

Werewere Liking and the Aesthetics of Necessity: Re-Considering Culture and Development in Post-Colonial Africa

Introduction

“If literature is about life, it must surely have a bearing on strategies which are intended to improve the quality of that life, which is really what development is all about” (Eustace Palmer, “African Literature: Its Role in Development” p.38).

In this study I contend that art, in its multiple manifestations, can be put to use as a vector of social development, and will further this claim by examining artist Werewere Liking’s activities in literature, theatre, and her community as efforts contributing to African development. A prominent characteristic of Liking’s art and highly emblematic of her political engagement in the African cultural scene is the practical implementation of her aesthetic ideals, her striking ability to move from discourse to practice. The *Ki-Yi M’Bock* Village that she created provides Africans with a dynamic metaphor of their continent, to be emulated and reproduced on a grander scale. Recognizing that all movements must begin at an individual, cellular level, Werewere Liking’s activities as writer and artist overlap with those of the social activist and visionary. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of African youth and the urgency of inculcating them with the wisdom and values of their ancestors in order to ground and re-connect them with their native roots, from which they have become detached. Guided by an *aesthetic of necessity*, Liking’s project is centered on African cultural and social issues, and is put into practice as a response to the continent’s developmental needs.

In 1985 Liking founded the Village *Ki-Yi M’Bock* (signifying «Ultimate knowledge» in Liking’s native Bassa language) in the bustling capital of Côte d’Ivoire. Today the Ki-Yi is a co-operative urban “village” within the heart of Abidjan and home to some fifty-odd resident artists of diverse traditions, ages, and origins: dancers, actors, puppeteers, sculptors, painters, costume designers, sound and light technicians, and musicians, among others. Liking approaches her undertakings from a materialist perspective, envisioning her village—as her writings, painting, and music—for a public who will concretely participate in the realization of her pan-African dream. “I needed to see my dreams

materialize...I needed actions to back up my theories,” she explains when questioned about the undertaking of such an enterprise.¹

From the outset, my position vis-à-vis Werewere Liking should be made clear. I find her work engaging and important, worthwhile on an aesthetic as well as human level. I personally know this artist, have collaborated with her and the people with whom she works in a variety of ways, and have invested time and resources to support her project. My approach is accordingly multi-pronged: literary, anthropological, as well as personal, and I would like to see my role as one of *facilitator* for helping make Werewere Liking’s voice be heard by new audiences. I support the idea that “A shift may be underway which takes the anthropologist away from mediating between people and projects towards facilitating better communication between communities and outsiders” (Gardner and Lewis 48). Perhaps this study can participate in fostering such a shift while recognizing the impossibility of extracting the personal from the political and intellectual in one’s research.

Werewere Liking is not only a playwright, poet, and novelist of the Francophone African avant-garde, she is also a painter with an impressive list of international exhibits, a singer in the Ki-Yi group *Les Reines Mères* with various recordings and tours, director of and actress in a troupe that has performed in a wide variety of festivals and cities spanning four continents, a film actress and director, an expert in traditional African sculpture, costume designer, jeweler... Through visits with Liking in Abidjan and several meetings in Paris over the past three years, I have observed *in situ* and abroad the artist admired for her scrupulous work ethic, tireless activism, and resolute commitment to the pan-African ideal.² Her efforts are carried out in a spirit of historical urgency—clearly linked to the need to recount and legitimize the pre-colonial aesthetic and spiritual heritage of her continent—and yet

¹ “J’avais besoin de voir mes rêves se concrétiser . . . Il me fallait des actions pour prouver mes théories.” From personal interview with Michelle Mielly, 2 June 2002.

² As Irène Assiba D’Almeida notes, Liking is “a Cameroonian artiste in the fullest sense of the word; poet, playwright, theater and movie actress, novelist, essayist, painter, jeweler, and researcher. She stands out among African writers, male and female alike, for the diversity of her oeuvre, as well as for the innovative nature of her writing . . . She has been very critical of contemporary African society, where she can see no

simultaneously strive to create and innovate works for an audience beyond Africa's borders. A self-described "utopian" with didactic aims, Liking declares that

Notre vie, nous nous efforçons de la rêver nous-mêmes comme une utopie, c'est-à-dire libérée de tout ce qui bloque notre continent aujourd'hui □ l'ignorance de nos propres cultures et notre histoire, le manque de remise en question des coutumes désormais inefficaces et de réévaluation de nos acquis, le blocage de circulation des énergies africaines à l'intérieur de l'Afrique, la trop grande dépendance de nos moindres initiatives des aides extérieures. Nous avons voulu que notre village soit panafricain, c'est-à-dire rassemblant des cultures de diverses origines africaines, les sortant du cadre tribal ou national pour faire une culture continentale. (Miller p. 238, note 20).

As a Cameroonian woman living in Côte d'Ivoire—traditionally a country of immigration, currently troubled by ethno-nationalist politics and military mutinies—Liking remains 'on the edge' in Africa as in the West, and we will keep in mind the implications of the immediate political climate in Côte d'Ivoire with regards to her writing and productions.

A Singular Trajectory: Biographical Sketches

Born in the village of Makak, located between Douala and Yaoundé in Bondé, South-Central Cameroon on May 1, 1950 into a family of musicians of the Bassa ethnic tradition, Werewere Liking-Gnepo (née Eddy Nicole Njock) was initiated early on to her ancestral traditions by her paternal grandparents, who designated her with the coveted role of 'priestess' of the Bassa philosophy and ritual practices. It was in fact her paternal grandmother, Ngo Biyong, who brought her into the various Bassa secret societies, orally handed down to her dozens of instructive, traditional tales and instilled in her the sacred knowledge of the cosmos, or *mbok*. The year of her birth marks an important turning point in her country's history, the end of the war decade and the beginning of anti-colonial, Maoist-inspired revolutionary movements such as the UPC (Union des Populations du Cameroun) under the inspired leadership of the martyr Ruben Um Nyobé, equally of the Bassa people.³ The

plan for the future . . . Therefore, she has devised a personal plan of cultural revival in which art and ritual play a pivotal role" (*Francophone African Women Writers* 225).

³ For more historical background on Cameroon's independence movements, see Richard Bjornson's monumental study, *The African Quest for Freedom and Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience*.

nationalist independence movements that were to sweep across Africa during the entire decade held a prominent beginning in Cameroon, the only ex-colony of France in sub-Saharan Africa to take up arms in its struggle for sovereignty—as in Algeria. Werewere directly bore witness to the forces of change leading to her country’s independence in 1960. Her writing has continually reflected the tensions and paradoxes inherent to this transit between Africa and the West, between an ancestral wisdom and a modernity offering new forms of subjective and collective identity to women in particular and to Africans in general. “Je pense que je suis moi-même un produit post-colonial. J’étais encore portée dans les maquis pendant les résistances et les luttes pour les indépendances. Mes écrits ne peuvent donc pas ne pas porter toutes les contradictions de cette époque-là” (Interview with W. Liking 2 June 2002). □

Liking is selective in offering specific information about her formal education, and strives in general for discretion and respect for her silence on the subject. Irène D’Almeida notes that Liking “has deliberately chosen to blur biographers’ charts, especially in regards to her private life and academic training.”⁴ What has been pieced together from interviews, articles, and other exchanges is that Werewere Liking is essentially self-taught.⁵ She completed at least three years of elementary education, and then was taken out of school by her father. By age twelve she was married according to traditional custom; before her thirteenth birthday she gave birth to a daughter, Lydie Germaine Ngo Njock, and by age fifteen she had begun to write poetry.⁶ Around October-November of 1966,

⁴ Cf. p. ix in “Introduction” for Marjolijn de Jaeger’s translation of *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail*.

⁵ See Liking’s interview with Sennen Andriamirado for additional commentary on this subject. John Conteh-Morgan explains that “At a time when many Cameroonian girls of her age were being initiated into the mysteries of Western culture through formal education, [Liking] was instead being initiated into those of the many secret cults of her Bassa people. It was much later, rather like the Senegalese novelist Sembène Ousmane, that she taught herself to read and write in French, skills which she subsequently used to explore for the stage those myths and ritual ceremonies that were such a vital part of her early experience” (Conteh-Morgan 1994, p. 211).

⁶ Cottenet and Makward assert that Liking gave birth quite young to her two children, at age fourteen and then at fifteen respectively, in what they describe as a “jeunesse quelque peu bohème et mouvementée” (382). However, Werewere has confirmed that her first pregnancy was at age 12 and indeed, her daughter is exactly 12 years younger than she. Her second birth is situated around 1975, when she was 15.

Werewere Liking had started earning her living as a featured singer in night clubs. The name *Werewere*, given to Eddy Nicole Njock by her parents in-law at age twelve, is in fact a deformation of the English adjective *velvety*—Cameroon’s national languages are both English and French—meant to reflect in her person the qualities of the fabric’s pleasing softness and prized beauty.

Werewere’s whereabouts between the mid-1960’s and the early 1970’s remain a bit vague, but we do know that she had a son, Lem, with a second husband, Albert Liking, that she launched a successful musical career, and that she began to frequent Cameroonian intellectuals of the post-independence Africa. By 1968, Liking had begun to paint, thus beginning a fertile, genre-crossing career. Between 1969 and 1971, Liking worked as a journalist in Cameroon, and during this period she was invited to give various exhibits of her paintings. 1974 marks the beginning of her research on oral traditions and traditional theatre techniques in Cameroon, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire, specifically the didactic techniques used in the initiation rituals of various ethnic groups in these countries. Following this period, Liking began to write poetry as well:

Pour commencer, j’ai écrit des poèmes sur lesquels je mettais des musiques. Cela donnait des petites chansons. Puis j’ai cessé de mettre des musiques et quelques amis m’ont encouragé à publier...cela a donné *On ne raisonne pas le venin*, publié en 1977, aux Éditions Saint-Germain-des-Près...Parallèlement à ce travail d’écriture, je faisais de la peinture. Or la peinture suscite une réflexion a posteriori. Elle invite à la réflexion. J’ai alors écrit des choses qui devaient être des liens entre la poésie et la peinture. (Liking, interview with Magnier, 17).

As D’Almeida notes, Liking “was born at a time when it was finally possible for women to write, to break the silence culturally imposed on them”, and her publication in 1977 places her “among the first Francophone African women to come to writing” (ibid. p. xi). This early endeavor is all the more compelling as it is the first indication of Liking’s direct contact with the French *métropole*; during the period 1976-78 she indeed spent time in France where she exposed her paintings in Parisian galleries and met other artists. While studies by Herzberger-Fofana as well as Rouch and Clavreuil contend that during this period Liking undertook literary studies in France, specializing in drama, there are no diplomas to speak of and Liking herself has never openly mentioned a formal

course of study in France.⁷ When one then places Liking alongside her African sisters and fellow writers, the exceptional nature of her career becomes more readily apparent. Not only is Werewere Liking's book of poetry, with its 1977 date of publication, the second such undertaking by a woman of Cameroon—following Jeanne Ngo Mai's elegies, *Poèmes sauvages et lamentations* (1967)—it also places her, along with Lydie Dooh-Bunya who published *La brise du jour* the same year, as the fifth Cameroonian woman to publish a literary work.⁸ She is evidently the only woman writer from Cameroon who did not enjoy the privilege of some form of higher education—whether in Africa or in Europe; and, unlike her compatriots, she did not set foot in Europe until well into her twenties. Similarly significant Cameroonian women novelists such as Thérèse Kuoh-Makoury, Delphine Zanga Tsogo, or Marie-Angèle Kingué completed graduate studies in Paris, Toulouse, Great-Britain and the U.S., respectively, and the feminist *enfant terrible* of Cameroonian letters, Calixthe Beyala, of more modest origins, was recognized as a student of promise before completing her baccalaureate in Douala.

Werewere explains that such a multi-faceted and markedly precocious career—by age eighteen she was already a poet, singer, painter, and mother—is a fundamental aspect of her native culture, which possesses a natural proclivity for artistic proficiency and creativity. Describing such, she says that such a trajectory was undertaken

... par simple sensibilité individuelle, et par réceptivité à mon environnement. J'ai toujours été dans un milieu où la poésie traditionnelle, rituellement déclamée par de grands aèdes dans la cour de mes grands parents, ou chantée par des prêtresses du *Mbéé*, du *Nding* ou du *Koo*, ont bercé mon enfance dans la cour de mon grand père. Pour la Bassa d'origine que je suis, dont l'art traditionnel premier, le "Mbock", est de tout verbe, de philosophie, de poésie, de mélodies et de rythmes confondus, mon art est tout simplement "naturel", essentiellement évident, c'est-à-dire qu'il fait partie de ma vie. (Interview with Michelle Mielly 1 December 2002).

⁷ Cf. *Littérature Féminine Francophone D'Afrique Noire* by Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana p. 433, or Alain Rouch and Gérard Clavreuil, *Littératures Nationales d'Écriture Française* p. 79.

⁸ If one respects the following chronology: (1) 1956—Marie-Claire Matip, *Ngonda* (2) 1967—Jeanne Ngo Mai, *Poèmes sauvages et lamentations*. (3) 1969—Thérèse Kuoh-Makoury, *Rencontres essentielles* and (4) 1972—Tabitha Yonko Nana, *La Reine*.

Writing from such an unprecedented, original perspective in terms of women's literary history and African arts, Liking produced with *On ne raisonne pas le venin* an initial articulation of what were to become trademark *topoi* that would be carried on throughout the rest of her writings: the verb as an instrument of combat, the calling to action of African youth, the need to regain harmony within an originary space of cosmic chaos, the importance for Africans to recognize and cultivate their sacred ancestral past, and, finally, an emphasis on a modern, syncretic African society that has undergone a healing process. Liking voices here her longstanding ideas about the relationship resulting from four centuries of African domination by the West, reasoning that if Africa is to recover its true identity, it must undergo a spiritual, transformational experience in order to rid itself of the poison or *venin* that such domination has injected into the African people's hearts. Above all, Liking wants to give Africa a voice, to fill its silent voids—a task undertaken in earnest by many of her peers in their novels and dramatic works, among them the Congolese Sony Labou Tansi who once declared in his inimitable fashion “J'écris parce que je suis six cents ans de silence”.⁹

During the period preceding this publication, Liking had come into contact with French ethnographer and future stage director Marie-José Hourantier, who was conducting research on ritual practices in Cameroon, and it was with Hourantier that Liking first came to France in 1976.¹⁰ Following this determining encounter, Hourantier wrote the preface for *On ne raisonne pas le venin*, and her laudatory tone indicates the beginning of a productive artistic collaboration between the two:

Avec Werewere, jeune poétesse camerounaise, la pensée quitte le terroir natal pour s'élever vers les problèmes de toute une civilisation à la recherche de son équilibre. Comme l'art africain est fonctionnel, cette poésie camerounaise annonce l'action, respire une passion sans cesse renouvelé

⁹ As cited in Géraldine de Catheu's article “Francophonie—En passant par Limoges”. *Le Quotidien* (Limoges) 9 October 1990.

¹⁰ Liking's first trip to France, however, was not primarily a cultural excursion. She went to Paris in March 1976 «□.. sur un brancard en évacuation sanitaire, à l'hôpital Cochin où je suis restée six (6) mois et où j'ai perdu un rein ...Je sus revenue un mois pour un contrôle médical fin juillet début août 1977, je ne sais plus trop...□ (Interview with Michelle Mielly 1 December 2002). However, some time during that same year Liking did manage to participate in a couple of painting exhibitions organized on her behalf, notably at private galleries in Geneva.

pour la vie...on rêve à l'éclosion d'une société neuve où s'harmoniseraient les valeurs traditionnelles et la haute technicité moderne (*On ne raisonne pas le venin* 8).

Apparently, Liking was in France when her book went to press, and fear of repressive measures taken against her by the authoritarian regime of Ahmadou Ahidjo—who had a history of imprisoning those writers and intellectuals who did not express his government's official perspective— kept her from returning there to live.

On ne raisonne pas le venin, dont le premier spécimen venait de parvenir à mon époux au Cameroun, a semblé soulever quelques inquiétudes par rapport à la censure et mon époux m'avait alors demandé d'attendre de voir les réactions officielles avant de rentrer. Il n'y eut pas de réactions officielles, mais nous apprîmes que j'aurais à répondre devant les services de renseignement de certaines de mes "allégations"... (Interview *ibid.*)

Liking therefore went directly to Mali in November of 1977, where she and Hourantier spent a year studying Bambara healer-priestesses of the Djinn cult. During this period they created an ambitious African theatre/ethnographic arts movement that they named the *théâtre-rituel*. The two went on to publish over seven collaborative works (theatre, oral tales, and essays), and moved together to Côte d'Ivoire in 1978, where they have remained ever since.

