

**UCLA**

**Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies**

**Title**

Theory and History of Marxist Poetics in Yambo Ouologuem's Bound to Violence: A Monologue by Caliban on Prospero

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7fs981sf>

**Journal**

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 7(3)

**ISSN**

0041-5715

**Author**

Masilela, Ntongela

**Publication Date**

1977

**DOI**

10.5070/F773017413

**Copyright Information**

Copyright 1977 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

\*THEORY AND HISTORY OF MARXIST POETICS  
 IN YAMBO OJOLOGUEM'S BOUND TO VIOLENCE:  
 A MONOLOGUE BY CALIBAN ON PROSPERO<sup>1</sup>

by

Ntongela Masilela

*For to question our culture is to question our very existence, our human reality itself, and thus to be willing to take a stand in favor of our irremediable colonial condition, since it suggests that we would be out a distorted echo of what occurs elsewhere. This elsewhere is of course the metropolis, the colonizing centers, whose "right wings" have exploited us and whose supposed "left wing" have pretended and continue to pretend to guide us with pious solicitude; in both cases, with assistance of local intermediaries of varying persuasions.*

-Roberto Fernandez Retamar, *Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America*

To concretely examine the unity of historical poetics that structures the narrative process in *Bound to Violence*, it is necessary to pose correctly and systematically the problematic which is effected in the constitutive and regulative principles that govern the movement of thematics within this novel. This materialist approach, which examines the ideological units that govern the thematics of the novel and locates the process of structuration in it is critical in order to avoid imposing an empiricist practice in the process of reading the diversifications of the novel. Of necessity, this approach locates the nature of the totality in the structure of the novel, and subsequently delineates the dialectic which structures its objective and subjective dimensions.

The materialist practice of reading the unity of the narrative process of the novel is important, not only in unravelling the complex unities of the novel, but also in combatting the empiricist practice of reading the novel, according to which the multifarious and multivocal complex principles of the novel are reduced into the subjective consciousness of characters.

<sup>1</sup>This is the second of a two-part essay. The first part appeared in *Ufhamu* Vol VII, Number 2, 1977

Since ideology is a transparent void in the process towards attainment of historical consciousness, the materialist reading of the novel does not reduce the complex unities of the novel into the subjective consciousness of characters.

The materialist practice of criticism in which we shall engage while in attempting to make comprehensible the complex structures and processes of *Bound to Violence*, will be governed by the synthetical unity of two dialectical moments of criticism: that is the unity of the theoretical and descriptive elements of any serious practical criticism of literary works. It will also be facilitated by the dialectical reciprocity between these two moments or elements of practical criticism the descriptive moment will be in dominance, although it will be determined by the theoretical moment of practical criticism.

This then will be the theoretical approach of practically applying the poetics of Marxist criticism to this great African novel, *Bound to Violence*, in order to unravel the thematic and structural principles that govern its theoretical and historical unity.

## II

According to the empiricist reading of the novel, the ostensible theme of *Bound to Violence* is the nature of the slavery from the Middle Ages to our Imperialist epoch (these designations are mine), practised by Africans on Africans, by Arabs on Africans, and lastly but more viciously, by Europeans on Africans. This, to the empiricist reading of the novel, is the theme that determines the unity and structure of *Bound to Violence*. As will be indicated and illustrated in the following sections of this essay, this reading is false because it identifies appearance with essence, intention with result, the subjective moment with the objective moment. This confusion of identities and distinctions by the empiricist reading of the novel is not accidental, precisely because this reading lacks the modes and the systematic process of making comprehensible the determinate hierarchical principles which decenter the structure of the narrative process. Therefore, this empiricist reading does not have systematic principles of apprehending the dialectical reciprocity between contradictory movements or processes.

