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'Anthropological mutilation' and the reordering of Cameroonian literature

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I argue in this article that the postcolonial existential wound, otherwise referred to by Eboussi Boulaga as the anthropological mutilation, represents the intertextual nexus that bridges the generational gap in Francophone Cameroonian literature. The tragic malaise, rooted in absurdity and the dire state of the postcolonial condition, echoes anxieties expressed by earlier generations of Cameroonian writers in the 1950s about engaged literature. The article is therefore an exercise in detecting commonalities and discontinuities that weave a shared national literary tradition. Among the commonalities, the presence of jazz, the writing of the anticolonial struggle stand out while innovations are to be found in the epidemic manifestation of madness and the disintegration of the basic social fabric visible in the form of incest. **Keywords:** Cameroonian literature, Francophone literature, national literary tradition.

At the annual conference of the African Literature Association held at the University of Vermont in 2009, I organized two sessions entitled "Anthropological Mutilation and the Existential Wound: Intergenerational Experiences in Cameroonian Literature." The sessions, which brought together Frieda Ekoto, Gilbert Doho, Juliana (Makuchi) Nfah-Abbenyi, Célestin Monga, Ambroise Kom, and Nathalie Etoke, among others, reflected what I detected as the malaise manifested in new Cameroonian writing. The presence of Makuchi in this analysis, which focuses on recent mutations in francophone writing, is explained by the fact that she participated in these conversations in Vermont. Those sessions in Vermont were themselves the result of my work on Mongo Beti, but also of readings of Cameroonian texts. The aesthetic and thematic mutations that reconfigure the course of *anthropological mutilation* in the Cameroonian imaginary therefore represent a working hypothesis that might correspond to the leanings of a Cameroonian writer or critic. The almost obsessive emphasis of writers of *créolité* is at the origin of the elevation of the "linguistic wound"¹ into an inescapable factor in the formulation of a theory of Antillean literature. I had also suggested to the writers to situate themselves in the intergenerational experiences that unfold in the field of Cameroonian literature. The first session brought together writers who were asked to reflect on the praxis of their writing, and the second session concentrated on criticism. This paper unites both the written work and the reflections that were borne out of the meetings in Vermont.

Anthropological mutilation refers here to the malaise found in the Cameroonian experience. I borrow this expression from the philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, who saw in it an ensemble of practices and discourses meant to effect a dehumanization in society:

Tous les régimes et les formes de pouvoir fondés sur la violence et l'arbitraire qui cherche une introuvable légitimité recourent aux magies du pouvoir et à ses rituels archaïques et cruels, qui comprennent des transgressions tournant autour de la destruction des identités familiales, généalogiques et des interdits fondateurs d'humanité: inceste, anthropophagie, viols et meurtres, parricides, etc. (Eboussi Boulaga, *Lignes de résistance* 21). (All regimes and forms of power that are based upon violence and the arbitrary that seek an unobtainable legitimacy resort to the magic of power and its archaic, cruel rituals, which comprise transgressions revolving around the destruction of the identities of family and genealogy, and humanity's founding taboos: incest, cannibalism, rapes and murders, parricides, etc.)

It takes the form of madness, incestuous rape, or child abandonment. The epidemic of routinized transgressions contributes to the destruction of the most basic social bond. *Anthropological mutilation* designates the normalization of the practices and discourses that contribute to the dissolution of the social fabric. I suggest in this contribution that the postcolonial wound, which the philosopher Eboussi Boulaga calls "anthropological mutilation," represents the intertextual link through which a francophone literature becomes possible in the Cameroonian space. I concede to Richard Bjornson that the generation of writers from the 1960s is distinguished by the "unifying cause of anticolonialism" (Bjornson 211). **For those writers, literature offers a "vehicle for the expression of highly personalized views of the world" (211).** Bjornson further attributes this focus to several factors, including the solitary nature of the act of writing and the fear of government censorship that is inherent in any authoritarian regime. Minyono-Nkodo also observes this evolution of a "littérature qui avait valeur de manifeste pour la défense et illustration de la cause de l'Afrique et des Africains à une littérature existentielle, en tout cas sevrée d'idéologie" (literature that had the value of a manifesto for the defense and illustration of the cause of Africa and Africans as an existential literature, in any case one that was cut off from ideology) (Minyono-Nkodo 118). Minyono-Nkodo and Bjornson conclude that the departure from the political imaginary corresponds to a tragic despair that, despite society's moral bankruptcy, represents a "decidedly utopian strain" (Bjornson 237). **Anthropological mutilation** emerges in that moral impasse that is coupled with a devastating material poverty. The existential wound constitutes the most remarkable phenomenon of the last three decades, accounting for a renewal of writers as well as themes in francophone literature.

Thematic innovations are discernible in the last novels of Mongo Beti, the persistent despair in the novels of Calixthe Beyala, Léonora Miano's African suite, and the works of Patrice Nganang, a veritable exposé of the postcolonial existential wound. Nganang unfolds an oeuvre that plunges deep into the colonial history of Cameroon as well as into the urban misery of the slums of Yaoundé. The postcolonial wound, while echoing the tragic despair evoked by Bjornson and Minyono-Nkodo, shows no trace of a utopia. It is rooted in the absurdity and untenable condition of daily life for Cameroonian society. The "cry of the African people," to borrow the title of Jean-Marc Ela's work, is echoed in the collective suicide taking place under the eyes of a "pouvoir politique anthropophage" (cannibalistic political power) (Monga 63). Francis Nkeme renders this triumph of the logic of death in his novel *Le Cimetière des bacheliers*. The destruction of the social bond is at the heart of the disintegration of the community fabric. I begin the analysis of this postcolonial wound by exploring incest and madness in Mongo Beti's *L'Histoire du fou*, Werewere Liking's *La Mémoire amputée*, and Léonora Miano's *Contours du jour qui vient*. Madness and incest are part of the realignment of the Cameroonian literary field. Radical negations, one of rationality, and the other, the social bond which are both at the very heart of human dignity; madness and incest pose the urgent question about a writing of anthropological mutilation. This urgency, which recalls the anguish expressed by the earlier generations of writers on the question of engaged literature, for example, leads the critic to detect the commonalities as well as the ruptures that structure a literary tradition in the making. Jazz rhythms, in Miano's novel, bear witness to an aesthetic practice that claims the totemic oeuvre of Mongo Beti as its founder. Miano signals her indebtedness only to forge new paths in the dialogue with the rhythms of the diaspora. Similarly, nationalist consciousness continues to be one of the points of convergence in the articulation of a postcolonial project, especially in the writing of anticolonial resistance. The conversation between Mongo Beti and Miano is filled, with regard to anticolonial memory, with malaise. Miano helps, as the analysis will show, to push anticolonial memory further to the edges of marginality. Miano appears to fall victim to a writing that is dominated by the memory of the colonizer. Gilbert Doho seeks specifically to restore the *amputated memory* in resorting to the archives of orality. The return of orality, through the sounds of the diaspora and suppressed memories, is one of the aesthetic surprises in the writing of anthropological mutilation.