As a result of the oppressive cultural atmosphere in Cameroon, Werewere Liking chose to live several thousands of kilometers to the north of her home country. Even though she does not consider herself an exile, by leaving Cameroon and later writing dissident works often parodying the African political order as corrupt, totalitarian, even depraved,¹¹ she joined along the ranks of fellow countrymen Daniel Ewandé, David Kom, or Mongo Béti who refused to present the dictator Ahidjo as a national hero and accordingly left the country. Along these lines, Richard Bjornson notes that although “the Ahidjo government carefully monitored publications within the country, it could not

¹¹ From her earliest writings Liking has brandished a broad-spanning critique of African leadership and political practices. All of her theatre writings—beginning with *La queue du diable* (in *Du rituel à la scène*, 1979) continually evoke the dire necessity of purification and healing for the continent through a purging of the political consciousness. This is also true of her novels, especially *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* and *L'amour-cent-vies* in which she caricatures the corrupt, Machiavellian regimes that prevent African development and maintain Africans in a state of constant dependency.

prevent Cameroonians living abroad from writing about contemporary history in ways that contradicted its version of the truth” (1991, p, 144). Once in Abidjan, Liking began working as a research fellow in the ILENA (Institut de Littérature et d’Esthétique Nègro-Africaine) at the Université d’Abidjan, and Hourantier began her long tenure at the École Normale Supérieure there, where she and Liking created the ARETNA (Atelier de Recherche en Esthétique Théâtrale Nègro-Africaine) among their many other activities. At some point the relationship between the two grew beyond the professional sphere, although no precise dates are available on what has now become a delicate subject to breach with either. What is certain is that when the two published *A la rencontre de...* in 1980, a spirit of love, cultural curiosity, and reconciliation between the races dominated the allegorical dialogue that they portrayed between *l’Occident* and *l’Afrique*. As Werewere wrote ritual-based stage productions for Hourantier the director, and with student actors, she began to question the efficiency of short-term artistic projects in an academic setting with young people whose commitment to art remained limited in scope. An increasing discontent with the intellectuals surrounding her becomes apparent in *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* (1983) possibly her most significant contribution to African women’s writing and a breakthrough novel in her trajectory as a writer. Liking’s parody of pedantic *intellectualisants*—epitomized by the ‘faux Nègre’ Babou and the ‘faux Blanc’ Grozi—is, according to conversations with the writer herself, in fact a masked parody of Marie-José Hourantier and an unnamed and male Ivoirian artist, respectively. Liking ridicules the extremes of what could be called “the emulation of difference” between Blacks and Whites in the post-colonial setting of Lunäi, a dystopian representation of Africa: “Grozi et Babou c’est un spécimen des couples maudits qui hantent Lunäi. Prisonniers du temps ils s’y sont retrouvés irrésistiblement impitoyablement pour *les dettes qu’ils avaient contractées l’un envers l’autre* et pour la toile que leurs émotions avaient inextricablement tissée” (*Elle sera de jaspe* 14) [my emphasis]. Apparently eager to break out of a similarly ‘neo-colonial’ relationship of dependency between herself and Hourantier, Liking strove for greater autonomy in the theatre. She wished to begin directing the plays herself, instead of only writing the texts to be produced and directed by

Hourantier. Fierce disagreement ensued, and by 1985, Liking ended their passionate and intense relationship, partly in order to explore and develop a more wide-reaching theatre that incorporates but moves beyond the ritual form alone, and partly to prove to herself and to the community that she was indeed capable of writing and directing independently of Hourantier.¹² Following what became known in Abidjan as an ‘epic’ split between the two, Liking left her position at the Université d’Abidjan and went on to focus her energies solely on the Village Ki-Yi, which she had founded with Hourantier in 1983. One will note that for Liking, the date given for the Ki-Yi Village’s inception is always 1985, when she and Hourantier went their separate ways. The two have had little or no further contact, and Marie-José has gone on to found her own experimental theatre troupe (the *Bin Kadi So*) with her students at the École Normale Supérieure in Abidjan.¹³

¹² As Liking explained to an audience in New York, “Le Groupe Ki-Yi Mbock a été créé en 1985 pendant que les Intellectuels, Critiques et Journalistes Africains faisaient encore couler beaucoup d'encre pour prouver, certains que le théâtre africain n'existait pas, et d'autres, que si ! Il s'agissait alors de se démarquer en tant que pratiquants, pratiquer jusqu'au professionnalisme sur les plateformes de compétitivité internationale, en se disant que si le théâtre africain n'existait pas, eh bien, il fallait l'inventer!” In the University of Western Australia’s African Literature website (<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/AFLIT/Ineditwerewere.html>), TEXTES INEDITS (unpublished texts) series, “Les Atouts panafricains de l'acteur du Groupe Ki-Yi Mbock d'Abidjan,” A lecture/demonstration given by Werewere Liking in New York, organized by ARTS INTERNATIONAL in June 1996.

¹³ My separate exchanges with both Hourantier and Liking indicate that although a certain amount of acrimony continues to exist between the two, each monitors, not without interest, the activities of the other. Hourantier, with funding from the École Normale Supérieure, has been able to follow a more experimental path in her theatre research, creating with her drama students productions not intended for the general audience of non-initiates. Liking, while recognizing the importance of an artistic élite and while continuing to produce from a research-oriented perspective, has moved toward a more mainstream approach that Hourantier disdainfully calls “théâtre de boulevard”. Clearly marking her divergence from Liking, Hourantier stated in 2000 on the editorial page of *L’Arc a dit*, a theatre arts journal that she created: “...le public d’Arkadi n’est plus considéré comme une masse anonyme mais comme une famille venant partager des expériences, apprendre, comprendre et vivre en compagnie du Beau rendu “intelligible” tout en se donnant des raisons d’en être supérieurement ému. Nous avons avant tout affaire à un “art dégagé”, libéré de toute pression, des bonnes et mauvaises causes, proposant comme un patchwork des paroles fortes d’artistes qui pénètrent le fond de l’humain” (Hourantier 2000, p. 3). This is clearly in opposition to Liking, clearly and vocally devoted to a “good cause” that of assisting African youth. Liking, on the other hand, has proven somewhat contradictory at times in her aesthetic objectives. In a 1989 interview, she regarded herself as an intermediary between the elite and the masses “...ce sont les gens qui décident au nom de l’Afrique qui m’intéressent. Pour moi, il faut préparer cette «élite» avec laquelle nous sommes obligés de communiquer. Parce que je sais que mon théâtre est souvent compris par des analphabètes, je crois que, tout compte fait, j’ai un pied à la base et un pied au sommet. L’essentiel en réalité est de laisser des choses pour l’histoire” (Interview with Tagne 1996). Today Liking seems to have moved closer towards a “total” theatre experience for the masses, and we will examine this in our discussion of the Aesthetic of Necessity.

The involvement with Marie-José Hourantier can therefore be considered as an essential, powerful, and determining factor in Werewere Liking's evolution as an artist, and the influence that they mutually exerted upon each other cannot be underestimated. One can assume that their collaboration fueled Liking's drive for artistic legitimacy and spurred her to call into question imposed Western models of culture and development as she sought to devise and implement her own, adapted for the African context. As a brilliant woman with no formal education credentials, Liking must have benefited from the exposure to her French counterpart's scholarly research on ritual practices in Cameroon and Mali, and reciprocally, Hourantier clearly needed an African partner initiated in the mystical ritual practices she was studying in order to facilitate and legitimize her work in the field, and to serve as an intermediary and interpreter. The indelible imprint that each left on the other can be read as an emblematic incursion toward the profound inner alterity at the heart of the ambiguous relationship between post-colonial subjects and their Western counterparts. Further discussions in Chapter Three will explore how this alterity, as a manifestation of the *Unheimlich*, is a constitutive element of Liking's writing.

By all accounts, Werewere Liking has demonstrated exceptional talent, and has proven her ability to create and produce over the long term, steadily mounting multiple, large-scale productions from 1987 to 2002 to go on to be presented in international festivals across the globe, often to critical acclaim (Cf. Appendix I for detailed list). Several of her theatrical works—such as *Dieu-Chose*, *La veuve dylemme*, *Quelque chose Afrique*, *Sunjata*, or *Berçouses d'éveil*—remain unpublished, although well-received by the international public. While numerous obstacles hinder the African writer's publication opportunities, it may well be that the polyvalent, multi-faceted nature of Liking's dramatic scenarios—as musical, multi-lingual, highly visual productions entailing spectator participation—create an additional challenge to publishing her written drama. Liking has often affirmed that the text itself is only one aspect of her theatre, and isolating it could thus undermine the

interdependent nature of her ambitious projects for the stage.¹⁴ The artist has nevertheless managed to clear many such hurdles, publishing, in Europe, North America, and Africa, at least eight dramatic works, with two translations in English, one in Italian, and more currently underway. She has put out four acclaimed novels with a fifth awaiting publication, and along with Hourantier she transcribed and edited two traditional initiation tales from the Bassa culture. Four of her essays on art and literature have been published, and a fifth—*Ntorol Tchorot*—is awaiting its day in print. Liking's publication activity was at its peak between 1979-1984, when she was able to churn out three to four texts per year while simultaneously staging performances of her plays. With the full-fledged creation of the Ki-Yi Village arts cooperative in 1985 and the sacrifices that it entailed, Liking's written production forcibly took a back seat to the performing and visual arts, and yet she has since clearly demonstrated a determination to forge ahead with the novel and essay forms.

Werewere Liking has gained the respect of her peers in Abidjan for her productivity and social activism, and is currently co-directing a pan-African epic play, *Sogolon Kédjou*, with prominent Ivoirian professor and playwright Bernard Zadi Zaourou. There are indications that over the past ten years or so she has begun to receive long-overdue recognition from the West. In 1991 Liking received the French *Prix Arletty* for her work in the theatre and was named *Officier de l'ordre culturel* in Côte d'Ivoire. The following year Jack Lang, then the French Minister of Culture, invited her to Paris to decorate her *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres*, and in 1993 the University of Alberta, Canada, awarded her the Fonlon-Nichols prize for Literary Excellence. In 1997 Liking received the prestigious appointment to France's *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie*, its High Council of Francophone Cultures. She regularly receives invitations for solo performances at book fairs and music and poetry festivals worldwide, and has multiple translations of her work in English and in Italian currently underway by different scholars. In 2001 the eminent German choreographer Pina

¹⁴ Liking in fact recently intimated that she has decided to no longer publish her plays, explaining that “Idéalement, mon théâtre, c’est un film, on ne peut pas lire mes textes, il faut les voir. Il y a un monde entre le spectacle et le texte.” (Interview with Liking 2 June 2002).

Bausch selected the *Wanda-Yi*, one of the Ki-Yi's modules of children dancers, to tour with her company in Germany and Alsace, and she is now serving as choreographic counsel for the *Sogolon* production. Most recently Liking was selected as laureate of the Netherlands' 2000 Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development award, whose website describes her as a "true *animatrice culturelle*", and a "creative personality in theater, dance, and literature...she galvanizes the cultural scene in Abidjan."¹⁵ The Dutch embassy in Abidjan has provided continued assistance to the Ki-Yi Village through this fund, financing ongoing production costs over the past few years and providing, along with the French embassy "une bouffée d'oxygène" in an otherwise difficult cultural and economic climate.¹⁶

It is not without a certain degree of paradox that one of Liking's most reliable and steady sources of financial and material support has been the Centre Culturel Français of Abidjan, an administration of the French Embassy, which, upon the request of President Jacques Chirac, personally impressed by Liking's unique and challenging project, provided dedicated funding for the construction of a new, modern theatre at the Ki-Yi Village. In addition, the CCF has continually promoted and assisted Liking's theatre initiatives for a number of years, helping her set long-term objectives for autonomy and the continued promotion of her oeuvre. When the MASA 2003 Festival was cancelled, the CCF stepped in and offered Liking a contractual agreement for use of its theatre and guaranteed promotion of the *Sogolon Kédjou* production.¹⁷ It is therefore highly unfortunate that since January 26, 2003, the

¹⁵ Dutch embassy officials in Abidjan closely follow Liking's activities and remain active supporters. Cf. http://www.princeclausfund.nl/source_eng/news/2000_were.html

¹⁶ Bénié Wa Bénié explains that "La bouffée d'oxygène vient du côté des Ambassades dont celle de la France pour les dortoirs des enfants et certaines institutions internationales telles que la Fondation Prince Claus (Pays Bas) qui a apporté son aide dans les ateliers de formation (marionnettes, danses, percussions, théâtres, etc.)" (8).

¹⁷ The MASA (Marché des Arts du Spectacle Africain), is a biennial event in Abidjan where a significant number of African groups in the performing arts are showcased, selected, and purchased by international buyers from across the globe. Originally programmed for the week of March 1-8th 2003, the current situation in Côte d'Ivoire forced its cancellation, thus throwing into question the possibilities for the Ki-Yi company's originally planned tour for 2003-2004. For more information see <http://masa.francophonie.org/masa2003/index>. I have a copy of the contract signed November 15, 2002 between the CCF (headed by Jean-Marc Fratani) and the Ki-Yi Pan-African foundation which provided

day that angry anti-French rioters ransacked its building, the CCF has been forced to close its doors.¹⁸ Liking's cultural organization finds itself therefore in a contradictory and highly precarious position: operating independently of African state interests, it nevertheless remains partially dependent on assistance from the "métropole" or colonial "center" in order to carry out and further its promotion of African arts. Now that the continued presence and assistance of those Western donors has been greatly jeopardized by recent events, the exact nature of the Ki-Yi's contradictory location on Africa's cultural map is changing, and the direction of its future uncertain at best.

The Critical Constellation

What is the scope of current scholarship on Werewere Liking and how does it fit into the bigger critical picture of Francophone literature? The growth of modern African literatures and the development of Western and African critical models for their study can only be considered in their loaded historical context: in other words, within the post-colonial struggle for legitimacy and agency in the cultural, social, and political spheres. This study is situated within this dynamic and fertile ground. The transition from a 'discovery' mode of Africa by the West to one of 'recovery' by Africans themselves—with the *Négritude* movement as a prominent point of departure—provided a prelude to the independence movements that swept across the continent in the 1950's and 60's. As noted earlier, Werewere Liking, born in the midst of pre-independence Cameroon in 1950, was a direct heir to this ongoing struggle for legitimacy and agency. This political legacy, coupled with an initiation at an early age to the ancestral Bassa philosophy and spiritual practices, has provided her with a rich and vibrant palette from which to conceive her art. Therefore, when she states that "Le

financing of the *Sogolon* production as well as promotional materials and use of the CCF's large theatre in downtown Abidjan.

¹⁸ The CCF has reduced its website to a single page with a photo of a half-burned minivan placed just outside its doors, with the date "26 janvier 2003" spray-painted across its door. The photo contains the following caption "SUITE A L'AGRESSION DONT IL A ETE L'OBJET LE 26 JANVIER 2003, LE CENTRE CULTUREL FRANCAIS D'ABIDJAN EST FERME JUSQU'A NOUVEL AVIS info@ccfabidjan.net". (see <http://www.ccfabidjan.net>). The anti-French rioting was apparently a result of demonstrations against France's mediation in Côte d'Ivoire's current struggle between the government of Laurent Gbagbo and the opposing northern rebels. French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin

passé de l’Afrique, c’est le futur du monde”¹⁹, she expresses the paradox inherent to her own artistic production and to this process of cultural recovery.

Scholars in Africa, France, the United States, and Canada have undertaken studies of Liking’s work, and, in terms of publications alone, their numbers have increasingly grown throughout the 1990’s until today. Although Liking has not published a novel since 1988—the latest one currently pending publication—her multi-faceted, complex writing fosters a diverse and dynamic criticism that re-generates new discourse on African writers, on feminism, and on her bold challenging of literary practices in general.²⁰ Werewere Liking’s literary production mirrors her practical endeavors for a cultural and spiritual African renaissance: defying categorization, it refuses convention and plays out its aesthetic in the margins of consensual literary discourse. Her novelistic style, a unique mixture alternating between poetry, ritual incantations, dialogue, and prose description, is a lyric genre she calls the *chant-roman*. Liking’s play on linguistic register and punctuation, as well as her use of intertextuality and dialogism, have empowered the genesis of a unique and inimitable textual form. Her satirical neologisms—if one thinks of *misovire*, *la machine-goutte*, or *Nuit-noire* to name just a few—enable her to parody the hegemonic power of language and post-colonial politics with subversive humor, and to move between genres to reflect her own orality steeped in the African tradition.

