

THE FRENCH REVIEW, Vol. 89, No. 3, March 2016 Printed in U.S.A.

## Agency in Exile: Spectatorship, Television, and Mediation in Kossi Efoui's Play *Récupérations*

by Anaïs Nony

IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SURROUNDINGS, we may think of media ubiquity and screen proliferation as characteristic of information society, where technologies of surveillance have become similar to those of entertainment and popular culture. However, playwrights from the Francophone diaspora frequently question the consequences of such ongoing mediatization. For decades, Francophone African and Caribbean playwrights such as Kossi Efoui, José Plyia, Gerty Dambury, and Koffi Kwahulé have used theater to question the effects of estrangement and wandering caused by linguistic and spatial mediations. Such authors have been producing diverse poetics, using the text as a signifying form to interpret a constantly changing world. By reclaiming the French language in their literary practices, they question the mediatized quality of our presence in the world. And their literary aesthetics express the plural quality of experience deploying innovative techniques, such as the use of jazz by Kwahulé and of the blues by Efoui, both of which present a challenge to the French language to be understood as a medium among others in a thoroughly mediated world.

In this article, I analyze the notion of exile in Efoui's theater, with a special focus on his play *Récupérations* as it offers a critical model to question technological mediation and bodies in transit. While many of Efoui's readers have noted the conditions of exile as tied to diasporic situations, I investigate the ontological dimension of exile as revealed through representational practices.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, in *Récupérations*, a television program is playing onstage during the performance. In this *mise en abyme*—the play and the reality show within the play—the dynamics of visibility are entangled with the weight of language and the act of speaking. I examine how *Récupérations* foregrounds the mediatization of life, paying particular attention to the political stakes of this process and the ways in which it delimits the subjects' agency. By placing the question of mediation alongside an examination of the subjects' agency, I aim to conceptualize exile as a consequence of both political and spectatorial strategies, offering a way to think of exilic migration

as tied to the dispossession of agency. Exile, as a dispossession of the subject's capacity to act, questions media responsibility in regulating people's images and stories and underlines the consequences and impacts of the ongoing mediation in our contemporary world.

Mediation is commonly understood as an indirect process through which something and/or someone is perceived and acknowledged. While the concept of mediation is usually employed in the context of the law referring to a third party that mediates a dispute, mediation is employed here to refer to the means through which an object, idea, and/or a subject is mediated. In other words, experience is the result of an ongoing mediation that takes place in the perceptual apparatus in which object, idea, and/or a subject is passed through a different medium such as language and television screens. In an interview with Sylvie Chalaye, Efoui talks about his relationship to the French language:

Je crois que nous avons appris à tourner le dos au regard occidental. Notre génération n'est plus dans l'imitation, ni dans la réponse ou la réaction. Si l'on prend l'espace de la langue française, qui est la langue dans laquelle nous écrivons et lisons, elle est perçue comme un espace de traduction. Dans cette langue, j'ai lu des Français, des Américains, des Italiens, des Japonais, des Espagnols, des Sud-Américains... Par conséquent, ce qui me nourrissait dans mon travail d'écriture, ce n'était pas le rapport idéologique au regard occidental, mais toutes ces individualités créatrices qui faisaient irruption. Et la langue française n'était que la librairie où je pouvais trouver tous ces grands gaillards-là. (*Afrique* 33)

The French language, understood as a relational experience between literary cultures, becomes a site of cultural translation in Efoui's writing. For one of the most prolific Francophone writers of the West African diaspora, the French language is not just a means for reading and writing, but is also a linguistic space of encounter and a vehicle for navigating and reaching out to other cultures. Efoui grew up in Togo and moved to France when his first play, *Le carrefour*, won RFI's Concours théâtral interafricain in 1989. Just as for his predecessor Kwahulé, Efoui's novels, essays, and plays offer a translational dimension imprinted in his literary universe. More particularly, Efoui uses the text as a place of transit in order to explore the relationship between mediation and interpretation. When Efoui uses language as a site of translation, he offers his readers a new way to think about mediation, with consequences on how the readers themselves—regardless of their location—understand migration, displacement, and transit.

