

# Semiotics and Poetics of the Road in Ferdinand Oyono's *Old Negro and the Medal*

Gounougo Aboubakar

Department of Modern Literature, Félix Houphouët-Boigny University, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

## Email address:

degounougo@yahoo.fr

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**Abstract:** In the novel, even if it is not turned primarily towards the road as in the road novels, the road is a real space-binding whose evocation triggers the immediate perception of the other literary categories such as time, character and narration. The road is also said to be a chronotope, that is to say a literary category of form and content whose study requires the mastery of the interactional functioning of "time-space" and of the other literary categories that contribute to its semantization. But, before any poetic consideration, the road is a linguistic sign whose sociological significance as a system of communication is revealed by semiology and semiotics. As for the novelistic fiction, it reveals this linguistic sign as a complex of presuppositions which is never neutral because, like any space, the road can be connoted positively or negatively and thus determine the movement or the actions of the actants and the circulation of the objects in a given fictional universe. In Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Negro and the Medal*, an anti-colonial African novel, the semiotic and poetic analysis of the chronotope "road" begins with an interrogation of its structure and functioning. The road is above all that which, vertically, connects the indigenous neighborhoods and the European neighborhood, but it also designates all those tracks, paths and alleys which, horizontally, connect the indigenous spaces to each other. From the point of view of the functioning of the road, it symbolizes the antagonistic relationships between the African and Western worlds, between the colonized and the colonists. It is euphoric when it leads the old Negro to the commander's house in a friendly manner and very dysphoric when it powerlessly witnesses the drama of the former. As a connecting space, the road counts in the relationship of domination of the natives by the settlers. From an aesthetic point of view, the road is a category of the narrative treated with manner and style in *The Old Negro and the Medal*. It is evoked not only in a tight and digestible way, that is, in a brachylogical way, but also treated stylistically by the writer in order to increase the level of affectivity in the readers. The writing of the road, thus, creates a literary form in Ferdinand Oyono's novel that can be interpreted as the expression of the social dialectic or even the Manichean vision of the colonial world.

**Keywords:** Road, Poetic Semiotics, Literary Categories, Chronotope, Social Dialectic

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## 1. Introduction

The road is undoubtedly one of the objects of literary discourse that can easily escape the attention of the analyst or that, from the outset, rarely form part of the major entries for reading the literary text, with the exception of road novels, which, logically, are built around this sub-category of space. In the literary fictions, certain spaces, even if they pass unnoticed because of their minority or because of the micrology which expresses them, remain necessary to the construction of these fictions. The road, which is part of these "superficial: kinds of chronotopes at the same time cellular and thematized, thematic figurations of surface" [11] is an

engine of distribution of the poetic dynamics which feed the narration. The road is a space-binding whose semiotic and poetic analysis engages the larger one of the whole discourse in which it is necessary to count necessarily with the information on the other literary categories of the character (which confers an ontological relevance to the road), of the evoked time (which appreciably connotes this space) and especially of the narration (which can enrich the road with a multitude of beings and objects).

The road is a discursive sign that is never neutral in African francophone fiction. Depending on the narrator's project, it is, in general, sometimes diurnal, sometimes nocturnal. The road can thus be, actancially, an adjuvant or

an opponent to the subject's quest. For the purposes of this study, we have placed the cursor on a classic novel of Francophone African literature, Ferdinand Oyono's *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (The Old Negro and the Medal), which is clearly not a road novel but a colonial novel in which, however, the semantics of the road contribute to the construction of the signifying whole of the narrative. A poetic semiotic approach to the road as an entry point for reading this novel by Ferdinand Oyono reveals a dark isotopia of this space-bond as the expression of a social dialectic. Better still, as a topos of the dialectic of good and evil, the road confuses, disabuses and depersonalizes the character. But, in order to build such an axiological value around the road, what is the structure that this space-bond presents in *The Old Negro and the Medal*, how does it function and what meaning does it derive from the poetization of its referents? In a single question, what are the parameters of semiotic-poetic aestheticization of the road in Ferdinand Oyono's fiction?

