

УДК 81'42
ББК Ш300.1

К. Ж. Н'Гессан
Абиджан, Кот-д'Ивуар

K. G. N'Guessan
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЙ ТЕКСТ КАК «ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЕ Н'ЗАСА»

Сведения об авторе: Куадио Жермен Н'Гессан, доктор философии, доцент Департамента Английского языка, Университет Феликс Уфует-Буани, Кот-д'Ивуар. Адрес: 01 почтовый ящик V 34, Абиджан 01, Кот-д'Ивуар, каб. 5А, e-mail: kouadiogermain@yahoo.fr.

THE LITERARY TEXT AS A "N'ZASSA"⁷⁵ CREATION

ABSTRACT. The analysis of the literary text requires from the reader a whole exploration and knowledge of the textual devices the writer uses to construct his/her narrative. The text, therefore, appears as a complex set of elements and its structure can disorient the reader and make him/her misunderstand the message that the writer wants to convey. However, a careful reading shows that in this complex and apparently disorganized composure, there is a sense of uniformity, aesthetics, and harmony. Like the Ivorian local fashion designer who makes loincloths using pieces of fabric of different colors (locally known as "n'zassa"), the writer combines various textual devices to construct his/her text. This article tries to show how this approach is reflected in the literary text. The aim is to extend it to different literary genres and spaces to show that it can serve as a tool for text analysis.

KEYWORDS: Writer, fashion designer, creation, aesthetics, loincloth, n'zassa.

About the author: N'Guessan Kouadio Germain, Ph.D, Associate Professor of the English Department, University Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire. Address: 01 BP V 34 Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire, bureau 5A; e-mail : kouadiogermain@yahoo.fr.

K. G. N'Guessan
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

LE TEXTE LITTÉRAIRE COMME UNE «CRÉATION N'ZASSA»

RÉSUMÉ. L'analyse d'un texte littéraire exige du lecteur toute une exploration et connaissance des éléments textuels que l'écrivain utilise pour construire son récit. Le texte, dès lors, apparaît comme un ensemble complexe d'éléments dont la structure peut désorienter le lecteur et l'amener à ne pas saisir le message de l'écrivain. Cependant, une lecture attentive montre que dans cette structure complexe et apparemment désorganisée, il y a un sens d'uniformité, d'esthétique et d'harmonie. A l'image du modéliste ivoirien qui crée le pagne en utilisant des morceaux de tissus de différentes couleurs (localement appelé « n'zassa »), l'écrivain combine divers éléments textuels pour construire son texte. Cet article tente de montrer comment cette approche se reflète dans le texte littéraire. L'objectif est de l'étendre à d'autres genres et espaces littéraires pour montrer qu'elle peut servir d'outil pour l'analyse d'un texte.

MOTS-CLÉS: Écrivain, modéliste, création, esthétique, pagne, n'zassa.

Auteur: N'Guessan Kouadio Germain, Docteur ès Lettres, Maître de Conférences, Département d'Anglais, Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Adresse: 01 BP V 34 Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire, bureau 5A.

⁷⁵The "n'zassa" is the name of an Ivorian local loincloth made of many pieces of fabric of different colors. I use this term here to show that by using different textual devices to construct his text and create his art, the writer reproduces the technique of manufacturing this local loincloth.

A system of ideas or principles explaining something, theory has always been at the core of critical analysis. The substance authors seek when framing a theory is aesthetics and homogeneity in thought and argumentation. What matters in theory is the mode of operation, that is, how it functions and how it is used. To this end, authors, depending on the theories they create, define operation criteria for potential users. It is in this context that I place what I term "n'zassa creation." Indeed, the term "n'zassa" is borrowed from the Akan, an Ivorian ethnic group, to refer to a mosaic of colors harmoniously and aesthetically patched together. This assortment is commonly used by local fashion designers who combine fabrics of different colors to make up clothes or loincloths. It also expresses Ivorian cultural plurality and diversity. The technique of n'zassa then, is a practice which insists on assembling elements of different origins, characters or natures to create a sense of wholeness. Its main principle or mode of operation lies in the achievement of harmony and homogeneity through diversity. This article aims to demonstrate that this technique, which has as its anchorage point the African loincloth, can perfectly apply to literature. Actually, I do not claim that it applies to any literary text or genre. I rather intend to show that the writer's organization of his text follows the logics of the n'zassa. In this regard, I will focus on texts taken from Ivorian and African American contexts in a process that brings them together in terms of combination of textual devices to achieve harmony and coherence. My approach, therefore, will consist in demonstrating that in these texts, there are clues that contribute to getting a well-matched set through the use by the authors, of various elements and techniques. Emphasis, then, will therefore be laid on textual elements such as style and rhetoric.

