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REWORKING THE SENSE OF BELONGING: THE RITUAL OF N'DEEP IN *NONNO DIO E GLI SPIRITI DANZANTI* BY PAP KHOUMA

Raffaella Bianchi

Griots play in the shadow of a mango tree in the courtyard of Aby Mané, where *tur* or *khamb* are built: a structure made of dry tree branches on which roots, herbs and shells wrapped in pieces of cloths or in animal skins or inserted into rams' or goats' horns are hung. Also plastic bottles full of *safara*, a magic filter, *calebasse*, carved pumpkin filled with mysterious substances. These are the instruments of the auntie to cure the possessed.¹

This description of the *n'deep*, a traditional ritual, narrated in Pap Kouma's novel *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* (*God Grandpa and the dancing spirits*), seems stereotypical of what a Western reader would expect from an African ritual *Voodoo*-like; from drums to evocative tools. At first sight, the book deals with a traditional type of healing ritual; it sounds like one setting of an ethnographic exploration of Victor Turner.² However, there is a substantial difference. Rituals analyzed by Turner took place in traditional societies; while Kouma's novel is set in a different environment. The ritual is performed amidst cultural tensions typical of the contemporary world where ethnicities, identities and traditional values are mixed. The chapter analyses this narrative that challenges the traditional concept of 'authenticity' and replace it with a multicultural perspective. By doing this, it highlights the function of the ritual for the solution of the novel's vis-à-vis the plot and the sense of belonging to a community.

At the time of writing, with the Syrian war pushing refugees around the borders and new walls of Europe, multiculturalism is a crucial theme that seems to be central to our future. This is a theme that has been largely explored by Italoophone

¹ P. KHOUMA: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* (Milan 2005) 111. "I *griot* suonano all'ombra di un mango nel cortile di Aby Mané, dove sono piantati i *tur* o *khamb*: una struttura fatta di rami secchi dai quali pendono radici, erbe, cortecce, conchiglie racchiuse in pezzi di stoffa o in pelli di animali o infilati dentro corni di montone e di capra. Penzolano anche bottiglie di plastica piene di *safara*, un filtro magico, *calebasse*, zucche secche svuotate e riempite con sostanze misteriose. Questi sono gli strumenti invisibili della zia per curare i posseduti". All translations of this novel are mine.

² V. TURNER: *The ritual process. Structure and antistructure* (New York 1969).

literature. Khouma is considered one of the most authoritative voices of this literary current, also called the Italian literature of migration.³ This literary stream emerged in the 1990s and has produced around five-hundred texts. These are written by new Italian citizens who migrated in Italy and choose Italian language as a mean for their literary and poetic expression.

In particular, Pap Khouma is native francophone. Khouma is famous because of his first novel which was one of the first examples of *récits de vie* of a migrant in Italy, and recounted the experience of whose street sellers that were labeled “*vu' cumpru*”.⁴ Raffaele Taddeo defines Pap Khouma as a migrant writer, in the sense that the experience of migration has been fundamental as inspiration for his writings.⁵ Indeed, *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* recounts another fundamental experience of migration, namely a journey back home. The author's experience of migrant is still relevant for this novel; however this is not as a source of inspiration for the plot. Khouma's second novel is not an autobiographical account. Indeed, it recounts a more universal experience that migrants encounter: the tension of religious and cultural traditions, habits and perspectives of their world of origins and of the new world they have settled in. In this changing cultural context, what is the place for a traditional ritual?

1. Rituals and belonging

Turner highlights how rituals are intertwined with values and power-structures of the traditional societies where they take place. As Jeffery Alexander puts it:

Rituals are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication's symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intentions. It is because of this shared understanding of intention and content, and in the intrinsic validity of the interaction, that rituals have their effect and affect.⁶

Belonging to a community that ‘share a mutual belief’ and understand ‘communication's symbolic contest’ is a precondition for the ritual's power. Participants to rituals belong to the same imagined community. During rituals takes place what Turner termed ‘liminality’, namely a state of fusion. According to Turner, all rituals

³ A. GNISCI: *Creolizzare l'Europa. Letteratura e migrazione* (Rome 2003); R. TADDEO: *Letteratura nascente* (Milan 2014); G. PARATI: ‘Italophone voices’, in *Italian Studies in Southern Africa* 8 (1995) 11-15.

