Transnational Approaches, Themes, and Identities in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century French and Francophone Novels

Marissa Brown

Langhorne, Pennsylvania

M.A., University of Georgia, 2007

B.A., Pace University, 2005

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of French

University of Virginia

May, 2014

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to articulate the relationship between identity construction and transnational movement in a corpus of novels published after 1990 written by French, Antillean and Sub-Saharan African authors. I examine thematic and stylistic inscriptions of the transnational in order to show what is at stake in using literature to depict the transnational as constructive or deconstructive transformations to identity. In addition to Françoise Lionnet's and Dominic Thomas's discussions on the transnational, I mobilize postmodern rhizomatic theory, postcolonial theory, and Édouard Glissant's writings to perform close readings of Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, J.M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*. I argue that these works exhibit a transnational identity that problematizes exclusionary standards of belonging and de-problematizes the construction of an identity that is rooted in multiple cultural and literary traditions. Because the transnational in this corpus involves areas united by historical oppression, these novels make particularly powerful statements on literature's role in promoting an appreciation of cultural diversity. I show how the authors call for belonging to be understood in terms of cultural values and practices, not physical presence or racial similarity. My study proves important to an understanding of how literature shows us a path towards a form of productive cross-cultural interaction that allows for identity to be open to other cultures yet maintain meaningful cultural particularities.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Prof. Kandioura Dramé for helping me to grow as a scholar and a person. His infinite wisdom and humor have inspired in me a love of Francophone literatures and cultures. The courses I took with him and our conversations over coffee (with Splenda) have greatly shaped my professional interests.

I also thank Prof. Ari Blatt, who, as a teacher, acted as a soundboard for new ideas, always welcoming creative approaches. As a mentor and part of our department, he has dedicated much time and energy to grad students. I thank him for all that he has done throughout my time at UVa.

I am also grateful to Prof. Stéphanie Bérard for expanding my horizons and exposing me to the Francophone Caribbean. The classes I took with Prof. Bérard motivated me to explore an area I knew nothing about. She encouraged me to think more creatively and critically, for which I am grateful.

I thank my dear friends who made Charlottesville a home for me. Their help with editing, printing, and organizing my ideas has proven invaluable.

I thank my father who, through his selfless and tireless devotion to his family, has given me the values and tools to succeed in life. I thank my mother for her unconditional love and patience, and for always being there for me. I have to mention my gratitude to my older siblings Chris, Amanda and Bryan for supporting their little sister since birth, and my nephews and niece Henry, Lucia and Jacob, who can make me laugh no matter what.

*For Henry, Lucia and Jacob*

Table of Contents

**Introduction**.......................................................................................................................1

Situating the Transnational: Literary, Social and Historical Contexts................................3

Theoretical Roots and Transnational Openings…………………………..…………........8

Chapter Synopses………………………………………………………………………...29

The Transnational: French, Francophone, or Both?..........................................................34

**Chapter One: Critical Belonging Between Shorelines: The Power of the Chosen Transnational Identity in Fatou Diome’s Le ventre de l’Atlantique**

Introduction........................................................................................................................36

Hanging onto the Shorelines: Exclusion and Inclusion.....................................................41

(Un)telling the Story of France..........................................................................................53

The Wax that Seals the Letter: The Role of Writing.........................................................63

L’Être-additionnée.............................................................................................................69

Conclusion.. ......................................................................................................................76

**Chapter Two: Growing Pains and Hybrid Memories in Gisele Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia***

Introduction........................................................................................................................79

Pride and Prejudice in the Hexagon...................................................................................85

Gardens of Memory and Painful Histories........................................................................94

Growing Into the Transnational.......................................................................................104  
Conclusion.......................................................................................................................113

**Chapter Three: Writing Memory and Re-Writing Identity in *L’Africain* by J.M.G. Le Clézio**Introduction......................................................................................................................115  
(Auto)biography in Text and Image................................................................................121  
Textual Sense...................................................................................................................128  
Reconstructing Africa and the Transnational..................................................................133  
Unraveling Memories in Writing.....................................................................................143  
Conclusion.......................................................................................................................151

**Chapter Four: The Tragic Transnational and the Struggle for Self-Determi(nation) in Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse***

Introduction......................................................................................................................153

Nation-Building and the Destruction of a Nation............................................................159

Performing Identities.......................................................................................................172

Tragic Entrapments..........................................................................................................190  
Conclusion.......................................................................................................................199

**Conclusion**......................................................................................................................201

**Works Cited**....................................................................................................................211

