

Anti-Oppressive Oppression: A Reaction to Leadership Recklessness in the Congo Space

Lecturer Ph.D. Abdul-Karim KAMARA
The University of Gambia, Brikama Campus
akkamara@utg.edu.gm

Abstract

Just like Sartre's anti-racist racism may be interpreted as the racism engendered by an original racist conduct, anti-oppressive oppression too may be interpreted as a reaction to the oppression instituted by the oppressive rhinos in power. Both cases have to do with the subaltern physically and verbally struggling to overturn the oppression imposed upon them by their "superior" other. This paper demonstrates how, in L'Etat Honteux and La Vie et Demie,¹ Sony Labou-Tansi has attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the image of leadership through the carnivalesque with the express purpose of extracting consent from it for relocation to a new locus of respect for democratic values.

Keywords: *subaltern, relocation to a third space, public/organic intellectual, carnivalesque, naming and shaming.*

It seems vital to broach this study with the excogitations of Jean-Paul Sartre and Joseph Ki-Zerbo who, it can be assumed, believe that the fight for the extermination of kakistocratic regimes requires the dogged determinacy of the public intellectual. This can be taken to mean that it is incumbent upon the credentialized followers to bear in mind that silence is not always golden particularly when the community they belong to is made to squirm under the iron boots of military dictators, to recast Jack London's "Iron Heel", in addition to being subjected to probably the most heinous types of socio-economic exploitation. There is probably no contesting the point that Labou-Tansi is aware of the incriminating silence Sartre, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and many other organic scholars seem to strongly condemn in their various styles.

It is probably pertinent to declare here that the choice of Labou-Tansi as an organic intellectual challenger is not fortuitous; it is noted that he is probably among the most outstanding Congolese satirists who believe that the truculent version of the carnivalesque is the most appropriate weapon of negotiation with

¹ The two works shall henceforward be referred to as *L'Etat* and *La Vie*.

the rhinoceroses. He seems to believe, just like Soyinka is to later demonstrate in his struggle with the Nigerian military dictators, that this is not the time for the intellectual writer “to indulge in palliatives” (Soyinka, 1996, p. 56).

It is to be noted that the two novels catalogue a non-Horacian type of satire; what this means is that, Labou-Tansi does not succumb to the temptation of mocking his dictator victims gently. What he rather does is to adopt what Hibbard and Thrall refer to as the Juvenalian type of satire – the caustic type – to expose the lunatic aberrations of people-in-power with a certain bitterness accompanied with spite (Holman, 1960, p. 477). But more significantly, it is tempting to project that Labou-Tansi seems to have been mainly influenced by the writings of Mikhaïl Bakhtine. Thus, this essay shall be hinged on the carnivalesque – a literary mode popularized by Mikhaïl Bakhtine – and how it meshes with Labou-Tansi’s narrative style.

An attentive reading of both *L’Etat* and *La Vie* makes it reasonable to suggest that Labou-Tansi may not have been unacquainted with the four categories of the carnivalesque proposed by Mikhaïl: the first category (familiar and free interaction between people) brings together people of antipodal social belonging and makes them interact on common terms; the second category (eccentric behaviour) provides for the said combination of people to behave in the most abnormal way possible; the third category (carnivalistic misalliances) allows for everything that may be generally separated to reunite, for instance heaven and hell, or young and old; and the fourth category (sacrilegious) caters for sacrilegious events to take place without the need for punishment. One can venture to suggest that these four categories are given more leverage by Phe-bot et al in their article titled *Le carnivalesque chez Mikhaïl Bakhtine* where they argue that:

(...) le carnaval au Moyen Age, loin de n’être qu’une manifestation folklorique, était une des expressions les plus fortes de la culture populaire, en particulier dans sa dimension subversive. C’était l’occasion pour le peuple de renverser, de façon symbolique et pendant une période limitée, toutes les hiérarchies instituées entre le pouvoir et les dominés, entre le noble et le trivial, entre le haut et le bas, entre raffiné et le grossier, entre le sacré et le profane. (Mikhaïl Bakhtin, 2011)

The views presented above gain validity based on what Bakhtin himself writes about the carnivalesque as an exclusive moment during which people enjoy complete freedom and everything is turned upside down:

[Le carnivalesque] est marqué, notamment, par la logique originale des choses “à l’envers”, “au contraire”, des permutations constantes du haut et du bas (“la roue”), de la face du derrière, par les formes le plus diverses de parodies et travestissements, rabaissements, profanations, couronnements et détronements

bouffons. La seconde vie, le second monde de la culture populaire s'édifie dans une certaine mesure comme une parodie de la vie ordinaire, comme "un monde à l'envers." (p. 19)