Cameroonian literature and its mutations

Richard Bjornson, in *The African Question for Freedom and Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience* (1991), maintains that the concepts of freedom and identity are at the heart of Cameroonian writing. For Bjornson, these two terms are pivotal in the unfinished quest for independence that dominates the oeuvres

of Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, René Philombe, and Louis-Marie Pouka. The old guard of francophone literature bowed out with the death of Mongo Beti, Philombe, and Oyono in the course of the last decade. Central to the literary production of that venerable generation was an ethical dimension. The ethics of writing is found in the depiction of the suffering of a martyr-people. Echoing this martyrdom, the writers raised a monument to the activists in the anticolonial struggles. *Le Bal des caïmans*, Yodi Karone's first novel, relates the last jolts of Cameroonian resistance through the turbulent experiences of two militants who were arrested in their struggle for an independent nation. The novel writes the final lines of a saga begun by Mongo Beti in *Main basse sur le Cameroun*, *Remember Ruben*, and *La Ruine presque cocasse d'un polichinelle*, and then more recently taken up again in *L'Histoire du fou*. Adrien, in Yodi Karone's *Le Bal des caïmans*, is that "homme pour qui la vie n'a de sens que dans la lutte contre la quotidienne misère; pour qui toucher l'injustice du doigt sans pouvoir se laver est un déshonneur; pour qui se révolter, parce que désespéré par la méchanceté d'une administration, est un devoir de conscience" (man for whom life has meaning only in the struggle against the daily misery; for whom touching injustice with the finger without being able to wash it away is a dishonor; for whom revolting, because he despairs in the wickedness of an administration, is a duty of conscience) (Karone 161–2). We might ask whether through a character such as Adrien, we are witnessing the last stand of the political novel or perhaps the inauguration of a new form of a political imaginary. The rarity of political subjects in the new writings would lend credence to the first supposition. Mongo Beti's death marks in a symbolic manner the end of the era when the Cameroonian novel was filled with political statements. And even if we were to take the author of *Remember Ruben* as the model of that focus on the political, we should also note that his last two novels sound the clarion call of retreat instead. In *L'Histoire du fou*, the elderly Zoaételeu, who experienced the nightmares of colonization, neocolonization, and the single party, announces his withdrawal and passes the torch to the new generations. *L'Histoire du fou* thus closes out the cycle begun more than a half-century earlier in *Ville cruelle*. Mongo Beti proclaimed moreover that the Union des Populations du Cameroun, the torchbearer of anticolonialist challenge, had accomplished its mission, which was the liberation of Cameroon (Beti, "L'UPC et ses avatars"; Kemedjio, *Mongo Beti: le Combattant fatigué*). The novels that focus on the political are rather more representative of the last jolts of an era that was on the verge of decline. The vestiges of the political may be a mutation in representation. Gilbert Doho and Werewere Liking henceforth recount the collective epic that feeds Mongo Beti's prose in the first person. The collective biography becomes personal, indeed intimate in the case of Liking. The figure of evil, long incarnated by colonial or neocolonial authorities, is now democratized or privatized. Democratization produces a writing of collective self-destruction, while privatization brings the violence within the family.

Lydie Moudileno observes that, unlike the first francophone writers' reticence about engaging in an exploration of the body, the new generations inscribe the body in an explicit manner within the lived experience of the postcolonial universe. Women writers distinguish themselves by tales "articulant des subjectivités féminines informées par l'expérience du corps féminin" (articulating women's subjectivities that are informed by the experience of the female body) (Moudileno 6). The writing of suffering is seen in an aesthetic that, for the first time in the Cameroonian novel and perhaps the African novel, frees itself from taboos in order to allow the body to be seen in all its materiality. The styles of writing about suffering are matched only by the representation of sexuality that often verges on the pornographic. Writing, as we see in *Femme noire*, *femme nue*, becomes the laboratory for a true deregulation of sexual norms. The erotic novel stages orgies and all kinds of sexual experimentation that subject men and women solely to the demands of pleasure. Erotic performance seems to remove the sexual act from the laws of reproduction that chain the characters to prostitution, the nationalization of the uterus, or clandestine abortions. The "cataclysmic disorder" (*Femme nue* 31) that the pleasure principle introduces into the world of sexuality is accompanied by a questioning of sexual norms.

Beyala questions the "conservative cultural orthodoxies" that are at the heart of the censoring of sexuality in African cultural productions. In that moral order, "the act of displaying sexual organs stems from pornography, which is considered a Western practice" (Tcheuyap 190). The upsurge of sexuality in African films is also part of a strategy of claiming initiative "through unrestricted and uncensored sexual pleasures" (Tcheuyap 200). Reclaiming her body in such an unapologetic gesture occurs to the detriment of the old patriarchal order, whether incarnated in the failing State or in impotent patriarchs: "The discourse of the decadent nation and corrupt administration is represented in terms of a flawed sexuality" (Tcheuyap 186). The fickle lover of *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* is not only handicapped, but he suffers from premature ejaculation syndrome. The failing phallus writes the story of the failure of the nationalist, consumerist bourgeoisie.

The whispered fate of Frieda Ekotto's character testifies to the reconfiguration of sexual codes:

Siliki aimait les femmes, et un de ses oncles qui soupçonnait ce penchant avait fait en sorte de surprendre ses ébats avec son amie. Siliki avait dû confesser sa faute, devant toute la famille. Il avait décidé qu'on ne pratiquerait pas l'ablation du clitoris, châtiment prescrit par la tradition dans de tels cas. On était moderne désormais. Les petites coupures valaient mieux que cette mutilation. Alors Siliki avait été vendue à un trafiquant (Ekotto 60).

(Siliki loved women, and one of her uncles who suspected that penchant arranged to surprise her with her friend. Siliki had had to admit her sin, in front of the whole family. He had decided that a clitoral ablation wouldn't be done, the punishment prescribed

by tradition in such cases. They were modern now. Small cuts were better than that mutilation. So Siliki was sold to a trafficker).

Ekotto's story is part of the Cameroonian library, as she so well affirmed in her talk in Vermont. The attentive critic will note with interest that the novel appears at the moment when homophobia in Cameroonian society was exploding into the open and transforming into a sort of public lynching of alleged homosexuals. Historians of culture will shed light on the possible conditions that permit the emergence of an episteme of the intellectual and literary imaginary on the question of homosexuality in the Cameroonian public square. For the time being, we can observe that the deregulation of norms of sexuality is inscribed in a broad movement of disintegration of the social fabric.

