symboliques que cette gramme de médailles frappées à l’effigie des saints de race blanche, ornement qu’il portait à son cou et dont il aimait à entendre le tintinambulement, Etienne Azombo n’osait le penser. (67)

An act such as this is strikingly similar to Marius’ destruction of the religious idols found in the home of Kuya and Tumbé. Indeed, Etienne comes to understand the religion of Father Marius to be the only logical choice: “le catholicisme émanait directement de Dieu, comme la pluie des nuages! En conséquence, il pensait que toutes les autres croyances ne formaient qu’un tissu d’absurdes inventions humaines” (67). Here, the “perroquet” that Etienne has become, echoes the thoughts one would expect from any western missionary or administrator. Perhaps most significantly, we are told that Etienne had taken to heart those same Biblical phrases that we earlier have discussed in relation to Father Marius. We are told that Etienne “avait retenu, mieux qu’aucun autre assistant,

ces phrases clés de l’Evangile” (68), the verses that Marius was known to use over and over again in seeking to justify from the pulpit the upheaval caused by the missionary and by the colonial occupation.

Consequently, when the will of the missionary conflicts with the will of his parents regarding travel to Zangali, Etienne determines that the will of God “l’appelait à Zangali” in contrast to “la voix négative de Kuya and Tumbé” (69). After learning that he will not be allowed to accompany the priest, Etienne so desperately wants to accompany his “père spirituel” to Zangali (67) that he stows away in Marius’ vehicle. This same attachment is demonstrated at Pala as well, when Etienne fears that Marius will force him to return home: “Etienne Azombo, à la pensée que son parrain allait déjà partir et l’abandonner, éclata en sanglots” (64).

His deep attachment to the priest and his acceptance of the superiority of Christianity makes Etienne willing to protect the missionary and his mission at all costs. He then plays a key role in the establishment and maintenance of Marius’ false identities. At Pala, when Marius encounters a threatening group of men, Etienne suddenly appears “en brandissant un fusil,” frightens those whom Marius has encountered (60) and then orders them to tell their chief that a “Commandant Blanc” (Marius) has arrived (61). Thus, through this young African, Marius’ path of deception through assuming false identities begins. Later in the novel, at Zangali, Etienne again plays a key role in establishing a false identity for the priest when he encourages a translator’s assumption that Marius must be “un guérisseur blanc” (113).

Returning to the events at Pala, we see that Etienne, not Marius, approaches the village elders regarding the presence of the princess Andela in the “Commandant’s”

quarters (81). In this encounter, Etienne seeks to maintain the false identity of the priest while relieving him of this traditional “gift” to the visiting Commandant. He does so by continuing the ruse he has begun, and by convincing the elders that Marius “n’était pas un Commandant comme les autres qui étaient passés à Pala avant lui” (86). Etienne even goes so far as to claim that his coming to see the elders about the matter is out of respect for them and their mutual heritage, stating, “je vous considère comme mes pères” (87). It is a tactic that calls to mind Marius’ later encounter with the Chief at Zangali, an event discussed earlier. Although the elders are initially dumbfounded that a Commandant would refuse a young woman offered to him, Etienne is eventually able to convince them that due to a “crise d’adaptation” (89), it is indeed possible that Commandant Marius might not “prendre goût aux femmes noires” (89). Yet, Etienne’s deceit goes even further. When these same elders raise their concerns to Etienne that the “grands espoirs” held for the new French rule, after the departure of the Germans, have not come to fruition, Etienne seeks to reassure them. If things seem relatively unchanged under the French, things are sure to change with time, Etienne tells them. Here, we see Etienne act not only to protect the individual missionary but also to assert that the benevolence of the colonial occupation will eventually be demonstrated.

Etienne in fact proves to exhibit the same zeal that we have previously seen in his mentor, Father Marius, a zeal that overwhelms any moral questions that might arise related to the colonial missionary endeavor: “Etienne Azombo est de ceux qui sont capables, au nom de leur religion, d’aimer ou de haïr, d’obéir ou de désobéir, de servir ou de désobliger, de bénir ou de maudire, sans chercher à savoir s’ils n’empiètent pas sur la morale et les contingences sociales” (94). Furthermore, as a result of his upbringing and

education at Marius' mission, Etienne is described as a domesticated and trained animal, resembling "une de ces bêtes qui, grâce à une longue pratique de zootechnie parviennent à exécuter telle ou telle action déterminée, et l'exécutent parfois avec un automatisme si impulsif qu'on y sent toujours une âme de bête" (94).

Conditioned to act for the mission and the missionary, Etienne also believes his actions to be both necessary and beneficial to the priest and his work. Leaving Pala, Etienne is convinced he has saved Marius from disaster: "Sans moi, se disait-il, que serait-il devenu à présent, le R.P. Marius?" (101). The fact that he has rescued the priest justifies in Etienne's eyes the deception he initiated at Pala. In his view "la seule solution se trouvait dans le mensonge" (102), and, upon arriving at Zangali, Etienne does not hesitate to encourage the same strategy. During a meeting with the chief at Zangali, Etienne fears that Marius will reveal his true identity and, as we have already noted, Etienne encourages the Chief's translator to follow his assumption that, if not a Commandant, Marius must then be "un guérisseur blanc" (113).

So, in Etienne Azombo we find a young man who was baptized into the Christian Church by parents who simply hoped to advance the family's social status. Raised and educated in the mission, Etienne, unlike his parents before him, comes to fully accept all aspects of the evangelizing mission. Ironically, the chief at Pala underscores the potential tragedy of Etienne's position. Unaware, of course, of the true identity of Marius or Etienne, the chief tells the young man that he and his generation will be the key to the liberation from colonial domination. Etienne, he tells him, will be part of "cette génération qui sera chargée de faire briller un jour, le soleil des hommes noirs" (91). Etienne and his generation will be those who resist and fight for the identity of the

colonized African: “Mission terrible, mais combien honorable. Dès maintenant, arme-toi de courage, mets-toi à l’école du patriotisme. Ton premier nom est “noir”, ne l’oublie jamais” (91). Yet this chief does not know, of course, that his words are directed at one whom the narrator describes as a “jeune chrétien” (91), one who has already taken on the ways and thoughts of European colonizers like Father Marius.

### **MEKULA: EXILED FROM ZANGALI**

Although he does not appear until very late in the novel, Mekula is nevertheless a very significant character. Andela and Etienne discover him, desperately ill and abandoned in the jungle, and he is too weak to communicate (148). Marius determines that they should take this sick man back to the residence the three have established in the jungle (149). Later, when he has regained some of his energy, Mekula explains that an epidemic once wiped out a village that stood where they now reside. This illness has recently returned to the region and, having demonstrated symptoms, Mekula has been exiled from Zangali and sent out into the jungle to die: “Toute personne qui en était frappée se voyait systématiquement exclue de la population” (160). Mekula, as we already know, is actually the first of several exiles the group will take in.

Naturally, Mekula gives credit to Marius for his survival: “Homme blanc, tu es vraiment un grand sorcier! Moi encore en vie? Personne n’oserait le croire à Zangali!” (152). We have already noted in our discussion of Father Marius that the experience of caring for Mekula and others like him marks a very significant turning point in his missionary activities. Mekula, meanwhile, identifies Marius simply as a man who took him in and cared for him, not as a colonizer, an oppressor, or even an evangelizer.

Motivated by his gratitude, Mekula steps forward on behalf of Marius when Marius has provoked the ire of the citizens of Zangali: “Qui ne me reconnaît ici? Ah, vous ne le pouvez! Tout le monde me croyait mort, n’est-ce pas? Grâce à ce sorcier blanc que vous alliez tuer, je suis encore en vie, moi, Mekula me Ndongo!” (169). Mekula does not know Marius as a Christian missionary, only as the man who saved him, and his testimony saves the Marius from what appears to be his impending execution (170).

Thus, through these characters, we see three very different relations with the missionary and his religion. Tumbé and Kuya turn to the priest with little concern for his actual religion. They simply see a very powerful white man who could change their social status. Etienne comes to naively and wholeheartedly accept the work of the missionary. Mekula, on the other hand, knows nothing of Marius’ role as a missionary. And, Mekula, of course, is the one who most genuinely and authentically benefits from his relation with Marius as someone who responds to his needs.

## CHAPTER III

### WOMEN IN THE NOVELS: THE DOUBLY OPPRESSED

At this point we turn our attention to the role and treatment of women as represented in these novels, separating their experience from that of other parishioners because of the twofold oppression of the woman described in Gutierrez' *A Theology of Liberation*, a situation he calls "intolerable" (xxii). The third world woman, whether she be in Latin America, where Gutierrez focuses his attention, in Africa, or elsewhere, suffers as part of an oppressed people as well as part of an oppressed gender within that people. In fact, Gutierrez identifies the effort to reject "machismo" as one of the key liberation struggles (xxx). Meanwhile, Deborah Wyrick notes that Frantz Fanon places great hope in the "revolutionary woman, who, having achieved her own liberation, becomes an agent of transformation for society as a whole" (95). For these founding thinkers of both liberation theology and postcolonial thought, women's issues were of particularly great importance. Consequently, both liberation and postcolonial thought consider the third-world woman as a potential victim of oppression at the hand of the colonizer as well as at the hand of her native culture.

We have already noted that, in these novels, Beti and Philombe do not simplistically absolve the native populations for their role in the exploitation of others. Susan Gasster notes, for example, Beti's refusal to oversimplify the conditions that lead to poverty and oppression in Africa, stating that "Beti is adamant that African society was not without flaws, at least as far back as we can see it" (Perspective 291). For Fanon,

unified struggle against the colonial presence can not only free a nation from its external imperial oppressor but can also lead to the creation of new nations freed from their own internal systems of exploitation and oppression, including traditionally held views on gender roles.