Bakhtine goes farther afield to make language (in relation to who is not socially qualified to say certain things) a prominent component of the carnivalesque:

(...) la subversion du système des valeurs passe d'abord par celle du langage. Il existe un langage officiel comme celui de l'église, du pouvoir, de l'élite qui se plie à des normes de courtoisie, de bienséance, de respect et de considération. Et il y a en contrepartie le langage populaire qui est caractérisé par les imprécations, injures et jurons, qui constitue le revers des louanges de la place publique. (...) des phénomènes tels que les grossièretés, les jurons, les obscénités sont les éléments non officiels du langage. Ils sont et étaient considérés comme une violation flagrante des règles normales du langage, comme un refus délibéré de se plier aux conventions verbales: étiquette, courtoisie, piété, considération, respect du rang. (Bakhtine, 1972, p. 190).

It is important to project that Labou-Tansi employs all the theoretical elements on the carnivalesque mentioned above in deriding the two leaders (Martillimi Lopez and the Providential Guide) on the one hand, and Maman Nationale (Martillimi Lopez's mother) on the other. In the pages ahead, attempts shall be made to demonstrate the application of the theoretical elements mentioned above to the two character groups captured above. The analysis shall be pursued in three phases namely, *The Leadership Carnavalesqued by the Subaltern*, *The Leadership Subalternizes itself* and *Maman Nationale in Carnavalesque Mood*.

Phase One: The Leadership Carnavalesqued by the Subaltern

It is tempting to project that an even casual reading of *La Vie*, but particularly of *L'Etat*, cannot but make the reader feel that indeed Labou-Tansi has written about States plunged into shameful conditions as a result of undisciplined leadership, and therefore, the only way to write about producers of this shame is to use a language perverted in both syntactic and semantic terms. It is against this backdrop that one may argue further that the burlesque has a place in the struggle for relocation to a third locus. *L'Etat* is interspersed with a surfeit of foul language against the political establishment and everyone around it, thus creating the impression that the subaltern writer is really writing to herald a beyond, a third space beyond, where leaders must be mindful about moral rectitude. Right from the first sentence of the novel, the reader is warned that the biography is a stinger and has nothing in common with the glorification of a leader whom the writer probably believes has nothing in common with glory: "Voici l'histoire de mon-

colonel Martillimi Lopez fils de Maman Nationale, venu au monde en se tenant la hernie, parti de ce monde toujours en se la tenant...” (*L’Etat*, p. 7). It is perhaps important to underline at this point that “hernie” and “palalie”, two derogatory vocables employed to shame Martillimi Lopez, are present more than once in almost every page of the novel.

The early pages of *L’Etat*, it is also to be noted, contain a catalogue of unsavoury details not just to evoke the rustic origins of Martillimi Lopez –

Nous le conduisîmes du village de Maman Nationale à la capitale où il n’était jamais venu avant, jamais de sa vie. (...) Nous étions tous sûrs que cette fois rien à faire nous aurions un bon président. Nous portions ses ustensiles de cuisine, ses vieux filets de pêche, ses machettes, ses hameçons, ses oiseaux de basse-cour, ses soixante et onze moutons, ses quinze lapins, son seau hygiénique, sa selle anglaise, ses trois caisses de moutarde Benedicta, ses onze sloughis, son quinquet, sa bicyclette, ses quinze arrosoirs, ses trois matelas, son arquebuse, ses claies... (*L’Etat*, p. 8)

- but to also portray him as a complete ignoramus as is revealed in this dialogue between him and Carvanso:

- *Qu’est-ce que c’est?*
- *C’est la carte de la patrie monsieur le Président.*
- *Ah ! d’accord ! Et qu’est-ce que c’est que ces serpents bleus ?*
- *Les rivières monsieur le Président.*
- *Ah ! d’accord. Et ces serpenteaux ?*
- *Les routes nationales monsieur le Président.*
- *Et ces serpentements-ci ?*
- *Les frontières monsieur le Président. (L’Etat, p. 10)*

Conceivably, the first scenario is meant to remind Martillimi Lopez that, as an erstwhile peripheral citizen, it is not expected of him to be one of those leaders who will choose to be unmindful about the paramount task of upgrading the lives of the poor. It is equally conceivable that he is being reminded of his humble past in order to rebuke and ridicule him for what seems reasonable to construe as short memory on his part. What is more, it can be argued that it is in that conversation that Labou-Tansi is seen to have dented the image of Martillimi Lopez all the more, in that, a president is expected to know the country over whose political affairs he is presiding. The seemingly asinine questions he asks Carvanso, who functions more or less as a tourist guide to the Guide, magnifies the irony entailed in seeing an ignorant Martillimi Lopez arrogate to himself the status of a guide and a father of the nation.