Disintegration of the social bond

The Cameroonian novel records a maximal deconstruction of the community bond, from incest in Beyala and Liking to cannibalism in *L'Intérieur de la nuit* by Miano. The phantoms of terror invented by the popular imagination occupy an important place in Liking's fantastic universe: "La peur enfantait la haine, haine de l'autre, témoin de notre peur, de notre honte, symbole de la conscience de notre dégradation, de notre humiliation, une conscience qu'on avait décidé de noyer" (Fear gave birth to hatred, the hatred of the other, a testimony of our fear, our shame, the symbol of the awareness of our degradation, of our humiliation, an awareness that we had decided to drown) (Liking, *Orphée Dafric* 22). The evil legends of Kong, of Fam-laa or Mont "koupé," symbols of zombification, are integrated into the denunciation of a society where "tout le génie créateur était voué aux maléfices, à la destruction, à l'auto-destruction" (the entire creative genius was dedicated to evils, to destruction, to self-destruction) (Liking, *Orphée Dafric* 21). Liking questions the impasse of a community that "avait décidé d'en finir dans le suicide collectif" (had decided to end up in a collective suicide) (Liking, *Orphée Dafric* 20). Beyala's oeuvre is an anthology of the "bloody slashing of mutilated childhood" (*Tu t'appelleras Tanga* 19). The cruelty of "devouring mothers" comes through in all its horror. Kalissa evokes a "community that is killing its own children" (Kalissa 82) in a "monstrous African city where life is harsh for the underprivileged class" (D'Almeida 72). The "cité rapace qui mange ses enfants" (rapacious city that eats its children) (Dussault 32) reproduces that gesture of the family "qui dévore ses enfants et les livre à la prostitution" (that devours its children and delivers them to prostitution) (Dussault 34). Brière mentions children devoured by cannibalistic mothers. She nevertheless draws our attention to the fact that the devouring mothers are themselves devoured by social forces that are even more powerful. Tanga's mother perfectly illustrates that scenario. She starves her children to feed her lover who equates her to the meat she has cooked for him.

Tanga's mother is thus metaphorically cannibalized by an impotent and parasitic patriarchy. Her volatile and abusive husband humiliates her through his multiple affairs. Her own daughter, Tanga, eventually becomes a victim of his addictive devouring of female pleasure:

Ainsi de l'homme mon père, qui, plus tard, non content de ramener chez ses maîtresses chez nous, de les tripoter sous l'oeil dégoûté de ma mère, m'écartela au printemps de mes douze ans, ainsi de cet homme, mon père qui m'engrossera et empoisonnera l'enfant, notre enfant, son petit-fils, cet homme ne s'apercevra jamais de ma souffrance et pourtant cette souffrance a duré jusqu'au jour de sa mort, jusqu'au jour de ma mort (Beyala, *Tanga* 46).

(And so it was that the man my father who, not content to bring his mistresses home, to fiddle under my mother's disgusted gaze, would later rip me apart in the budding of my twelfth year. And so that this man my father—who made me pregnant and poisoned the child, our child, his grandson—the man never noticed my suffering, and yet it lasted until the day he died, until the day of my own death) (Beyala, *Tanga* 30).

The fruits of incest proliferate like a flower of evil. Incest, in *La Mémoire amputée*, calls for a ritual purification that occurs as forced copulation with a dog in front of the community. The animalization of the guilty is read as a means of redemption for her dehumanized soul. She can once again take her place in the society of humans: "[C]ette fille a été convaincue d'inceste. En couchant avec son frère, elle s'est comportée comme une chienne et c'est normal qu'on la fasse coucher avec un chien publiquement" (Liking, *Mémoire amputée* 125). "This girl was convicted of incest. By sleeping with her brother she behaved like a bitch, and it's only normal that they make her sleep with a dog in public" (Liking, *Amputated Memory* 116). Her father rapes Petite Halla, the heroine of *La Mémoire amputée*. He is never to be unmasked: "Son regard est aussi vide que si rien de tout cela n'avait jamais existé. D'ailleurs, aujourd'hui, j'en suis certaine: il y était parvenu. Phénoménal, cette force de l'oubli. Les traumatisés, ce sont les gens qui portent mal le voile de l'oubli" (*Mémoire amputée* 195). "His gaze is as empty as if no such event had ever existed, or if he has forgotten it all, erased from his memory. What is more, I am sure today that he has succeeded. The power of forgetfulness is phenomenal. It is the traumatized who have a hard time wearing the veil of oblivion" (*Amputated Memory* 189). The transgression remains unpunished. The ritual of purification doesn't take place. Another time, another zoophilia: the prostitute has sex with a dog for hard cash. She becomes, in the mechanics of the narrative set in place by Liking, a dog. According to the grammar of the restorative ritual evoked above, she initiates her own exclusion from the human race. Ritualistic zoophilia has become profane. Prostitution with dogs allows the prostitute in Liking's narrative to survive in the face of poverty. The incestuous father adopts amnesia as his "system of survival" (Liking, *Mémoire* 20). The impunity of the sin

signals that society has no more resources to shield itself from the “bestialization of the other” (Eboussi Boulaga, “L’homosexualité” 7). The ethical compass bequeathed by traditions is henceforth null and void. The disintegration of the social bond is symptomatic of this banalized absurdity. The violence announced by Beyala’s oeuvre takes on the shades of suicide. The forces of death appear to have won the battle. The living dead populate the Cameroonian imaginary. The bloodsucking mother dominates the landscape of the novel: “Les sangsues en peuvent aimer leurs enfants. Elles n’en ont que pour consolider leur position sociale. Ici, c’est chacun pour soi. Un enfant peut devenir le pire ennemi de ses parents, sans même le savoir. Il n’a y plus vraiment de communauté, papa avait raison” (Bloodsuckers do not love their children. They have them only to fortify their social position. Here, it’s everyone for himself or herself. A child can become the worst enemy of his or her parents, without even knowing it. There truly is no longer any community—Dad was right))(Miano, *Contours du jour qui vient* 104). The bloodsucking mothers in Miano and Beyala drive their children to suicide on the altar of their despair. The prostitution of children is taken as a means of survival.

Writing registers the parades of survival enacted to contend with a fate that seems to be ever more implacable. The friend of Sibora, the woman of the people and expert “in the business of survival” (Makuchi 28), sets the power of laughter against the existential wound: “Never I have known a woman transform so much pain into laughter. She taught me a great lesson: Never to let go of those things that nourish our beings, our souls, and make life worth living, despite ...” (Makuchi 27). Makuchi reminds us, as if to freeze out any urge of optimism about the resistance of Sibora’s **girlfriend, that the burst of laughter masks a repressed anger. The frustrations** find no resolution. They are but superficially buried (three feet deep, not even six feet deep). And that is perhaps why Monga (*The Anthropology of Anger*) warns us about the mute angers that will explode, sooner or later, in a huge conflagration. The sacrifice of children by dissolute mothers, zoophilia for survival, or laughter in order to bear the unbearable are parades of survival to which is added the epidemic of mental illnesses, another modality of manifestations of the existential wound.

