

### Where are the Natives? Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* as Parody of Authenticity

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#### Abstract

*This article reengages Mongo Beti's Mission to Kala as a retrospective conversation with colonial discourses of authentic Africa, a depiction of Africa that fulfills the metropolitan audience's desire for exotic images of distant and purportedly different people. Set within the theoretical contexts of Paul S. Landau's "Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa" and Manthia Diawara's In Search of Africa, it analyzes the novel's ironic portrayal of the colonial civilizing mission. Through the satirical device of parody, the novel destabilizes the colonial desire for pristine, pure, and timeless Africans and instead privileges a hybrid appropriation of colonial culture, thereby mitigating the prejudiced colonial gaze.*

**Keywords:** *authentic, parodic, colonial, native, appropriation*

#### Introduction

Mongo Beti is the author of *Ville Cruelle*, *Poor Christ of Bomba*, *Mission to Kala*, *King Lazarus*, to mention a few. There seems to be an urgent need to return to Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1957) especially because the colonial gaze usually results in negative stereotypes about the people of the postcolony (Bhabha, 1994). These stereotypes often trigger what Hogan (1994) calls "reactionary nativism" (p. 107), the valorization of one's culture, race or ethnicity in response to domination. Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1957) provides the cultural space to reflect on these events while avoiding the temptation to succumb to reactionary nativism, and consequently, its passionate call for essentializing difference and authenticity. Partly because of the timing of its publication and the key issues it raises, the dominant interpretations of *Mission to Kala* have largely emphasized its anti-colonial temperament. Probably because of the journey motif that promises redemption for the protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza, the novel appears to romanticize an authentic rural and tribal life of Africans. However, taking a closer look at the text, rather than privileging a Negritudist view of rural African communities, *Mission to Kala*

(1957) transgresses colonial Manichean divide that sets the imperial power in opposition to the colony. More importantly, this study suggests that Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala*, rather than glorifying tribal life or valorizing a pristine and pure rural Africa, parodies colonial narratives of purity and authenticity.

### Review of Literature

As expected, *Mission to Kala* (1957) attracted robust critical perspectives. It is often considered as a psychoanalytical text (Cornwell, 1987, p. 644), as an autobiography (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1998, p. 84), and as a picaresque (Palmer, (1998, p. 98; Nnolim, 1976, p. 58), as *bildungsroman* (Mickelson, 1998, p. 71). However, Joseph (1998) in "Radicalism and Angst in the Early Novels of Mongo Beti" asserts, "[i]n *Mission to Kala*, Jean-Marie settles on the prospect of exile and an intense love relationship as the solution after attempting a return to the people, to rural simplicity, and to purity" (p. 319). While there is some validity to this claim, it does not account for simplicity and purity as discourses that were generated by the colonial library. Therefore, this interpretation tends to obfuscate the novel's journey motif, through which it self-consciously deconstructs the very idea of associating purity with rural life. Also, in "Amilcar Cabral and the Fortunes of African Literature," Taonezvi and Zegeye (2006) argue that Beti's *Mission to Kala* is about returning to the source, by which they mean "identifying with the broad-based quest for democracy that ordinary people engage in daily" (p. 27). They are quick to elaborate their position by stating that "a 'return to the source' is an ideological reconversion to the goals of Africanisation" (p. 27). As ideological as this stance might be, it is important to question logocentric categories and concepts such as "ordinary people" and "Africanization," precisely because they suggest authentic identities based on colonial perception of the "other." *Mission to Kala* does not valorize or essentialize African tribal life and is not a return to a timeless world. Tariq and Khan (2023), suggest that the traditional African communities are detrimental to women's self-fulfillment precisely because the native customs operate on patriarchal values that devalue women. Although Jean-Marie Medza's journey to Kala is meant to bring back his uncle's wife, which has the tendency to reduce the woman to a mere commodity, Tariq and Khan's argument appears reductive because it ignores the sites in which women are portrayed to exercise their agency. Their claim over-generalizes on the gendered society of Kala. Moreover, Oyetimi (2025) submits that the village setting of the novel is a symbol of cultural authenticity that acts as a counterpoint and resistance to colonial modernity (pp. 37-38). While Oyetimi's (2025) position on resistance to

colonization seems valid, the assertion that the village setting symbolizes cultural authenticity misreads the novel in the sense that authenticity functions as an apparatus of colonial imaginary about Africa. Whatever “authenticity” exists in the novel is Medza’s own invention, which emanates from his arrogant and egocentric diminution of Kala’s culture and people, both of which he assumes are primitive. *Mission to Kala* (1957) explodes the myth that African communities can be encountered as a social formation untouched by modernity and therefore, should never be construed to exist in binary opposition to modernity. The setting of the novel may have been situated far from the city, but its rural locale does not necessarily imply cultural “authenticity.”