⁴ P. KHOUMA & O. PIVETTA: *Io venditore di elefanti* (Milan 1990).

⁵ TADDEO: *Letteratura nascente* 12.

⁶ J.C. ALEXANDER: ‘Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy’, in J.C. ALEXANDER, B. GIESEN & J.L. MAST (eds.): *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics and ritual* (Cambridge and New York 2006) 29.

have liminal spaces in which traditional status distinctions dissolve, social constraints suspend, and a special form of solidarity, which he called *communitas*, takes place. In liminal spaces, social distinctions gave room to egalitarianism.⁷ Therefore, through rituals the individual experiences a profound sense of belonging to a community. In turn, the community is strengthened through rituals.

Is this sense of belonging to a place re-enforced in Khouma's novel? The context in which the *n'deep* of this novel takes place is far from being a traditional society where there is a clear set of shared values, and all the participants and the audience accept the authenticity of the ritual's intentions. Written in Italian and enriched by words in French and *Wolof*, the novel is set at the intersection of different cultures and geographies. In traditional societies, rituals solidified collective identities and embedded the cultural system in individual actions. However, later on, Turner notes that as social forms of organization became more complex and cultural systems more heterogeneous, collective rituals have grown more contingent.⁸ This chapter explores the significance of the shifted function and meaning of the ritual in the novel vis-à-vis this shift in the community system. As we will see below, the ritual of *n'deep* is recounted with multiple perspectives, in a challenging globalized world in which there are many contradictions at the level of the individual and of the community.

2. Multiple perspectives of belonging

The ritual of *n'deep* takes place in a global community. This is narrated through multiple perspectives. The story develops in the imaginary city of Taagh, which could be anywhere in Western Africa. The city and its inhabitants have a choral voice. This is expressed by a sort of community narrator. Like in Giovanni Verga's novel, this 'collective omniscient narrator' sees characters and events with the common sense of the community. Thus, everybody provides unwanted advice typical of traditional common sense; for instance, every illness should be cured by a brood of boiled beef's knees. Common sayings repeated in the text provide a fresh and ironic gaze on some Occidentalisms. These are stereotyped notions of the West which are supposed to be common in Africa. This stereotypical 'African gaze' looks towards the North to those whites with a weak complexion: '*Ils sont fragile les Toubab*'. According to the perspective of those who belong to this African community, Europe becomes the land of *Toubab*, the land of whites.

Yet, this collective narrator is not the only perspective of the book. In particular, points of view pertaining to the main protagonists are also presented. All the main characters of this novel visiting Taagh, are coming from Italy. Apart from

⁷ V. TURNER: *Dramas, fields, and metaphors. Symbolic action in human society* (Ithaca, NY 1974).

⁸ ALEXANDER, GIESEN & MAST (eds.): *Social performance*.

Øng there are other people whose destinies cross in Taagh. In particular, these people live in Lombardy, a region in the North of Italy where the higher percentage of migrants from Senegal live. These characters, are either migrants, or are Italians visiting the family of one of their relatives. Gork Mark and his wife Elena Rossini have a male child and they are visiting Gork's family of origin. Sensitive issues of hybridization and cultural cross-contaminations are expressed by their perspectives. Their mixed identities generate a cluster of diverse perspectives. The novel expresses feelings and sentiments of a universal experience of transformation that occurs to migrant subjects, which will be re-worked by the ritual. Sociologist calls this process secondary socialization. If family, schools and institutions of the country of origins have contributed to the primary socialization process of the individual; the experience of moving to a new country with a new set of norms and institutions generate a process of 'secondary' process of socialization. When coming back from 'where they belong', migrants are confronted with the world 'back home': new values acquired by migrants clash with the perspectives and informal rules of their world of origins.