The novels of Beti and Philombe we are exploring would seem to express the same sort of hope. They refuse to present oppression only on the part of the occupier. We have already seen how many African characters in the novel are not immune from criticism for their behavior, including their complicity in the exploitation of many Africans. On the other hand, the role of the colonial occupation in engendering, fostering, or simply taking advantage of existing systems of oppression is likewise underscored. Thus, the concept of a “double oppression” is most evident in exploring the roles and treatment of women in the novels, both as they relate to the colonial mission and as they relate to indigenous practices.

### ***LE PAUVRE CHRIST DE BOMBA***

Since the mission boy Denis is the reader’s filter for all information, we will first explore the attitudes Denis himself expresses regarding women. As he does in relation to Father Drumont’s views on religious matters, we can expect that Denis incorporate much of the missionary’s thoughts about women. At the same time, he also expresses opinions based on his own experiences growing up in Bomba. Early in the novel, for example, Denis underscores the native cultural preference for the male gender. Denis notes that his own father, who is a catechist, would be quite happy if his daughter had a baby before marriage: “Tiens, mon père, par exemple, est catéchiste. Pourtant, je suis certain qu’il

serait l'homme le plus heureux si ma soeur Anne faisait un enfant avant d'aller en mariage, surtout un garçon: ça serait toujours un garçon de plus à la maison" (20).

Despite the fact that such an event would jeopardize the place of both Denis' father and sister in the Church, Denis is convinced that such an event would only please his father. This early statement emphasizes both the value ascribed to a male child and a relative lack of concern for the female child.

Later, Denis repeats his father's opinion of women: "Mon père dit souvent que les femmes ressemblent aux enfants par leurs désirs" (29). Denis, in fact, suspects that such childishness must explain why so many women seem to take an interest in Zacharie. Denis also repeats the priest's condescending warning that women can be especially dangerous: "Il m'a dit de toujours éviter les femmes, de veiller à ce qu'elles ne m'approchent jamais; et que les hommes ne se méfient jamais assez des femmes" (225). Thus, from the earliest pages in the text, it is clear that Denis himself holds the same opinion of women as most adult males around him, including the priest himself.

Yet, given his attachment to the dogma of the mission, Denis also parrots the Father's opinion of polygamy as sinful, a seemingly pro-feminine stance. For example, Denis refers to one man's polygamy and refusal of a Christian marriage as a "situation odieuse" (40). Most converts, however, do not hold as steadfastly as Denis to the Church's stance on this matter. Rather, they often quickly come to ignore the mission's stand on taking multiple wives. Denis notes, for example, that at the village of Mombet, many of the converts "ont pris une deuxième femme, quand ce n'est pas une troisième" (25). As we have seen in other cases such as customary village festivals, conversion does not necessarily lead to wholesale renunciation of traditions that conflict with the

mission's teaching. This proves to be especially true as it relates to polygamy and traditional gender roles.

Nevertheless, Drumont wages an energetic campaign against polygamy, albeit without any notable mention of the rights or well being of women. For example, an encounter with the chief at Timbo demonstrates that Drumont, like Le Guen in Essazam, hopes to convince chief to disavow polygamy. This chief had been a convert of sorts, but when his wife bears no children, he decides to take another. This is a matter he chooses not to discuss with his priest, and it is important to note that "c'était la première fois depuis son baptême qu'il prenait une décision sans avoir consulté le R.P.S. On ne le vit plus à la mission de Bomba" (51). So, when it comes to matters of polygamy, the chief simply chooses to separate himself from the mission rather than face the priest's condemnation and hostility. Consequently, regardless of his motivations for opposing the polygamy of this chief or any other male convert, Drumont's stand against the system is unlikely to have any significant impact on individual behavior.

Meanwhile, at Ekokot, the village chief tries to convince Drumont to accept his taking on of other wives, on the grounds that his first wife is sterile. In his case, the chief claims he will put off conversion until a later date. He will wait to convert until he has enough children and no longer needs to take other wives:

-Alors, chef, quand te convertis-tu?

Le chef est resté longtemps pensif, puis il a répliqué:

-Oh, Père, euh... Eh bien! ma foi, quand j'aurai beaucoup d'enfants. (113)

With a sterile first wife, he tells the missionary, he had no choice but to take another:

"Alors, tu comprends, moi, forcément, j'ai pris d'autres femmes pour faire des enfants.

Quand j'aurai suffisamment d'enfants, je laisserai peut-être mes femmes partir" (113).

To Drumont, this is nothing but the same ruse he has heard from many others who claim they will dismiss their "extra" wives once they've had children: "Mais ils ne laissent jamais partir leurs femmes, même quand ils ont plus d'enfants qu'il ne faut" (113).

Presumably, Drumont will refuse baptism to a polygamous man such as the chief when he does seek to convert. However, the missionary's response indicates that he might be willing to accept the chief were Drumont sure he would follow through on his word to rid himself of his multiple wives. Once again, the moral imperative for Drumont is based purely on the abstract concept of polygamy. The potential consequences for the affected women, who would find themselves shunned and abandoned, seem to be of little concern.

A woman who visits the priest at Ekokot further demonstrates the missionary's lack of personal concern in his manner of dealing with polygamy and its consequences. Certainly Drumont takes a clear stand against polygamy in most cases, particularly if the men in question do not hold the status of a chief. Unfortunately, Drumont's position is also often so strict as to completely divide families. He demonstrates a dogmatic stance against polygamy that actually indicates little concern for the personal consequences either from the system of polygamy itself or from the rigidity of his own reactions. For instance, Drumont encounters a woman who regularly visits her daughter despite the daughter's participation in a polygamous marriage. The missionary's command is simple and rigid, as he insists that she "cesse de fréquenter [s]a fille" (107). Not surprisingly, the mother reacts by begging that the priest allow her to continue to see her daughter: "inflige-moi toutes les punitions que tu voudras, mais ne m'interdis pas de voir ma fille" (107). To this request, Drumont curtly responds that any Christian mother must resolve

herself to end all dealings with a daughter who would be the wife of a polygamist.

Clearly, the dogma is presented as much more important to Drumont than the emotions of either the mother or the daughter.

In considering the position of females in the missionary enclave at Bomba, the objectifying relation of women and wives to money must also be noted. In the village of Bitié, for example, men regularly accept Christian marriages and send their wives to the sixa. However, almost immediately upon sending the first wife away, they tend to take a second “car avec tout l’argent qu’ils tirent du cacao, la chose est quasiment inévitable” (70). In other words, men as wealthy as these would be expected to take second wives. Furthermore, the local catechist suggests that these men fully intend to take other wives even as they participate in Christian marriage ceremonies with their first wives. In Denis’ words, “au moment même où ils répondent en bons chrétiens aux questions rituelles, ils songent déjà à leur prochaine femme” (70). The second wife, therefore, represents an emblem of the husband’s material success. Ironically, the mission also benefits financially when these men take second wives because children from polygamous marriages must pay higher fees for the baptism of their children than “les bons chrétiens” (71). At Ekokot, we see how the administration itself is involved in the selling of daughters for marriage. Drumont is approached about a conflict in which a young bride’s family has demanded five thousand francs to “purchase” their daughter for marriage: “Une femme a comparu devant le R.P.S. Elle était accusée de ne s’être pas interposée lorsque le jeune homme qui devait épouser sa fille avait été contraint de verser cinq mille francs” (105). Drumont expresses opposition, but to the amount rather than the practice: “Cinq cents francs, voilà tout ce que ton mari pouvait demander à ton gendre, tout au plus

cinq cents... Et cela, c'est l'administrateur qui l'a ordonné: c'est une loi" (106).

Although this limit of five hundred francs imposed by the administration is far less than the five thousand discussed in this instance, the administration's limitation of the total exchange is also an implicit endorsement of the system itself. Drumont expresses a similar endorsement on the part of the Church. According to the priest, this woman should be only ashamed for having sold her daughter for such an amount, and this is the reason for which he scolds her: "Comment as-tu toléré qu'on achète ta fille à ce prix exorbitant? lui a demandé le R.P.S. Cinq mille francs! Est-ce que tu n'as pas honte? Une chrétienne qui vend sa fille au prix de cinq mille francs!" (105). Essentially, this episode demonstrates the consent of both the administration and the church to the practice.

Further underscoring the concept of a double oppression discussed by Gutierrez, we witness a battle for control of women between Drumont and the husbands. Denis tells us that Drumont's visits to women would often draw hostile reactions from their husbands: "Mais si nous restions longtemps dans une case de femme, le mari s'amenait avec une mine patibulaire. Ils sont très sévères ici sur leurs femmes et très jaloux" (184). Denis understands the husbands' reactions as evidence of the severity of their treatment of their wives. Denis may be correct in his observation, but he is also unaware of the similar controlling attitude on the part of the mission itself and of the mission's school for young wives, the *sixa*. At the *sixa*, the resident's rigid schedule and forced labor demonstrates a sort of control that may be seen as significantly more "severe" than that which Denis has observed on the part of the native husbands.

## THE SIXA

In *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, the most telling sign of the treatment of women is the women's school run by the Catholic Mission. This arm of the colonial church becomes a grotesque example of the mistreatment and abuse of the region's women, with both the native men and the European Church clearly culpable. Thomas Melone powerfully describes such mistreatment when he states that the sixa is "un véritable gang de sexe abusant toutes les femmes de la sixa" (155) and further emphasizes that it is "un monde pourri physiquement et moralement" (160). The sixa is a home to over 60 young women (197) who are dominated by the mission's appointed administrator, Raphaël. The young women, we are told, have little choice but to do the bidding of the director: "dans la maison il fallait en passer par les volontés de Raphaël" (280). Meanwhile, as indicated in the first chapter, Father Drumont is ignorant of the way in which the sixa, for which he is ultimately responsible, is being run. Yet, even as he becomes aware of how the women have been abused by Raphaël, we witness Drumont condone another sort of abuse. During the interrogations that seek to expose the exploitation of the women of the sixa, Drumont coerces answers from the young women with whippings and threats of whippings (284).

