

## Symptoms of the Deterioration of Political Links

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### Abstract

Voltaic students - then Burkinabe - from the years sixties to nineties were, in their large majority, politically enrolled at the left-wing. From the arrival of Gorbachev at the head of the soviet state to the fall of the wall of Berlin and the liberation of Nelson Mandela in South Africa in the years nineties, their convictions have been brutally shaken up. This text deals with the itinerary of Burkinabe communist students enrolled in France universities in this period, first the way their political conviction has been forged since their secondary school, then the way they went through the whole story, finally the strategies they developed to survive the loss of this ideal, the renunciation of what, for some among them, constituted the very reason of their life. It is also a research work and reflection of a psychologist clinician who is also involved in this story at the same time.

**Keywords:** *The Fall of the Communism; The End of the Apartheid; The Loss of the Ideal; Political Disavowal; Addictive Behavior*

### Introduction

The paths followed by communist militants to extricate themselves from the political formations of which they were part until the deconstruction of the European communist system are very diverse. The reasons that push them to renounce their commitment are not always the same<sup>1</sup>. But that, it seems, has always been the case in these formations. Claude Lefort explains that "among those who, outside the ranks of the Party, have made the name of the USSR a bulwark against insecurity, as among those who militated and engaged very far away, there are those who abandoned their faith. during the Prague coup, others at the time of Slansky or the White Coats affair, others awakened by the uprising of the workers in East Berlin, others who awaited the Hungarian insurrection, the revolts of Poland or the entry of Russian tanks into Budapest, or even, much later, their intervention in Czechoslovakia. In everyone, experience follows a course that events in the world determine only from afar"<sup>2</sup>.

After Khrushchev's intervention at the XX Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union)<sup>3</sup>, Communist militants (and movements) have also known varied experiences. Claude Roy describes some episodes of this crisis. The Stalinist writer Fadaëv commits suicide. The secretary general of the British Communist Party will refuse to believe in the revelations of the "Report"; then, he will be stricken with blindness for two weeks; he will eventually accept the content of the "Report". In the West in general, the Faith is initially diverted to China<sup>4</sup>, then, generally, towards the Catholic Church: "The disillusioned militants laid down the flags of the Cultural Revolution at the entrance to the confessional where they solemnly come to recant the master thinkers"<sup>5</sup>. Or towards psychoanalysis.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Pierre Birnbaum, *La fin du politique*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1975 [1]. A. Ducouflé, *Sociologie des révolutions*, Paris, PUF, collection "Que sais-je?", 1976 [2].

<sup>2</sup>Claude Lefort, *Un homme en trop* (1976), Paris, Le Seuil, 1986, p. 20 [3].

<sup>3</sup>Branko Lazitch, *Le rapport Khrouchtchev et son histoire*, Paris, Le seuil, 1976 [4].

<sup>4</sup>Voir par exemple: Comité central du parti communiste de l'Union soviétique, *L'Histoire du parti communiste bolchévique de l'URSS* (1938), Paris, Norman Béthune, 1971 [5] et Yves Lequin, Jacques Maillard, *L'URSS et le monde socialiste européen*, Paris, Masson & Cie, 1970 [6].

<sup>5</sup>Claude Roy, "Les séquestrés de la croyance", *La croyance*, Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse, 1978, numéro 18, pp. 99-112, p. 110 [7].

Here we will discover the strategies used by people for whom activism was a necessary and sufficient reason - to live. These are Burkinabè students enrolled in French universities, and who have been, at one time or another in their life, engaged at a high level in communist training<sup>6</sup>.

It seems that the decision to give up is more or less personal. Only, some act as if they are desperate to be excluded. In any case, let loose by his organization, left to himself, the activist finds himself helpless (while in the countries concerned, the populations engage in the dismantling of mausoleums in an attempt to exorcise their ghosts)<sup>7</sup>.

A large part of the activists we are talking about here, especially among those who are identified as the "hard and fast", those who generally show unfailing loyalty to the "line" of the organization, have returned to their country: they therefore broke, in fact, with the structure to which they belonged, without ever denying it, however.

Some others took to cohabiting, having sustained and "normal" relationships with a partner of the opposite sex, which reduced their dedication to the movement even further. Among them, many got married<sup>8</sup>, some have had children.

Still others have, since their departure from the movement, indulged in continuous alcohol consumption. They perform this ceremony alone, or with former comrades.

### David, professional revolutionary

Since high school, David has always been a member of communist organizations. When the political formation of which he was a member in 1983 came to power (thanks to the revolution linked to the name of Thomas Sankara), he was sent to the USSR to organize Burkinabè students in this country into a "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution" (CDR). After the settling of scores which resulted in Sankara's death (in October 1987)<sup>9</sup>, David ends up in France (under conditions that we have not tried to elucidate).

