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## **I- HISTOIRE**

# POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN GORGUI DIENG'S *A LEAP OUT THE DARK*

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## Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing the postcolonial leadership in Gorgui Dieng's *A Leap out of the Dark*, a novel which was published in 2004. The paper also aims at bringing to light some hindrances to political stability and economic development that gain ground in Africa where a closer look at its postcolonial political situation shows that African politics is undermined by dictatorship, censorship and recurrent coup d'états. As far as the economic development of the continent is concerned, it is jeopardized by bad practices such as corruption, embezzlement to name but a few. As a result, committed and sensitive writers resort to literature so as to denounce such practices. This novel, which casts a glance at the prevailing situation in Kensega, mirrors the Senegalese society. Roughly speaking, throughout Gorgui Dieng's satirical work, we deduce the conclusion according to which the first concern of writers is their compatriots' welfare. Dieng shows us that a writer must be interested in his fellows' living conditions and defend them whenever it does not work. Such an intellectual attitude puts aside art for art's sake which is not enough in order to fight against some evils that promote bad governance and mismanagement.

**Keywords:** Politics, Leadership, Multiparty, Dictatorship, Censorship.

## Résumé

Cet article vise à analyser le leadership postcolonial dans *A Leap out of the Dark* de Gorgui Dieng, un roman publié en 2004. Il vise également à jeter la lumière sur quelques entraves à la stabilité politique et au développement économique qui gagnent du terrain dans l'Afrique postcoloniale où un examen plus approfondi de la situation politique montre que la politique africaine est minée par la dictature, la censure et les coups d'Etats récurrents. Quant au développement économique du continent, il est compromis par de mauvaises pratiques comme la corruption, le détournement de fonds, pour ne citer que celles-là. Par conséquent, les écrivains engagés et sensibles font recours à la littérature afin de dénoncer pareilles pratiques. Ce roman qui jette un regard critique sur la situation qui prévaut à Kensega est à l'image de la société sénégalaise. En gros, à travers l'œuvre satirique de Gorgui Dieng, nous déduisons la conclusion selon laquelle la première préoccupation des écrivains est le bien-être de leurs compatriotes. Dieng nous montre qu'un écrivain doit s'intéresser aux conditions de vie de ses semblables et les défendre quand ça ne marche pas. Une telle attitude intellectuelle met de côté l'art pour l'art, ce qui ne suffit pas pour lutter contre quelques maux qui favorisent la mauvaise gouvernance et la mauvaise gestion.

**Mots-clés :** Politique, Leadership, Multipartisme, Dictature, Censure.

## Introduction

Africa, which is considered the youngest continent, was the covetousness of many European nations which came in the above-mentioned continent for various reasons among which: slavery, imperialism and colonization. This mirrors that African people were victims of ill-treatment, torture and deprivation of freedom and rights. These hardships urged some Africans to unite their forces and fight for the African sovereignty. Some native Africans such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Modibo Keita, Sekou Touré, to name but a few, got politically



involved and asked for the independence of their countries. In this vein, Guinea Conakry got its independence in 1958. In the eve of 1960, many other African nations got their independence which brought a great hope because African leaders took over the power from the colonizers. As a result, they were responsible for their countries' destiny. That is the reason why they were expected to bring positive changes in all fields in their communities.

Unfortunately, these expectations did not last because some new African leaders perpetuated the failing policy of their predecessors. Then, the high promises they had formulated for their new independent countries turned into motives of self-interest; which led to the implementation of open corruption, embezzlement, censorship and dictatorship. That prevailing situation also gave way to a mood of profound disillusionment insofar as their dreams and hopes for a better independent Africa were jeopardized. It is indicative of the awareness of postcolonial writers about this disenchanting situation that they should place their critical issues in the forefront of their commitment to the effect of social and political changes.