The reflection that we are going to carry out in the following pages is obviously indebted to semiotic and poetic methods, methods of analysis to which the first words of our reflection will be devoted. This epistemological decision, once it is well marked out, makes it possible to describe the structure and the functioning of the road on the one hand, and on the other hand, to apprehend the brachylogical and figurative expression of this space-link in the narrative that conveys a Manichean vision of the world.

## 2. Why a Semiotics and a Poetics of the Road

In the novelistic discourse, the road is a sign that necessarily interacts with other linguistic signs. Even if it is not always obviously evoked in the body of the narrative, the sign "road" can carry connotative valences in the novelistic fiction that contribute to the general meaning of the narrative. In other words, the road as a significant and signifying sign in the novelistic narrative is the site of various literary issues of a thematic or semantic, stylistic, poetic, narratological, historical nature, etc. But why a semiotics and a poetics of the road in Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Negro and the Medal*? Because the modality adopted by the narrator to construct the road in a given temporality, which connotes its meaning, and according to the fact that this space-link is also semantized by the characters whose very nature is to maintain relationships, is a work on the linguistic sign. In the novelistic narrative, the treatment of the road-sign, like all the other lemmas, poses the problematic of the literary category of form and content, that is to say that it engages the reflection on the chronotope.

### 2.1. Because the Road Is a Linguistic Sign

Because the road is a linguistic sign, it can, by this nature, be applied all the theories on the subject. For Ferdinand de Saussure, the linguistic sign unites, "not a name and a thing, but a concept and an acoustic image" [16], that is to say a

signifier and a signified. And this union is arbitrary and conventional especially since it is admitted that the "sign is indeed a thing that refers to another, and that is not it" [7]. Thus, the word "road" is composed of an acoustic face (signifier) /route/ and a concept (signified) "road". Much better, we will say, not a concept but rather concepts, i.e. signifieds, according to the French language dictionaries. The online *Dictionnaire Littré* (XMLittré v2), which we have chosen for philological reasons, gives several meanings to the word "road", among which we have retained, to begin with, the first three, denotative, which present the road as a sensible reality. In the first definition, the road designates a "large alley pierced in a forest, for the convenience of the cart, the hunt, the walk", in the second, the road is a "way practiced to go from a place to another" and in the third definition, the road means a "direction that one follows to go to a place". In these three definitions, the idea of movement or action is perceptible, respectively, through the following terms: "path", "way" and "direction". It should be noted that these different conceptualizations of the road place this sign in a paradigm that includes other almost synonymous lemmas such as path, track, path, street, alley, avenue, boulevard, route, etc., which have the word "way" as their hyperonym. The *Littré* confirms this statement thus:

"Way is the general term; it is said of everything that leads to some place: there is no need for the hand of man to have intervened. The path and the road are always paths made by the hand of man. The path is a dirt road. The road, whose primitive meaning is not felt, is also said of the ways by sea and of the heavenly ways. In general, these three words are used indiscriminately in the tropical sense.

By using the term "tropical sense", this definition implies that the road can also be defined as an abstraction. In this case, the meanings attached to it are more affective than objective, connoted rather than denoted, as can be seen in this second group of definitions in *Littré*, which present the road as a "space through which the stars, waters, etc. travel" and as "that which one follows to arrive at some result, as one follows a road to arrive at the end of one's journey. To these first meanings of the road, we must add the one that, from a semiotic point of view, apprehends the road above all as a space whose general function is to make other spatial entities communicate with each other. The road is thus a link-space and when this sign is written, better, poetized in the novelistic discourse, it reveals itself as an interesting chronotope likely to motivate a poetic semiotic analysis.