Although Liking has been anthologized as a Cameroonian woman writer and feminist, she has lived more than half of her life outside Cameroon and is a citizen of Côte d’Ivoire married to an Ivoirian. The cultural élite of Côte d’Ivoire claims her as one of its own. In addition, her work does

brokered a peace deal which involved handing over key ministries to rebel leaders in a coalition government which was widely objected to by Gbagbo loyalists.

¹⁹ Interview with Michelle Mielly 4 June 2002.

²⁰ Africans such as Irène Assiba D’Almeida or Cécile Dolisane Ébousse have reflected on Liking’s novels as challenging African patriarchal models and has engaged in a number of studies around this central notion (with regards to feminism, women’s roles, subversive humor and language, etc.) and Western critics such as Kathryn Wright and Bernadette Kassi have evoked Liking’s semantic games and blurring of generic distinctions, for example. We shall look at the various categories of existing criticism in more detail in a

not readily lend itself to analysis with Western theoretical schools of thought such as ‘feminism’ or ‘post-modernism’.²¹ Through her constant use of a variety of African languages and song in her plays and with the direct translation into French of native Bassa concepts, Liking experiments with language in a radical way similar to Ivoirian Amadou Kourouma, whose “*malinkéisation*” of French has consistently characterized his writing.²² Critics have compared her to the late Sony Labou Tansi for her skillful blending of an audacious avant-garde style with traditional oral narrative forms—not to mention the scathing political caricatures that the two developed in their theatre and novels. Like Wole Soyinka with his Yoruba Theatre or Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and his Community Theatre, Liking has combined social activism and experimental stage techniques to create powerful political statements for a larger African public. Werewere Liking’s highly lyrical, dialogical prose shares similar stylistic qualities with that of Véronique Tadjo; her concern for women’s memory and questions of their oppression link her to a variety of African women writers from Mariama Bâ to Assia Djébar to Calixthe Beyala. Liking has sought to emulate the work of Amadou Hampaté Bâ, describing his influence as one that has led her to an essential, popular art:

Mon objectif, c'est de faire un art qui satisfait, qui déclenche et étanche les soifs essentielles. Un art *futile et utile, pour les bambins, les tisseuses de coton, comme pour les mentons velus et les talons rugueux*—pour citer *Kaydara* de Hampaté Bâ—chacun en profitant selon sa capacité (Interview *ibid.*).²³

section below. Interestingly and somewhat paradoxically, the complex, at times hermetic nature of her writing has incited new scholarship in the West from a postmodern critical perspective.

²¹ I prefer to use the term ‘pro-feminine’ for Liking’s approach to gender questions and will analyze Liking’s writing from an anthropological approach that incorporates psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory instead of directly applying context-specific labels such as post-modernism. The paradoxes and contradictions inherent to nomenclature and theory in the study of African writing is discussed at more length in the section ‘Critical Approach’.

²² Liking engages more often in practices of a diglossia or the simultaneous practice of two languages, whereas Kourouma submits the French language to the demands of Malinké, skillfully rendering in French idiomatic expressions and figures of speech from his native tongue. See Kourouma, *Les Soleils des indépendances* or *Monnè, outrages et défis*, or *Allah n’est pas obligé*.

²³ Liking paraphrases the traditional preamble of the Peul tale *Kaidara* as written by Hampaté Bâ when she describes “Un art “futile et utile...” etc. In the full text (as follows) the verb becomes a sort of prosopopeia of Africa’s oral tradition:

Conte, conté, à conter...
Es-tu véridique?

Liking's tribute to the Malian author's utilitarian approach to writing—presenting the Peul tale as a singular emblem of Africa's rich oral history, accessible to all Africans—is indicative not only of her commitment to an aesthetics of necessity, but also of its genealogy within African letters. Finally, since the 1983 publication of the polemic and beautifully crafted novel *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail: (Journal d'une misovire...)*, Werewere Liking has been labeled a feminist writer, sometimes decried or dismissed as a man-hater or a lesbian. Due to the bold and sharp-witted manner in which she portrays the male characters Grozy and Babou in the novel's 'journal', written by a *misovire*, (a term coined by Liking using both Greek and Latin roots to denote 'man-hater') she “ushers in a woman's discourse on man” in the feminine novel by Francophone African women.²⁴ Following that publication, the 1988 novel *Amour-cent-vies* and especially the 1990 play *Singue Murà* have provided more conciliatory approaches to the sexual conflict in what she has portrayed as a misogynistic society, cut off from its feminine earth energies. Clearly, due to the originality and diversity of a writing that lives up to Liking's standards of one that is in her own words “*ouvert, éclectique et généreux*”, she must be considered as a pan-artist of multiple genres and styles within the development of post-colonial African literatures.²⁵ While questions of feminism, politics, psychoanalysis, history, and anthropology will animate our discussions of Werewere Liking's

Pour le bambins qui s'ébattent au clair de lune,
mon conte est une histoire fantastique.
Pour les fileuses de coton pendant les longues nuits
de la saison froide, mon récit est un passe-temps délectable.
Pour le mentons velus et les talons rugueux, c'est une véritable révélation.
Je suis à la fois futile, utile, et instructeur.
Déroule-le donc pour nous...

Cf. p. 251, “Kaïdara” in *Contes initiatiques peuls*, by Amadou Hampaté Bâ. Paris □ Stock, 1994.

²⁴ cf. Cazenave p. 165. In Chapter 6, “Toward a New Sexual Ethic: The (Re)Presentation of Man” Cazenave portrays Liking as a pioneer in such iconoclastic representations of the African male, enabling writers such as Calixthe Beyala and Angèle Rawiri to bring the inquiry into masculine behaviors to new levels in their novels.

²⁵ Liking explains that “Je n'ai pas une écriture conventionnelle. Elle est difficile à faire accepter parce qu'elle travaille sur elle-même en tant que forme d'art.” Quotation from interview with Sennen Andriamirado, cited by Assiba d'Almeida (1996) p. 265. Assiba d'Almeida notes that “it is precisely the reflexive nature of her writing that makes Liking unique, and that leads to an abundant, imaginative use of

oeuvre, I nevertheless prefer to examine her in broader terms, as a public intellectual and artist in post-colonial Africa.

Analyses of Werewere Liking's literary works and theatre have appeared in a variety of periodical publications, and interviews with a number of scholars and writers have been published in both English and French. Her works have been anthologized in several French-language publications, with Judith G. Miller and Marjolijn De Jaeger having published English translations of at least two of her works (cf. Bibliography). Both scholars have collaborated with Liking in a variety of ways—fundraising, promotion, and other forms of support. Nancy Molavi has recently undertaken the translation of *Orphée d'Afrique* as well as that of specific essays. Awareness of Liking's work among scholars and students is increasing concurrently with her inclusion in a growing number of publications, colloquia, and courses on Francophone writers—as made evident by recent calls for papers for a variety of conferences (NEMLA, MLA, Women in French, “Colloque International de la Recherche Féministe francophone” in Toulouse, Sept. 2002, to name a few) requesting works on Liking. Francophone feminist scholar Irène Assiba d'Almeida has continued to include Liking in a wide variety of her studies, among them *Francophone African Women Writers*²⁶. Odile Cazenave includes several detailed references to Liking in *Rebellious women*, a cross-section of emergent African women writers of the 1980's and 90's.²⁷ At the time of writing, no book-length study of Liking's work has been published.

intertextual material allowing her to rework previous signifying systems within the context of writing about Africa” (ibid.).

²⁶ Cf. Chapter Three “Writing change: Women as Social Critics” where Assiba d'Almeida examines Liking, Senegalese writer Aminata Sow Fall, and Ivoirian writer Véronique Tadjo under this light. “Of course, as it is difficult to divide autobiography from fiction, it is equally problematic to isolate Liking, Fall, or Tadjo as social critics. Their work is complex and multilayered. I start with Werewere Liking of Cameroon, who is a pioneer in the incorporation of ritual elements within her writing” (125).

²⁷ To my knowledge, two scholars to have undertaken earlier studies of Liking's theatre are first Anne V. Adams of Cornell (who first visited Abidjan in 1990) and Katheryn Wright of Rhodes College, in 1992. (Assiba d'Almeida had equally visited the Ki-Yi village by 1991). Wright recently gave a talk on the function of humor in Liking's works (CIEF Abidjan 2002) and is currently writing a book on the stylistics of Liking's novels. There are currently several young scholars and doctoral students who are beginning to research and publish works on Liking: Cameroonian scholar Cécile Dolisane Ébosse at the Université de Toulouse-le Mirail included detailed analyses of Liking's writing in her unpublished doctoral thesis

In light of the above, the current criticism on Werewere Liking can be placed under the following categories:

1. **Theme-based analyses:** Assiba d'Almeida has analyzed specific writings such *Orphée Dafric* or *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* and their often subversive relation to Western motifs (The myth of Orpheus, African feminism or Liking's *misovirie*). Katheryn Wright has explore the theme of humor in Liking's novels, and Elizabeth Locey has studied the function of polygamy in the play *Singuè Mura*. Richard Bjornson's examinations of the ritual as a healing/purifying activity in a variety of Liking's writings is especially informative as it provides both a view into her implementation of Bassa rituals and general overview of her evolution as a writer. Cécile Dolisane-Ebosse wrote a thesis on the portrayal of women in the Cameroonian novel with analyses on Liking, Mongo Béti, and Lydie Dooh-Bunya.
2. **Genre-based analysis:** While the works by Miller, Bjornson, and Hawkins are primarily focused on Liking's highly original techniques for theatrical production and stylistics, Cazenave, Assiba d'Almeida, Adams, Dolisane-Ebosse, Kassi and Borgomano limit their analyses to Liking's novels. Many critics such as Tagliacozzo mention in passing her one book of poetry, *On ne raisonne pas le venin*, but do not go into explicit detail.
3. **Literature-as-engagement analyses:** Assiba d'Almeida's *African Women Writers* makes a first step in the exploration of Liking's work as a social critic and writer. Her analysis of the intertext in *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* (Assiba 1996) moves effectively towards an understanding of Liking as a political writer whose novel pivots around the necessity for change in Africa.²⁸ Cazenave examines Liking's *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* and *L'amour-cent-vies* with regards to feminine/feminist writing and the emergence of a new political novel, respectively. She equally demonstrates how Liking radically challenges

defended at that same institution and completed in 1998. Sara Tagliacozzo, a doctoral candidate at the University of Siena, Italy studying anthropology and literature, is in the initial stages of research for her dissertation on Liking and has written both a graduate thesis (*Tesi de Laurea*) and a D.E.A. thesis on Liking and the Village Ki-Yi.²⁷ Bernadette Kassi of the Université de Laval, in Québec, has recently defended her dissertation on Francophone women writers that includes chapters on Liking's *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail*, and has published some critical works including Liking (cf. Bibliography). An array of articles exists on Liking from African, French and Canadian daily publications, often written in conjunction with performances given at festivals or during international tours of the Ki-Yi Troupe, and the local press of Abidjan has closely followed her activities on a regular basis.

²⁸ "Through the mediation of the intertext, [Liking's] beautifully written book becomes a powerful collage, with all kinds of intersections and interconnections aiming at turning attention to the necessity for change... This approach reveals a measure of the sociopolitical commitment that this lucid, impassioned, and highly original writer brings to bear to make a plea for a return to social wholeness on the African continent" (Assiba d'Almeida 1996, 282).

language and social practices through her writing, through a re-thinking of “the fundamental principles—cultural, religious, social, and political—upon which life is based. (Cazenave 200). Madeleine Borgomano gives a pertinent account of *L’amour-cent-vies* as a lyrical family tale about ‘survival’ that enables the transgression of taboos while providing Liking with a multi-layered forum to voice her political discontent. Tagliacozzo reads Liking as an activist whose writing represents a new form of resistance in the post-colonial African context, and to this end she presents a close textual analysis of Liking’s use of language in *Elle sera de jaspe et de corail* and *L’amour-cent-vies* as subversive vis-à-vis hegemonic Western discourse.

To date, no one has undertaken an in-depth inquiry of Liking’s writing with regards to her commitment to the African youth and to the cultural development of the continent in general. This is my aim, to be discussed below.

Our Location in the Constellation

Where is this study situated within the abundant and growing constellation of criticism on Werewere Liking? The primary aim here is to establish the connections between Werewere Liking’s aesthetic production and practices and her firm commitment to African development, exploring the various faces of the aesthetic of necessity and its impact on a broader level. In other words, Liking’s writings and the Ki-Yi Village’s activities will be examined as vectors of cultural development—as overt political, activist *statements*—consequently evoking the compelling and sometimes paradoxical questions that such an undertaking will raise. In this study of the aesthetics of necessity and development, Liking’s novels, plays, essays, and interviews, are our primary points of reference, as well as daily life practices at the Ki-Yi Village.²⁹

²⁹ Other scholars in the field have undertaken similar inquiries in the past; those of particular interest to us are ones that juxtapose considerations of literature and development. Bernard Mouralis’ exhaustive work—*Littérature et Développement. Essai sur le statut, la fonction, et la représentation de la littérature négro-africaine d’expression française*—first presented as his doctoral thesis at the Université de Lille III in 1978, gives a detailed account of Francophone literature in relation to political, intellectual, social questions, before and after the independence movements of 1960. However, *development* from Mouralis’ perspective denotes the *emergence and growth* of the first generation of Francophone African letters from a sociological and historical standpoint, with the colonial experience as the common denominator, and one

I would like to engage in and contribute to this debate on literature, culture, and development in the continuum of a particular one previously engaged in by the African Literature Association in 1987 its Conference at Cornell University: “What is the Role of Literature in Africa’s Development?”³⁰ As Anne V. Adams notes on the subject,

The conjunction between African literature and Development can be read and theorized to mean a *transformative space*. It may be interpreted, at the same time, as an intersection where multiple ideas about literary and social practice, economics and politics converge—producing knowledge and agency ... (Adams and Mayes 2).

The present study is situated within this *transformative space* where questions of literature and development may be re-interrogated and apprehended for the particular case of Werewere Liking. The notion of development will be addressed in greater detail.

Theoretical and Critical Approaches: Anthropology and Literature

Given the absence of an in-depth, book-length study on Werewere Liking, and the scope and variety of her activities in the literary, theatre, and plastic arts, it would be fastidious and of limited value to undertake an examination of her work vis-à-vis specific categories of genre, theme, or theory alone. As noted by Judith Miller, Liking’s pan-African philosophy is mirrored by her pan-artistic productivity; therefore approaching her from a purely literary point of view would be tantamount to neglecting the multi-faceted nature of her creativity. Keeping this in mind, I wish to propose an analysis that takes into account the philosophical and cultural underpinnings of Werewere Liking’s writing, situating it within a theoretical and historical perspective with points of interest for literary

chapter only is dedicated to African writers and their specific works, including Mongo Béti, Henri Lopes, and Sembène Ousmane, among others. Stanislas Adotevi’s 1988 work, *Culture et Développement*, published by UNESCO, approaches the question from an ethical and philosophical standpoint, and UNESCO has published a variety of titles on the subject in recent years, demonstrating the growing interest in a cross-disciplinary discussion on development.²⁹ The Université des Femmes in Brussels has published, in its *Chroniques féministes* series, an issue on *Feminisms and Developments* that explores cultural questions in part, and the Review *ECHO* (a bilingual publication of AFARD, a women’s development organization) published in Yaoundé, Cameroon, has looked at questions of women, education, development, and culture in a number of its issues.

³⁰ The proceedings of this conference, transcriptions of roundtable discussions, and more recent studies of the question were published in one volume in 1998, *African Literature & Africa’s Development*, Anne V. Adams & Janis A. Mayes, Eds. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998.

and non-literary readers. This is a project of both introduction and discovery; aiming to familiarize readers with Liking while exploring the connections between her writing and the philosophical teachings of her native Bassa culture, with an overall view to examine the greater link between culture and development.