Fundamentally, the empiricist reading is regressive because it cannot articulate the determinate distinction between process and system, between the subjective and the objective. It fails completely to articulate the complex unities of *Bound to Violence*, because the whole narrative process of this novel is a dialectical movement between two structural modes; one structural mode is represented by the Notables who form a

particular social class, and the other structural mode is represented by the social class of Serfs. The narrative process of the novel also transforms and articulates the incorporation of the historical structures of the Nakem Empire and Nakem-Ziuko into the narrative structures of the novel (that is, their relational movement). This, the empiricist practice of reading the novel fails to register and articulate as being central to its understanding.

The materialist practice of reading the novel poses and articulates a distinct and complex problematic within, and towards understanding the diversified unities which structure *Bound to Violence*. This reading not only examines the problematic of the novel, but also poses the following concrete questions: What is the object of this problematic? What is the nature of the narrative modes within which the problematic and its object are articulated? What is the nature of the presentative process within which this articulation is facilitated, that is, what are the compositional poetics at play in the construction of the novel?

It is by posing such questions that one may be able to constitute the historical and structural principles which would be helpful in making tangible the unique poetics of this African novel. The real question is: what is it that makes *Bound to Violence* an African novel and, not say, a European novel or a Latin American novel? Why is the man behind this novel Ouloguem, and not Graham Greene? Indirectly this novel poses the problem of the nature of African poetics; are these poetics the product of the unity of divergent instances or are they the product of the unity of converging articulations?

By employing the materialist reading of the novel in relation to *Bound to Violence*, the theme which structures its unity is no longer that of slavery in the Nakem Empire, but historically and concretely, the uncertainty of historical consciousness and the near impossibility of active political practice being contemporaneous with the historical present. The theme of the novel therefore is the momentary elision of consciousness within particular historical periodizations; that is, it tracks the process and movement of decentered consciousness in history through the particular ideological forms consciousness undergoes within singular temporalizations. This historical consciousness articulated within the class structure (composed of Notables, Serfs, Saif, Lords, Marabouts, Griots, and Peasants) of the Nakem Empire and Nakem-Ziuko is realized within the complexly dissociated structure of the novel. Its principal articulators (with its variants mediated by a particular contradictory process of history), in contradictory and antagonistic relation to each other, are the notables who are in dominance and the oppressed lower class composed of Serfs and Peasants.

This thematical poetics of the novel structures the unitary movement of the narrative process, and mediates the multivalent and multivocal effects of its systematizing temporalizations as they effect the ideological contingencies of its characterization. In short, they effect an integrative process of the constitutive and regulative principles of the structure in converging the decentered totality of *Bound to Violence*; that is, thematology unifies the diverse objective and subjective elements of the structure of the novel into a totality.

The whole presentation so far may seem paradoxical and disconcerting, in that, it may appear that an empiricist reading of *Bound to Violence* is able to postulate a concrete problematic of the novel which it sees as the economic enterprise of slavery; whereas a materialist reading of the novel may seem to postulate an abstract and nebulous problematic; that is, the possible appearance of elision of historical consciousness within certain social modes. At the level of appearance this seems to be the case; but when one displaces this perspective to the level of essence, it becomes clear that it is actually the materialist reading of Ouoologuem's novel which postulates the concrete inverted object (the inversion of the distinction between primary and secondary subject and object determinate and dominance, and the nature of their historical relationship); that concrete object is the nature of the class struggle between the notables and the serfs, especially within the locality of the Nakem Empire from the Middle Ages to the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko in the present Imperialist epoch (these designations present a problem—they reflect the dominance of European history on African history). The periodization in *Bound to Violence* is one demarcated by particular class and ideological contestations, for it is a Process that unifies into a synthetic totality the continuous and discontinuous moments of the narrative structure of the Literary Form (in this instance the novel) in relation to History.

The above articulation of the distinction between the determinate hierarchical orders of the concrete and the abstract, primary principles and secondary principles, subject and object take on resonance and dialectical meaning when counterposed in relation to the Introduction of the *Grundrisse*, where Marx articulates the dialectical relationship between production, consumption, exchange and distribution. The whole complex dialectical relationship is articulated by Marx through what Galvano Della Volpe calls *determinate abstractions*; that is, the determinate and indeterminate processes and system that facilitate for understanding of the dialectical relationship between the abstract and the concrete. This process of determinate abstractions will be utilized in practice when delineating the different components and elements of the narrative process in *Bound to Violence*.