### 2.2. Because the Road Is a Chronotope

The concept of chronotope is of Mikhail Bakhtin who translates it literally by the expression "space-time" [1] which, it means for him "the essential correlation of the space-time relations, such as it was assimilated by the literature." [1]. In the novel, space cannot be studied independently of other literary categories such as characters, history, and especially time, with which it maintains an irreducible correlation. Bakhtin poses this question in a more than striking detail:

In the chronotope of the literary art takes place the fusion of

the spatial and temporal indices in an intelligible and concrete whole. Here, the time condenses, becomes compact, visible for the art, while the space intensifies, engulfs itself in the movement of the time, the subject, the history. The indices of time are discovered in space, this one is perceived and measured according to time. This intersection of the series and this fusion of the indices characterize, precisely, the chronotope of the literary art [1].

Because the study of space necessarily implies the consideration or taking into account of other literary categories, then the chronotope, i.e. "time-space" is in essence "an aesthetically configured category that necessarily conveys its own worldview" [4]. Another characterization of the chronotope is in this proposal of Henri Mitterand:

In its most general use, chronotope designates any human universe determined consubstantially by a time and a place, and also any vision, any homogeneous representation of such a universe, any picture of the world integrating the comprehension of a time and that of a cosmos [11].

It would therefore be futile, in the study of a chronotope such as that of the road, in African fiction, to limit oneself to "the identification of notations relating to time and space" [11]. The chronotopic analysis is a pretext, or rather an indispensable entry point for penetrating the novelistic mode and world. And because the novel is a literary discourse, the chronotope can only be perceived as "a literary category of form and content". In *The Old Negro and the Medal*, the road is a literary chronotope whose poetic semiotic analysis makes it possible to apprehend all the affective semantics which is attached to it. And this analysis can be made in the light of Mitterand's reflections commenting on Bakhtin's works on the chronotope of the road:

The road induces a whole system of presuppositions (...); the road is conceived only as a place of the itinerary, with its adventures and its encounters, its preconstructed program of courses, obstacles, tests of victories or failures on the time and on the distance. The importance of the chronotope of the road, can thus indicate Bakhtin, is enormous in the literature; rare are the works that do without some of its variants, and many of them are directly built on it [1].

To summarize and draw the consequences that are necessary here, we say that the road is above all a linguistic sign whose semiotic content is synthesized in the definitions of the French language dictionary, the Dictionnaire Littré (XMLittré v2) online. But in the framework of our reflection, namely African fiction, the "road" functions as a chronotope, that is, a literary category of form and content. Clearly, we will speak of the road as a linguistic sign in a regime of poetic functioning, which explains why the congruence between semiotics and poetics is the method used here to apprehend the literary category of the road.

### 3. Structure and Functioning of the Road

In Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Negro and the Medal*, the road is structurally presented as a space-binding whose functioning determines the entire narrative scheme of the

work. Better still, "the road, understood like Bakhtin as 'the path of life', gives the narrative its episodic form" [3]. There are two roads that structure the initial stage of the narrative: a road, taken twice in a round trip, that connects the spaces and the events that take place there and that conditions the narrative of the announcement of the decoration ceremony. Then there is the road that is the theater where the drama of the character is played out. This road of adventures is the one that takes the main character and his supporters up to the European quarter, that brings them down abruptly from the colonial heights (Meka's return is a descent into hell) and that leads to the final stage or stage of the assessment of the quest. The road is thus a structuring category in Oyono's narrative.

#### 3.1. Description of the Structure of the Road in the Narrative

The first road to be mapped is the one that starts the story by revealing its real purpose: the awarding of a medal of "honor" by colonial France to an old Negro. It is a trail that leads Meka, the main character, from his home to the indigenous quarter, and then from there to the residence of the commander who has officially summoned him. The narrator describing this route reveals, in the same place, the psychology of the character in contact with this space-bond of which he has some experience:

"If Meka got up early, it was not that his village was far from the city. He sometimes went there to get a shot at the Crève des Nègres. He did not know exactly how far his village of Doum was from the city. For him, this distance was reduced to a single step: to Mami Titi's, this woman who came from the seaside and whose reputation for distilling arki was unprecedented. At Mami Titi's, who lived in the indigenous district, it was already the city. From there to the commandant's office, it was only a few steps up a steep hill" (*The old negro and the medal*, p. 11).