Defining his poetics of n'zassa in his novels, Ivorian writer Jean Marie-Adiaffi argues that it was born from his desire, as a writer, to create a particular style, thereby a genre that differs from the classical literary genre:

This is how I created my style called "n'zassa," a "genre that is not a genre" which breaks without any regret with the classical, artificial classification of the genre: novels,

short stories, epic, theater, essay, poetry. Indeed, in my novels, there are all language levels. Depending on my emotion, I choose "the genre," the language which to me seems to appropriately express with more force, more power, what I deeply feel in my erotic-esthetic relation with writing. The "n'zassa" is an African loincloth, a sort of tapestry that patches together, retrieves all the small pieces of fabric thrown away by fashion designers to make up a loincloth which is in fact a multi-loincloth, a chameleon loincloth with all the colors. This is thus the "n'zassa," a "genre that is not a genre" which tries to harmoniously mix up epic, poetry, and prose, therefore, essay. (in Kola, 2005: 345-346, my translation)

This citation clearly sets the foundation of the n'zassa as a tool for literary production and/or interpretation. To Adiaffi, the n'zassa text mirrors continuity through discontinuity, order through disorder, unity and uniformity through disunity in the same way as the African tapestry. Its construction is nurtured by the African traditional weaver's process of manufacturing loincloth. It is a mixture of various genres, a patchwork. My idea of the "literary text as a n'zassa creation," therefore, is inspired by Adiaffi's concept of "n'zassa"

African American novelist Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) well illustrates the concept of n'zassa in the literary creation. In this work, Reed mixes up seven genres: fiction, theatre, journalism, painting, photography, letter, and publicity. As such, it becomes difficult to classify it in a particular genre. At first sight, the textual structure appears as a confused even chaotic arrangement where the reader can be lost. But a careful reading helps find meaning in this puzzle. While reading the novel, the reader progressively discovers order and meaning in what apparently seems to be a disordered construction. In fact, Reed merges pieces of African and Western civilizations to build a story whose substance is an invitation for cultures to interact on the ground of what unites them rather than what makes them different and prompts them into conflict. And fiction, theatre, journalism, painting, photography, letter, and publicity on which he leans to construct his narrative constitute each,

individual part of the unity they must create. The n'zassa, then, in the sense of Adiaffi, is well articulated here in the combination of these genres.

The very structure of Reed's text is also interesting to scrutinize as part of the n'zassa creation. Throughout the novel, one discovers a seemingly disorganized structuring. There is always something unfinished in the storyline, some kind of incessant "beginning" in the "end." The narrative always seems to offer a new start, so that the reader feels as if he is faced with a new story. In so doing, the text functions like jazz music where the listener must always expect a change in the form and the tone while keeping the background of the discourse. Like a jazz singer, then, Reed makes use of various improvisations in his creative art. Thus, while the reader thinks that the story is going to its end, a new genre is called on but always with the writer's same intention to explore African civilization in its confrontation with Western one. This suspense in the narrative structure through improvisation gives substance to the novel and creates an aesthetic and totalizing set. Each of the genres adds to the internal organization of the whole text and complements its n'zassa content.

Very soon in the narrative, Reed departs from the classical form of fiction. The linear form of the storyline usually found in a novel is disjointed. For instance, the first chapter is placed before the second cover page. Apparently, this arrangement can disorient the reader to such an extent that it becomes difficult or quite impossible for him to follow the logical sequence of the story and decode the author's message. But a careful analysis helps comprehend that this first chapter serves as the prologue to the whole work when we consider the epilogue at the end. Also, though a fiction, *Mumbo Jumbo* differs from the classical fiction work when it comes to form in that it contains a bibliography at the end (219). At first sight, this bibliography might make the reader think that he is dealing with a research or a history book. But it adds to the aesthetic value of the text and confirms the writer's desire to break with the linear, to create order from disorder.