It seems vital to further project that the humiliation and demoralization of Martillimi Lopez is taken to a baser level when the novelist hires the services of

Merline, a prophet endowed with extraordinary clairvoyance, as well as the power to cure all forms of illnesses and to unravel all forms of mysteries. As the narrative reveals, it is by virtue of these powers that he (Merline) is invited by Martillimi Lopez to his presidential palace not to cure his “hernie”, but to tell him what the future holds for him:

Il lui montre mes sept kilos de testicules mais ce n'est pas pour cette raison que je t'ai fait venir, dis-moi plutôt comment les choses vont finir. (...) Tu auras ta case de fonction, ta voiture de fonction, tu auras un corps de fonction, et ta mère sera une maman de fonction. Mais dis-moi comment, quand et qui... ma hernie je ne veux pas qu'on m'en guérisse, je n'ai qu'elle au monde. (L'Etat, p. 94)

On the balance of probabilities, the soothsayer, Merline, is expected to move to the camp of Martillimi Lopez in a hurry and not subject him to a four-tier prestige-depleting ordeal. First, he is made to bring a ten coustrani coin that seems to be out of circulation and which the enemy camp (the people) refuses to provide. Next, he is made to swallow the coin (when he eventually gets it from the bank) and bring it back later to Merline for the soothsaying activity to be done. Thirdly, he is made to fall into coma for two months after swallowing it; he is made to sniff and fiddle with his «merde puante» in search of the coin. And finally, he is made to purge his «hernie» thinking that the coin might have hidden itself there, yet, the coin does not resurface (*L'Etat*, pp. 95-99). It can be posited that the just-mentioned ordeals that Martillimi Lopez is made to undergo unarguably illustrate the degree and intensity of hatred and low esteem the people have for their president.

It is deemed vital to add that, in an effort to sustain the minimization of Martillimi Lopez, Merline makes him literally do what evangelists may term as “speaking in tongues”:

Merci monsieur le Président, maintenant dites cinq cent fois la parole du prophète: “Coulchi, coulcha poumikanata”, ensuite vous direz autant de fois la réponse des dieux: “Kalmitana mahanomanchi lusata.” (L'Etat, p. 95)

One might argue that the minimization is not so much in making the leader succumb to his (Merline) orders, but in the fact that he subjects him to a long-drawn repetition of apparent idiocies. By so doing, it can be further proposed, he succeeds in making Lopez an idiot, at least temporarily. The same can be said about the Guide when he is also made to speak in tongues, in a language that seems unintelligible to the reader:

A la naissance de Patatra, le Guide Jean-Cœur-de-Père fit adopter par référendum une constitution à deux articles (...) Gronaniniata mésé boutouété taoutaou, moro metani bamanasar larani meta yelomanikatana. (La Vie, p. 28)

By making the leadership speak in a language that probably no one understands apart from them, it can be projected that Labou-Tansi's leader characters have lost the power to make themselves relevant in the spaces they are ruling.

On a similar note, probably writing with the same objective of humiliating his presidential characters, Labou-Tansi evokes the rustic origin of the Providential Guide, a rustic origin stained with an ignominious practice as a former livestock thief. It is probably reasonable to assume that he presents him as a thief to suggest that once a thief, one will always be a thief, and therefore, he neither deserves the mantle of leadership nor does he deserve respect. More to that, it is tempting to suggest that individuals with skeletons in their cupboards may very likely condone evil and therefore not able to shepherd the masses to a third space where poverty and unemployment levels are seen dwindling; and where the gaping inequalities between the core and the periphery are also seen being attenuated.

The idea can be floated that the enlightened members of the society are aware of the incompetence and insincerity of the leadership and since it is not likely that such leaders can be put under gun point, they can at least be put under pen point. With this in mind, it can be speculated that Labou-Tansi buckles himself down anew to the business of annoying, degrading and unsettling the political leadership of the Central African space in *La Vie*. It can be argued that his surest weapon of leadership debasement is to burlesque their proclivity to lechery. This is noticed in the manner he paints the superlative virility of the Providential Guide; he does not just give him the power to have carnal knowledge of fifty virgins at a go, but to also have the power to impregnate all of them in that single go.

