

Anny Dominique Curtius

University of Iowa

The Great White Man of Lambaréné
by Bassek ba Kobhio: When Translating
a Colonial Mentality Loses its Meaning

This article focuses on a specific scene of Bassek ba Kobhio's 1994 film *Le grand Blanc de Lambaréné/The Great White Man of Lambaréné*, where Albert Schweitzer preaches Christian principles in French to a group of Gabonese people in Lambaréné. His sermon is translated into Fang by an interpreter. Because of English subtitles during this sermon scene in the California Newsreel version of the film, and the absence of subtitles in the original version distributed by La Médiathèque des Trois Mondes, several types of audiences are constituted, and several layers of interpretations and innuendos interweave. This article proposes to explore how a dynamics of mistranslation or missed translation locks this particular scene into a dead end and raises two kinds of questions: those concerning the distribution of African cinema beyond African borders, the translation of African languages in African cinema, and the script in African cinema; and others concerning matters of mobility, authenticity, and inaccuracy that subvert Albert Schweitzer's authority while enriching Bassek ba Kobhio's discourse on colonial and postcolonial mentalities.

“Racoutié [...] avait eu une peur bleue de Wangrin, parce que celui-ci savait parler au commandant non pas en ‘forofifon naspa,’ mais en français couleur vin de Bordeaux [...].” (*L'étrange destin de Wangrin ou les roueries d'un interprète africain* 39)

The central point of this study is a short scene from Cameroonian director Bassek ba Kobhio's 1994 feature film, *The Great White Man of Lambaréné*. I would like to explore how the original French version distributed by M3M (Médiathèque des Trois Mondes) and the version distributed by California Newsreel with subtitles in English articulate two contradictory discourses about the Christianization of Gabonese people in Lambaréné.

In the original version, Albert Schweitzer, whose nickname in the film is "Le Grand Blanc," "The Great White Man," preaches the Gospel to the people of Lambaréné and focuses particularly on the necessity of hard work as the only form of redemption for them as colonized people. However, in the English version, the confrontation of the written text — the English subtitles — and the oral text, that of the film script itself, manifests another type of discourse. Viewers who are able to understand both English and French constitute a specific audience. Indeed, in the California Newsreel version, when listening to the French while reading the English subtitles, these privileged viewers realize that an interpreter wisely conceals and manipulates the Great White Man's sermon. In this scene, the interpreter is the one who reveals the Great White Man's accusation of laziness leveled at "his" colonized people, but the viewer with knowledge of French realizes that the doctor never uses belittling terms in his sermon. It is also this same interpreter who, through his biased translation, admonishes the people of Lambaréné to embrace fully the stereotypes he attributes to the Great White Man as a way to articulate new strategies of identity.

Before delving into the analysis of this particular scene, I find it useful to recall what Ba Kobhio's film communicates to its audience.

Bassek ba Kobhio looks critically at Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) — the physician, the missionary, the philosopher, the theologian, the musicologist, the organist, and also the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Schweitzer created a hospital in Lambaréné in 1913 and lived there from 1924 until his death; his mission in Gabon established him as one of the most important spokespersons for colonial projects in Central Africa. In this film, focusing on the last twenty-one years of his life in Lambaréné, Ba Kobhio examines Schweitzer's reinvention of a colonial Africa fossilized in its dependence on the French Empire.

Ba Kobbio draws attention to Schweitzer's cultural arrogance and paternalism toward the Gabonese people, whom he usually calls his "primitives," and the filmmaker also points to Schweitzer's ambiguous love/disdain relationship with the Gabonese people. Thus, picturing him as both racist and philanthropist, selfish but generous, arrogant yet humble, Ba Kobbio explores this intrinsic ambiguity of the colonizer as analyzed by Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé*, to the extent that, by the end of the film, one is at a loss to say whether Ba Kobbio makes Schweitzer a hard-core colonialist who must be condemned, or a sort of humanist in disguise.