### Work at the sixa

Although Father Drumont expressed his concern regarding forced labor projects in the region, we learn that the sixa itself coerces the young women enrolled there to participate in its own enterprises. As Susan Gasser notes: "The mission is obviously involved in the same practices of forced labor disguised only by name" ("Perspective"

294). In this case of mistreatment, even Drumont cannot claim ignorance. When building the mission itself, Drumont put sixa girls to work whenever they were short of men on the project, making the sixa his own source of labor:

Il fit battre les briques et les tuiles par les femmes de la sixa; chaque semaine, il convoquait les villages chrétiens, qui venaient travailler à tour de rôle; mais, en dépit de cela, la main-d'oeuvre masculine n'était ni permanente ni suffisante. Alors, il mit une femme de la sixa partout où manquait un homme et révéla aux gens de chez nous que les femmes étaient aussi aptes que les hommes à des travaux que personne auparavant n'aurait eu l'idée de leur faire accomplir: tels de scier le bois en planches.

(30)

Denis notes that, by working on the project, the women demonstrate that they are capable of things local people had never thought possible. However, they do so only in the context of forced labor for the mission. Drumont certainly never affords them any other chance to demonstrate these abilities and surely only provides this “opportunity” for the labor he needs and wishes to encourage. It is also important to note that Drumont himself also extended the required stay at the sixa from three to four months for the explicit purpose of maintaining a labor force (30). He even created a song “pour les inciter au travail” (28) and to make them believe that such work was a demonstration of their character:

Quoi que tu fasses  
Qui te dépasse,  
Ne renonce jamais,

### Redouble l'effort... (27)

The sixa, then, clearly works for the material benefit of the mission, forcing the young women to work, all the while cloaking their labor under the guise of spiritual and moral development. However, the coercion of labor does not represent the worst of the women's treatment at the sixa.

### The sixa brothel

The difficult work imposed upon the women living in the sixa by the priest pales in comparison to another abusive practice at this institution. As noted earlier, unbeknownst to the Father, the sixa has for some time acted as a local brothel benefiting Raphaël and the others charged with running the school by way of the coerced participation of the women residing there. As the novel approaches its conclusion, one of the young women finally confronts Father Drumont: "Tu ne peux pas ignorer que toutes les femmes de la sixa couchent avec quelqu'un de la mission ou de l'extérieur. . . A mon arrivée à la sixa, ces mœurs-là existaient déjà; je les ai trouvées: ce n'est pas moi qui les ai inventées" (295). She continues and makes it clear that this is not a problem that has developed recently, nor is it limited to a select few women at the sixa. It is a longstanding arrangement that, she says, represents "ce qui toujours s'est passé, ce qui se passera toujours dans cette maison" (295). Furthermore, the young woman explains to Drumont that, under the arrangements of the director, Raphaël, all of the young women must take men: "Puisque tu veux le savoir, toutes les femmes de ta sixa couchaient avec quelqu'un. Toutes, m'entends-tu, toutes!" (296).

An examination of the women by a physician confirms that, as a result of this activity, both syphilis and gonorrhea are present at the sixa (322), with syphilis affecting dozens of women (282). For Zacharie, these infections pose no problem because he merely changes girls when the one he has been seeing exhibits symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease (282), returning her to the cycle of prostitution. In fact, the text offers no evidence at of men becoming infected, underscoring the manner in which they take advantage of the women while avoiding consequences themselves. Meanwhile, the Father is shocked when Catherine reveals the presence of the disease: “La syphilis dans ma sixa! Un comble. Tu es bien certaine que c’est la syphilis qu’elle a, cette fille?” (283). Furthermore, the living conditions at the sixa, again seemingly unknown the Father, are reported as being nothing less than squalid. After the doctor examines the grounds, he describes the complex as violating even “le bon sens le plus élémentaire” (319).

Even though the mission priest has for years been ignorant of the nature of the sixa, the brothel is apparently well known among the local population. Denis, for example, states that “[j]’ai toujours entendu que les femmes de la sixa avaient une mauvaise conduite” (199). Notably, Denis is not only aware of the nature of the sixa but also appears to place the blame on the “mauvaise conduite” of the women. Drumont, however, remains unaware of all these things because of his failure properly to oversee the school, and because of the longstanding silence of the women themselves. In addition to having been coerced into prostitution, we must also note that they have clearly also been intimidated into remaining silent. For example, Catherine, whom we will discuss later, admits that she was intimidated into following Raphaël’s orders.

In fact, the only notable resistance comes from a man. Catherine's (Zacharie's mistress) fiancé confronts Zacharie about his exploitation of this young woman. After delivering a beating to Zacharie, he tells him "que les femmes de la sixa n'ont pas été mises là pour ton plaisir" (228). He continues:

Il est une chose qu'il faut bien que vous compreniez, vous tous qui travaillez à la mission de Bomba: il faut que vous vous mettiez bien dans la tête que les femmes qui se trouvent là-bas à la sixa ne sont pas vos femmes; on n'est pas venu les mettre là pour vous, il faut que vous vous le disiez bien. (229)

Here, we see a significant indication of a native man's perception of the sixa. This man's anger is not only directed at Zacharie for his relationship with Catherine, but also at the whole of the Bomba mission for its complicity. His words also indict the mission for its role in the similar use and abuse of countless others who have been enrolled there. Far from being a liberating or spiritually edifying presence, the sixa is presented as an institution that grotesquely exploits the local women for its own purposes.

As mentioned earlier, the conditions under which the women live and work at the sixa only serve to reinforce this impression. When the young women are questioned about the events at the sixa, Drumont's treatment of them further confirms his lack of concern for their personal well-being. As each woman arrives for questioning, she is greeted with fifteen cane thrashes, with ten more ordered for those who "ne montraient pas suffisamment de complaisance" (306). When this humiliating interrogation is completed, Drumont then sends the young women home, admonishing them: "Vous me faites honte. Vous déshonorez ma mission. Je ne veux plus vous revoir" (329). Already

abandoned by the men who ran the sixa, these women are now abandoned by the Father as well. According to Thomas Melone, they are victims of “un vaste complot psychologique et social, dont la femme cernée de tous côtés par des forces d’une incontrôlable puissance, sera fatalement la victime” (160). Even young Denis seems to support such treatment of the sixa women. According to Susan Gasster, “Denis’ reporting of this exploitation from a position of fearful respect for the priest sets him doubly on the side of evil. He sides with the men against the women, and the whites against the blacks. He is clearly more seduced by the glory of his relationship with Drumont than moved by compassion for the flock” (Perspective 293). In other words, it is a perspective that privileges the privileged, working from the top town. These young women are victims of the African man, victims of the white man, victims of the Church, and abandoned by all.

### **CATHERINE: ZACHARIE’S MISTRESS**

Perhaps the most telling example of the sixa’s victimization of the women is Catherine, the young woman who follows Zacharie along the tour of the Tala country. As the tour nears its end, Zacharie’s wife, Clémentine, appears and accuses Catherine of having an affair with Zacharie. Catherine admits, as accused, that she has followed Zacharie on his tour of the Tala country and that “elle couchait déjà avec Zacharie à la mission de Bomba, au su de Raphaël” (212). This revelation about Catherine is the first example revealed to Drumont concerning the clandestine activities at the sixa and the role of the sixa administration in supporting them. Yet, Drumont does not react against Zacharie or Raphaël. Rather, the priest violently punishes the young woman: “Le R.P.S.

a fait donner une longue fessée à Catherine par le catéchiste local” (213). The roles of the two men are ignored while the young woman takes the blame and the punishment.

Zacharie, the man most involved in the incident, believes that a beating is indeed merited, but suggests that his wife should be the one punished, rather than Catherine: “La nouvelle de la fessée l’a exaspéré et il a déclaré que c’est à Clémentine que cette fessée aurait dû être administrée si le R.P.S. avait été un homme averti” (213). Zacharie complains that “les Blancs ne comprennent rien à notre sagesse” (214), indicating that Drumont has mishandled the punishment in such a situation. To Zacharie, Drumont has imposed his own solution while ignoring the way native “wisdom” would address the situation. However, the text gives no deference to the alternative offered by Zacharie. It is evident that neither perspective in this instance offers a reasonable solution for the woman. Whether the European Drumont or the African Zacharie handles the conflict between Catherine and Clémentine, a woman will still be beaten in either scenario.

Furthermore, Catherine’s relationship with Zacharie, the source of this conflict, did not begin by her own volition. Rather, it was a relationship she initially had to accept in order to avoid punishment at the sixa. This becomes clear when Catherine shares with Drumont the circumstances of the beginning of her relationship with Zacharie. One evening, Raphaël appeared at her door and asked her to follow him:

Elle s’était levée; elle avait suivi Raphaël. Ils étaient entrés dans la case du catéchiste. Raphaël, sans rien dire, avait désigné du doigt une pièce de sa case et cette pièce était éclairée par un lame-tempête. A moitié endormie, sans pouvoir réaliser exactement, Catherine avait pénétré dans la pièce et y avait trouvé Zacharie, assis sur le lit et souriant. Catherine

avait fait mine de sortir de la pièce et de s'en aller; mais elle avait trouvé

Raphaël debout dans la grande pièce et Raphaël lui avait demandé

sévèrement:

-Où vas-tu donc? Rentre dans cette chambre!

Elle avait peur et elle était embarrassée. Raphaël lui avait dit avec

humeur:

-Rentreras-tu dans cette chambre, à la fin?

Elle n'avait pas le courage de désobéir. (280)

In this scene we witness the sort of power Raphaël holds over young women like Catherine. We see that she is both humiliated and overcome by fear. Refusing to do what is asked of her is clearly not an option for Catherine. She simply does not have the courage to risk the inevitable consequences of resistance. After this initial encounter, she continues the relationship. Catherine determines that she must maintain the liason with Zacharie or be forced to undertake "travaux pénibles" (280). Given a personal room at the catechist's home which Zacharie visits when he wishes (281), she is there for his pleasure at his convenience.