For the narrator, the road that Meka must take to get to the commandant's residence is the one that connects his village to the town where the commandant lives, passing through Mami Titi's buvette. The narrator is quite explicit in the following passage:

"Meka had taken the shortcuts, those winding paths, around the small colonial towns. His pants were wet below the knees. At this early hour, the dew-covered grasses were leaning over the path. Meka pushed them aside with his walking stick, but they immediately returned to cling to his pants and drench him generously.

Meka sighed as the trail led to the indigenous quarter. Overlooking the latter, the town of the whites, built on the adjacent hill, was in sight" (pp. 11-12).

The road from Doum to the city is described by the narrator as a pathway that the character travels and that is made up of "shortcuts", "winding paths" and climbs up "a steep hill". From the indigenous quarter to the European quarter where the commander lives, Meka travels a street. The character's means of locomotion is walking, which is clearly not ideal because of four apparent obstacles: the old Negro's advanced age, which justifies his use of a cane to walk; the abundant

dew, which bothers the character and hinders his progress; the sinuousness of the paths taken; and the steepness of the hill that Meka must climb to get to the commandant's house. The system of the road thus presented, it emerges that Meka's itinerary is painful at all levels of the link-space that he takes.

In contrast to the outward journey, Meka's return to Doum, his village, after he had responded to the commandant's official summons, was favorable because of the ease of locomotion. It was a car that dropped the old native off at his home, which undoubtedly spared him the trying pitfalls of walking on winding paths. Meka's triumphant return from the commandant's office is recalled in Ferdinand Oyono's novel: "The car was heading towards the middle of the courtyard, followed by a crowd of naked kids who were shouting frantically. Meka was sitting next to a white man who was driving" (p. 22).

It is worth noting that this first road, in and out, which sets up the initial stage of Ferdinand Oyono's narrative, is the same one that structures the unfolding of the adventures. It is therefore the most important road. Alongside this main route, there is another, secondary one, whose influence on the narrative, while not zero, is not as perceptible. This is the road taken by Engamba, Meka's brother-in-law, and his wife Amalia, whose spatial plan is different from that of the main road that holds the unfolding of the events. If this main road is essentially vertical, as the figure above clearly shows, the secondary road whose structure we are now addressing is largely horizontal. It begins in the village of Zourian and ends in the village of Doum, where the Meka's host couple resides, and the town where the ceremony to decorate the old negro takes place. But between these two geographical points, there are spaces that function as stopovers or simply as landmarks that allow travelers to evaluate the distance they are traveling. These are the hamlet of Nkongo (stopover of the traveling couple), other villages not mentioned by name (geographical landmark), the Biton forest (geographical landmark), the European quarter (geographical landmark), the indigenous quarter (geographical landmark) and the cemetery of the Catholic mission, the last place after which the travelers reach Doum, the village of Meka. It is on foot that the couple travels, day and night, this long distance.

### **3.2. Analysis of the Functioning of the Road in the Narrative**

As mentioned above, the main road in Oyono's narrative is essentially straight. By linking the village of Meka, lost in the bush, to the Commandant's residence, perched on the top of a "steep hill", the road ensures communication between two different, even contradictory, worlds, namely the village and the indigenous quarter on the one hand, and the European quarter and the Commandant's residence on the other. This first road that holds the initial stage of the story is therefore fundamentally colonial. It creates a connection between two worlds to better reveal the relationship of contradiction that links them. The proof is given here that indeed "the chronotope of the road possesses the quality of bringing together characters normally separated by a social distance

and makes heterogeneous voices clash, [9]. Thus, it is thanks to the road that the commander's summons, addressed to Meka, finds all its meaning, both in terms of its reception and the execution of its content. The reader is therefore not surprised that this road, which structures the initial stage, is the one that makes possible the narration of the adventures tragically experienced by Meka.