Critics often describe Efoui's poetics as un-settled and mutable. In his writing, both the content and the form resist facile interpretation, requiring the critic to be

supple and adaptive. His different uses of genres such as journalism, melodrama, and poetry, as well as the constant infiltration of metaphoric figures such as masks, birds, and vagabonds create a sense of movement in which both form and content are intertwined. The universe of his writing is populated by motifs of displacement (*L'ombre des choses à venir*), instability (*Solo d'un revenant*), invisibility (*Concessions*), and illusion (*Le carrefour*) that invite us to think about the ongoing process of identity construction and deconstruction at work in contemporary societies. From his first play *Le carrefour* (in which the theatrical stage exists only in the narrator's head), to the ambivalent spectatorship exposed in *Concessions* (in which the spectator is exposed to a Machiavellian industry of mass-media entertainment), his theatrical universe imposes a reflective imperative on our mediated culture.

In Efoui's 1992 *Récupérations*, the main scene consists of a talk show in which poor people are interviewed in a shantytown named "Du côté de chez Dieu." This *bidonville* has been reconstituted in the television studio for a program called "La voix," which is sensational rather than informational. Prompted by questions from the interviewer, "La journaliste," the life stories of these people are framed by the medial apparatus of the talk show, which shapes and punctuates their discourses. This play offers three distinct diegetic layers: the play, divided in acts and sequences; the show, rehearsed and broadcasted for a television program; and the world outside the television show (namely the shantytown that is being destroyed). Two acts divide the play: a *Première journée*—itself divided into five sequences—and a *Seconde journée*, divided into four sequences. In the second sequence of act one, a special guest, Otto Kopf, is briefly interviewed. He is a doctor who runs an apolitical organization whose motivations are: "humanisme, humanisme, humanisme" and whose goal is: "[A]pporter aux personnes démunies la même affection que nous avons pour nos chiens, nos canaris, nos perroquets. Pour cela, il suffit qu'elles soient pauvres, mais honnêtes et dignes" (15). In the second sequence of act two, the program broadcasts an interview with another guest, "Germain Leduc." He is presented as the creator of a new literary genre—the "roman-reportage"—and has just published a book, "Du côté de chez Dieu" (36). When the journalist asks him if he is aware that the shantytown—upon which his book inspired—is to be demolished soon, his response is: "Je ne peux que m'insurger contre cette ignominie vis-à-vis de la littérature et de la beauté" (38). These sentences reveal the absurdity of the situation in which both Otto Kopf and Germain Leduc stand as specialists, thus providing a sense of authority and control over the situation and yet giving ways to irrational and illogical speeches. Although a parody of the presence of these kinds of experts is a common characteristic of reality television shows today, Efoui's drama highlights the meaninglessness of these characters' responses, offering a critique of how people's misery is exploited for the sake of entertainment.

The beginning of the play engages with a critique of double spectatorships: the spectator of the play and the audience of the broadcast. In the play's first act, the journalist, Hadriana Mirado, welcomes the inhabitants of the shanty-town:

La journaliste: Vous avez vu le décor? C'est beau, hein?... Vous avez fait bon voyage?... Je comprends votre surprise. Nous avons tout reproduit exactement comme chez vous, dans les moindres détails. Allons, allons, mettez-vous à l'aise. Faites comme chez vous. (5)

This first question: "Vous avez vu le décor?" is addressed both to the audience of the play and the audience of the broadcast, and yet, the journalist is talking to the participants. While dramatic dialogue is typically structured by the characters on stage and by the presence of a silent spectator, in *Récupérations*, Efoui adds a third layer to this so-called *double situation d'énonciation*. The television studio and the theatrical stage overlap to create an in-between space made of concomitant worlds, one in which agency and subjectivity function differently. Here mediation is characterized by the use of a theatrical dialogue that allows for a ubiquitous space to take place, in which the spectator is both the spectator of a play and of a show within a play. Efoui's literary strategy recalls other *mises en abyme* such as Corneille's *Illusion comique* and Genet's *Les bonnes*. In these plays, the theater itself is duplicated to create *le théâtre dans le théâtre*. In Efoui's drama, two distinct representational apparatuses are taking place: a stage and a television studio. In *Récupérations*, mediation is thus tied to a representational strategy in which multiple layers of situational actions are taking place. However, as Chalaye underlines, the television set within the play is only a space of trickery. This space of illusion shows both the presence of a shantytown displayed in studio and its absence at the same time ("Théâtres" 33). The shantytown presented in the broadcast is a staged and artificial reconstruction, while the original and unseen shantytown is being destroyed during the television program. The destructive and spectatorial action of the television program within the play provides a way to question how the mediated apparatuses shape the notion of transit and spectatorship.