In this regard, Gorgui Dieng, in *A Leap out of the Dark*, has dealt with many themes that have befallen in a fictitious country named Kensega. He also points out the relationships between religious guides and politicians. He shows how the newly adopted political system has destroyed people's hopes. Hence the choice of the following topic: "Postcolonial leadership in Gorgui Dieng's *A Leap out of the Dark*." The choice of such a topic is motivated by the relevance of the themes dealt with in this novel in today's African societies. In so doing, in this work, it will be of primary interest to explore the themes relating to corruption, money embezzlement, dictatorship, censorship, and so on addressed in the above-mentioned novel. In other words, a particular emphasis will be laid on the author's perception of politics in postcolonial African societies.

So, through a thematic approach, our study is going to be built around three parts. In the first one, the stress will be laid on the description of the postcolonial leadership and political system. In the second part, some lights will be shed on dictatorship and censorship, and in the third one, we are going to lay emphasis on some cases of mismanagement in Kensega, in particular, and African societies, in general, pointed out by Gorgui Dieng in *A Leap out the Dark*.

## **1. Postcolonial leadership and political system**

The year 1960 is indeed of paramount importance in Africa given that it witnesses the attainment of independence of many African countries. That independence brought a great joy to the people of each country. There was more optimism that after decades of foreign rule, political freedom and independence would provide a voice of all citizens in the political process.

Moreover, there was a widespread belief that with independence, new African governments would be able to use political resources so as to provide their citizens for basic, social and economic services such as education, health care, housing, employment.... The first African intellectuals who fought for independence and reached it took over the destinies of the newly independent countries. These new leaders made several promises in order to improve people's living conditions. Unquestionably, they were expected to develop their countries. Unfortunately, they were not able to meet the social and economic needs of their countries and that situation leads to the disillusionment of the citizens who were fed up with governments that could not provide meaningful social and economic services. It is true to mention that new leaders seemed to inherit a weak political system from the colonizers, but the problem was that they showed no eagerness, and determination to meet people's needs; which was different from the promises they used to hold to the masses they were supposed to rule. It was as if the white men were still ruling as the system of governance was unaltered.

African leaders behaved like the former colonizers, even worse. That fact urged Frantz Fanon to write his novel entitled *Black Skin, White Mask* in 1967. This mirrors that there is no difference between the colonizers and the black leaders. Gorgui Dieng who is on the same wavelength with Fanon writes:

Moodu thought that independence hopes had been partly jeopardized by the negative role played by people like the village chief. They had helped the colonialists to control the country and at independence, instead of suing them for what they had done, the new authorities resorted to them so that they could play the same grubby role for them; which made Moodu rightfully believe that there was no visible line between the colonialists and the new African leaders, except that the former were red-eared and the latter black-eared (G. Dieng, 2004, p.78).

Furthermore, the political environment they implemented gave a rise to ethnic tensions that, at times, became as severe as to threaten the political system. The post-independent period is especially characterized by the reign of totalitarian regimes under the control of tyrants. Indeed, some citizens who wanted positive changes in all fields were fed up and African writers declare themselves to be the spokesmen of their kinsmen and raise their voices in order to point out the disenchanting situation in which their countries were plunged. They placed these critical issues in the forefront of their commitment for social and political changes.

In this respect, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has put a particular emphasis on the problems and situations that have befallen his country in particular but the African continent in general. Hence his novel entitled *Anthills of the Savannah* published in 1987 where he points out his disillusionment, and disappointment which symbolize the situation fostered by the political and social atmosphere in Nigeria and in Africa after independence. Ayi Kwei Armah, in *Fragments*, lets readers know about his disappointment too, for independence appears to be materialistic. In other words, he discovers that after independence, many Ghanaian people are only interested in making money.