David was born into a very pious Protestant family. For this reason, he did his secondary studies in a seminary. The operation and regulations of this establishment were too restrictive, finds David. "It was slavery, at the limit". He tells how it was necessary for students to get up at 5 a.m. to fetch water and serve teachers as a priority, and other unpleasant constraints of this nature that could not be protested in the establishment. This is what led David to take an interest in the union movements of public establishments. He will join the union of Marxist obedience that was at the time the ASO (the Association of School Students of Ouagadougou). When in the seventies the question of the relevance of this "line" arose for the communist organizations which chose China against the USSR, this association experienced a major split which reflected and renewed the ruptures which were intervened in all the left formations under whose influence it was. Indeed, the speech of the leaders of the Chinese Party does not convince any more, since they send hundreds of their students to form in Western universities, these unshakable ideological apparatuses of international imperialism, and that China allowed the establishment on its soil of branches of multinational firms (such as Coca Cola for example). Its denunciation of imperialism can no longer be heard since

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<sup>6</sup>La recherche sur ce groupe a trouvé son origine dans l'élaboration d'une thèse de Doctorat où je montrais que l'expérience vécue par les militants de "gauche" depuis la déconstruction du système communiste européen donne à penser que dans de telles situations, l'idéal perdu revient hanter le moi, tout comme un "double" ou comme l'objet perdu dans la mélancolie. (Cf. Aboubacar Barry, *La croyance, ses sources, ses ressources et leur tarissement. Essai ethnopsychanalytique sur la confection du lien culturel*, Thèse de Doctorat de Psychologie, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, 1995) [8].

<sup>7</sup>See for example: Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1986 [9]. Alain Brossat, Jean-Yves Potel (ed.), *L'Est, les mythes et les restes*, Communications, number 55, 1992 [10]. Et Jacques Rupnik (dir.), *From Sarajevo to Sarajevo. The Yugoslav Failure*, Brussels, Editions Complexe, 1992 [11].

<sup>8</sup>The marriage rate of Burkinabè students in France has certainly never reached that of the years 1989-1995.

<sup>9</sup>See Ludo Martens (with the collaboration of Hilde Meesters), *Sankara, Compaoré and the Burkinabè Revolution*, Anvers, EPO, 1989 [12].

it accompanied it with “imperialist” type attacks against Vietnam, for example. As “impregnable bastion of communism” and “guarantor of the struggle of the peoples”, China no longer seems to respond present, because it is suspected of arming the soldiers of Pinochet and Mobutu. It was during this time of ideological disarray that a kickoff of fratricidal struggles within the communist movements of Upper Volta was given by a group of Voltaic students in France, Algeria, the USSR and Dakar, who demand a change in the political orientation of the powerful student union, and, of course, the removal of its executive committee. These renovators are defeated in Congress and identified under the infamous denomination of NCOL (Nouveau Courant Opportuniste et Liquidateur); they later founded the Union de Luttes Communistes (ULC). The official union authorities, having thus identified these “internal” detractors with the new “international” enemy, will only have to look away from Beijing, to see Albania as the only “anti-imperialist and anti-reactionary”; these will later create the Voltaic Revolutionary Communist Party (PCRv), a supporter of the (Stalinist) principles of the Albanian Workers’ Party. All this will have repercussions on the students’ union and give birth to two movements: AESO (the Association of Secondary Students of Ouagadougou) and ASO-CP (the Association of School Students of Ouagadougou-Comité Provisoire).

Strong feelings of repulsion, which were given free rein in the leaflets, resulted from this division. “For two years, explains David, I tried to be a mediator between my friends and myself”. He will not correct this slip.

David chose to join ULC<sup>10</sup>. With the revolution of Sankara of which the ULC-R is the main component, he is sent to the USSR to create a committee for the defense of the revolution, of which he will be responsible for political and ideological training. He fulfills this mission as best he can. It was also at this time that Gorbachev’s ideas began to gain ground: “Gorba talks about giving a voice to the people”. This will cause some upheavals in the communist movements. David and the members of his committee will undertake a work of reflection on perestroika and on the need for glasnost in the practices of the Burkinabé revolution.

In October 1987, Sankara was shot and thrown into a mass grave. He is made responsible for all the failings of the regime and accused of “personalization of power”, “militarism”, “voluntarism”, “delirium of grandeur”, and ... “mysticism”! His comrades in the struggle formed a “popular front” and undertook a policy of “rectification”.

When talking about Sankara’s death, David trembles with rage and shows signs of disgust. He engages in a long ideological development intended to clarify the event. What shocks David the most is not, in itself, Sankara’s death, but his assassination, not by just anyone, but by “the very architects of this revolution”. If he had been killed by “a delinquent”, explains David, “I would have said to myself: these are things that happen... They killed him and buried him like a dog”. He recovers and continues: “It was the end of the revolution. The ideal no longer exists, it goes without saying that I will not continue to delude myself<sup>11</sup>”.

We then ask him what struck him the most, shocked him the most, or what particularly caught his attention in the deconstruction of the communist system. Without hesitation, he replies: “The wall! The wall, synonymous with the demarcation between the two systems, material symbol, materialized, of the existence of two worlds, two ideologies which had little chance of being together. For the wall to fall, something was needed: an agreement between the two systems, triggered by the USSR, A concrete wall, indestructible... “This wall, he specifies, separated “communism” from “Socialism”. And here, too, he will not correct himself.