*Bound to Violence* is a historical novel that articulates the elision within historical consciousness of the nature of class struggle between the Serfs and the Notables. For the moment, it will be necessary to critically examine the nature of the historical novel.

### III

The classic Marxist theory of the historical novel is formulated by Georg Lukács in his great book, *The Historical Novel*. The concrete task of the historical novel, according to Lukács is to demonstrate the movement and contradictions of a particular historical reality:

*What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, fall and act just as they did in historical reality.*<sup>2</sup>

The historical novel, therefore, according to Lukácsian literary principles, must disclose the artistic connection between the spontaneous reaction of the masses and the historical consciousness of the leading personalities.<sup>3</sup> Lukács does not explain why only the leading personalities of a particular historical era possess historical consciousness, and the masses only have a spontaneous understanding of it. The weakness of Lukács is that some of his insightful critical statements are tempered with idealistic notions; therefore, there is a continual displacement of the concrete materialist object within his analysis.

The paradoxical nature of Lukács, which expresses his greatness is his constant movement between the idealist and the materialist terrain, and in this contradictory movement, utters profound insights:

*The interesting and difficult task of the historical novel is to represent the significant qualities of the historical individual in such a way that it neglects none of the complex, capillary factors of development in the whole society of the time; that, on the contrary, the significant features of the "world historical individual" not only grow organically out of this development, but at the same time explain it, give it consciousness and raise it to a higher level.*<sup>4</sup>

For Lukács therefore, the historical novel must not only portray the progressiveness of the movement of history; it must also convey the truthfulness of historical atmosphere in individualizing particular historical figures. Yambo Ouologuem's outstanding historical novel *Bound to Violence* completely fulfills these Lukácsian principles in tracing the historical development of the Nagem Empire during the Middle Ages to its culmination as a Republic of Nagem-Ziuko and tutelage under British and French domination in our present Imperialist epoch.

For Lukács also, the historical novel must portray the nature and process of the class struggle:

*The interaction between "above" and "below", the sum of which constitutes the totality of popular life, is thus manifested in the fact that, while on the whole the historical tendencies "above" receive a more distinct and generalized expression, we find the true heroism with which the historical antagonisms are fought out, with few exceptions, "below".<sup>5</sup>*

*Bound to Violence* also fulfills this Lukácsian principle of the historical novel: it not only has a typological structure of the "above" and the "below" represented by the Notables and the Serfs, who are governed by the "world historical individual", the Saif, it also at another level, portrays the movement of this typology, represented this time by the natives and settlers (as Fanon would say) in the Republic of Nagem-Ziuko.

It is within this historical context, that for Lukács the historical novel is a portrayal of the representation of the totality of relations and the totality of objects, through the typification of characters, circumstances, and scenes, in articulating the struggle of different classes, strata, parties and trends. *Bound to Violence*, within the above-mentioned double typological structures, does portray the typification of the historical epoch of which it is its getting (this will become concrete below, as we shall be analysing the complex narrative structure of the novel in relation to the historical period it narrates). In critical conformity to Lukácsian principles of the historical novel, it does portray the complex relation between the individual and class, and the complex and paradoxical relationship between the historical nature of an event and its manner of presentation. Lastly, Ouologuem's novel does convey the idea of the contradictory character of progress in illustrating the historical background and setting of the Nagem Empire and of the Nagem-Ziuko Republic.

Indeed *Bound to Violence* is a historical novel in the tradition of great European historical novels, for as "...the

historical novel reflects and portrays the development of historical reality the measure for its content and form is to be found in this reality itself."<sup>6</sup>

By what literary modes does Oulougem's novel portray concretize its *historicalness*, and in what systematic form does it present its movement? The answer to this question requires a study of the ideological unities of the narrative point of view within the systematic movement of the narrative process.