To this aim, the first task consists in problematizing the critical context within which her work may be grasped. As a self-taught artist, Liking's writing simultaneously invites and defies Western paradigms of aesthetic analysis. Although Liking underwent 'initiations' into European culture through her lengthy collaborations with Marie-José Hourantier and travels to Europe, she claims that her approach to art has remained resolutely African, and she has maintained a critical—and often paradoxical—relationship with the French culture. In the spirit of post-colonial resistance at the core of Werewere Liking's project, I wish to refrain from the temptation of entering into the sort of 'theoretical overdrive' afforded by the abundance of available criticism and encouraged by the immediate complexities of her writing. This question of theory needs to be seen in more detail.

In my critical approach, I will walk the uneasy tightrope between my own Western referential framework—necessary to ground and effectively insert my arguments within a culture-specific discourse—and the description of a non-Western individual, her oeuvre, and the social, cultural, and historical environments informing her narration. This approach represents an invitation to simultaneously transcend *and* embrace my own cultural embeddedness when narrating the specificity of Werewere Liking's postcolonial project. It implies my entering into a readerly pact of understanding with the foreign writer, establishing a "contact zone" of ethnographic interpretation that would allow me to apprehend Liking's project beyond the discourse of otherness.³¹ With an

³¹ I borrow here anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt's term "contact zone" to convey the process of *transculturation* that she ascribes to colonial encounters, a process of the reciprocal influences of representation and cultural practices between the metropole and the colony. Pratt notes that 'contact zones' are social spaces where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today (Pratt 1992: 4). A similar "cultural mixing" occurs in my encounters with Werewere Liking and her texts, the 'contact zone' being the point of mutual

awareness of my own outsider/insider anxieties, I'd like to explore and grapple with Werewere Liking's work as a to-and-fro movement of *cultural translation*, which Homi Bhabha sees as something that "desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy, and in that very act, demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation within minority positions" (Bhabha 1994: 228). The Western critic, working within such a zone of communication and interpretation, could acknowledge the innovations of Liking the pan-African activist as unfamiliar, even radically alien, and yet could accept them simultaneously as emblematic of his or her own cultural limitations. In other words, the balancing act here consists in moving continuously between two environments that exist within the same work station. One is culture-specific, providing familiar analytical tools for the *translatio* upon which we are about to embark, the other is subject-specific, involving the constant negotiation between the "baggage" that the reading subject necessarily brings to any given literary text and his or her capacity to fully appreciate the originality of foreign writer without fetishizing the "exotic", without appropriating or repudiating differences. Such a negotiation reflects the general struggle of critics in their assessments of post-colonial literature.³² Finally, the contents of my Western "toolbox" have been altered during the process of transculturation, in the transit between the

'contamination' where each interlocutor is obliged to move from his/her autochthonous frame of reference towards that of the other. It goes without saying that such a process may apply to any encounter with post-colonial literature written in the language of the *métropole*. Liking is linguistically operating within such a zone through the French *lingua franca*, a vehicle of communication allowing her to convey African concepts and practices. As a reader of Liking, I am confronted with the "foreignness" of these concepts and practices as well as their depiction in a language which is, for both myself and Liking, a non-native one.

³² The general cautiousness exercised by the Western critic in post-colonial literary analysis reflects an awareness of dangers inherent to such a sensitive "cultural-translational" task. The effective application of post-colonial criticism has been questioned by critics such as Anthony R. Guneratne, summarized by his definition of post-colonialism as "...a critical practice whose foundations were laid by scholar-immigrants to the West (Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha) but which has since become the province of metropolitan scholars and intended primarily for metropolitan consumption." (Cf. <http://landow.stg.brown.edu/post/poldiscourse/guneratne2.html>). Besides risking the discursive exclusion of the "subaltern" populations who remain in post-colonial countries, one of the greatest risks is that of subjecting the literatures of the former colonies to a new form of intellectual hegemony through the imposition of Western epistemological assumptions. By the same token, Western criticism of post-colonial literatures may provide a safeguard against what Edward Said describes as "a double kind of possessive exclusivism" in criticism limited to race or region, such as Black criticism. The aim would be to avoid "the sense of being an exclusive insider by virtue of experience" (Said 1985, 106).

ethnos and *graphos*. “Alterity implies alteration, and no European theory is likely to be appropriate in different cultural circumstances without itself undergoing a radical rethinking—an ‘appropriation’ by a different discourse” (Ashcroft et. al. 1989: 34).

I would like to avoid such discursive ‘appropriation’ and yet acknowledge that as a student of African literature within an American institution, a critical vacuum is utopian. Certain realms of dominant Western theory—often detached jargon, unfairly reduced to sound-bite concepts—simply pose tremendous problems to me as a reader of Werewere Liking. Where and how do I situate, for example, Euro-centric questions of discursive/temporal *differance*, performativity, or alterity in Liking’s writing and stage productions : who is the speaking, writing, or performing subject and *who* is the other being represented or read? The answer to this dilemma is, in part, to be found through the mediation of an anthropological approach; in other words, by admitting from the outset my cultural outsider status and by sometimes integrating critical modes established by others who have worked in the field. Francophone scholar Christopher Miller, a proponent of such an approach, explains that

if anthropology has anything to offer the reader of African literatures, it is not just ethnographic “facts” but also access to modes of understanding that emanate from other cultures ... The formulation of any literary anthropological approach would involve recourse to African systems of knowledge that owe nothing to the Western world. The grandest promise of anthropology is of gaining access to such systems through the supposedly transparent mediation of ethnographic texts. The inescapable epistemological paradox here is of course that access to non-Western systems is mediated through a discipline that has been invented and controlled by the West. My contention is that without a surrender to that paradox, *without some reliance on anthropological texts, Westerners will not be able to read African literatures in any adequate way* (Miller 1990 p. 21). [my emphasis]

In consideration of my own personal experiences with non-Western cultures and writers in Latin America and in Africa, I advocate the above approach, along with the inherent epistemological paradox that it accordingly poses. I therefore propose to navigate through Werewere Liking’s writings and to approach the question of development and the aesthetics of necessity through the negotiation of—but not limited to—texts by Westerners such as Miller, James Clifford, Marc Augé, Victor Turner, Marie-José Hourantier and Richard Schechner and by Africans such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Stanislas Spero Adotevi, Abiola Irele, Paulin J. Hountondji, and Valentin Mudimbe, for

example. Our clear advantage in an anthropological-based study is that Liking herself has transcribed the philosophical and spiritual teachings of her Bassa ancestors in the essay *Ntorol Tchorot*. It is particularly through the agency of this text, as well as anthropological studies of the Bassa by other Cameroonians³³, that will facilitate our access to what are often perceived as hermetic, culture-specific literary and mystical texts.³⁴

Ki-Yi Art in the Age of Globalization

“La bataille économique, c’est d’abord une bataille culturelle. Si les gens ne réussissent pas à avoir une image culturelle à vendre, ils ne peuvent rien vendre.” —W. Liking³⁵

Werewere Liking’s statement reveals her position on an artistic playing field where market dictates transform culture into a commodity and where the artist must engage in a ‘battle’ to ‘sell’ a cultural image to consumers. She implies that a country’s selling power is directly correlative to its ability to project its culture favorably: it can otherwise sell *nothing*. Market transactions here are premised primarily on a principle of cultural representation and relativism, where not all players are created equally and where a nation’s or a region’s identity and potential must be packaged properly in order to compete at all. The playing field’s not fair from the start, but one can still play if one is creative. Embedded in Liking’s observation are issues of cultural legitimacy and agency and Africa’s struggle to engage effectively in the global economy. Her concern with *selling* underscores

³³ Particularly: Ndebi Biya’s work *Etre, Pouvoir et Génération: Le système mbok chez les Basa du Sud-Cameroun*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1987, Jean-Marcel Eugène Wognou’s *Les Basaa du Cameroun: Monographie Historique d’après la tradition orale*. Niamey, Niger: Centre d’Études Linguistiques et Historiques par Tradition Orale, 1985, and Eno Belinga’s *L’épopée camerounaise. M’vet: Moneblum ou l’homme bleu*. Yaoundé, Cameroun, Editions Université de Yaoundé, 1978.

³⁴ Anne-Claire Jaccard explains that “Werewere Liking’s researches are too complex and rooted in the Bassa cultural universe to appeal to a public of non-initiates” (quoted by Conteh-Morgan 1994 p. 212). Conteh-Morgan continues this reflection in noting that “This lack of a wide appeal can be attributed to her work’s extensive use of an esoteric and highly ritualised language; of dream, trance and spirit-possession techniques, of an intricate symbolism of gestures, colours, costumes and sounds and the repetition of songs, dances, and movements. Also, unlike the theatre of her predecessors and contemporaries, hers is resolutely non-realistic...her plays are religious in essence, rooted in Bassa healing, initiation, or death rituals of which they are in fact the dramatic recreation, both in content and structure” (*Ibid.* 212-13).

³⁵ From interview with David Ndachi Tagne, 1989.

the battle that she wages against a general consumerism amongst African youth: she'd rather see them create than consume, export their talents and ideas rather than continually import and assimilate those from elsewhere. Instead of portraying the global market as purely hegemonic and debilitating for Africans, a more common and predictable stance, Werewere Liking implies that there is a *choice* for Africans in this context, they can make culture a priority. Poverty undeniably disables decision-making and action here; so the message is highly political and directed at governments more than civilians. Liking wants to empower Africans *and* reform social policy in Africa. Africans do not have to wait passively on the sidelines in order to join the game, they can begin by building and projecting an image that is distinct and appealing. This begins when governments put cultural affairs and promotion at the top of their laundry lists.

Therefore, if Africa has a role to play in the global economy, Liking has opened up a space for its artists as cultural ambassadors who would be central to future success. Apparently obliged to operate within the mandates and discourse of the market, Liking appropriates a fundamental role for herself and for her artistic project that would potentially foster development-from-within. Otherwise stated, since development has traditionally been viewed and expressed through a dominantly economic prism, she adopts its language and logic to convey the Ki-Yi's philosophy-as-development. Yet for now she still struggles for everyday survival in a Hobbesian economic climate, where her work and efforts have not been financially rewarded by African leadership, and where she can only engage in this image-building process for cultural valorization with funding from the West. The process of intensified economic interdependency and deepening exchanges known as globalization has contributed to this paradoxical situation.

Globalization holds many different, often conflicting meanings for many different people. My aim is to examine its role in the limited context of the Ki-Yi Village instead of providing a detailed critique of its role in the political economy of Côte d'Ivoire. There is a wider body of recent

scholarship on the subject which has been helpful to this study and to which I refer my readers.³⁶

Globalization has probably had both a positive *and* negative impact on the Village and it becomes therefore problematic to judge it monolithically. What is useful to us is to understand the creation of the Village Ki-Yi in relation to globalization; how globalization has been a '*companion de route*' or travel companion accompanying the genesis of Liking's social project. Such a project seems to attempt to respond to the social crises that this phenomenon has fomented across much of the African continent and the rest of the developing world.

Locating globalization on the Ki-Yi roadmap is important to understanding its entry into the discourse of cultural development, and to do so requires a brief overview of its epistemology and significance in the context of Côte d'Ivoire. For its proponents within international financial institutions, working from a neo-liberal concept of the political economy, globalization is "...largely understood in terms of a worldwide economic and political convergence around liberal market principles and the increasing real-time integration of business, technological and financial systems."³⁷ It has been argued to be "synonymous with an irresistible process of economic, political, and cultural change that is sweeping all national boundaries and protectionist tendencies before it. Indeed, for a country to remain outside this process is now tantamount to its marginalization and failure" (Duffield 46). It would ideally be "the securing of global circuits of money and commodities governed by consumer-citizens" (McMichael 96). So the orthodox neo-liberal view holds that globalization is a good thing for the Third World, contributing to and improving areas such as resource allocation, capital flow and distribution, and economic competitiveness, while decreasing heavy-handed governmental intervention.

On the other side of the spectrum, pundits contend that capital has become even more concentrated in areas that were already wealthy, while the poorer have inevitably grown poorer.

³⁶ See, for example, McMichael, Kothari, Kiely, Cheru, Sandbrook, Falk, et. al.

³⁷ From Held et. al., as quoted by Duffield p. 46

There is in other words an indisputably unequal power geometry that actually causes disparities to *increase*. The inexorable march of global interdependency has forced many Third-World players off the field, as "...the growth of the informational economy and market liberalization has had an ambiguous impact on the economies of the South...much of [its] conventional economic activity has become redundant in relation to the nodes and networks of the core areas of the global economy" (Duffield *ibid.*). Some analysts juxtaposing development with globalization paint an even gloomier picture, as Sandbrook told us in 2000:

Certainly, development is badly in need of a workable and humane guide to action. Although certain regions and countries of the developing world are achieving high to respectable growth rates, problems abound: growing poverty in South Asia and Africa, deepening inequalities between and within countries, dangerous volatility as capital washes in and out of vulnerable emerging markets, widespread ecological decline, faulty democratic transitions, and state collapse and civil war, especially in Africa (Sandbrook 1071).

There is however no disputing that the fall of socialism from 1989 onwards has given greater credence to capitalism and has fostered the view that globalization is a good thing for everyone. In addition, the acknowledged failure of development to solve many problems of the world's poor has likely also helped rally support for the notion that globalization could be its new messiah to bring about positive changes sought for decades. The divergent views on globalization reveal opposing philosophies operating with distinct logics. At the heart of anthropological thought is the post-colonial notion of unequal power relationships and of the need to bring those into greater balance. Globalization is often seen as a continuity of neo-colonial domination by thinkers who value contextual specificity in their study of non-Western subjects and their cultural practices. In neoclassical Keynesian economics, *social* concerns of the collective whole are not at the top the priorities list; one encounters a greater emphasis on the relation of the individual to the *market*. A logic of universal rational choice governing all human behavior indicates how the individual will interact with the market and enables forecasting and projections to be carried out accordingly. The conventional economic theory of 'comparative advantage', which holds that the periphery will naturally benefit from industrial exchanges with the center, holds sway in the neoclassical

imagination regarding development.³⁸ National, regional, and ethnic communities are viewed in relation to a process of modernization and progress where the West is held as the model to be replicated across the global board. This is why globalization has a direct impact on questions of development, and this is why issues surrounding it must be raised here. At its worst, globalization is purported to hold adverse effects for the poor, those who are to be ‘developed’, since “the premium on financial viability subverts the social goal of development” (McMichael 98).

Simultaneous to increased economic globalization is an ostensibly greater imbalance in the distribution of the world’s wealth. Poverty has increased, and many Third-World countries—including Côte d’Ivoire—have been obliged to drastically slash their social welfare spending (health, education, unemployment, culture) in order to be ‘structurally adjusted’ for entry into the global game.³⁹ The Côte d’Ivoire did, by all accounts, provide fertile grounds for the unfolding of the 1980’s debt crises, since analysts have diagnosed the country as having had ‘structural blockages’ such as low diversification, over-reliance on world market prices for its cash crops, as well as an external debt that killed any perspectives of renewed growth.⁴⁰ The problem

³⁸ Peet and Hardwick give a detailed analysis of Raul Prebisch’s critique of comparative advantage. As the former head of the Central Bank of Argentina, Prebisch demonstrates that “Latin America’s peripheral position and primary exports were the causes of its lack of progress, specifically because of a long-term decline in the periphery’s terms of trade (the ratio between the value of exports and the value of imports.) Using Britain as a case study, Prebisch showed that the terms of trade for center countries had improved with industrialization... Technical advance benefited the center countries rather than the entire world” (42).

³⁹ Philip McMichael’s piece on *Virtualism* as the “specter of Globalization” provides a very helpful overview of the conceptual and practical history of the global economy and exposes its direct links to development. He contends that the thinking of neo-classical economics is apparent in the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP’s) undertaken in 1980’s in response to major debt crises beginning in Southeast Asia, “which reconfigured power relations both within and between states” (95). SAP’s force priorities to shift from the social to the economic sphere, affecting the foundations of the European nation-state as inherited and adopted by postcolonial countries in the post-war era, which the author calls the ‘development project’. “Its rise and fall is the context for the current global restructuring” (100). The removal of national and international controls of capital flow undermined the power of states to promote national development, presaging the institutionalization of the global market and the demise of the ‘development project’ (105).

McMichael speaks of a ‘virtualist’ notion of Globalization—what in literary studies would be called a discursive construct—which holds that “all states are better off competing in the global economy.” This means privileging the global market over national ones—requiring a ‘shrinking of the state’. It “involves a double fiction”: it dissolves historically-specific political cultures, and it replaces them with an economic abstraction”(105). McMichael concludes that the debt regime of globalization is replacing the universalist rhetoric of development, elevating market logic over historical and cultural specificities.