He is silent, remains prostrate, as if he were immersed in painful memories. We ask him, after a rather long moment of silence, what now seems important to him to live, to achieve, what for him would be worth fighting again. “Africa. Africa as a whole, South Africa in

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<sup>10</sup>The ULC will transform into ULC-R (Renovated) in 1984, then into PDS (Party of Social Democracy) in 1989.

<sup>11</sup>This interview took place on November 19, 1991. I had asked David to tell me about his experience in the communist movements. At that time he drank a lot and was almost always intoxicated. We had agreed on the date, place and time of the interview. David was punctual and offered me the plan for the discussion himself: first, he would tell me how he came to Marxism, then he would tell me about his life as an activist; finally, he would take stock of the communist experience in general.

particular". He finds that what is happening in South Africa is comparable to what has happened in Germany: "Taboos are falling there. The referendum will bring about the abolition of taboos. It is the most important event in the world, beside which wars are small events".

We ask him if he is a believer, since he comes from a very pious family. "I have remained the man who hardly believes, hardly does not believe. I have a religious spirit: the spirit of tolerance. Scientific Marxism could not convince me of the inexistence of God<sup>12</sup>. But I believe more in death than in God. God created something that he could never control; the misery of people, moral debauchery and Evil have drowned God..."

Since the Gulf War, a can of beer, a bottle of wine..., for David, "SCUD". The SCUD being the great illusion created by the then Iraqi president to make believe that he could stop the forces leagued against him, the imaginary instrument having served him to slow down his eviction from Kuwait by the Western soldiers, one can wonder if, in David, alcohol does not fulfill the same function.

He explains calmly: "I was the mediator between others and myself". There is something like a "generalization" of the ego. As an echo to this narcissistic withdrawal, comes the fact that David continues to cancel the differences in other areas: thus, for him, the wall separated communism from socialism; two very close ideologies, derived from each other. At the same time, it is almost true, since the wall separated Germany from Germany, Berlin from Berlin! Those who got along only after the fall of the wall already spoke the same language. Then, most of the former communist movements - including the one to which David belonged, the Union de Luttes Communistes which became the Social Democracy Party - became socialist (socio-democratic) after the fall of the wall.

### A group without object

Small groups constitute transitory means of managing the mourning of the object of political passion, one of the most common means of escaping the grip of political organizations. We will see here how students, united by the same political convictions and by an identical academic and political background, are led to form such a group. Originally from Burkina Faso, like David, they evolved in a political structure opposed to that which David had integrated. For the most part activists of the student union in which they held positions of responsibility, they also, certainly, belonged to the Youth of the PCRV. They got to know each other during high school, which they attended at the same school. This youthful friendship, reinforced by membership in the same party, moreover underground, will have another very effective catalyst: the persecution to which the members of this political formation are the object, on the part of all powers, indiscriminately and above all, since the revolution of Sankara; the obligation to keep their beliefs secret, to lead an occult life alongside that of everyday life, the eminently perverse atmosphere of possessing a secret to which no one else has access, finally, the conviction of always being right, a conviction which will paradoxically be reinforced as much as they are fought, by what they find, in the persecutions of which they are victims, the very proof of the correctness of their commitment. It is undeniable that parties of this nature need to be persecuted - just like the early Christians - in order to continue to exist<sup>13</sup>. They recall these persecutions just as people recall the honors, distinctions, titles... of famous people.

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<sup>12</sup>The organization in which David militates thus explains his transformation from Union of Communist Struggles into Social Democracy Party: "Our present attitude is also a rejection of Western materialism which denies all spirituality. And while recognizing the operationality of historical materialism, we refuse that it is the absolute of philosophy... By making our philosophical conception of Marxism-Leninism, namely historical materialism, our own, how should we achieve this? reconcile it with our religious faith? For most of us, moments of atheism were experienced as the "last step" before perfect faith". (Historical retrospective and perspective of renewal, summary report of the extraordinary congress of the PDS of Burkina Faso, held at Paris on March 23, 24 and 25, 1990, 2nd edition) [13].

<sup>13</sup>"The feeling of belonging to the small number of elected officials, the security that gives a closed system where the whole history as well as our person find their place and their meaning, the pride of joining the past to the future in 'action presents, secures and supports the true believer... the one who lives entirely for the cause and no longer recognizes the humanity of his fellows outside the party. (Raymond Aron, *L'opium des intellectuels*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1955, p. 333) [14].

In Burkina Faso, at the time when they enrolled in university, the psychology and philosophy courses were limited only to the DEUG, and that of sociology to the license. Those who are registered in these courses, if they want to continue after the DEUG or the license, are therefore required to go to foreign countries (Senegal, France, Ivory Coast). This is how these students enroll in various French academies where they come in 1987 and 1988.