Madness in the cruel city

The decaying of the existential fabric gives birth to a writing of madness. Mongo Beti invites us to explore insanity in *L’Histoire du fou*. The madman has killed the young brother who has been under his care. This fratricide is at the root of his descent into Hell: “Dans cette ville où, bien que les fous y fourmillent, il n’y a pas d’asile de fous, ni d’hôpital acceptant de les accueillir, on voit un jeune homme, trente ans au maximum, nu *comme le fut*, dit-on, le premier homme au jardin d’Eden, déambuler le jour dans les rues populeuses du grand port” (*Histoire* 9). “In this city where, despite the large population of madmen, there is no single asylum or hospital willing

to admit them, a young man, thirty at most and as naked as they say Adam was in the garden of Eden, wanders daily through the crowded streets" (*Madman* 3). The epidemic of madness ravages the city. The madman in *L'Histoire du fou* is naked, just like the brigade of madmen in *La Cicatrice*. The madwoman in *La Mémoire amputée* embodies a glimmer of lucidity in a universe distorted by absurd passions and beliefs: "Elle est arrivée à la salle du royaume toute nue, ses cheveux copieusement enrobés d'argile rouge. Pendant que tous les 'frères' et 'sistas' priaient leur père qui est aux cieux, elle est entrée sans aucun bruit et s'est placée au beau milieu du pupitre des conférences, ses mains en croix, elle regardait le ciel" (*Mémoire amputée* 121). "She came to the Kingdom Hall completely naked, her hair thickly coated with red clay. While all the "fratas" and "sisters" prayed their father who is in heaven, she entered soundlessly and stood right at the center of the lectern, her hands stretched out to the side, gazing toward heaven" (*Amputated Memory* 112). Dementia is at the heart of the short story "American Lottery" by Makuchi, included in the collection *Your Madness, Not Mine* and whose title is quite telling:

The day you shall have the time or the chance to walk down Freedom Street, look carefully, just look at the corner of Freedom Street and Survival, you will see a tall, lanky, bearded old man, who sleeps under the shelter of the huge mango tree. That old man who talks to himself, staring into space, staring at the leaves, at the moon, talking with the stars, singing in the rain, that old man who shivers from the cold some night, *whose manhood lies bare* for all the children to ogle, giggle at, and mock; for all the children who run by, some shouting, some screaming some laughing; that old man they call Pa, or Popaul, or Papa Popaul; that old man is my little brother, Paul. I made him into an alien (Makuchi 96; emphasis added).

In the work of Nathalie Etoke, madness is also manifested through nudity: "Personne ne s'interroge sur la femme nue qui déambule. La nudité du fou et de la folle fait partie du quotidien. On la voit sans la voir" (Nobody questions the naked woman who is wandering around. The nakedness of the madman or the madwoman is part of everyday life. You see her without seeing her) (Etoke 189). The banalization of insanity makes it invisible: "[L]es gens avaient l'habitude de voir les démentes déambuler nues dans les rues. Elles étaient rarement aussi jeunes que moi, mais en ces temps déraisonnables, tout pouvait arriver" (People were used to seeing the crazy walking around naked in the streets. They were rarely as young as me, but in those absurd times, anything was possible) (Miano, *Contours* 25). *Anthropological mutilation* comes from the routinization of the unbearable. It points to an individual and collective abdication in the face of an impasse. All that is left is the search for mirages: "La misère fait venir la folie" (Poverty brings madness) (Miano, *Contours* 73). Consumed by the illusion of the American Diversity Visa lottery, Paul cannot bear the failure of his quixotic plans. His application never leaves the Cameroonian

post office. The fading of his wild dreams leads him straight to madness. Madness is symptomatic of that refusal to confront disappointing reality through rational means. Anthropological mutilation seizes upon that hallucination invented by the despair of people set adrift when they are faced with a suffering that is all too real.

The city is cruel for madmen and women. It sets no place aside for them, no special, hospitable structure. The transgression of incest no longer activates the ritual mechanism of resocialization. Prostitutes who have sex with dogs for cash are marked in an indelible manner by that animalization. The poet proclaims his concern over “*l’ardeur bestiale / Des vieilles demoiselles désœuvrées / Qui rendent lubrique / Le boulevard le plus ridicule du monde*” (the bestial ardor / Of washed-up old ladies / Who turn / the most ludicrous boulevard in the world into a lecher) (Tcheho 22). Sexual depravity leads, as Liking and Tcheho observe, to the bestialization of the human being. The mercenaries of zoophilia have not implemented any mechanism for rehumanization. Society is deprived of any structure for the insane. Miano describes the madness of Ewendji, made insane through her desperate belief in the love of a man—desperate to the point of sacrificing and abandoning her daughter at the altar of this illusion. Doctors who care too little about their Hippocratic Oath abandon Ewendji, like the orphans or the prostitutes who have been dehumanized by zoophilia, to her fate:

Le lendemain matin, on t’a conduite à l’hôpital afin de te faire interner chez les fous.
Tu avais été hystérique toute la nuit, criant qu’on verrait ce qu’on verrait, qu’on ne savait pas à qui on avait affaire, alors qu’on t’avait trouvée sur le trottoir d’un quartier populaire. Les psychiatres n’ont pas voulu de toi. En effet, on ne te connaissait aucune famille pour payer tes soins. (Miano, *Contours* 73–4)

(The next morning, they took you to the hospital to have you locked away with the insane. You had been hysterical the entire night, crying that we will see what will happen, that we didn’t know who we were dealing with, when we had found you on the sidewalk of a working class neighborhood. Psychiatrists didn’t want anything to do with you. In fact, they couldn’t find anyone in your family to pay for your care.)

The *cruel city* is indifferent to the misery of the mentally ill. *Plaies-Travers-Patrie*, the title of the first collection of writing by Isaac Célestin Tchecho, is a parodic echo of Cameroon’s motto, “*Paix-Travail-Patrie*” which the poet imagines as an “immense pays-hopital” (immense hospital-country) (Tchecho 22). The poet’s anguished alarm speaks to the gravity of the existential wound: “*L’espace de la fêlure est sans bornes ... Mon pays est un patient au pavillon des grandes urgences*” (The fissured space has no boundaries ... My country is a patient in an urgent care center) (Tchecho 7). The sick social body enters an urgent care center with no doctors. The sick instead encounter scorn and persecution: “*Parfois, un sourire illumine les visages des badauds, et même il arrive que l’un d’eux se détache, bouscule l’homme nu tout en le frappant violemment, jusqu’à ce qu’il s’étende de tout son long, et lui administre*

plusieurs coups de pied. C'est tout juste si les autres badauds n'applaudissent pas" (Beti, *Histoire* 10–1). "At times, a smile lights up the onlookers's faces, and one of them may even steps forward, jostle the naked man—striking him brutally until he falls to the ground—and kick him repeatedly. And it is all the others can do not to applaud" (Beti, *Madman* 4). Makuchi also evokes that violence when she speaks of the "old man who shivers from the cold some nights, whose manhood lies bare for all the children to ogle, giggle at, and mock." The morbid voyeurism of the spectators is a sign of the state of degeneracy of a "paralyzed city where no one works any longer and where schools lie as deserted as necropolises" (Beti, *Madman* 4). Ayané, in Miano's *L'Intérieur de la nuit*, is the daughter of an outlawed family. She participates in a scene of cannibalism. Throughout the night, militiamen, fearing neither God nor the law, force the people to kill, prepare, and eat a child from the community. Ayané, on her way to France where she resides, stops in the city. She is fascinated by the madwoman Epupa, an old school chum: "Ce sont les livres qui l'ont rendue folle. Quand on vous dit que les femmes ne doivent pas faire carburer leur cervelle" (Miano, *Intérieur* 196). "It's all the books that drove her mad. They said women shouldn't fry their brains" (Miano, *Dark Heart of the Night* 141). The description of the madwoman takes on an erotic coloring. The tale, in this case from the perspective of Ayané, tells us that Epupa wore nothing under her dress:

Epupa se tenait jambes jointes et bras écartés. La brise du crépuscule soulevait la robe sous laquelle elle ne portait pas de sous-vêtements. On voyait aussi sous ses cuisses les boucles de ses poils pubiens. On voyait aussi un ventre légèrement renflé, comme celui d'une femme enceinte de trois mois environ. Cela n'aurait pas été la première fois, qu'une femme égarée était engrossée par un homme qui ne la trouvait pas si folle que cela, au moment de la posséder (*Intérieur* 208).