The overlap between the space of the show and the stage of the theater interrogates the diegetic and extradiegetic structure of the representation by questioning the relation between first: live performance and delayed time in television, second: bodily presence and different mediated discourses. Furthermore, this double structure is reinforced by the use of the medium specificity of both theater and moving images. *Récupérations* underscores the process of visibility and disappearance implicit in both the theatrical and cinematic apparatuses. I refer on the one hand to the ephemeral quality of the theatrical stage, where the object disappears once the representation is over, and on the other hand to the movement of the film

slide, in which the visibility of one image is contingent upon the disappearance of the previous one. Within the television show as depicted in the play, the disappearance is characterized differently as it does no longer refer to the materiality of the moving image itself, but to the disappearance of the original object, that is, the shantytown. The more the broadcast is taking place, the more the actual shantytown is being destroyed, in a Balzacian *peau de chagrin* type of way.

The simultaneity that exists between the production of narrative for show and the demolition of the shantytown creates a lived performance that is haunted by the devastation of the inhabitants' homes. At the very beginning of the play, the participants do not know that the government is in the process of destroying their original houses while they are rehearsing and performing for the television program. While people's homes and stories are transformed through the means of sensationalism, the term "reality show" suddenly takes on a poignant meaning: the show is presented as depicting the lives of the inhabitants, but it is in fact their material lives that are at stake while the show is broadcast. In this case, the creation of a duplicate, or representation, masks the destruction of the original: at the end of the play, the houses no longer exist outside the setting of the show. First, the destruction of the original object—the shantytown—appears as a condition for the production of representation. Second, the impossibility of a return home functions as a critique of simulacrum—reproduction of copies that no longer have an original—as the basic component of image production within mass media. Jean Baudrillard develops such a critique in "La précession des simulacres," where he states that simulation is opposed to representation as the latter is grounded on the equivalence between signs and the real, whereas the former takes signs as canceling all references to the real (16). While Baudrillard diagnoses simulation as being made of signs that hide that there is no reference to the real, the play denounces simulation used as an alibi for the destruction of the real. The setting of the play not only reveals that a false representation is taking place (in other words, that an ideology is circulating), but that simulation is a representational strategy that masks the destruction of the original object. Whereas the show's spectators believe they are looking at actual houses, these are artificially made visible in the studio so that the shantytown can be destroyed without witnesses. In other words, the fakeness of the program operates as an alibi to maintain a political stratagem. In this context, the play not only demonstrates the alienating dimension of simulation, it criticizes the cost of disappearance of authenticity within television programs and its political ramifications.

In the context of this double critique of spectatorship, the creation of a television studio within a play exposes the artificiality of representational practices. While the journalist is rehearsing before the show starts, the inhabitants understand the set as being an attempt to duplicate their own shacks and notice parts of the

set that do not match their original homes. Dieu, the shantytown's first settler, tries to interrupt the journalist: "Il manque un clou. Le clou au milieu pour mon sac à outils" (5). Ignoring his request, the journalist constantly modifies the talk show to regulate the inhabitants' ability to speak. During the rehearsal, she asks her cameraman to turn off the video, which he does. However, a clash erupts between Séfa, one of the play's central characters, and other residents, namely Keli (a florist), Mama-Keta (the child trader), Dieu (a brigand), Moudjibate (who is both a prostitute and Séfa's wife), and Yen Yah (Séfa and Moudjibate's child, and "l'enfant de tous") (4). The clash is a common dispute according to Mama-Keta, a monthly ritual that Séfa performs each day of "mauvaise lune" (13). The violence of the scene (Séfa is holding a knife) as well as the verbal behavior of the people (rhymes, idiomatic expressions, metaphors) create a spectacular moment. Impressed by the intensity, the journalist asks that the camera be turned on, but the scene is already over:

La journaliste: Tiens, j'ai une idée. On pourrait peut-être reprendre ça. C'est impressionnant.

Mama-Keta: Comment allez-vous faire? Il n'a qu'une crise par mois. Le jour de mauvaise lune.

Yen Yah: Quand les chiens aboient aux fantômes toute la nuit.

