

Contrast of Visions in Paule Marshall and Laurent Gaudé's Novels

Daniel Tia¹

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, American Literature, University of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan-Cocody, Côte d'Ivoire

Correspondence: Daniel Tia, Assistant Professor, Department of English, American Literature, University of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan-Cocody, Côte d'Ivoire.

Received: May 14, 2021

Accepted: June 3, 2021

Available online: June 28, 2021

doi:10.11114/ijsss.v9i4.5279

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v9i4.5279>

Abstract

This article examines two novels written by two writers from distinct nationalities –one is an American citizen and the other is a French citizen; their linguistic landmarks are visibly illustrated in their respective texts. Despite that cultural difference, those exegetes of literature, share common aesthetic values. On the one hand, they cross their geographical boundaries and on the other hand, textualize black Diaspora, Western social realities, African/Western cultures and spaces, thus giving credence to the ideals of globalization. A global policy, which advocates the removal of cultural barriers between countries and human beings. Through creative art, those writers free themselves from every sectarian practice, promote the humanist and open one. Being now world citizens and evolving in a planetary village, they make divergent judgments upon some of the regions of their new ideal society. Black/white characters, through the prism of literary texts, judge Africa and the Western World. Both spaces are poetically praised and denigrated. This perceptive ambivalence is the focus point of the current study, whose anchor is primarily comparative semiotics. By drawing upon its operational principles, this work aims to decipher the semantic network, which emerges from both visions.

Keywords: ambivalent vision, Africanity, relativity, Western World, globalization, world citizens

1. Introduction

Literary texts, regardless of their genres, construct two types of values. To Vincent Jouve, some are “extratextual” and others are “original” or “complex” (Jouve, 2001). Those figures are scattered in the text making it as a “melting pot” of values –their originality or creativeness remains the main criterion of literarity, for they give aesthetic tone and a specific vision to the text. Among those values, black/white characters' visions occupy an essential place; the normative apparatuses (characters) involved in animating the narrative spaces have different perceptions. In *Praisesong for the Widow*¹ (1983) and *Eldorado* (2006), the issue of vision acquires ambivalent significance: it is admiring and hateful; as such, a semantic network is constructed around that sign, thus making vision as an interpretable literary sign. However, before interrogating it, let us consider some of the critical works already done upon the current novels to avoid rehearsals, for repetitions generate only insignificant epigones.

Chronologically, we have Daryl Cumber Dance's “African American Literature by Writers of Caribbean Descent Dance” (2011), Eugenia Dhanashree Thorat's “Oral Traditions: An Analysis of Story Telling and Performance in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*” (2011), Janelle Rodrigues's “Threads Thin to the Point of Invisibility, yet Strong as ropes: Afrofuturistic Diaspora in *Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow*” (2017), Silvia U. Baage's “Regards exotopiques sur deux portes de l'Europe : la crise migratoire à Lampedusa et à Mayotte dans *Eldorado et Tropique de la violence*” (2017), Izabella Penier's “Culture-bearing Women: The Black Women Renaissance and Cultural Nationalism” (2019), Gary D. Mole's “Mordre la poussière dans l'Eldorado à rebours: Laurent Gaudé la migration clandestine et l'ombre de Massambalo” (2019), Aurélie Palud's “Trajectoires contemporaines : traverser la Méditerranée dans le roman du XXI^e siècle” (2020), T. Ezhilarasi's “Dilemma and Genetic Memory in *Praisesong for the Widow*” (2020), Daisy Rani Doley's “Redefining Black Female Identity in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*” (2020), and Daniel Tia's *La Mobilité dans Praisesong for the Widow* (2020).

In terms of interest, the works based on *Praisesong* define Africa as a homeland –a land of ancestral reconnection,

¹ For any other references to *Praisesong for the Widow*, we will use *Praisesong*.

collective memories and the others based on *Eldorado* deal with African migrants' experience on their way to the Western World. Without exaggerating, those critical works are innovative, for each of them constitutes a scientific contribution –each addresses a particular aspect of the novels under consideration. However, beyond all those remarkable critical contributions, what is lacking, which substantiates the current study is that none of the works mentioned in the review, makes an objective comparative semiotic analysis based on the characters' visions. Thus, that theme proves to be of paramount importance as it is related to the elusive nature of African and Western societies. With reference to those limitations, the above review is certainly of notable scientific value, but it embodies some weaknesses. In other words, that review is not exhaustive and does not definitively account for all the issues posed or evoked by both novels (*Praisesong* and *Eldorado*). Substantial aspects, such as vision, need to be deciphered with more attentiveness to comprehend both authors' literary projects. A priori vision refers to perception and implies the constructive imaginary inscribed in any rational and discursive judgments (opinions) –this can be materialized in literary texts or be orally stated. Literary texts are the products of human spirit; as such, they reflect social realities. No matter the characters involved in the fictional universe, they always epitomize a hierarchy, culture, human activity, and socio-political organization, which characterize life in the textualized society. Any attempt aiming to decipher the opacity of those values helps to reveal the author's vision(s).

As explained above, vision appears in the characters' voices, beliefs, and deeds. In *Praisesong* and *Eldorado*, the latter make divergent judgments upon Africa and the Western World. From a diasporic perspective, Africa is a cradle of hospitality, love, and cultural richness, which serves as a space of spiritual recollection, replenishment, and communion. Paradoxically, the West is shown as a place of discrimination, injustice, inequality, and cultural acculturation. From a purely African perspective, the West is perceived as a space of fulfillment, justice, and prosperity. As to Africa, it is qualified as a conflicting and poor world, which epitomizes an earthly evil; i.e., its populations suffer from any kinds of difficulties. Thus, the issue of relativity arises, for in reality, no society is intrinsically better than another one; each has its negative and positive dimensions, its strengths and weaknesses. In congruence with that relativity, which textual figures illustrate the ambivalence of visions in *Praisesong* and *Eldorado*? What does that ambivalence imply? Through those questions, the current study aims to show that human societies (be it Africa or the West) are relative. Thus, to carry out this work, the comparative semiotic perspective will serve as a guideline.