They eventually meet, and they live in the same studio in Paris. They are very active activists in the section of the union in France (the Association of Burkinabè Students in France - AEBF, section of the General Union of Burkinabè Students - UGEB) and three of them hold important positions there. Then, they begin to express "intellectual" reservations (as they insist on specifying), on the democratic centralism which drives the union, on the rigidity of its structures, on the absence of contradiction within it, on its functioning somewhat petrified, etc. They are gradually then resolutely excluded. They then plunge into alcoholism from which it seems impossible for them to get out.

As the Soviet political system crumbles, they become supporters of the CPSU. They therefore revise the criticisms they have always formulated with regard to the USSR. The coup will seem like a good thing to them, a last burst of dignity and the return of things in their place. Then, they will relapse into their gloom, when it is established that the putsch has failed. Everything can constitute for them a pretext for great debates. When a stranger to the group expresses an opinion during these discussions, they are all opposed, as if in principle, to him. They then speak to each other, even if they speak to the interlocutor: "Do you hear what So-and-so is saying?" He doesn't even take into account... You have to explain to him that..." Alcoholism is almost the only occupation they have. Some do odd jobs to feed the group and to be able to buy drinks. All day long, the bottles of big rouge follow one another, and this drinking party ends late at night, when they finally fall on their mattresses placed on the floor, in the basement of the building where they ended up sleeping find.

The only solution for them seems to be to return to their country. This return has most often the appearance of a passage to the act; they suddenly decide to leave everything there and go home. In a few months, five of them returned, one of whom returned to continue his studies. Another dropped out of sociology studies and is now doing postgraduate economics. This assiduous reader of Fougeyrollas has converted to economics (market?) Studies. (I'll call him Karim). The last one who spends his time fixing the dates of his final departure for Burkina seems to have completely abandoned his studies. He may be in an irregular situation in France. He now survives by doing odd jobs in the moonlight. At home, there are personal and family reasons that make him fear this return home. He comes from a family that is almost part of the Burkinabé high society; not having completed the studies for which he had come to France, it is less open to him than to others to consider returning in this way. (Some of those who have returned have returned to organize their return (withdrawal of diplomas, etc.), before returning to Burkina Faso).

I had made an appointment with Karim (end of November 1991) for an interview. He arrived a little over two hours after the appointed time. He explained to me how he came to Marxism: he comes from a family with modest resources; family influences led him to become involved in communist movements. He then explained to me the problems which opposed him to the leaders of his movement and which led to his exclusion. The main reason for this is, he says, his "refusal to submit". "Marxism," he continues, "failed because it was too big an ideal. The project was to build a scientific society, which is possible with robots, not with humans. In the organization to which he belonged, what disappointed him the most with his exclusion was to see how the leaders were stubborn, to the point of refusing any concessions, any compromise. The events in the Eastern European countries did not mark him, he explains. But he was particularly shocked by the removal from power of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. "The events in the East are based on the bestial and the instinctive, Swedish Social Democracy was a perfect balance between liberalism and dictatorship; that was Reason itself. And Reason has been pushed aside while bestiality takes hold of everyone". This is the lesson he takes from everything that has unfolded in recent years. "As for communism, as an ideal of social justice it is not dead. The desire for a fair distribution of property still exists. Only those who adorn themselves with this label die (before our eyes). Those who passed themselves off as the best representatives of this demand for justice. And so it is. Because of them, the states refused to meet the needs of the people by equating any claim with communism. Communism, the bête noire,

being dead, the claims will be taken into consideration as such”.

What interests him now is: deepening his intellectual training to put himself at the service of the development of his country.

He then speaks of Lacan, Fougeyrollas, Marx and Bourdieu, and he leaves.

What seemed interesting to us to remember in Karim’s words is this insistence on the difficulty of making compromises, as if this were the unconscious echo of the situation in which he is himself, of his difficulty. to organize a clear symptom, a compromise between desire and defense. He would therefore try (if one thinks of the Freudian theory according to which participation in the collective ideal - religious or political - has the gift of saving from individual neurosis<sup>14</sup>) to make alcohol play the same role, fulfill the same function.

The group itself falls apart by gradually losing all of its members. An amputated group. And all those who go, go home. As if the only way out is to no longer be abroad. Karim’s plan now is to be a good son, useful to his country. The paternal mission submission to the father - not having been carried out, would he not transform himself into a good son of the mother, the first protector against external dangers, external dangers<sup>15</sup>?

### A home

Many former members of these communist movements that we are talking about have chosen, to cut off all ties with their organization, to live with a friend (these are male subjects). Among these, many very quickly made children. Some among the CDRs (so called the active members of the committees for the defense of the revolution, structures created under Thomas Sankara) had children a few months after Sankara’s death and many named their son: Thomas.

An important member of the students’ union gave up his post of responsibility because her friend was expecting a child and it had become essential for her to take care of her future family, an activity which was hardly compatible with the leadership of such a movement. The child was certainly conceived some time after the fall of the Albanian regime. Since then, we hardly see this comrade in the various activities of the union, to which he had given himself, body and soul, for several years (he has devoted himself to the ideals of the left for nearly twenty years). These cases are very numerous so that one is obliged to rule out the hypothesis of chance.