Moreover, the title of Reed's work echoes the concept of the n'zassa. In

fact, in some African communities, a mumbo jumbo is a sort of griot who always accompanies tribal dancers or masks. He has a large repertoire of songs that only those who are initiated can understand. Often, this griot has a sort of horn thought to have supernatural powers. The idea of the n'zassa through the mumbo jumbo here relates to the whole range of songs taken from various contexts and situations to make the dances and celebrations harmonious ceremonies. This conception of the mumbo jumbo prevails in the collective memory of the black Diaspora. The powers it is thought to possess indicate this community's desire to celebrate or assert its cultural values as they are in a perpetual confrontation with Western ones. By naming his work after this traditional griot, Reed reproduces the tradition of the African griot among the African Diaspora and posits himself as an heir of this tradition. Also, by constructing his narrative from a "large repertoire of genres" and a complex technique, he offers a text that only those who are initiated (those who have a good approach of reading) can understand. In so doing, Reed behaves as the traditional griot and his pen metaphorically becomes his horn to sing his tradition.

Unlike Adiaffi whose conception of the n'zassa essentially focuses on the African context of making loincloths from pieces of fabric of different colors, my understanding of this concept in this article more focuses on the internal organization of the text. In this perspective, my mode of operation and my approach differ from what Adiaffi produces in his literature. Definitely, contrary to the "Adiaffian n'zassa," mine looks more into the structure and rhetoric of the text. For example, the mixture of different narrative techniques in the same text is a perfect example of this approach I intend to develop. This aims to demonstrate that if the n'zassa creation consists in patching different pieces together to make up a unified body, therefore, the texts analyzed in this article can be read as n'zassa archetypes. Thus, character development, language, style, or other textual devices that contribute to the structure of these texts provide them with a n'zassa substance. But because I have already developed the mixture of the genres as an example of the n'zassa creation through Ishmael Redd's work, I will give more impetus to

the narrative techniques and the textual structure. This does not mean that I ignore the importance of the genres in my conception of the n'zassa or that my articulation of the concept visibly puts them in the background. Actually, it considers them. But my approach is essentially meant to be more inclusive and integral in the analysis of the text as a complex structure likely to create uniformity and meaning through its complexity and diversity.

In each of the texts under analysis in this article, the internal structure of the narrative evidences the n'zassa creation. Depending on the audience, the writers use a particular style or language to construct their story and vehicle their message. The reader then leans on his personal knowledge or critical mind to decipher and apprehend this message. While the story deploys, the reader enters into what French philosopher Louis Althusser calls the poetics of interpellation, that is, the text invites the reader into a communicative interaction. And when the latter succeeds in understanding the message, he is said to have positively responded to the invitation. Conversely, the more he fails to understand the message, the less he can appreciate how the n'zassa operates in the text. The impossibility for the reader to have sufficient materials to decode the message of the text obstructs his comprehension of what the author wants to demonstrate. By the same token, this absence of appropriate tools creates in the reader a critical castration that thwarts his capacity to draw his personal conclusions about what he reads.

In discussing the writer's style or technique, such elements as flashbacks, inter-texts, pastiches, character development, plot, language, etc., constitute ingredients of the textual n'zassa. A writer can use one or many of them in the same text. Sometimes, this arrangement can disrupt the internal coherence or the logical order of the text and make it difficult for the reader to understand its internal functioning and the message. Other times, the order of the events may follow a distorted or irregular order. However, the global objective of all this is to achieve unity and wholeness in the message to convey. As Julia Kristeva argues following Mikhail Bakhtin, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is a

transformation of another." (1980: 66) The mosaic at stake here constitutes a communicative device for the writer. Interestingly, nothing in what a writer says is new. What he says is a reproduction of his personal experience or someone else's. He simply uses his imaginative creation to give it a new interest and entice new interpretations.

I will consider again Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and expand my argumentation to African American literature with a focus on language as a narrative technique. Indeed, an important trait in Reed's novel as well as in the literature produced by many African American writers is the incorporation of black vernacular, a language that is characteristic of black American community, in the narrative fabric. Some writers so profusely lean on this language that it passes for a technique proper to them. Painstakingly, what is at stake in keeping with the n'zassa creation is the use of this type of language or else, this narrative voice along with Standard English in the same text to create a textual harmony offering the reader a good understanding of African American history. In many African American texts, this mixture brings together two linguistic systems: one embodied by the vernacular and the other by Standard English. The use of both systems in the same text often serves the style of the author(s) and informs African Americans' historical heritage and experience. In fact, the vernacular came into being out of Blacks' linguistic castration during slavery period when they were deprived of education; they could not learn how to read and to write. As a result, this language was created from the mixture of their mother tongue(s) and snatches of Standard English they achieved to capture from their contact with their masters or with other people who have a good command of Standard English.

