

Peul's (Fulani) Worldview as Seen in Bâ's Work: A Critique

Victor Ariole

*Dept. of European Languages & Integration Studies
University of Lagos, Nigeria
vicariole@gmail.com*

Abstract

Peul and Fulani are synonyms. The Francophone countries know them as Peulh or Fula or Fuldé. They are no fewer than 40 million in the whole of West and Central Africa. They are divided into nine constituents with three basic leading clusters seen in their ruling caste; the academic driven caste – consisting of the marabouts and teachers of the culture – and the pastoral caste consisting mostly of those could be termed as peasants – nomadic and sedentary. By Amadou Hampaté Bâ's account, they are basically driven in their culture and tradition by the greater search for loftier existential pursuits that culminate in "probity" to face the hereafter. Each constituent acts in consonance with probity for the wholistic wellbeing of the rest to avoid quarrels among the constituents. Given this well-established fact that the Peul are peacefully integrated intra-culturally, why do they find it difficult to extend the integration values to their other African neighbours who are not Peul? This paper aims at identifying the cultural integration constraints in Africa, as social and economic sustainability endeavours fail. Bâ, a Fulani sage, and his works, serve as subjects of the study. The paper critiques Bâ's thought patterns in the light of what mythocritique theories state as guide for knowing the origins of cultures and traditions as peoples of different cultures meet and seek to integrate in line with globalisation concepts and their constraints. Findings show that Bâ's thought patterns are quite relevant in understanding the Peul's worldview which sees probity and constituents' responsibilities as inalienable with peaceful living; hence a continuous critique of his works is important, if only what they reveal could be made to adapt to current global knowledge process for a review of the Fulani old ways that still remain elastic and amenable

to new ways that can lead to progress and friendly multicultural integration.

Keywords: *Peul's worldview, cultural integration, peaceful cohabitation, social justice, Francophone neighbours*

1. Introduction

Generally, African worldview is inscribed in myths and proverbs, which are polysemic in nature and could be interpreted, in time and space, as cultural dynamics dictate, as no culture of any people insinuates stagnation. Africans are, sometimes, given the impression of a stagnant culture which is erroneous. Amadou Hampâté Bâ as a sage who had stood as adviser on African culture to some heads of state and UNESCO, remains a great inspirer of the progressive content of the Fulani culture known from the Francophone perspective as Pèul/Fula/Fulani, which had remained untapped as most of the people that ought to exploit it tend to see it in its "crude" state instead of reproducing it to match the state of affairs as time and space dictate.

In pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial era, Bâ attempted in his books and thoughts what any given worldview should make of a changing world as civilisation come and gone. In effect each appearing civilisation had lived its own lost "paradise" which it seems to be applying backward integration to regain; even when it is seen as progress for such civilisation; or when such civilisation oppresses other civilisations and, sometimes negative approach of such oppressed civilisation occasions dragging processes of both the leading and the oppressed, as "chameleonic" survival tricks are made to intervene as expressed in Bâ's *L'étrange destin de Wangrin* (Strange Destiny of Wangrin) and *Oui mon Commandant!* (Yes Sir! District Officer) or (As It Pleases My Lordship!). The Fulani or Peul, as the Francophones call them, evidently seem to be having challenges in integrating with other peoples of West and Central Africa. This paper analyses and critiques Bâ's works, especially as they relate to peaceful living and cohabitation of the Fulani with other ethnic groups or tribes with a bid to unravel the real issues behind the problem.

Some theoretical background that formed, a priori, the growing up of Bâ as myths oblige and what some critics posit about them are of importance, to further embark on the critique of his thoughts so as to give them some relevance in the current space and time, as Africa struggles for survival in the current globalisation era.