What is worse is that many politicians enrich themselves at the expense of the masses. There is a disparity between the wealthy leaders and the masses because they do not take into account the masses' needs. While authorities are living in luxurious houses, their compatriots are living in extreme poverty. This fact urges Armah to write: "*She knew there are people who had power given to them to do something to change all this, but who were, like people she had known at home and in all her travels, only concerned with digging themselves a comfortable resting place within a bad system*" (A. K. Armah, 1970, p.31).

This passage shows that leaders do not care about the system in which they are; what interests them, is their own financial situation and that of their parents and relatives. As a result, the consequences have a great impact on the system. We can say doubtlessly that many new African leaders are the embodiment of a bad leadership in postcolonial African societies. In this perspective, Chinua Achebe, in *The Trouble with Nigeria*, asserts: "*The trouble with Nigeria is simply and scarcely the failure of leadership*" (C. Achebe, 1984, p.1).

In a nutshell, African leaders' bad leadership is unquestionably the implementation of dictatorship, censorship, corruption, and so on.

## **2. Dictatorship and Censorship in the novel.**

*A Leap out the Dark* seems to be a satirical novel regarding the postcolonial period. In Kensega, Dieng talks about Fojo, a tough and pitiless President who behaves like a tyrant and intimidates his countrymen, especially journalists. The period of joy only lasted few years for the masses to realize that the new leaders were not on the right path to bring the solutions to their needs.

Most of the time, intellectuals and journalists who do not side with the leading party risk their lives. Whenever they dare to criticize, they are charged of disloyalty and are sought in order to be arrested or killed. In this way, Dieng's novel, *A Leap out of the Dark*, is a wonderful illustration. In the above-mentioned book, Moodu who is the editor of the newspaper called "The New Beginning" in a country named Kensega, one day, wrote about some Ministers who had billions of francs saved in the Swiss banks. Bravely, he gave their names with all the reliable and relevant details: account numbers, deposit dates, names of banks. What is the most surprising is that Fojo, the President of Kensega is on the top of the list with Cfa 200 billion. These revelations urge the government of dictators to send a group of masked people to go to Moodu's house to pick him up and arrest him instead of trying to bring contradictory and reliable proofs. In this sense, Moodu says:

Some people are seeking to kill me and the thugs have already come around to pay me an unfriendly visit. But think well before acting because my own death will not automatically mean your survival. You cannot stop the foaming sea with your arms; the tide is too high now. You will only make a hero of me by taking my life. Do I really deserve the honor? (G. Dieng, 2004, p.163).

President Fojo and the members of his government are not satisfied with Moodu who satirizes the cases of bad governance that prevail in Kensega. That is the reason why they want to get rid of him. Some political parties even seek to recruit him into their different organizations but he refuses given that he is not interested in politics and keeps on writing satirical newspapers under the headline *note or die* where he points out a political manipulation which could make the entire world collapse overnight. In the eyes of the leaders, Moodu, the editor of the "New Beginning", the largest daily newspaper in Kensega, is troublesome and they do all their best to put an end to his enlightening activities. Thus, because of the newspapers that are considered to be unkind and critical, Moodu's house is visited by a group of masked men. Even if they do not find him, they terrify his wife Faatu and break the family treasures. As a result, Moodu's house and the headquarters of his newspapers are burnt down by security forces who act under the command of the State authorities. Moodu is wanted and Dieng writes:

The authorities took a decisive step: the headquarters of all six newspapers were stormed, their valuable and hard-earned equipment destroyed or stolen and the personnel, including the editors, found on the premises were arrested. The aim was to cut the people off their only unfailing resources of information (G. Dieng, 2004, p.195).

Censorship is usually applied on media which are of paramount importance in the view of nurturing and promoting democracy in any given country. On the one hand, media provide a platform for both members of the opposition and the ruling party to engage in constructive debates. Thus, they are essential for the promotion of durable peace and mutual understanding in any society. On the other hand, media allow illiterate people to be informed regularly seeing that they only rely on radios for information. Unfortunately, in dictatorial regimes, leaders use censorship for many reasons. Being aware of the fact that means of expression such as television sets, radios, newspapers, magazines...reveal most of the time the truth, political authorities lay emphasis on censorship in order to make people keep quiet. Leaders also know that a lack of information is byword for ignorance and inactivity; which seemingly impose silence, submission and obedience.