### **Theoretical Framework**

*Mission to Kala* has to be understood as resistance to what Said (1993) describes as the West’s prejudicial perspectives about non-Western people, which were deployed in order to justify their “civilizing mission” (p. vi). Interestingly enough, *Mission to Kala* participates in this discourse though not in a neo-negritudist fashion but in a parodic rewriting of the narrative of authenticity. Far from being untouched by modernity, *Mission to Kala* projects cultural inclusiveness and reterritorialization. For the analysis of this important text, two theoretical texts: Landau’s (2002) “Empires of the Visual: Photography and Colonial Administration in Africa” and Diawara’s (1998) *In Search of Africa* are deployed.

Landau’s (2002) article questions the very basis of European modernity which defines itself based on the Manichean logic of “self” and “other,” and constructs Africa as a radical “Other,” freezing in a historical vacuum. Landau (2002) argues that European explorers present Africa to their metropolitan audience as a place where people and nature are one and the same, and therefore untouched by modern influence (p. 159). Landau (2002) contends that that colonial photography, anthropology, and narratives complement one another in the propagation of the myth of the authentic in the colonies (p. 161). Landau explains that the metropolitan audience’s inordinate demand for images and narratives of differentiated people and exotic cultures acts as catalyst for establishing the myth of distant barbaric and uncivilized native (pp. 159-161). Diawara’s (1998) *In Search of Africa* demonstrates how appropriating African art transforms European modern art and how African sculptors equally indigenize European cultural influence (p. 192). However, Diawara notes that European art critics were disappointed by African sculptors’ appropriation of European cultural symbols precisely because it

destabilizes European discourses of an authentic Africa (p. 198). Consequently, he argues that although European modern cultures (art especially) were partly influenced by other cultures that include African art, such cultural influences are effaced in colonial discourses in order to maintain derogatory perspectives of Africans as primitives, and therefore, authentic (p. 193). Cross-cultural influence then becomes a tool for undermining colonial discourses and the European notion of modernity, both of which are ineluctably predicated on binary oppositions in which the West features as modern, while Africa assumes primordial authentic identity. Diawara (1998) demonstrates that when European modern art emerged from Picasso's encounter with African art, that encounter results in the West's reflection on the "'dehumanizing' effect of industrialization on the arts" (p. 193). Yet, when European influence is discovered in African art, the Europeans criticize it for having been contaminated (p. 194). Rather than this narrative of contamination, Diawara (1998) submits that hybrid influence is empowering because it subverts the rhetoric of "primitive" Africa. The rest of this article is divided into two. The first part labeled "Undermining the Civilizing Mission" explores how *Mission to Kala* challenges European narrative of conquest, through a parody of Jean-Marie Medza's adventure to Kala. The second section entitled "Where are the Natives?" questions Europeans' claim to cultural superiority and their propensity to stigmatize Africans as radically differentiated.

### **Undermining the Civilizing Mission**

*Mission to Kala* chronicles the story of Jean-Marie Medza who has just failed his *baccalauréat* examinations but who, on his return home, is given the task of travelling to Kala to retrieve his uncle's (Niam) wife who has absconded. On his way to Kala, he constructs a colonial imaginary for himself and regards the people of Kala as inferior other without having met them. On getting to Kala, his imaginary identity begins to crumble when he realizes that the very colonial cultural artifacts that he arrogates to himself already existed in Kala, and indigenized. Ironically, he has to rely on the "local" peers to navigate the social world, especially, of dating. The time he spends in Kala transforms him to an emerging African non-conformist, who is determined to resist the dogma of colonial education and parental control. In *Mission to Kala* (1957), Beti parodies the discourse of modernity by developing a counter-narrative to European modernity. One important device through which this is achieved is the first-person narrator protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza. This narrator-protagonist becomes a powerful tool for debunking the myth of the civilizing mission. It is for this reason that the road plays a crucial role in the

caricature of a colonial conqueror that has a priori arrogated superiority to himself and inferiority to the people of a “distant land” to whom he wishes to teach his culture.