The process of going back to the country of origin, and to one of the main institutions of primary socialization, such as the family, challenges subject's identity and values. This is because norms and values pertaining to the two processes of socializations are confronted. This might generate confusion and identitarian crises. This is the case of the other male migrant character of this novel, Gork who is described as torn between the values of his country of origins represented by his mother and the values of the country where he has established his family represented by his wife. These are two worlds that might want to meet, but found fundamental differences in some habits, ways of life and relevant issues. For instance, Gork's mum think is time to take steps to organize the party for his grandson circumcision; while Gork's wife is horrified by this practice. Gork does not seem to have a clear opinion or to have made a choice about the circumcision of his son. Going back has put him in a state of identitarian crises between his two worlds of affects. He is not able to make up his mind on what is right. He sees the reasons of both parts. This conflict is expressed by his headache. Gork's headache represents the painful indecision of cultural belonging.

Indeed, the originality of this novel lays on the lack of a clear border that set one world against the other. Here, Orientalisms and Occidentalisms are not depicted as opposite.⁹ This creates a shared space in which identities and expressions of different languages melts. Here, characters are on the move, namely migrants and travelers who do not belong to a specific culture. In addition, the multiperspectivity of the book generates multiple-Others. This is paradigmatically expressed in the protagonist's double name Øng/Dawala. Øng is the name used by

⁹ E.W. SAID: *Orientalism* (New York 1978).

the narrator of the novel to introduce this character. However Øng's mother would call him Dawala. The first name was chosen by the protagonist's father and the mother refuses it. Øng stays at his mother's place and his name in the local community will be Dawala, although he calls himself Øng. These multiple-Others are the conflicted senses of belonging of migrants.

Precisely, it is the multiperspectivity¹⁰ that blurs borders of a world that is not depicted as black and white. Therefore, the encounter between African culture and European-*Toubab* culture is not situated on a clear binary opposition between 'us' and 'them'.

This novel situates itself beyond the narrow borders of a national literature,¹¹ and expresses with its multiperspectivity voices and identities which do not belong anywhere in particular. They express the universal sufferance of identities in flux.

3. Places of belonging versus interconnected space

Identities do not belong anywhere specifically, and also places are no longer defined by clear cultural borders. In other words, there is no longer a 'specific' place and culture where to belong. This is because space is depicted as interconnected. Taagh is not described as a closed traditional community. Pieces of news arrive from other parts of the country and from abroad, sea traffic mix waters, goods and morals. In addition, events happening long-distance are influencing directly lives of characters over there. Taagh is an imaginary African city clearly situated in the contemporary global world. Pap Khouma's gaze is a view coming from Africa, and yet clearly situated in Northern Italy. The author has migrated from Senegal thirty years ago, and he has become a well-known Milanese intellectual, also his characters are coming from the same region.

Øng's point of view, the ways he describes things is not connected with memories of the past. By contrast, the space that he sees from the plane's window is displaced and associated in his imagination to Italy: "Taagh's airport looks like plants of Bergamo's firms."¹² Since the very first gaze from the plane's window, Øng sees the space of Africa with the eyes of a person from Lombardy; and the word he uses *capannone* and *ditte* stroke me as a typical word used in the North of Italy to define factories and companies.

¹⁰ M. HARTNER: 'Multiperspectivity', in P. HÜHN ET AL. (eds.): *The living handbook of narratology* (Hamburg view date: 25 May 2015), available at: <http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php?title=Multiperspectivity&oldid=1857>.

¹¹ On this topic see U. FRACASSA: *Patria e lettere. Per una critica della letteratura postcoloniale e migrante in Italia* (Rome 2012).

¹² KHOUMA: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* 11: "L'aereoporto di Taagh assomiglia ai capannoni delle ditte bergamasche."

The relation of the subject with the globalized world is complex. Since the first few lines, space is narrated as displacement. The narration's space opens up in the sky, in between countries. The plot begins and ends in a circular way: with a flight of the protagonist. Interestingly, Øng is not in control of the space. The migrant could be seen as the epitome of the traveler at the time of globalization. Øng is a good example of this, as he does not master the means of transports he is taken around with. The journey by taxi from the airport to his mother's home becomes a disaster, and at the end of the novel he is forcibly taken back to Milan. This is because he is accused by the police of having assaulted his partner, Federica Colombo. In addition, also the other characters have difficulties in going back and forth. What is narrated here is not the story of a nineteenth century traveler who dominates the world, opposite to the modernizer *Faust*.¹³