When Catherine follows Zacharie while he is on tour with Drumont, she acts at the command of Raphaël, who told her "qu'elle devait accepter d'accompagner Zacharie en tournée" (286). Once again, it is evident that she has little choice but to follow Raphael's orders. Even the presence of the priest offers no reasonable opportunity for Catherine to escape this exploitation. She reveals to Drumont that she never considered telling him about the conditions of the sixa because of his reputation for refusing to believe any stories concerning problems with his mission or its staff (284). Thus,

Catherine, who has essentially been placed in this compromising situation by representatives of the Church, sees no hope in the leader of the mission. She suffers an immediate and real oppression but has no recourse within the Church, not even to the priest himself.

### **CLEMENTINE: ZACHARIE'S WIFE**

The other woman in Zacharie's life, his wife, is no less victimized. When Denis discovers that she has been spying on her husband and his mistress, she confides in the mission boy. Her despair at being deceived and abandoned by her husband is painfully clear: "Clémentine pleurait et elle disait: 'Il m'a laissée avec un tout jeune bébé et c'était pour faire ça! Je me demandais pourquoi cela lui faisait tant de bonheur d'effectuer une tournée'" (195). Soon thereafter, Clémentine seeks out Catherine. Ironically, she confronts Catherine while Zacharie, Denis, and Drumont are at mass (201). The fight can be easily heard from the church: "on aurait dit qu'un jeune éléphant turbulent avait été enfermé dans notre case, que le jeune éléphant éprouvait la soudaine et capricieuse envie de s'en aller, de renverser les murs et de regagner sa forêt natal" (202). Yet, in a most symbolic act that reveals Drumont's lack of concern for the problems of the women in his region, "[l]e R.P.S. a continué à dire la messe et il ne s'est pas troublé" (202). This indifference is underscored when the two women burst out of the house in plain view of those in attendance. They then turn their attention to watching the fight through the church windows while "[l]e R.P.S. continuait à dire la messe et il ne se troublait pas" (203). Only when this fight conflicts with Drumont's own work, when the congregation physically leaves the church to watch the fight and he "s'est aperçu que la chapelle était

vide” (203), does the missionary choose to involve himself in the conflict, finally working his way through the crowd to break up the struggle.

Underscoring a sense of dual complicity on the part of both the Europeans and the Africans, Zacharie does not wish to see himself as in any way responsible for the conflict between Catherine and Clémentine, while Drumont places the blame directly on his cook. Ignoring any role he and his sixa may have played in the development of such circumstances, Drumont tells Zacharie “cette histoire, ce scandale, c’est toi qui l’as provoqué” (206). But Zacharie “a grommelé entre ses mâchoires que cette histoire ne le regardait pas et que lui ne l’avait pas cherchée” (206). Furthermore, he continues to insist that if he were left to deal with the situation he “administrerait une telle fessée à Clémentine que toute l’affaire en resterait là” (207).

As the novel comes to a close, Clémentine finds herself shamed and with nowhere to turn. Abandoned by Zacharie, she seeks out Father Drumont, asking, “Que vais-je faire maintenant, Père?” (335). But Drumont offers her little assistance. Instead, as she leaves, Drumont can do no better than to offer her a bit of money and suggest “accepte tes peines comme une pénitence” (336). Thus, rather than offering either his help or even his remorse for the situation in which Clémentine finds herself, Drumont implies that her suffering is merely a part of her relation with the Christian faith. Furthermore, by implying that such suffering is a sort of “pénitence”, Drumont goes so far as to suggest that, in fact, her suffering is a direct result of her own sins. The sins of Zacharie, Raphaël, and even Drumont himself are conspicuously unmentioned.

**MARGUERITE**

Sixa resident Marguerite is called for questioning by Drumont after Catherine has identified her as Zacharie's previous mistress from the sixa. Her arrival for interrogation presents yet another disturbing image of the way these women are treated: "Le cuisinier adjoint est revenu, poussant devant lui Marguerite Anaba comme on fait d'une chèvre ou de toute autre bête réticente" (287). Her initial resistance to the priest's questioning draws a violent response. Nevertheless, she tries to continue to resist. Marguerite is whipped for her refusal to answer questions with proper respect but refuses to succumb: "Jamais une plainte, jamais un geste chez Marguerite immobile, inébranlable comme une souche. Au vingtième coup, le R.P.S. a fait signe au cuisinier adjoint d'arrêter. Alors seulement la fille Marguerite a porté ses mains sur ses fesses qu'elle a légèrement frottées" (288-289). Even after twenty lashes, she refuses to answer Drumont's questions. Yet this brief image of resistance quickly becomes an image of a woman forced into submission. Marguerite will eventually succumb and answer the Father's questions through tears of pain (290). To emphasize the depth of the brutality, at one point she is whipped even after agreeing to respond to a question (295).

When interrogated by Drumont, Marguerite suggests that Raphaël did what any man would have done in such a position. For Marguerite, Raphaël does not represent a man who views women exceptionally poorly in relation to other men. Rather, thanks to his position at the mission, he is simply placed in a particular position of power over many women: "N'importe qui à sa place se serait comporté comme lui et cela aurait été normal" (291). This is a very significant response, as it indicates that the power given to him through his role with the Church both allows and encourages Raphaël to act as he

does. Once again the Church and the native man are presented as mutually complicit in creating an environment conducive to such abuse.

For Marguerite, Raphaël and the sixa have ruined her life, not only by forcing her to participate in the brothel at the sixa, but also by conspiring to keep her longer than the usual term of four months. He does so by refusing to allow her to see her fiancé and by convincing him in turn that she did not wish to see him (298). Consequently, Marguerite is separated from her future family. For all of this, she makes her anger clear to Drumont: “Ce Raphaël, ton catéchiste, ton homme de confiance, eh bien, moi je le déteste! Je le hais, tu m’entends. Père, je le tuerais. Tout ce qui est arrivé, ça a été de sa faute” (297). Marguerite’s reaction powerfully exposes the utter failure of the mission to offer any sort of hope to these women it claims to serve. In this case, Marguerite’s outrage underscores the level to which she feels she has been betrayed.

Again, through the perspective of this woman, we see that the Bomba mission is far from a liberating or empowering presence for the women of the region. All three of the women discussed here, as well hundreds of others, have clearly and cruelly been victims of a double oppression. The text powerfully presents each of these women as examples of mistreatment and exploitation both by the African male, represented by Raphaël and Zacharie, and by the European Church, represented by the Bomba mission and its missionary.

**LE ROI MIRACULE**

As in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, attitudes and opinions expressed by various characters in *Le Roi miraculé* reveal much about the standing of women in the social context of the novel. Gustave, mission boy to Father Le Guen, reveals early in the novel his opinion of the female gender. When asked by the Father about his newborn sibling, he responds, “Oh, une fille! déclara l’enfant avec une moue” (42), a statement and expression Frederick Muller translates as “only a girl” (33). Other characters, including two of the village elders, display similarly condescending views of females, as seen in the following exchange between two elders, Ndibidi and Ondoua, in the moments while they anxiously await the Chief’s decision regarding his wives:

- Comme le disaient nos pères, qu’est-ce la femme? “Un épis de maïs! Le broute quiconque a de bonnes dents!”

Ce disant, Ndibidi levait un beau morceau de mouton, le jaugait de l’index et du pouce et comme l’épaisseur de viandes lui agréait, l’étreignait fermement de toute sa grosse main droite, donnant même la gauche en renfort. (146)

Ondoua then grabs his own piece of meat and replies with a proverb of his own:

- Et comme ils avaient raison! Ils disaient aussi: “La femme? Un svelte palmier, y grimpe quiconque est muni d’une ceinture.” (146)

This image of these two men creates a biting criticism of their views as they share these “words of wisdom.” The manner in which they devour the meat underscores the objectifying attitude of their statements. A woman appears to be no less a consumable object than the meat. In fact, the sight of these two gnawing away at the meat is one that

another African man, Mekanda, observes “avec dégoût” (146). Nevertheless, such objectifying attitudes are clearly entrenched, as evidenced by the behavior of other male characters, even including the catechist, Ezoum.

Ezoum, as we have already noted, is known to have made advances to all twenty-three of the Chief’s wives. Meanwhile, in a briefly mentioned revelation, we also learn that Maurice and Cecilia, son and daughter of Chief Essomba, make their living as “une prostituée et d’un maquereau” (69). Even the daughter of the village chief is most readily defined by her role as sexual object whose life is surely controlled by her “souteneur,” Maurice (69). Finally, this view women is most strikingly underscored by the decision of the Chief to renounce Makrita, who holds the status of being the first wife, as well as the twenty-one wives who followed her. His choice of the young and beautiful Anaba, the most recent of the wives, strikes Mekanda, the chief’s brother, as the perfectly logical decision: “Laquelle? répétait Mekanda comme pour faire durer le plaisir, laquelle? Mais Anaba évidemment” (149). Even the narrator describes this choice as both legitimate and logical, “évidemment légitime et toute naturelle, étant données les mérites et la grande beauté de la jeune femme” (171). Thus, through characters like Ezoum, Maurice, and Mekanda, the text exposes an objectifying view of women among native men, a view which presents women as little more than commodities to be exchanged, consumed, or discarded.

This depreciated vision of women is not unique to the African characters of the novel. As he talks with Father Le Guen, Joseph Schoegel, a colleague at the mission, seems envious of the seemingly stress-free lifestyle of African men like the chief, the comfort of which can be attributed, in large part, to his many wives: “Ils doivent pourtant

se conserver mieux ici que chez nous. A ne rien fiche, à laisser travailler leurs femmes – les chefs surtout. Pas de souci, pas d'émotion, un système nerveux équilibré. Ne pas être aux prises des pays industrialisés, c'est un avantage cela, saint homme" (47). The statement, noticeably unchallenged by Le Guen, reveals among these European visitors their own objectified view of the women of the region. Here, their identity evolves from their role as sources of labor that make life much easier for men.

We have already noted that Le Guen's obsessive focus on Chief Essomba's immediate renunciation of his wives and his insistence that each of the rejected wives be sent back to her native clan is a catalyst for disaster. Le Guen's rigid insistence also makes it very clear that his motivation on this issue stems from his focus on dogma rather than from a concern for the well-being of any of the women themselves. Although he states that he observes an "éternelle opposition" of man against woman in Essazam (96), Le Guen makes no apparent effort to solve this acknowledged problem.