#### IV

The narrative point of view is a process that locates and synthesizes the dialectical relationship between the historical and the structural elements that compose the totality of the novel. Robert Weimann, the East German literary historian has defined this complex process in the following manner:

*...the narrative point of view functions as a connecting medium between representation and evaluation, and it is as a means of achieving and communicating their unity that point of view must be seen as being at the heart of the narrator's method.*<sup>7</sup>

Within this historical perspective, the narrative point of view is a unity of the objective and the subjective structural principles of the novel; a unity that is a product of and corresponds to the historical relations between the novel and history.

For, it is the unity between objective representation, which relates the novel to the concrete world, and subjective evaluation which relates the novel to the indeterminate notion that renders concrete the relation between text (the novel) and context (society). This unity is mediated by temporal ideological contestations and manifestations. This then is the unity of the narrative point of view within the novel in relation to its context.

On the other hand, the narrative point of view within the text, is the unity of the narrative point of view of the author and that of the character(s); it is this unity that structures the narrative process of the novel.

The narrative point of view is a perspective governed by convergent and divergent constituents that relate to each other the real and the imaginative worlds of the novel. Within this context it is an indeterminate process which locates the tensions and correlations of the narrative method within the structural unity of the process.



By employing the synthetical and analytical tools of the narrative point of view in imposing a materialist reading of *Bound to Violence*, it will be possible to disengage the unity of the narrative process so as to be able to define and theorize upon the theory of history in this novel. For criticism, according to Brecht, is constituted by the act of disengagement of the unities within an artistic work, in order for them to be reconstituted and re-synthesized anew.

## V

Ouologuem's novel is composed of four chapters: Chapter I, the Legend of the Saifs, p. 3-24; Chapter II, Ecstasy and Agony, p. 25-33; Chapter III, the Night of the Giants, p. 34-72; and Chapter IV, Dawn, p. 173-182. The progressiveness of the movement of history is articulated within these temporal modes. The task is to trace the periodization of history through them within the structure and thematic unity of the narrative process of *Bound to Violence*.

Perhaps a word of caution is in order: it is not the aim of this essay to present the linear development of plot in *Bound to Violence*, which is an empiricist problematic; rather, its aim is to dialectically trace the developmental unity of plot construction within the narrative process--and this is a materialist problematic.

## VI

The decentered consciousness, which is the problematic of the novel, is articulated in the first chapter (the Legend of the Saifs, p. 3-24) through three distinct narrative modes: the authorial narrative mode (omniscient), whose dominance is articulating the movement of the narrative process, is governed by a constitutive principle which is a product of the compositional exigencies of novel construction; mode constructed from written Arab chronicles by Arab historians; and lastly, the oral narrative mode constructed from the great epics of oral African literature (in the tradition of the griots). The last two narrative modes, which in combined articulation determine the movement of the narrative process, are governed by the regulatory principles which are a product of the historical exigencies of the relation between text and context (an African society, its particular historical instance).

It is the dialectical unities and disunities of the triadic structure of these narrative modes which determine the nature and means of the movement of the narrative process in this chapter. Whereas the authorial narrative mode with its

constructive principle can be an element of any novel (African, European, Chinese etc.), the other two narrative modes (from Arab chronicles and oral African literature) and their regulative principles are elements that specify and determine the uniqueness and singularity of the African historical novel. It is the confluence and interpenetration of these narrative modes as the synthesized totality of the narrative process which makes *Be to Violence* the remarkable novel it is. This synthesizing totality is the product of the unity of the dialectic between the dominant order (the constitutive principle) and the determinative order (the regulative principles); and the dialectic of reciprocal counterpointing between the two principles.