The road is an important motif especially because Jean-Marie’s journey begins on city road but has to travel the dirt road to Kala. Turning from the main road to dirt road signifies Jean-Marie’s impending discourse of the civilizing mission. He remembers the elder’s (Bikokolo) advice that he “only has to make the trip there and put the fear of God into those savages” (Beti, 1957, p. 13), a statement that makes him develop a superior sense of himself and consequently, makes him regard the people of Kala as primitives. To highlight his opinion of the people of Kala and to reinforce Beti’s parody of colonialism’s rhetoric, Jean-Marie says, “[a]n *easy* adventure, among comparatively simple people, is the secret wish of every adventurer. When you come to think of it, the very existence of adventurers is only made possible by the survival of primitive, simple-minded tribes” (Beti, 1957, p. 16; Original emphasis). Jean-Marie’s rationalization of his journey transcends the retrieval of Niam’s wife; it suggests an engagement with the discourse of modernity, which is why he sees himself as an adventurer going on a mission in the “heart of darkness.” When he rides through the bush path to Kala, he is convinced of his civilizing mission and believes that he is making an important journey.

Jean-Marie remembers the “primitivity” of the people of Kala when he states, “[i]f these up-country bushmen round Kala saw cars every day, I can’t see any reason why they shouldn’t be as smart as we are” (Beti, 1957, p. 17). Mongo Beti’s humor in this quote is profound in its caricature of the protagonist as he imagines the village context. The important aspect of the humor is foregrounding the chauvinism and arrogance that Jean-Marie assumes as he enters Kala with the air of a civilizing conqueror. In the quotation Jean-Marie deploys the self vs. other binary opposition, reinforcing his notion of Kala’s “authenticity” through his colonial signification of the village’s remoteness. Landau (2002:152) provides a critical context that connects remoteness with imperial discourse:

[t]his reduction of differences to the level of variations in genera was not simply a taxonomic expedient. It was a function of distance. For while “scientific” typological studies were of limited use to colonialism, the remote command structure of metropolitan overrule

made the idea of the authentic appealing. It crystallized after the era of first-person accounts of exploration. This imaginary place not only helped compensate for the ugliness of the genuine colonial encounters, but suggested that Africans who appeared carnal and impure and devious had been corrupted by colonialism.

Landau's claim exposes the politics of othering because, had the people of Kala access to modern technology, they would cease to give Bikokolo and Jean-Marie their exotic appeal.

Because he sees himself as an adventurer, he assumes a fitting personality and chooses a particular persona, the conquistador, a choice that he justifies when he says, "[m]y imagination was running away from me. The ploughed student was transformed into a brigand chief, a pirate, a true Conquistador. My fancy settled firmly for the Conquistadors. The thought of being adopted into this exclusive clan elated me: my promotion had indeed been rapid" (Betí, 1957, p. 16). At the same time, Jean-Marie becomes a caricature missionary and phony Conquistador, who strategically becomes an instrument for mocking Europeans who colonized Africa on the pretext that African values were antithetical to their own modern values.

Jean-Marie's colonial arrogance manifests once he sets foot in Kala: he sees some residents playing a game unknown to him and instantly infantilizes them. He says, "I was astonished by the whole thing, though in the end I remembered that when we were about six or so we used to play a similar sort of game at home" (Betí, 1957, p. 22). There are two issues that one can deduce from this excerpt: one is that Jean-Marie constructs the people of Kala as children so that they can fit his preconceived notion of "primitive." The other issue is that of remoteness of "other" people, which is why Jean-Marie conflates remoteness with savagery and primitivity. The novel reinforces this point by making Jean-Marie allude to the nascent colonial intention of the eponymous hero of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), who imagines the island as uninhabited prior to colonizing it. Jean-Marie states: "Kala gave me a simultaneous impression of savagery and security: it was as though one was on a small island, pounded by heavy seas, and yet safe from drowning" (Betí, 1957, p. 30). In order for him to demonstrate that the people of Kala are authentically primitive he describes them with qualities of children and nature. In essence, Jean-Marie views the people of Kala as if they were one and the same with nature.