So, the best way for many State authorities to punish or to quieten down civilian people and opposition members is to put pressure on journalists so as not to report anything being able to bring popular uprisings or simply, to censor the means of communication. But censorship does not happen without bad consequences, for journalists are, most of the time,

the targets. In so doing, governments perpetuate systematic attacks on media houses and journalists are compelled with the threat of existing draconian media laws revolving around false publication and sedition which carry jail terms and heavy fines.

Furthermore, censorship compels some journalists to go to exile because they are sometimes imprisoned or killed. In this case, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* is a good example because Chris who is the commissioner for information is responsible for censorship in the country named Kangan. This is where the main theme and the tension of the book come from. While trying to be loyal to Sam, the Head of the State, Chris controls Ikem, the editor of the National Gazette according to the President's instructions whereas Ikem Osodi is his closest friend with whom he studies together in Britain. The reasons why the National Gazette is censored are that Ikem meets kinsmen of his from Abazon, opposes to the ruling elite and grows more and more radical in the course of the book.

Ikem is also accused of writing editorials which are considered to be critical to the government's policies of Kangan and this eventually gets him into trouble because he is charged of treason and conspiracy. He is picked up from his house by unnamed soldiers and is shot to death, claiming that it was an accident. As a result, the National Gazette which apparently seems to be the only one in the country is censored and orders of censorship seem to come from Sam, the Head of State. Thus, most of the time, censorship is not without using violence. In this way, they use weapons so as to intimidate, silence or frighten people, especially journalists. These series of actions against journalists and media, which include torture of detained journalists, and attacks on supposed opposition newspapers, radios and the use of draconian media laws to imprison journalists, oblige many professionals to leave their countries.

Everybody is compelled to toe the line of the leading group to gain safety and avoid being trampled and treaded. At that time, in Kensega and almost everywhere in Africa, the ruling party and its leaders had always a mouthpiece among the media. This also mirrors that many politicians are only interested in privileges and positions and they are even able to kill their opponents and Dieng writes:

Politicians will be politicians; they can turn their flags from red to white overnight.... They do not abide by principles: they only know where their interests lie; the meanest amongst them can even slaughter their own children and parents if they believe that this can pave the way for them to the power, the only thing in which they really believe (G. Dieng, 2004, p.41).

This quotation reveals a real lust of power for many politicians and Gorgui Dieng's view of the new leadership in postcolonial Africa is shared by other writers. Doesn't Ayi Kwei Armah see this in his first novel when he asserts: "*These men who were to lead us out of despair; they came like men already grown fat and cynical with the eating of centuries of power they had never struggled for?*" (A. K. Armah, 1968, p.1).

As a result, many State authorities do everything they can in order to remain in power as they dishonestly and shamefully try to make people believe that they are only in the services of the populations. They are not, at all, ready to leave the power because when there are elections, they never lose. They manipulate the electoral process and rig elections to retain the power; that is to say, they always win the elections anyway, regardless of whether or not elections are free and fair. This plague urges Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* to satirize through the characters of Chief Nanga and Chief Koko: "*...Elections are a democratic farce in which bribery; thuggery and brutal force are used with the connivance and financial backing of British commercial interests to enable Nanga and his henchmen to return to power unopposed.*" (C. Achebe, 1966: p.59)

Both Gorgui Dieng and Chinua Achebe satirically attack these selfish political leaders by showing that their only concern is to maintain their positions, despite all the wrongdoings

for which they are responsible. Indeed, power is very tempting, especially in Africa where people think without any shade of doubt that power gives access to privileges and many advantages. Closing radio stations simply suggests that many government officials are denying the citizens, a vast majority of whom are illiterate, the right to know to be able to misuse or embezzle the public funds.