La journaliste: Ce n'est pas grave, on fait semblant. Vous allez essayer de me refaire la même chose que tout à l'heure. (13)

The verbs *reprendre* and *recupérer* are linked in this scene to the function of the cinematic retake. In the play, the rehearsal is tied to the will to repeat and reiterate, leading to a conflict between the predictable—and yet non-reproducible event—and the journalist's determination to create a sensationalist scene. On the one hand, the temporality of this monthly ritual cannot be scheduled and only emerges spontaneously. On the other hand, the technological setting of the artificially reproduced social context facilitates the production of retakes understood as both simulation and representation. *Répétition* as a temporal dimension specific to theatrical practices is intertwined with *recupération* as a process of object and image production. Here, the title of the play *Récupérations* itself assumes a double meaning: the ongoing appropriation of stories for the sake of sensationalism, and the transformation of time and space for the sake of representation.

If, as we have seen, mediation resonates with simulation understood as an alibi for the destruction of the original object, it also echoes practices of censorship and control. During the first part of the play, the journalist's utterances impose a power dynamic that regulates the interviewees' speech, thus shaping their agency as subjects. In the sequence of the first act, one can read the tension between the inhabitants'

will to speak in front of the camera and the journalist's resistance to let them tell their stories. When Moudjibate, a prostitute, tries to answer the journalist's question, the latter disapproves of what she hears and prevents Moudjibate from explaining further:

Moudjibate: J'avais peur de tuer mon enfant. Oh, bien sûr, je l'aimais... mais je lui en voulais d'être là et de compliquer les choses. C'est tout. Je le frappais. Nous le frappions. Ce n'était pas pour faire mal. C'est plus compliqué... C'est... C'est tout.

La journaliste: Coupez!

Moudjibate: Attendez!

Le cameraman: J'ai coupé! (21)

The regulation of speech frames the context through which the inhabitants' lives are being presented in the television show. The journalist does not address the inhabitants as *corps-sujets*, that is, bodies that can be consciously perceived in the world and addressed as such. The medial apparatus replaces these bodies by speechless *corps-images*. Judith Butler has underlined that it is "by virtue of his fundamental dependency on the address of the 'Other'" that a subject comes to exist (*Excitable* 5). In this sense, "being" means being addressed, called by someone else's language. In the context of the play, the inhabitants lose their ability to be *interpellés* as singular individuals.<sup>2</sup> They simultaneously lose their capacity to express and to be addressed as agents of themselves. Furthermore, as Butler underscores, "agency" in language becomes the "very action" of language (*Excitable* 7). In other words, the notion of agency defines a subversive potential of the subject to act linked to language. Within the mediating setting of the show, the subject's agency has been withdrawn, as its capacity to express itself is being mediated and censored.

The journalist's speech replaces the inhabitants' agency and becomes an *actant* unto itself inside the talk show. In this case, mediation replaces the objects mediated: the broadcast of "La voix" explicitly becomes both the act of regulating the inhabitant's utterances and the act of producing a regulated subjectivity that can be consumed by the television audience. Thus, the television program within the play depicts the very definition of the performative: that which regulates what it produces and creates. Several times in the text, the inhabitants ask: "De quel côté de la vie es-tu?" This question—which could be analyzed for its potential religious values, given the name of the shantytown ("Du côté de chez Dieu")—functions as a leitmotiv in the play. Through the repetition of this sentence, the residents underscore the ambiguous dimension of their situation and reveal the regulating power of the journalist's position. In one instance, she responds to the question by

deploying an abstract and absurd analysis of the broadcast's activities: "La journaliste: Oh oh! Tu aimes la poésie mon garçon. Eh bien... la poésie du quotidien, c'est nous. 'La voix' s'écoute. C'est une musique intérieure. (*De plus en plus lyrique*) Soyez à l'écoute de 'La voix'" (6). The relationship between the broadcast's aim to shock and sensationalize and the journalist's lyrical tone of voice contrasts with the precarious situation in which the inhabitants are placed. This question "De quel côté de la vie es-tu?" is addressed to the journalist when the residents realize that the program imposes a particular interpretation of their lives, labeled as "real documentary" entertainment to be consumed by the audience. This interrogative sentence calls for a new attention to place and position: not only is the inhabitants' displacement grounded in geography—they have been displaced from their homes—but their exile questions the landscape of ideas, values, and rights for which the journalist, and therefore the audience, stand.