Traditional ethics demand that sex-related issues be treated as sublime and that the name should not even be mentioned crudely, particularly when this has to do with magnates in authority. Additionally, in societies of yesteryears matters of this nature are taboo topics for the subject. It is discovered that in *La Vie*, Labou-Tansi respects the second obligation and therefore chooses to refer to the act of love-making by the President of the Republic as "faire la chose-là" or "il y a match ce soir". In this way, it is observed that Labou-Tansi injects laughter into the sublime. But like Ayi Kwei Amah in *The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*, Labou-Tansi makes the burlesque appear to trespass propriety when he glosses it with a Juvenal veneer of vulgarity as can be seen in his portrayal of the Providential Guide as a leader that is incapable of managing his sexual cravings to the point of becoming insensitive to the presence of his guards:

(...) et quand les reins du Guide avaient posé leur problème, on remplaçait les peaux-collants directs par des êtres du sexe d'en face, les gardes assistaient alors aux vertigineuses élucubrations charnelles du guide Providentiel exécutant sans cesse leur éternel va-et-vient au fond sonore aux clapotements fougueux des chairs dilatées. (La Vie, 1979, p. 20)

Labou-Tansi also makes the Providential Guide appear as a leader who does not deserve respect because he apparently does not respect his obligation to portray himself as an expected paragon of morality. Thus, Labou-Tansi demonstrates the mental alertness to steadily minimize him in the eyes of the reader by injecting vulgarity into the burlesque. Demonstrably not being satisfied with his presentation of the Guide's natural endowment as an "énorme machine de procréation" (*La Vie*, p. 54), he buckles down to the task of giving details about the preparations the Guide undertakes for something Labou-Tansi probably considers frivolous:

Le guide Henri-au-Cœur-Tendre voulut recevoir son épouse en mâle, et pas comme un mâle d'eau douce. (...) Des masseurs de talent le travaillaient: c'étaient deux Toubabes originaires de la puissance étrangère (...); on lava longuement sa bouche, on nettoya ses oreilles et ses narines, on vérifia tous les orifices. Il se débarrassa du poids de sa vessie, aéra son gros intestin pendant deux quarts d'heure. (La Vie, p. 125)

The foregoing makes it tempting to posit that Labou-Tansi is determined to annihilate the fake aura of sanctity the Guide has been surrounded with. It is equally tempting to observe that Labou-Tansi is seen taking the punishment or demoralization of the Guide to another level by denying him the opportunity to consummate his relationship with Chaïdana like a "vrai mâle"² in spite of all the preparations captured above. Instead of receiving the diva of a Chaïdana whom he saw before the preparations, he is now made to see a ghost Chaïdana covered in blood. His debasement, it is observed, seems to be heightened when, out of fright, he runs out naked as done earlier by the original Providential Guide at the Hotel la Vie et Demie.

In view of the various humiliating episodes highlighted in this section, it is probably reasonable to suggest that when the subaltern speaks or writes to register disgust with the head of the local committee of rhinoceroses for having reduced the fictionalized Central African space to the shameful state in which it is, they do not just do so to annoy and degrade him, but also to render him increasingly abnormal. This probably explains why insults and other deprecatory forms of naming have been resorted to by the socio-economically deprived.

² It is important to note that "mâle" is normally reserved for animals of lower rank.

Phase Two: The Leadership Subalternizes itself

This portion surveys the direct participation in and contribution made by the leadership apparatus to the carnivalesque. It is obvious that they do not in real life belong to the subaltern class but, as demand the principles of the carnivalesque such as captured above, the leadership is momentarily “subalternized”, that is, they voluntarily reduce themselves to subaltern status or are reduced to it. What this means is that, people of a “noble cast” are seen exhibiting a behaviour that is not in keeping with their social standing.

It can be argued that the burlesque (in carnivalesque terms) in Labou-Tansi’s works further strikes a chord with Mikhaïl’s cogitations particularly in regard to the liberty enjoyed by the author – who belongs and speaks on behalf of the outcasts of the Congolese society under review – to punish the people in the topmost echelon of society’s ladder. Minimal elements of this have already been seen above where the world is turned upside down, thus making the objects assume authority to transform the subject leader into a helpless obedient object. While in the previous component, the task of deriding the leader is undertaken by the followers, it is crucial to note that the current component aims at exhibiting how the leader participates in the destruction of the honour reserved for people of his category.