2. Some Myths and Theories of the African Worldview

Most cultures in Africa operate by the dictates of the “Myth of eternal return”, which is also aimed at making human beings relate with the past, the present and the future as unbreakable chain; and as well as reminding them that in the present, both the ancestors and those yet unborn are in communion. Even if it does not make sense to some civilisations, the current issues of climate change reminds everyone that the planet is not just for humans living in the present, but for those yet unborn, as posited by Gbadebo (2017:171) that Yoruba thought system is attributed to Olodumare (God) the creator of man and the universe and the ‘sustainers’ of creation; including pre-existence in celestial world as well as post existence, hereafter; all linked in sustainability of life on earth. Furthermore, Alaba (2017:30) agrees that change is part of what African cultures admit also as it is demonstrated in written poetry. According to him, “Situation Ethics” are replacing “Traditional Ethics”; and means of communicating changes to the society is the constant duty of writers. Some Africans see them as griots while the Malinké or Mandé people talk about the Diabatés ever relating new things to the people. Diabatés are the caste in charge of knowledge search and transmission. The name could vary in different tribes. Citing “Le TOTEM” by Senghor (2007:28), one sees the “eternal return” bound African.

Il me faut le cacher au plus intime de mes veins
L’Ancêtre à la peau d’orage sillonnée d’éclairs et de foudre
Mon animal gardien, il me faut le cacher
Que je ne rompe le barrage des scandales.
Il est mon sang fidèle qui requiert fidélité
Protégeant mon orgueil nu contre
Moi-même et la superbe des races heureuses.

(Being hidden in the innermost part of my veins
The ancestor bearing magnetic complexion enhanced by ever
presence of lightning and thunder
Like that animal that serves as my totem that must be kept
hidden.
So as not to erupt the chain of scandals that follow if wrongly
handled
It is my faithful blood and it requires my faithfulness
Hence protecting my crude ego against my wish and against the
exalted one of the happy races)

“Totem” is like what it takes to run away from impending disaster, especially the one that humans in the “present” intend to unleash against themselves without understanding that forces seen and unseen interfere in their lives to keep the stead of “eternal return” alive. Happy races exist either as individuals or collectivity, but holding to a totem create instances of restraint that make humans more humane among other species. When you kill that totem, the conscience is dead, and no sooner than the entire human race, whether happy or of crude ego, would have gone extinct.

It is necessary to view what critics in francophone literary studies like Kesteloot and Césaire point at that relate to this presentation. Kesteloot, in her inserted comment in *Kaïdara* sees it from the feudal perspective. *Kaïdara* is one of Bâ's work. The Fulani feudal system operates a “code of honour” as demonstrated by three travelers of that system: Hammadi – the noble; Hamtoudo; and Dembourou – the supporters; all in the quest of eternal return – Kaïdara, the god of all that is good, gold and the star. The nobility of the acclaimed noble is manifest in observing the code of honour and leading the rest of humanity to Kaïdara; even the pastoral work of Fulani herdsmen is a search for Kaïdara. It is not an end in itself. When it is viewed as a noble quest, it snubs brutality, and it is not Kaïdara intended.

In effect what is noble to the African is the respect of the “code of conduct” that leads to the re-establishment of the lost paradise, or at worst keeping the stages of attaining the beauty of life which the Igbo call “nmandu”, that is, human being to be human; as not every human being intend to live by the code, hence clash of civilisations and reason for deliberate discrimination either positive or negative. However, it does not warrant killing of the travellers by

themselves. Some of the thoughts of Bâ relate what such code of conduct is and how to live by it either in a feudalist, capitalist or socialist dominated civilisation. Kesteloot further warns that what Bâ expresses in his works are full of metaphors and require some wisdom of the initiated to unravel. That understanding is to be relayed to the uninitiated operating as either herdsmen or tending the flocks awaiting the direction that leads to Kaïdara.

Unravelling the mystery of life is somehow an adventure that some civilisations embark on, albeit in different ways, as their worldviews oblige. Even the interactions of Africans in the Diaspora, as seen from Césaire's (2013:204) perspective, is based on relationship of human beings with the sun and the moon as their blood remain the dashboard for evaluating the ease of better living for humans. Even when the blood is covered by skin texture, as it is the same for all humans, the texture in pains or joy relates the message of the blood – human temperament, either individually or collectively when in peace or war with environmental elements, shows it.

Sang! Sang! Tout notre sang ému par le cœur mâle du soleil
Ceux qui savent la féminité de la lune au corps d'huile
L'exaltation réconciliée de l'antilope et de l'étoile
Ceux dont la survie cheminée en la germination de l'herbe!
Eia parfait cercle du monde et close concordance! (cf. Arnold,
2013)

(Blood! Blood! All our blood overtaken by the male heart seen
in the sun Acknowledge those who know the femininity of the
moon with shining oil unction
Greatly astounding in how the antelope and the star meet.
In acknowledgement of those whose survival depends on the
renewal of shrubs!
Eia (what a mystery) perfect cycle of the world and in utmost
agreement!)