Mediation, as a process through which a medium intervenes and shapes the communication can both produce censorship and displacement. As we have seen, *Récupérations* presents a double representational apparatus through the juxtaposition of the television setup and the theatrical stage. This double space produces what Marc Augé defines as a *non-lieu* that is a place of transience, a paradigmatic place of absent being. He defines airports, train stations, and intersections as *non-lieux*; they are made for circulation and not destinations in and of themselves. Since the *bidonville* is being destroyed, what should have only been a temporary destination—the television show—becomes a place of undetermined transit for the inhabitants. This spatial dimension in the play reimagines exile as produced by a mediatized visibility. In the case of the television show, the movement of the inhabitants' displacement operates on both spatial and identitarian levels: the subject is simultaneously reduced to a geographical space of transit and to a linguistic presence regulated by the medium. In other words, *Récupérations* presents a transit that is geographic and yet tied to the representational practice of mediation. Furthermore, the studio becomes a place for creating both spatial uncertainty and "body-images" that can be communicated and consumed by the television audience. The inhabitants' identities are framed and constructed to produce a valuable commodity. The constant intertwining of "body-image" (understood as a body that can no longer talk for itself) and "identity-image" (understood as identity that has been shaped by mediatized apparatuses) is grounded in an interrogation of space occupation within the specific setting of the play. As Achille Mbembe points out, in the colonial context, occupation "meant relegating the colonized into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood" (26). In *Récupérations*, the colonial context resonates with a global concern for mediatization and representation: the third zone is the one of a geographical in-betweenness. In a thoroughly mediated world, the occupation of this third zone causes geographic and identitarian

wanderings. As we have seen, the inhabitants' capacity to express themselves as subjects is thwarted, and they now stand somewhere between subjecthood and objecthood. In other words, Efoui's play exposes its spectator to agencies in transit, namely mediated agencies that operate not only between subject and object, but also between body and image, identity and commodity.

In this context, mediation operates as a governmental strategy to shape public opinion. The broadcast works to reshape the inhabitants' actions and utterances. It frames their social context—the shantytown has been rebuilt—and the image they present by dictating their behaviors through the medial apparatus. The journalist announces at the beginning of the play: “N’oubliez pas que nous sommes en pleine période électorale. Si le camarade-candidat-président veut se faire réélire, il a tout intérêt à soigner l’image personnelle de sa démocratie” (8). Efoui's drama here takes the television show not as a mere entertainment but instead as a powerful form of popular culture that has an impact on how public opinion is formed.

The play criticizes contemporary democratic societies in which television operates as advertisement, entertainment, and political platform during election campaigns. At the beginning of the play, the journalist gives a portrait of the situation in which to frame the role of mass media in the government's strategy:

La journaliste (*perplexe*): Bon, assez perdu de temps, on commence. Résumé: nous avons appris que le gouvernement a décidé de raser vos... “habitations” pour raison de salubrité publique. Ça tombe bien... Je veux dire qu’il y a longtemps que nous rêvons de vous consacrer une émission. Alors nous saisissons l’occasion. Et puis, imaginez un seul instant l’effet que produirait sur l’opinion internationale francophone une émission en bon français relatant l’itinéraire de chacun d’entre vous,... et vos conditions de vie. (7–8)

The government uses the excuse of public hygiene in order to destroy the shantytown, and the show uses this destruction to establish a certain visibility and representation of the inhabitants. The destruction of the shantytown for sanitary reasons recalls a common strategy used by governments to control space. The discourse of cleanliness and sanitation dictates the rules of livability in a particular area. To a certain extent, the play requires us to reflect on how official policy is empowered to invade one's space with the help of a television show. The inhabitants' mediatized subjectivities not only appear as tools for governmental policies, but also to promote civic engagement and shape opinion. However, the inhabitants do not realize that their homes are being destroyed *while* they are performing for the television show. They fail to understand that the destruction is happening at the same time that their speeches are being reshaped. It is not until the very end of the play that the participants will realize they have been trapped.