On repeated occasions, the mighty are made to fall by having them participate in the carnivalesque. Martillimi Lopez participates in a mud-smearing feast and renders himself completely unrecognizable or perhaps identical with his subjects but in ridiculous terms (*L’Etat*, pp. 42-49). He even animates the carnival by acting as the lead vocalist, and sings the refrain, together with his disgruntled youth, of a song that aims at ruining his prestige:

*Si j’étais une petite souris
j’irais creuser dans sa grasse hernie
si j’étais un petit petit chat
j’irais chasser dans sa hernie
si j’étais une petite petite chique
je choisirais sa hernie ... (p. 42)*

His prestige seems to be ruined not only by the words he pronounces, but by the observation that “sa lourde machine se balance dans sa musette au rythme de [la] cadence” (*L’Etat*, p. 42), a description repeated in *La Vie* as “son énorme machine de procréation” (p. 34). There is probably no gainsaying the point that the song is reminiscent of the raï music, a syncretized brand of music combining “elements of western rock, disco, and jazz, and West African music, together with songs from such spaces as Latin America and Bollywood – a range of sources that

has no formal limit (Young, 2003, p. 73), created by the Algerian adolescent found at the periphery of society, who lives in deprived conditions of poverty, poor housing, and unemployment. It is observed, that the said adolescents have been able to make themselves heard in a significant way about the injustices brought to bear on them by the French as well as by their traditional leaders. It can further be argued that in keeping with carnivalesque principles, the debasement is taken to another appalling level by having Martillimi Lopez himself deal a twist of the knife in his own rotten vitals. Conceivably, there is no need to employ the services of a Kim Chi Ha who, backing his words with concrete action, will not hesitate to do the same against people-in-power, including their legions of obedient cogs (Berrigan, 1977, p. 21).

More significantly, he is made to demonstrate a high sense of camaraderie with his otherwise inferior Others, in that, even after being gravely injured – prestige-wise – by “un gaillard bien musclé [qui] le renverse dans la glaise” (*L’Etat*, p. 43), he does not take umbrage.

It is perhaps useful to add that like Martillimi Lopez, the Providential Guide temporarily abandons his status as leader to mingle with the common people in a musical jamboree. Apparently, Labou-Tansi does not use the occasion to increase the value of the Guide in the eyes of the people, but rather, to devalue him. This is what is evidenced when, after making himself crowned as the “plus grand poète de son temps” for having written a poem that could best be classified as verbiage, the Guide joins the band of the famous musician, Mapou-Anchia:

L’orchestre perdit son prestige en deux mois du fait que le guide Jean-Cœur-de Père voulut chanter tous les morceaux avec sa voix qui donnait plutôt à rire et son physique maltraitant qui lui valut son petit nom de Jean Baleine. (La Vie, p. 127)

The episodes above seem to bolster the argument that the people can be taken in for quite a number of times but once the frequency attains unacceptable limits and they become deeply disillusioned, no show of camaraderie by the leader can have them see him in positive light.

It is a truism that when important people associate themselves with a ceremony, the expectation is for them to add grandeur to such a ceremony or “to grace the occasion», as is often expressed. But the argument Labou-Tansi probably intends to advance is that, when the activities of such important people lead them to a significant drop in prestige, whatever they do is interpreted by the public as shameful and that they only remain important as objects of ridicule. Thus, instead of “gracing” occasions, they disgrace them. And as Bakhtin makes it obvious, praises will give way to obscenities.

Apparently, in keeping with another principle of the carnivalesque that entails having noble characters resort to the use of a language that is inconsistent with their social standing, both Martillimi Lopez and the Providential Guides are made to lock horns with their subjects in a battle of invectives. Lopez demonstrates this voluntary moral fall in so many ways. He is, in fact, seen ignoring the etiquettes of his class when he brazenly declares, “il faut hurler avec les loups” (*L’Etat*, p. 135). In demonstrating this, he issues out a barrage of vituperative pronouncements against his subaltern or inferior tormentors. If he is not heard promising vengeance on his underground subaltern torturers in dirty language: “[p]endant six mois la ville est envahie par ce caca de vos mamans mais moi je me vengerai” (pp. 86-7), he is heard openly insulting a pleading victim: “[c]’est trop tard nom d’un bordel” (p. 88); if he is not heard berating his incompetent soldiers in crude language: [m]ais qu’est-ce que foutent les tirailleurs? (...) Mais je comprends: au lieu de garder la patrie, ils montent les femmes. Maintenant vous me consommerez comme vous m’avez foutu ... (pp. 89-90) or “Que de cons : vous êtes tous des cons : les militaires, les civils, tous. Dans ce pays il n’y a que ma hernie qui raisonne” (p. 103) ; if he is not seen arguing with his subordinates: “Icuzo national quelle hernie t’a piqué : tu me parles comme tu parles à tes femmes” (p. 90), he is seen disguising himself as an Arab (together with Vauban, probably his aide de corps) trading tantrums with one of his subjects over a woman:³ “Tu veux te mesurer à ma hernie? d’accord: comme tu voudras” (p. 134). It is vital to note that a similar exhibition of sleazy behaviour is put up by the Providential Guide, although not comparable in frequency to that of Martillimi Lopez. For instance, in a fit of apoplexy over the foreign envoy’s inability to understand his coded speech, Jean Coriace explodes: “Ne me forcez pas à croire que dans les vieux pays, les ministres sont de vieux cons qui ne comprennent pas.” (*La Vie*, p. 179)