**Introduction**

The 21st century has been aptly deemed the "Age of Globalization" due to the massive flows of information, goods and people crossing borders.[[1]](#footnote-0) Yet cross-cultural contact and the idea of global movement is certainly nothing new. In the Francophone context, the French established trade posts in St. Louis, Senegal as early as 1659 ("French in West Africa"). In the Caribbean, contact with Martinique was made as early as 1502 (Glissant 39). Given that "all displacement (movement from one place—or language—to another) involves replacement," (Laroche 125) we can speak of colonial dislocations of people and cultures from Africa to the Caribbean during the triangular trade, and relocations of a form of French identity and culture to areas outside of France's barriers.[[2]](#footnote-1) In turn, France, too, has been changed by these outside forces, an argument at the heart of Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman's book *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History* (2010). The collection of articles spanning from the Middle Ages to contemporary times answers the question they pose at the beginning: "Is it possible to reread the whole sweep of French literature in a world perspective?" (ix). Françoise Lionnet has pointed to canonical French writers like Montaigne, Baudelaire and Gide to remind us how "areas of *francophonie* that share a history of colonial domination…have contributed an enormous amount to the development of a specifically French *imaginaire* ever since the Renaissance" ("National Language" 1253).

What validates the importance of this dissertation's focus on French and Francophone novels published after the 1990s that deal with local identities and global networks is that more than any other time in history, "the scale and the ease with which people move are unprecedented and so are the cultural dynamics that devolve from such movements" (Adesanmi, "Redefining Paris" 966). Literary scholars and critics have been actively producing various terminologies and approaches in order to understand how literature from around the French-speaking world has been reflecting such intense change. Amongst immigrant, nomad, and diasporic, to name a few, the transnational has surfaced as a buzzword. Françoise Lionnet calls our present time “l’ère du transnationalisme" since "the vast migratory patterns of the last fifty years have contributed to the blurring of the colonial borders between the hexagon and its former empire, and the field is now, by definition, transnational and comparative" ("Introduction" 784). The 2010 edited collection *Transnational French Studies*: *Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde* situates the transnational in terms of the *littérature-monde* movement that debuted in 2007 with Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud's manifesto. The collection focuses less on problematizing the category of the transnational and more on the implications of the *littérature monde* movement's desire to deconstruct literary hierarchies. But while proponents of *littérature monde* seek to erase literary hierarchies by destroying borders, authors who write the transnational make more complex statements cultural, national, and literary boundaries. From the abundance of scholarship, the transnational clearly denotes more than merely crossing borders, but it has yet to be mapped out in a way that recognizes the heterogeneity of its literary manifestations.

This dissertation seeks to show how literature teaches us about what is at stake when cross-cultural interaction involving areas connected by historical and present inequalities is celebrated. I delve into a close reading of Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, J.M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain*, Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* and Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, all of which center on literal transnational journeys and their constructive or destructive impact on identity. By limiting my corpus to French, Antillean (Martinique and Guadeloupe), Sub-Saharan (specifically West African and Central African) authors, thereby excluding North Africa, areas of Asia, Canada, and so forth, I put into conversation transnational formulations within areas united by the slave trade and colonization. I argue that because the transnational in this corpus unfolds within a context of historical oppression, these novels[[3]](#footnote-2) make particularly powerful statements on literature's role in promoting an appreciation of diversity and hybridization. These authors write a discourse that rejects the idea that belonging is contingent on genealogy, culture or race. They show that belonging can be forged and maintained in multiple spaces. I argue that inclusion is the target, thereby allowing belonging to develop in terms of cultural values and practices, not blood or geographical origins.

**Situating the Transnational: Literary, Social and Historical Contexts**

The 1990s proves particularly fertile soil for my analysis given numerous socio-political factors that would shape the literary world. First, the large numbers of people from Francophone African countries and the Antilles coming to France since the 1940s have changed what being French "looks like." While active recruitment policies in post-war France sought Antilleans and African immigrants to help rebuild the country, policies again shifted starting in the mid-1970s in order to "halt and if possible reverse migratory flows from Third World countries" (Hargreaves, "Perceptions" 10). Despite the end of France's thirty years of prosperity that led to high unemployment and economic instability, immigration from former colonies continued. Lydie Moudileno explains that in the case of Sub-Saharan Africans, people fled to France to escape worsening realities caused by "l'instauration de régimes totalitaires en Afrique" (*Littératures Africaines* 86). In the Francophone Caribbean context, departmentalization of Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1946 did not lead to a more secure situation on the islands. In fact, in the post-departmentalization years, "a high rate of unemployment on the islands forced a record number of Antilleans to relocate to France" (Ireland and Proulx 141). Maeve McCusker adds that in the 1960s, "the key period of independence struggles and decolonization the world over heralded in the Antilles an increasingly dependent relationship with France " ("Small Worlds" 113). Like Sub-Saharan Africans, Antilleans also fled deplorable economic situations.