### Political orientation and dreamlike space

This man, a former militant of a communist organization with which he broke, brutally and without explanation, all contact, begins to doubt his wife’s loyalty. The idea had come over him that she was cheating on him. This idea seemed naturally ridiculous to him when

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<sup>14</sup>Sigmund Freud, “Psychology of crowds and analysis of the self” (1921), in *Essais de psychanalyse*, Paris, Payot, 1981 [15]. Sigmund Freud, *Malaise dans la civilisation* (1929) Paris, PUF, 1971 [16]. Althusser describes the atmosphere which reigned in the streets of the cities of France in May 1968: “It was a great abortive dream. Yet he did not disappear from memories. We kept, we will keep the memory of that month of May for a long time, when everyone was in the street, where a real fraternity reigned there, where anyone could talk to anyone, as if they knew him. all eternity, where everything had suddenly become natural, where everyone believed that the imagination was in power”. (Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Long Followed by The Facts*, Paris, Stock, 1992, p. 347) [17].

<sup>15</sup>“The mother, who satisfies hunger, becomes the first object of love and certainly also the first protection against the indeterminate dangers which threaten the child in the outside world. It becomes, one might say, the first protection against anxiety.” Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Paris, PUF, 1951, pp. 62-63 [18].

he tried to reason, for he really saw no reason why she would still live with him. But these objections which he made did not prevent him from suspecting her of finding that all the other men were preferable to her.

He had accumulated various degrees in the most varied disciplines and was now preparing to return to his country. But, he felt a great anguish of this return... His wife had finally decided to go home before him, until he was ready. She had even found a job. So at least they would have a place to sleep there, until he too finally made up his mind to do something with his life.

When he went out with his wife (before her departure for Burkina Faso) - they both lived at the time in Paris in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> arrondissement - he often said to himself: "if she crosses the street before such post (by example) is that she is cheating on me". He always walked behind her, and when she stopped to cross the street before the fateful spot, he had tantrums that could last for several hours. Other times, it was by her clothing that he "guessed" that she was cheating on him. Any movie he watched and where a woman cheated on her husband plunged him into a terrible fury. Now that she had returned, he was more reassured, and those thoughts had left him. He knew full well that she now had plenty of time to live her life without fear, while he remained "stuck" here, but also, he knew that her fears were not justified.

Lately, every time he left his house to go somewhere, he was sure he was wrong. He took the correct metro and invariably made the wrong connections; or else he took it but in the wrong direction; when it was the train, he always took the wrong platform. He couldn't orient himself at all when he walked. All because at specific times everything - starting with itself - became unreal; he suddenly got the feeling that none of this existed. It was at this precise moment that he got lost. (This symptom of depersonalization, in addition to the haunting thoughts described above and the fact that he had asked for my help after hearing a talk about the rat men, had led me to believe that he was suffering from obsessive neurosis<sup>16</sup>).

Although we didn't know each other very well, he came to see me following a talk I gave on "The Haunting Thoughts" where I presented he detailed story of "The Rat Man"<sup>17</sup> and Lacan's analysis of it<sup>18</sup>, to ask me to help him break the deadlock that prevented him from managing his life properly. When we first met, he called me "cousin" because his mother is Peule (from the same ethnic group as me). Despite my hesitations and fears - I already had my clinical psychologist degree and was in analysis, but I was not yet practicing psychotherapy - he insisted so much that we ended up in a relationship that we can hardly qualify as therapeutic, which consisted in coming to see me when he thought he had "important things" to say...

It was in this "frame" that he had arrived one morning, soaked and chilled with cold, bringing with him some pages in which he had carefully noted the dream that had awakened him with a start. He had spent a very restless night and had hardly managed to sleep. In the early morning, he had taken a shower, got dressed, and began to reread a book that I had lent him: *The forbidden sacrifice of Marie Balmory*<sup>19</sup>. He had come to the passage on love of neighbor, then put the book on his table, lay down again, and fell asleep all at once. He had then had the following dream which he had hastened to write down in detail when he woke up so as not to omit anything.

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<sup>16</sup>On this point, see Maurice Bouvet, "Depersonalization and object relation" (1960), in *Œuvres psychanalytiques I. The object relation. Obsessive neurosis and depersonalization*, Paris, Payot, 1967 [19].

<sup>17</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Remarques sur un cas de névrose obsessionnelle (l'homme aux rats)" (1909), in *Cinq psychanalyses*, Paris, PUF, 1954 [20]. Et Sigmund Freud, *L'Homme aux rats, Journal d'une analyse*, Paris, PUF, 1984 [21].

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Le mythe individuel du névrosé* (1952), Paris, Le Seuil, 2007 [22].

<sup>19</sup>Marie Balmory, *The forbidden sacrifice: Freud and the Bible*, Paris, Grasset and Fasquelles, 1986 [23].