In contrast to the initial stage, where the route is essentially euphoric, despite the anguish caused by the silence on the reason for the commander's summoning of the old native, the action stage presents a primarily dysphoric route. In the initial stage, Meka's return, or at least his descent from the hill that houses the commandant's office, is favorable to him since, having left on foot to answer the commandant's official summons, it is in a car, driven by a white man, that Meka returns to the village. Conversely, if Oyono's narrative is silent on Meka's ascent to the European quarter for his decoration, it is a drama that makes his return very noisy in the novel. Let us not forget the temporal category, precisely atmospheric time, the other side of "time-space" that contributes to the meaning of events. If the morning seems favorable to the movement of the old negro who can only be extremely euphoric after his return from the commander's house and especially after his stopover at Mami Titi's, the stormy night of the return journey makes the account of the adventures very dark. It should be noted here that the descent of the steep hill, at the top of which the commander resides, in the initial stage of the narrative, is as we have already mentioned, euphoric. The old Negro's return journey is favorable to him, having been honored by the chief of the colonists. On the other hand, in the adventure stage, the main character's descent from the hill of the commander is a descent into hell. The road here functions visibly as a "fabula of rout" [8] in the sense that David Laporte gives to this expression, namely that it implies another, the "pathos of failure" [8], both expressions being justified by the etymology of the word "rout":

A rout is defined by the disorderly flight of defeated troops and emphasizes: 1) the fact of escaping from a trap, from a problematic situation; 2) the chaotic and disorganized character of this flight; 3) the feeling of defeat. Since it is not so much a matter of gaining a place as of leaving one, no longer of going towards but of moving away from, routing opens up a whole range of geographical possibilities [8].

This definition sheds light on Meka's condition to whom the "anywhere but here" applies [8] because, in reality, the character is baffled by nocturnal events that remind him without further ado of his small condition as a slumming native who is allowed to visit the colonial quarter only by special dispensation from the commandant. The old native has failed in his secret desire to become an important Negro, that is, a friend of the whites. Indeed, from the African home in the European quarter where he was decorated during the day to his village, Meka will experience a stormy night on the main road in every sense of the word. The road back home that was supposed to take the character home is no longer a road, or at least it no longer functions as a simple connecting space. It is

the theater of the manifestation of the indignity of the colon and the dehumanization of the colonized. Picked up and mistreated by the guards of Gosier d'Oiseau, Meka is taken to the police station where he is horribly tortured before being granted extenuating conditions because after the crime, the colonist and his secular arms pretend to recognize the friend of France who, the day before, had benefited from the recognition of the metropolis. At the level of the course of action, the main road, from the point of view of the return journey, is dysphoric as an expression of the unhappiness of the character. This is why we say that the road on which the power of the white man is exercised is ideologically colonial. Like other spaces where the Negro and the settler oppose and fight each other, the road is an instrument for the expression of colonial hegemony, because it allows for the summoning and taming of all souls to be subjugated.

As for the secondary road, the one that Engamba and his wife Amalia travel by day and night, it functions as a socio-cultural space that reveals the ancient soul of Africa whose values are centered on humanism. This road connects the two indigenous villages of Zourian and Doum, with stopovers that are as many spaces that try to preserve and perpetuate this traditional soul of Africa annexed by the colonial administration. This is why we refer to the route taken by the couple of characters as the African route. The humanism of this African road is translated here by:

1. the family: Engamba and his wife Amalia have undertaken to travel all this distance to support Meka, the brother-in-law, and thus strengthen family ties, confirming the philosophy of African solidarity that the happiness or misfortune of some is that of others;
2. Education: Binama, the friend who receives the travelers, teaches his son named De Gaulle the values of respect and consideration due to the elder and to the stranger;
3. Hospitality: traditional Africa is also about unconditional hospitality and it is in the name of this human value that the Binama couple offers hospitality to Engamba and his wife;
4. Friendship and solicitude: in the name of these values, the Binama couple keeps their guests company for a good distance on the road ahead before wishing them a safe journey.