Explicitly, semiotics as a tool of analysis is interested in the modeling of the abstract structures of the meaning; it accounts for the significance of the texts under consideration. Visions being inscribed in those texts, semiotics deciphers their manifestations; those textual occurrences are always subtle; therefore, that methodological tool will be interested in the changes between characters. Being based on two novels, the current study will lean on the comparative semiotic perspective. To Louis Hébert, “[a] comparative [study] compares texts and textual forms (...). But [it also deciphers] different types of semiotic products (...) and their associated forms coming in principle from different cultures (possibly from different languages), in order to bring out the identities, similarities, oppositions and provide the causes, modalities of presence and effects of those different comparative relations” (Translation mine) (Hébert, 2014). With reference to that explicatory detail, the semiotic comparative perspective chosen in the framework of this study, will examine some of the values attributed to the characters of both novels (*Praisesong* and *Eldorado*) through two major points: African descents/westerners' perception of Africa and the West and “Pure-born” Africans' perception of the West and Africa.

2. African Descents/Westerners' Perception of Africa and the West

The points this step proposes to elucidate, are two in total. They are, in particular, the picture of Africa on the one hand, and that of the host society on the other. Both pictures are considered as signs and deserve to be carefully explored.

From a semiotic perspective, Africa is not a lost society in Marshall's fictional work. Black female and male figures (black characters), Avey Johnson, Aunt Cuney, Lebert Joseph, and the Carriacouans are committed to defending its values (ancestral heritage). In *Praisesong*, black characters are initially described as acculturated or disconnected beings. Being deprived of all their ancestral values by American society, they undertake a double struggle to change their lives. One is social as it implies the improvement of their social conditions and the other has a cultural scope. The acquisition of social mobility is complex because American imperialism prevents Blacks from acquiring financial autonomy. As a result, injustices and inequalities are still rampant in Blacks' lives. In response to that situation, they initiate the latter in which Africa holds a central position. Here, Marshall faithfully renders the importance of African cultural resources. For example, the Johnson family whose conditions are apparent in the first and second chapter (Runagate and Sleeper's Wake), epitomizes black Diaspora. The members of that family are accustomed to listening to some “old blues records” (Marshall, 1983), which link them to their past (ancestral roots). The narrator reveals, “the Jay who emerged from the music of an evening, the self that would never be seen down at the store, was open, witty, playful, even outrageous at times: he might suddenly stage an impromptu dance just for the two of them in the living room, declaring it to be Rockland Palace or the Renny. And affectionate: his arms folding around her from behind when she least expected them, the needful way he spoke her name even when they quarreled” (Marshall, 1983). Clearly, the Johnson family is a textual

figure around which various ideological values are constructed. Indeed, Avey Johnson (Jay Johnson's wife) is a courageous, humanist, traditionalist, responsible woman. Thanks to her exceptional qualities, she succeeds in embracing her past. She is also involved in convincing members of black Diaspora to revisit their ancestral roots. To her, Africa can help them redefine themselves; therefore, she exhorts them to appropriate their African resources. In fact, she is advised by Aunt Cuney (one of Marshall's ancestral figures) to sensitize African descents about the relevance of African heritage in their fight against white oppression. In terms of vision, Avey Johnson sustains African descents in their challenge to overcome Western cultural imperialism or neo-imperialism.

Besides, Marion, one of Avey Johnson's daughters is another traditionalist figure who, despite her young age, has a bright vision; she has a panegyric perception of Africa. She considers it as the ancestors' roots and true cultural source of regeneration for African descents. To her, African descents (Carriacouans and Outlanders) were born in America and elsewhere, but they have their roots in Africa. Above all else, Marion's message is far from being discriminatory. On the contrary, it restores Blacks' history and aims to improve their tarnished image. To her, African descents should reinvent themselves. This means they should not judge themselves according to the insulting and denigrating image constructed by white colonists and other conservative spirits. Through a challenging struggle, they should affirm their dignity considering their past as an integral part of their being. That past, be it painful or peaceful, should be taken into account in the process of redefinition of black folks. By redefinition, this study does not mean that Blacks should affirm their superiority to other people; the process of identity construction underlined here, advocates the consideration of Blacks' past, history, collective memory, cultures, traditions, myths, legends, languages, which have been destroyed by white colonists or merely denied. In other words, by exhorting her mother (Avey Johnson), Marion (one of Marshall's characters) tries to sensitize all members of black Diaspora to wake up and deconstruct Whites' misrepresentation of Blacks by valorizing their ancestral heritage. Significantly, to succeed in constructing the above historical and cultural values, Africa should be considered, for it represents Blacks' ancestral society (true place of togetherness and wholeness).

By visiting Africa, members of black Diaspora can practice their ancestral tradition. *Praisesong* provides an example of a journey back to the roots, which enables African descents to discover their cultural resources. During that journey (Annual Excursion), they pay tribute to their ancestors and learn to discover themselves. To Marion, that self-discovery is more economical than undertaking a purposeless excursion with Whites. That is why she is firmly against her mother's relationship with white women (Thomasina Moore and Clarice). The following textual clue is representative of her opposition, "why go on some meaningless cruise with a bunch of white folks anyway, I keep asking you? What's that supposed to be about?" (Marshall, 1983). Obviously, historical pains are still recurrent in Marion's mind; she believes that her mother's relationship with Whites is unfair and hypocritical. Indeed, during the period of colonization, Africans were deported to various regions of the Western World. They were taken on the Senegalese coasts and deported to America. Gaudé and Marshall respectively reconstruct that painful past in the ensuing utterances, "it all started in Gorée, off the coast of Senegal, when Captain Bressac had the bad idea to die. We had been anchored there for twelve days: the time to buy ebony wood and load it on board. We were about to leave for America as we had done so many times before, but Bressac fell ill" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2007)/"It was here that they brought 'em. They taken 'em out of the boats right here. Where we's standing. Nobody remembers how many of 'em it was, but they was a good few 'cording to my gran' who was a little girl no bigger than you when it happened" (Marshall, 1983). Both citations trace the one-way trip of Africans to unknown horizons. Those deported people carried with them their cultures and traditions, but their contact with other cultural resources altered theirs. In that context, their descendants, whether they like it or not, are acculturated beings, for in one way or another, they are influenced by external values, which they adopt out of necessity.