### Opening and closing

He goes back to his apartment. There are several people inside. Some that he had known at an earlier time, long before he left his country, but of which he has no further news. But now he doesn't know who it is. He scolds his wife, "What are they doing at my place? They line up and come in as soon as I go out, and they line up and out as soon as I come in. So, they don't come for it. me but for you". A dog wants to jump out of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor window of their apartment. His wife calls him back. He looks at them. She lies down on the floor, in her nightgown. The dog rolls over her and walks out the open door as she plays with a second dog. He opens the door to enter his apartment. He finds his wife in Schwarzenegger's arms. She seems very small against her body. He takes the phone that is in a cabinet on the right and dials number 14 to notify the police. He is in a court in his country. Baba (Papa) [Bafitini's big brother (half brother)] holds Bafitini (Little Papa) by the hand and leads him. Said to him; "Bafitini has also become sassy!" He wants to retrace his steps to insult him or to beat him. But Baba manages to hold him back, while a door on the left opens for him and enters. Then he leaves and goes to the right where the lady [the hostess, the head of the family's first wife] said he would find the others. He goes straight ahead, pushes a door, enters the backyard. Women - whom he knows - are busy cooking. He sees the large Djennè bent over the pot which is on the fire. He greets the women and walks in the direction of Grande Djennè. He wants to tell little Djennè that he knew her friend X. in Paris, but he forgets X's name as well as that of little Djennè. Little Djennè comes forward to give him a kiss and changes; it whitens visibly; she is of mixed race and has an unpleasant, rough little mustache; then it becomes quite white and disappears. He continues to shake hands. One of the women disappears before he gets to her. She is the mother of Bafitini (and also of the great Djennè), and he thinks that she left because she felt offended by what he said to her son and does not want to greet him. He no longer sees big Djennè. He is told to open. He pushes the door open and there are lots of boys lying, sitting. Some people make tea on a stove. Others are standing back there. He comes forward, shakes hands, in the midst of general hostility. Although he's sort of in his family, he doesn't know any of the faces. Then, when he extends his hand, people wait for him to say the word "hello" before they in turn extend their hand. He has great difficulty forming the sound. It's very weird, like in The Kafka Trial. He walks with difficulty, bare legs, for he is wearing a kind of Bermuda shorts, and continues to shake hands. He walks up to two men to greet them. The second is his cousin and teenage boyfriend Bakary. He jumps to her neck, hugs her chest, happy. Bakary marks a moment of indecision, bewildered, then acts as if he is happy too. Bakary wears one of those weird shirts like in the 70s, these shirts we called Embroidered which look like the shirts of the "Baba cool". He realizes that he has only brought back a book from his stay in France and wakes up with a start.

Most of his thoughts were on events he had lived through the night before: an invitation to dinner with friends he considered to be the only ones he had left, and whom he thought they had hurt through clumsiness. When it was time to leave, he had closed the door instead of opening it, which had earned him an "unpleasant" remark from the husband. (Successful opening of several doors in the dream). That evening, someone had also been mentioned in the discussions, a "fat guy" who he said was making advances to his wife. (Big = Schwarzenegger). His friends had called him on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month for this invitation. (He picks up the phone and dials 14).

The remarks his friend had made after he had closed the door instead of opening it reminded him that one of his cousins, "a dirty Dogon of Bandiagara", had once said to him: "You are not than a sheep. You don't know how to do anything. And if you don't do well in school, we won't know what to do with you!" Another more distant memory came back to him: his father had once called him "good for nothing" (in his language, "simple ghost", or more exactly "ghost of nothing at all"), after which he had decided to play "good for nothing" for several days.

In the book that I had lent him, he was in the passage where the author pointed out that the requirement of love of neighbor in the Bible, is accompanied by the recommendation to make the neighbor the reproaches that are due to him. He had missed, when he had known his friends, to reproach the husband like that; and since then, he never missed an opportunity to humiliate him.

In (West) Africa, there is a custom which consists in giving some of his children the first names of his own parents. So is it common to meet names like Baba (papa), Bafitini (grandfather) in Bambara which mean that this child bears the first name of one of his grand-



parents. We also find, in the same family (in the African sense: in children whose parents are brothers for example), identical first names (these first names are generally those of a parent of the parents). We distinguish these homonymous children by qualifying them as “small” or “large”, or by simply appending the adjective “small” to the first name of the youngest (Baba/Bafitini). (In fact, Baba was not Bafitini’s brother, as the dream presented him, but his cousin. And the lady who had eclipsed was not Bafitini’s mother, but really that of the great Djennè).

People lining up to get in and out. It made him think of Brel’s song: “Next”. So, it was his delusional belief that was expressed thus. Everyone was worth sexually, to her, better than him. Dogs were for him, of course, a pejorative way of referring to his imaginary rivals, and the fact that she lay down full length while they rolled over him a way of saying: it’s just a roll. (After the fact, we think this has something to do with what’s going on in Eastern European countries as well, given that all this phantasmagoria is contemporaneous with the collapse of this system. All of those who lined up under (and behind) Stalin, now lined up to go out, and sold (prostituted themselves) to the highest bidder, not hesitating to multiply partners. This is a feeling that we often encounter among former militants).