The African road is therefore, semantically speaking, euphoric and it is in this way that the means of locomotion, namely walking, over a long distance, is in no way a handicap or an obstacle for the travelers who are nevertheless of an advanced age. The African road leads to the home of the old negro, the brother-in-law, who is going to receive the honors of the great France and that is what counts.

Thus, regardless of the type of road considered in Ferdinand Oyono's narrative, the road is a modality of the narrative, a chronotope whose description takes into account other literary categories such as time (atmospheric or historical), characters and narrative. This is the content of the literary category, i.e. the chronotope "road". But what about its linguistic expression? Let us question for that the

brachylogical and figurative expression of this chronotope.

## 4. Brachylogical and Figurative Expression of the Chronotope

The new brachylogy, as Mansour M'henni conceives it, is a discourse of brevity. But things are not so simple because this discipline covers all the fields of activity where the brief is necessarily expressed. The new brachylogy which is interested in brevity in all its dimensions is constituted of the brachylogical poetics or brachypoetics and the general brachylogy. It is a rehabilitation of brachylogy in order to give it back its Socratic meaning and to free it from the taxonomic dungeon of rhetoric which has sadly reduced it to a simple figure of speech. The new brachylogy is both a method and a practice. Brachylogical poetics, which is called upon in this reflection, is defined as "a poetics of both brevity, as a way of saying, and therefore as a quality, and of dimensionally brief forms, and therefore as a quantification of speech" [10]. In *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille*, the road, because it is evoked in a brachylogical manner, operates discreetly but effectively in the construction of the narrative.

### 4.1. The Brachylogical Expression of the Road

As we said above, Ferdinand Oyono's novel is not, in itself, a road novel, but it is the road that makes possible the unfolding of the events and the movement of the characters who act and travel through the spaces in a given time. The road does not have a strong scriptural dimension in the story because it is more suggested than evoked. In this respect, the gaps, the absences, the ellipses, the silences, the breaks in the narrative thread, the blanks that structure the different events of the narrative, all contribute to reducing the material presence of the road in the written body of the narrative without, however, calling into question its active principle of an unfolding menu of the stages of the narrative scheme. The reading of the road as a link-space in the novel cannot be done without taking into account the "zones of indeterminacy", the details of which are explicit in this statement:

In a novel, only a certain number of places, rooms, objects appear. For example, when a character gets off the train to meet his relatives, I know that he is walking on the platform, even if the station is not described, nor even named. If the edge of the sidewalk where the cab is waiting is the only topographical element mentioned, I instantly apply one of the laws of literary space: I fill in the blank, I reduce to nothing the emptiness that separates the train from the sidewalk, thanks to my knowledge of these places called stations. All this is done without my knowledge, without my even noticing it [2].

We are here in the middle of brachylogical reception where the reader is of capital importance because it is to him that the responsibility falls to describe the literary space as not being subjected to the discontinuity or to the places of indeterminacy. This is so because it is "on the side of the receiving actant that all the modalization procedures in the developed discourse are measured" [13]. This is why the linguistic economy in the

evocation of the road is in no way an obstacle to the activity of the reader, who is basically the real topographer who establishes the geometry of this space of the road, the evocation of which in fictional novels involves many unspoken words or silences.