Epupa stood with her legs pressed together and her arms flung wide. The early evening breeze raised her dress under which she was not wearing panties. Her thighs and the curls of her pubic hair were visible underneath, as too was a faintly rounded belly, like that of a woman about three-months pregnant. It would not have been the first time that a man had gotten a woman pregnant who had gone out of her mind, finding her not as crazy as all that at the moment of possession (Miano, *Dark* 142).

The reader suspects that Ayana, who entones the cry of madness, becomes insane through gaining sexual intimacy with the madwoman. What is not up for speculation is that the madwoman in Doho's novel is raped by the psychiatrist in the hospital where she is held. That rape unleashes the furor of the nurse who, out of jealousy, in turn, rapes the madwoman. The violences of the doctor and the nurse reproduce the persecutions that are inflicted upon the defenseless body of the mentally ill in the hell of the postcolonial city. Society remains indifferent to the fate of the insane. The passersby witness, with passive approbation, the violences directed at the madman

in *L'Histoire due fou*. Parents abdicate their responsibility for supervising their children, becoming sadistic voyeurs of the macabre spectacle of violence. It is a matter of individual as well as collective self-destruction because "le fou a une histoire, d'autant plus déplorable que ce n'est pas vraiment son histoire, ... mais l'histoire de son père, et à vrai dire l'histoire d'un peuple qui rêva beaucoup, mais souffrit plus encore" (Beti, *Histoire* 11) "[T]he madman has a story, which is all the more deplorable because it is really not his story is not really his story [but] the story of a people who dreamed much and suffered even more" (Beti, *Madman* 5). We can make a link between the violences and Epupa's pregnancy. The distortion of sexual relations takes the form of incestuous pedophilia or the rape of madwomen. Epupa will certainly give birth to a child: the lineage of madness is assured. Madness constitutes one of the ultimate forms of disintegration of the social bond. That it becomes one of the sites of connection in Cameroonian writing alerts us to the gravity of the anthropological mutilation deep at work in society.

Remaking the imaginary

The remaking of the imaginary represents one of the commonplaces of national storytelling. The Cameroonian story is experiencing the need to effect a return to the roots of the birth of artistic vocations. What is writing and what to do with writing, these seem to be some of the questions that are haunting Cameroonian creative writers. The gesture of reconceptualizing writing recalls the 1940s and 1950s when African literature was then seeking to invent its reasons for existing. The return to the roots of vocations seems to go hand in hand with the exposition of libraries that nourished the imaginary of Cameroonian writers. Confronted with the existential wound, Cameroonian writers feel the need to justify, once again, the *raison d'être* for writing.

Monga sees in writing the means of adapting to the "malédiction du quotidien" (the curses of the everyday) (Monga, *The Anthropology of Anger* 26) and to "conjuré la folie" (conjuring madness) (Monga, *Un Bantou à Washington suivi de Un Bantou à Djibouti* 23). To write it to conjure up madness. Conjuring madness is an act of public health if we focus on the epidemic of mental illness evoked above. Madness symbolizes the extent of the Cameroonian existential wound, whence the urgency for the writing. Writing in a situation of urgency is the quest for a new language to put a name to the anthropologic mutilation. The abandoned girl in *Contours de la nuit qui vient* addresses her absent mother. The relationship between the daughter and her mother is inexistent. Writing, then, is an exorcism of mute sorrows:

Si j'écrivais des livres, je ferais cela avec des mots. Je tracerais des adieux poétiques à la colère qui a si longuement tari mes larmes. Je jetterais sur le papier un suaire syntaxique qui couvrirait une fois pour toute la peine de n'avoir pas été aimée par ma mère. Mais je n'écris pas, même si j'ai des mots dans la tête. Je ne sais que le silence qui soupire ou hurle entre deux roulements de tam-tam. Je ne sais que l'épaisseur des formes qui ne

doivent plus être des déguisements, des masques, mais la face révélée de nos drames intérieurs (Miano, *Contours* 146).

(If I wrote books, I would do so with words. I would write out poetic goodbyes to the anger that has dried up my tears for so long. I would cast on paper a syntactical shroud that would once and for all cover up all the pain of not having been loved by my mother. But I do not write, even if I do have the words in my head. I only know silence that sighs or that screams out between two drum rolls. I only know that thickness of forms that should no longer be disguises, masks, but rather the revealed face of our inner dramas.)

Suffering is the impossibility of writing. The words remain blocked in the head. Musango has not yet been able to write. Her affliction could also be read as a crisis of representation. Her misfortunes resist writing. She is nevertheless not completely inexpressive. Her voice comes to the aid of the girl who cannot write: “Des voix refuseront de se taire. Elles viendront révéler au grand jour les secrets de famille, levant ainsi la sentence de mort que nous avons prononcée contre nous-mêmes” (Voices will refuse to be silenced. They will bring out into broad daylight the family secrets, thus lifting the death sentence that we have placed upon ourselves) (Miano, *Contours* 196). Writing will aid the search for inner truth. Silencing the silences represents the first stage in the process of recovering an authentic life. Writing shatters the taboos that condemn us to mute suffering. The “heightened awareness of women’s aspirations for self-realization” that Bjornson detected in the emergence of Cameroonian writers on the literary scene sinks into a “pervasive despair that expresses itself in the ugliness” (Bjornson 417) of incestuous fathers, abandoned children, and even vampire-mothers. Women’s writing has the merit, as Béatrice Gallimore noted with regard to Beyala, of naming the body, but also identifying the surrealistic condition of the woman in all its fullness (Gallimore 60). Following in the footsteps of Beyala, Miano and Liking take as their mission to “tuer le vide du silence” (kill the emptiness silence). Miano’s oeuvre participates in this community of mute suffering. Miano nevertheless distinguishes herself by the intertextual conversation that makes her novel the site where a Cameroonian literary tradition emerges. Jazz and the saga of the maquisards constitute the counterpoints of a writing that innovates from its anchoring in literary antecedents.

Mongo Beti belongs to those groups of students who were educated by teachers—Monsieur Salvain in Ferdinand Oyono’s *Une Vie de boy*, for example—who came from France. Musango affirms that she is not part of “cette promotion d’enfants scolarisés en maternelle et instruits l’époque par des maîtresses venues de France” (that first generation of primary school children educated by schoolteachers who had come from France) (*Contours* 61). She informs us that it is her father who had initiated her into jazz. The disappearance of his jazz collection deprives Zamakoué, an exile who

has returned from Europe and is nearing retirement, of his *drug*. The stolen records could constitute, in the generational scenario scripted by Miano, the “collection des disques de jazz de papa” (Dad’s collection of jazz records) (*Contours* 17). Mongo Beti’s generation receives its ancestral heritage by the fireside, as we read in *Ville cruelle*. Musango, on the other hand, discovers these ancestral stories in a chance encounter with her maternal grandmother who “chante un vieux conte, une de ces histoires qui se passent dans la brousse et dans laquelle les animaux parlent” (sings an old tale, one of those stories that take place in the brush and in which animals talk) (*Contours* 246). The grandmother dies in the story. We can speculate that after her burial, the words spoken by the fireside will become increasingly rare. The ancestral wisdom is no longer to be found only by the fireside. Mongo Beti and his generation have deposited the stories they received from their mothers and their wanderings through the colonial learning process in the modern library of African knowledge. Jazz is one of the dividends of knowledge gained at school.

