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Literary strains of négritude and consciencism in Joseph Brahim Seid: Envisioning nation and a new multicultural Chadian identity

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This study introduces Joseph Brahim Seid, one of Africa's intellectuals of the first generation of independence, in relation to the ideologisation of his contemporaneous counterparts, to Léopold Sédar Senghor's négritude and Kwame Nkrumah's consciencism. Two stories from J. B. Seid's 1962 collection, *Au Tchad sous les Etoiles* (translated as *Told By Starlight in Chad*, 2007) are read as envisioning nation and a new multicultural Chadian identity at the moment of independence. Unpacking literary strains of négritude and consciencism lays bare neglected and overlooked tensions that thwart reconciliation of the different segments of Chadian society: African/tradition—Arab/Islam—Western/Christianity. One story envisions modernisation in the reconciliation between Africa and the West, but in real life modernisation does not occur within the context of African communalism as the story has it, but in the neo-colonial context, where it benefits the few, and mostly international stakeholders. Possibly with the intent of building nation, Seid tends to harmonize African-Arab cultures and traditional-Islamic religions, neglecting the tyranny of Islamisation and Arabisation in the past. In the present, as we know, rivalry between Arab and African populations in the Chad region has resurfaced. Superimposing Biblical motifs and understating traditional African beliefs and religious practices in a story that tends to reconcile Christianity, Islam and the traditional society, Seid overlooks the colonial context in which "civilising" Christianity is implicated, especially the distaste it engendered towards the traditional society and religions. Double-standards result from the higher prestige attaching to Islam, associated with literacy, and Christianity, associated with modernisation, thus African societies have yielded to the perceived progress imperative. While J. B. Seid's stories elevate the traditional societal value of communalism, portrayed with positive affect, in real life it has not transformed itself into a socialism sufficient to build nation and promote the multiculturalism envisioned and desired. **Key words:** négritude, consciencism, Joseph Brahim Seid, Chadian identity.

Introduction

Tradition versus Islam, Islam versus Christianity, Nationalism versus Islam, Christianity and Colonialism. Revolution versus neo-colonialism and communism. Every segment against all other segments, and intellectual attempts at a reconciliation versus intellectual opposition and hence intellectual confusion (Okadigbo 1985: 19).

The African writer is almost by definition socially and politically committed, *engagé*. He and increasingly she, feels a tremendous responsibility to resolve the continental crisis of conscience described by Chuba Okadigbo, through philosophy, visionary theorizing, political or literary writing. The result since the early 1900s has been ideologisation which we have come to know by such names as African Renaissance, pan-Africanism, *négritude*, the African personality, *ujamaa*, consciencism, African socialism, which in different ways strive for nationhood against the backdrop of political and economic subjugation to dominant powers and alien cultures (Okadigbo 1985: 19–20). In various ways, all wrestle with the ever-present yet elusive spectre of a racism that manifests in doublestandards.

This study introduces Joseph Brahim Seid, one of Africa's intellectuals of the first generation of independence, in relation to the ideologisation of his contemporaneous counterparts, to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *négritude* and Kwame Nkrumah's consciencism.¹ Seid was not a philosopher after the manner of Senghor or Nkrumah, but, it is here argued, literary strains of *négritude* and consciencism in his 1962 collection, *Au Tchad sous les Etoiles (Told By Starlight in Chad, 2007)* can be read as an "intellectual attempt at a reconciliation". Two stories, "Le Tchad, pays d'abondance, de bonheur et d'amour" ("Chad, land of plenty, land of happiness and land of brotherly love") and "Le Sultan Saboun" ("Sultan Sabun") are selected for analysis. Before the analysis proper, a few remarks are made by way of introducing Seid, the man, and his little known collection of stories.