Therefore, the only efficient and reliable way out to save themselves from infinite and everlasting acculturation is to return to their homeland (ancestral roots). In *Praisesong*, Africa appears as a textual sign capable of effectively combating acculturation. Indeed, Africa still abounds with the necessary intangible cultural resources, which African generations bequeathed to each other; i.e., those inherited resources can enable members of black Diaspora to redefine themselves, revivify or revitalize their cultural identity. Let us underline that African descents' process of identity construction is a noble initiation. However, they should embrace and magnify their sense of Africanity without being ashamed. To Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, "the journey is also the essential trope. The geographical journey marked for the deported African a moment, a new history linked to but yet divergent from African history. The symbolic journey, on the other hand, functions as a metaphor for an identity quest, an itinerary and an exploration by the novelistic characters of their own memory. In their quest for contact with a different society and culture, they transform the spaces they visit into places of self-knowledge and self-realization. (...) If we consider the African survivals in the black Americas, we can certainly read their history as one of continuity" (Translation mine) (Mudimbe-Boyi, 2006).

As far as Gaudé's *Eldorado* is concerned, it defines Africa as a place where hope is possible. For instance, Salvatore

Piracci's resignation from his profession in the Western World to embark on an adventure to Africa is semiotically a lesson (commitment) whose social and ideological scope is to deconstruct the negative judgments nurtured by Western imperialists. In *Eldorado*, Gaudé depicts Africa as an asylum for Salvatore Piracci. This means he feels frustrated and disappointed about the Western ideological pressure. As a result, he decides to flee and settle in Libya (Africa). Salvatore Piracci is the one of the soldiers who enforces European discriminatory law of immigration –a deal in which European political leaders are involved. Indeed, with time, that soldier discovers that despite his remarkable work, he is not rewarded, but blamed. Salvatore Piracci realizes that he is betrayed by the Western political leaders' discourses; he confesses it as follows, "they used to tell us that we were there to watch over the citadel. (...) They said: I believed it (...) I am not talking about politics or ideology, no, but I believed because for a long time that is what I felt when I was at sea. I watched the horizon with binoculars. I checked the radar. Spotting. Hunting. Intercepting. I was for a long time off the coast, one of the guardians of the citadel. (...) I am tired (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2007). Clearly, Salvatore Piracci wants to experience a peaceful life outside Europe. In *Eldorado*, Africa turns out to be the land of dreams capable of freeing Salvatore Piracci from his anxieties. The narrator reveals his thought in the utterance, which follows, "the grass will be fat and the trees full of fruit... Everything will be sweet there. And life will pass like a caress. Eldorado. That was all he could think about. He knew well that he was going against the current of the river of emigrants" (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006). Explicitly, Salvatore Piracci considers Africa as a universe where everyone can visit and fulfil their dream. A close glance at the picture of Africa in the texts under consideration helps to discover that Marion (*Praisesong*) and Salvatore Piracci (*Eldorado*) praise Africa. Metaphorically, African traditional values are portrayed as remedies, which can cure cultural disconnected individuals and members of black Diaspora from social bondage. Africa is also considered as an Eldorado (promise land). From a cultural point of view, Africa is depicted as a motif, which can contribute to deconstruct Whites' tarnishing judgments on Blacks. Indeed, Marshall and Gaudé's fictional works elevate Africa to a rank of honor not by advocating its economic dynamism/success; nevertheless, by praising and considering its human and cultural potentialities as sources of realization, and recognition.

Better still, hospitality, love, true unity based on mutual respect (without barriers) are some of the values entertained and preserved by African societies. As such, it is akin to an earthly paradise where lost subjects, disconnected and disappointed beings can go and escape from existential difficulties. In other words, Africa is a space of recollection, resourcing, and rest. In Gaudé's novel, there is no concrete Eldorado; be it Western World or Africa, every society has their positive and negative aspects. Salvatore Piracci settles in Africa to experience that social liberation, which he does not find in Europe. He is disappointed about European political system. As far as Avey Johnson is concerned, she discovers that the death of her husband is one of the consequences of American imperialist system. The fear to fall into poverty trap and be unable to sustain his family compels Jay Johnson and his wife (Avey Johnson) to embark on a continuous quest for material qualified as a "marathon". This provides the above couple with a social identity and financial independence, but with a cultural exploitation. Analyzing what Africa and America represent for African descents, Susan Rogers argues, "Avey's memories of Africa are an essential part of her being, while her American identity is a socially constructed one, is problematic" (Susan Rogers, 2000). That constraining struggle aiming to sustain social balance within his family negatively influences his relationship with his wife (Avey Johnson). He starts overlooking her, and worse, he repudiates his own cultural identity. Jay Johnson spends his lifetime without resting. He loses his cultural landmarks because of his continuous quest for material. As a result, he becomes an acculturated and marginalized being. To avoid such a situation, Marshall exhorts members of black Diaspora to come out of their tower and visit their ancestors' roots not as tourists, but as worthy descents who return to their roots after a long absence to become immersed with their cultural realities. Marion, one of Marshall's characters suggests to her mother (Avey Johnson) to visit Africa, "here last summer I begged you to go on that tour to Brazil, and on the one, the year before that, to Ghana" (Marshall, 1983). Apparently, Marion disapproves her mother's sudden change. Indeed, Avey Johnson has entirely adopted Western style and given up the African one. Her daughter (Marion) who believes that Western style alters African cultural identity undervalues that attitude. So, the only way out to refuse acculturation is to go back to Africa and deeply experience what is practiced there. Marion's suggestion is not necessary about a physical displacement, but a spiritual immersion through black history and culture.