Medza compares the melody of the “fille-des-revenants” (daughter of ghosts), the bird of ill omen, to the trombone solo by Lawrence Brown in “I’m in Another World” by the orchestra of Johnnie Hodges (Beti, *Mission* 77). We note here that Mongo Beti, or rather Medza, compares jazz to the traditional melody, the sign of a culture under assault but always dynamic. Musango would compare Church hymns, already highly creolized and even influenced by the rhythms of the diaspora such as soul or gospel, to jazz:

Son phrasé est aussi impeccable que celui des plus grands chanteurs de jazz, qui savent combien le silence est essentiel à la musique, à l’attention de l’auditeur, à la captation de son émotion. Il ne faut pas remplir l’air de notes, mais savoir les distiller. Cette performance n’est possible qu’après de longues années de pratique. Ils ont chacun son genre. Mama Bosangui, qui n’a pas dans son répertoire la délicatesse des vocalistes du jazz, mais qui possède tout à fait la démesure de la soul, est une sorte d’Aretha Franklin vieillie et doublement épaissie. Son époux est un Nat King Cole qui aurait intégré dans son récital les feintes d’Andy Bey (*Contours* 193).

(His phrasing is as impeccable as that of the great jazz singers, who know how essential silence is to the music, to the listeners’ attention, to capturing their emotion. You can’t just fill the air with notes, but you have to know how to distill them. That kind of performance is possible only after long years of practice. Each one has its own genre. Mama Bosangui, whose repertory doesn’t include the delicacy of jazz vocalists, but who has all the soulful excesses, is a kind of Aretha Franklin, elderly and twice as broad. Her husband is a Nat King Cole who brings touches of Andy Bey into his recital.)

Aretha Franklin and Nat King Cole are legends of African American music whose biographies are found in Mongo Beti’s *Dictionnaire de la Négritude*. The music collection, a manifestation of the oral, derives from the library, from that knowledge

acquired in school. Papa's collections of books and music are inseparable: "Il me lisait les livres qu'il aimait et me faisait écouter du jazz vocal, sa musique préférée" (He read me the books he loved and made me listen to vocal jazz, his favorite music) (Miano, *Contours* 37). After the death of the father, Ewendji, the self-indulgent mother, abandons Musango. In her wanderings throughout the city, the lessons of jazz serve as a stabilizing reference point for Musango:

Je pense à papa, en regardant ce spectacle parfaitement mis en scène. C'est lui qui m'a enseigné les codes de l'interprétation du jazz vocal. Il me prenait sur les genoux pendant qu'il écoutait les grands chanteurs, et m'expliquait en s'adressant à lui-même plus qu'à moi, la valeur expressive du vibrato et des harmonies suggérées par les silences. Il me disait qu'une improvisation devait être construite, avoir un début, un point d'orgue et une fin. Il précisait que la croche en était la dominante, et qu'on devait toujours pouvoir en reconnaître le thème. Je pense à lui qui m'a transmis ces choses par inadvertance, me tenant contre lui dans sa solitude comme un enfant étreignant une peluche (*Contours* 193).

(I think of Dad, when I see this spectacle that is perfectly performed. He's the one who taught me the codes for interpreting vocal jazz. He took me upon his knees while he listened to the great singers, and explained to me, talking more to himself than to me, the expressive value of vibrato and the harmonies suggested by the silences. He told me that an improvisation needed to be constructed, had to have a beginning, a climax, and an ending. He specified that the eighth note was dominant, and that you always had to be able to recognize the theme. I think of him, who passed along these things to me inadvertently, holding me close in his solitude like a child hugging a teddy bear.)

The jazz greats set fire to the imagination of Mongo Beti, as we can see in *Mission terminée*, *Trop de soleil tue l'amour*, or even *Le Dictionnaire de la Négritude*.² His parents brought back jazz from their stay in Black Paris during the 1950s, "le temps des bals nègres et des caves de jazz" (the time of the *bals nègres* and the jazz clubs) (Miano, *Ces Âmes chagrines* 49). Papa's collections of music and books assembled by that generation now represent the memory of the postcolonial clan. Jazz is at the root of an intertextual symphony that tempers the existential wound. The jazz harmonies nevertheless cannot mask the poorly healed wounds of the postcolonial fracture. The return to Cameroon's war of liberation represents one of these lines of fracture in the national body.

Modi, in *Ces Âmes chagrines*, is the only daughter of pastor Massoma, a dignitary from the coast. She decides to marry a foreigner who has taken the local name of Kingué: "Kingué n'était pas le nom véritable de cet homme. Il s'était arrogé le droit de porter un patronyme de la côte, mais il était en réalité issu du *mbusa mundi* (la brousse), et du pire endroit qui se puisse concevoir: les Grasslands" (Kingué was not this man's real name. He had appropriated the right to bear a patronym from the

coast, but in reality he had come from the *mbusa mundi* (the bush), and from the worst place conceivable: the Grasslands) (Miano, *Âmes* 88). The so-called Kingué opted for revolutionary violence against the colonizer. "Kingué" allowed him to mask his true political and ethnic identity. Pastor Modi reveals the strategy, allowing for several interpretations. The struggle for liberation was foreign to the group that claimed totemic rights to the *patronym from the coast*. The impostor from the Grasslands wishes to enter into the coastal family in order to legitimize his onomastic theft.

The reader learns that the pastor (and patriarch) is opposed to the struggle for independence. He opposes the union of his daughter with the impostor, who happens to be a freedom fighter. The daughter leaves the family home to go live in the maquis. Her father repudiates her. Colonial violence will then end up taking away two of his sons, leaving the third seriously handicapped. Before his death, the father unleashes every curse upon his daughter. The separation is beyond repair. Modi's story is one of the most radical forms of erasure of anticolonialist memory. In fact, the maquisard from the Grasslands has no name. We learn that he has chosen the name of Kingué in order to "bien marquer le fait que, dans le Mboasu qu'ils bâtiraient, ses frères d'armes et lui-même, les distinctions tribales n'auraient pas cours" (clearly mark the fact that in the Mboasu that they would create, he and his brothers-in-arms, tribal distinctions would carry no weight) (*Âmes* 90). National consciousness is gained at the cost of the suppression of the identity of the man called Kingué. The suppressed identity is that of the ethnic group conceptualized as a threat to nation building. The adopted name, despite an ethnic anchoring, is the carrier of a national identity. Certain identities are obstacles to the nation while others are unifying.