In the legend of the Saifs, Ouluguem narrates the grandeur and the subsequent collapse of the Nakem Empire, due to internal contradictions, through the periodization of its historical evolution. Though the history of Nakem is seen within the context of its rulers, the Saifs; through the reigns of different Saifs (from period to period) Ouluguem locates the different temporalizations of the history of Nakem. But the epochs of Nakem history (within this periodization) are traced through the dislocations and transformations of the social structure of the Nakem Empire. For the social structure of Nakem Empire is composed of different social classes who are in conflict and ideological contestation against each other (within the "feudal" mode of production):

*After the death of the just Saif Isaac al-Heit, however, the accursed son Saif Al-Haram and his minister Al Hadj Abd al-Hassana struck by a stone in the soul they did not possess, spent large sums of money supporting the most influential and discontented families at court; twelve thousand dishes were served them at each meal; they received bribes, pensions and titles of nobility as pompous as they were meaningless; all the magnificence of a fairy tale: their horses, to the number of 3,260, drank milk in mangers inlaid with gold and ivory. Allah harmin katemadjo! 8*

*For two hundred years courtiers, peasants, warriors, slaves and artisans sang their praises, filling the pockets and swarming around the imperial cheese, in whose stench anyone with an ounce of ability could hope, in emulation of the Court to obtain lands, cattle, titles of nobility, money and everything it buys, including women.*

*Amidst all this turmoil, this dissolute life with its general bastardization, its vice and corruption, the Arab conquest, which had come several centuries*

*earlier, settled over the land like a She-dog baring her white fangs in raucous laughter: more and more often, unfreed slaves and subjugated tribes were herded off to Mecca, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Red Sea, and America at prices as ridiculous as the flea-bitten dignity of the nigger-trash.<sup>9</sup>*

This complete disintegration of the Nakem Empire, due to class contradictions occurred around 1546 (at this time in Europe mercantile capitalism was beginning its imperial expansionism in earnest, which was to have devastating effects on the Nakem Empire in 18th and 19th centuries) and its transformation into a French colonial dominion of the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko in the late 19th century, is in complete contrast to its grandeur from 1202 to 1498. Isaac al-Heit (died in 1498) ruled during the grandeur period of the Nakem Empire and is immortalized in an epic poem written by the griot Mahmud Traore of the African Republic of Nakem-Ziuko.

Saif Isaac al-Heit, immortalized in this epic poem as a righteous man who freed a slave each day and united various small kingdoms, was born of a black Jew, Abraham al-Heit, and an oriental Jewess<sup>10</sup> from Kenana (Canaan).

The legend of Saif Isaac al-Heit is presented by Ouologuem within the oral-written narrative mode of the African griots, whose historical veracity cannot be authenticated, since it is a combination of truth and invention, thus appealing to the black romanticism and political thinking of the African Republic of Nakem-Ziuko.

The disintegration (which thus facilitated European colonial penetration) of the Nakem Empire, due to internal class and religious conflicts and the struggle for power among the various descendants of Saif Essac al-Heit (Saifs al-Haram, al-Hilal, Tevi, Rabban Johanan and lastly Saif ben Isaac al-Heit) is presented by Ouologuem within the written narrative mode of the Arab chronicles.

The history of the Nakem Empire (its grandeur and disintegration) is presented by Ouologuem in an objective and retrospective viewpoint. This history of Nakem is related through the narrative process of Chapter I by the constant contrasting and counter-pointing against each other, of the written narrative mode of the Arab chronicles and the oral narrative mode of the African epic. It is by means of this dialectical counterpointing that the continuity and movement of the narrative process is established and carried forth from periodization to periodization. This interpenetration of the narrative modes forms a unity within the dominant authorial narrative mode. The unity of the regulative principles of the written and oral narrative modes

is due to their contradictory and oppositional forms of pressing the movement of history; the former within the context of collective enterprise, and the latter within a context of an individual undertaking.