In order to build up the ambiguity, Ba Kobbio creates six key characters whose roles are to destabilize and challenge Schweitzer's power by questioning his international reputation in five fields of expertise: medicine, theology, philosophy, musicology, and philanthropy.

In the field of medicine, a young Gabonese physician, Koumba, challenges the Great White Man. As a boy protected by Schweitzer, Koumba was told that he should become a male nurse, not a doctor, because Africa, Schweitzer says, "needs carpenters and farmers, not doctors." Years later, when Koumba returns from Europe, where he studied medicine and law, he openly criticizes Schweitzer's ethnocentric vision of medicine, his insensitive treatment of Gabonese patients, and his dubious administration of the hospital.

In the field of medicine linked to tradition and philosophy, the traditional healer who does not share the Great White Man's philosophy of healing, suffering, and medication reinforces Koumba's position. The healer questions Schweitzer's expertise since, from a traditional perspective, the Great White Man's medical knowledge is fossilized in books, whereas his own is alive.

In turn, two women — a French journalist and Bissa, the Gabonese "wife"¹ who was given to the Great White Man by the village

¹ At a ceremony that the Great White Man attends for the first time and that follows his visit to the traditional healer, the village chief accepts to unveil to the doctor the secret of a powerful medicinal plant, the iboga. Then the chief allows Bissa to play a key role during this ceremony and offers him Bissa as a sign of friendship. As a Christian and Westerner, the Great White Man does not take Bissa as his second wife.

chief — question respectively his Nobel Peace Prize and the sense of his mission in Lambaréné. Whereas the journalist fiercely attacks him for his brutality against the natives, his ethnocentrism, his use of African patients for medical experiments, his doubtful administration of the hospital, Bissa makes the Great White Man face his own ambiguities about his perceived mission of saving the people of Lambaréné as a doctor and a missionary.

Similarly, a young Gabonese drummer, whom Schweitzer calls “le fou du tam tam” (the crazy drummer or the tom-tom geek),² challenges the Great White Man’s expertise as a musicologist and organist, and skillfully tries to compel him to reconsider his dislike for African music by playing the drum at night every time the doctor plays the organ. It is not obvious that the drummer succeeds in making him revise his ethnocentric discourse on the purity and universality of classical European music, however. Because the Great White Man is deeply irritated by the *unrefined* sound of the drum, he will eventually give the drummer a trumpet as a Christmas present, urging him then to barter his African instrument for a more *acceptable* European substitute. By doing so, the Great White Man states his conditions for accepting to pursue this musical dialogue initiated by the drummer. The latter accepts to be taught how to play the trumpet, and in a revealing teaching scene, a bridge is somehow built between the Great White Man and the young drummer of Lambaréné, between Africa and Europe. In this scene, even though the doctor seems to be the conductor, the composer, and the primary performer (Higginson 214) — while the trumpet player is in a subaltern position — it is important to point out that the ensuing musical scenes of the film represent the young African man using his trumpet to play “Indépendance cha-cha”³ for the people of Lambaréné celebrating independence, blues for

It is only on the eve of his death that he allows her to lie in his bed by his side. At this point in the film, we learn that she would sleep on the floor when he would occasionally let her enter his room after the death of his wife.

² Francis Higginson accurately points out the various ways of interpreting what the doctor means by “le fou du tam tam.” From Schweitzer’s perspective this could insinuate someone who is nuts about the tom-tom, someone who is nuts and who plays the tom-tom, someone who is crazy because he plays the tom-tom, or crazed by this irrational instrument (213-14).

³ In 1960, the Congolese singer Joseph Kabasele, alias Grand Kallé, who founded the famous orchestra African Jazz, composed “Indépendance Cha Cha.” This

the Great White Man and Bissa, and finally the Gabonese national anthem for the doctor on the day of his grandiose funeral.⁴ Master of his new instrument, the trumpet player is able to display publicly his identity politics, first to the new independent nation, then to the Great White Man. Indeed, by choosing not to play a Bach symphony but blues, and then the Gabonese national anthem, he proudly asserts his agency to Schweitzer and subverts the feeling of inferiority that the doctor wanted to instill into the consciousness of the people of Lambaréné.