Qualifying in law in France in 1955, practising thereafter as a magistrate in Chad, Seid seems to have imbibed and embodied a traditional view of justice, with its emphasis on reconciliation: "Our ancestors had a very high sense of justice. Moreover the word is synonymous with peace. The judge is first and foremost a peacemaker. His task is to quiet conflict, extinguish hatred, and lead those consumed with anger and revenge to reconciliation. He is a man of harmony".²

Referring to Seid's twelve years service in the Ministry of Justice, Samuel Decalo (1997: 388) writes, "[his] non-involvement in factional politics in the cabinet, his unswerving loyalty to the head of government – as well as his high reputation in foreign circles – explain his longevity in office during one of the most turbulent eras of Chadian politics" From Seid's 1967 autobiographical essay one gains the sense of a man of diplomacy, at pains to reconcile the different cultural and religious presences, which ran through his own life as well as the life of the nation.³

Seid's primary aim in *Au Tchad sous les Etoiles* is arguably nation-building. "The portrayal of heroic events in African history [...] is often an attempt to define moments of glory in African nationalism" (Mazrui and Tidy 1984: 315). Six out of the fourteen stories in his collection are mythologized historical stories, four of which relate to the golden age of empires: two to the kingdom of Wadai (17th to 19th centuries), one to the founding of the Bagirmi kingdom (16th century) and one to a ruler of

the Kanem empire (9th to 13th centuries). A fifth recounts the early migrations of the Sara Gor people – the Saras being the largest ethnic and linguistic group in Chad – and the sixth tells the history of the Kotoko, generally considered the earliest inhabitants of the Lake Chad region, whose descendants earn their livelihood by fishing to this day. The evocation of historical figures and events from various parts of Chad – though the northern Saharan regions are regrettably not represented – can be said to create a nationalist myth (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989), if it is true that countries build up a shared cultural heritage by celebrating events, figures and achievements drawn from different regions (Mazrui and Tidy 1984: 302). Forging a nationalist myth Seid arguably aims to effect unity and identity. The analysis that follows discusses literary strains of *négritude* and consciencism as envisioning nation and a new multicultural Chadian identity at the moment of independence.

Strains of *négritude* as envisioning nation

Balancing the six stories of historical interest, *Au Tchad sous les Etoiles* includes six folkloric fantasies. Although nominally set in Chad, these stories could have happened anywhere and have broader, more universal appeal, arguably signaling Seid's simultaneous desire to reach beyond Chad's borders and promote international integration – in the vein of Senghor, a reconciliation between Africa and the West. Most marked in Seid is the idealism and romantic nostalgia, associated with Senghor's *négritude*. One can tangibly feel the attachment to his country and his people, in "Le Tchad, pays d'abondance, de bonheur et d'amour" ("Chad, land of plenty, land of happiness and land of brotherly love") which depicts the arrival of the Kotoko people at Lake Chad:

On the far bank of the large lake, the chief of the tribe found a city with numerous gigantic huts. On reaching land, Alifa saw children as tall as palm trees in the nearby streets, sharing their games with lions, panthers, and rhinoceros. Huge snakes with luminous green eyes, slithering around their limbs, played a curious game of hide-and-seek with them.

On the trees of colossal girth, dense with foliage, countless birds were singing as they flew hither and thither. The air was vibrant with their mellifluous music.

Most blessed of lands! Here animals and people lived in the most perfect accord. Evil was unknown. Kindness reigned in every heart. Innocence shone in all eyes and no one was even aware of it. Work was revered. Strength, skill, intelligence and genius, everything which men receive at birth as a gift from God, was put to use for the common good: here to clear the forest which would soon give way to fertile fields, there to divert the course of rivers so as to irrigate the plantations, elsewhere to harness the lightning or the last rays of the setting sun so as to illuminate the city walls. And always, in all time and in all places to the greater glory of the Eternal (Seid 2007: 3).⁴

Typically strains of *négritude*, as here, represent “the warmth of being, living and participating in a natural, social and spiritual harmony” (Mudimbe 1988: 93). There is a harking back to the communalism that characterizes traditional African society and to its oft acknowledged “reassuring communally securing social structures” (Diop 1991: 218). The image of the giant children playing in the streets with lions, panthers and snakes, distinctly African in its rendition, is reminiscent of Isaiah’s prophetic vision in which “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11: 6), hence it might be inferred that Seid here prophesies a future Chadian nation. *Négritude*, we might say, operates here as a nation-building vision, to inculcate pride in the traditional society alongside accommodation to the West. Specifically, Seid inserts the traditional system, communalism, within an image of modernity. Modernity is implied by mastery over nature, technology used to control earth and its physical environments. Traditionally the forces of creation and the created were part of the same reality, but with the arrival of Islam and Christianity came a new relationship – nature became a servant to man rather than a partner (Mazrui 1986: episode 1, “The Nature of a Continent”).