Moreover, Africa serves as a land of reminiscence, spiritual regeneration, and hospitality. To Marshall, the development of the planetary village cannot be achieved without black people's contribution. Her novel traces the furrows of the commitment of renewal. This means Africa is a cultural treasure, which can contribute to the global cultural development. To her, African descents are to take part in that project; therefore, they are to bring their support. To Louis Mendy, "Paule Marshall, through the character of Avey Johnson, seems to remind not only Africans, but also people of most Diasporas of the importance of being constantly connected to their true identities" (Mendy, 2019). In other words, African descents are to invalidate the fault thesis according to which, Blacks are subhuman. By accepting to redefine themselves, taking into account their cultural roots, they can destroy the prejudices constructed by white colonists. This can help them perpetuate African values and affirm their Africanity. In the attempt to define Africanity, Toyin Falola and

Ricardo René Laremont assert, “Ali A. Mazrui redefines Africanity across geographical spaces, time, and academic disciplines. He challenges pre-established notions both of the definitions of Africans and Africanity, forcing us to reject imperialist paradigms and encouraging us to think more creatively about African social realities” (Mazrui quoted by Falola & Laremont, 2009).

Noticeably, the spiritual journey to Africa is a necessity, for it helps to discover the “self,” which has long been buried in the meanders of Western cultural values. In terms of globalization, the return of members of black Diaspora to their ancestral roots means that there is no barrier of mistrust and reluctance. This journey attests that Africa is a cradle of cultures and traditions; for instance, *Praisesong* details African cultural assets through dances like “Big Drum” and “Nation Dance Ceremony”. By appropriating those ancestral dances, African descents free themselves from any forms of sorrow linked to their painful and long oppressive experience. To Patrick Taylor, “to dance the nation is to find oneself immersed in a liminal world where tradition informs contemporary experience and ritual takes on new meaning” (Taylor, 2001). As indicated above, Africa is a society of great civilization where the practice of spirituality liberates individuals. To Dorothy Hamer Denniston, “in precolonial African societies religion (...) was essential to virtually every facet of daily living. That is, religion was not institutionalized so as to separate secular and spiritual life; rather, it informed, directed, and became the very fabric of secular living” (Translation mine) (Denniston quoted by Janelle Rodrigues, 2017). Always better, African descents are exhorted to embrace their ancestral heritage.

As to the Western society, it is portrayed in both texts as a corrupted space, due to the poor social policies in place. In terms of opportunities, discrimination is persistent; African descents exert informal activities. That situation makes them hypermodern; they give less importance to immaterial values (culture and tradition) and are more interested in the quest for material. What is essential for them is their desire to find an instant solution to their social difficulties. They feel obliged to carry several activities to support their family. This means the Western society implicitly promotes inequality. The drawbacks of that injustice are exhausting, for individuals sometimes perish without achieving financial independence. In *Praisesong*, Jay Johnson is one of the victims of Western imperialism; he does not exert decent activities, which can provide him with stable self-sufficiency. He therefore feels constrained to carry out various activities in order to maintain social balance within his families and elsewhere in his day life. More important, the Western World is a place of tensions. Blacks and Whites are always in competition. The former struggle to acquire social and financial mobility, but the latter worsen their conditions to maintain them in the margins as second-class citizens.

As a result, African descents profoundly suffer from exclusions and other humiliations. Questioning the social pressures prevailing in the Western World and decrying the pitiful treatments inflicted upon Blacks, Marshall asserts: “But chains didn’t stop those Ibo none. Neither iron the way my gran tol it (other folks in Tatem said it wasn’t so and that she was crazy but never paid êm no mind) cording to her they just kept on walking like the water was solid ground. Left the white folks standin’ back here with they mouth hung open and they take off down of the river on foot. Stepping [...] these Ibo! Just upped and walked on away not two minutes after getting here!” (Marshall, 1983). Here, the chains embody suffering, alienation, slavery and injustice. Through those chains, the West is presented as a place where human beings are denigrated. The legend of the flying men, which Marshall highlights in this quote is illustrative of the lack of hospitality that prevails in the Western world. In addition, in *Eldorado*, the horizon of expectation is violated. Indeed, the title of the novel is contrary to the substance. Indeed, the space called Catania shows that the West is confronted with various environmental crises; its streets are very dirty, its beaches are also unpleasant. The narrator illustrates that ecological crisis as follows, “in Catania, on that day, the rebels’ pavement in the Duomo district smelled fishy” (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006).

Worse still, some migrants fail to cross the Atlantic –their dead corpses are rejected on shores discrediting fishing and tourist activities. In terms of influence, this jeopardizes citizens’ health and pollutes the environment. Explicitly, the humanitarian situation is critical due to mass immigration. This worsens the access to jobs opportunities. Far from being a paradise, the West acquires a chaotic image. Gaudé’s narrator indicates, “at the beginning, the inhabitants of Lampedusa had seen these boats of misery arrive with amazement. The sea regularly appeared to them dead corpses and they were upset. Those men, whose names, countries and histories they knew nothing about, had come to be stranded in their homes and their corpses could never be returned to their mothers” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). Metaphorically, Europe is a real cemetery. In both texts, America and Europe promote an exclusive political system, which negatively affects African descents and other African migrants’ lives. In fact, Jay Johnson’s death, on the one hand, and Salvatore Piracci’s resignation, on the other, are illustrative of the harmful policies of governance, which prevails in Western societies. In the ensuing utterance, Gaudé’s narrator discloses Salvatore Piracci’s disappointment, “I am about to say goodbye to life, he thought, and I feel no sadness about it” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006).