Black vernacular appears as a hybrid language. For Mikhail Bakhtin, linguistic hybridism results from "an utterance which, according to the grammatical (syntactic) and compositional clues belongs to the sole speaker, but where really, two utterances, two ways of speaking, two 'languages,' two semantic and sociological perspectives meet." (1978: 125-126, my translation) In black vernacular, in fact, two languages with

different semantic and sociological perspectives really meet. One is typically revealing of slaves' African linguistic background that they seek to perpetuate in America as an expression of their cultural heritage. The other one is characteristic of their difficult attempt to have a good command of the master's language, the dominant language with its codes and traits. But since they do not know how to read and to write, they can only mix up elements of both languages. By using it in their texts along with Standard English, black writers make Blacks' desire to get an independent voice, a common vision. This undertaking must be achieved regardless of their social and economic classes. Educated Blacks as well as illiterate ones, rich Blacks as well as middle class or poor ones must be concerned by this desire to voice their collective imposed silence.

Bakhtin's assertion recurs in African American literature. In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983), for example, Janie's as well as Celie's respective languages denounce the African American woman's exploitation by the capitalist and patriarchal system of her society. Though these languages appear at first sight distorted and deconstructed, which might unseat or disorient a careless or unskilled reader, one progressively realizes that their individual experience and ill-treatment in the hands of brutal and wicked men help understand Black women's collective experience as the narratives progress. The linguistic dislocation at the beginning of the narratives finally smoothes out and creates a new unified linguistic system where the Black woman's experience is at the core of the whole scene.

Their Eyes Were Watching God and *The Color Purple* are rich in vernacular language, known as the spoken version of dialect used in rural American South at the time of slavery. That Hurston and later Walker, and other black writers use it in their works is an indication that it has been developed as a cultural heritage and a literary tradition among African American writers. In fact, this language is characterized by distinctive features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. In their works, Hurston and Walker tell their readers what to expect in the language of their characters. Readers

unfamiliar with or not initiated to the use of such language often see it as a strange dialect and a barrier to understanding the stories and to enjoying the novels. But as they go through the narratives and understand its common features, the texts become familiar and easy to read.

The reader approaches each text as an outsider and soon discovers patterns in the language of the characters. Initial and final consonants are frequently dropped. "You" becomes "yuh," occasionally "y'all" (plural). "I" invariably becomes "Ah." Vowel shifts also occur often. For example, "get" becomes "git." The final "r" is "ah." "Us" may occur as the nominative, and verbs, especially auxiliary verbs, are generally left out. A double negative such as "Nobody don't know," or "You better not never tell nobody" are emphasized. Distortions of the past tense also occur: "knew" becomes "knowed." Because the suffix "-ed" is used as a mark of the simple past, it becomes logical in dialect to add "-ed" at the end of the verb to make the past tense. The reflexive pronoun "himself" becomes "hisself." A final "th" is spoken as "f," and although the final "r" is softened in some words, it is added to others. By the same token, the final "s" at the end of most verbs at the third person singular (except for the modals may, can, must, and ought to) to build the present tense is often dropped as in "She say," "He come," etc. Although this construction is irrespective of the grammar rules of Standard English, it contributes to provide an internal coherence to the text, thereby meaning, aesthetics, and homogeneity. Present in the text under various forms, black vernacular is an important tool for the use of the n'zassa in the literary text. It gathers complex and disorganized syntactic, grammatical and vocabulary features to finally create a uniformed and artistic text.