Travel literature is a genre that has passionate readers for centuries. Interestingly, the characters or this novel do not move around easily. Despite the great narration of globalization, migrants and travelers are not described as conqueror of space. Obviously, this is relevant for those migrants that cross the desert and the Mediterranean and do not survive the journey, as it is evident for Syrian refugees currently persecuted in Hungary. However, this seems also to be the case for more fortunate expats. In my novel, *15 Kg* the sense of displacement of identity shifts are symbolized in the struggle to move stuff around in luggage.¹⁴ Paradoxically, travel has become easier; however, it has lost its positivist flavor. Moving is no longer an adventurous discovery, planned in beautifully drawn maps of the world. Now a journey is represented in small screen of phones that show the contingency of where one is, rather than providing an idea of the context of the space of travel. Rather than being a decision planned head, sudden circumstances force the novel's characters to move across space. There is a parallel with the findings of a recent study on drain-brain in Italy. Italian researchers working abroad rarely talks about the decision of leaving Italy as a strategy of movement carefully planned. Rather, their decision of moving is associated to the words: 'randomness' and 'circumstances'.¹⁵ This relation with space, of the postmodern subject living in a globalized era, is a characteristic that is well portrayed in this novel.

¹³ M. BERMAN: *All that is solid melts into air* (London/New York: 1982) 37-86.

¹⁴ R. BIANCHI: '15 Kg', in *El-ghibli rivista online di letteratura della migrazione* 10/40 (2013), available at http://archivio.el-ghibli.org/index.php/%3Fid=1&issue=10_40§ion=2&index_pos=2.html (accessed May 2015).

¹⁵ J. GROVE: 'Study reveals misery of overseas scholars "living the dream"', in *Times of Higher Education* (21 May 2015), available at http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/study-reveals-misery-of-overseas-scholars-living-the-dream/2020276.article?utm_content=buffer71eb7&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer#.VW0QVU-_rpM.facebook (accessed May 2015).

4. The sound of belonging

As we have seen, the novel highlights how Taagh (and the world) has mutated, and there is no place that has a clear set of original and traditional values. Modernity has brought change. The place where things have not mutated is only the space of memory. In the novel, the sense of belonging to the country of origin is articulated within multiple identities. These mirrors the diverse points of view expressed by a narrator who shifts perspectives. In this context, the binary opposition between 'us' and 'them' takes place only in memories of childhood. In these memories, drum rolls become a signifier of difference:

‘Can’t they play an instrument less boring than the harp?’ they asked the Fathers. ‘Only harp and not even one little drum? How sad! This is why no black child would like to go to the Heaven of Whites; not to get bored with the harp!’¹⁶

This sentence expresses a soundscape of difference. Drums are musical instruments used in Senegal in the traditional spiritual ritual of the *n'deep*, and are signifiers of African musical traditions; while the harp is an instrument associated with the music of angels in Christian iconographic tradition. The binary opposition is between blacks and whites angels. The latter play the harp on walls of Christian missions that Øng attended when he was a child, with the aim of playing and watching films with other children. These memory cutaways are presented with a subtle humor. The *locus* of a defined identity is the space of memory placed in the migrant's subconscious.

However, as it has been noted elsewhere, the present tense makes this book not a novel of memories.¹⁷ The novel is recounted in a present tense and, although the plot is set in an imaginary city, all references are to present conditions of Africa and Lombardy. Thus, the present tense used in the text highlights the present time we are living in, namely our globalized societies characterized by mixed identities. In addition, the present is the time for action. *Io venditore di elefanti*, the first book by Pap Khouma, was written as a political document and was full of autobiographical elements; while this second book is an action novel. The plot is set in motion. First, Øng is in a plane, then he gets into a car, different means of transports are displacing the subject. The protagonist is involved in a plot of action with sexual intercourses, traffics and even a murder. Moreover, the novel presents some international mafia characters that are acting in the background and are dealing with weapons and boats, while even a civil war is coming closer to Taagh. The book expresses the

¹⁶ KHOUMA: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* 62: “Non potevano suonare uno strumento meno noioso dell’arpa?” aveva domandato ai Padri. “Solo arpa e nessun tamburino, che tristezza!” Ecco perché nessun bambino nero vuol andare nel paradiso dei bianchi, per non annoiarsi con l’arpa!”