Saif ben Isaac al-Heit presides over a collapsing Nakem Empire with the support of sheiks, emirs and ulemas who had formed a union of Aristocrats and Notables; with and through them he exploited his populace, which was small having been populated by slavery. At this precise historical moment (late 19th century) European colonialism intruded upon the Empire of Nakem:

*...sponsored by the banks, the universities, the Army and the Navy--geographical societies, international associations of philanthropists, explorers, economists and promoters sprang up throughout Europe, unleashing a deadly competition between the European powers which swarmed through Nakem, fighting, conquering, pacifying, obtaining treaties and burying cartridges, gunflints, bullets, and gunpowder in token of peace. 'We are burying war so deep', they said, 'that our children will not be able to dig it up again. The tree that will grow here will bear witness to the everlasting alliance between Whites and Blacks. And until the day when its branches bear bullets, cartridges, and gunpowder, peace will endure.'* 11

With the intervention of European imperial powers, an epoch was coming to an end in the history of the Nakem Empire and a new particular system with its unique historico-social relationships was in the process of unfolding:

*The Whites devised a system of international colonial law consecrating the principle of spheres of influence, and legitimizing the rights of the first occupant. But to Nakem the colonial powers came too late, for with the help of the local Notables a colonial overlord had established himself long since, and that colonial overlord was none other than Saif.* 12

The elision within decentered consciousness is structured in *Bound to Violence* through the narrative process, by means of the ideological functioning of the diachronic and synchronic instances of a historical process. Through the three narrative models, the process of narration in the novel articulates and synthesizes the following unities: the material and spiritual elements of African cosmology; the process and movement of history; and the dialectical relationship between man, nature and the spirits. These narrative modes in their movement form a

sequential order of historical interpenetration.

## VII

The authorial (impersonal) narrative mode is the only narrative device that mediates the progression of narrative process in Chapter II (Ecstasy and Agony, pp. 25-33). It is not accidental, therefore, that this narrative mode, which is a product of compositional exigencies, should not only dominate but also determine the structuring of the narrative; for the historical periodization of which it is dominant in *Bound to Violence*, is the period in which African history is subordinated to, and subsumed by European history. There is absolute congruency between this narrative device (a product of the developmental unity of novel formation within European literary history) and the periodization it effects in mediating the diachronic processes of history in the novel.

Within this omniscient narration of the history of Nakem Empire, which is in the process of being transformed into a French colonial dominion of the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko, history is related to the agony and the supposed ecstasy of its disintegration. In this hour of disintegration, pillage, infanticide, and mass scale genocide, are the order of the day; this destruction of the Nakem Empire is from internal contradictions, which ultimately made possible the intervention of European imperial powers at the close of the nineteenth century. The contradiction between the Notables, Sheiks, Emirs and Slaves, and peasants, which was determinant and dominant within the history of the Nakem Empire is displaced into a higher and more complex dialectical level, by the contradiction between Whites and Blacks within the history of the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko:

*The Empire was pacified, broken up into several zones which the Whites divided. Saved from slavery the niggertrash welcomed the White man with joy, hoping he would make them forget the mighty Saif's meticulously organized cruelty.*

From this period, the history of Nakem will be the history of European (French) imperialist domination and imposition.

The dominant category of this omniscient narrative mode is analytical, whereas the dominant category of the dialectical unity of the other two narrative modes was synthetic in its totalizing progression.

## VIII

The totalizing progression of the narrative process, of Chapter III, *The Night of the Giants* (p. 34-172), in portraying the decentered consciousness of the class struggle between different social classes of the Nakem Empire (on the one hand, Nobles, Aristocracy, Lords, and on the other, Serfs, and Peasant Slaves), and the subsequent transformation of Nakem into a colonial dominion, the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko, is mediated by, and realized within two structural modes which govern its thematic presentation; one articulating the horizontal complexity of the historical relations between Serfs and Notables (Lords), and the other, articulating the vertical complexity of historical relations between the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko and the French Imperial power.

The structural and thematic unity within *Bound to Violence* is a product, not of some ahistorical artistic imagination, but of a concrete moment of periodization, within African history, which was and is the process of unity of internal and external contradictions and the synthesis of unity of objective and subjective coordinates; in short, the novel thematically presents a unique conjuncture within African history, and structurally is a product of that process of temporalization.