The destruction of individual agency during the television show performs a dual disappearance: the destruction of the inhabitants' ability to act as subjects and the devastation of their original homes. In the play, the camera is positioned between the inhabitants and the audience of the show. The medium works as a filter between the real—the shantytown—and the production of an image of the real—the television show. The latter reproduces a social context within a mediatised form in order to create the greatest possible impact on the audience. At the beginning of the play, the journalist presents the wide range of topics covered by the broadcast:

La journaliste: L'interview exclusive d'outre-tombe de Papa Doc, c'est 'La voix'. Les enfants de la mort en direct, du Vietnam aux bidonvilles de Manille en passant par l'Éthiopie et le Soudan, c'est encore nous. [...] Eh! bien ça, c'est 'La voix'. Pour toutes les urgences—tremblement de terre, éruption volcanique, catastrophe nucléaire, marée noire—une seule adresse: 'La voix'. Et n'oubliez pas notre rubrique sportive... ni celle des Arts-Spectacle-Culture. Là où il y a quelque chose à dire, 'La voix' crie. (6–7)

The emphasis is put here on the global coverage of the broadcast, both thematically and geographically. Furthermore, the use of liveness (understood as autonomous, non-mediated subjectivity) in the show interrogates the government's process of producing both sensationalism and refugees. By displacing the inhabitants and destroying their original homes, the government engenders potential refugees. Once the interviewees start to realize that the show not only fossilizes a certain image of them, but is part of a strategy to wipe their *bidonville* off the map, Séfa yells from backstage: "Nous sommes tous dehors. Sans distinction de race ni de religion" (17). This sentence invites us to reflect on how the medial apparatus and mediatised images constitute a larger stratagem that impacts participants' future as potential refugees. The medial apparatus functions as a tool in which the production and presentation of noncitizens are intertwined. The set of the television show is thus understood as a liminal space that disrupts inside/outside divisions. According to Giorgio Agamben, "one of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics (which will continue to increase in our century) is its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside" (131). Following Michel Foucault's critique of biopower defined as both disciplinary power over bodies and regulatory power over population (*Histoire* 183), Agamben states that the new political body of the West is formed by its own ability to be under the control of regulating politics that have the power to decide how individuals are allowed to live. The play demonstrates that we are all potential refugees, thus disturbing the functional quality of the separation between inside and outside within the context of the medial apparatus. Since

bodies are tied to a medial apparatus that regulates what content is communicated and how speech should be delivered, the play delivers a critique of citizenship tied to political, geographic, and identitarian exile:

If refugees (whose number has continued to grow in our century, to the point of including a significant part of humanity today) represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, *nativity* and *nationality*, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret pre-supposition of the political domain—bare life—to appear for an instant within that domain. (Agamben 131)

Agamben offers a way to think about the refugee as a disruptive figure that reclaims rights for life outside of the law of the nation-state that is the law of citizenship. Efoui's drama extends such biopolitical critique by questioning the capitalization of people's agency through the means of performance. In the play, Séfa's claim states that we are all outside, without any distinctions of race and religion (17). This line not only underscores that we are all potential refugees, but also reveals that such displacement and uncertain transit can be part of a media apparatus. This figure of the refugee is embodied through the inhabitants' unsettling position and offers a reflexive gesture that criticizes the use of misery and uncertainty as performance:

Séfa: Nous sommes tous dehors, je l'avais prédit. J'avais raison. J'ai raison!

Les bulldozers démolissent nos baraques.

La journaliste: Coupez! Faites quelque chose à la régie...

Séfa (*cassant tout avec sa bicyclette*): Les bulldozers démolissent nos baraques. Tout part en fumée... et il n'y a pas de feu. C'est lourd, c'est mou, c'est gras. Et ça écrase! Et ça craque! J'ai vu... j'ai tout vu... Ils ont tout rasé. Personne ne me croit? Tes fleurs, Keli... ton chien, Mama Keta... On ne verra plus jamais de fleur ni de chiens. Même l'herbe qui était là avant nous: rasée! Dieu ne reconnaîtra pas les siens. C'est plat, c'est fin. Rasé!... Je l'avais prédit!

(*Il sort. La régie a lancé la diffusion d'un match de foot*)

Keli: Les fleurs, les chiens, l'herbe. Ça pourrait pareil.