In this idyllic vision of the future Chadian nation, technological advance, harnessing lightning and solar energy, is imaged in terms of promoting “the common good” (*le bien de tous*), that is, technological progress works not for the few but for the entire community.⁵ It is motivated by religiosity, the desire to honour the Supreme Being. Thus we can infer that Seid’s African socialism envisaged for the future entails “the common good” and religiosity and is consequently at odds with greed.⁶ Put differently, his vision of nationhood entails a happy marriage between the communalism and religiosity of traditional Africa (turned into African socialism for the future) and modern technology. But if we move to the present and consider modernisation in the form of “development projects” occurring since 2005, with the discovery of oil fields in Chad, for example, technological advance does not go hand in hand with “the common good”. It works rather for the benefit of a small minority and many of them the international stakeholders, such as the multinational oil companies who monitor the project (Kotch 2005: 50–65). In what can only be termed a neo-colonial context, the very sovereignty of the Chadian government is fragile and nation without sovereignty is problematic. Modernisation, deemed a desirable social good, like *négritude*, a desirable reconciliation between Africa and the West, places the new African nation in the international context where power relations are highly unequal.

While elevating his African culture, extolling its humanitarian values, Seid never politicises his African culture or his black skin. His stories do not entail a “passionate exaltation of the black race” (Irele 1990: 68) nor does he engage in the “anti-racist racialism” sometimes attributed to *négritude*. The only reference to race in his entire

collection of stories is one image of racial harmony in "Le Sultan Saboun" ("Sultan Sabun"). Depicting the newborn sultan's naming ceremony, he writes: "young girls of amber and ebony complexion sang the praises of the young prince" (Seid 2007: 13).⁷ Note the poetic, négritudist quality of "complexion" rather than "skin" and the use of amber and ebony, with their connotations of natural beauty and opulence, rendering positive affect and dignity to these skin colours. Seid's vision of racial harmony here might be hinting that Arab-African reconciliation is more relevant in Chad than the African-Western reconciliation, most closely associated with négritude.⁸ If we consider the present crisis in Darfur, Sudan, which spills over into neighboring Chad, it is Arab-African tensions that threaten national unity in Sudan and peace and stability in the region. Famine, drought and subsequent scarcity of resources, since the 80's have caused or certainly exacerbated old divisions, whereby Sudanese Arabs now seek to eliminate Sudanese Africans (Darfur/Darfur 2007).

Strains of consciencism as envisioning a new multicultural Chadian identity

Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* was only published in 1964 but it seems likely that Seid was influenced by this philosophy. Nkrumah (1964: 68) posits three segments in society "one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; [...] a second segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; [...] a final segment which represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa, using the vehicles of colonialism and neo-colonialism." This last phrase "using the vehicles of colonialism and neo-colonialism" forewarns of the tensions and contradictions that threaten any attempted synthesis or reconciliation of the three segments of society. Nkrumah (1964: 70) elucidates his prescriptive nation-building vision, "To contain at once the African experience of the Moslem and Euro-Christian presence, and that of traditional society and through a kind of gestation, to use them for the harmonious development of this society." In *Au Tchad sous les Etoiles* two attempted reconciliations are evident, African/traditional-Arab/Islam and African/traditional-Arab/Islam-Western/Christian segments. "Le Sultan Saboun" which relates the mythologized life of an actual Muslim ruler at the height of the Wadai empire in the first decade of the 19th century, deals specifically with first, the African/tradition-Arab/Islam dynamic. At the newborn child's naming ceremony:

An assembly of fakih, seers, witchdoctors and fetish doctors deliberated at length the name that should be given the newborn child. A happy compromise was reached: while a fakih wrote an amulet to put around the child's neck, a witchdoctor performed a frenzied dance to ward off the evil spirits and a fetish doctor combined several pulverized roots to produce a talisman with uncommon powers. The little prince was named Mahamat Abd-al-Karim, meaning the servant of God (Seid 2007: 13-4).⁹

At first sight this episode appears as a happy reconciliation between tradition and Islam but here complexity announces itself and one wonders to what extent reconciliation is possible. What is called fetish doctor in the story might be in modern terms medicine man or traditional doctor – one who makes medicines with special herbs and plants. What is called witchdoctor here might be unrelated to religion, an age-old traditional practice nevertheless, which corresponds with exorcism in modern terms. Religious belief and healing practices are closely intertwined. In real life, the result of synthesis has tended often to be cultural compromise and conflicted African identities.¹⁰ Ali Mazrui in his 1986 documentary, *The Africans*, depicts in episode 8, “A clash of cultures”, bizarre mixings such as Muslim healers, miracle-workers, frequently sought even by non-believing Christians; a form of exorcism sometimes performed in the Christian church; and the not uncommon practice of consulting both the traditional medicine man and the Western-style doctor. While mixings occur in Western culture, there is a sense in which colonialism, hand-in-hand with “civilising” Christianity, stereotyped the continent, demonized traditional practices and beliefs, including healing practices, lumped together and classified as “witchcraft” and the work of Satan. Negative affect accompanying these stereotypes has been internalised by Africans themselves.

Returning to the sultan’s naming ceremony, Seid’s story takes a twist: it is related that just as the ceremony was closing, an elderly seer stepped forward, prophesied the important role the child would play in the history of Wadai and renamed him *Saboun le pur* (Sabun, the Pure) (Seid 1962: 28) in honour of the ancestors. Though both names, Abd-al-Karim and Sabun, were used, the latter was favoured and retained. Thus the final word is in fact given to the traditional African culture as represented by the ancestors. The presence of the ancestors, viewed as links between the living and the invisible spiritual forces of the universe, gives religious sanction to rituals such as naming and initiation (Zenani 1992: 213), which mark membership in the society. In this episode then African religious belief is privileged and Islam compelled to adapt. The outside religions, Islam and Christianity, have survived and thrive on the continent, Mazrui argues, where they have adapted, as under Ahmadou Bamba who indigenised Islam and Simon Kimbangu who Africanized Christianity (Mazrui 1986: episode 3, “New Gods”).

Seid’s story goes on to portray Sultan Sabun as an exemplary Muslim and Wadaian ruler, in which there appears to be no contradiction between the African/traditional and Arab/Islamic layers of culture. Pairs of reconciliatory images include the young Sabun’s excellence at running and wrestling, both African sports and in Arabian horsemanship; Sabun acquiring indigenous knowledge such as the art of divination, astrology and the occult sciences, alongside Koranic scholarship; receiving at his enthronement ceremony two sacred objects – the warrior’s sabre and the Koran, representing the African and the Islamic cultures respectively. Such reconciliatory imag-

es accumulate, so that aside from the naming ceremony, there is no further hint of African resistance to Islamisation and Arabisation. This is arguably motivated on Seid's part by the desire to reconcile and harmonise by forgetting the brutality of conquest in the past. Bringing nation into being requires both a forgetting and a remembering, specifically, forgetting the divisions of the past (Bhabha 1994: 160). Yet traditional Africa did resist and continues to wrestle with the "ideological colonialism" of Islam (Okadigbo 1985: 10), which has again reared its ugly head in the central Sudanic crisis mentioned earlier. High prestige attaches to Islam, especially to its association with literacy and learning, just as earlier, it might be said, high prestige attaches to modernisation, to technological progress in an attempted reconciliation with the West. It is not coincidental that exaggerated images depicting the person and reign of Sultan Sabun reach a climax in the depiction of Wadai's advance in scholarship:

Sabun opened schools everywhere and turned the Abecher mosque into the intellectual capital of the world. In its day, it was the seat of human learning, excelling in the arts and humanities.