The combination of these two equally destructive sources of attitudes towards the women of the novel, that is, the attitudes of the colonized man and of the colonizing man, reinforces the idea of double oppression suggested by Gutierrez. This double oppression described by the liberation theologian is not at all unlike the "double colonization" that a postcolonial theorist might identify in the same context. In fact, according to John McCleod in *Beginning Postcolonialism*, double colonization of women in postcolonial criticism acknowledges "the fact that women are twice colonized – by *colonialist* realities and representations, and by *patriarchal* ones too" (174). Whether viewed from the perspective of the theologian or the critic, the position of women is one in which they risk exploitation from both the traditional system and the colonial system.

Nowhere are the consequences of this double oppression or colonization more evident than what occurs after the Chief renounces his wives and agrees to enter into a Christian marriage with one. In the context of the polygamous system in which the women live, their departure, orchestrated by Le Guen and Yosifa, is clearly devastating for them. On the day of the chief's decision to send them away, we witness him go from one wife's home to another, "à l'intérieur de laquelle il humilierait une autre femme qui, pourtant, durant de longues années, avait été son épouse" (157). Thomas Melone affirms that Essomba's decision to send the former wives back to their original clans is "une grande humiliation pour celles-ci" (194). Furthermore, we see that none of the wives indicates any hope in having been freed from the system, rather "les épouses du chef se confinaient dans une taciturne espérance" that she will be the one the Chief chooses to keep and marry (145). The possibility of being removed from marriage to the chief is met with fear and humiliation, not joy of liberation.

It is also important to note that the renunciation of the women belonging to each of the clans in the intricate political system that constitutes the basis for the marriages constitutes an insult both for the women themselves as well as the clans they represent. Representatives of these clans, who had arrived after hearing news of the chief's illness, now leave, each "tenant pour une injure la répudiation de la fille du clan qu'il représentait" (161), creating a "grande colère" not seen among the Essazam for many years (160). These representatives believe that the giving of the young women in marriage constitutes a political alliance that is now being broken. Representatives of one particular clan, the Ebibot, Makrrita's clan, claim that in giving over this woman in marriage, they have essentially "signé avec lui [Essomba] une alliance à vie" (168). They

continue to then make claims as to the ignored “droits imprescriptibles” (168) of a woman like Makrita. However, the narrator quickly clarifies that the clan elders are most interested in the “jeu” of the alliances and that “l’être humain ne leur inspirait aucun respect” (169). We have already seen Father Le Guen push for the dissolution of these marriages while giving little thought to the personal consequences for each woman affected. Here, we see the representatives of the clan push for the maintenance of a marriage, but they too are motivated by factors other than the well-being of the individual woman involved. Rather, their reaction demonstrates that wives such as Makrita are merely being used as political collateral by the elders of their particular clans.

Although the personal humiliation and suffering of these women is ignored by the men of the novel, the text presents several female characters who provide the reader with insight into their personal situations. The feelings of these women seem to be of little importance to either the priest who seeks to remove them from their marriages or to the clansmen who seek to keep them in the marriages. In the following pages, we will consider some of these women in relation to this situation.

### **MEDZO: YOUNGER SISTER OF ANABA**

The presence of Medzo, sister to the twenty-third and eventually chosen wife, underscores the political nature of these marriages in two ways. To her, the narrator indicates, “devait échoir l’honneur d’accoucher l’événement” (189). In other words, Medzo’s actions are the final spark that ignites the outbreak of violence at Essazam. Medzo finds herself in the midst of a crowd of women representing many different clans. Despite the tension of the situation, the women who have gathered there get along rather

well initially. When Medzo arrives, we witness a festive scene in which the women have gathered to dance. Soon, Medzo is convinced to join the festivities.

Celebrating her sister's victory and, consequently, that of her own clan in this marriage sweepstakes, Medzo brings to the surface the political rivalries inherent in the marriages and the implications of the Chief's decision:

Medzo pénétra dans le cercle, en expulsa quasiment la fille qui s'y trouvait déjà et entreprit d'improviser. Elle était heureuse, elle nageait dans une douce euphorie, venant de se révéler femme à elle-même; elle enfilait vers sur vers, couplet sur couplet – sa facilité, son aisance, sa féminité apparurent proprement prodigieuses à tous ceux qui assistaient à cette sorte d'apothéose où Medzo couvrit les concurrentes de sa soeur et aussi leurs clans et même leurs enfants de sarcasmes, de défis, d'injures qui coulaient comme l'eau d'une source généreuse. (195)

Just moments before, the scene had consisted of women from the many different clans dancing and singing together, putting aside the burdens of the Chief's conversion. As Medzo's tirade continues, the mood changes. The women of the clans "après un temps de flottement et de muette consternation, se rangèrent à une hostilité d'abord timide, mais qui crût" (196). The anger and frustration of these women rises as Medzo publicly proclaims the humiliation of the rejected wives. Medzo brazenly announces that they are "répudiées, insultées, honnies" (197). Moments later, the bloody fight that eventually leads to military intervention begins.

Medzo's behavior underscores the political nature of the marriages and the delicate alliances they represent. The fight that breaks out takes place not simply among

the former wives, but spreads to include all those representing the various clans involved in the alliances that have been sealed by the Chief's marriages. As the novel nears its close, Medzo's own marriage is announced, and it is a marriage that reinforces this concept. This engagement affirms that the incident with the Chief and his wives, despite the upheaval it caused, has done little to change the political system that controls these marriages. In a wedding obviously intended to strengthen the bonds between the Chief's clan and that of his chosen wife, Mekanda, his brother, announces that he will marry Medzo (219).

All who hear this announcement appear enthusiastic and pleased, with the exception of the young bride herself. Medzo's apprehension is evident as she steps in front of the gathered crowd that has just heard the announcement: "Elle arborait un sourire crispé, ou plutôt une grimace qui la faisait croire au bord des larmes, et peut-être l'était-elle" (219). Whether she desires to be or not, this young woman is clearly the first link in attempts to re-establish the alliances destroyed by the fallout from the chief's conversion.

### **MAKRITA: THE FIRST WIFE**

In Makrita, the first wife of Essomba, we find a woman who is victimized by both the polygamous system of her village and by Father Le Guen's efforts to eliminate that very system. She does, indeed, enjoy a certain status as the first wife of the Chief, both as the "seule que Le Guen avait consenti à baptiser" (12), and, more importantly, as the wife who holds the traditional responsibility and status of having been the first. But, as we shall see, this amounts to little for Makrita.

When the Chief finds himself in the crisis of his illness, he drags himself to her house “plutôt qu’à celle de n’importe quelle autre femme” (36). It is not a home he would normally visit in the late hours of the night, but, in a situation like this, the chief turns to Makrita. Indeed, seeing the Chief with Makrita at such a late hour of the night is more than enough to worry the village elders (35). She is not one to whom he would turn for intimacy, but rather for care or guidance. Therefore the reaction of the elders is a testament not only to the status as a caregiver that she holds as the first wife, but also to the status as a companion that she has lost with each younger wife taken on by the Chief. Thus, if he is with Makrita in the middle of the night, the elders know something must be amiss.

Indeed, Makrita actually appears to the reader as a defeated woman, something which is underscored by the description of both her physical and mental states. The “pauvreté des hanches, la maigreur du postérieur et d’autres disgrâces encore” (35) contrasts with the beauty of the newer, younger wives and, most significantly, Anaba. When the Chief turns to her in his illness, it represents an opportunity for Makrita to overcome her futility and the humiliation of her arranged marriage:

Cette femme, la première épouse du Chef, celle à qui il s’était joint dans son jeune âge, sans l’avoir choisie il va de soi, voilà des décades qu’elle guettait, sollicitait du Ciel ce jour de victoire car, si peu que cela fût apparent, elle triomphait. En vain était-elle allée pleurer devant chaque sage du clan et même de la tribu, en vain avait-elle conté la misère et l’injustice de sa condition. Alors, elle s’était mise à mépriser ces vieillards, à leur cracher au visage leur inanité, leur disant: “On me chasse

du lit pour d'autres. Mais, aux jours de malheur, c'est moi qui répondrai: présente!" (36)

Clearly, Makrita has felt abandoned in her marriage long before the events of her husband's conversion. Essomba's choosing of Anaba to be his Christian wife is only the latest in a long succession of rejections that have obviously left her bitter and defeated. In his illness, however, she is the one who will respond "présente". For Makrita, this represents her opportunity to re-establish herself as the most important wife to both Essomba and to the tribe.

Despite the suffering it causes her, Makrita sees polygamy as a system into which a woman has no choice but to enter. Consequently, she sees no hope for herself after having been rejected by the same husband whom she considers to be the source of her suffering. To Makrita, remaining in such a marriage is still preferable to being dismissed: "Une femme qui n'a pas de mari n'est rien. Et moi je ne pourrai plus me remarier, je suis trop vieille" (158). In fact, the only real way for a woman to escape is to be born a man. To her nephew, Kris, she says "Si tu avais des enfants un jour – ce que je te souhaite de tout mon coeur – tâche que ce soient des garçons, Kris. Tel que je te connais, si tu avais une fille, tu ne manquerais pas d'assassiner un homme, parce qu'il aurait fait souffrir ta fille; car, étant un homme, tu ignores à quel point une femme est faite pour être malheureuse" (157).

Yet, despite having been repeatedly rejected by her husband's numerous marriages, including the final rejection precipitated by his conversion, and despite the years of exploitation that appear to have defeated her spirit, Makrita also distinguishes herself among the women of the Essazam. She does so by way of her resistance to the

chief's decision to renounce his wives. Melone notes that she reacts "avec fermeté et dignité mais elle est la seule à réagir ainsi" (194). We have already seen her tell the elders that, despite having been "chased from the bridal bed," she intends to remain the wife in charge in times of crisis and makes it clear that she intends to be the one to care for the ailing Chief. And, among the wives who are told to return to their clans, she is the only one to resist: "Il n'y eut que Makrita pour rester, pour nier que sa maison ne fût pas sienne, qu'elle même n'appartînt pas irrévocablement au village d'Essazam ainsi qu'au clan des Ebazok, que le Chef ne fût pas son époux pour la vie" (162).