Césaire admits the great mystery that could lead to sustainability of species on earth but wonders why humans fail to see it. Like blood, like your totem, they need deliberate human efforts to be kept protected.

Furthermore, he suggests that a civilisation that is incapable of resolving the problems that its approaches create is a decadent civilisation; a civilisation that plays around with its own principles is quite moribund (cf. Arnold 2013:1448). According to him, whether it is capitalist, feudalist, or socialist, the determinant for human beings and other species must be observed and it is not as partial or simple as some civilisations approach it, hence, the need to carefully weigh the two axes – space and time - and any approach must also see how the coordinates affect the earth as human blood explains; either in its heated, moribund or stable state as thermometer indicates or heat wave or winter storm induces panic. For Hugo (2010:169), it is like blood, like the opening up of stars into the dark world.

... L'astre se répétait dans le triangle énorme;
Il y jetait ainsi qu'en un Lac son reflet,
Lueur mystérieuse et sacrée...

(... The astral space showed up as usual in an
immense triangle;
Throwing out its sparkle in lake-like burst,
Mysterious and sacred spark)

The unfolding patterns of the star or stars are part of the mysteries humans should look into as they define the pattern of their intended civilization. Bâ sees it in either the approach of “handful of dust” or Kaïdara – the blossoming star. Both ways, incarnation of the mysterious unfolding are possible, but how are they to be handled? “Handful of dust” is as well “the ashes that aspire”, they look insignificant but they harbour mysteries as seen in the transformation of gases and matters, subjected to heat or cold; and the current clamour to reduce carbon emission so as to keep the planet safe for humans attests that 1.5⁰C is the acceptable base and that above 3.5⁰C, humans are in peril. It therefore behoves humans to reason rightly.

3. A Critique of the Thought Patterns

Thought patterns do not evolve from empty mind. They are functions of culture, tradition, environmental challenges and parental cum societal experiences. In the modern perspectives, they are seen in ideologies as capitalism or socialism or even feudalism – a priori ideology. This is so because, seemingly, it sympathises with the

patriarchal system as the female specie that must bear, mostly, the burden of procreation; expects the male specie to remain protective of the household as pregnancy or carrying eggs denote temporary strength, a hibernation process that must be shielded from danger by the male. However, capitalism and socialism as ideologies remain mostly a posteriori in debunking the feudalist stance, as both ideologies insist on co-responsibility in the burden of each other – whether protection or incubating or pregnancy, like the penguins do. It is also part of the current queer gender proof as science intends to prove that fluidity of gender exists. We peruse Bâ's thoughts from extracts in *Contes Initiatiques Peuls* (henceforth *CIP*) and *La poignée de poussière* (henceforth *PP*) in which both ideologies are presented. From Feudalism through capitalism to socialism, Bâ's works are relevant. Their validity in the current globalising world is what this presentation intends to critique and interrogate; if, indeed, sustainability of the planet earth as well as humanity ought to matter for human beings.

On feudalism, Bâ has this to say. The Fulani (peul) world started as kingdom of mountains moving to the creation of a country known as country of two rivers. It was dominated by Zan Donso – a hunter and Sordian – a knitter (cf. p.7). Here, feudalism rears its head. He went further to introduce, as afterthought, the king of the mountains whose princess is to take her bathe in the rivers, and there meets with either the Prince of the two rivers; or the Prince of the mountains meets the alternative princess; and in any case, a prince could be a prince in the like of Soundajata of the Malian kingdom, mythically rising from incapacity to great strength enabled by a woman. A woman could also be a symbol of calamity or the spinner of evil if not well handled as seen in Njeddo Dewal – mother of calamity (cf. *CIP*: 9). It explains the phenomenon of lost paradise as the male specie remains stubborn in understanding the intent of Gueno – the Eternal god (see *CIP*:11). The deviation of man in working for the sustenance of the Gueno's eternal movement has to be re-worked as Neddo-Mawdo – the new dignifying man has to be born. Neddo-Mawdo procreated four children; a Hearing Child, a Seeing Child, a Speaking Child, and an Executing Child who have to compete, furthermore, with a procreation of his sister in the persons of Misery, Spell, Animosity and Distaste.