The self-debasement of the leadership, particularly of Lopez, is capped with the confessions he makes. He is made to repeatedly denounce the actions of his predecessors, arguably with the intention of increasing his leverage. To demonstrate his “patience”, for instance, a quality he is not known for in the work, he will castigate Darbanso and Manuel Lansio as follow:

Faites vite! ah si j’étais Darbanso qui vous fusillait pour un oui ou pour un non! si j’étais Manuel Lansio qui en faisait cuire deux pour être sûr que le troisième va s’y

³ Specifically over the beautiful dancer and wife of late Yambo-Yambi whom he killed in order to possess her.

mettre! mais je suis un bon président et vous en profitez pour entrer dans mes culottes (L'Etat, p. 39).

Further to this, he denies being Alto Maniania who hangs his victims like monkeys or Sardosso Banda or Manuêlo de Salamatar whom he portrays as sanguinary leaders (p. 40); he denies being Dimitri Lamonso whom he berates for taking the capital to his mother's village (p. 52); or Lazo Lorenzo whom he accuses of coercing the people of Yam-Yoko to support his yellow party (p. 52). He denies being Lan Domingo whom he accuses of embezzling state funds (p. 52); or Cornez Caracho whom he besmirches for his homosexual inclinations (p. 52). He denies being like the other presidents on the other side of the river whom he accuses of sleeping with the wives of his ministers (p. 56); or like Sarnio Lampourta whom he condemns for revelling in alcohol and cannabis (p. 70). He denies being like Dartanio Maniania whom he blames for leaving the country insolvent owing to his indulgence in hedonistic pursuits (p. 70). He rejects being like Tistano Rama or Larabinto whom he condemns for entrusting power with unintelligent successors (p. 75); or like Zalo "qui donnait des ordres par le cul" (p. 80).⁴ He denies being Toutanso "qui a mis tout le pognon de la patrie en Suisse (p. 107)»; or Carlos Dantès "qui a tué la moitié de la tribu des Khas" in just two years of rule. He denies being Tonso, Matos, Juarioni or Dartanio Diaz whom he accuses of pandering to the whims and caprices of Western powers. To cite one more case of denunciation of his predecessors, he denies being Luis de Lamoundia whom he accuses of taking the country as his personal property (p. 148).

It is vital to posit that the decision to draw this elaborate canvas of examples stems from the importance of understanding the magnitude of the human and economic damage the Congo space has been plunged into. The irony surrounding the various disclosures, basing one's argument on his (Martillimi Lopez) actions, is that, he is just as guilty as he has charged his predecessors. The narrative demonstrates that he incarnates all the attributes he has imputed to his predecessors, plus more others. Thus, he is seen validating the argument that politicians do not always mean what they say. For it is observed that in repeated fits of apoplexy, he is quick to exterminate the lives of his victims in the most horrendous manner. And apparently, by seeing Lopez boasting "toujours de ses 37 ans au pouvoir sans tuer une mouche" (p. 131), he unwittingly burlesques himself. Additionally, by directly revealing or confessing to their shortcomings, he

⁴ Pronouncements made before this make it tempting to assume that he is talking about not being prepared to embark on anal sex.

becomes his own Kim Chi-Ha and deals a twist of the knife in his own rotten vitals, to echo the words of Berrigan (1977, p. 21).

Additionally, based on the episodes of sexual obsession by the leadership adduced in the two works, it can be posited that Labou-Tansi seems to be intent on presenting leaders in the Congolese space as non-starters and absolute cases of failure. This seems to be unequivocally demonstrated in the case of the Martillimi Lopez who, in the middle of presumably serious matters, will stray into rhapsodies over the beauty and succulence of women. If he is not seen fetishizing one young lady as “Flora et la Joconde réunies” (*L’Etat*, p. 27), or as “belle comme quatre” (p. 141), he would evoke the intoxicating and incendiary capacity of others: “cette fille est *terrific* (...) elle incendie tes boyaux” (p. 81) or, “mon Dieu comme elle est belle. Elle me chauffe les entrailles. Elle allume mon sang” (p. 102). And if he is not heard singing or reciting panegyric poetry about one (p. 102), he would extoll the unmatched voluptuousness of another: “Qu’est-ce qu’elle est belle nom de Dieu qu’est-ce qu’elle est charnue” (p. 113). It is observed that he does not stop at making adulatory pronouncements about his divas; he also endeavors to consummate his cravings, to borrow Platon’s expression (Pascal, 1986, p. 11).