¹⁷ LA TENDA: ‘Nonno Dio e gli spiriti’, available at http://www.latenda.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=159 (Milan 2 December 2005).

dynamism of contemporary globalized life, memories are just a sound from the past chanting in migrants' heads; sounds of past belonging.

5. Coming back to where one belongs

In this word of displacement, does the novel express the need to go back to the roots? Is a journey back home a quest to find again the place where one belongs and settle in nicely?

The impossibility of return for a migrant is a popular topic dealt with by the Italian literature of migration. According to the literary analysis of Raffaele Taddeo, in novels and short stories of the literature of migration one of the main reasons migrants cannot go back is the refusal of the community of origins.¹⁸ This impossibility of going back where one belongs to is also well-expressed in *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti*. Since his arrival, Øng's mother welcomes his son; however she keeps denying his identity as migrant. In particular, she seems not keen to learn in which country of Europe her son lives, and what his profession is. These are essential characteristics of a personal identity. Øng's new identity is refused by his family of origins. To come back does not necessarily mean to find a community of affects. The experience of migration of one family member has changed perspectives, and transformed the sense of belonging also inside the community of origins. The family of origin is not a welcoming community. The migrant has been transformed by the experience of migration; in addition, the family of origin is not like the one the migrant has left before. Not only place is seen as dis-placement; also time had an impact on migrant's belonging. The community distanced itself from migrant's memories of belonging.

It is important to highlight how processes of development and transformation took place also in the original community. This makes the community of origin different from memories which are stuck on the mind of migrants. Taagh is conceptualized as community of origin only on memories, and on the subconscious of the migrants. Øng's wife, his son and a choral character named the 'gossiping tongues' (*les mauvaises langues*) do not accept his return. Life of affects developed when he was away. Øng's son was born and grew up without seeing his father, and he is afraid of him. Øng's wife is with another man, although she keeps appearance by still living in the house of Øng's family with the child. Øng and his wife have been apart for longtime and they did not shared a great deal, so they have in common old memories and a child; however they seems incapable of affection and do not share a common project or a similar gaze on life. Øng's effort to come closer to his son and wife are not successful.

¹⁸ R. TADDEO: *La ferita di Odisseo. Il ritorno nella letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Nardò 2010).

Gork Mark and Elena Rossini are challenged as a couple by the return of Gork. Gork Mark is torn between the values of his wife Elena, and the principles of his mother. As Pap Khouma highlighted, these characters question the very concept of 'mixed couple':

What is a mixed couple? Is it a union between two people who were born in the same ethnic group? And what happens if, then, they have different life experiences in culturally diverse countries? Or could be defined a mix couple, a couple made up of people who have different ways of life? Where's the accent when we focus on 'mix'?¹⁹

Khouma believes that culture held a stronger power than ethnicity. According to him, a mixed couple is a couple with heterogeneous values and experience of belongings. Øng and his wife who remained in Senegal are a mixed couple despite belonging to the same ethnicity group. Gork and his wife have different skin colors, but they both belong to Lombardy. However, this is true until they get to Taagh, and Gork's sense of belonging is challenged. The *deus-ex-machina* of the novel that reworks 'affective belongings' and identitarian headaches is the ritual of the *n'deep*.