In *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille*, the road is only clearly evoked in the journey that leads the old native Meka to the commandant who has officially summoned him to announce the date of his decoration by France. On the other hand, it is suggested in the story that relates the journey of the Engamba-Amalia couple from Zourian to Doum and in the story of the main character's return from his decoration ceremony, a road on which he will experience a real martyrdom. The analysis of the structure of the road in Ferdinand Oyono's novel above has shown this. What concerns us here, rather, are the routes that the narrator visibly passes over in silence, but which are well felt by the reader insofar as they lead Meka from his home to the church, from his home to the tailor's workshop in Doum, from his home to the place of the decoration ceremony, and which also ensure his return to the place of departure, that is to say, to Doum, his village. There is thus, as in the cinema, a motivated choice of shots of the story to be told and to be seen, and whatever these choices are, whether the road is evoked or implied, it is an incompressible category in the narrative. Some examples of the implied expression of the road in Oyono's novel:

*"That morning, two streams, four villages, three forests, three rivers of Doum, in this small village where Kelara, by a thunderclap, saw the light of day at the foot of a banana tree" (p. 33).*

*"Engamba accompanied him to the other end of the village on the bank of the river where his tribe ended and that of the Yemeyemas, of which Nkolo was a member, began" (p. 43).*

*"I will travel at night. It is difficult to drive a goat in the heat. I plan to return after the holidays, unless Kelara and her husband hold us back further" (p. 48).*

*"Bareheaded, with his arms clasped to his body, Meka stood motionless in the whitewashed circle where he had been placed to await the arrival of the white chief" (p. 95).*

In all these statements, the road is unquestionably mentioned. If it is suggested in the first three statements, in the fourth, it is implied. In order for the character to be there, in this place, waiting to be honored, he had to travel this road that is familiar to him, which goes from Doum, his village, to the city, precisely to the European neighborhood that houses the African home where the decoration ceremony takes place. The spirit of conversation that founds the new Brachylogy and its poetics is expressed here through the nature of the scriptural pact that binds the narrator to the obvie reader. The first, by evoking the road, by effects of intermittence or spotlight, leaves much to think about the second. The latter is the one who reconstitutes the puzzle to make appear the syntax and the semantics of the road. In other words, the narrator speaks little about the road, evokes it or describes it less, compared to the other objects of discourse, but this link-space remains indispensable for the construction of the narrative. Thus, the only explicit occurrences of the chronotope "road" are

expressed by certain figures of speech.

#### 4.2. The Figurative Expression of the Road

When we look at the writing of the road in *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille*, as brachylogical as it may be, we see that this writing is figurative and reveals Meka's subjectivity in his relationship to the road. The figure of speech is defined by Olivier Reboul as "a bonus of enjoyment, a stylistic amenity to get the argument across" [15]. The prevailing argument, speaking of the road, is that this space is certainly inscribed in the colonial system and as such symbolizes the injustice that characterizes communication between natives and settlers, but that it is a cultural site of indigenous Africa that reveals it. This argument is rendered indirectly and affectively in figurative expressions like these:

*"Meka had taken the shortcuts, those winding roads, around the small colonial towns" (p. 11).*

*"I took the shortcuts," says Meka with an embarrassed smile. I'm only good on the tracks... I can't help it... The road, with those big rocks..." (p. 13).*

*"They talked for a long time in small groups on the road, then spread out across the thousand tracks that led to the native quarter" (p. 125).*

The figures present in these three statements are respectively emphasis, aposiopesis and hyperbole. The first, emphasis, insists on the rustic, sinuous or non-linear character of the road taken by the character. The aposiopesis that follows, in addition to confirming these initial characteristics of the road, signals an unexpressed state of mind of the character on this road. The restriction introduced by the expression "I am only good on the tracks..." suggests that the character is struggling on his way. The hyperbole confirms the rusticity of the road, an indicator of the precariousness of the indigenous neighborhood. The three figures, considered in their interaction, reveal a deformity of the road that well describes the social dialectic in Ferdinand Oyono's novel. The access routes to Doum or to the indigenous quarter are "shortcuts", "tracks" and "winding paths", while the road, even if it seems to be inconvenient for the character because of its "big stones", allows communication with the European quarter and its commander.