In the n'zassa creation, nothing is fixed. No style, no language, or other textual devices is particularly given precedence over the others when used in the same text. There is a sort of equilibrium among them so as to offer a harmonious framework. In the text, each of the devices plays a significant and contributing role. In other words, each of these elements, taken individually, adds to the construction of the textual fabric and helps frame the aesthetic aspect of the text. If one is removed from its place

or is wrongly or badly incorporated in the text, then, the whole structure becomes disarticulated, which can infer a disorganized text and, of course, a blurred message. But since the writer's intention while producing a work of art is to leave a message to the reader or to inform him about a situation, one of his prime concerns is therefore to create a coherent text. And this can only be achieved through the appropriate organization of the elements he uses. In the same way as the Ivorian local loincloth maker, the writer, as a creator and artist, frames his text first after a meticulous choice of the devices he wants to use. Then, he weaves these devices together to make a harmonious text providing, as Roland Barthes argues, "pleasure" while reading. Indeed, defining the pleasure the reader feels while reading a text, Barthes writes:

The pleasure of the text can be defined by a practice (without any risk of repression): location and time of reading: house, province, neighboring meal, lamp, family where need be, that is, farther and not farther [...], etc. Extraordinary reinforcement of the self (by fantasy: outraged unconscious. This pleasure can be *told*: thence, criticism comes out [...]) The pleasure of the text is not precarious, it is worse: *premature*; it does not come at a time proper to it, it does not depend on any maturation. Everything quickens once. This passion is evident in painting, the one of today: once understood, the principle of the loss becomes inefficient. One must pass on to something else. Everything is at stake, everything is enjoyed *at first sight*. (1973: 70-71, my translation)

This is exactly what happens when we read a text. The act of enjoying the text, the pleasure then, comes concomitantly with the act of reading. Nothing is determined or set in advance. No maturation is prepared. There is rather simultaneity. The text embarks the reader in its internal movement. The suspense in the actions, the movements of the plot, the characters' joy, sadness, anxiety, in a word, things are shared by the reader as he progresses in the narrative. This textual organization that seems apparently complex is nothing but a product of the creative imagination of the writer. In its complexity, the reader's reaction is concurrently aroused and he

cannot but follow the characters in their adventures.

Noteworthy, the important presence of proverbs and images in Francophone as well as Anglophone African literature interestingly partakes in the poetics of the n'zassa. It serves the African context of orality as a key means of education and of socialization. Indeed, in African traditional context, teaching or education are often accomplished through indirect ways. To teach something to someone, the "teacher," most of the time an elder, leans on proverbs and images. And to decode the message behind the story, the listener or learner must know the context (most of the time cultural or socio-historical) of the story; otherwise he will get totally lost and be unable to grasp this message. Many writers lean on this practice to perpetuate or conform to this oral tradition of storytelling. For instance, in *Quand on refuse on dit non* (2004), Ahmadou Kourouma profusely uses this practice. At the beginning of the novel, he writes: "The monkey that escaped leaving a bit of its tail in the mouth of the dog does not have in the escape the same attitude as the other monkeys of the band." (2004: 11, my translation) Literally, this proverb might mean that someone who has lived a bad experience does not behave the same way as those who have never experienced a similar situation. Similarly, in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, the heroine's resort to supernatural powers when she cannot procreate (24) or when she cannot interpret her dream (192), the rituals she performs to ask for the leniency of the river goddess (193), the cleansing ceremony she is made to perform after the death of her child (93), etc., constitute all, a semiotic network of the cultural reality of her community.

What seems to be an articulation of the n'zassa in the above examples lies in the cultural syncretism Kourouma, Nwapa and many other African writers use in their works. This syncretism is composed of various elements taken from African cultural cosmogony. Often, these elements are used in the same text, giving it an eclectic content. Only this suffices to create misunderstanding and confusion. In this context, the reader cannot well catch the message of the writer unless he knows the cultural context of the text or tries to get impregnated with it. It ensues then that a

careless reading resulting from the reader's lack of knowledge of the context might inevitably lead to a wrong interpretation of the text. It is important to indicate that in the apparent complexity and anachronism, there is uniformity and fusion in the narrative sequence. Finally, the context serves as a catalyst that sustains the mixture of the textual elements. If it is not well known or mastered, then, it becomes quite impossible to understand the organization of the text.