The narrative process of the novel, especially in this chapter, *The Night of the Giants*, is a dialectical movement in a series of contrasting montages within the unity of horizontal and vertical structural modes. It is also a sequence of continuous and discontinuous unities, a process of opposing in articulating the form and nature of ideological characterization within the novel. What follows is presentation of this process in which a continuity is consistently re-established within discontinuous moments of the narrative.

Complex and different themes are interwoven (sometimes in dialectical reciprocity and at other times as givens of a negativity) in relation to, and within the structural modes: for example, the love relationship between Tambira and Kassoumi (who are both Serfs) and the result of which is the birth of Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi (who will venture to Europe for education at the turn of the century, and will return to Nakem-Ziuko after World War II); the religious conflict between Bishop Thomas de Seignac (Catholic) and Al Hadj Ali Gakore (the Berber Peul copyist, and pretentious Islamic scholar)--and the subsequent plot of the Bishop to assassinate the Saif (His Royal Magnificence); the ambivalent power relationship between Governor Vandame (representing the French imperial power) and Saif ben Isaac al-Heit (representing the Assembly of Notables and Aristocrats), after the former assassinates the governor ad interim administrator Jean Chevalier. All of these relationships (a

few among many others) express and indicate the nature and form of the French colonial domination in the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko.

Although the authorial (implied) narrative mode is dominant within the narrative process, it is now and then mediated by the oral narrative mode; occasionally they interact to form a structure of dialectical reciprocity.

Towards the end of this chapter, the narrative shifts to Europe where Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi encounters many experiences and tragedies: he meets his sister, Kadidia who is a prostitute in Paris; he also has a homosexual experience; and fights in World War II during which he meets a young French woman whom he marries.

On July 17, 1947, on the seven hundred and forty fifth anniversary of the founding of the Nakem Empire, Raymond Spartacus Kassoumi (after obtaining a degree in France) returns with his family to the Republic of Nakem-Ziuko:

*...Kassoumi thought sadly of the legend of the Saifs, a legend in which the future seems to seek itself in the night of time--prehistory in a tail-coat: there stands the African.*

*Not that Raymond, at that inspired turning point in African civilization, embodied a mere intellectual protest. He knew that in spite of Saif his whole existence would be a protest: the condition of this country was scandalous beyond description.*

*But the Notables here--as elsewhere the bourgeoisie--were prepared to turn this protest to their own use--labeling, wrapping, and selling even the sense of outrage. Vis-a-vis the traditionals, Tambira's son, in the political role he aspired to play in the Nakem that murdered his parents, remained a kind of artist, and like the artist in all societies he was free because he himself was problematic existence, a living conflict.*

## IX

The last chapter of the novel (Dawn, p. 173-182) is composed of a dialogue between Bishop Henry (representing the European Church) and Saif ben Isaac al-Heit (representing the African Absolutist State); it is a dialogue of the near impossibility of Man's action being contemporaneous with his historical present, due to elision within consciousness in relation to

particular historical contexts; this theme governs the structure and dialectical unity of *Bound to Violence*. It is a historic problematic defined by Régis Debray, in a famous paragraph of *Revolution in the Revolution*:

*We are never completely contemporaneous with our present. History advances in disguise; it appears on stage wearing the mask of the preceding scene, and we tend to lose the meaning of the play. Each time the curtain rises, continuity has to be re-established. The blame, of course is not history's but lies in our vision, encumbered with memory and images learned in the past. We see the past superimposed on the present even when the present is a revolution.*<sup>15</sup>

For Saïf ben Isaac al-Heit therefore:

*Man is in history is in politics. Politics is cleavage. No solidarity is possible. Nor purity.*<sup>16</sup>

*Bound to Violence* ends on an elegiac note of pessimism:

*Often, it is true, the soul desires to dream the echo of happiness, an echo that has no past, but projects into the world, one cannot help recalling that Saïf, mourned three million times is forever reborn to history beneath the hot ashes of more than thirty African Republics.*

*...That night, as they sought one another until the terrace was soiled with the black summits of dawn, a dust fell on the chessboard; but in that hour when the eyes of Nakem take flight in search of memories, forest and coast were fertile and hot with compassion. And such was the earth of men that the balance between air, water and fire was no more than a game.*<sup>17</sup>

Though it ends on this trenody, *Bound to Violence* is also a novel of optimism, similar to the magical realism (Carpentier) of contemporary Latin American novels.