6. *N'deep* and conflicts of belonging

Tensions of changes in the sentimental way of life of visitors of Taagh are interrupted by the sounds of drums; the *n'deep* is the moment of boiling of these tensions. Here, the ritual exposes the contradictions of the plot, making tense situations to explode, and changing migrants' loving life. More precisely, with the ruling of drums of the *n'deep* there is an acceleration of events that will make a shift on the relationships of migrants with belongings to places, cultures, and affective groups. Gork Mark has been having a migraine since he came back to Taagh. He goes to the *n'deep* only because of his Toubab wife, Elena, who is curious about it. However, the unexpected happened: he is possessed. He spends days in a state of trance. During these days, things develop in his life. Elena has to go home to Gork's family alone with their child, and she is lost in cultural differences of everyday life. Firstly, she is not able to get used to a house always full of guests, which make it difficult for her to use the bathroom, and to eat. She does not belong to this crowded house. In addition, her mother in law insists on practicing circumcision on Elena's and Gork's child. Elena decides to send her child home to Bergamo, where he belongs. Then, she moves out from the family's house, and chose to stay in a hotel. Moreover, Elena does not belong to the culture of Taagh; thus, she does not believe in spirits. This makes it difficult for her to understand what is happening to Gork. She distances herself from the country of her husband. She feels isolated and one night she has sex with Øng.

¹⁹ R. BIANCHI: Interview with Pap Khouma, 30 March 2013.

This change also Øng's family life, as his wife found out and leaves him. In the meantime, rebels and a war are increasingly coming closer to Taagh. This pushes Elena towards the decision to go back where she belongs in Bergamo, with or without Gork who is still in trance. Although she is still his wife, the journey and the ritual have changed their relationship. Yet, she does not want to become Øng's partner (there is a funny scene of pursuit in the market that is a *topoi* of many Orientalist movies). This is not an African version of the plot of the movie *Casablanca*. The focus is not on romance, but on belonging to a world of emotions in motion. Here, the *n'deep* works on stuck emotions; reworking affective belongings according to emotions, rather than restructuring the subject within traditional family and community values. This is in contrast with Turner's understanding of the role of rituals in traditional societies. This might be because, as we said above, Taagh is no longer a traditional society, so the function of the ritual is more contingent, like the community where it is performed.

7. Belonging and moving

This is clear also if one analyses the role of rituals in reference with the values of the local community. Paradoxically, both Aunty Mané, who performs the *n'deep*, and the migrants of the novel, have controversial relations with the community of origin. They both struggle to be accepted. In the novel they are both a reality of the past; they do not fit in Taagh's social life. The ritual of *n'deep*, is far from strengthening community values; by contrast, it no longer belongs to the community. In particular, Aunty Mané is challenged by two different male authorities: the elderly of the mosque, and a Western doctor.

Firstly, the group of elderly men meeting at the mosque opposes the *n'deep* and tries to stop Aunty Mané healing practices. They go to Aunty Mané's home and she meets them in a studio that is decorated with posters of Sofia Loren (written with a 'ph', *Sophia*), Zeudi Araya, Giuliano Gemma's horse, Mandela and Claudia Cardinale. This would be an unusual environment for a healer of a traditional community; the space suggests that this is a globalized space. Aunty Mané offers her guests some drinks and keeps wishing peace to everybody, and every living creature. Men interrupt her abruptly: "Aby Mané you have to stop with the *n'deep* and with your mania to bother spirits. *N'deep* is a mortal sin."²⁰ Aunty Mané explains that she works with spirits (*rap*) who are part of their traditional myths in order to alleviate the suffering of people, as it had always been done in that place. Elderly men, reply accusing her of being pagan. According to their views, pagans and

²⁰ KHOUMA: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* 136: "Aby Mané, la devi smettere col *n'deep* e con la tua mania d'infastidire gli spiriti. Il *n'deep* è peccato mortale."

masons are similar as they both will go to hell. It seems that also the *n'deep* struggle to belong in Taagh.

At this point, the dialogue takes a twist. Aunty Mané invites elderly men to leave her house, and to deal with the devastating political situation of Sahaél, instead of worrying about spirits. She says that they are governed by corrupted autocrats who are all male; she defines them as 'impaired' (*carenti*) male. Young male are at war, and the people are tired. She menaces to take lead of Sahaél's women in order to give a positive destiny to the country: "to save it from you men."²¹ This can be seen as a variation from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.²² Indeed, elderly of the mosque represents the conservative patriarchy that blocks political development of Taagh, and healing through the ritual. This is the aspect of the novel which has been more discussed in book launches. This gendered political dimension is intentional, and in line with the author's thought. Pap Khouma underlines how positive work for development of countries in Africa is usually carried out by women; while men are dealing with power, strange traffics, war and corruption.²³ His views on gender and development have close affinities with Vandana Shiva's concept of eco-feminism.²⁴

In addition, another man challenges Aunty Mané's practices. This represents two relevant powers, namely the power white colonizers who have superimposed "modernization" and Western medicine to traditional societies. The doctor is an important character in the novel Professeur Jean Dumaison, director of the psychiatric hospital of Taagh, wants to close the *n'deep*. His behavior typifies the attitude of the West towards traditional medicine and rituals. At the beginning Western colonizers tried to suppress the. Later on, an anthropological and medical interest became predominant and rituals were studied. So, also Professeur Jean Dumaison starts to study the *n'deep* like Turner.