Other examples of the necessity for the reader to know the context to better seize the n'zassa content in a text find illustration in Ivorian writers Bandaman Maurice's *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois* (2001) or Diégou Bailly's *La Traversée du guerrier* (2004). Here, terms such as "Sicoboï," or "premier bureau" and "deuxième bureau," etc., will appear quite unknown to the reader unfamiliar with Ivorian socio-cultural context. As such, he will fail to understand the text and decipher its message. Describing the "Sicoboï," Bandaman Maurice writes:

Huts are overlapped, intertwined, and connected together in an indescribable disorder. They are piled in an entanglement of black plastic that covers the roof of these sheds. Real hideaways made of wood and provisional iron sheets. They stand, frightened and shivering like women who are threatened to death, these hideous hovels which stick together as to stand in the way of town hall bulldozers which, every three months, threaten to demolish them. But these huts shelter faithful electors who swarm like maggots. They will then resist the rain and destructions. (193, my translation)

The term "Sicoboï," in fact, refers to shantytowns mostly found in some quarters of Abidjan, the Ivorian capital city, and characterized by its overpopulation and the bad living conditions of the populations. It is a sort of dead-end, a place where people essentially end up when they do not have any means to afford a decent accommodation elsewhere or when they do not have anywhere else to go because of their precarious conditions.

In the above passage, the n'zassa structure is embodied by the aesthetic combination of images, metaphors, and personifications to describe what

appears as the houses of the populations. Huts and maggots are personified while human beings are reified. The narrative describes the entanglement of these huts as if they were people hand in hand, elbows against elbows during a demonstration, refusing to step back face to security forces. In such posture, the huts seem to defy the authorities. When reading this passage, the reader may imagine a scene where the atmosphere is one of poverty and degradation. Apparently, no human being is supposed to live in such an area. But paradoxically, this is where electors abound, giving the place a politically strategic position. Thus, in the same way these areas are repulsive because of their disgusting odor and the proliferation of maggots, they are very important for politicians when it comes to solicit their votes during elections. They know that they can promise everything, even the impossible, to these "fragile" populations in exchange for their votes. This is probably why they refuse, so to speak, to destroy these shantytowns as their destruction would mean the dislocation of their potential electorate.

Interestingly, this passage is aesthetically well-structured. Beyond the socio-economic context of the shantytowns that the reader is expected to know in analyzing it, he must also know the political context to understand the proliferation of these areas in many cities and why political leaders are hesitant to destroy them. As such, it is their interest to maintain their inhabitants in dependence and control them by means of fake promises. The other important idea is that beyond the political strategy of having their electorate within reach, the passage maliciously points out the political leaders' wickedness, inhumanity, and their refusal to assist these needy people, which the reader may not perceive without an insightful reading.

As for the terms "militant-akpani" (82), "premier bureau" or "deuxième bureau" (97), etc., in Diégou Bailly's work, they are all illustrative of the writer's knowledge of Ivorian social context. Truly, they are images used by the writer to serve his art. Apparently, translating them respectively by "bat-militant," "first bureau" or "second bureau" is quite inappropriate and totally diverting for a reader unfamiliar with the social context of the work. But one who is

familiar with this context or has information about it can easily understand these terms and thereby find their meaning. Artistically, the writer uses them as elements of the social context of his community to construct his narrative. Indeed, "akpani" is a translation of "bat" in Akan, an Ivorian ethnic group. This small mammal lives in trees or caves and is known for its frequent changes of place, moving from tree to tree or from area to area. In Ivorian context, then, when used to refer to an individual, the image reveals the changing attitude of this person. Thus, the term "bat-militant" is a metaphor to allude to activists who change political parties according to their interests. These activists have nothing to do with the ideology of their party but only their personal interests. Their activism is determined by what they can earn from the party rather than what they can give it. As such, they unconsciously create their own dependence in the same way as poor people of the "Sicobois" do. Through this term and many others found in the text, the writer shows his knowledge of the political context of his community.

As for the terms "premier bureau" and "deuxième bureau," they serve to define the attitude of men who are married but have other wives outside their households. The ordinal numbers "premier" (first) and "deuxième" (second) indicate the number of wives they have and the degree of their relationship with them. Broadly, the mixture of elements from the social reality creates the beauty of the text and provides its artistic value. My reference to them aims to insist on the importance of the context in analyzing a text and to show that the complexity of its structure does not always create misunderstanding but can help catch the message.