During his reign, Wadai was known the world over [...] People came [...] from the most diverse and distant horizons to learn at the feet of the most brilliant teachers, from whom one could never tell which ray of universal truth might be shed on the most perplexing problems of philosophy, ethics, religion and theodicy. Never had Wadai reached such heights (Seid 2007: 17).¹¹

While such might indeed be said of Timbuktu of old, clearly it is an overreaching claim of Abecher, capital of the Wadai empire, but is illuminating as regards the intellectual superiority which arguably accompanied Islam. Islam carries high prestige because literacy is perceived as leading to socio-economic and spiritual progress. Christianity, which also brought literacy, both religious and secular, is associated with progress too. It follows that local religions are destined to yield to the progress imperative and the world religions (Okadigbo 1985: 2).

In "Le Tchad, pays d'abondance, de bonheur et d'amour" ("Chad, land of plenty, land of happiness and land of brotherly love"), Seid's best literary rendition of consciencism, tradition-Islam-Christianity synthesis, he appears to privilege Christianity. Biblical names used in the story to signify the Supreme Being include *Dieu* (God), *l'Eternel* (the Eternal), *Créateur* (Creator), *Très-Haut* (Most-High) and *Seigneur* (Lord). Moreover the opening, a rain of fire sent by Providence to destroy the earth and her inhabitants, strongly suggests a Biblical motif:

A long, long time ago, so long that not one among us could say how many moons have since waxed and waned, a cataclysm sent by God, shattered the earth. The earth was full of violence because, as we well know, men had acquired the knowledge of evil, and woe to them and their offspring. God looked on the earth and behold it was corrupt!

At that time, the skies did not cease from their scolding rumble. God, the Eternal, sent a ghastly rain of fire upon the earth. Everything was consumed. Only one tribe, Alifa's was spared ... (Seid 2007: 1).¹²

Several details of the story are reminiscent of the Biblical flood: a mention that the earth was filled with violence (see Gen. 6: 11); a mention that God looked on the earth and it was corrupt (see Gen. 6: 12); and later in the story, the appearance of giants (see Gen. 6: 4). Since according to Biblical history the flood occurred before Abraham, a common ancestor of Muslims and Christians, it refers to a shared history. Moreover, traditions of a primeval flood exist in the history of many cultures, both mono- and polytheistic (Dummelow 1908: xxxiii–iv). That the leader of the tribe in Seid's story is called 'Alifa,' from the Arabic word *khalifa* meaning a deputy ruler (Decalo 1997: 48), hints at links to Islam. The Kotoko people have in fact converted to Islam (Decalo 1997: 251).

There are five mentions of Alifa's people singing praises or giving thanks to God – the actual hymn they sing elaborated twice like a refrain – the implication being that they love and worship the Supreme Being, in keeping with both monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam. That Alifa's people develop close relations and intermarry with the friendly giant tribe they encounter intimates perhaps that the Kotoko are a chosen people, descended from gods or the sons of God, as implied in Genesis 6: 4: "The giants came from the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men. These were the mighty men of ancient lore, the famous ones." The first male child of the union between Alifa's people and the giants in the story, is named Sao, ancestor of the Kotoko people (Decalo 1997: 251). According to Seid's story, Sao means *concorde, amour de tous les hommes* (harmony, love for all mankind) (Seid 1962: 18). Love for all mankind evokes the doctrines of the world religions, Christianity and Islam and simultaneously evokes African communalism.

Thus Seid presents the earliest inhabitants of Chad as deeply religious, perhaps a chosen people, who love the Supreme Being and their fellow human beings and in the process he implies the marriage of Christianity and Islam, worship of one God, to the traditional African societal norm and value, communalism or "the oneness of man". Whereas the Kotoko people of Chad have adopted Islam, they have also retained indigenous religious practices, worship of the water and river deities (Decalo 1997: 252) to which Seid's story makes no reference. While elevating the traditional society, as in the norm of communalism, he appears to reject local religious practices and accommodate Christianity, which does not tolerate worship of the gods or spirits of nature.