To him, he has been serving Europe for twenty years; but now, he realizes that he implicitly participates in the European discriminatory migration policy. In other words, Salvatore Piracci is exasperated with that inhumane policy, which

theoretically praises human values, but in practice, promotes division, separation, loneliness, and discrimination; he therefore decides to give up his profession and venture to Libya hoping to find a way out to her sorrow and disarray. Once in Africa, he relates the dark truth of the West, “he spoke of the misery of the rich. Of the slave life that awaited most of those who attempted the journey. He spoke of the disgust at the huge stores where everything can be bought, but nothing is necessary. He spoke of money. About its violence and its reign” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). In accordance with human relations, Western societies do not unite citizens. There is no hospitality between Whites and Blacks; the West sustains an implicit campaign of denigration, which is practiced to keep Blacks on one side and Whites on the other. In *Eldorado*, the narrator depicts the injustices against immigrants, which disappoint Salvatore Piracci and is disclosed by Gaudé’s narrator, “for a while again, there was only that. As soon as they all had boarded, he would have to become again the Italian commander of an interceptor ship. He would have wanted this moment to stretch, so that this can be his job: a quest in the night in search of lost ships. A fight between him and the sea. Nothing else. Take back men from death. Pull them out of the mouth of the ocean. Everything else, the arrest procedures, the detention centers, the stamps on the papers, all that, at that moment, was derisory and ugly” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). Instead of helping migrants find a reliable and stable solution to their critical situation, the coast guards arrest them. In terms of interpretation, insecurity, violence, and injustice are rampant in the West. Political figures take decisions, which are ineffective on the ground. *Eldorado* is a novel, which faithfully renders that pathetic social reality.

Besides, in *Praisesong*, there is a social barrier between Halsey Street and North White Plains. The former space, which is mainly inhabited by Blacks, is poor. The latter one, which is mostly inhabited by Whites, is posh. Significantly, Western political system proves to be incapable of fighting against those social disparities, thus exacerbating human relations. In *Eldorado*, the West is against fair policies of globalization. Yet, those policies are supposed to promote freedom of movement and cross-cultural practice. However, some walls are erected between Africa and Europe, thus symbolizing division (separation). Analyzing the tension, which prevails between Blacks and Whites in the Western societies, Daniel Tia asserts, “in American society, this hatred is more or less hidden –it is purely ideological, i.e. the citizens do not directly exert brutal force on each other, but the economic and political systems worsen the relationship between the individuals” (Tia, 2020). From a symbolic view, those barriers denote the rejection of the other. Thus, integration initiatives remain meaningless and pave the way to injustices. For instance, both texts disclose that the West is not ready to promote universal unity.

On the contrary, *Praisesong* and *Eldorado* nurtures an unprecedented policy of division –African migrants who succeed in crossing the barriers erected between Africa and Europe are arrested and put in detention centers (another name for prisons). Those walls are representative of obstacles; they prevent the advent of true globalization. That is why Salvatore Piracci, one of Gaudé’s characters Gaudé qualifies Western political figures’ discourses as “oiled words, false words” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). Openly, those discourses contradict the ideals of globalization. Clearly, the walls show that the West advocates a policy of protectionism, for it realizes that its environment is more and more saturated by African immigrants. Unambiguously, the soldiers assigned to carry out rescue missions are transformed into repressive machines once the rescue actions are completed or achieved.

From the above, African descents and Westerners valorize Africa, but undervalue the West. As to the following step, it will deal with the pure-born Africans’ vision.

3. “Pure-born” Africans’ Perception of the West and Africa

Like the preceding step, this one focuses on two points, inter alia pure-born Africans’ vision of the West and Africa.

In both texts (*Praisesong* and *Eldorado*), the Western economic is depicted as being attractive; African migrants flock there to change their social status to construct a shining social identity. In other words, Africans decide to settle in Western societies to take care of their families. Thus, the West is perceived as a place where the access to social mobility is easy. The narrator discloses the enthusiasm, which animates African migrants when they get close to the European borders, “we are a few meters away from our dream life” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). In the texts under consideration, the West is characterized by the myth of Eldorado. Africans’ ardent desire to experience European Eldorado pushes them to settle in Western societies. To them, the West promotes opportunities of chance. Therefore, they consider it as a place of justice, equality, and respect for human dignity. Some characters’ words show that the West is a paradisiacal universe and that its inhabitants evolve in opulence, “I will go to Europe and will work like hell. If things are as they say, I’ll soon have some money. I’ll send everything over there. As fast as I can. The money must flow to my brother. He will then see that Soleiman is stronger than he thought. That Soleiman can do without everything to be by his side. I will work like hell, yes. It doesn’t matter. I am young. He will be able to buy his medicine. The fight has begun. It is a race and I must be efficient and fast. As soon as I set foot in Europe, I will seek a job. Anything. Jamal is wrong. There are both of us. And I don’t forget him” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006).

Noticeably, this young Sudanese is not the only one to head to the West in search of material. Various other African

young people are involved in the practice of illegal immigration. In reality, the Westerners' response to that phenomenon is brutal and inefficient. Instead of assisting despairing beings fleeing famine, conflicts and poverty, the Westerners put them in detention centers or send them back to their respective countries. The character-narrator confesses, "a meeting of the leaders was decided. There are more than five hundred of us, piled up here among the trees and blankets. There is one chief per nationality. The Malians, Cameroonians, Nigerians, Togolese, Guineans, Liberians, each community has designated a chief to make decisions that concern the entire camp" (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006). The West is an area of attraction for Africans. They are so concerned about their future that they challenge any adversities preventing them from settling in Western societies. Hence, the West appears as African migrants' dreamland. In spite of the obstacles on the way to the West, they are determined to settle in Europe. Indeed, *Eldorado* describes the Atlantic as a natural border, which hinders Africans from travelling to Europe. Nevertheless, they are more willing than ever to brave the waves. To them, human adventure has its setbacks and is to be overcome, "we will taste the exiles' sweet relief who speak of their lack to try to fill it. We will grow old together, my brother, promise me. Or I'll not grow old" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). In *Eldorado*, the use of myths plays a paramount role. Indeed, those values motivate African migrants to settle in Europe hoping to improve their standard of living. To Claude Pichois, André-Michel Rousseau and Pierre Brunel, "[the analysis of myths in comparative studies is significant because] the comparatist feels very much at home" (Translation mine) (Pichois, Rousseau, & Brunel, 2009).