The concept of *n'zassa* also brings to light the narrative levels that Bakhtin skillfully coins. Indeed, for him, the literary text articulates two levels of narration: the narrator's and the writer's. He calls this association "multilingualism" and explains how it operates in the text:

Each of the moments of the narrative is clearly perceived on two levels: on the narrator's level, according to his objective, semantic, and expressive perception, then on the writer's, who speaks in a refractive

way in this narrative, and through it. The narrator himself, his discourse, and everything that is narrated, together enter into the writer's perspective. We imagine the accents of the latter, placed on the subject of the narrative as well as on the narrative itself and on the narrator's image, revealed as the narrative deploys. Failing to consider this second level of the writer, intentional, is to understand nothing in the novel. (Op. cit.: 135, my translation)

He further adds:

Each moment of the narrative is correlated to this language and to this perspective, it is confronted to them [...] point of view against point of view, accent against accent, appreciation against appreciation [...]. This correlation, this dialogic connection between two languages, two perspectives, helps the writer's intention to be achieved so that, we distinctly feel it at any moment of the novel. The writer is neither in the language of the narrator nor in the "normal" literary language to which the narrative is correlated [...], but he uses both languages to avoid entirely giving his intentions to any of them. Anytime in his novel, he leans on this interpellation, this dialogue of languages, to remain, on the linguistic level, as neutral, as a "third person" in the dispute among the two others. (Ibid)

In applying the above citations to the texts analyzed in this article, it turns out that the narrative levels amount to what the author and the narrator, taken individually, know about the same story and how their intentions, though different, fuse to avoid giving contradictory versions to this story. My point, therefore, emphasizes the use of these different but converging levels as an example of the combination by the author, of various stylistic elements to create his art; which reinforces the understanding of the concept of *n'zassa* as a motley patchwork. For the reader to well appreciate a text, he must identify these two levels in the sense that they can help him see how the text functions and how its elements or sequences are interconnected. This requires, for example, avoiding making confusion between the narrator and the author. Failing to notice this often minor but fundamental distinction leads to serious

problems of understanding and incapability to decipher the message.

All the texts analyzed in this article evidence Bakhtin's multilingualism. Each of them contains a first level narration embodied by a narrator who knows the story and tells it, and a second level, represented by the author to whom the narrator tells the story to write. The author becomes therefore a relay between the narrator and the reader. As such, the reader's understanding of the text will depend on the author's capability to accurately narrate what the narrator tells him. Also, because these levels are different from each other but are combined in the same story, an essential preoccupation of the author is to succeed in drawing the reader's attention. It appears then that there is a desire to achieve order from disorder, unity and wholeness from singleness, collectivity from individuality, which highlights the main hypothesis underlining my concept of n'zassa.

Respectively, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Color Purple* and *Mumbo Jumbo* on the one hand, and *Quand on refuse on dit non*, *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois* and *La traversée du guerrier*, on the other hand, deploy these two narrative perspectives or levels. In each of these novels, there is a narrator who seems to know the social and/or historical context of the story related. Behind him is the author to whom he tells the story to write. If one of these two actors ignores something about what is to be told, then, the structure of the story is disjointed and the story becomes confused for the reader to understand; he will be completely disoriented. Thus, the narrators of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Color Purple* respectively know the black women's plight in America and these women's struggle to win back their suppressed voices, their being silenced by the oppressive and patriarchal systems of their communities. Similarly, the narrator of *Mumbo Jumbo* knows how jazz music functions: its incessant restart, improvisation, and change in form and tone while keeping the background of the message. He leans on this apparently distorted or broken structure to explore, as I already said, the confrontation between African civilization and Western one. Also, this confrontation brings to light the necessity for cultures to interact basing

on what unites them rather than what differentiates them and creates conflicts among them. As Blacks, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Ishmael Reed, like the narrators in their texts, know the history of their communities, their history, so that they can easily write it.

The juxtaposition of the narrative levels that occurs in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Color Purple* and *Mumbo Jumbo* recurs in *Quand on refuse on dit non*, *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois* and *La traversée du guerrier*. Here, the different narrators know the Ivorian context to such an extent that they can account for it. For instance, while the narrator of *Quand on refuse on dit non* scrutinizes Ivorian political environment and the elements that triggered the bloody crisis that the country underwent, those of *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois* and *La traversée du guerrier* explore the social context of the country. More precisely, they inspect people's day to day relationships, the trickeries that constitute the social malaise of a community in search of its landmarks. And Ahmadou Kourouma, Bandama Maurice, and Diégou Bailly well know these contexts. This is why they can easily and artistically use them as essential vectors for their narratives. They mutually interact with their narrators like in a relay race: the narrator, as the first runner, passes the baton to the author to continue the race. But in the case in point, none of the partners stops to leave the other one continue alone. Both go hand in hand from the beginning to the end of their adventure even though one, the author, acts as a relay between the narrator and the reader.