Baba guiding Bafitini. He thought of his father who was a very impulsive person, who rushed without thinking in the decisions he made. On the other hand, his father’s elder brother appeared to be wisdom itself. He was the one who guided his father in life, advised him, slowed down the execution of his impulses... (In his dream, he ends up meeting a cool baba [daddy]).

A memory of his childhood came back to him at that time. A distant cousin came from Mali to visit them and stayed with the family for a long time. One day, his father had chased this cousin away. He had told her to leave the family and not to set foot there again. He had never known exactly why.

The doors he pushed open. We can also put this in relation to his past as a political activist: he entered on the left and apparently found nothing there; he comes out, and enters on the right, where there are a lot of people. (Shift from a leftist political orientation to a more right-wing orientation necessitated by the end of communism). Later, he had thought that his father had driven this Malian cousin away, perhaps because he was circling around his mother. If that was the case, she might as well have replaced it with another. (So here we get the idea that a woman can always cheat on a (her) man). He had started to doubt his mother’s loyalty and wondered especially if he really was his father’s son.

When he was 9 or 10 years old, there was a child, the neighbor’s child, a little older than him with whom he was playing. This little boy was still beating him. So, he had wished for her death and had even engaged in magical activities to bring about this death. He was in another village (the village of which we will later discover the importance for him) when the news of the death of this little boy reached him. He hadn’t been surprised but had taken a solemn oath never to make death vows to his parents or siblings. He had never confessed to anyone, however, that he was responsible for the death of the one grown-ups considered his boyfriend.

He himself had escaped death several times. He was 5 or 6 years old and was traveling in a car in his mother’s arms. A bridge had given way in their path, they had found themselves in the water. He alone had escaped the adventure unscathed. All the others had been more or less seriously injured. His mother must have protected him without worrying about his own life. Shortly after, he was looking at the bottom of a pool at the toads or frogs swimming on the surface of the water. He had found himself in the pond without understanding how, as if he had lost consciousness between the moment he scrutinized the water and the next moment he swallowed the cup. Fortunately, someone had seen him slip and another hadn’t hesitated to jump into the pond to save him. At the same time, but after these two falls, at least certainly in the same year, he was running and playing with other children in the streets of a small town. Suddenly he hadn’t seen any of the other children. He had lost his way. There, too, it was as if at some point he had lost consciousness of things around him. He had walked for a long time. He had stepped into the waters of a river just outside the city. Fortunately, this time too, there was a gentleman who was sitting not far from there, weaving seko [assembly of straws used for the walls or roofs of the huts]. The old man had rushed to bring him back out of the water. He had only then burst into tears. The old man had made him sit down next to him, had consoled him. But

he did not know how to explain where he came from, or the names that he was asked. The old man had walked around town so he could return it to his mother.

### The maternal uncle's daughter

At 8/9 years old, he was walking with an older cousin than him in the bush [in the village where a year later he received the news of the death of his "boyfriend"]. They were arguing. She was screaming louder than him, and he had started to cry. Suddenly he found himself at the bottom of a well. He later learned that his cousin had been blamed for this accident, because he allegedly said she was the one who pushed him. The girl had even been beaten. He didn't remember saying that, or how he got to the bottom of that well. In any case, it was she who had saved his life: she had run to the village to seek help. In these situations, it was as if he woke up suddenly from a long absence.

To this series of "miracles", we must add the fact that he had never caught the common childhood diseases at that time (measles, chicken pox, mumps, whooping cough...). As if a particularly benevolent providence protected him.

Later, he went to spend a vacation in this cousin's village. They were almost inseparable. From the start, she had warned him: "I hope this time that if something happens to you, you won't blame me". He was a city dweller, and he knew nothing about the bush; then, she laughed at him, deceived him by making him believe that such and such a fruit came from this tree whereas it was rather the fruit of such and such a tree. When he had walked well, she burst out laughing. He felt in her company completely lost and ridiculous, completely useless, and he was ashamed. He was not up to the task at all. "She made me mistake bladders for lanterns".

In his adolescence, he often spent his holidays in this village. But her cousin had completely changed her attitude towards her. She had become distant. She treated him like he was "less than nothing". She was certainly the most beautiful and desirable girl around. All the boys were circling around him. Some even fought (hit each other) because of it. And she reigned superbly over this whole pack. He didn't like her. He even hated her for her proud and superior looks.

### The symbolic position of the maternal uncle: the duty of assistance to the nephew in danger

To understand the "transferential ingredients" that made him somehow trust me blindly, confide in me, and behave with me as if I necessarily had to prevent sacrificing his life, as if something committed me to take care of him, perhaps my own attitude to this call, I am forced to resort to explanations coming from social anthropology<sup>20</sup>.

I found myself, as a Peul, enrolled in this Fulani - maternal - branch of his family. In this branch, there is first and foremost the mother; there is also this uncle with whom he spent almost all his school holidays, the daughter of this uncle, the beautiful and haughty cousin and finally, there is the cousin Bakary with whom he passed through adolescence and who, therefore, is the object of a special friendship, made of complicity and trust and which he places above all those he has established subsequently.