Like a Conquistador and colonialist, and in the manner of the anthropological documentaries, Jean-Marie unleashes his prejudice on the people of Kala and the first victim is his cousin, Zambo:

Having first taken a bird's-eye, panoramic view of the scene, I now began to examine it in detail. The first thing that caught my eye was a great *hulking devil* in the Kala team ... He was tall and flat-footed, with a disproportionately lengthy torso which ... he carried very badly .... He was like a kind of *human baobab tree* ... I found it hard to convince myself that this *monster* was really my cousin .... [v]ery few of the players in either team made any very serious attempts to hit the ball when this *great ape* was in charge of it .... (Betí, 1957, p. 23). But I honestly believed that a *Tarzan* such as my cousin could fail to impress any woman. (Betí, 1957, p. 54; Emphasis mine)

The use of “hulking devil” and “monster” indicates that Jean-Marie obliterates Zambo’s humanity, although the erasure is not total mainly because he integrates his cousin with wildlife. Deploying terms such as “human baobab tree,” “great ape,” and “Tarzan,” Jean-Marie tries to connect Zambo with subhuman nature so that he can fit the archetype of the authentic African in whom he has purportedly come to put the fear of God. Jean-Marie intensifies his coercion of the people of Kala into his “authentic” category by describing another character, his uncle, Zambo’s father as follows: “[m]y uncle stretched out his neck, *rather like an ostrich*, and gulped down an enormous mouthful of food. He then blinked several times, filled himself a glass of water, and swallowed that too” (Betí, 1957, p. 59). The novel also parodies Marlow’s reluctance to ascribe full humanity to the “natives” in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow says in detail: “We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were. . . . No they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman (Conrad, 1988, 37). The word “there” is strategically used to emphasize the remoteness, which at the same time distance Africa from himself and Europe. In this passage, Marlow’s use of the phrase “not inhuman” on the surface seems to acknowledge Africans’ humanity. However, he sees them as monsters with whom he unfortunately shares a common humanity. Jean-Marie mimics Marlow, consistently associating the people of Kala with animals, trying to undermine their humanity. As will be evident in the next section, the novel

destabilizes Jean-Marie's prejudice and therefore, challenges his very expectation of the authentic, once he settles down in Kala.

### **Where Are the Natives?**

The word, "Native," has acquired specialized signification in postcolonial discourse. More often than not, the term, "Native," is deployed as a derogatory name to describe colonized peoples in the former colonies. Therefore, the term "native" is inseparable from the manner in which colonial powers imagined non-Europeans, even though what constitutes the identity of the native in colonial imagination transcends their non-European origin. According to Fanon (1963, p. 41), the colonial world is a Manichean world in which the colonialists and the native are imagined not only as different, but also as radically different. He argues that the construction of the native's identity is shaped by the totalitarian character of colonialism, which represents the native as "quintessential evil" (1963, p. 41). Fanon also contends that the native "is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values" (1963, 41). In other words, the native is framed as being opposed to the colonizer's history, culture, and governance, the implication of which is that the native is portrayed not only as inferior to European colonizers, but also threatening to them. This notion of primitivity undergirds the representation of the local people in *Mission to Kala*, a representation that the novel deconstructs by mocking Jean-Marie's arrogance and sense of superiority with which he approaches the people of Kala. At the end of his journey to Kala, he realizes that he is actually the one who lacks cultural refinement.

*Mission to Kala* is a parody of colonial narratives of the authentic, as it destabilizes the Manichean division that structured colonial essentialization of difference. *Mission to Kala* (1957), does reaffirm African cultural values against European devaluation. It is important to note that the novel launches its satiric assault on the colonial modernization project in Africa, which is why it is important to appreciate its satiric attack on authenticity. In Kala, Jean-Marie discovers that his cousin, Zambo, can speak impeccable French and that the community is more organized and more systematic than his notion of it on arrival. Jean-Marie is shocked when he hears Zambo say, "[l]ui-même en chair et en os!" (Betí, 1957, p. 31). With this statement, Zambo defies Jean-Marie's preconceived notion of Kala as primitive, realizing that a foreign culture can be indigenized in resisting colonial domination. Zambo therefore ceases to be the authentic African that Jean-Marie had previously constructed before his encounter with him.