In effect, Bâ assumes that outside feudal system, a complex system takes over and it is the ideology known in modern term as capitalism which must contend with some negative forces. This is in line with Césaire's argument that a civilisation which fails to tame the problems it creates is moribund. Hickel (2017:77) corroborates this thus:

Up through the Middle Ages, the vast majority of people in Europe (Like in Africa also) wouldn't have wanted to work for wages. People didn't need to earn wages in order to live ... they were quite happy cultivating the land to provide for their own needs (...) Wealthy nobles; eager to profit from the highly lucrative wool trade began a systematic campaign to turn their land into sheep pasture. To do this, they dissolved the old feudal obligations ...

The pastoral culture started as such nobles, seen in what Bâ sees as the four children of Neddo Mawdo, knitted as existential issues; and saw more the need of confronting the negativity than pushing for "eternal" needs. It has been a perpetual pursuit of crushing what they perceive as negative intents and either conquering by sword or imposing rules to subdue the perceived negative intents; though internal to the Fulanis, they seem to extend it as they relate with other peoples instead of integrating with them for positive ends.

It is not out of place to link the Mandé's civilisation that seems to have created the Fulani civilisation as contending with that latter civilisation as Europeans and the Arabs infiltrated the African space and started redirecting economic interests. It is evident that the Tran-Saharan slave trade as well as the early Portuguese presence collided in the Ottoman empire's interest that harboured both economic interests of either "provide for the wellbeing of the nobles by the invented Vassals" or keep them in pastoral activities for extraction of wools and leathers, while they find a sustainable subsistence living on milk, meat, and picking fruits or tubers on their pastoral journey. Pastoral journey or nomadic life, or endeavours, are not initiated by the Mandé civilisation but a hybrid civilisation that admits both communal and noble living and Bâ sees it pointing to Seydou – a Mandé name – turned a commoner from his being a king by admitting that the turban is weighing too much on him and he needed to feel like a commoner or at best seek for a more fulfilling

living than that of being covered by turban, which to him is symbolic of living in fool's paradise (cf. p.85). Since then, being on the move tends to be the lot of the majority of the Fulanis and it has also been mindful of the professional alchemy of the four children of Neddo-Mawdo. However, the Marxist historical dialectics seem to agree with that as none of the professions ever aims at accumulation of wealth which is also what the Mandé civilisation abhorred till the time the Arabs introduced slave trade and other trades to it, creating middlemen who aimed at being rich like their Arab masters. The era created people like Boukaré, Samba, and Soripoulho who must go in search of greener pasture and new settlements (see *La poignée de poussière* 89 and *Contes initiatiques Peuls* 138). It also negated the original intent of the Fulani noble as itinerant preacher or knowledge disseminator for a noble goal - eternity.

For Bâ, it is the presence of Nâ'ngue – the Sun as the great provider and quite eternal, giving space for the Lewrou – the moon and its reverse darkness – to participate in time temporal – Doumounna, with nine division of humans to create eternal cyclical spaces just like Senghor earlier on stated, “astral space with lake-like burst in sparkles” (see *Contes initiatiques Peuls* 19). Even the dark spaces contribute in the beauty of the astral space which human beings should emulate instead of disturbing the lake-like sparkles which, sometimes, misunderstanding of integration of cultures and civilisations ignites and thereby creates bellicose attitudes seen in conflicts among human beings with different economic interests as well as a ruling class that fails to apply the rules that make for harmonious living.

The Mandé people had always been worried by crisis of accumulation which makes them seem to prefer what capitalist adduce as poverty mindedness or what the Swedish people avoid - never to talk about wealth acquisition, but allow it flow and permeate the system without monopolising it, as stated by *BBC*. Like President Xi of China said, Africa is the continent that prays more than their Arab and European colonisers. To President Xi, religion is the only thing the two colonisers left for Africa, hence, the entrenchment of belief systems that negate progress. The aforesaid statement is quite debatable as China is still carrying the burden of oppressing its believers in the name of progress. However, new trends like the Chinese's swinging economic ideologies are proving that no country

is an island unto itself. So, one way or another, integration obliges opening up to create “astral space” beyond the “Sun in-situ”. Even the current IMF boss, Kristalina Georgieva (2020:25) sees it that way.