With the gist of these five lines of reading the film in mind, let us look at the specific scene, earlier described, where the interpreter questions the Great White Man's expertise in theology and mocks his ability to speak several languages. Because it uses a faulty translation in the subtitles provided by the California Newsreel English version, the scene can be read from two significant angles: 1) from an African perspective of spirituality, and 2) from a European perspective. The differential status between an African and a European spirituality results in a clash between a colonial and postcolonial mentality. Schweitzer himself was a polyglot but, as Bissa clearly states later on in the film, he never bothered to learn the languages spoken in Lambaréné. Hence, in the scene where he preaches the Gospel to the people, he needs to rely on a Gabonese interpreter to communicate his message to the villagers, who do not seem to understand the original French. It is significant that the original version of the film is entirely in French except for this particular scene of the sermon, which is in French on the doctor's side, and in Fang on the interpreter's side.

song became a song of freedom for several newly independent West African countries.

⁴ Koumba had obtained permission from the village chief to organize a grandiose funeral for the doctor, and to grant him the title of Prince Panther after his death.

California Newsreel Version⁵

1. Great White Man: Le message de Dieu est d'une extrême simplicité et d'une divine complexité à la fois. (*God's message is at the same time extremely simple and divinely complex.*)⁶

Interpreter/subtitles: Me I understand, but the Bible is too complicated for you natives.

2. Great White Man: Ce qu'il faut retenir dans toute la Bible est parfois facile. C'est le travail seul qui sauve. (*What should be learned from the Bible is sometimes easy. It's work alone that saves.*)

Interpreter/subtitles: Illiterates, just get on with your work, the rest will follow.

3. Great White Man: Ce n'est pas le sacrifice de Jésus sur la croix qui sauve, mais le fait de le suivre par un engagement actif. Dans ce sens, le travail dans toutes les conditions est un acte de salut. (*It isn't just Jesus's sacrifice on the cross that saves, but one must follow an active engagement. In this sense, work in all conditions is an act of salvation.*)

Interpreter/subtitles: Fornicator or drunk. You are sure to have a place in heaven if you work.

4. Great White Man: Amen

Interpreter/subtitles: What has been said is final.

⁵ Authorization to reproduce this picture was granted by California Newsreel.

⁶ Translations from French into English of the Great White Man's sermon are mine.

This scene clearly shows that one needs to analyze it from the perspective of four different viewers: a bilingual audience fluent in French and English, an English-speaking audience, a French-speaking audience, and a trilingual audience fluent in French, English, and Fang.

1. The French- and English-speaking audience

From the perspective of a bilingual audience, able to consider both the original and the English subtitles, the analysis I propose is that of a privileged viewer-reader. In his sermon in French, Schweitzer is perceived as the theologian on a mission to Christianize and civilize, and he is apparently convinced that his message reaches his audience through the translation, something we know is not true, when we consider the subtitles. This reading of his symbolic power is indeed reinforced by the presence of his wife and two nurses all dressed in white, and sitting on stools higher than those used by the Gabonese people. However, when one considers the empty gaze of the audience — their obvious lack of interest for the doctor's homily and, most significantly, one woman smirking and somehow nodding in agreement, or perhaps in disagreement, with either the Great White Man or the interpreter — it becomes clear that Schweitzer's power is being reconsidered. At this point the doctor fails to understand that the interpreter transforms his words, that he is being mocked, and that it is actually the interpreter who is in command of the message, not Schweitzer. Let us remember that according to Amadou Hampaté Bâ in *L'étrange destin de Wangrin*, the African interpreter never loses face in front of the colonizer. Most importantly — and this is the postcolonial twist — as Schweitzer does not show any interest in learning Fang and therefore fails to become a *true* translator-missionary,⁷ he himself maps out a dynamics that contributes to the failure of his Christianizing mission, since the interpreter cannily subverts it. Moreover, the posture and physical appearance of the interpreter, who wears western clothes, a colonial helmet, and holds a Bible in his hand, confer authority upon him for the Western viewer.