---

#### Footnotes

1. Charges of plagiarism have been levelled at Yambo Ouologuem some of which have been substantiated by different authors. One of the most prominent is Eric Sellin's essay, "The Unknown Voice of Yambo Ouologuem" which appeared in the *Yale French Studies*, No. 53, 1976. Given this context,



the choice to critically study and analyse *Bound to Violence* is governed both by literary and political considerations. Though some of these charges have been authenticated and are therefore in a sense truly tragic, they are not of great importance; what is of great historical importance is the *ideological functioning* and the *consequences* that have followed this accusation. There has been complete silence on this question of plagiarism. What should be asked and answered, not by European *bourgeois* scholars, but by African *Marxist* literary historians, is the question of "plagiarism" within the context of African literary poetics, (the domain of African cultural creation and aesthetics) for in a sense "Ouloguem has committed a European faux-paus" (Sellin, p. 162). Politically, this whole affair of plagiarism raises the question of cultural imperialism; this question becomes of profound historical importance when examined within the context of the essay by the great Cuban intellectual, Roberto Fernandez Retamar. The essay "Caliban: Notes Towards a discussion of Culture in Our America", which originally appeared in a 1971 issue of *Casa de Las Americas* during the Padilla Affair, later appeared in the *Massachusetts Review* of Winter-Spring, 1974. For the task of translating this remarkable essay we have to extend our appreciation to Robert Marquez, Lynn Garafola and David A. McMurray. In this essay, Retamar, following the example of Jose Marti, delineates and presents historically, the *true order* of Latin American culture; the culture of their America, of which Cuba is the most prominent example. Likewise, we Africans have to study and present the true order and nature of our cultural heritage (present and past); the true cultural order of *Our Africa*, within the context of the Angolan Revolution. It is for these reasons that this essay is on *Bound to Violence*; for this great novel combats both the Romanticism of Negritude and the myth of African Socialism, according to its ahistorical understanding of history, there were no class cleavages, and formations within African history (hence the questioning of the necessity of class struggle, past and/or present). Nevertheless, *Bound to Violence*, like any other artistic object, is not beyond criticism.

2. Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*, p. 42. The great fault of Lukács' theory of the novel (that is, the Marxist Lukács and not the Kantian Lukács) is its ultra-canonization of the realist mode in the novel. The critical realism of the 19th Century bourgeois novel becomes the paragon, in Lukács theory of the novel, for all future creations within the novelistic genre. Not only is this understanding of the historical development of the novel formalistic, it is also ahistorical in refusing to give cognisance to particular mediating processes, within each historical temporalization. Lukács reduces the instrument of literary creation to its

articulating procedure. The fantastic mode could be more autic than the realistic mode in creating great realistic liter works. Witness the contemporary Italian writer, Italo Calvir and the Argentinian novelist, Julio Cortazar. Lukács theory of the novel must be applied with great reservations.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 127
5. *Ibid.*, p. 49
6. *Ibid.*, p. 333
7. Weimann, Robert, *Structure and Society in Literary History Studies in the History and Theory of Historical Criticism.* p. 236.
8. *Bound to Violence*, p. 11.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
10. See Jean-Paul Sartre's *Antisemite and Jew*, for explanatio of the ideological complexes surrounding the word "Jewess within European culture.
11. *Bound to Violence*, p. 23-24.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 31
14. *Ibid.*, p. 167
15. Debray, Regis, *Revolution in the Revolution*, p. 19.
16. *Bound to Violence*, p. 175.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 181-182.

\* \* \* \*

Ntongela Masilela is a Developmental Specialist at the Fanon Research & Development Center, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, Charles Drew Post-Graduate Medical School, Los Angeles and has just received his Ph.D. in Sociology from U.C.L.A.