Elsewhere in his collection, Seid attenuates the full force of the traditional African belief regarding the presence of the ancestors among the living. The allusion "our ancestors whose protecting shadows hover over Wara" (*nos ancêtres dont les ombres*

tutélaires planent sur Ouarra, Seid 2007: 14; Seid 1962: 28) as well as “protected by the invigorating influx of the deity and by the strength of their departed ancestors” (*protégés par l’influx bénéfique de la divinité et la force des ancêtres défunts*, Seid 2007, 6; Seid 1962: 20) and “the lake which is the sanctuary of the ancestral spirits”, (*[le] lac, qui est le refuge des âmes ancestrales et le palladium du royaume*, Seid 2007: 21; Seid, 1962: 40) – in French the choice of the word *âmes* has Christian connotations of “souls” rather than the African connotations of “spirits” – do not compare with Senghor’s articulation in “Nuit de Sine” (“Night of Sine”): “Woman, light the clear oil lamp, where the ancestors gathered around may talk as parents talk when the children are put to bed” (Senghor 1976: 104) – where the traditional belief in the presence of the ancestors, communicating directly with the living, is deemed a natural experience.¹³ In this respect Seid exhibits ambivalence: the first story discussed, “Le Sultan Saboun” privileges the traditional, respect for the wishes of the ancestors, while “Le Tchad, pays d’abondance, de bonheur et d’amour” understates the traditional religion, omitting to mention the worship of water and river deities. In his attempt to reconcile with Christianity and Islam Seid only partially states the indigenous belief, accommodating Christianity’s intolerance towards what it deems “paganism.” Might it be inferred that Seid, the Christianised African, exhibits “an identity swamped by the imposed cultural ‘norms’?” (Brathwaite paraphrased in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989: 147).

“Civilising” Christianity, hand-in-hand with colonialism, was complicit in a racism that spawned double standards, reducing Africa in the eyes of the world and its own eyes, presenting Africans views of themselves by outsiders looking in. Hypocrisy was evident in the fact that the tenets of Christianity, including love for one’s neighbour, was not the Christianity typically practiced toward Africans under colonialism (Mazrui 1974: 5). Nor was the sermon of “turning the other cheek,” preached by Christianity, the typical black African experience of colonial control (Mazrui 1974: 5). Christianity, partially responsible for and complicit in the distaste attaching to African religions, nevertheless achieved high prestige among Africans, including Seid. Any effective reconciliation and the achievement of a multicultural Chadian identity must recognise the racism partially introduced by “civilising” Christianity, the doublestandards that point up the inequality of status that different religions enjoy. If consciencism, reconciliation of the three segments of Chadian society, assumes an equal status accorded each religion and culture, then low prestige attaching to local traditional religions is problematic.

Conclusion

Seid, man of diplomacy, appears to walk a fine line between the reconciliation he attempts rhetorically and the compromise he exhibits. Unpacking literary strains of

négritude and consciencism lays bare neglected and overlooked tensions, understatement and omission that thwart at every turn harmonisation of the different segments of Chadian society. One story envisions modernisation in the reconciliation between Africa and the West, but in real life modernisation does not occur within the context of African communalism or socialism as the story has it, but in the neo-colonial context, where it benefits only a few, and mostly international stakeholders. The Chadian government still does not enjoy sovereignty. Possibly with the intent of building nation, Seid tends to harmonise African and Arab segments of society, overlooking the tyranny of Islamisation and Arabisation in the past. In the present, as we know, rivalry between Arab and African populations in the central Sudanic region including Chad has resurfaced. Superimposing Biblical motifs and understating traditional African beliefs and religious practices in a story that appears to reconcile Christianity, Islam and the traditional society, Seid neglects the colonial context in which “civilising” Christianity is implicated, especially the distaste it engendered towards the traditional society and religions. Doublestandards result from the higher prestige attaching to Islam, associated with literacy, and Christianity, associated with modernisation, and African societies have yielded to the perceived progress imperative.