Combined, the myths of Eldorado and Massambalo have a religious scope. Individuals (African migrants) believe in them as if they were spiritual beings. They exhort African migrants to be active and hopeful. By believing in them, migrating subjects acquire social balance; for instance, Salvatore Piracci, Aboubakar, and other Africans decide to cross the Atlantic and settle on one side, in Africa and the other side, in Europe to flee difficulties prevailing in their respective societies. Those myths sustain, strengthen, and motivate them in their struggle against existential realities, such as poverty, famine, war, and death. Migrants always die on the Atlantic; nevertheless, no one seems to be aware that venturing there is risky. To African migrants, crossing the Atlantic is a way to success (European Eldorado). The African migrants believe that mythical gods praised by the myth of Massambalo always assist them. In reality, Gaudé's novel constructs two myths (Eldorado and Massambalo), but if we refer to the migrants' misadventure, we can infer that Gaudé's novel deconstructs both myths (Eldorado and Massambalo). In his text, the Western World is far from being a paradise. As depicted in *Eldorado*, many migrants lose their lives when crossing the borders to reach the Western World.

By reconstructing or rewriting the above myths, Gaudé reveals one of the features of literary texts pointed out by Pierre Rajotte, "[the] rewriting of tradition can also take the form of a deconstruction of myths. (...) As Yves-Michel Ergal suggests about the same mythical figure, deconstruction or disappearance is often a harbinger of renewal. To deconstruct a myth is also very often to allow it to be reborn" (Translation mine) (Rajotte, 2001). By deconstructing the myth of Eldorado through the environmental crisis, Gaudé challenges the Africans and others who are candidates for illegal immigration. Moreover, by depicting the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe on the Atlantic, Gaudé questions the ideals of the myth of Massambalo, which teaches that on the Atlantic, migrants are under the protection of a mythical god. The former myth has a cultural background; it sustains and substantiates the prosperity of the Western World –it glorifies Westerners' mode of governance (democracy), economic success, and promising educational system. As to the myth of Massambalo, it has no cultural background, but in Gaudé's novel, it urges Africans to leave their respective countries. Talking about both myths, what is essential is that be it true or false, all myths have a religious scope. African migrants venerate them, as if they were divine beings –they believe in their ideals. In reality, those mythical values stimulate subjects (migrants) to act and be involved. A close observation of Gaudé's African characters helps to discover their sense of motivation.

Without having been to Europe before, the myth of Eldorado exhorts African migrants to leave Africa; for instance, the character-narrator thinks, in advance, of his future life in Europe. This prolepsis shows how relevant the West is in Africans' mentalities. In *Eldorado*, the myth of Massambalo comforts them in their adventure. According to that myth, a protective god watches over the migrants as they cross the Atlantic. The myth of Massambalo galvanizes them and urges them to settle in Europe. In a psycho-narrative, Gaudé's omniscient narrator reveals Salvatore Piracci's thought as follows, "an old man, he thought, this is what I am becoming. Moreover, the young people I intercept are always stronger. They have in their muscles the strength and the authority of their twenty years. They try to pass and try again once, twice, three times if necessary" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). In some clearer terms, evolving in one of the Western societies is regarded as a success. To African migrants, job opportunities abound in Western societies. A meticulous analysis of African migrants' vision helps to realize that the West acquires a panegyric picture in Gaudé's novel. As depicted in Gaudé's text, the Western World is a place where everything is positive. In short, to African migrants, material is more essential than any other things in life and the ideal place where people can easily earn material is the Western World. Indeed, to the migrating people, material is the possible solution to all problems. This

substantiates their movement towards the Western World.

That materialistic scope is illustrated in Gaudé's narrative technique consisting in silencing the cultural dimension of the West and advocating its materialistic sense through the African migrants' vision. What seems to be of primary importance for those migrants is the acquisition of financial mobility. In other words, in their mentalities (understanding), financial autonomy is more significant than cultural autonomy. This splendid image of Europe urges the African citizens to migrate. This means they leave their homeland and settle elsewhere. The ensuing citation describes Salvatore Piracci's regrets; he realizes that despite his commitment, the struggle against illegal immigrants is far from being won –African migrants are more numerous and determined. Gaudé's narrator reveals, "the guard of the citadel was tired while the attackers were younger and younger. And they were beautiful with the light that hope gives to the eyes. They are right, he thought. Four times. Ten times. Let them try until they succeed. He thought then that it was useless. That he was pushing back men who were always coming back more lively and conquering" (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006). The preceding textual clue exemplifies the idea according to which the West is a paradise. To Soleiman, returning to Sudan without fulfilling his dream is a shame. And that feeling remains in all migrants' psyche. They do not want to be the laughing stock of their respective villages; they do not want to be shown up. Even if they have to starve in Europe, they prefer it to returning home empty-handed.

Further, the myths of Eldorado and Massambalo are incorporated into Gaudé's novel in a complementary dynamism. Despite the difficulties: deaths, detentions, and other mistreatments with which the African migrants are confronted, they still believe in the Western Eldorado. Importantly, that vision is so rooted in the Africans' morals that they flock to the Western borders. Without being to the Western World before, they nurture a strong desire to go there, at the risk of their lives. *Eldorado* describes a horrific scene as follows, "in the rush, the men were trampling each other, climbing over each other, pushing each other violently. I saw, a few meters away from me, a woman lose her baby. Before she could throw herself on the ground to protect it, men, without even noticing, had passed over it. It was nothing but screams and furious fights to stand up. He continued to fall from the top of the first fence, but they fell on a human tide. I could see us dying there, in a strip of land that belongs to no one" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). Pure-born Africans are envious, they believe in the myths of Massambalo and Eldorado. This belief blinds them so that they face the waves of the Atlantic and the coast guards. Their struggle is to overcome them in order to reach Europe. Soleiman and Aboubakar are Gaudé's heroes, who despite the long period spent in bushes and the barriers erected between Africa and Europe, manage to reach Europe. Those black characters' tenacity and that of many other African migrants show that the West is symbolically their dreamland.