Rather than accept the humiliation of returning to her clan, the humiliation put upon her by the Chief's decision, Makrita refuses to readily accept her fate. In so doing, even though she fights to maintain her position in a marriage that she wanted no part of, and which has already stripped her of much of her dignity, Makrita presents a sort of feminine resistance at Essazam. If she has suffered at the hands of the patriarchy of her village, she will not willingly accept being victimized by the colonizer's system as well. Ignoring the status of the priest that leads so many to fear him, she challenges Le Guen as the one who initiated her "expulsion": "Eh bien, *father*, tu ne dis donc rien? J'avais pourtant entendu dire que tu souhaitais mon départ. Que t'arrive-t-il tout à coup? Serait-ce que le courage te manque d'avouer ton opinion publiquement?" (221). In the face of this final blow to her being, Makrita not only actively resists the will of Father Le Guen, but, at the same time, "elle défia les défaillances natives de son sexe" (221), challenging, then, both sides of her double oppression.

**ANABA: THE CHOSEN WIFE**

Although her role in the novel is much smaller than that of Makrita, Anaba, the young woman whom the chief chooses to be his Christian wife, underscores the objectifying views cited earlier in this section. As she is introduced, we learn that the chief prefers this most recent and youngest wife for her youth and beauty. These, of course, are the same characteristics that will motivate him to select her for his Christian wife: “Une belle femme, surtout une jeune femme, une toute petite fille fraîche comme il les aimait” (13). Her youth and beauty, “la plus belle” according to Yosifa (64), make her the wife who “vivait constamment tout près de lui” (13). Yet, despite her preferred status, we also see her working as a sort of servant around the Chief’s residence, working at the beck and call of the Chief or his brother (20). Even if she holds this preferred marital status, she appears to remain subservient to the chief.

Anaba is not only the preferred wife among the twenty-three but also the obvious choice, in the words of both Mekanda and the narrator, to be the Chief’s sole Christian wife. The same objectifying factors that make her the preferred in the Essazam polygamy make her the preferred in European system imposed by Le Guen. Perhaps most significantly, the preferences that she “wins,” will also make her the target of the anger and violence that erupts. It is Anaba, not Le Guen, Essomba, or even Medzo, who is “extirpée de la mêlée, meurtrie, défaillante, couverte d’égratignures et de morsures, geignant telle une moribonde” (198). While the others who contributed to the tension that instigated the brawl escape basically unharmed, Anaba is the victim of the anger surrounding the chief’s decisions.

Perhaps most significantly, Anaba's role in the entire matter is presented as basically a silent one. She is essentially a character without a voice. Although she may be the chosen wife, the narrator never acknowledges any say or opinion on Anaba's part. So, despite the fact that she may be considered the victor in the chief's selection process, she also appears to be treated as little more than the prized possession among the chief's twenty-three wives.

### **YOSIFA: AUNT AND BAPTIZER OF THE CHIEF**

With Yosifa, who raised the Chief from his childhood and the woman who initiates his "conversion," we see a woman who contrasts with Makrita and Anaba by the fact that she has chosen to convert to Christianity. Her physical description, however, recalls the description of the tired and defeated Makrita, a thin, frail body "*balloté sur les remous de chagrin*" (55). Also like Makrita, the narrator tells us that Yosifa is a victim of years of abuse from men, "*les mâles qui n'avaient pas dû la manipuler avec ménagement jusqu'à ce qu'elle fût évidemment hors d'usage*" (54). Indeed, her description seems to distinguish itself from that of Makrita only by her wearing of an outward sign of her conversion to Christianity: "*au cou, elle arborait un chapelet géant*" (54).

Thus, Yosifa, may be seen as the novel's representation of the female convert, the woman who has sought comfort in the faith of the missionary. Her portrayal, however, offers the Essazam woman little hope in Christianity. The two characteristics most readily attributable to Yosifa are merely anger and madness. She is described as "*hurlant de cette voix éraillée qui, chez les femmes, caractérise l'hystérie*" (57) when she confronts the elders and accuses them of having plotted to murder their Chief. Having

railed against the elders, she then attacks the wives of the Chief with the same sorts of accusations:

Cette fois, Ezoum, le catéchiste, l'homme de Dieu, n'intervint pas, de sorte que la vieille put à loisir distiller son venin sur les pauvres femmes du Chef qu'on voyait éclater silencieusement en sanglots qui les secouaient doucement comme des rires retenus, des larmes coulaient sur leurs joues le long de sillons déjà creusés par d'autres larmes. (59)

To both the elders and the wives, Yosifa, the principal representative of conversion to the faith of the colonizers, offers no comfort in this difficult time. Rather than bringing peace, her religion only manifests itself in this situation as contributing to her madness and her anger. We should note here that William Hart, in his work, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, notes that religion can be a potential source of “divine madness,” among a “coerced” and “seduced” following (10). Such emotions “often cause deadly harm” (Hart 10), and this certainly proves to be the case with Yosifa’s ongoing frenzy. Nevertheless, we should also note Hart’s characterization of a converted following as one that has been “seduced”. Even if Yosifa’s passion causes great harm in Essazam, we must remember what has influenced her anger, namely Le Guen’s dogmatic rigidity.

Furthermore, as we already know, Yosifa will play a key role, in convincing the Chief to follow Le Guen’s advice that he must rid himself of his wives. She does so, it should be added, by way of deception. Rather than being liberated by her attachment to this religion that so vigorously opposes the system of polygamy, a system presented in no flattering terms in the context of this novel, Yosifa is little different from Le Guen

himself. Although she does support the elders' suggestion that the repudiated wives be allowed to maintain their residences rather than be forced to return to their clans, her efforts here pale in comparison to her coerced baptism of the Chief and her unscrupulous efforts to see that he immediately take on a Christian marital arrangement.

Yosifa seems to have gained little from her religious conversion to Christianity. She shares Le Guen's opposition to the Chief's polygamy but pays little more attention than the priest himself to the impending consequences of dismantling the marriages. She ignores the potential fallout of a sudden change in such a politically entrenched set of arranged marriages. Thus, she too may be seen as victim of a double colonization, albeit somewhat differently from the others. That she has suffered at the hands of men for years is made quite clear, yet her conversion seems to have gained her little more.

As for the other women, their situation is no better, yet they make no effort to resist. Melone notes that, with the exception Makrita, the women "acceptent pratiquement la situation avec plus ou moins de philosophie, convaincues qu'il n'y a rien à espérer" (194), and even Makrita, like the others, finds herself abandoned within her marriage and further abandoned when she is forced to leave it.

### ***UN SORCIER BLANC A ZANGALI***

Although *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali* does not include a central event related to women, such as the revelations about the sixa in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* or the marriages of the chief in *Le Roi miraculé*, there are nevertheless certain female characters whose circumstances speak to the status and situation of women in this setting. Despite a

more subtle presentation, the unique oppression of women in the context of a colonial setting is also addressed in this novel.

### **TUMBE: ETIENNE'S MOTHER**

Tumbé, whom we have already considered as wife of Kuya and mother of Etienne, is portrayed early in the novel as one who works exceptionally hard to maintain her home and care for her family. In her home, we see an image of a crucifix, described with attention to the suffering Christ. The narrator tells us that on the wall “trônait misérablement un Jésus-Christ couronné d’épines, sous les insultes impunies de la poussière et de la suie” (27). This image surely relates in part to the suffering of the couple that we have already discussed. Still, it must be noted that the image of the crucifix is presented in the midst of a description of the household chores of the wife. In other words, the suffering Christ is presented as Tumbé “vaquait fièvreusement à son ménage” and labored to the point that she “perdait souvent haleine et avait les yeux rouges” (27). When we see the suffering Christ in the home of Kuya and Tumbé, we see him in the midst of her exhausting work.

Meanwhile, in this particular context of gender roles in the home, Kuya is not presented as sharing in his wife’s misery. On the contrary, he is quite distanced from her labor. As Tumbé works, we see Kuya, who “s’était vautré dans sa chaise longue de bambou” (28). The text continues to note that “il ne semblait nullement s’incommoder de cette fumée qui faisait de la hutte sans pièce, un véritable étouffoir” (28) and that he followed “d’un oeil indifférent les va-et-vient laborieux de sa femme” (28). In this scene from the home life of Kuya and Tumbé, one that follows the presentation of their mutual

suffering as a slave couple, sold from master to master, we find a woman who, even while sharing such a low social standing with her husband, appears to hold an inferior status to him in the context of the marriage itself. Although this may be interpreted as a simple image of traditional gender roles within a home, the language of the text powerfully presents a distinct contract between the toil of the woman and the “indifférence” of the man.

However, when it suddenly appears that Tumbé the mother might also lose her son to a dangerous mission for Marius and the Church, we see a spark of resistance. This resistance arises not only from Tumbé herself but also from several other women. The village women, we are told, support Tumbé’s resistance to her son being taken to Zangali: “Quelle mère accepterait-elle une si dangereuse entreprise? Mille tombes! Tu as raison, Tumbé, de t’opposer!” (38). In this situation, Tumbé not only challenges Marius, among the most powerful of the white men, but her husband as well: “Ma colère se décharge surtout sur Kuya! C’est lui qui avait eu la terrible idée de confier l’enfant au Fada!” (38). The women around her unite in support: “Quelques voisines eurent de la peine à la consoler. Elles n’oublièrent pas de fulminer contre Etienne Azombo, contre Yosef Kuya, et contre le R.P. Marius” (38).

Thus, in Tumbé, the novel presents a woman who, because of both her race and gender, is exploited from many directions. As a slave, she has been bought and sold as a commodity; as a wife, we watch her labor under the gaze of her indifferent husband. We also know, of course, that in the hope of securing a better life for him, she has essentially given her son to the Christian mission. However, we also witness a woman who eventually determines that she must resist, and does so as forcefully as possible.