We know that it involves the Grasslands, a rather vague term that does not permit a precise identification. The tribe in question is that of the maquisards, either pursued as enemies of the nascent nation or celebrated as heralds of the struggle for independence. The so-called Kingué chooses a name that does not belong to the tribe of those who are banished and condemned to death. Kingué belongs to the tribe of power. The English term Grasslands designates the Highlands of Western Cameroon. The geographic identification is all the more vague in that this designation can refer to several administrative or cultural areas. The Grasslands, for example, refer to francophone West Cameroon as well as the Anglophone Northwest region. Such an expression, in Miano's **francophone text, conveys a confusion that might nevertheless be seen as significant**. The Bamilekés of the West, just like the Anglophones of the North West, do not belong to the national body. Like the maquisard who borrows the name Kingué to bear witness to his membership in the construction of the nation, the populations from the Grasslands are perceived as a strangers (or a threat) to the Cameroonian nation. The narrative strategies, which range from the refusal to name them to the curse that is cast upon this line as well as the obstinacy of the pastor in refusing to accept the maquisard into his family, amplify this exclusion.

The nameless maquisard's rhetorical cannibalization points to the alien status of the populations that carry this burden. Cameroon's security is saved, precisely at the price of this rhetorical and narrative cannibalization.

And yet, if we follow Miano's narrative logic, we drift in an imprecision to which we can add fraud. Death terminates the work begun by the deletion of tribal identity. The so-called Kingué dies, leaving behind a daughter whose only inheritance is her maternal grandfather's curse. The unknown maquisard who sought to symbolize the nation disappears as one of the damned. The accursed daughter finds herself without a fixed home in France, before being taken back by her son. Her sudden death eventually leads to her son's insanity: "Combien en effet avaient perdu la raison dans l'enfer des napalms, des têtes exposées sur les places publiques, des corps toute puanteur? La guerre a toujours ses retombées en loques humaines, en épaves ambulantes..." (How many, in fact, have lost their reason in the hell of napalm, heads exposed in public squares, bodies reeking of stench? The war always has its fallen members in human tatters, in walking flotsam and jetsam...) (Doho, *La Cicatrice* 82). The insanity of the maquisards' descendants is broadcast directly on television. Anticolonialism, consigned to the nameless, lives on only through the cursed lineage.

We are dealing with the reproduction of Cameroon's attitude toward the memory of the anticolonial struggle.⁴ The erasure of that memory is always close to the criminalization of the rebellious ethnic groups. The fault is due, not to Miano, but to books: "Ceux qui ne voulaient pas d'un Mboassu indépendant avaient eu le pouvoir. Ils étaient encore là. Pour moi, ce n'étaient que des histoires. C'était dans les livres comme les mots du dictionnaire" (Those who did not want an independent Mboassu were in power. They were still there. As for me, those were only stories. They were in books, like words in the dictionary) (Miano, *L'Intérieur* 160). Miano is the product of that made-to-measure library. The English translation of *L'Intérieur de la nuit* escalates the controversy around the memory of these struggles. The writer of the preface to the translation, Teresa Svoboda, locates the inspiration of the text in a story reported by Western news agencies about a massacre attributed to fighters of the Union des Populations du Cameroun:

Léonora Miano was born in 1973 in Douala, the biggest port in West Africa and Cameroon's largest city. Miano was thirteen years old when a band of machete-wielding teenage guerillas marched Rwanda-style down the dirt roads just a hundred miles away, singing songs to the tune of John Brown's **Body. Known as the Hashish massacre**, most of its eighty casualties were women and children. Drugged teenage killers babbled incoherently to *captors* being branded on the chest with five cuts that were supposed to make them invulnerable to bullets. Reinventing the incident, *Dark Heart of the Night* won many awards in France (Svoboda viii).

Svoboda thus copies almost word for word a dispatch from the Associated Press that was passed along in *Time* magazine on March 7, 1960. The *Time* journalists specified that these were adolescents of Bamileké origin who perpetrated the massacre in the city of Dschang, one of the epicenters of the confrontation between government and nationalist forces. Miano repudiated the preface in these terms: “I discovered the so-called ‘Hashish Massacre’ in the foreword. I had never heard of that, even if I knew about the armed conflicts we had in the country during the late fifties, when our people were fighting for their independence” (“Cameroonian Novelist”). Miano’s protestations over the distortion of her text were made in good faith. Nevertheless, she appears to misunderstand the power of intertextuality. Miano and the preface writer consulted the same colonial library. Patrice Nganang, in *Mont Plaisant* and *La saison des prunes*, leaves himself open to that same trap by keeping too close company with the colonial archive. In *Mont Plaisant*, Nganang resorts to the archives of German and French colonization to tell the story of the Sultan of the Bamoun, about the invention of his system of writing during his exile in Yaoundé. Sultan Njoya, a pathetic victim of German, English, and French colonialisms, converses with precocious figures of the anticolonialist challenge. Njoya’s guilty conscience, due to decisions he made that played into the hands of the colonizer, is repeated in the tragic destiny of the pastor mentioned earlier. *La saison des prunes* relies on the archives of French colonization, and in particular the war memories of veteran French soldiers. The tale begins in the heart of Bassaland, migrates to Yaoundé, then follows the way of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* into North Africa. Nganang and Miano both read the written archives that emphasize the truth of the colonizer. One cannot come away unscathed from frequenting the colonial library.

The version of history recounted by Miano testifies to what Mbembe perceives as the “conflit entre la parole et l’écrit, entre les représentations officielles et les représentations clandestines” (conflict between the spoken and the written, between official representations and clandestine representations) of the struggles for national liberation (Mbembe, “Notes et introduction” 11). In *La Naissance du maquis au Sud-Cameroun* (1996), Mbembe offers a masterly analysis that supplements the editorial work he was engaged in on the oeuvre of Ruben Um Nyobe. The movement failed to turn a popular, symbolic domination into a political victory. The populations that were branded with the stigmata of armed rebellion were integrated into the national family, but under the defamatory category of permanent suspects. Miano, by once and for all consigning the heroic, if unfinished resistance to the darkness of the unnamed, puts into a present context the debate between the forces of besieged orality and the forces of the conquering written word. The memory of decolonization is thus amputated. It seems to me significant that Liking and Doho draw upon the sources of oral memory to counter the pervasive effects of the colonial library.

Song as an esthetics of commemoration

“Comment raconter les silences de l’Afrique?” (How do we recount the silences of Africa?), asks Werewere Liking in *La Mémoire amputée* (21). Writing about the forbidden war immediately supposes taking cognizance of the unresolved dispute over the war of independence that provoked a *disjunction between heads and bodies*, to borrow from Doho’s expression in *La Cicatrice*. Such an expression takes us back to the tale of all colonial adventures, which according to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, always begins with a disjunction of memory (Ngũgĩ 7). The amputation of memory belonged to the period of survival tactics: “Tu sais que nous avons vécu dans un contexte où nous avons dû choisir l’oubli comme un système de survie, un secret de vie, un art de vivre. Et tu n’ignores pas le gag immense, ce vaudeville qu’est l’histoire de l’Afrique, surtout quand on essaie de se référer aux ‘écrits” (*La Mémoire* 20–1). “You know we’ve been living in a context that made us choose oblivion as a survival method, a secret of life, an art of living. And surely you know what a colossal joke, what a farce Africa’s history is, especially when they refer to ‘records” (*Amputated Memory* 6–7). You know that we lived in a situation where we had to choose forgetting as a system of survival, a secret of life, an art of living. And you do know about that immense gag, that vaudeville that is Africa, especially when we try to refer to “writings” *La Mémoire amputée* chronicles the life of a woman who has reached a venerable age. The central character of this cosmic chant has suffered rape, incest, and other *habits of unhappiness*. Yet she has survived and even thrived to tell her story. Her story could also be said to be a biography of an entire nation, as it tells the horrors of the repression endured by the maquisards and the populations that lived in what amounted to concentration camps. The quest for national consciousness, in this narrative, becomes the nexus where the writing of the postcolonial wound comes together, bridging the generational divide in the articulation of a tortured, yet hopeful female condition.