Up to this step, the West has been addressed from a purely appreciative perspective. Africans celebrate it as a space devoid of vices; i.e., a perfect society where citizens make no effort to succeed. Africans' vision of the West is therefore inherently positive, giving the impression that the West is a model of human society to be followed. Nevertheless, what about Africans' opinion of Africa? Let us note that Gaudé's *Eldorado* presents Africa under a turbulent angle, its young people are idle –they move towards other unknown horizons. This massive exodus is not exclusive to a unique African country. Various African countries suffer from that exodus; their populations flock to the West in search of social welfare. In *Eldorado*, that exodus occurs in the sub-Saharan and Maghreb countries, namely Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Togo, Guinea, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria. Coincidentally, there is a serious political instability in those countries. Thus, their young people flee towards Western borders. Those who migrate are not ready to return to their respective countries. Soleiman, the character-narrator confesses, "it is impossible for me to go home. To find my brother and tell him that I have failed. Not only am I not bringing the money that will save him, but that I have not crossed any sea. It is impossible to bring this desolation with me and to offer it to those who saw me leave" (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006). In essence, the migrants are disappointed about African social calamities. Indeed, they believe that Africa is unable to offer them a propitious future; therefore, they decide to settle in Europe to seek job. That conception of the Western World is purely panegyric and gives the impression that the Western societies have no social difficulties.

In *Eldorado*, the first object of desire is the West; the second object is the quest for material (money). Like both Soleiman and Aboubakar, many other young Africans are willing to settle in Europe and possess those objects. This is why Soleiman and Aboubakar feel relieved when they cross the barrier, which separates Europe from Africa, "everything is there, the vast sky, the night coming to an end, but I can no longer hear the rush of the assault. It is all over. We are there. Aboubakar's voice surrounds me. We are here, my bro. And it's thanks to you" (Translation mine) (Gaudé 2006). This passage shows that African migrants feel relieved to leave Africa. That feeling is meaningful in *Eldorado*, not because it brings joy to the migrants, but rather because of its link with the way, Africans consider Africa. Indeed, African young people are disappointed with their authorities –they do not have a viable project in the short or long term for them. They make promises to their people, but do not set up necessary infrastructures, which can actually concretize those ambitious promises. Worse still, there is no incentive policy to create jobs and keep young people in

Africa. Africa is a continent plagued by intercommunal wars, famine, and viral diseases. Indeed, African youth qualify Africa as a hell on earth.

Significantly, the image of the flame in *Eldorado* illustrates the tensions prevailing in Africa. Metaphorically, the flame refers to the various crises, which devastate Africa and give the impression that it is a hell. Those people who evolve there suffer from many shortcomings. Indeed, the textual clue, which follows, describes Africans' troubles, "then Aboubakar points his finger towards the night, towards the hill where we were hiding. Look, he said. I can see small orange lights flickering in the night. More and more numerous. It's burning. They just set fire to our camp. The flames are higher and higher. We imagine our bags, our things are burning over there, a few hundred meters away. They will continue their harassment on others than us, without ceasing. And the emigrants will continue to crowd the borders of Europe, ever poorer, ever hungrier. The truncheons will always be harder but the race of the damned will always be faster. I have passed by. I watch the flames rise in the night and recommend my brothers to the sky. May they be given to cross the borders. May they be tireless and blessed. Why should they not try their chance? What are they leaving behind that is so enviable? We leave nothing behind us but a cloak heavy with poverty" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006). Symbolically, the "cloak" is Africa and one of its characteristics is its impoverished nature. In fact, Africa is unable to feed its populations; idle, hungry and abandoned, those populations wander in the forests at the borders of Europe seeking to flee Africa for other horizons judged as being favorable and promising. Gaudé's novel makes a critical judgment upon African political governance, which neglects the future of African youth. This is obvious, African young people's disappointment is not natural, but artificial –that is the result of poor governance prevailing in African countries.

In Gaudé's text, Africa is described as a miserable society whose social strata are crumbling and being drained of their substance (populations). If *Eldorado* implicitly demonizes Africa, *Praisesong* openly idealizes it. Indeed, Gaudé presents Africans from a humanist perspective; i.e., by drawing a bleak picture of the management of its populations, he urges political decision-makers to change their mode of governance; he exhorts them to pay attention to the drama prevailing in Africa. Far from blaming a specific African leader, Gaudé focuses his novel on sub-Saharan Africa. This narrative technique, which consists in depicting West African citizens' exodus, shows that there is a serious problem of governance in West African countries. Here, the populations' exodus is justified by number of reasons, inter alia the growing poverty related to the lack of infrastructure and fair governance. In addition, insecurity, arbitrary murders, tribal wars, and nepotism (related to poor governance), compel African young people to settle in the Western World. Combined, those causes motivate Africans' departure in search of a propitious shelter. Let us note that those migrating populations do not praise Africa; they rather consider it as a hostile space, for it is unable to contribute to their achievement.

In accordance with the preceding analysis, one of the crucial issue, undermining Africa is that it suffers from a lack of internal solidarity –African leaders are disunited. This is apparent in Gaudé's text. Africans do not move freely within Africa; each of the African leaders imposes a barrier, which prevents the free movement of goods and people. The character-narrator describes, "two men had drawn weapons. Pistols that they ostensibly brandished. The third man walked by us and started yelling. He yelled at us to get our money out. All our money, he said. [...] There is no boat. We are not where we should be. The danger is all around us. You can feel it in your skin. [...] One of the men fired a shot in the air, to show us that we should not expect any help, which no one here would come to our rescue. [...] They pulled me away from the group and beat me up. I fell to the ground and immediately. They hit me for a long time again, until I didn't move at all" (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006).

Obviously, hospitality is lacking at all levels in Africa. In those circumstances, there is no real integration and Africans consider each other as enemies. This picture of Africa is far from being encouraging; it is rather pitiful.