⁴⁰ Bruno Losch’s comprehensive essay reviews the scholarship on this question. Cf. p.17-18.

seems to be the failure of the imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) to redress the situation in the long term.

The notion that “all states are better off competing in the global economy” means privileging a global economic market over national markets and local cultures—requiring a shrinking of the state through SAP's and increased compliance with objectives set by the World Bank and the I.M.F. (cf. McMichael 105). In post-colonial African countries, whose borders alone recount part of Europe's imperial legacy, the nation-state ‘experiment’, already wrought by deep ethnic, economic, and political tensions, had barely reached its two-decade mark before this internationalist trend began to shape development agendas in the 1980's. In turn, this intervention, like most top-down or vertical ‘patron-recipient’ types of development plans, has hindered the abilities of these nations to reach self-determination, in the sense that the ‘imagining’, elaboration, and consolidation of a national community, especially a post-colonial one, is a long time in the making, as Fanon, Bhabha, or Anderson suggest.⁴¹ While McMichael presents the cases of Mexico and Jamaica (p. 108) to illustrate his critique of Structural Adjustment as a misguided sort of ‘New Deal’ for development, the Côte d'Ivoire provides a striking, and in many ways tragic, example to support his argument.⁴²

Long heralded as the *'miracle ivoirien'* with undeniable success in business and agriculture, it is the only African country to attain the status as the number one worldwide producer and exporter of a given commodity—cocoa. However, in what Bruno Losch refers to as the country's “economic re-composition” of the 90's—in other words the devaluation of the CFA Franc in 1994, the rise in

⁴¹ Cf. Anderson Chapters 1,2, 6 and 7; Bhabha (1994) Chapter 8, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the margins of the Modern Nation”; Fanon (1961) Chapter 4, “Sur la culture nationale”.

⁴² For McMichael, the debt regime imposed by SAP's transformed the discourse on development in two ways: first, credit renewal conditions imposed on debtors enabled debt managers (i.e. the IMF and the World Bank) to restructure national projects, re-aligning them with the global one. Second, austerity measures, privatization, and export expansion renewed the *global* economy rather than *national* economies. Among the consequences were lowered wages, reduction of social welfare programs (education, healthcare) increased poverty and infant mortality, decline in per capita income, export glut, decapitalization, and erosion of the tax base.

unemployment and cost of living, massive privatizations, and drastic cuts in social welfare spending that accompany fiscal structural adjustment—the ‘miracle’ was abruptly transformed into a ‘mirage’.⁴³ Francis Akindès’ analysis of social inequalities and the process of pauperization in Côte d’Ivoire takes into account the country’s progressive economic downturn to underscore its current political disarray, looking at three phases of activity. The first, 1960-1980, that of the ‘*miracle ivoirien*,’ is characterized by intensified investment, high public spending, and strong state regulation. The decline began sometime around 1981, hitting rock-bottom around 1987, when, unable to reimburse its external debts, the Ivoirian government is forced to adopt stabilization and Structural Adjustment Programs prescribed by the IMF.

...malgré les mesures correctives envisagées sous la pression des bailleurs de fonds, les déséquilibres continuent à s’aggraver. C’est dans cette situation de fragilité structurelle que prend forme la troisième phase marquée par la dévaluation du franc CFA...L’étude relative au profil de pauvreté en Côte d’Ivoire a révélé une amplification du phénomène de la pauvreté qui serait passé d’un taux de 10% en 1985 à 32,3% en 1993, puis à 36,8% en 1995...La remise en question de la fonction re-distributive de l’État, liée aux difficultés de trésorerie, a démultiplié les “itinéraires d’exclusion” (chômage, déclassement, marginalisation) qui se sont transformés progressivement en “itinéraires de refus”...il s’est développé au sein de la société ivoirienne une masse critique considérable qui alimente les rangs des partis d’opposition (Akindès 129-130).

By 1999, the Côte d’Ivoire’s social situation had collapsed to the point that the *Human Development Report* ranked it 154th out of 174 countries using HPI (Human Poverty Indicators) and HDI (Human Development Indicators) that evaluate chances for survival (life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rates, probability of death before age 60, maternal death rates at childbirth, etc.).⁴⁴

It is within this arena of gradual social and economic erosion that Werewere Liking’s project for cultural development comes into play. This is all the more compelling since we know she originally chose to live in the Côte d’Ivoire in the late 1970’s—when the ‘miracle ivoirien’ was running its last lap—thanks to its relative wealth, political tolerance, and vibrant cultural atmosphere. The 1985

⁴³ Losch’s excellent article and overview of Côte d’Ivoire’s history and political economy provide a very interesting glimpse into the ethno-nationalist trend of Ivoirian politics in relation to its declining economy. “La Côte d’Ivoire en quête d’un nouveau projet national,” *Politique africaine* 78 (June 2000) 5-25.

⁴⁴ Cf. Akindès p. 129 note 6.

debut of the Ki-Yi Village coincides with a deepening of the country's social and financial crises—so it is no wonder Liking has come to conceive of her work as essential for the children and future of Côte d'Ivoire. Combating at the beginning economic and social exclusion in general by offering a space to the marginalized children of the city, today she finds herself also battling what Akindès refers to as the “itinéraire du refus” which has created a civil war-like atmosphere across the country with growing xenophobia and intense political divisions. It therefore becomes increasingly apparent that Liking's project for African social and cultural development came into being as a response to a crisis within a specific historical context that is tied to the ongoing process of economic globalization.

We know that many critics of globalization provide a litany of the perverse effects that it has held for development alone, generating greater obstacles for sustained success of grassroots, social movement-oriented initiatives such as Liking's Ki-Yi Village. One general reproach is the undermining of *social development* objectives for *economic* objectives, replacing culture-driven solutions with market-driven ones.⁴⁵ This trend has possibly compelled Liking to speak of ‘selling’ a cultural image which is in fact destined for non-African ‘buyers’ in a highly competitive marketplace. Yet globalization can't be ‘stopped’ or done away with, it is a dynamic process and it holds potential for a range of communities and concerns, especially with regards to human rights. There is nevertheless hope that it can be reformed and seized as a creative opportunity for social development, as demonstrated by Werewere Liking's playfully provocative take on culture as a commodity.

While this analysis provides just a few examples among many other critiques of globalization, it may illustrate how Liking's project has been shaped by the impact of this phenomenon at the

⁴⁵ “One major drawback to defining development as economic growth is that in reality the ‘trickle-down’ effect rarely takes place; growth does not necessarily lead to enhanced standards of living. As societies in the affluent North demonstrate, the increased use of highly sophisticated technology or a fast-growing GNP does not necessarily eradicate poverty, illiteracy or homelessness, although it may well alter the ways these ills are experienced” (Gardner and Lewis 7).

microeconomic level, and how a part of the Ki-Yi's operation has paradoxically come to rely on private capital and foreign aid while promoting endogenous, community-oriented development.

Postcolonial Dilemmas

The ambiguity surrounding the problem of funding sources for the Ki-Yi is much in line with the contradictory condition of modern post-colonial African writers. Who in fact publishes and distributes these writers' works, in what language do they write, who is their target and actual readership? Short of taking a radical path—in the example of Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiongo—and writing in a national language, today's African writer doesn't have much of a choice if he or she wants to have serious impact internationally. Liking's aesthetic project is obviously faced with comparable constraints: funding from local African sources is virtually non-existent, the great majority of the Ki-Yi's international performances are hosted by Western theatre festivals, and the list of past and present donors to the Ki-Yi Foundation does not contain many African names. I do not wish to imply that Africans are ignoring Werewere Liking's work, nor that the African community in Abidjan does not openly respect and admire the Ki-Yi's accomplishments under her leadership. A great many performance reviews and literary criticism from Liking's press book come from Abidjan dailies, and many African parents come to the Ki-Yi, desperately hoping that their children be allowed to attend classes there after failure in the traditional French-style scholastic system. When the Ki-Yi presents its "off" performances during the biennial MASA Festival in Abidjan, the majority of spectators are African. However, it seems that local African support is limited to the above examples: when asked about an African élite in Abidjan and its support of her work, Liking laments that

...la communauté abidjanaise n'a jamais eu à se manifester à l'endroit du Ki-Yi, autrement qu'en venant à nos manifestations culturelles et artistiques. Non, pas d'élite africaine derrière le Ki-Yi non plus, hélas. Le seul soutien de l'élite réside dans sa reconnaissance intellectuelle, où elle s'accorde à nous citer comme référence, dans les articles comme dans les discours, allant parfois jusqu'à nous envoyer les enfants à problèmes de leurs familles. Certains parfois acceptent d'organiser une réception dans notre cadre ou de programmer nos spectacles dans leurs manifestations culturelles. Leur aide s'arrête là. (Interview *ibid.*)

In fact, the artist openly admits that the real assistance received has come from a host of people in the West—people like Judith Miller of N.Y.U., her translator and friend Marjolijn de Jaeger in Connecticut, or Sophie Arouet of *Radio France Outremer* in Paris—as well as periodic assistance for financing projects from the French or Dutch governments through their local embassies. In spite of this discouraging reality, Liking’s troupe has continued to seek local support beyond the urban setting alone, where it has attained a ‘cultural constant’ sort of status. Undertaking in the past what she describes as ‘kamikaze’ tours in rural Africa in an effort to decentralize Culture, the Ki-Yi has refused to let material questions and lack of appropriate facilities prevent them from taking their theatre out of the cities.

Bien que le théâtre soit de plus en plus un phénomène urbain, des troupes se créent, même dans les villages. Les populations des cités et localités rurales exigent aujourd'hui d'avoir accès aux œuvres reconnues...Elles ne veulent plus qu'on leur parle du manque de structures et d'infrastructures. Elles demandent aux artistes de "créer la situation" comme on dit ici. C'est ainsi que notre compagnie a entrepris une tournée africaine et nationale depuis mars et jusqu'à maintenant, et qui se poursuivra jusqu'à la fin de l'année [1996].⁴⁶

I am therefore not calling into question Liking’s dedication to Africa and its causes that she has clearly chosen to defend, and note that the majority of Africans who are familiar with her work are enthusiastic supporters. I am more interested in pointing out the creative and ingenious ways in which she works with the former colonial powers and—primarily—its cultural élite in order to achieve precise goals within her context. While continually stressing the disastrous consequences of Western materialism and neo-colonialist political and economic interventionism in Africa, Werewere Liking does not appear to be beset by an anxiety of jeopardizing her principles through her solicitation and acceptance of philanthropic assistance from donors and foundations located in those wealthier hemispheres.

This ambiguous situation seems to be symptomatic of a sort of ‘structural’ limitation of development initiatives in Africa and elsewhere, following to some extent the logic of dependency

⁴⁶ Cf. Speech by Werewere Liking in New York, 1996.

theory, where local populations come to rely on Westerners as necessary benefactors for projects that are intended to impact them directly. Instead of becoming active participants in their development they become passive onlookers.⁴⁷ So while Liking tries to reverse the trend in the Ki-Yi project, the difficulty of acquiring assistance from a African élite underscores the root problem of a lack of commitment and involvement at the local level. The steady economic decline of the Ivoirian economy has certainly contributed to this predicament, as has the impact of structural adjustment, where state funding for the arts has been all but eradicated.

The questions of funding in the context of globalization raises issues of commercial art and art-for-Westerners, which will be examined in Chapter Three as an integral aspect of the Ki-Yi's representation of Africa. At this point I'll take stock of what African aesthetics means to this study. Liking is a hybrid product of modern post-colonial Africa and its ancestral traditions. Her art—which she herself recognizes as fundamentally materialist—is an expression of this inherent duality, and in this context Western critics must ask themselves how they can effectively evaluate her work. Christopher Miller advises caution against oversimplification when proceeding in African aesthetics, as demonstrated by early twentieth-century German anthropologist Leo Frobenius—who “finds something like an “esthetocracy” in which each cup, each pipe, each spoon is a work of art” (Miller 1990; 17). In the nineteenth century, and under the impulses of Positivism and Darwinism, African art was classified as “primitive” art, denoting its inferior position in the evolution of the species. Following in this logic, Laurick Zerbini notes that: “Ces pièces [de l'art africain] ne sont-elles pas considérées comme appartenant à un *art du besoin*? Ne dit-on pas volontiers qu'il s'agit d'instinct artistique, d'un art né de la “spontanéité”, de “l'impulsion”, plutôt que de production artistique? (13) [my emphasis]. Zerbini demonstrates how early proponents of anthropological

⁴⁷ André Gunder Frank, a leading critic of modernization theory, brought the *dependista* philosophy from Latin American economic circles to the rest of the world in the late 1960's. Based on a Marxist analysis of production and trade, Frank argued that metropolitan Centers were actively involved in the *underdevelopment* of their peripheral countries. Cf. Peet and Hardwick, Chapter 4, p. 107-111 for a detailed critique of this theory.

museums such as Edmé François Jomard (1777-1862) or Philippe-Frantz von Siebold (1796-1866) presented a vision of primitive peoples that provided not only the necessary conditions for the European colonial enterprise, but also a justification for such (ibid. 12). The African object became a documentary source of information on ‘underdeveloped’ peoples and on racial inequalities, leading to the emergence and persistence of a naturalist vision of African art, based on *human needs* in an evolutionary process. While this deterministic vision would be disputed by the early twentieth century with the advent of cultural anthropology and movements like Dada and Surrealism, there remains a genuine dilemma over the classification, criticism, and nomenclature of non-European art, as illustrated by the heated debate in France over the *Musée du Quai Branly*, to be inaugurated sometime in 2005.⁴⁸

I would like to underscore a very interesting aspect of Werewere Liking’s aesthetics in relation to this brief account: while utilitarian art has traditionally been considered a product of lesser, primitive civilizations and while a number attempts have been made to rectify this prejudice,

⁴⁸ The Musée began its turbulent journey in 1995 when Philippe Douste-Blazy, then Chirac’s Minister of Culture, designated the future museum as the *Musée de l’Homme, des arts et des civilisations*. Following objections from the pre-existing *Musée de l’homme* at the Trocadéro, it then became simply the *Musée des arts et des civilisations*. Since 2000 the collection has been housed at the Louvre as a major gallery of *Arts Premiers*—yet another hotly contested, supposedly “politically correct” designation for non-Western art! It only recently took on the more sober name indicating its future location in Paris, and will in the end swallow the collections of the *Musée de l’Homme* and the now-notorious museum built for the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*, the *Musée national des arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie* (MAAO), both of which are currently preparing to close their doors for good. The polemic raised over the housing of the collection at the Louvre—whose curators are not trained in non-Western art—incited a general debate in France over the limits to be set between anthropology and art, underscoring, in the words of Juliette Barbara, the difficulty of implementing a coherent cultural policy for the “Arts premiers” in France. See «Ouverture de la Salle des Arts premiers le Louvre au cœur de la tourmente» at <http://www.fluctuat.net/expos/chroniques/artspremiers1.htm>. All of the information cited was obtained from the above source as well as from Pierre Courcelles’ article «Arts premiers Un musée autrement», June 2002 in *Regards* (<http://www.regards.fr/archives/2000/200006/200006cre01.html>), and Gilles Labarthe’s article, «Dernière visite à la ‘galerie des races’» in *Courrier International*, Nov. 7-13, 2002, p. 14.

The drama surrounding the *Musée du Quai Branly* would be humorous if not for the underlying and deep-seated tensions which it has revealed. The French, as other former colonial powers, have to reckon further with their not-so-distant past and come to grips with their nation’s misdeeds, prejudices, and inconsistencies—in spite of their prized status as the inventors of ‘universal’ human rights. (Yes, the French did abolish slavery in 1848, but they also supported forced labor in their colonies well after that date.) The polemic surrounding the establishment of the *Musée du Quai Branly* as aroused by the French media and major figures of the art world made it clear that there is still a lot of progress to be made in reaching any form of collective consensus on the colonial past.