On May 5, 2014, Gilbert Doho sent me a note along with his novel *La Cicatrice*: “Cilas, En toute conscience arrose donc l’arbre de paix planté pour les têtes sans corps” (Cilas, **Consciously water the tree of peace planted for the heads without bodies**). I only discovered this note in the month of November, specifically on November 16, 2014. I was on my second reading of the text and I had already taken the bulk of notes for a presentation that I was preparing. That note led to another, this time verbal, that went back more than twenty years, to the times when we were still on the University of Yaoundé campus. During the student strikes, Papa Gilbert—as I affectionately called Gilbert Doho—gave me a manuscript copy of songs invented by women, men, and children then fighting for Cameroon’s independence. This poetry of a people on the march for their destiny has since been published. The South African group Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens, in their hit song “Kazet” (2006), theorize a poetics of the words of freedom: “This is our kind of freedom in Africa.

We send our messages in music in our tradition in Africa." **At the time when speaking of the war of liberation was forbidden in Cameroon, the memory of resistance survived thanks to songs: "Chanter est forme de combat. Chanter est forme de liberté. On peut nous briser mais pas notre pensée. On peut tout changer, mais pas nos chants"** (Singing is a form of fighting. Singing is a form of freedom. They can break us, but not our thoughts. They can change everything, but not our songs) (Doho, *La Cicatrice* 150). Singing means rejecting the defeatism of the heads that are disjointed and paraded in public: "On apprît," Liking writes in *La Mémoire amputée*, "seulement que le grand Maquisard avait été abattu ... Les chants des femmes affirmaient que leur Mpôdôl n'était pas mort mais attendait la réconciliation de ses frères et sœurs de tous les camps pour revenir rayonnant, continuer à servir et à faire évoluer son pays" (*La Mémoire* 135). "All they knew was that the Great Resistance Fighter had been brought down ... The women's songs insisted that their Mpôdôl wasn't dead, but waiting for the reconciliation of his brothers and sisters in all the camps so he could luminously reappear and continue to serve develop his country" (*Amputated Memory* 125–6). **The women's song transfigures the dead hero into postcolonial mythology.** The song represents a dynamic memorialization of the anticolonialist hero. Singing allows the unnamed to be named, reversing the narrative cannibalization that transpires from the colonial library. Singing authorizes the people to effectively mourn the Great Maquisard, thus allowing them to escape the torment of history (Kemedjio, "Faire taire les silences du corps noir", 2006). Singing was a celebration of the dead who had no graves. I therefore am making a link between the process of scarring, song, and the note that commanded me to water the tree of peace. Those familiar with West Cameroon know the symbolic power of the tree of peace. This tree, in the face of the *disjunction of bodies and heads*, is an invitation to work on what Ngūgī wa Thiong'o calls the process of re-membering. Re-membering has two meanings: to remember, but also to reconnect severed fragments: "Toute cicatrice demande justice. Toute cicatrice est malédiction ou bénédiction. Etre ... équivaut à faire face à la cicatrice, au passé. Vivre c'est nier ou accepter la cicatrice, les traces du passé en un mot, la mémoire" (Every scar calls for justice. Every scar is a curse or a blessing. Being amounts to confronting the scar, the past. Living means denying or accepting the scar, the traces of the past, in a word, memory) (Doho, *La Cicatrice* 2). The title of Liking's book evokes a maimed memory. Ngūgī recalls for us the fate of the King Hintsa of the Xhosa—present-day Eastern Cape of South Africa—, captured resistance and decapitated by the British. The British colonizers took his head to the British Museum, just as they had done with the decapitated head of the Maori King of New Zealand. "Of course," continues Ngūgī, "colonialists did not literally cut off the heads of the colonized or physically bury them alive. Rather, they dismembered the colonized from memory, turning their heads upside down and burying all the memories they carried" (Ngūgī 7). This practice of power was intended to pacify

a populace, and a performance of power intended to produce docility" (Ngũgĩ 4). Mutilation leaves wounds unhealed. The scar is the result of a wounding. It involves an act of violence that leaves lasting traces on the flayed body. Hiding the scar is the sign of an unhealed wound. Song, in its formal deployment, is an aesthetics of appeasement that renders healing possible. The tree of peace is thus one of the conditions for bringing a disjuncted national community to reconciliation with its memory.

Notes

1. "Nous ne pouvons pas, par exemple dans notre littérature ne pas être conscient du problème linguistique: si un écrivain martiniquais créole de la Caraïbe tente de décrire son Lieu sans avoir un problème avec les langues, il serait en dehors de la blessure linguistique. Nous ne pouvons pas, par exemple, envisager une littérature qui ne soit pas consciente qu'il y a, avant, toute la richesse narrative littéraire de l'oralité. Nous ne pouvons pas donner la main au conteur créole. Nous ne pouvons pas garder la rupture" (Chamoiseau 127).
2. Jazz, which dominated Black Paris during the period of 1940-60, made a lasting mark upon the African and Antillean students who were there doing their studies. One can see this influence, for example, in the autobiography of Christiane Taubira (*Mes Météores, combats politiques au long cours*), in *Jazz ou vin de palme* by the Congolese writer Emmanuel Dongola, or in *L'Isolé soleil* by the Guadeloupean Daniel Maximin.
3. The ambivalence of anticolonial memory in the official imaginary of the Republic of Cameroon is at odds with the fact that the struggles for independence led by Cameroonians are becoming a sort of reference point in the paradigm of resistances to the colonial occupier. Nelson Mandela, in *Long Walk to Freedom*, evokes Cameroon as one of the examples that inspired him in the creation of the armed branch of the African National Congress: "I was eager to know more about the armed struggle of the people of Ethiopia against Mussolini, and the guérilla armies of Kenya, Algeria, and the Cameroons" (274). Christiane Taubira, in her autobiography cited above, refers to the misfortunes of the Union des Populations du Cameroun to exemplify the ambivalence of decolonization under De Gaulle: "Qui a fait empoisonner le Camerounnais Félix Moumié ? Qui a fait tuer Paul Momo et Martin Singap ? Ils luttèrent pour la liberté et leurs prêtres étaient à leurs côtés, du moins Mgr Ndongmo. Je ne sais pas si de Gaulle est au courant de tout, mais Foccart est à la manœuvre et de Gaulle profite de tout" ("Who had the Cameroonian Félix Moumié poisoned? Who had Paul Momo and Martin Singap killed? They were fighting for freedom and their priests were at their side, at least Monsignor Ndongmo. I don't know whether de Gaulle is aware of all this, but Foccart is making maneuvers and De Gaulle is profiting from everything") (Taubira 119). Laurent Gbagbo, from inside the prison of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, also cites Cameroon as an example of resistances to Foccartism.

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