While Seid’s stories elevate the traditional societal value of communalism, portrayed with positive affect, in real life it has not transformed itself into a socialism sufficient to build nation and promote the multiculturalism envisioned and desired.

If forgetting is necessary to nation-building, there needs also to be an unlearning of negative affect and cultural contempt toward traditional Africa. “Let us continue to revisit our indigenous ideologisation,” in its various expressions, in order to understand the crisis of conscience that threatens “African identity, freedom, sovereignty, democracy and social justice, socio-economic and cultural progress, peace and solidarity within our societies and in relation to the rest of the world” (Guèye 1999: 249).

Notes

1. J. B. Seid (1927–80), is remembered mainly for his public roles, first ambassador to France after independence, 1960–66, and Keeper of the Seals and Minister of Justice 1966–78; he received his primary education in French colonial schools in N’Djamena and Brazzaville, Congo and secondary education in Cairo, Egypt. In 1955, he obtained his BA in Law in Lyons, France, distinguishing himself as Chad’s first university graduate (Decalo 1997: 388).
2. My translation. “Nos ancêtres avaient une notion très haute de la justice. Ce mot est d’ailleurs synonyme de paix. Le juge est d’abord un conciliateur. Sa tâche consiste à apaiser les conflits à éteindre les haines et à amener ceux qui sont déchirés par la colère et la rancune à se réconcilier. Il est un homme de concorde” (Seid 1967: 95).
3. Among influences in his early life were a friend of his father, a Muslim fakih and miracle-worker, representing the Islamic presence; his friend and mentor, a Jesuit priest, representing the Christian and Western presence; and his future father-in-law, a rich source of traditional knowledge and cultural wisdom, representing the indigenous African society (Seid 1967: 35–44; 53–87 and 91–104).

4. "Sur l'autre rive du grand lac, le chef de la tribu découvrit une cité dont les cases étaient immenses et nombreuses. Quand ils débarquèrent, Alifa vit dans les rues avoisinantes des enfants, hauts comme des palmiers, partager leurs jeux avec des lions, des panthères, des rhinocéros ... D'énormes reptiles aux yeux verts phosphorescents se faufilaient autour de leurs membres, jouant avec eux une mystérieuse partie de cache-cache.

Sur des arbres démesurés, aux fondaisons épaisses, des myriades d'oiseaux chantaient en volant çà et là. L'air vibrait de leur suave musique.

Pays béni entre tous ! Là, bêtes et gens vivaient dans la plus parfaite entente. Le mal n'était point connu. La bonté animait tous les cœurs. L'innocence se reflétait dans tous les yeux et nul parmi eux n'en avait conscience. Le travail était vénéré. La force, l'habileté, l'intelligence ou le génie, tout ce que l'homme possédait en naissant comme un don reçu de Dieu, était intégralement utilisé pour le bien de tous: ici, pour déraciner les arbres de la forêt qui bientôt feraient place à des champs fertiles; là, pour dévier le cours des fleuves afin d'irriguer les plantations; ailleurs, pour saisir la foudre du ciel ou les derniers rayons du soleil couchant afin d'illuminer les murs de la cité. Et cela partout, en tous temps et en tous lieux, pour mieux glorifier l'Éternel" (Seid 1962:16-7).