Policy makers, to achieve SDGs, must adopt a balanced approach between investing in people and upgrading infrastructure, between long-term development objectives and pressing immediate needs, between financing development and safeguarding debt sustainability.

Here, indeed, both socialist and capitalist intents collide for a seemingly better approach of linking workmen – those in need of being empowered to fend for themselves out of their labour, with visionary people entrepreneurs or job creators; and by so doing, it is balancing human beings' wellbeing quest in-between extremes of wealth acquisition and abject poverty. That is the new humanity Bâ sees in Gorko-Mawdo – the road to joy:

Ô Siré! Je te prenais pour Njeddo Dewal, ma première maîtresse, qui m'avait asservi et ne m'employait qu'à faire du mal. Je vous salue, vous qui venez de me délivrer. Je suis Koumbasâra, l'un des vingt-huit dieux du panthéon des Peuls pasteurs. J'ai été enfermé par la grande maléfique dans cette gourde composée d'un alliage de sept métaux différents. (CIP: 124)

(Ô Lordship! I had thought you were Njeddo Dewal, my first mistress who was at my service and was leading me to doing evil. I greet you, now that you are here to save me. I am Koumbasâra, one of twenty eight gods of the Fulanis, the nomadic Fulanis. I have been caged all along in this big evil jar containing the mixture of seven different metals.)

Bâ feels that the nomadic Fulani is embroiled in a spell that must be dispelled starting from knowing the seven metals cooked together to hold him in a jar; the metals are not far from envisaging what mineral resources seen in any of the seven countries they have mostly

migrated to harbour, or how they perceive their totems are mishandled.

In Nigeria, crude oil is one of the elements that must be seen as part of the metals for liberation purposes. Kaïdara abhors metal exposure, albeit in quantum that creates disaster. Reaching Kaïdara requires systematic and mild exposure. It is also a re-think for friendly economic activities that enable the appearance of Kaïdara – sustainable development.

4. Conclusion

The Peul or Fulani worldview, which needs to be critiqued in view of its current challenges among other peoples in the Nigerian, West African, and Central African spaces is exposed in this representation. Within the scope of Bâ's works and observations both intertextual and on-the-spot from the Futa Jalon origin of the Fulanis in Guinea to Central Africa, crossing other countries in West Africa, Bâ admits that the worldview is encapsulated in the myth of mountains and rivers – confluence rivers; either river Senegal or River Niger or, in extension, River Benue and River Oubangni. Water and shrubs are the basics. They form the challenges of existential beings beyond beings who intend to experience “Kaïdara” – the light or the shining star that leads to eternity. Kaïdara could be attained by knowledge which seems to have escaped most people who rely on living from hand to mouth as both feudal, capitalist and socialist civilisations are not converging enough to reduce the suffering of most people in Africa including a pair of the Fulanis – those guided by Njeddo-Dewal, mother of calamity. Even when socialism created a window for a better living, the other pair guided by Neddo-Mawdo, the new man toward better living, seems not to find the way out, recursing himself from his original mission of always showing the light as ever itinerant knowledge disseminator, and tends to adopt the “Seydou” approach of abusive self-fulfilment of wealth accumulation through the metaphor of accumulating “handful of dust”.

In effect, Bâ admits that there is a systemic failure as waters and shrubs are misused from their original worth for an economic order that is wasteful – whether from animal husbandry perspective or metal exploitation perspective. Mythically, as well as religiously, most directional knowledge had come from mountain top and had flowed like river down to its course or search for the mythical

“Kaïdara”, and never allowed to be drained – and if it happens, it is resisted – till it meets the greater space – the oceans; even governance and economic models must flow to the grassroots into the oceans for effective cycle. That is, using knowledge to burst sparks of lake-like stars in the movement of the river so as to banish ignorance and poverty unto the open sea; not a sword – like wars to dip it into the ocean but to renewed humanity to regain its loss – harmonious living with nature.

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