Thus, if the road expresses a certain injustice through its structure, it is because it is an object of power. The road connects two antagonistic spaces, that of the natives and that of the colonists. It is even an instrument of domination at the service of the latter, which is confirmed by this part of Meka's monologue: "This road is beautiful," says Meka, "it is really beautiful! O road! daughter of our chores, take me to the white man" (p. 18). All the symbolism of the road in Ferdinand Oyono's novel is made clear in this vast allegory in which a personification coupled with a predicative apostrophe (O road! daughter of our chores), a repetition (of the evaluative "beautiful" which is part of the affective language), an imperative address (take me to the white man's house) and an irony of words because the exclamation in question here ("This road is beautiful," says Meka, "it's really beautiful!") betrays the feelings of anguish of the character who is

traveling this road to respond to the official summons of the commander. Other figures of speech are likely to be perceived in this statement.

From this vast allegory, which is the central motif of the above statement, it is clear that the road is a symbol of colonial domination, which is revealed, moreover, by the antithetical cadence of the statement, which has its climax on the word "road". From this point of rupture, the positive evaluation "This road is beautiful, says Meka, it is really beautiful!" is opposed to the metaphorical expression of the subjugation or domination of the negroes by the colonists: "Daughter of our chores, take me to the white man". This brief monologue by Meka is in fact a profound introspection in which the Manichaeism of colonization is implicitly expressed. And the most odious manifestation of this Manichaeism is found in the unfolding of the tragic night experienced by Meka after his decoration ceremony by the white chief. The account of this tragedy experienced by the old Negro perfectly translates all the contradictions and inconsistencies of the whites who always take back with the left hand what they have given with the right hand to the point of provoking this great questioning among the natives: "In what way could they say that they were more than brothers for the natives?" (p. 124). And, to these white masters belongs the road that is one of the strong symbols of their hegemony. It is worth noting that on the night of Meka's decoration, the road is once again the place where the hypocrisy of the colonist who has given a medal in the morning and at night mistreats the recipient is manifested.

To make the story of Meka's tragedy worthy of a horror film, the narrator appropriates the recategorizing power of the trope to set an apocalyptic scene where the connotation of the road remains striking: "Meka was alone on this immense sea, without compass or lantern. It was always raining" (p. 134). In this metaphor in absentia, the phore "immense sea" designates the theme "road" which is thus recategorized to translate in a bolder way the nocturnal character of the space-bond. The metaphorical meaning is all the more dense and intense as it is completed by the characterizing value of the non-essential complements of "without compass or lantern". These grammatical elements, which are generated by the metaphorical expression "Meka was alone on this immense sea", are not necessary here for the informational and syntactic completeness of the discourse. Their emphatic use allows the narrator to emphasize the seriousness of the situation that the character experiences during his return journey from the African Home to Doum, his village. It is in this already unfavorable kairos setting that the old native is captured and tortured by the colonial guards of Gosier D'oiseau before being taken to the police station for violent interrogations. The torrential night and the flooded road belong, in fact, to the colonists who take advantage of this time-space to martyr the native. To the latter, abused and disillusioned, then, the night and the road back are interminable.

## 5. Conclusion

It emerges from this study that the chronotope "road" is

fundamental in Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Negro and the Medal*, even if it does not have a massive scriptural use as in road novels or stories of the road. Evoked in a brachylogical way, the road remains a real literary sub-category which, being part of the space, calls upon the other literary categories of time and characters to contribute to the construction of the narrative. As a connecting space, the road connects different spaces, the indigenous villages and the European city, the seat of colonial power. It is inscribed in the colonial system because it is at the service of the colonist who uses it as a means to communicate vertically and unbalanced with the colonized, that is to say to subjugate him. If the road is familiar to the main character who lives it without pressure through tracks, shortcuts, winding paths and trails, it becomes a source of setbacks as the road of the big stones, that is, the colonial road, the road that forces the negroes to climb a steep hill on top of which is the residence of the commander. All in all, the poetic semiotics of the road in Ferdinand Oyono's novel reveals a negatively connoted link-space because it is the theater where the social dialectic of "white/black" or "settler/settled" is necessarily played out.

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