Although Etienne will later leave of his own accord, Tumbé does succeed in convincing Marius to leave her son at home, evidence of a small success in her resistance.

### **ANDELA: A YOUNG WOMAN OFFERED TO MARIUS**

Just as Tumbé has been bought and sold as an object, so too is the reader introduced to Andela. This young woman at Pala is offered by the chief as a gift to Commandant Marius (84). In fact, the appearance of Andela in the novel creates a particularly striking image of the African woman's "double oppression" at the hands of her own culture as well as that of the colonizer. The offering of a young woman like Andela has become an established practice at Pala for gaining favor with visiting administrators: "le choix d'une fille destinée à la couche du commandant blanc en tournée a toujours été de l'étiquette" (85). Thus, Andela is a commodity exchanged between the African and the European, nothing more than object to both. The narrator affirms this objectification when noting the chief's desire to "se servir d'elle comme d'une pièce de monnaie en vie de conquérir la faveur des commandants blancs" (97). This role is apparently one that Andela has come to accept for, as the narrator indicates, she is devastated when she perceives herself to be rejected by the visiting commandant: "elle sentait son amour-propre douloureusement blessé" (97).

Although Marius may not see Andela in the same manner as would generally be expected of a visiting commandant, his initial view of her is no less exploitive. When Andela expresses an interest in learning Marius' language and in learning about his religious practices (127), Marius begins to see her as a tool for achieving his evangelizing goals. Her possible conversion to Christianity represents to Marius a potential

opportunity to use her in efforts to convert others. Noting her interest in his religion, Marius determines that he should take full advantage of the situation: “Elle reflétait un désir vague, qu’il lui fallait cependant exploiter à fond. Et déjà, dans son coeur, il échaufadait de beaux projets sur Andela. Chrétienne et initiée à tâches diverses, Andela attirerait des femmes indigènes à la nouvelle religion . . .” (128). Marius proceeds to work toward making a convert of Andela, although her interest in Christianity is not spiritually motivated. Andela merely wishes to gain the favor of the man to whom she has been given and holds to the “espoir de devenir un jour son épouse” (127). We have seen just Marius, on the other hand, demonstrate his hope for practical gains for his work through Andela’s conversion. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that all evidence of Andela’s progress toward conversion is presented in terms of ritualistic practices of Christianity. When she is baptized, the narrator notes that she will take a name chosen by the missionary, and she learns to recite “les principales prières du jour, ainsi que tous les dogmes de l’Eglise catholique” (142). In other words, Le Guen seeks to develop all the visible signs of conversion in order to offer Andela to others as an example of how a new convert should act.

Yet, just as Tumbé presents a certain level of hope through her eventual resistance, Andela’s development also suggests the beginnings of an alternative to the simple acceptance of her role. Although we do not see Andela resist, we do witness certain characteristics in her that distinguish her from what might be expected of a woman in her situation. For example, in contrast to Etienne, who is portrayed as consumed by fear as the three adjust to their living arrangements in the jungle outside Zangali, Andela demonstrates “un calme étonnant” on their first night in the brush (127).

She gives her best effort toward forging a small community in the jungle with these two men. In so doing, she demonstrates her ability to be a valuable contributor to such an endeavor: “Elle donnait au travail le meilleur d’elle-même, prouvant ainsi qu’une belle princesse avait mieux à faire que de s’alanguir oisivement à longueur de journée au fond du harem paternel” (141). The narrator continues, noting that “[o]n la voyait manier la houe avec entrain et dextérité” (141). This, of course, is not the first time we have seen women demonstrate the ability to take on work that they might have otherwise been thought incapable of accomplishing. We should recall here that the women of the sixa in Beti’s *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* also prove themselves in a similar manner, albeit under quite different circumstances. However, in Andela’s case, her work appears to be a voluntary yet necessary contribution to the group’s survival efforts while they are in the jungle.

In Andela’s case, her demonstration of these “hidden” abilities interestingly corresponds to a change in the manner in which she relates to the two men: We see that the hierarchy that would have kept her in an inferior position to both Marius and Etienne seems to be breaking down in the context of their small, new community. Here, Andela interacts with them on a level that would seem to indicate a closing of the gap in the social structure of this village of three. Suddenly, Andela becomes a young woman at ease with the two men: “Elle allait et venait d’un pas déluré, taquinait plaisamment le missionnaire européen ou Azombo pour leur arracher un sourire.” (141). It also is important to emphasize that her role in this community seems to equal that of the two men, as she is “toujours bout-en-train de la petite communauté” (142). So, while the women at the sixa demonstrate their abilities under the duress of forced labor, Andela

does so of her own accord, and in the context of a newfound relationship with the men with whom she lives, one in which she is no longer in the subservient position of the African woman presented as a gift to the white man. Rather, she asserts herself in the context of the interdependence of the three.

Finally, we must note that Andela's last act recorded in the novel is to "défaire les cordes du R.P. Marius" (170) just after Mekula saves him from execution. Although her fate after these events is unclear, Philombe leaves the reader with a very powerful final image of Andela. She literally removes the ties that bind him just before he will express the change in perspective that leads him to question his mission and the manner in which he has conducted it. Clearly, the removal of the bonds is a significant symbol of the change in the missionary's perspective, but it is also important to note that they are removed by this woman whom he has encountered. As his change of view is in large part connected to the time he spent in the jungle with Andela and Etienne, it is only fitting that she should remove these cords that bind him. Soon after this event, Marius articulates his questions about how he has conducted himself as part of the missionary effort, demonstrating that his experience with the Africans themselves has led him to reconsider his actions.

## **TWO WOMEN: TWO FLEETING ENCOUNTERS WITH FATHER MARIUS**

Finally, two brief appearances provide two contrasting images of women as they come into contact with the colonial presence, represented in Marius. In an incident discussed in an earlier section, Marius encounters a young woman who questions him as to why she cannot be baptized. She has followed all of the ritualistic requirements of the

faith, “elle s’est faite inscrire à la doctrine” (32), yet “elle se plaint parce que le baptême lui est toujours refusé” (32). As we have seen, Marius has refused her baptism because she is an unwed mother. In this case, her primary motivation to continue to seek baptism is fear, a fear that clearly comes from the teaching of the missionary. She is certain that, without baptism, she risks being “condamnée à être brûlée éternellement en enfer” (32). The narrator affirms that she is overwhelmed by this desire to protect herself from such a fate; stating that she is “toute éplorée et consumée par l’ardent désir de devenir chrétienne à n’importe quel prix” (32). Clearly her reaction to his miscommunicated question (see page 95) reveals the level of her desperation. Her reaction leaves her humiliated, chastised, and only further distanced from the mission: “La femme n’y comprend rien; elle ne comprend pas surtout pourquoi le catéchiste la chasse à coups de bâton en l’affublant de l’étiquette de ‘satan’” (33). This woman does not appear again in the text, however this single encounter nevertheless presents a desperate person who receives little sympathy from the missionary establishment.

Marius has another significant encounter with a woman while he masquerades as a commandant at Pala. Like the woman seeking baptism, she is unnamed and only appears briefly, but the manner in which she contrasts with the other women of her village is nevertheless quite significant. She is the only one of the mothers of the village who resists an unusual request from Commandant Marius. On the night of festivities honoring his presence, Marius asks that the children of the village be awakened to join the rest of the village. To this request, she expresses “tout haut l’immense inquiétude qu’éprouvait en silence toutes les mères de Pala” (75). Although they were clearly afraid or unwilling to speak out, the narrator tells us that all of these mothers had concerns

about bringing their children out: “Elles savaient à quel danger s’exposaient les petits enfants en sortant à cette heure avancée de nuit” (75). They are particularly concerned that their feeble lungs that should not be exposed to the night air. Yet this single woman “se trouvait seule” in questioning the idea of breaking with the practice of keeping young children inside at night. For the others, the presence of the white man constitutes reason enough: “Manger avec un homme blanc et par surcroît un commandant, il n’y avait pas porte-bonheur plus efficace. L’occasion était belle et unique!” (76). Thus, in questioning this request on the part of the white man, one that clearly does not respect an important custom of the village, this single woman finds herself speaking on behalf of the collective mothers of the village, a voice for those who will not speak up.

That both of these women are nameless is likewise significant. As is literally the case with the second woman, they speak not only of their personal situations, but also of those of many other women. The woman who desperately seeks care and guidance from the priest and the woman who questions the wholesale acceptance of the requests of the white man could both take many names. In both cases, their circumstances are not unique; they are surely shared by many women in similar contexts. Thus, their nameless appearance is emblematic of both a lack of individual identity, and, at the same, the universality of their experience.

Furthermore, the women of all three novels speak to the particular plight of women in such colonial settings. “The colonial world was no place for a woman,” claim Kirsten Peterson and Anna Rutherford in *A Double Colonization*. Certainly this is an assertion supported by these three novels. Just as theologian Gustavo Gutierrez speaks of the “double oppression” of the colonized woman, critic Bill Ashcroft asserts that feminist

postcolonial critics “argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and the ‘double colonization’ that resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women needs to be taken into account in any analysis of colonial oppression” (103). The women of these novels affirm the existence of this double oppression and most assuredly call it into question.

## CONCLUSION

Bernard Mouralis notes that all of the events recounted by Denis in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* revolve around violence (43). It can also be said that the primary events of the other two novels we have examined have very violent results as well. In each work, violent conflict is tragically central to the missionary's story. In Denis' case, the boy blindly accepts such violence as a necessary part of the colonial mission. As Mouralis again emphasizes: "En particulier, il se refuse à condamner, car il en vient à penser que la violence que subissent les hommes et les femmes qu'il rencontre sur son parcours est en définitive acceptable puisqu'elle lui paraît correspondre aux desseins de la Providence" (44). Certainly, Denis' view is based on what he has learned from Father Drumont, and as we have seen, Le Guen and Marius also demonstrate similar attitudes. The work of the colonial missionary is the work of God. Consequently, any resultant difficulties or suffering are also part of God's plan. Yet, the stories of each of these three priests contradict such a naïve understanding. If the violent events correspond to something, it is not to God's providence, but rather to colonialism itself, a relationship which each of the texts exposes for all of its injustices.