Werewere Liking explicitly and purposefully produces her art from the perspective of *necessity*. In fact necessity is heralded as the founding principle of her aesthetics.⁴⁹ In other words, while disputing Western hegemonic discourse about her continent's artistic inferiority, she turns the tables on all fronts, deliberately opting for an aesthetic approach that has been a source of disregard or scorn for African art in the past. When viewed as elements of collective societal practices, African objects of art indeed can be attributed with a functional quality, whether in the form of puppets, masks, or painted clothing to be used in rituals or ceremonies, everyday objects for cooking and craft-making, and instruments doted with totemic powers, *djembe* percussion instruments as mediators of ancestral wisdom and cosmic rhythm, or dance as a practical means of exorcising evil and cleansing the spirit. Yet this art simultaneously affirms a vast distance from pure functionality through its refusal of realistic representation and its natural propensity for abstraction, induced by deep-rooted animistic and mystical underpinnings. From this spiritual-mystical perspective Werewere explains that "...le sculpteur se doit de mettre en exergue, de manière symbolique, plus les éléments qui caractérisent [une] personne que son aspect visuel réaliste. Le symbole est donc toujours, de toute manière, *un langage plus efficace* auprès des forces occultes" (*Statues colons* 23) [my emphases]. Like the African sculptor, Werewere values the efficacy of symbolic representation as part of a larger cosmology where 'hidden' forces influence artistic creation and inspiration. The symbol, as the medium of a dialogue between the artist and the divine, supersedes the thing in itself that is represented. In other words, if the symbol is the essence remaining from such a dialogue, then the means used to conceive and create it become secondary. Werewere believes that "le savoir est divin, le savoir-faire est humain. Nous ne sommes que des médiums de cette divinité" (Interview with Michelle Mielly, 2 June 2002). What all of this may serve to demonstrate is that it becomes difficult to assess certain 'paradoxes' in Werewere Liking's Western-funded cultural project for Africa when one begins to situate her within her own critical-spiritual apparatus.

⁴⁹ Cf. below section on the Aesthetics of Necessity.

By pointing out what appear to be inconsistencies between Liking's philosophy and her practices, we may in fact be revealing our own cultural assumptions and limitations. From an African perspective, Liking challenges such biases about art's aspirations. "...en Amour comme en Art, c'est toujours soi que l'on cherche. Soit dans ce à quoi l'on aspire de plus beau, de plus élevé, de plus fort et de plus grand. Ou soit dans ce qui manque et qui pourrait être complété, dans ce qui pourrait être un écho, un reflet, un prolongement."⁵⁰ Art therefore feeds the hungry narcissistic soul much like the much sought-after love of the other, projecting and mediating a new reflection of the self, that part of the self that is lacking. It would follow that to apprehend the art of the other is engage in a journey into the self: we must first adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis our own culture and limitations, accepting that the detour via the other represents in fact a voyage into our own subjectivity. While a more detailed a discussion of alterity will be developed in Chapter Three, we can begin at this point to recognize our limited knowledge of the other and the necessity to acquire a self-reflexive attitude. Victor Turner, with his unique postmodern anthropological vision, aptly observed that

Reflexivity creatively democratizes: as we become on earth a single noosphere, the Platonic cleavage between an aristocracy of the spirit and the "lower or foreign orders" can no longer be maintained. To be reflexive is to be at once one's own subject and direct object ... Cartesian dualism has insisted on distancing subject from object, us from them...Westerners, endeavoring to trap non-Western philosophies and poetics in the corrals of their own cognitive constructions, find that they have caught sublime monsters, eastern dragons, lords of fructile chaos, whose wisdom makes our knowledge look somehow shrunken and inadequate.⁵¹

When seen through this prism, attempts to discern and interpret the underlying tensions existing between Werewere Liking's philosophy and practices become increasingly challenging. Following Turner, we should first turn the critical eye back on ourselves to examine the premises that inform our understanding of such 'tensions' or paradoxes. In the African context, Liking seems able to reconcile her intellectual aspirations and practical efforts towards a new consciousness for African

⁵⁰ ibid.

⁵¹ Turner 1983 p, 338.

youth with the reality of a certain material assistance from benevolent non-African donors and sponsors. Survival over material failure means seeking and obtaining whatever means necessary to strive toward explicit ends such as saving African youth from the streets. If the benefits outweigh the costs, and if the greater underlying goal is cultural development for Africa, then Werewere Liking may necessarily remain bound to a certain degree of dependence on Western benefactors, at least for the time being. As the various schools of developmental thought challenge some of their most fundamental convictions of development practitioners, it becomes clear that our understanding of the interplay between Africa and the rest of the world is evolving. The implications of such a paradigm shift in the case of Werewere Liking will be addressed subsequently.

An Aesthetics of Necessity: The Ki-Yi Village as a New Social Movement

“Je dis toujours que la nécessité crée l’esthétique.”
—W. Liking, interview with C. Pillot, 1990.

The Ki-Yi’s aesthetic project cannot be dissociated from Liking’s project for African social solidarity: over thirty of the children living in the Ki-Yi are from indigent or difficult backgrounds, often school dropouts picked up out of Abidjan’s ghettos or elsewhere whose room, board, and training are financed by the Ki-Yi Foundation. Once a center for experimental theatre and aesthetic research, the Village seems to have progressively moved towards active social intervention.

“Werewere Liking accorde désormais la priorité à la formation des jeunes en difficulté. Ce sont plus d’une cinquantaine, sortis de la rue qui partagent avec elle son rêve panafricain de promotion des arts et culture” (Bénié 8). We know that the Ki-Yi Foundation does not receive subsidies or donations on a regular basis, but does sporadically receive material assistance from either individual donors or governmental-ambassadorial initiatives present in Côte d’Ivoire. The majority of their autonomous financing comes from the dinner-theater performances given regularly at the village, which typically cost around \$20 per person for a full-scale show and a ‘pan-African’ meal afterwards. In addition, various publications and recordings are for sale during the shows, as well as jewelry, fabrics, clothing, and other wares produced in the Village. Set against such a backdrop, it becomes evident

that for Liking, aesthetics are inextricable from ethics, since her art must meet the demands of necessity:

Je dirais que mon esthétique est *celle de la nécessité*. Je fais mon art selon les besoins, comme le cordonnier qui réalise un travail pour une utilisation immédiate. J'ai besoin de voir mes rêves se concrétiser. Au début, j'ai travaillé dans un théâtre expérimental, rituel, musical... Aujourd'hui, on ne sait plus où me ranger, côté esthétique. Mais c'est selon les besoins des jeunes avec qui je travaille. Mon théâtre est donc vital, il fonctionne selon les exigences du jour.⁵²

The aesthetics of necessity seems to adapt itself to the market, much like Liking's evocative notion of a cultural image that must be sold in order to be seen. Despite enormous personal and financial obstacles, Werewere and her staff have trained over three hundred young people since they began operating in 1985, many of them going on to rewarding professional careers on an international scale.⁵³

A Ki-Yi Foundation document introducing the current production *Sogolon Kédjou* states the practical objectives of the Ki-Yi Village project, as expressly outlined in their statutes:

La Fondation Ki-Yi a pour une cause panafricaine d'envergure

⁵² I would say that my aesthetic is one of *necessity*. I create my art according to needs, like the cobbler who carries out his work for immediate use. I need to see my dreams materialize. In the beginning, I worked in experimental theater techniques, with ritual, music ... Today, no one knows where to classify me, in terms of an aesthetic. But it's according to the needs of the young people with whom I work. My theater is therefore a vital one, it functions according to the needs of the day". Excerpts from the «Plenary Session with Ivoirian playwrights Werewere Liking and Zadi Zaourou» (Séance plénière avec les dramaturges ivoiriens Werewere Liking et Zadi Zaourou) at the CIEF (Conseil International des Études Francophones) Congress, Abidjan, Thursday May 30th, 2002.

⁵³ Liking's interview with Yvonne Monkam touches on this subject. According to Gerly Ngo Njock, Communications and Public Relations Director of the Village Ki-Yi, «La formation Ki-Yi a donné des jeunes créateurs déjà reconnus à l'échelle internationale : Bomou Mamadou, Boni Gnahoré, Nsèrèl Njock, Atou Ecaré, Don Zigré, Claude Boworé, Appolos Diaby, de Côte d'Ivoire, King Mensah du Togo et Ebawadé du Bénin, sont parmi les plus connus. Au moins trois cent personnes ont suivi cette formation depuis le début de notre expérience. Depuis quelques années, les classes d'art enrichissent les programmes d'éducation classique et l'accueil des stagiaires non Africains augmentent de loin ce chiffre. Bien d'autres encore sont en début d'une carrière prometteuse d'acteur, chanteurs, musiciens, danseurs et chorégraphes comme :Blébo Kouagni, Gohourou Gnepo, Djédjé Djédjé, Naï Zou, Akobé Mbolo, Sahi Boudamein, Osée Kosmer, Bailly Blo, Méléldja Akpa, Lohouré Gnagra, Eugue Makubi, Honakami Tapé, Péhoula Zéréhoué, Niamba Bacome, les Ano Neko (France). Des musiciens en ascendance comme Bassa Bomou, Ba Banga Nyeck, Manu Gallo, Yollo Ngimbus, avec des percussionnistes de valeur comme Zadi Toh, Zaouli Mabo, Gouléi Tchèpo, Kacou Dadié, sous la direction de Ray Lema. Des sculpteurs de grands talent comme Makosso d'Aygnarlé, Diané Lanfia, Lem Liking, Sari Bolonda, sortent aussi de là...» (Personal interview with Michelle Mielly, October 9, 2002).

L'œuvre de Werewere-Liking et de son groupe Ki-Yi Mbock a largement dépassé la création et la construction de carrières artistiques, pour devenir une cause d'envergure : une autre approche du développement de l'Afrique et de l'humanité toute entière laissant ses chances à chacun, quel que soit son niveau de départ.

La fondation panafricaine Ki-Yi est née pour être l'outil premier au service de cette cause et se donne comme objets statutaires :

- La lutte contre la délinquance juvénile et la réinsertion sociale par la pratique des arts au quotidien ;
- L'encadrement professionnel des jeunes formés par les centres de formation de la Fondation Ki-Yi ;
- La promotion et la diffusion des créations et innovations contemporaines panafricaines de toutes sortes ;
- La protection et la conservation du patrimoine culturel panafricain ;
- Une meilleure circulation des créateurs (enfants, jeunes comme adultes) et de leurs œuvres à travers toute l'Afrique et le reste du monde ;
- La promotion des échanges culturels susceptibles d'aider toutes les autres jeunes gens du monde en difficulté, à partir des modèles de formation et de structuration Ki-Yi

Thanks to the existence of such documents, we can fully assess the scope of the Ki-Yi's goals—on paper at least—and the practical means deployed in order to reach them. The Ki-Yi Village is a unique example of what anthropologist and development pundit Arturo Escobar hails as the future alternative for development: a New Social Movement (N.S.M.) that works to foster "...greater autonomy and pluralism, less dependence on the state, and new values of solidarity and participation" (Escobar 1995b: 219). The Ki-Yi essentially tries to provide a counter-discourse to the problems of economic and political reliance encountered with most NGO's whose donor-client relationship and charting of priorities and needs condition all projects with their Third-world counterparts. The benefactors of the Ki-Yi Village choose to give their money to its cause and have much lesser involvement in its redistribution and deployment than do traditional NGO's or cultural research centers. When she created the village, Liking decided to break with traditional institutional organizations such as the state-financed ones that she was familiar with at the University of Abidjan. The political and artistic freedom that she has subsequently enjoyed has nevertheless constantly been threatened by questions of economic survival. Hence a creative process dictated by *necessity*:

Nous, on s'est jeté à l'eau au gré de nos besoins...il a fallu créer selon les nécessités...D'abord, *la nécessité d'un lieu de vie, de travail et d'échanges permanents* pour les artistes permettant d'atteindre un niveau suffisamment compétitif à l'échelle internationale à partir de l'Afrique. Ensuite, *la nécessité de formation* pour porter le métier au rang d'idéal, c'est-à-dire permettre aux artistes d'en vivre dignement en ayant un impact social de nouveau bénéfique dans leur milieu

...Malgré tout, il nous faut trouver au moins trois millions de francs CFA par mois, soit quatre mille cinq cent soixante quatorze euros, pour espérer que les créateurs et formateurs puissent se fidéliser par au moins une rémunération minimale de semi-volontaire. (Interview with Michelle Mielly, June 2, 2002).⁵⁴

This aesthetics of necessity essentially represents a *channeling* of Liking's creative energies, imposing a steady focus on the practical demands of collective life. In spite of the adversities that such a life choice presents, Liking continues, from this perspective, to write novels and plays, to produce and direct major stage productions in Africa for the international theatre scene, to give lectures and appearances across the world at colloquia and conferences, as well as to continually orchestrate the rigorous, day-to-day grind at the Ki-Yi which begins at 6 am and often goes on until after midnight. The visitor to the Ki-Yi village will notice that a great part of this work is carried out in often unfavorable or very modest material conditions.

The aesthetics of necessity, as a 'bare-bones' approach to art and daily living, is a "modulable" strategy for survival in Liking's immediate artistic milieu; it is frequently re-defined or modified according to the most pressing exigencies to which it must respond. Ostensibly a determining factor behind the orientation and evolution of the Ki-Yi theatre's artistic production, the aesthetic of necessity appears to Liking as the *only viable alternative* in the difficult position that she occupies : constantly short of operational funding and with a seemingly endemic lack of materials and skilled labor, she is equally faced with the constant challenge of disciplining and training disadvantaged adolescents with little or no parental assistance. The aesthetics of necessity is not so much based on the financial needs of the Ki-Yi project itself as it is on the basic needs of the people involved in it. From this standpoint it becomes evident that the unique and formidable nature of the Ki-Yi's ambitions requires a materialist approach where the demands of the community are taken into consideration.

⁵⁴ It should be added that the sum of 3,000,000 CFA Francs per month represents no small fortune in a country where the average per capita salary totals 1,600 Euros *annually*. (Year 2000 Statistics, cf. CIA Website on Côte d'Ivoire <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iv.html>).

If the aesthetics of necessity is ultimately perceived as a means to an end—for Africans' attainment of greater cultural literacy—then we can see it as a creative alternative responding to the “politics of needs” adopted by donor agencies and multi-lateral development organizations. Escobar sees the ‘politics of needs’ as a central forum for NSM’s to subvert and challenge large-scale institutional development schemes that have previously failed:

The definition of needs presumes the knowledge of experts who certify ‘needs’ and the institutionalization of ‘social services’ by the state... the means of satisfying ‘needs’ position people as ‘clients’ in relation to the state. Models of needs satisfaction are stratified along class, gender and ethnic lines...the political status of a given need is an arena of struggle over how it is interpreted ...In the Third World the process of needs interpretation and satisfaction is clearly and inextricably linked to the development apparatus...The ‘basic human needs’ strategy, pushed by the World Bank and adopted by most international agencies...is based on a liberal human rights discourse and on the rational, scientific assessment and measurement of ‘needs’ Lacking a significant link to people’s everyday experience, ‘basic human needs’ discourse does not foster greater political participation. This is why the struggle over needs interpretation is a key political arena of struggle for new social actors involved in redirecting the apparatuses of development and the state (Escobar 1995b, 224-225).

Werewere Liking’s *esthétique de la nécessité* enters into this “key arena of struggle” by attempting to work from the inside out, by assessing needs through local or indigenous knowledge and action, and by foregoing the employment of outside intermediaries whose expertise would be required for such an assessment. As an essentially autonomous organization, the Ki-Yi Village operates outside of institutionalized ‘basic human needs’ discourse, functioning according to its own agenda, ideally fostering à la Escobar “greater political participation” by its members, whose voices and presence can potentially determine future actions. Possibly part of the reason that the Ki-Yi Village has been able to survive and maintain its appeal over the years is because of its status as a fledgling, as a struggling African cultural center and not as a well-oiled institution-based organization. It could be argued that by remaining unconventional, the Ki-Yi has foregone receiving subsidies on a regular, predictable basis, therefore wielding less power and less legitimacy in the eyes of large donor agencies. Whether this is intentional or not is open to debate, but it does seem that the Ki-Yi continues to generate spontaneous support and interest by virtue of its marginal status.

The aesthetics of necessity can be apprehended from a multiplicity of standpoints, but its political agenda appears inextricable from its artistic one. Other movements have certainly attempted to produce similar results; and one finds many similarities between Liking's work and the projects of several Brazilian artists, with the prominent example Glauber Rocha, the driving force behind the *Cinema Novo* movement in Brazil in the 1960's. Rocha developed a theory he called the "Aesthetic of Hunger", also called the "Aesthetic of Violence" for a 1965 speech where he describes hunger and violence as fundamental notions behind the artistic process in new Latin American cinema and art:⁵⁵

For the European observer the process of artistic creation in the underdeveloped world is of interest only insofar as it satisfies a nostalgia for primitivism... This economic and political conditioning has led us to philosophical weakness and impotence that engenders sterility... and hysteria... It is for this reason that the hunger of Latin America is not simply an alarming symptom: it is the essence of our society... our originality is our hunger and our greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood... For the European it is a strange tropical surrealism. For the Brazilian it is a national shame... Therefore, only a culture of hunger, weakening its own structures, can surpass itself qualitatively; the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence (Rocha in Martin 59-60).