⁷ As Robert Wechsler shows, translation into colloquial language that can be understood by all is something [Protestant Bible translators] have considered absolutely necessary to the spread of Christianity.

The scene can be interpreted as follows. In the sentence, “Me I understand, but the Bible is too complicated for you natives,” the “me” most certainly refers to the doctor, but the interpreter, by not translating the sentence properly, steals the position originally occupied by the Great White Man. By stealing his voice and therefore his colonial power, he substitutes himself for the voice and position of the Great White Man. In so doing, he establishes a social, religious, and cultural distance between himself, as the talking subject, and the silent audience. In this scene, the interpreter can certainly be identified as “a subject mystified by colonization who adopts the ideology of the colonizer for himself or for others in order to escape his political and social conditions,” to cite Albert Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé* (149-50). In this case, since the interpreter refuses to be associated with the vision imposed on him by colonialism, he subverts the Great White Man’s discourse by reinventing it, and uses to his own advantage the stereotypes often put forward to identify the colonized, with the words “illiterates, fornicators, drunks.” Thus, he dissociates himself from the people of Lambaréné to become the Great White Man’s mimic man, and even to associate himself with the civilizing mission. In this position, the interpreter is what Frantz Fanon calls “l’évolué,” the “sophisticated subject” (*Peau noire masques blancs* 11). Consequently, the “me” in “Me I understand” could easily be the interpreter, who lies to the people of Lambaréné since, as the scene seems to suggest, they are not fluent (enough) in French to understand the sermon and to realize that the interpreter misleads them. So, borrowing the notion of subalternity elaborated by Gayatri Spivak in her seminal article “Can the Subaltern Speak,” I see the interpreter as a subaltern who speaks to other subalterns, but departs from his subaltern position by misleading both the Great White Man and the Gabonese, because he understands the power of language and therefore chooses to speak in tongues, as a way to manipulate and reinvent the power of language.

2. The English-speaking audience

Viewers who understand only English may not be in a position to make such an analysis, since they have access only to the subverted translation provided by the subtitles, which they incorrectly assume to be the Great White man’s words. As a result, they may not be able to identify the ideological impact such a complex game played by the

interpreter can have on the audience. Moreover, they may not be equipped to grasp how, in this complex linguistic game, the interpreter, the Great White Man, and the people of Lambaréné find themselves in a triangle of miscommunication that undermines relations between colonizer and colonized. On another level, the translation the interpreter provides, made available through the subtitles, does not allow the audience who understands only English to read this scene from a perspective in which the interpreter is not a subject “mystified” by colonization, but is only interested in mimicking the Great White Man’s ideology and becoming his accomplice. The audience targeted by the English subtitles may be seen as unable to perceive the interpreter as a postcolonial parasite⁸ who occupies a border zone that allows him to manipulate and reinvent two realities: the Great White Man’s authority and the subaltern position of the Gabonese. In this case, the audience may not grasp that the interpreter associates himself with the people of Lambaréné by distorting the doctor’s sermon, and lets them appreciate the extent of the Great White Man’s disdain and condescendence. More is missed by the audience who is unaware of the fact that the words “illiterates, fornicators, drunks” are not used in his sermon. This audience will not likely understand that, according to the interpreter, beneath the doctor’s well-articulated hermeneutics of the necessity of hard work for the colonized, there lies a subtext that refers to their laziness, stupidity, and immaturity. So, as a postcolonial parasite, the interpreter has the mission to unveil skillfully a theological subtext and to reveal its true intent: to reinforce a colonial mentality by using negative stereotypes. In this position, the interpreter is a threat to the authority, credibility, and respect that the doctor has gained in the community.