In sum, in all the texts analyzed here, both the author's perception and the narrator's, as narrative levels, mediate to create stories whose substance serves to explore the historical, social, and political context of their respective communities. Because their perceptions converge, it becomes easy for the narrator to tell the story to the author and easy for the author to write the story the narrator tells him. Finally, because these two narrative levels converge, the reader can easily understand the context underlining the creation of these narratives and grasp the message behind them. The disjointed

language (vernacular) in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or *The Color Purple* complements the double narrative level. Indeed, to this language is associated a well articulated one to point out not only the narrator's knowledge of African Americans' difficulties to learn to write and to read, but also their efforts to achieve a good speaking and writing level. When Hurston and Walker use these two linguistic levels in their texts, they show their knowledge of these realities and share them with their narrators in the same way they invite their readers to do so. In a similar way, the expressions or phrases used in *Quand on refuse on dit non*, *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois* and *La traversée du guerrier* serve to create an environment that both the narrators and the authors perfectly know. Be it in African American context or Ivorian context, the concept of n'zassa, with regard to the narrative levels, occurs as a juxtaposition of two discursive positions which seem to differ from each other but coherently and artistically serve the same story, say, storyline.

By way of conclusion, let us say that the literary text is a combination of different elements that the writer patches together to create a sense of

meaning and pass on a message. In this article, I have tried to show that this combination reflects the Ivorian local fashion designer's process of manufacturing clothes and loincloths (the n'zassa). The aim is to demonstrate that this process well applies to the texts I analyzed. The n'zassa creation, therefore, can be defined as a technique of analysis of the literary text. By leaning on fiction works, I articulated this approach in my work. Such textual devices as metaphor, proverb, image, personification, character development, language levels, etc., were all inspected. The presence of many or some of these elements in the same text apparently creates a chaotic and disordered climate and disorients the reader. But, really, through this heterogeneity, disunity, and chaos, there are unity, homogeneity, order. This is how the n'zassa works, a motley patchwork. There is no confusion per se. Taken individually, everything is a contributing part of a totality. However, because my analysis is a case study, it cannot claim to articulate a universal approach of the n'zassa. Nevertheless, it lays the basis for such universality if this concept is expanded to more literary genres and spaces.

LITERATURE

1. Bailly, D., 2004, *La Traversée du guerrier*. Abidjan, CEDA.
2. Bakhtine, M., 1978, *Esthétique et théorie du roman*. Paris, Gallimard.
3. Bandaman, M., 2001, *Même au paradis on pleure quelquefois*. Abidjan, Nouvelles Éditions ivoiriennes.
4. Barthes, R., 1973, *Le Plaisir du texte*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
5. Eastman, M., 1953, *Selected Poems of Claude McKay*. San Diego/New York/London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.
6. Foster, Frances Smith, 1990, *A Brighter coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*. New York, the Feminist Press at the City University of New York.
7. Hamilton, I., 1973, *Robert Frost: Selected Poems*. USA, Penguin Books.
8. Hurston, Zora Neale, 1978, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* [1937]. Chicago, University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
9. Kola, J.-F., 2005, *Identité et institution de la littérature en Côte d'Ivoire*, Thèse unique de doctorat, vol. 1, Université de Cocody (Côte d'Ivoire)/Université de Limoges (France), sous la direction de Prof. Michel Beniamino et Prof. Gérard Lezou Dago.
10. Kourouma, A., 2004, *Quand on refuse on dit non*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
11. Kristeva, J., 1980, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
12. Morrison, T., 1997, *Beloved* [1987]. USA, Vintage.
13. Ramonet, I., 1997, *Géopolitique du chaos*. France, Éditions Galilée.
14. Reed, I., 1972, *Mumbo Jumbo*. New York, Simon & Schuster.
15. Reuter, Y., 2005, *L'Analyse du récit* [2001], Paris, Armand Colin.
16. Walker, A., 1982, *The Color Purple*. New York, Pocket Books.