Given its revolutionary Marxist tone, the aesthetics of hunger worked from a different historical perspective from that of Liking and yet provides a similar counter-discourse to neo-colonialism. Whether hunger, violence, or necessity, both artists engage in projecting an uncomfortable inside reality that is both disturbing and subversive. Both work with problems of misery and necessity in order to capture the essential conditions of existence in their contexts and to present this to a larger public. They both encourage cultural awakening or *conscientization* through their creations, hoping to spawn a new generation of engaged artists that can reach a larger public.

Another striking example is Brazilian Augusto Boal's "Forum Theatre" or "Theatre for the Oppressed" that emerged in the 1970's and has subsequently inspired scores of African troupes involved in the "Theatre for Intervention" movement such as the *Atelier théâtre burkinabé*, the Malian *Groupe Nyogolon*, or the *Théâtre de la Fraternité* (Burkina Faso).⁵⁶ Werewere Liking has

⁵⁵ See Rocha in Michael Martin and Sylvie Pierre p. 119-125 for further reading on the Aesthetics of Hunger.

⁵⁶ See article by Thérèse-Marie Deffontaines for more information about these various groups working within the context of "Théâtre d'intervention". "Qu'on l'appelle, selon les lieux et les pratiques, théâtre

recognized and situated herself within such movements that serve to meet tangible needs through its communicative abilities:

Le théâtre en Afrique aujourd'hui reprend progressivement la place prépondérante qu'il occupait dans les traditions : celle d'une parole essentielle, urgente et directe, nécessaire à la régulation sociale et mystique. Rituel ou ludique, psychologique ou mythique, vocal, percussif ou silencieux, plastique et esthétisant ou complètement épuré, le théâtre sert aujourd'hui à toutes sortes de communications : l'alphabétisation, les messages sanitaires, la publicité, et même les propagandes et les oppositions politiques. Il y a des théâtres "forum", des dits "utiles" ou "curatifs", et même des théâtres religieux ! Et le public en redemande... Le Groupe [Ki-Yi] lui a commencé par le théâtre rituel inspiré de différents peuples africains (Bassa du Cameroun, Bambara du Mali, Agni de Côte d'Ivoire.) Il a pratiqué ensuite le théâtre de Marionnettes et d'ombres, avant de s'adonner depuis plusieurs années déjà à un théâtre plus global, très ample.⁵⁷

Essential thus to this evolved theatre's 'global' approach is its ability to reach out to its public by raising contemporary concerns that affect it directly. The aesthetics of necessity conforms not only to the needs of its pan-African practitioners at the Ki-Yi Village, but also those needs of its *local*, immediate public. It endeavors to present pressing African issues to Africans and non-Africans alike within a global context, mustering up a "parole essentielle, urgente et directe" in order to penetrate into the root of current problems and heighten sensibilities, propelling its spectators towards the ultimate goal of cultural awakening, or what we will later elaborate as Liking's project for *conscientization*.

How can we view the aesthetics of necessity as anything short of a radical concept? Werewere Liking has conceived of an approach to her artistic activity in accordance with her daily life; in the collective context in which it is conveyed and practiced, such an approach achieves the status of a *movement*. By virtue of its sheer size, multiple exchanges and intense activity, the Ki-Yi Village is an active, living example of an aesthetic notion whose adherents' participation upholds its principles. The strict application of rules and standards of conduct for all of the Ki-Yi's inhabitants, as well as

forum, théâtre débat ou encore théâtre utile, il est clair qu'il correspond à un véritable besoin de la société et qu'il est pour les hommes et les femmes de théâtre africains que nous avons rencontrés un moyen de participer à l'effort de développement de leurs pays" (90).

⁵⁷ Cf. Speech by Werewere Liking in New York, June 1996.

their weekly Saturday meetings where collective issues are voiced, debated, and voted, ensures at least minimally that all concerned by the aesthetics of necessity are aware of both the sacrifices and rewards that its pursuit involves. While differences and discord are part and parcel of community living—especially when a majority of its members are adolescents—what is apparent to the outside observer of the Ki-Yi collective is the powerful relationship between thought and action, goals and realizations, dreams and the articulation of a means to their end. The Ki-Yi Village, with its inevitable defects, nonetheless provides an example of the kind of participatory development initiatives promoted by theorists of development alternatives such as NSM's, indigenous organizations and cooperatives, anti-dependency strategies, and the like. The Ki-Yi possesses structural elements that Portes and Sensenbrenner (1992), following Weberian social theory, have distinguished as mechanisms affecting economic and other goal-seeking behavior, using human or 'social' capital as its main resource.⁵⁸ Among these mechanisms the most salient that I observed at the Ki-Yi Village would be first what they call "bounded solidarity" or a reciprocal support system created by an awareness of common goals or interests, and secondly what they term as "enforceable trust", which claims that a certain level of community conformity to rules and practices is essential to reaching long-term collective goals, "enforced" through existence of sanctions at individual or group levels. This naturally comes into play in a context where a large part of the community's members are teenagers. Liking has continually stressed that the act of taking responsibility for one's own actions is the cornerstone of African development. This act begins at the individual level, and when one sees the high level of artistic expertise reached by such young performers during their tenures at the Ki-Yi, one begins to grasp how the aesthetics of necessity operates as a philosophy of self-responsibility, guided by an acceptance and embracing of one's place in the world, in the Nietzschean sense of *amor fati*. Similar to the development other grass-roots movements, the growth and evolution of Liking's initial project—a pan-African arts cooperative centered on the revival and

⁵⁸ Cf. Alejandro Portes And Julia Sensenbrenner, "Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action", *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (1992): 1320-50.

revalorization of traditional African arts—progressively provided the conditions that spawned her aesthetic philosophy. The aesthetics of necessity has in turn educated and prepared the futures of hundreds of individuals since its creation.

A Discussion of *Development*. Liking as an agent of cultural transformation.

“The idea of development stands like a ruin on the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work.”
W. Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*

“Culture will undoubtedly be one of the major issues of sustainability, development and governance in the twenty-first century. This is because it provides the building blocks of identity and ethnic allegiance; moulds attitudes to work, savings and consumption; underlies political behavior; and most important of all, builds the values that can drive collective action for a sustainable future in the new global context.” —Arizpe, ‘Introduction’, *The Cultural Dimension of Global Change: An Anthropological Approach*.

Since this study proposes to examine Werewere Liking’s activities in literature, theatre, and her community as efforts contributing to African development, it simultaneously begs the interpretation of the loaded term *development* that is being used here. Its etymology implies an unfolding, to “lay open more fully” from the Old French *desveloper*: in other words, the opposite of to envelop.⁵⁹ It follows then that *to develop* indicates a process of opening up, of making appear that which had previously remained out of sight or on the inside. This semantic understanding of *development* suggests that it operates on premises of visibility/invisibility, and on the notion of *revealing* that which is known to implicitly exist already. Development history and studies show, however, that until recently most proposals for societal change were based on an exogenous principle, where transformations were brought about from the outside by the imposition of a prescribed model usually foreign to the subject of development.⁶⁰ Over time a divergence between meaning and action, between thought and practice,

⁵⁹ Cf. Hoad, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Modern Etymology*, “develop” p. 122.

⁶⁰See, for example, the works by K. Gardner and D. Lewis, A. Escobar, U. Kothari and M. Minogue, M. Cowen and T. Shenton, J. Ferguson, C. Leys, or B. Fine.

seems to have taken place which may help to explain why the development 'machine' is today beleaguered by its critics and its aid recipients themselves.

In the present context of African literature, *development* would most obviously suggest contrasting socio-economic paradigms of growth and progress between the West and the developing world, following the main tenets of modernization theory. "In virtually all of its usages, development implies positive change or progress. It also evokes natural metaphors of organic growth and evolution" (Gardner and Lewis 3). Whereas some studies trace the genealogy of the Western approach to development back to the nineteenth century—"The classical approach to development measured all societies in relation to the epochal change in Western culture that was brought about by the industrial revolution" (UNESCO 41)—we can imagine that as a culturally-dependent notion it goes back much further. For example, much ink has flowed over the alleged 'discovery' of the New World in the late fifteenth century; and regardless of the historical inaccuracies and ethical dilemmas that it obviously poses, such a discovery brought about a set of *events* that were to determine the fate of Africa and the millions who would be exploited for the slave trade over the following four centuries—not to mention the fate of the autochthonous peoples in that New World. The fifteenth-century advent of the printing press in Europe and the subsequent development of national print cultures⁶¹ was accompanied by concurrent advances in cartography and navigation techniques. Such a progression fueled the humanist-inspired drive for exotic, unknown spaces, and with this came a new knowledge of and curiosity for strangers in distant lands. The chronicles and testimony of missionaries, adventurers, merchants, and other settlers in the uncharted regions of the world provided unprecedented information, often clearly distorted or romanticized, about societies in other hemispheres whose members were often portrayed as

⁶¹ Benedict Anderson's classic 1983 study on the origins of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, has generated a *culture* of print culture that has taken on a life of its own—perhaps encouraged by the rapid advances in information technology in our era and a sense of real-time simultaneity of action (members of a 'virtual' community). Chapters Two "Cultural Roots" and Three "The Origins of National Consciousness" detail the growth of national consciousness in relation to print becoming a commodity in a Capitalist culture, and contiguous factors of influence such as the Reformation and the question of greater linguistic

cannibals, savages, primitive, or animal-like.⁶² These often inadequate and caricatured accounts supplied the sole sources of information on other peoples and regions of the world, and yet ironically enough they fostered *a posteriori* a contemplation on the historical progress of humankind and Europe's role in that progress. Such a reflection naturally tended to induce an inherent belief in Europe's superior position in this process and its consequent altruistic-Christian duty towards 'lesser' peoples. By the eighteenth century the discourse on development had evolved into the secularized philosophies and theories of the Enlightenment that served to uphold a Euro-centric world view, but also from time to time called such a view into question, sometimes in derisive fashion⁶³—demonstrated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's observation that “Le grand défaut des Européens est de philosopher toujours sur les origines des choses d'après ce qui se passe autour d'eux” (*Essai sur l'origine des langues* 89). The nineteenth century saw the genesis of evolutionary theory and physical anthropology, and these developments were accompanied by a growing assurance of the European as universal reference. Europeans' status as members of the 'model' race became a certitude.⁶⁴

We can therefore assert that an historical conceptualization of *development* emerged out of an Enlightenment-inspired philosophy of human perfectibility whose origins harken back *at least* to the early Renaissance.⁶⁵ It has been argued that this totalizing perception of mankind's steadfast and

diversity .vs. centralized national languages. “The essential thing [in nationalistic ideologies] is the interplay between fatality, technology, and capitalism” (43).

⁶² There are exceptions to this, among them Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca for Peru, Jean de Léry for Brazil, Valentim Fernandes or Pachecho Pereira for Nigeria and Congo, and Michel de Montaigne for his anti-imperial, culturally sensitive interrogations in *Des Cannibales* and *Des Coches*.

⁶³ Notably, the natural dominion of Europe over lesser civilizations underlies the writings of Kant and Hegel. Conversely, in the French tradition there are many canonical works of the eighteenth century that examine issues of otherness, difference, and human progress, and throw into question Europe's superiority as well as its religions and political order. Among them Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, *Les lettres persanes* by Montesquieu, *l'Essai sur l'origine des langues* by Rousseau, *les Lettres d'une Péruvienne* by Mme. de Graffigny, or *Traité sur la tolérance* by Voltaire.

⁶⁴ See Zerbini p. 10.

⁶⁵ It has been argued that the origins of Euro-centric notions of development—and the contiguous phenomenon of territorial expansion and domination—can be traced back to the Roman Empire, as Koebner demonstrated in his important work, *Empire* (1961). Gilbert Rist (1997) traces development

inexorable march towards its own betterment in all spheres of existence first lent itself to the growth of nationalism across European nations, and eventually led to the standoff of the two great developmental models of the twentieth century, Capitalism and Marxism.⁶⁶ The nineteenth-century scramble for Africa, the drive to conquer and rule vast territories of peoples across the globe can certainly be seen as an early doctrine of Euro-centric development theory in practice, and the subsequent results of the colonial process are inextricably bound to the current discussion of Werewere Liking in contemporary Africa. Edward Said notes that by 1914 Europe held 85% of the earth as part of the Western concept of “colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths”, focusing specifically on the English and French Empires due to the “sheer distance of attractive territories” which “summoned the projection of far-flung interests” (*Culture and Imperialism* 10).⁶⁷ Without imperialism or colonialism, the current semantic understanding of *development* as a notion and practice could simply not exist. In the present context, imperialism and colonialism are therefore historical *discourses on development* which—just like development initiatives undertaken by a variety of multi-lateral organizations since World War II—depend on the capital, logistics, and active participation by wealthier nations. “While ‘they’ in the South are undeveloped, or in the process of being developed, we in the North (it is implied) have already reached that coveted state” (Gardner and Lewis *ibid.*). A rallying cry of *we know what’s best for them* seems to have fueled the counter-discourse of anti-development or post-development

history back to Greek antiquity where modernization theory also finds its origins in what he calls the Western “religion” of modernity. I prefer to harken back to the early Renaissance. The emergence of print-culture and capitalism during this period appears especially relevant to our discussion of development in the modern post-colonial context.. Significant factors contributing to colonialism’s success include the progressive growth of a national consciousness, the facilitated exchange of information, and the ability to ‘import’ exotic cultures of the colony back to Europe for consumption.

⁶⁶ “...the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought...What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning...few things were better suited to this end than an idea of nation” (Anderson 11). In UNESCO’s study, the notion of progress was conditioned by the limited sets of hypotheses inherent to capitalist or communist ideologies. Cf p, 42 *Change in Continuity*.

⁶⁷ Said views the nineteenth-century *novel* as a unifying element of imperialism which advocated a normative pattern of social authority from the center to the colonies, creating a “regulatory social presence” in these territories.

theories such as those articulated by Escobar (1995) or Sachs (1992). “Development was—and continues to be for the most part—a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of ‘progress’” (Escobar 1995: 44). Within the greater context of the history of ideas, it becomes apparent that our current understanding of development and the discourses surrounding it are rife with contention and controversy. The post-modern turn has a lot to do with this.

Michel Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge* undertakes to demonstrate the significance of the *rupture* in the “excavation” of culturally-constructed concepts:

...l’histoire d’un concept n’est pas, en tout et pour tout, celle de son affinement progressif, de sa rationalité, continûment croissante, de son gradient d’abstraction, mais *celle de ses divers champs de constitution et de validité, celles de ses règles successives d’usage, des milieux théoriques multiples où s’est poursuivie et achevée son élaboration*...les descriptions historiques s’ordonnent nécessairement à *l’actualité du savoir*, se multiplient avec ses transformations et ne cessent à leur tour de rompre avec elles-mêmes...(L’archéologie du savoir 11). [my emphases]

Following this reasoning, one which has largely influenced the major theories surrounding development studies since the 1980’s,⁶⁸ I would like to participate in fostering such a productive rupture in the discourse on development. The social sciences, economics in particular, have enjoyed a privileged role in the contemporary discussions surrounding this issue and base their understanding on hard data or material results that can be measured, quantified, and modeled with their methodology. In his book *Development as Freedom* (1999) Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen offers a holistic approach, defining development as the “expansion of freedom” where political liberty must accompany economic liberty for development to occur. This subtle and laudable approach to remedy development

⁶⁸ Peet and Hartwick (1999) explain that “During the 1980’s, poststructural critiques of modern, humanist endeavors like development, together with postcolonial skepticism about the continued operation of imperialism in new “benign” forms, entered development studies and changed it forever...First, there was a change in attitudes toward development. Progress, improvement, development—all that had been assumed to be automatically good at the level of intuition...the very notions “progress” and “beneficial” became suspect in terms not only of “Beneficent for whom?” but also, more revealingly, in terms of “Who determines what beneficial means?”...Second, there was a change in the methodology used in development studies...the term “development” was an invention, or social construction, and the concept had a discursive or a cultural (rather than natural) history...Poststructural thought, especially in the tradition of Foucault, placed new emphasis on development discourses formed in the context of cultures and framed within power relations” (144-145).

conundrums has been however problematized as yet another supporting argument for neo-liberal reform as the sole solution for growing poverty (cf. Sandbrook, 2000).