The appropriation of foreign cultural influence in Kala is an effective tool for deconstructing colonial culture, a point that Diawara (1998) emphasizes when he claims: “[f]rom the perspectives of modernist primitivism, it is clear that African art, and Africans themselves, are interesting to the West only if they can supply a theory of how the West sees itself—in other words, if they can be timelessly primitive and thereby a compelling exception to the Western teleological narrative” (pp. 192-93). Consequently, Jean-Marie’s desire to denigrate Zambo and other people of Kala as primitive meets with a shock when he hears Zambo speak in mastered French. Diawara says further, “[w]hen European artists borrow from Africa, this does not detract from the originality of their work, whereas African artists cannot borrow from Europe without being considered inauthentic” (p. 194). As a way of maintaining colonial modernity’s hierarchical structure, Jean-Marie intensifies his perception of Zambo as a man of low intelligence even when it is abundantly clear that the two of them subscribe to the same modern culture, in this case, French. He would rather consider Zambo as inauthentic because of his ability to speak good French, the implication of which is that Jean-Marie desperately wants to maintain binary oppositions of the authentic and the modern between the two of them. Furthermore, Diawara illustrates his criticism of colonial prejudice with the example of a *Baule* drum decorated with a man carrying a rifle, but which white art critics demean as no longer authentic. Diawara (1988) says, “[s]ince the rifle is considered European, its presence in African art spoils its authenticity” (p. 194), a point that allows us to understand the intensity of Zambo’s deconstruction of Jean-Marie’s prejudiced expectations of Kala. However, *Mission to Kala*’s critique of the authentic goes beyond portraying the people of Kala as civilized; the novel demonstrates that the people have not only appropriated modernity but also have deployed it to serve an oppressive system.

Ironically, Medza is shocked by the people’s civility especially when he realizes that he is unsuccessful in the dating world, unlike Zambo, whose expertise he has to depend on to succeed with Edima, his eventual girlfriend. What makes Beti’s caricature of Jean-Marie effective lies in developing a counter-narrative through parodic repetition of the colonial command (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112; Butler, 1997, p. 382). However, this parodic strategy is not limited to Jean-Marie’s assumption about the people of Kala; it manifests in the ambivalent ways in which colonial modernity has been deployed in Kala’s political structure.

The deployment of modern culture for oppressive ends can be seen in local authorities, whether in Kala or neighboring communities. From this perspective, modernity has brought a system which has been integrated into the political system and simultaneously exploited for personal acquisition of wealth and maintenance of class hierarchies. For instance, the chief in Jean-Marie's town may not have been a dominant character in this story, but he nevertheless depicts the corrupt political institution that oppresses the poor and women in particular. Apart from Jean-Marie's aunt, Amou, the chief is the only one who has a bicycle, which is offered to Jean-Marie on the condition that he does not compete with the chief for the girls. Obviously, the chief has questionable access to economic resources and women, and excitedly lends the bicycle to Jean-Marie on the tacit agreement that the young man would not transgress his harem of young girls. Therefore, *Mission to Kala* rejects the representation of Africans from the colonial gaze as authentic by showing that Africans have not only appropriated aspects of colonial culture, but have also applied them for personal gains. The political institution in the local communities is defined by corruption, questionable wealth, and sexual exploitation of women.

*Mission to Kala* has shown that exploitative practices in many communities, including Kala, are possible because of the support provided by the French central administration to institutionalize corruption. Such practices are not merely fictional creation of the author but are analogous to historical evidence of French administration in its colonies. Mamdani (1996) agrees with this observation: "[t]he administrative justice and the administrative coercion that were the sum and substance of his [the customary chief] authority lay behind a regime of extra-economic coercion, a regime that breathed life into a whole range of compulsions: forced labor, forced crops, forced sales, forced contributions, and forced removals" (p. 23). The chief of Kala therefore represents a compromised political system, through which he serves the interests of the French as well. For example, in order to marry a sixth wife, the chief of Kala deploys all sorts of methods of intimidation in order to extort bride wealth from his people, thereby testifying to customary political system's ability to manipulate the French oppressive political power for personal interests. Mamdani's (1996) claim that "this monarchical, authoritarian, and patriarchal notion of the customary ... most accurately mirrored colonial practices" is valid and it is important not to lose sight of the punitive effects of this power in the hands of the chiefs as convincingly demonstrated by the two chiefs in *Mission to Kala* (p. 22).

This exploitative practice is not limited to the chiefs but can also be found among other people in Kala and the character who best represents this practice is Jean-Marie's uncle, Zambo's father. Beti pokes fun at him through his narrative of kinship, which does not imply familial ties only but also a relationship defined more by parasitism than altruism. Zambo's father organizes several meetings between Jean-Marie and the townspeople in Kala, after which the gifts of sheep, goats, and chicken serve as the foundation for his livestock wealth. Zambo's father does not attempt to preserve any fictitious tribal culture; rather, he evinces the extent to which customary practices can be used for wealth acquisition precisely because colonial administrative hierarchies create opportunities for such abuse of office. In essence, life in Kala does not represent pristine existence.