In my opinion, shifts of behavior of this character are key to understand the role of the ritual in this novel, as well as its positive message of hope. Also the surname of the doctor is significant: '*maison*' means house/home and Professor is '*Du' maison*, someone at home, familiar. Thus, one needs to deal with presences that have made home of your country. His character mirrors our work as Western interested in the Other, and yet provided with imperfect tolls.

Or, the doctor's name could be a signifier that one could be at home everywhere if s/he is able to rework emotional and cultural belongings, by accepting practices of reconciliation of cultural conflicts like the *n'deep*. Surprisingly, Dumaison does something more radical than just studying. He asks Aunty Mané

²¹ KHOUMA: *Nonno Dio e gli spiriti danzanti* 137: "[...] per salvarlo da voi uomini."

²² ARISTOPHANES: *Lysistrata* [411 BC] (Oxford 1987).

²³ BIANCHI: Interview to Pap Khouma, 30 March 2013.

²⁴ S. VANDANA: *Staying alive. Women, ecology and development* (New Delhi 1988).

to perform the *n'deep* in his hospital. This is deeply significant as a way to reconcile medical with traditional knowledge in a dialectic relationship. It is also significant of a mutate relationship of power between male and female, as well as of ex-colonizer and ex-colonized subjects. Through the ritual, the space of medicine is made sacred again, and sacred and science meet. In dealing with the relation between medicine and traditional healing practices, the novel also stages what Kenneth Thompson defined as the dialectic between sacralization and secularization.²⁵

The *n'deep* transforms itself situating its healing power in a special space across boundaries of medical/traditional knowledge, as well as across power boundaries of colonized subject/colonizer. In other words, not only disenchantment but re-enchantment characterizes post-traditional societies.²⁶ The multiple perspectives, the diverse gazes of the characters and the diverse space is the space of narration between Europe (or Italy) and Africa (or Senegal). The *n'deep* helps these perspectives and these contradictions to emerge. There is no belonging: there is no return for the migrant to a reality of the past that exists only in sound memories. There is no return to pre-globalized traditional communities. However, there is the possibility of making science and traditional knowledge both as instruments at the service of a shared common space of encounter. The *n'deep* shows a possibility of a dialectic relationship.

Migrants passing across situations of micro-conflicts have the possibility to change and to heal; then, they are suddenly drown elsewhere. They cannot belong, they have to keep moving. All the characters are displaced again back to Italy for different and contingent reasons. In the case of the protagonist Øng/Duwala, the accusation of having assaulted his partner in Milan, Federica Colombo, would take him back to another trouble to face. We do not know what will happen to him and we are not hoping for a second book that will explain. The final is open, and yet, somehow, it closes in a perfect circular way: from plane to plane. This movement across space and cultures is not ending with a settled finale, like the movement of people across our global world. Characters are always on the move. However, as the novel shows, sometimes there is a space that becomes a sacred space of sharing. There, a new form of liminality is possible: liminality across cultures. In this space, the ruling of drums can be heard in hospitals with angels drawn on walls. Their sound have healing powers for the global community and the individuals belonging to it.

²⁵ T. KENNETH: 'Secularization and sacralization', in J.C. ALEXANDER & P. SZTOMPKA: *Rethinking progress: Movements, forces, and ideas at the end of the 20th century* (Boston 1990) 161-181.

²⁶ S.J. SHERWOOD: 'Narrating the social: Postmodernism and the drama of democracy', in *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 4 (1994) 69-88; Z. BAUMAN: *Postmodern ethics* (Cambridge, MA 1993).