While economists are aware that development has not alleviated poverty in the Third World, precious few of those operating in the large multi-lateral institutions put neo-liberal economic theory and practices themselves on the stand to be tried for failure to reform and re-think its role in the problem. The United Nations' Organization, in its 1994 *Human Development Report*, openly recognized the failure of fifty years' worth of Western efforts to promote and achieve development in the Third World: "...unprecedented human progress coexists with unspeakable human misery...humanity has advanced on many fronts, only to retreat on many others; and...the astonishing globalization of wealth has been accompanied by a terrifying globalization of poverty."(UNDP 1994). In 1998 Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist for the World Bank, candidly admitted the inability and ultimate failure of the mainstream development approach to positively address and impact poverty throughout the entire post-WWII period. Yet his solution, based on social change, remains within the framework of the neo-liberal marketplace, where the transformation of entire societies is necessary in order to "weaken" or disable existing traditional institutions that are understood to be inherently 'bad' for the development business.⁶⁹ To compound the problem, consciousness and knowledge of development issues, instead of increasing, seems to be retracting, at least in the world's wealthiest nation. Jeffrey Sachs has noted that

If we were to send teams of 'UN Development Inspectors' into the United States, the results would not be pretty. First, they would discover a nearly total disconnect between global commitments and domestic politics. Mr. Bush has not discussed America's commitments at Johannesburg with the American people (and perhaps his aides have not even discussed them with the president.) Second, they would find complete disarray with regard to the organization, budgeting, and staffing necessary to fulfil the commitments. White House and State Department foreign-policy experts are overwhelmingly directed towards military and diplomatic issues, not development issues. (J. Sachs 81).

⁶⁹ Mark Duffield presents Stiglitz's comments in the framework of what he calls a new global "liberal governance". While Duffield does not address the deeper implications of attempting to enact such far-reaching social transformations, he does re-iterate the enigmatic and essential question that Stiglitz leaves unanswered: "Transformation to what kind of society, and for what ends?" (Stiglitz, 29, quoted by Duffield, 40).

In light of the acknowledged inadequacy of past developmental models and the misguided policy practices currently surrounding development, I propose to approach *development* from an unconventional angle, setting aside social, political, and economic definitions to consider development rather as an *esthetic* and *cultural* notion. In other words, I call into question the customary understanding of development as the privileged domain of the social and material sciences. What occurs when cultural activities—literature, theater, dance, or music, for example—intersect with aspirations for development? As stated earlier, my inquiry finds itself in the wake of those undertaken by my predecessors—especially the delegates to the African Literature Association’s 1987 conference at Cornell, “Africa’s Literature and Africa’s Development”. Anne Adams and Janis Mayes, editors of the proceedings, explain that

“African Development,” as a concept, is not generally construed to incorporate ‘the literary’...However, within a less-restrictive construction of “development” it can be argued that, among the cadres who function as “African Development Agents,” working “in the field” as well as in the theoretical realm, belong African creative writers—novelists, poets, playwrights. For one thing, quite apart from their published works, African writers, as wordsmiths, typically function—in an evolved African tradition—as Public Intellectuals: insightful, incisive, visible activist commentators...to refer to the work of [Nigerian] Ken Saro-Wiwa—as well as that of others and scores more of African writers who actualize in real life their vision for their societies, their nations, their continent—as ‘development’ work, brings into question the definition, or construction, of ‘development’ ... (Adams and Mayes 2-3).

In the footsteps of this earlier exploration, my elaboration of *development* is therefore a theoretical *construction* rather than a definition, an epistemological challenge to predominantly Western understandings of the term. By examining such a connotative notion’s latent potential and intrinsic limits, I hope to push the debate beyond its current realm—primarily within the social sciences and material disciplines—thereby inviting a larger discussion on the juncture between literature and politics, art and ethical commitment. Returning to Liking’s idea that “la bataille économique, c’est d’abord une bataille culturelle”, my thesis will argue that the subject of development in Africa, as elsewhere, cannot be breached without first engaging in a serious commitment to and study of its culture, traditions, and indigenous forms of knowledge. I assert that *no one* is better suited to do this than Africans themselves.

Our theoretical scrutiny and critical examination of ‘culture’ and ‘development’ at work in the Ki-Yi Village incites responses from both sides of the developmental fence. On the one hand, the Ki-Yi’s model for development represents an endeavor for progress and the improvement of living conditions for those it aims to benefit. On the other hand, development here does not fit within the Western model of modernist evolution; nor does it correspond to prescriptive techniques or methods inscribed in traditional discourse on development by adopting technical, scientific, or economic approaches alone. The development we are interested in demonstrating here is a hybrid construct, conceived of by Africans, for Africans, on African soil—yet supported in part by Western benefactors. It is a *culture-centered* model for development. Molar Ogundipe-Leslie reasons that “It is high time that we insisted more on ‘development with a cultural face’” since

...development as conceived historically now in Western hegemonic discourses and activities is failing because it has no cultural face. More correctly, development has the face/s of its enforcers’ cultures not the face/s of those who are supposed to utilize the development ideas. An underlying problem, without doubt, is that development should not be imposed. It should be locogenetic; developed by its users; conceived by the people who need the development” (Ogundipe-Leslie 27).

Ogundipe-Leslie’s post-modernist observations echo most current developmental theory in the field of anthropology, whose “holistic approach to social and economic life...stresses an interrelatedness that is often missed by other [development] practitioners” thereby offering the potential “to make useful links between the macro and micro perspectives, as well as revealing hidden, complex realities which have a bearing on project-based work (Gardner and Lewis 43). The increasingly interdisciplinary trend in the study of non-Western literatures and its intersection with cultural studies stands to greatly benefit from the anthropological experience in development practices and the lessons it has drawn over time.

Given this, I cannot stress enough the importance of framing this study within a context of facilitation as opposed to one of *representation*: I said from the beginning that I do not conceive of myself as ‘spokeswoman’ for the Ki-Yi Village or Werewere Liking, but rather as facilitator. I endeavor to work towards helping make Liking’s voice heard by others in and outside of the field of Francophone African literature studies, much like the applied anthropologist whose goal is one of public *advocacy* in the move away from the role of cultural mediator. Since I believe that Liking’s project for

cultural rebirth and literacy is a worthwhile one for Africans, then I can attempt to facilitate her struggle to be heard by other audiences while simultaneously turning her message back towards my own society, hoping it addresses a similar battle against cultural ignorance and isolationism on the Western front. *Human agency* is the centerpiece of Liking's battle for cultural autonomy and revalorization in Africa. Hopefully this study can help promote 'cultural militancy' alongside the political and social in Werewere Liking's project, helping Westerners learn something about Africa along the way. As her late friend Sony Labou Tansi once humorously pointed out, "A quelques exceptions près, l'Afrique demeure pour l'Occident une curieuse bête velue. Nous y sommes pour quelque chose: Nous acceptons trop souvent la fonction d'homme à développer. Moi, je ne suis pas à développer, mais à prendre ou à laisser" (Labou Tansi 1985, 5). This tongue-in-cheek commentary provides in fact a powerful statement of the post-colonial African artist: in the quest for legitimacy and agency, one must first call into question the widely accepted use of a connotative and often misunderstood term—*development*—and the import of designating certain nations as 'developing': in other words, in-process-of-becoming a *developed* nation like ours. As Werewere Liking, Labou Tansi stakes a claim for Africa, the "curieuse bête velue", on his own terms, opting to use his art as a forum to raise questions of mutual limitations and the need to bring cultural relativism to the discussion table on development.

In Liking's introduction to her current production, *Sogolon Kédjou*, she explains that "L'œuvre de Werewere Liking et de son groupe Ki-Yi Mbock a largement dépassé la création et la construction de carrières artistiques, pour devenir une cause d'envergure : une autre approche du développement de l'Afrique et de l'humanité toute entière laissant ses chances à chacun, quel que soit son niveau de départ" ("Introduction" *Sogolon Kédjou*). The quest for an *other* approach to African development as taken on by Werewere Liking is exactly what developmental pundits—as well as its expert practitioners—are now calling for. W. Sachs' now much-cited image of "development in ruins" as cited at the beginning of this section calls for an alternative when it declares that "it did not work". By recognizing cultural specificity and its valorization as integral to assessing and designing development projects, Werewere

Liking is describing the sort of grass-roots, African-based initiative that development agencies are promoting and encouraging.

If the aim of development really is to empower all nations so as to enable them to achieve full capacity for independent development, then it must begin by recognizing and valuing the one intrinsic asset which they can possess and without which they would cease to exist in their own eyes: *their culture*. (UNESCO, *Change in Continuity* 36). [my emphasis]

Liking is seeking to provoke a general social transformation at a microcosmic, individual level—“*quel que soit son niveau de départ*”—in order to empower each person to develop his or her full capacities. Such a transformation implies a re-formulation of post-colonial Africa’s goals and aspirations, moving away from short-term material gain to a long-term change in values. If Africans want to strive for good governance and self-determination, follows the reasoning, then they need not reinvent the wheel nor accept imposed models that are often ill-adapted to their cultural context. They must first become familiar with the time-proven traditional methods of government and education as practiced by their ancestors. Instead of seeking technology-intensive solutions in engineering, agriculture, or construction—a strategy that has proven ineffective for sustainable and equitable change in Africa—Werewere looks to the culture’s origins for inspiration and guidance in this process. Her strategy therefore constitutes a radical reversal of conceiving of development in the Third World: instead of approaching traditional culture as a hindrance to modernization and progress, Liking seeks to instill in Africans an acute awareness of the wealth of their heritage, necessary to gaining autonomy and promoting individual initiative. Somewhat ironically, exactly such a radical reversal in the approach to development work has been increasingly promoted by the international community:

To define development in terms of the aspirations inherent to a culture, rather than to assess culture in terms of its potential to help or hinder development, represents a substantial transformation in the attitude taken towards development work, which, if fully realized, in deeds as well as in words, could constitute an epochal change in international relations (Ibid 53).

The resolutions adopted by the United Nations’ 2002 World summit in Johannesburg reflect the developmental failures acknowledged since the Rio summit in 1992—basically, that a top-down

approach to development rarely works.⁷⁰ Werewere Liking, who over the past eighteen years has based her developmental model on traditional practices for Africans in Africa, clearly could have provided much earlier a vibrant example of the new social movement form of collaborative, endogenous development currently being embraced.

If that's Development, then what's Culture?

In staking a claim for Werewere Liking's cultural activities within the context of African development, the question of *culture* must also be addressed: in asserting such, we are first assuming that there is something called 'culture' and that it can be reduced to an umbrella concept covering that which is 'African' or 'traditional'. As heir to the Bassa culture living in Côte d'Ivoire and proponent of a pan-African approach to art and living, Liking herself is a combination of contrasting cultures and their very distinct values and priorities. In such a context it would therefore be impossible to define 'culture' in essential terms as it carries a multiplicity of representations across societies. I would rather like to outline the features of culture using a concept devised by Leo Dubbeldam from an *educational* standpoint: a key element in Werewere Liking's cultural development project.

Culture can be defined as the configuration of ideas and learned behavior+r and their results whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society in a continuous process of imitation and intended transfer of knowledge about society, nature and the supernatural, as well as through adaptations to and alterations in society's changing environment and through its members' creativity (Dubbeldam 17).

Dubbeldam's broad definition enables us to designate the Ki-Yi Village's pan-African practices as a *culture* in of itself, as constitutive of a shared group identity whose learned social and moral codes are transmitted from its older to its newer members. The notions of adaptation and creativity are especially compelling in the context of the Ki-Yi and demonstrate a culture's need to re-interrogate and renew its values and practices. Most significantly, Werewere Liking's cultural development goals are

⁷⁰ See article from *The Economist* ("Sustainable Development: A few green shoots" 31 August 2002, p. 57-59) which describes the shift in policy in some detail. "A fashionable, though controversial, move in this direction, which this summit [Johannesburg] could make less controversial, is so-called "Type 2"

precisely centered on an intended transfer of knowledge—the *Mbock* wisdom of the universe of her Bassa ancestors—and adapted for a young audience from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. *Education* is therefore the cornerstone of her development project for Africa, and it focuses on the attainment of cultural literacy at the microcosmic level in order to progressively expand outwards to the broader population.

Tout peuple désireux d'être plus responsable de son destin se base sur sa culture pour définir ses choix de développement. Les décideurs africains devront se baser eux aussi sur leurs cultures pour définir l'éducation des populations africaines s'ils veulent réussir à perpétuer leurs traditions les plus efficaces et à animer la création d'une nouvelle Afrique et d'un monde nouveau où l'Afrique jouerait enfin un rôle conçu par elle-même (Liking, *Ntorol Tchoret* 3).

Eminently political, Werewere Liking's objectives for cultural development are clearly not limited to the confines of the Ki-Yi 'Laboratory'. The process of coming-to-awareness of one's heritage involves an initial commitment to and acceptance of responsibility for his or her future, and contiguously, that of Africa. Dubbeldam has interestingly noted that most references to a specific cultural identity invoke the past or the present, but rarely the *future* (ibid. 20). Werewere Liking's dream of new Africa that determines its own destiny provides an exceptional example of culture and tradition at the service of Africa's future: in other words, its development.

—End of Chapter—

[Note to readers: Originally, there was to be a final section here entitled Werewere Liking's art in the current political climate of Côte d'Ivoire. We will follow the evolution of the complex political situation in Côte d'Ivoire with regards to its impact on the village Ki-Yi and a detailed section in the last chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to this analysis. I feel that this section would find its place more appropriately in the last chapter but also recognize that we may want to simply introduce the question of the turbulent politics at the end of the first chapter: what do you think?

partnerships, organised by (or, at least sanctioned by) the UN, and involving governments, businesses, NGO's, and local community groups. ("Type 1" partnerships are government-to-government)" (59).

Appendix I

Ki-Yi Mbock Troupe representations in International Festivals and Colloquia

EUROPE

- International Francophone Festival in Limousin, Limoges, France : 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1997
- Worldwide Festival of Marionette Theatre in Charleville-Mezières, France: 1988, 1991, 2000.
- Theatre Biennial, Chaux-de-Fond, Switzerland : 1990
- Berliner Ensemble, Berlin Germany : 1991
- "Climat" Festival, Brussels, Belgium : 1991
- "Forum Théâtre", Festival, Brussels : 1992
- "Images of Africa" Festival , Copenhagen, Denmark : 1993
- Nantes, France Summer Festival : 1993, 2001
- "Black Moovies" Festival, Geneva, Switzerland : 1993
- "Bis-Arts" Festival, Charleroi, France : 1993
- May Fest in Glasgow, Scotland : 1994
- "Musiques Métisses" Festival, Angoulême, France : 1994
- Avignon, France 'off' Festival : 1994
- Pavillon d'Armenonville, Paris : 1999
- Alsace Tour : 2000
- Blois, France – Hanover, Germany —Paris: TILF La Villette : 2000
- Belgian Tour : Centre des Cultures du Monde d'Anvers (Antwerp, Belgium) : 2000 & 2001
- Alsace, Aubervilliers and "Divan du Monde" in Paris : 2001
- Savigny sur Orge, France 2001 "Villes Citoyennes" Festival : 2001
- Residencies and exchanges between the Wanda-Yi Children's Troupe across ten cities in Alsace : 2002

ASIA

- Tokyo International Theatre Festival : 1992

THE AMERICAS

- "Cervantino" Festival, Guanajuato, Mexico : 1991
- "Young Theater" Festival, Philadelphia USA : 1992
- Québec Summer Festival : 1993
- World Stage Festival of Toronto : 1992 and 1994
- World Marionette Theatre Festival, La Jonquière, France : 1994
- Carrefour International de Théâtre de Québec : 1994
- Franco-Ontarian Festival, Ottawa, Canada : 1994
- Université de Sherbrooke, Québec : 1994
- Kennedy Center (African Odyssey, Harry Belafonte & Friends in Africa United), Washington, DC : 1997

- Michigan State University : 1997
- Madison University, Wisconsin : 1997
- Austin Arts Center, Hartford Connecticut : 1997
- Palace Theater, International Festival of Arts and Ideas, New Haven, Connecticut : 1997
- Drake University, Iowa : 1997
- Yale Repertory Theater, New Haven, with Ralph Lemon : 1997 and 1999