And, arguably, it can be projected that the economically wasteful part of Lopez’ hedonistic pursuit attains its apogee when, right in Paris, he does what follows in pursuit of a white whore trying to run away from him:

Il la poursuit en pyjama, avec son inséparable mallette de billets (...). Reviens! Ils arrivent au marché aux fleurs et alors qu’il allait l’attraper il est tombé et cette vieille chipie lui barre la route parce que monsieur vous allez me les payer! il ouvre sa mallette et lui lance un gros billet entre tes dents gâtées. Il veut la rattraper mais monsieur tu vas me les payer et encore et encore.

Bon d’accord je vous achète votre marché et ne m’emmerdez plus, il leur lance des billets partout, mais laissez-moi la rattraper. Lopez de maman tout fleuri cette fois mais ma belle sois bonne après ce bouillon de billets au marché de leurs mamans. (Ibidem, p. 154)

Conspicuous in the above is the syntactic havoc Labou-Tansi resorts to arguably with the intention of depicting Lopez as a human mistake. Also conspicuous in it is his penchant to financial wastefulness. On account of the foregoing, it is crucial to argue that beyond the surrealistic presentation of the episode, the reader is expected to be more interested in its symbolic representation, which is, diverting the Congolese riches to the opulent North, but specifically Paris.

Phase Three: Maman Nationale in Carnavalesque Mood

Fou du roi, folle à la marotte, dervé, histrion, jongleur, sot, bouffon, Zanni de la commedia dell'arte, Arlequin, Scapin, Pierrot, saltimbanque, clown: de nombreux visages comiques désignent sur scène celui qui possède le "savoir-faire rire." Néanmoins, malgré son inépuisable réserve de costumes et d'accoutrements fantasques, définir le bouffon est une entreprise difficile. A l'origine, ce mot remonte à l'italien buffone dont la racine buffo signifie comique. Il semble qu'on accepte donc le bouffon en tant que masque comique, comme on accepte Arlequin, Sganarelle ou Polichinelle. Le public ne se pose pas de questions sur son état civil, sa biographie ou sa situation familiale ou sociale: sa présence suffit et sa grimace rassure. Le bouffon est là sur scène pour faire rire: il est le ressort comique de la comédie. (Buchler, 2003, p. 1)

It is deemed imperative to reproduce Buchler's words in the above epigraph as are used in the opening chapter (*Le carnavalesque, le dialogisme, la ménipée*) of her thesis for they seem to perfectly mesh with Labou-Tansi's carnavalesque treatment of Martillimi Lopez' mother, Maman Nationale. It is also probably pertinent to observe that when the disillusioned subaltern writes or speaks, they go to unimaginable lengths to render the humiliation of the people-in-power total. Thus, it can be projected that in the deconstruction and reconstruction of the leadership image in the Central African space, Labou-Tansi knows no sacred cows. Otherwise stated, no one that has an organic link with the leadership is exempted from embarrassment. It is observed that this has been the fate of Martillimi Lopez' mother, Maman Nationale, who, in the audit of the masses, should be smeared with the dirty paint remaining in Labou-Tansi's carnival brush for being the biological source of the apparent misfortune that the peripheral populations are dealing with.

Thus, in addition to quibbling over, singing and jibing at the president's "hernie", his mother receives an avalanche of opprobrious treatments from the people. The people openly "insultent Maman Nationale qui [leur] a donné un fils aussi honteux, Maman Nationale qui fornique au lieu de considérer son âge" (*L'Etat*, p. 42). Conceivably, what may be estimated as a transgression of the bounds of propriety is when Maman Nationale is burlesqued as a mentally deranged person displaying acts unbecoming of a president's mother:

Maman folle nationale chante les chansons de chez nous. Elle imite les bêtes. Elle jette ses pagnes à la face de son fils: que je te montre d'où tu es venu. Maman! Elle se calme. Et plus personne ne se souvient qu'elle est folle. Sauf à cette heure du diner ou elle met sa patte dans son plat. (L'Etat, p. 100)

The above presentation of the president's mother, not just as an individual incapable of observing moral values but also as a clownish mad woman, makes it

tempting to assume that the president's mood will be vacillating between anger and shame for having a mother that seems to be irreversibly out to compound the already catastrophic situation he is made to live in by the followership.