(*Il sort. Mama-Keta sort également précipitamment*)

Yen Yah: Emmène-moi. J'apprends vite. Emmène-moi

(*Moudjibate s'effondre. Dieu s'avance vers la journaliste*)

Voix off: Coupez! (*Noir*) (41)

As the play concludes with this scene, it becomes possible for us to connect this final act of speech to Butler's notion of agency, understood as a subversive potential of the subject that is linked to his or her language. To Butler, performative speech appears in social rituals and establishes the power of negotiating bodies within a specific space. "The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated" (*Excitable* 160). In other words, Butler coins the idea of speech act as the possibility of "an insurrectionary act" (160). In the context of Efoui's play, Séfa's speech act appears as "an insurrectionary act" and works to re-appropriate the inhabitants' agency in front of the camera. The inhabitants consequently acquire a mediatized visibility that can be remembered by the audience, which becomes the witness of an event that takes place in the television setup. Butler has extended Foucault's notion of regulatory power to develop the idea that a body's materiality can be thought of as "the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (*Bodies* 2). For Butler, the notion of performativity is tied both to hierarchical and systemic conditions. Foucault's biopolitics and its regulatory power over bodies and subjects work "as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed" (*Bodies* 22). As Butler points out, Foucault develops the idea that disciplinary power has found its major function in the act of training subjects in order to withdraw their forces. While her specific critique examines the power of heterosexual hegemony, her comment is helpful to better grasp the power dynamic at stake here. In biopolitics, training is both considered as a discipline that produces subjects and as a technique of power that takes the individual as its object and instrument of action. In that sense, surveillance and punishment, as responses that constantly regulate subjects, work to normalize the individual.

Rather than conceiving of techniques and instruments of power as occurring in a non-specific place, *Récupérations* invites us to consider them as creating a place of mediatization and entertainment in which the agency of the subject is at stake. By juxtaposing a television show on a theatrical stage, Efoui challenges the locus from which to think about biopolitics' normative authority. The mechanical lens of the camera in the play not only controls the interviewees' bodies; it creates normalized subjects by the regulation of speech, presence, and visibility in front of the camera. Whereas in Foucault the Panopticon is used as an institutional model of auto-regulation and surveillance (*Surveiller* 201), in Efoui's play the television show invites us to reconsider the different places in which such dynamics of regulation and power are in effect. *Récupérations* invites to think of image production within mass media as exercising performative forces over people's agency. The mediatization of life becomes the principal cause of exile in the play, which criticizes the political strategies of such media processes and the ways in which they shapes the subjects' capacity to act. *Récupérations* urges us to conceptualize

exilic migration as the dispossession of the subject's capacity to be its own agent while underlining the consequences of the ongoing mediation in our contemporary societies.<sup>3</sup>

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Some of the most productive scholarship on Efoui's theater has come from Chalaye and Dechauffour, who treat his work as an existential reflection on diaspora and the cultural politics of French colonialism. They write from two different positions: Chalaye's work is inscribed in an anthropological interrogation of the emergence of the motif of exile in Efoui's poetics, underlining the political dimension of identity quests present in his texts; Dechauffour's research investigates poetic metaphors through the double lens of the literary and representational critique. Dechauffour's work is particularly valuable as it offers the first systematic study of the use of puppetry in Efoui's writings.

<sup>2</sup>This notion was formulated by Althusser to designate the moment when an ideological structure addresses an individual as its subject.

<sup>3</sup>The author thanks her colleagues Charlotte Soulpin and Corbin Treacy for their valuable comments, as well as Sylvie Chalaye for her years of support and encouragement.

### Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Althusser, Louis. "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)". *La Pensée* 151 (1970): 67–125.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Seuil, 1996.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacre et simulation*. Paris: Galilée, 1981.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Psychology, 1997.
- Chalaye, Sylvie. *Afrique noire et dramaturgie contemporaine: le syndrome Frankenstein*. Paris: Théâtrales, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Théâtres contemporains d'Afrique noire francophone ou les dramaturgies de l'exil". *Africultures* 15 (1999): 33–39.
- Corneille. *L'illusion comique*. Paris: Pocket, 2008.
- Efoui, Kossi. *Concessions*. Morlanwetz: Lansman, 2005.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Le carrefour*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *L'ombre des choses à venir*. Paris: Seuil, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Récupérations*. Morlanwetz: Lansman, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Solo d'un revenant*. Paris: Seuil, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la sexualité I: la volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- Genet, Jean. *Les bonnes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2003.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11–40.