The maternal uncle occupies an important function in this society. His sister's child can live with him as long as he wants, he is treated better than his own. The maternal uncle has a duty of assistance towards his sister's children. In the event of conflict with his fathers, the nephew can go and settle with the maternal uncle. This one will raise him, will help him (among the Peuls) to constitute a small herd of oxen, will find him a wife, and will allow him to stay in his family as much as he wishes, but also, leave when he feels like it. If it is a niece, the requirements are the same, except that generally it is not for the uncle to look after her marriage. In general, the girl joins her parents

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<sup>20</sup>See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949), Paris, Mouton and Co and *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, 1967 [24] and Claude Lévi-Strauss, "La famille", (1956), in Raymond Bellour, Catherine Clément (eds.), *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979 [25].

at the time of adolescence to marry the one whom they will have chosen for her as husband. He's the father as we would like him to be, the cool Baba. The sons of the maternal uncle are in a debtor position in relation to this cousin or to this cousin (matrilateral parallel). They have to give him a gift, a gift (not reciprocal), every year. Everyone is in this position with regard to the children of their paternal aunts. As long as we have a maternal uncle, we are sure to always have a family<sup>21</sup>...

This duty of assistance which falls on me, as a "cousin" in this foreign country, towards him, largely explains the request he has addressed to me.

What should also be added is that during his visits to me, he had borrowed 2 or 3 books from me. I had also, of my own accord, without knowing exactly why, offered to take with him, to read it, a book that would not fail to interest him: *Le sacrifice interdite* precisely!

When I remembered that the initiative to lend him this book came from me, I asked him what he got from it. Quite frankly, he admitted, nothing. First, he did not see the point of learning that the interpretation received so far of a particular passage of the Bible was wrong, and of discovering a new meaning in this passage. Second, and most importantly, the Bible was not one of his bedside books, and in fact he "didn't care". But, he had felt like he had to read it, and had read it completely.

By lending him this book, it was perhaps not the content that I was thinking, but the title. I unconsciously told him that he was forbidden to sacrifice his life. He therefore felt compelled to fully read this forbidden sacrifice.

Cousin Bakary who appears at the end of the dream and who is even the stopping point could also represent me. Boubacar = Babacar = Bakary = Boubcari = Bocar = Boukary = Aboubacar... are as many "Africanizations" of Abu Bakhr as Mahamadou, Mamadou, Mamoudou... are deformations of Mohamed. He called me "cousin" because his mother is Fulani and he speaks Fulani himself. The beautiful cousin is part of the Fulani branch of her family, as is cousin Bakary. This cousin is the only one he recognizes, just as I was the only one he could trust for him. It was just after Bakary's appearance that the idea of "bringing back a book"<sup>22</sup> presents itself in the dream.

Basically, the central idea of this dream is that it is wrong to open up to the outside world, to the new world. He is the one who made a mistake by marrying another woman than the one intended for him by the Law: the daughter of his maternal uncle (behind whom there is his mother)!

The fact of now denying the (political) ideas to which he had adhered for years also confirmed that he was wrong.

We are wrong in wanting to open the doors to go to the other side, to open to the other. We inevitably remain neither inside nor outside, but only on the threshold; so we'd better close them instead of (and before) opening them. He himself had remained on the threshold of two "cultures", his parents belonging to different ethnic groups. Neither Peul nor anything else<sup>23</sup>, is he not himself the product of such an attempt to open up which plunges him irremediably into the non-existent intersection of two universes which cancel each other out?

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<sup>21</sup>See for example: Aboubacar Barry, "Le lien de sève et la maison paternelle At the roots of the Identity of the JafunBe Fulani of the Samo country", *L'Homme, Revue française d'anthropologie*, number 163, 2002, pp. 137-156 [26]. And Aboubacar Barry, *Alliances peules en pays samo* (Burkina Faso), Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004 [27].

<sup>22</sup>When I mentioned this case during the defense of my doctoral thesis on July 7, 1995, a psychoanalyst member of the jury, Bernard Doray, also pointed out to me that the name of the author of the book that I had lent him, Marie Balmory, consonant with my own name: "Barry".

<sup>23</sup>See for example: Christine Hartung, "Neither really Peul, nor really Baatombu. The identity conflict of the Gando", In T. Bierschenk and P.-Y. Le Meur. (dir.), *Fulani trajectories in Benin. Six anthropological studies*, Paris, Karthala, 1997 [28,29].

Her suspicions about her mother are also really well founded, since she is the first to have broken the social contract according to which she was to marry the son of her paternal aunt.

### Conclusion

The few explanations attempted here about the fate of left-wing students after the crumbling of the Soviet system would doubtless not apply to the small world of today's Burkinabè intelligentsia. As everywhere else, political commitment has crumbled and the focus and priorities chosen are no longer the same. It would be interesting to do a similar research on pupils and students in this part of the world seized by globalization and the reign of new technologies and social networks, when it is mostly kept away from it.

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