### 3. Mismanagement of public funds

The independence of African countries brought great hope which, unhappily, does not last seeing that the new African leaders showed no eagerness to meet the population's needs. They put forward their self-interests; which paved the way to dictatorship, censorship, corruption, embezzlement, to name but a few. Being aware of the fact that State authorities fail to satisfy their compatriots' needs, many intellectuals devote their time to writing not only to express their despair regarding the prevailing situation in their countries, but also to satirize practices such as corruption and embezzlement. In *A Leap out of the Dark*, Dieng points out the above-mentioned practices that gain ground in a fictitious country named Kensega where State authorities, instead of fighting against the mismanagement of public funds, perpetrate it shamelessly. Moodu, the editor of the "New Beginning", the largest daily newspaper in Kensega, interviews Samba, a young boy who says: "*At the port and airport, only approximately 20% of the expected tax money goes to the State, 40% into the customs-men's pockets and the remaining 40% to the businessmen. The situation is the same everywhere. The State never gets 50% of the total money due to it*" (G. Dieng, 2004, p.178).

These revelations are chilling in a country where poor people outnumber rich ones. In postcolonial Africa, many government officials shamelessly embezzle the public funds trusted with to them and the paradox is that many African "*political leaders were richer than their European and American peers, whose countries ironically provide theirs with vital financial aid and loans.*" (G. Dieng, 2004, p.41)

Moreover, embezzlement is part of leaders' system of ruling. Most of the time, people who are supposed to be fair, to be good examples of leaders are involved into embezzlement. That is to say, they use the money they are trusted with for themselves. Unfortunately, many people take delight whenever they get the information about a case of embezzlement. They go further qualifying the one responsible for the act to be a brave and worthy son. In this respect, Gorgui Dieng does not delay to point out this behavior when he asserts:

Now when people hear a case of embezzlement, the first question they will ask is: "how much did the fellow hit?" If they say a figure ranging between CFA 100.000 and CFA 1.000.000, they hysterically call the mother's fellow's private parts and argue that the worthless rascal deserves a proper lynching. But if the jackpot is in hundreds of millions of francs, they admiringly thrust their thumbs out into the air in great delight and congratulate their hero on his bravery: "well done! I wish I were a relative of his... Everybody will respect them now...because they have a worthy son to speak on their behalf... When they called the master-embezzler a brave and worthy man, they were right because even the police, who were supposed to cope, shared their opinion (G. Dieng, 2004, p.17)

In view of this, the masses seem to be happy to be stolen given that the more some politicians cheat them, the more willingly they side with them. And when you try to explain them that they are being misled by some politicians and other rascals in the government, they will, without any shadow of doubt, laugh at you and tell you that it is the number-one role of any politician worthy of the name. They think that the first thing political leaders should do is to serve themselves and others after. The end of embezzlement of the public funds in Africa is not for tomorrow. Another plague that jeopardizes the development of many African countries is corruption. It is one of the main themes dealt with in many novels during the postcolonial

era. In Armah's *Fragments*, the answer given to Baako by the junior assistant secretary of the civil service commission is a good illustration. Baako, coming to see him, the assistant secretary says:

You're very late. The appointment was for eleven. You'd better know I'm a busy man, a very busy man. I can't waste time like this. You will have to come tomorrow... You want me to help you?... you can come and see me when you decide you want me to help you. And don't come just to waste my time. I'm a busy man. I have a post (A. K. Armah, 1970, p.77-78).

These words advanced by the junior assistant towards Baako do not please, at all, Kofi Ocran, an artist and Baako's friend. According to Ocran, the junior assistant wants to be given money so as to satisfy Baako's needs. That is why he says: "*That's what they say when they want a bribe. Nothing works in this country. The place is run by so-called elite of pompous asses trained to do nothing. Nothing works*" (A. K. Armah, 1970, p.81).