I would like to suggest that both the Great White Man and the interpreter articulate distorted colonial and postcolonial discourses.

⁸ For a further analysis of the intricacy of the concept of parasite in postcolonial situations, see Mireille Rosello’s *Declining the Stereotype* (1998) and *Postcolonial Hospitality* (2001) as well as Michel Laronde’s *Postcolonialiser la Haute Culture à l’Ecole de la République* (2008). Throughout this article, I use the term postcolonial in instances as “postcolonial trickster” or “postcolonial parasite” to refer to an oppositional strategy that is at play in the colonial setting of the film. Therefore, postcolonial is not used in the chronological sense of the term, (conquest-colonization-decolonization) but to describe the deconstructive strategies that characterize a postcolonial mentality.

For the missionary/doctor, to strengthen his hermeneutics of the place of the colonized within Christianity, he would need to rely on negative stereotypes such as laziness, lack of intellectual sophistication, and lechery — all constitutive of the essence of the colonized, according to an ethnocentric colonial mentality. But Schweitzer does not rely on such a vocabulary. As for the interpreter, it is through an exegesis of the doctor's sermon that he suggests that the people of Lambaréné should live the stereotypes to their fullest, as a postcolonial strategy of displacement and demarginalization. In other words, the interpreter supposedly tells the Gabonese that since the Great White Man is telling them they are illiterate, fornicators, and drunks, then they should choose to be so, and live the plenitude of the stereotypes.

As a parasite, the interpreter chooses a discursive strategy that allows him to confuse the issues and to acquire authority as a disruptive go-between. Like all parasites in the biological sense of the word, he only exists if he inscribes himself into the power dynamics in which the Great White Man is immersed. His translation is detrimental to the doctor's power and provides the community with tools aimed at dismantling his mission and colonial project.

As a trickster, the interpreter cleverly steals the stereotypes of laziness, stupidity, and lechery, reappropriates them, and, Bible in hand, wearing his colonial helmet, he gives the illusion of sharing the Great White Man's ideology, yet he cleverly subverts the colonizer's discourse. Since his behavior is a form of smuggling as well as a legitimate positioning of border crossing, he is actively speaking from a "third space" at the junction of a colonial and a postcolonial mentality. In that situation, he wears a mask that serves to unveil the innuendos in the Great White Man's sermon and the very depths of his colonial mentality. Moreover, as a trickster, he reserves the right to interpret what he believes to be left unsaid and concealed in the doctor's sermon, and he uses the most offensive stereotypes to destabilize the Great White Man in public. If I wanted to bring to an end my analysis of the various discursive strategies used in this scene at this stage, I realize that the French original version alone does not allow me to do so, since it does not allow for a duplicitous discourse of reinterpretation to be present in the words of the interpreter until the English subtitles appear in the film.

M3M French Original Version⁹**3. The French-speaking audience**

Originally in French, the film is primarily intended for a French-speaking audience, and Fang is only used by the interpreter to translate the doctor's homily. Therefore, when privileged French and English-speaking viewers watch the M3M original version and try to understand why the Fang is not translated into French at this particular moment in the film, they conclude that the French distributor took for granted that the interpreter's translation is accurate. On the other hand, bilingual viewers who believe that the English subtitles in the sermon scene in the California Newsreel version are correct would tend to think that the French distributor subverted Ba Kobhio's supposedly strategic position and adopted a particular ideological stand by not providing the French audience with the subtitles that make Schweitzer look ridiculous. Thus, the French-speaking audience is not given the opportunity to articulate a critical discourse as the other audiences are. Consequently, this is how an ideological discourse evolves from an allegedly technical "mistake," or how a technical "mistake" gives rise to the construction of an ideological discourse. At this point only, the subtitles missing in the French version drastically change the ideological meaning. As is the case with the monolingual English audience,

⁹ Authorization to reproduce this picture was granted by Bassek ba Kobhio.

the French-speaking audience is not in a position to encode the colonial-postcolonial dialectics that comes into play in the scene.