5. The 'communalism' of Africa, variously articulated by Africa's intellectuals, centres around the notion of "the common good." In a recent articulation, Tutu says: "Africans have this thing called UBUNTU ... the essence of being human [...] We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours.[...] The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore *you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community in belonging*" (quoted in Mulemfo 2000: 57-8; italics mine)
6. Not only the proverbial "scramble" for territorial Africa in the 1880's but in the Cold War era, as African nations were gaining national liberation, Western capitalism and Soviet communism fought for the soul of the continent, a struggle which gave birth to African Socialism, variously conceived and articulated by Africa's intellectuals, as part of their nation-building vision. While drawn to communism, most could not reconcile with the atheism of Soviet communism.
7. "des jeunes filles au teint d'ambre et d'ébène chantaient la gloire du petit prince" (Seid 1962: 28).
8. It is interesting that Senghor, proponent of négritude, of reconciliation between Africa and the West, by 1961 had realized the need and had included in his model for national unity in Senegal the Arab/Islamic layer of culture (Irele 1990: 108).
9. "Une assemblée de fakih, de devins, de sorciers et de féticheurs discuta longtemps du nom qu'il fallait donner au nouveau-né. Tout se termina par une heureuse conciliation. Tandis qu'un fakih écrivait une amulette pour la suspendre au cou de l'enfant, un sorcier exécuta une danse frénétique pour éloigner les mauvais esprits et un féticheur combina plusieurs racines réduites en poudre pour obtenir un talisman aux vertus singulières. Le petit prince fut appelé Mahamat Abdel-Kérim ou le serviteur de Dieu" (Seid 1962: 28).
10. The problematic nature of reconciliation between traditional religion and Islam is evident in an incident Seid relates from his own childhood. As a young boy he became seriously ill with a fever and, we are told, his parents sent for the witchdoctor, the fetish doctor and the Muslim fakih, all of whom prescribed various remedies. The fever did not subside and his friend, the Jesuit priest, then took him to a European hospital for treatment. Two weeks later he recovered but when his immediate family discussed his recovery, each attributed the cure to a different cause. His mother believed: "When certain ancient gestures are carefully imitated, when we chant correctly without modulating the voice certain prayers, exactly as they were passed down by our ancestors, it is more likely that Allah will answer them [...] The living are links in a chain, a chain connecting those who have gone before with those who are yet to be born. The dead are the salt of the earth, the living taste that salt" (my translation). "Lorsqu'on reproduit exactement certains gestes millénaires, lorsqu'on psalmodie correctement, sans inflexion de voix, certaines prières telles qu'elles nous ont été transmises par nos ancêtres, il y a plus de chance qu'Allah les exauce [...] Les vivants constituent les maillons d'une chaîne qui relie ceux qui ne sont plus à ceux qui naîtront. Les morts sont le sel de la terre, les vivants en goûtent la saveur" (Seid 1967: 63). In the mother's belief traditional African religion and Islam coexist harmoniously but one wonders if, from the Islamic perspective, the key role of the ancestors in answering prayer, her belief in 'the dead as part of the living and of the unborn' which she retains from her traditional religion, is perhaps evidence of persistent "paganism". On the whole, traditional African religions have been high on tolerance and more accommodating of the world religions than the other way around – perhaps because of their polytheism, which has little trouble making space for a new god (Mazrui 1974: 6, 8, 33).

11. "Dans le domaine intellectuel, Saboun ouvrit partout des écoles et fit de la Mosquée d'Abécher le cerveau de l'univers, le plus grand foyer de la culture humaine où florissaient les arts et les lettres.
Sous son règne, l'Ouadaï était connu du monde entier. [...] On y venait [...] des horizons les plus lointains et les plus divers pour s'instruire des enseignements que donnaient des professeurs célèbres dont on ne saura jamais dire quel rayon d'infini ils savaient projeter sur les problèmes les plus obscurs de la philosophie, de la morale, de la religion et de la théodicée. Jamais la grandeur du Ouadaï n'atteignit une telle ampleur" (Seid 1962: 33-4).
12. "A une époque très lointaine, si lointaine que nul parmi nous ne peut en compter les lunes, un cataclysme providentiel bouleversa la terre. La terre était pleine de violence parce que les hommes avaient acquis, comme chacun sait, pour leur malheur et celui de toute leur descendance, la connaissance du mal. Dieu regarda la terre et voici qu'elle était corrompue !
Alors, les cieux grondèrent sans discontinuer et l'Éternel laissa tomber sur toute chose une horrible pluie de feu. Tout fut consumé" (Seid 1962: 13).
13. Femme, allume la lampe au beurre clair, que causent autour les Ancêtres comme les parents, les enfants au lit (Maetso 1987: 59).

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