Arguably, the carnivalesque attains its paroxysm when, as typical of carnivals during the Medieval period or the Middle Ages, the mad person is brought on stage not just to amuse the other participants, but to deliver the keynote address where the source of the social conflict between the followership and the leadership is exposed as Buchler summarizes: "Le bouffon au théâtre n'est pas seulement un masque comique, comme il a été si souvent défini, mais au contraire un personnage clé qui sert à cristalliser l'esprit de contestation du moment historique" (2003, p. 19). It is crucial to observe that this is what is made evident in *L'Etat* when the general's wives (Armando Liz Agonashi, Sobra Ikesse, Laura Paltès, Lavinia, Flaura Nantès, Mryama...), revenging themselves on Maman Nationale for the sexual abuse they suffer from her son (*L'Etat*, p. 108), they momentarily transform her into a mad woman. It is observed that the burlesque is injected into the carnivalesque when the wives of the generals evidently transgress ethical boundaries; they do not just kidnap Maman Nationale, but they also dress her in military gadgets, make her sing and dance, have her wash their dirty menstrual linen and above all, examine "le chemin qui a donné un fils aussi honteux" and make her deliver the keynote address to narrate the "shameful history of her son" (*L'Etat*, pp. 108-109).

It is vital to note that what has been labelled as transgression above is, in fact, in keeping with the carnivalesque spirit such as is expounded by Bakhtine. Labou-Tansi's peculiarity however seems to reside in the decision to punish the Congolese nobility twice: he subalternizes this class and at the same time chooses a key figure from among them to deliver the satirical speech which, in medieval carnival festivals, was done by someone from the abused class. It is tempting to argue that selecting someone from an inferior social class to play the role of the buffoon might not generate the right volume of anger and madness Labou-Tansi wants to see his victim in. This argument is validated by the reaction of Martillimi Lopez when, livid, he makes the probably mad decision of subjecting his culprits to a sexual punishment: "Il fait venir six cent tirailleurs six cent d'entre nous les travailleurs du palais et pour laver ma honte je vous en prie, là, devant moi, dormez-moi ces chiennes. Chauffez-les à blanc: je vous donne une semaine." (p. 110).

Departing from the observation that Le Guide Providentiel and Martillimi Lopez seem to have attained incorrigibility, and that they now seem to be

impervious to reason, Labou-Tansi's resort to verbal violence against them can be considered appropriate. Its possible appropriateness stems from the argument that in a system where orthodox checks and balances are absent, unorthodox verbal violence can be used by the disembedded followership to fill this gap. It seems pertinent to close this essay by positing that Labou-Tansi's use of the carnivalesque to deride the pitfalls of the leadership can be considered successful in that it produced the desired degree of disturbance in the minds of his political victims. That is to say, although he uses Spanish names for his characters, and writes in fictional terms, he was in real life denied the opportunity by state authorities to travel out of his country to seek for a cure to the illness that he eventually died from. This reaction by state authorities consolidates the speculation that although the carnivalesque cannot overthrow bad governments or create the right impetus for the derided leadership to immediately accept relocating to a third space of freedom and prosperity for all, the future leadership of the Labou-Tansi's space might not indulge in degrading acts for fear of being torn apart by the pens of organic intellectual writers.

References:

1. Armah, A. K. (1968). *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*. Accra: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
2. Armah, A. K. (1995). *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*. Dakar: Per Ankh, Per Penguine, West Africa.
3. Bakhtine, M. (1972). *L'œuvre de François Rabelais*. Paris: Gallimard,
4. Berrigan, R. D. (1978). From a Korean Prison: A Path to Life. *Focus on Asian Studies*, Issues 39-44.
5. Buchler, D. J. (2003). *Le Bouffon et le Carnavalesque dans le théâtre français, d'Adam de la Halle à Samuel Beckett*. (Doctoral thesis). University of Florida.
6. Cultural Reader. (2011). Mikhail Bakhtin: "Carnival and Carnavalesque." *Cultural Reader. Article Summaries and Reviews in Cultural Studies*. culturalstudiesnow.blogspot.com/2011/07.
7. Holman, H. C. *A Handbook of Literature*. (1960). New York: Odyssey Press.
8. Jeanpierre, W. A. (1965). Sartre's Theory of "Anti-Racist Racism" in His Study of Negritude. *The Massachusetts Review*, 6(4), 870-72. www.jstor.org/stable/25087373.
9. Labou-Tansi, S. (1979). *La vie et demie*. Paris: Seuil.
10. Labou-Tansi, S. (1981). *L'état honteux*. Paris: Seuil.

11. Mkandawire, T. (Ed.). (2005). *African Intellectuals, Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*. Dakar: CODESRIA Books.
12. Pascal, G. (1986). *Les Grands textes de la philosophie*. Paris: Bordas.
13. Soyinka, W. (1996). *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
14. Soyinka, W. (2011). *The Man Died*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
15. Young, R. J. C. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. London: Oxford University Press.