



## Justin Bisanswa, Ph.D.

Professeur en Littératures africaines et en Francophonie

Université Laval, Québec

Né 1959 à Kumbi, Zaire  
Études en philosophie et lettres, philologie, littératures à l'Université de Liège et l'Université Nationale du Zaire

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### PROJECT

## The Body in Contemporary African Literature

L'hypothèse de recherche est que le corps renvoie au jeu d'une identité qui aurait la forme de la répétition et du même, mais aussi que le corps réfère au jeu d'une identité qui a la forme de l'individualité et du moi. La littérature double et prolonge l'expérience du corps. Le corps mène une double vie dont chacune s'alimente et se module à la source de l'autre. La première le place face à une certaine réalité, la seconde dans le souci narcissique de soi. La souffrance du corps double souvent la souffrance socio-politique dans le projet de métaphoriser les dérèglements sociaux. Les détraquements de la tête de Samba Diallo se posent tout à la fois en symptômes de la maladie psychique et en signes d'abjection du monde contemporain. Le corps est donc un prisme à travers lequel se construit une vision du monde. Viols, prostitution, homosexualité, adultères, inceste sont autant de motifs récurrents dans les littératures africaines contemporaines avec, en filigrane, l'incrustation de la mort, non pas en vertu de quelque rapprochement entre Eros et Thanatos, mais parce que le corps, par son caractère transgressif, est voué au châtement suprême. Mais cet aspect dramatique du corps est compensé toujours par la force de la phrase, par l'incongruité qui transcende l'horreur.

### À lire

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- "Le voyageur et son double." *Littératures et sociétés africaines: regards comparatistes et perspectives interculturelles*, edited by János Riesz et al. Tübingen: Narr, 2001.

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## The "Model" and Its Others: The Shape of Future Dialogue

I would like to share with you some ideas from the first part of a book that I am writing here in Berlin which bears the provisional title "La modernité de la parole africaine". In it I am investigating the context in which arose the African voice and the notion of black identity in Paris in 1932, and perforce I will be examining western depictions of black Africans. Not being an art historian, I will engage neither in theoretical ponderings nor concern myself with the pictures as such. Rather I will be exploring them as a text in the sense understood by Barthes and other modern theorists, analyzing them as metaphors of the encounter between cultures and of relations between peoples. As soon as a black person "enters the picture" they are always seen through an ideological lens that depicts them as some remote other, as a curiosity that is branded not European-the norm and model par excellence.

But these ideological depictions are also present in cultural products and academic institutions, either through their concepts of center and periphery or through designations such as "cultural studies", "subaltern studies," and "post-colonialism". I will analyze the Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism of such concepts and demonstrate their ineffectiveness in describing the relations between cultures. It would seem that the western scholar is unable to think outside the parameters of the ideology into which he was born-while take for instance such European artists as Picasso, Braque and Modigliani, who consciously borrowed from Africa; or today's "world music."

My investigative foray will lead to a renewed inquiry into modernity and will immerse us in issues of the present, of the here and now. There is an established dualism in today's analysis of intercultural relations. To the distinctions north/south and center/periphery have lately been added the divisions local/global (or local/universal). An examination of their multiple relations often gives priority to either dynamic global assimilation which-while being far from unidimensional-would have us believe that the world is one "vast village," or to resistance at the local level which is taken as affirmation of its substance and specificity. A reevaluation of the local emits in the interpretive revival of the notion of an African identity that is today more relevant than ever.

At a moment when globalization imposes new duties and blazes new trails, I believe it is useful to examine the increasing cultural standardization taking place and the cultural annihilation that accompanies it; to examine the situation of a sole culture arrogating to itself all the functions of prestige and power and tending to relegate all others to second-class status when not threatening them with outright destruction.

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