4. The Fang, French, and English-speaking audience

The interpretation by a fourth audience fluent in Fang, French, and English adds a powerful twist to the three analyses proposed so far. At this stage, reflecting upon the interrelation between languages in the film, it seemed logical to verify whether the English subtitles correspond to what the interpreter was saying in Fang in the sermon scene. And my investigation led to the question of the reception of such a film by an African audience, a consideration often ignored in studies of African Cinema. I then looked for Fang speakers who could provide me with a thorough translation of the different ways the interpreter, according to my analyses, allows himself to bypass the Great White Man's sermon and challenge his authority. Two Fang speakers from Gabon and Equatorial Guinea reported the subtitles in the California Newsreel version to be inaccurate and to depart significantly from the original text, the doctor's sermon in French.

1. Great White Man: Le message de Dieu est d'une extrême simplicité et d'une divine complexité à la fois.

Interpreter: Medzu mese Nzame a nga dzo ne mi ke bo mia bo dzia me, ve mia yia ne wokh medzu mese a ke mine ekaneghe.¹⁰ (*Tout ce que Dieu vous recommande de faire, vous devez le faire. Vous devez écouter ce que je vous transmets.*) (*You must do everything that God tells you to do. You must listen to what I'm telling you.*)¹¹

2. Great White Man: Ce qu'il faut retenir dans toute la Bible est parfois facile. C'est le travail seul qui sauve.

Interpreter: Edzam mia yia ne sile ezango, eti e ne foghe, ve ise, ise ete ede eke mine vole. (*Ce que vous devez attendre de Dieu, est que seul le travail va vous aider.*) (*What you can expect from God is that work alone will help you.*)

3. Great White Man: Ce n'est pas le sacrifice de Jésus sur la croix qui sauve, mais le fait de le suivre par un engagement actif. Dans ce sens, le travail dans toutes les conditions est un acte de salut.

¹⁰ Jeannette Ekomie Cinnamon provided me with the transcriptions in Fang.

¹¹ Fang informants' translation into French are followed by my translation into English.

Interpreter: Mia yia ne yem na, adzu Nzame ede mia yia neb o etam, et mia yia ne yem fen a abwi mam asese me ne eti, Nzame enye a ve me. (*Vous devez savoir que tout ce que vous avez, c'est Dieu qui vous l'a donné.*) (*You must know that God has given you all that you have.*)

4. Great White Man: Amen.

Interpreter: Medzu mese a ndokh man kobe mi, mia yia ne yen na. (*Tout ce qu'il vient de dire, c'est ce que vous devez faire.*) (*Everything he has just said, that's what you have to do.*)

Indeed, the Fang as spoken in the film does not translate the Great White Man's detailed theological rhetoric, with respect to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and the utmost meaning of work as an act of redemption. However, it has nothing of the sardonic and insulting thrust of the English subtitles available in the California Newsreel version. The perspectives of the three audiences analyzed above reveal that they are oppositional receptors, since each group is limited by its ignorance of one or two of the other languages and partially knows a single discourse, which is believed to be the only "truth." However, the Fang, French, and English-speaking audience appears to stand beyond the dynamics of oppositionality that characterizes the three audiences, since it has the tools to browse through the innuendos of a discourse that is henceforth articulated from the opposition of inaccuracy and authenticity. Interestingly, the crucial sermon scene, which relies on translation in order to allow Ba Kobbio's postcolonial revision of Albert Schweitzer to come full circle, is deconstructed by another dynamics of translation, that of another translator who, using inaccurate subtitles, hijacks both Schweitzer and Ba Kobbio. Lost in translation, Schweitzer is ridiculed, Ba Kobbio's script is transformed, and a mysterious¹² translator, performing within the film and beyond the screen, takes the place of the interpreter — whom I identified previously as a postcolonial trickster — to become the *real* trickster. But does knowing the *truth* make my previous analyses inappropriate? Are interpretations by viewers of the California Newsreel version also faulty, inasmuch as they are based on *wrong* English subtitles? My earlier analyses need not be discarded, since both versions of the film