The novel presents the appropriation of colonial culture as prevalent among government officials and the people but another individual who represents this system of exploitation excellently well is Jean-Marie's father. The description of his father sums up this practice: "He was a living example of the astonishing results that can occur when Western hypocrisy and commercial materialism are grafted on to a first-rate African intelligence. Some of these results were quite admirable, some disastrous: but my father was the quintessential Westernized native of one generation back" (p. 166). Jean-Marie elaborates on his father by saying that in order to develop his coconut farm he lends people money and they will be bonded to work in his coconut farms, a system that exploits the people more than it seems on the surface (p. 166). Jean-Marie's father sees the connection between his son's formal education and his budding capitalist empire and this discovery is the reason that Jean-Marie is skeptical of his father's enthusiasm to send him to school (pp. 164-165). Whether his father's capitalist interests account for Jean-Marie's education or not, formal education serves the dubious needs of the patriarchy in the novel and in fact, Jean-Marie is just an instrument to be exploited by the gerontocratic authority. When Bikokolo says to him, "Shall I tell you what your special thunder is? Your certificates, your learning, your knowledge of white men's secrets (Beti, 1957, p. 15), it is obvious that he is manipulating Jean-Marie in order to maintain his patriarchal privilege and also maintain gender hierarchy. However, Western education is treated with ambivalence because on the one hand it helps Jean-Marie to reject the gerontocracy but on the other, it is not certain if his eventual exile constitutes resistance. No matter how one may downplay the significance of retrieving Niam's wife, Jean-Marie's formal education is complicit with the perpetuation of gender hierarchies and patriarchal privileges. Niam simply wants

his wife back so that she will be reduced to domesticity and become an instrument in the propagation of his agricultural wealth, which is by now uncertain because the farms have been overtaken by weeds. Niam's reluctance to work in his farm by himself emphasizes his egoistic plan that takes advantage of his wife in particular and women in general. Beti (1957) is quite visionary to have anticipated an Africa that needs redemption from modernity especially, from authoritarian political administration, economic perfidy, and the oppression of women.

The concluding section of *Mission to Kala* (1957) also parodies colonial arrogance as represented in Jean-Marie's description of the people as he prepares to leave Kala. In spite of his inability to engage the people of Kala intellectually, and in spite of his discovery that the people are probably more modern than himself, he could not resist the urge to display colonial contempt for the people. For instance, he calls the chief an "*old pig*" and portrays all the people who come to see him off at the end of his adventure as wild animals. He states, "[t]hey all said more or less the same thing to me: 'I'll probably come and visit you in town one day, boy. I won't warn you, I'll just turn up like a *chimpanzee* out of the jungle'" (Beti, 1957, p. 161; Mine emphasis). What is instructive about this quote is that Jean-Marie, assuming the arrogance of the colonizer, homogenizes the people of Kala. The parody of this colonial practice assumes great force when one considers the desire to perceive non-Europeans as culturally undifferentiated. Also, Jean-Marie seems to be intent on convincing himself about the people's incomplete humanity, in this case, through the use of the word, chimpanzee. The word, "chimpanzee," renders Jean-Marie's mission ineffectual on the grounds that the people have reterritorialized the word from its original command. Just as Landau (2002) argues that photography dominates the natives, Jean-Marie tries to use his narrative to dominate the people of Kala. Landau (2002) says, "[t]he photography of Africa shared some of the same personnel, techniques, and even technology with hunting. By hunting African big game, men of leisure asserted their domination of nature and by extension, the manly, European domination of Africa" (p. 147). Jean-Marie does not bring a gun or camera to Kala but while the camera and the gun dominate the people and the landscape in imperial discourse and acts, Jean-Marie tries to dominate them with his narrative of the authentic Kala people. But he eventually fails to fulfill the expectations of his imaginary of distant primitive natives.

## Conclusion

*Mission to Kala* is a strong critique of modernity's narrative of Africa as authentic by mimicking the very discourse of colonial modernity. The protagonist, Jean-Marie Medza, is constructed as a conceited character that sees his journey to Kala as a colonizer's adventure and it is through him that the novel deconstructs the myth of the authentic. He discovers that contrary to his assumptions, the people of Kala show more civility which renders his civilizing mission a failure. Although African communities in the novel contradict the colonial perception as pristine and pure, the legacy of modernity in these communities becomes counter-hegemonic, especially by the people of Kala, and by the political class. Judging from its last page, one may be tempted to conclude that the novel projects French education as alienating; but at the same time, by challenging the gerontocracy, it appropriates French education for subversive purposes. In essence, while *Mission to Kala* displaces and destabilizes the myth of the authentic native through the satirical assault on the civilizing mission, it is inextricably entangled with colonial modernity as a cultural apparatus.

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