Corruption is one of the biggest hindrances postcolonial African countries are facing and the writers who are very sensitive regarding the situation of their nations tackle such a practice in their novels. Corruption involves efforts by civil servants to enrich themselves through illegal means. In view of this, individuals are said to be engaging in corruption when they are granted power by society to perform public duties, but as a result of the expectation, a personal reward or gain be it monetary or not, civil servants undertake actions that reduce the welfare of their societies or damage the public interest.

In addition, many studies have been done in order to determine the causes of corruption in Africa. Consequently, many African civil servants may be obliged to share the proceeds of their public offices with their kinfolk. The African extended family places significant pressure on the civil servant, forcing him/her to engage in corrupt and nepotic practices.

In many African countries, civil service employees view public service as an opportunity for self-enrichment. Incompetence and inefficiency among civil servants are other institutional issues associated to corruption. Additionally, many African leaders seem to have lost their traditional values. In other words, it is as if they have no dignity which forbids them to be involved in corruption. They are no longer afraid of promoting corruption because they feel protected by their hierarchical masters or by their religious guides. In this regard, Gorgui Dieng, in *A Leap out of the Dark*, says: "*Kensegans...seem to have lost that sense of dignity; paradoxically their ancestors' most rooted virtue. When their corruption is revealed, they do not think of resigning from office. They shamelessly go and seek protection from their religious leaders*" (G. Dieng, 2004, p.38).

What is worse is that even the media experts who are expected to be independent are sometimes involved in this trend of corruption. Some journalists often side with political leaders, expecting to be rewarded at return. In a nutshell, all standards of States are contaminated by the naughty virus of bribery, embezzlement, manipulation and corruption. In a country where it does not matter what you know but who you know, a country where, if you do not know big men or give bribe, you will not even get a telephone number, this country cannot move forward. Fed up with these harmful practices, Gorgui Dieng condemns them with bitterness in his novel *A Leap of the Dark* even though the events take place in a fictitious country, Kensega. Then, the postcolonial leadership in Africa is characterized by dictatorship, censorship, embezzlement, corruption, and so on.

## Conclusion

This article aimed at exploring some themes that are pointed out by Gorgui Dieng; hence the choice of a thematic approach. We notice that, throughout his novel entitled *A Leap out of the Dark*, Dieng condemns bitterly the alarming situation that prevails in a fictitious

country named Kensega. The conclusion we have drawn from the novel is that the period of joy engendered by independence did not last seeing that new African leaders showed no eagerness to satisfy their compatriots' needs. In other words, independence seems to be a failure. In this respect, Dieng writes: "*many African and Western intellectuals and thinkers have come to the conclusion that African independence has been an utter failure in almost every respect*" (G. Dieng, 2004, p.306).

Such a viewpoint is an undeniable truth, for practices such as dictatorship, censorship, corruption, and money embezzlement are, shamelessly and with impunity, implemented in postcolonial African countries. These aforementioned plagues also prevent Kensegans from living in a fair and harmonious society insofar as justice, equality and moral values are undermined. Gorgui Dieng resorts to a genuine commitment in order to express his feelings of despair and disappointment regarding the above mentioned scourges that do not abide by ethics. Such a commitment is understandable given that his homeland, Senegal, is also undermined by these harmful practices and he firmly believes that this hindrance to a peaceful life will last. In so doing, he writes: "*Embezzlement in Africa has still better days to come*" (G. Dieng, 2004, p.17).

Being an eyewitness of the way politics is practised in his country; Gorgui Dieng satirizes the political situation prevailing in Kensega by laying emphasis on well chosen and relevant themes which are previously mentioned. Now, it is necessary to ask whether or not there are other hindrances to the political leadership pointed out by many African writers. We are also wondering if time has not come to propose political systems that would take into consideration social realities, review the personalization of power and transcend political, social and economic conflicts.

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