4. Conclusion

In this study, the interest was to examine the ambivalence of visions in two novels written by two writers from different nationalities. By considering their respective characters' visions, some points of convergence and divergence have been pointed out. In the first section, members of black Diaspora perceive Africa as their ancestral roots; they praise its cultural asset as a value, which can help them construct their cultural identity and combat acculturation. This study has defined Africa as an asylum. In the same section, the Western World has been addressed. From that analysis, it should be noted that the West is not exempt from social shortcomings; its cultural and economic imperialism exacerbates members of black Diaspora's lives; its policy of protectionism makes it radical and hostile. It alienates and alters Blacks' cultural values and prevents them from experiencing freedom of movement. In the second section, the West has been defined as an Eldorado; Africans flock there to acquire social mobility. The economic prosperity of the West has also been deciphered. Here, Africa has been scrutinized as a poor society. This study has also revealed that African populations are miserable because of wars prevailing in their respective countries. So, Africa is compared to hell

(unlivable space). The analysis of the ambivalence of visions has been possible thanks to comparative semiotics.

By contrasting, number of textual clues taken from *Praisesong for the Widow* and *Eldorado*, considered of course as signs, this study has disclosed that all human societies are relative and that in accordance with that relativity, there should be mutual love between humans. It has also been indicated that Africa and the Western World suffer from a social turmoil because the political game prevailing in both areas is unfair. With reference to those details, it should be noted that literature as a medium of communication, contributes to the advent of globalization. Through literary works, writers from various cultural roots transcend their geographical barriers (boundaries) and textualize social realities, which threaten the world citizens. This new artistic practice frees literature from any forms of sectarianism and favors the advent of world-literature, which aesthetically promotes togetherness and universal unity. However, the implementation of the ideals of globalization (merit, equality between citizens, freedom of entrepreneurship, and freedom of movement) is a failure. On the ground, those ideals continue to be influenced by Western political restrictions and other protectionist measures. In practice, the lack of humanism and fair assistance illustrated by both authors in their respective texts brings the operability of globalization into disrepute. Through his novel, Gaudé reveals some of the features of Western political discourses as follows, “you are the wall of Europe. (...) This is a war, you are at war, and you are in the front line. You shall not let yourselves be overwhelmed. You shall hold on. They are always more numerous and Fortress Europe needs you” (Translation mine) (Gaudé, 2006).

Explicitly, this order is from one of the European political figures. Not only does that utterance compel the soldier (Salvatore Piracci) to closely monitor the borders, but it also jeopardizes the West’s relationship with the rest of the world. That utterance embodies hatred, pride, and hypocrisy; its pragmatic impact constitutes a truly threat, for it does not allow the enforcement of the ideals of globalization. The repressive machine (soldier), to whom that order is designed, meticulously carry it out on the ground, thus preventing globalization from prospering and inscribing in manners.

In short, the outcomes of the current study are satisfactory and stimulating, but the values constructed by both writers are numerous –the semantic values acquired by analepsis and prolepsis in their novels is of paramount interest and deserves to be questioned for further understanding.

References

- Baage, S. U. (2017). Regards exotiques sur deux portes de l’Europe: la crise migratoire à Lampedusa et à Mayotte dans *Eldorado et Tropique de la violence*. *Carnets*. 2^{ème} Série –11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/carnets.2369>
- Daisy R. D. (2020). Redefining Black Female Identity in Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(15). Retrieved April 10, 2021, from <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/english-faculty-publications>
- Dance, D. C. (2011). African American Literature by Writers of Caribbean Descent. *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1, 377-404. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521872171.020>
- Doley, D. R. (2020). Redefining Black Female Identity in Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(15).
- Falola, T., & Laremont, R. R. (2002). *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui Vol. 1*, Africa World Press.
- Gaudé L. (2006). *Eldorado*. Paris, Actes Sud.
- Gaudé L. (2007). *Dans la nuit de Mozambique*. Paris, Actes Sud.
- Hébert, L. (2014). *L’Analyse des textes littéraires. Une méthodologie complète*. Paris, Classiques Garnier.
- Jouve, V. (2001). *Poétique des valeurs*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Marshall, P. (1983). *Praisesong for the Widow*. Dublin, OCLC.
- Mazrui, A. A., & Laremont, R. R. (2002). *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays of Ali A. Mazrui Vol. 1*. UK, Africa World Press.
- Mendy, L. (2019). Some Connections of Africa and the U.S.A in American World Literature. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management (IJSRM)*, 7(10), 557-562. Retrieved April 14, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijrm/v7i10.sh02>
- Mole, G. D. (2019). Mordre la poussière dans l’Eldorado à rebours: Laurent Gaudé, la migration clandestine et l’ombre de Massambalo. *The French Review*, 93(2). <https://doi.org/10.1353/tfr.2019.0006>

- Mudimbe-Boyi, E. (2006). *Entre pays rêvés et pays réels. Essais sur les cultures en contact Afrique, Amériques, Europe*. Paris, Karthala, pp. 203-241. <https://doi.org/10.3917/kart.mudim.2006.01>
- Palud, A. (2020). Trajectoires contemporaines : traverser la Méditerranée dans le roman du XXI^e siècle. *Mémoire en jeu (Memories at Stake)*, *Revue Critique Interdisciplinaire et Multiculturelle sur les Enjeux de Mémoire*. Retrieved April 8, 2021, from <https://www.memoires-en-jeu.com/pedagogie/trajectoires-contemporaines-traverser-la-mediterranee-dans-le-roman-du-xxie-siecle/>
- Pichois, C., Rousseau, A. M., & Brunel, P. (2009). *Qu'est-ce que la littérature comparée?* Paris, Armand Colin.
- Rodriques, J. (2017). Threads Thin to the Point of Invisibility, yet Strong as Ropes: Afrofuturistic Diaspora in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 14(1). Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.331>
- Rogers, S. (2000). Embodying Cultural Memory in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. *African American Review*, 34(1), 77-93. Retrieved April 4, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.2307/2901185>
- Thorat, D. (2011). Oral Traditions: An Analysis of Story Telling and Performance in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. *The Kennesaw Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 1(1), 2. Retrieved April 4, 2021, from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/kjur/vol1/iss1/2>
- Tia, D. (2020). From Sin to Redemption: A Cultural Critique of Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. *Advances in Literary Study*, 8(4). Retrieved April 4, 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2020.84015>
- Tia, D. (2020). *La Mobilité dans Praisesong for the Widow*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution license](#) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.