Indeed, the close relation of the Church and the colonial enterprise is underscored in all three novels. We may recall, for example, that the administrator Vidal tells Father Drumont in *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, "je continue à soutenir que la mienne [vocation] et la vôtre ne font qu'une" (58). This connection is surely no less strong in the other two texts, as we witness Le Guen's removal from his post for his ironic refusal to follow the

administration's wishes and Marius' vain attempts to stop the administration's efforts to punish the chief at Zangali. Furthermore, the native population is also quite aware of this relationship, as we have discussed, for example, in relation to Kuya and Tumbé of *Un Sorcier blanc à Zangali*. While Kuya makes particular note of the respect given to priests by other Europeans, Denis also points out that locals near Bomba will surely observe the same: "C'est une bonne leçon pour les Tala qu'un Blanc, un administrateur, aborde un prêtre avec tant de respect, presque de vénération" (57).

Thus, each of the priests shares a close relation to the colonial administration and the colonial undertaking. Similarly, they are also connected to one another through their perceived pursuit of power, their unwavering insistence on instilling a particular moral code and, most telling, through the disastrous results of each of their endeavors. While Susan Gasster suggests in her article "Mongo Beti's Priests in Perspective" that "it is clear that Drumont and Le Guen do not stand for the Church" (294), this statement seems to ignore the position of the priest as the primary representative of the Church to the native population in his region. Such an understanding would unjustly allow an indictment of the priests while absolving the institution for which they work, ignoring the complicity of the institution itself.

Gustavo Gutierrez emphasizes in *A Theology of Liberation* that the Church must recognize its own connection to oppressive social structures (128). Absent such an understanding, the Church is unable to fully oppose oppression and exploitation. In some cases, particularly those of Drumont and Marius, the priests do indeed begin to recognize the connection to which Gutierrez refers. Nevertheless, they remain paralyzed by their inability or unwillingness to act even as they become aware of the brutal injustice of the

situations around them. Men such as these are bound by binary colonial thought that separates them from the colonized: Fanon identifies this thought in *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*: “Le colonialisme français refuse en effet d’admettre qu’un Européen bien constitué puisse véritablement se battre aux côtés du peuple algérien” (151). Although this sort of thought binds them, they must release themselves and transcend such an understanding if they are to oppose the oppression they have begun to recognize.

The change and beginnings of self-awareness necessary in the priests of these texts are much like the change Gutierrez claims is necessary in the Church as a whole. The Church, he says, must become “an institution of social criticism” and must transform itself into a “nonrepressive institution (*Theology* 128). Gutierrez further insists that “the Church must cease considering itself as the exclusive place of salvation and orient itself toward a new and radical service of people” (143). This represents an “uncentering” not unlike the transformation we witness beginning in Father Marius as he cares for the exiled ill in the jungle. The transformed Church is called upon, like the priests of these novels, to “criticize every sacralization of oppressive structures to which the Church itself might have contributed” (152). With Father Le Guen, we witness not only the tragedy of the events at Essazam but also the tragedy of his apparent failure to recognize the role he has played in the events at the village. In the cases of Drumont and Marius, we actually witness the beginnings of such a transformation, although we also witness the tragedy of their inability or unwillingness to effectively act on their changing understanding.

Many desperate and exploited native characters vividly reveal the oppression to which the missions contributed. Often, they seem plagued by the sense of inferiority

described by Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs*, an image reinforced by the missionary's message of their spiritual and moral shortcomings. Other native characters, such as Raphaël of *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, themselves contribute to and profit from the exploitation of other natives. In many cases, we then see women victimized by both colonial and native oppression. These women reinforce John McCleod's assertion that the postcolonial concept of double colonization acknowledges the "fact that women are twice colonized – by *colonialist* realities and representations, and by *patriarchal* ones too" (174). At the same time, these women underscore Gutierrez' parallel claim that they are doubly oppressed.

Both postcolonial theorists and liberation theologians, particularly those, such as Said and Gutierrez, to whom we have often referred, encourage us to recognize such oppression and its sources. Gutierrez notes, for example, that the essential cause of poverty, in all its manifestations, is "the injustice of oppressors" (*Theology* 165). Furthermore, Gutierrez notes that poverty in the eyes of liberation theology considers far more than just material poverty, and Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng concurs:

Finally, it is observed that the want or lack in question must not be restricted to material goods alone. There are other goods – spiritual, moral, cultural, sociological, and so on – the privation of which engenders other types of poverty; spiritual, moral, cultural, and sociological. These kinds of poverty are just as devastating for a human being as is simple material poverty. ("Impoverishment" 156)

Mveng indicts all establishments that act as agents of poverty and oppression as having no "human or religious value"; they are rather "agents of the debasement of people and

the destruction of their dignity as persons and daughters or sons of God”

(“Impoverishment” 163). In the context of the texts we have examined, the mission is clearly a principal agent for such “debasement” and must be exposed as such.

Gutierrez and Mveng further agree that the oppressed must be liberated from such institutions, whatever they may be. In fact, Gutierrez identifies the first level of liberation as “liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization” (*Theology* xxxviii) while Mveng suggests that any presence of the Western Christian Church in the Third World “demands first and foremost the destruction of the structures of sin and their spawn: the factories of power, misery, and the vicious circle of impoverishment” (“Impoverishment” 164). In other words, their message as it relates to the colonial context is much like that of Fanon himself, namely that such oppression and the agents who encourage it must be universally resisted. Eventually, such resistance must come from all sides. Indeed, for Fanon, revolutionary struggle is ultimately a humanistic project encompassing all people: “Ce travail colossal qui consiste à réintroduire l’homme dans le monde, l’homme total, se fera avec l’aide décisive des masses européennes . . .” (*Les damnés* 140-141). Meanwhile, Gutierrez affirms that this help is not unreasonable to expect, because when the causes of poverty are identified, then even “the privileged begin to resist” (*Theology* xxiv). In other words, resistance will not be complete or successful without the support and participation of the “privileged,” the colonizers. In the case of these novels, the privileged are foremost represented by the priests, and, in fact, we do witness the beginnings of resistance on the part of at least two of them.

It is in this struggle that we witness the convergence of postcolonial literary and cultural theory and the basic tenets of liberation theology. Both encourage a vision of the world, and certainly a reading of these novels, “from the bottom up.” To cite Gutierrez again, “liberation expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes” (*Theology* 24). Indeed, this expression is a central accomplishment of each of the three novels we have examined, exposing both the plight of the colonized and the complicity of even the most well-intentioned among the colonizers. And this same struggle described by the acknowledged founder of liberation theology is also very evident in Edward Said’s understanding of the role of the intellectual as one who must represent “all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (*Representations* 11). In other words, Said’s intellectual is called upon to represent the “non-persons” of liberation theology, those whom Gutierrez defines as “those who are not considered to be human being with full rights, beginning with the right to life and freedom in all spheres” (*Theology* xxix). Most assuredly, among those “non-persons” are those for whom Beti and Philombe have spoken.

Yet we must continue to remind ourselves that thinkers such as Said and Gutierrez also warn against oversimplifying the struggle. Just as Gutierrez insists that the Church cannot ignore its own role in the establishment and maintenance of structures of oppression, Said emphasizes that the intellectual must acknowledge and resist all oppression, including that of his own culture, because “one of the shabbiest of all intellectual gambits is to pontificate about the abuses in someone else’s society and to

excuse exactly the same practices in one's own" (*Representations* 92). Clearly, these novels expose such injustices to the Western reader, but their African authors also heed Said's warning. Indeed, it should again be noted here that the novels themselves refuse to simply invert the colonial binaries and repaint "good as evil" as "evil and good". Rather, while clearly focusing on the role of the mission, they do not ignore those natives who contribute the exploitation of the people as well.

Finally, we must note that all three novels conclude ambiguously. That is to say that the reader knows little about what becomes of the characters in the aftermath of the three disasters presented. We do not know what becomes of any of the priests, with the exception of a hint in *Le Roi miraculé* that Father Drumont did indeed return to France. Nor do we know how their understanding of their work develops. Likewise, the fate of the mission boys, Denis, Gustave, and Etienne, or of women such as Clémentine, Catherine, Makrita, and Yosifa, or Andela is unclear. As for Zacharie, Raphaël, and Kris, we know only that they flee. These endings encourage the readers to look forward, to recognize that the attitudes, oppression, and exploitation exposed by these texts are far from resolved. Indeed, these novels of the mid-twentieth century are no less relevant in the twenty-first century and will remain so until the intellectual no longer needs to speak for all those "swept under the rug." Said's challenge to the intellectual to take up a voice for the voiceless is clearly evident in these three novels written decades before Said himself articulated it, and it is echoed as a challenge to the Church by one of the most prominent theologians and activists of the twentieth century, Desmond Tutu, in "The Theology of Liberation in Africa":

Liberation theology challenges churches everywhere to be true to their calling to exercise a prophetic ministry in speaking up for the dumb, the voiceless, for those too weak to speak up for themselves, to oppose oppression, injustice, corruption, and evil wherever these may be found. (168)

Tutu's challenge to churches is, of course, not at all unlike Said's challenge to intellectuals, and these novels present this same challenge to their readers.

While the novels make these challenges when written in the fifties as Frantz Fanon is writing much of his work, they remain relevant a half-century later. As we have seen, Liberation Theology and Postcolonial Theory take up many similar issues as those movements develop in the seventies and beyond. Bishop Tutu's words cited above date from 1979, and Edward Said's series of lectures published as *Representations of the Intellectual* first appeared in 1994. Taken as a whole, these works, although separated by half a century, bring us forward to the present day. At the time of this writing the (post)colonial West continues to encounter the rest of the world from its very particular point of view, making these works no less relevant, and their messages no less urgent than at the time of their writing.

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