¹² Neither California Newsreel nor Bassek ba Kobbio was able to identify the translator. Ba Kobbio informed me that the translation was negotiated between California Newsreel and the producer.

will continue to circulate, and multiple layers of interpretation will continue to be intertwined because of the missing (the M3M original version) or existing (the California Newsreel version) subtitles, and because of the geographical, linguistic, and ideological boundaries that the film has crossed. Moreover, is the omniscient Fang, French, and English-speaking audience in an ideal position to elaborate a definitive interpretation of the Bible teaching scene? The following observations of the director of *The Great White Man of Lambaréné* speak to the contrary.

In September 2007, I finally communicated with Bassek ba Kobhio, and here are his written remarks about the sermon scene:

En effet, l'interprète n'est pas fidèle aux propos du docteur. Il choisit d'interpréter dans le sens qui l'arrange et c'est ça qui est intéressant. Je crois qu'il y a une erreur que je n'ai pas relevée lorsqu'on faisait la première version vidéo, parce que je constate que même sur le DVD produit par l'Organisation de la Francophonie que je viens de consulter, il n'y a pas de sous-titres français à cet endroit, alors que la traduction anglaise part des textes que j'ai dû valider en français.

A greater confusion thus derives from knowing all three languages. Even if one is now convinced that the California Newsreel translation is false and that the translator henceforth plays a fundamental role in the appreciation of the sermon scene, Ba Kobhio's remarks bring us back to a reality, that of a script which uses an interpreter to convey a postcolonial critical discourse about Schweitzer's Christianizing mission. But if one takes into account that cinematic creation in West Africa allows space for collaboration among actors, directors, and producers, and that the script is often negotiated, transformed, reinterpreted by everyone, then, inevitably, improvisation and *différance* in the Derridian sense of the term become the norm. From this perspective, one is able to guess the interaction that may have been mapped out between the actor who played the role of the interpreter in the film and Ba Kobhio. It is true, as Ba Kobhio observes, that in this scene the interpreter is not faithful to what the doctor says, and yet his lack of fidelity in Fang does not really generate a postcolonial criticism of Schweitzer's Christianizing mission. Consequently, despite the importance of the traditional healer, Bissa, Koumba, the drummer/trumpet player, and the journalist, it

is the interpreter's translation in Fang that short-circuits Ba Kobhio's postcolonial gaze on Albert Schweitzer in Lambaréné in the 1940s. Might this be the reason why the California Newsreel translator, dissatisfied with the translation¹³ in Fang, decided not to remain subservient to the original text? As a performer, at this specific moment of the film, the translator barter the position of faithful translator for that of a cultural agent who produces meaning for a North American audience and requires that his reinvented English subtitles stand in their own right. Thus, the postcolonial detour of Bassek ba Kobhio's film is not articulated through Fang but through English.

In this scene that generates a weave of polysemic subtexts, each participant makes innuendos, wears a mask, subverts individual languages. This is how a postcolonial translation of a colonial mentality loses its meaning. I can only wish that one day, the California Newsreel trickster-translator will identify himself or herself and reveal to us the secret of his or her performance.

My deepest gratitude goes to two informants, Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo from Equatorial Guinea and Jeannette Ekomie Cinnamon from Gabon, who provided me with the translation from Fang. Thank you to Mamadou Badiane, John M. Cinnamon and Shelly Jarrett-Bromberg for their precious help in facilitating the translation process with these two informants.

¹³ One could assume that this translator shrewdly manipulates and controls the meaning of the doctor and the interpreter's words because he understands French and Fang.

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