With these changes in population, in addition to economic worries and increased conservative values promoted by politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National in the 80s, anxiety-riddled discourses have manifested themselves on the national level in France (Ireland and Proulx 1). Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy attempted to hold debates on national identity and even created a *Ministère de l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité nationale et du Développement solidaire* in 2007. Sarkozy's postures reveal a questioning that takes place on two levels, since to question what it means to be French necessarily entails a discussion on who and what is *not* French. A view of cultural or national identity as quantifiable and fixed reiterates colonial thought that framed the modern French nation, "erected on an ethnocentric assimilationist paradigm that refused to interpret culture as a dynamic process" (Thomas, *Black France* 9). A. James Arnold argues in his article "Perilous Symmetry: Exoticism and the Geography of Colonial and Postcolonial Culture" that France has always depended on the colonial other to have a definition: "Binary oppositions… structure France's view of its culture over against that which is not-France…Not-France is in fact necessary for France to know itself" (13). Debates on national identity can also be understood, then, as debates on non-national identity. Contemporary attempts to solidify Frenchness[[4]](#footnote-3) thus re-enact colonial discourse that relied on putting forth categories of identity. Given these contemporary events and discourses, scholars have largely concluded that the decolonization of African colonies in the 1960s and the departmentalization of the Antilles in 1946 serve more as historical moments than as markers of a definitive end to colonial dynamics.[[5]](#footnote-4) According to Dominic Thomas, "Republican ideals are deployed in the context of immigration politics to preserve the status quo and secure the dominance of a monolithic vision of history, " (*Black France* 8) so that we can speak of contemporary neocolonial or transcolonial[[6]](#footnote-5) phenomena.

Literature in French from France and throughout the Francophone world has been responding to these identity-restricting discourses, some more explicitly than others, as we see in Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'identité nationale. Hors-la-loi?* (2007). I analyze representations of identity, both on the level of individual characters and in terms of national identity, by following a definition that Glissant and Chamoiseau propose: “Une des richesses les plus fragiles de l’identité, personnelle ou collective, et les plus précieuses aussi, est que d'évidence elle se développe et se renforce de manière continue—nulle part on ne rencontre de fixité identitaire” (1). Revealing and challenging Hexagonal xenophobia harks back to the fathers of Negritude, Leopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and Aimé Césaire of Martinique, who served as trailblazers for future writers to use the pen as a counter-hegemonic instrument. For these politicians and writers, Paris of the 1930s and 1940s became a diasporic meeting place where they conceived of literature as a way to affirm the value of African cultures and civilizations. Pius Adesanmi has argued that the intellectual activity produced by these black thinkers represented a "textual revolution" that gave birth to "epistemologies of subjecthood and agency through which the revalued voice of the black man did not only speak the truth to the power of modernity but also became transmodern in the sense of placing the black subject beyond the epistemic claims of Euromodernity" ("Redefining Paris" 960). Adesanmi highlights how literature was used as a counterpoint to colonial logic's beliefs in the authority of its discourse to define the other.

Today's writers are exploring questions of self-representation and collective identities, but from a different point of view than Senghor and Césaire, who were students in France from the 1920s to the 1940s. Since the 1990s, various terminologies have been put forth to describe or categorize the new mappings of contemporary black writers. Many scholars speak strictly on black writers in France who discuss the question of immigration, or they specifically talk about African writers: Jules Rosetta's "Black Paris," Odile Casenave's "Afrique-sur-Seine," Jacques Chevrier's "migritude," and Abdourahman Waberi's "enfants de la postcolonie" are but a few of these categories that will be explored more fully later on. The point is that these terms reflect the abundance of scholarly attempts to forge paths towards an understanding of writers and narratives that inscribe migration and complicated notions of belonging. Most often, we hear talk of a *roman d'immigration*, "un 'mouvement littéraire', soit en fonction de critères identitaires, soit en fonction de thématiques communes" (Moudileno, *Littératures Africaines* 22). Moudileno uses quotation marks to underscore the uncertainty of such broadly defined classifications. I agree with Moudileno's wariness of broad genres particularly because of the complexity of the concept of immigrant.

Abdourahman Waberi's designation *les enfants de la postcolonie* or "les Franco-quelque chose" (12) captures the dual identity that characterizes new authors who live and write the experience of migration. Diome has called herself Franco-Sénégalaise, Mabanckou considers himself Franco-Congolais, but Le Clézio does not call himself Franco-Africain or Afro-Français, although he does lay claim to an African identity, as we will see. And Gisèle Pineau, an Antillean born in Paris, is she just French? Antillean? Would Franco-Antillaise be redundant? Gaining Frenchness is not purely a question for those without citizenship nor is France the only space authors are discussing. The transnational imposes itself as a necessary way of looking at what authors are saying about belonging in various spaces. It allows us to look at characters' views of being French, and Senegalese, and Antillean, and Congolese, and so forth, placing representations of France alongside representations of other spaces. This line of thinking works on the premise that movement across borders does not occur in a vacuum. The question of who leaves begs the question of who stays, and who has the luxury of staying. In other words, I will demonstrate how the transnational allows readers to interpret how authors balance the need for particular politico-cultural needs while also writing narratives that take place on a global stage. What are these transnational alignments, in what context are they mobilized and what are the larger stakes of these new networks in our understanding of literary representations of identity?

**Theoretical Roots and Transnational** **Openings**

In her fascinating article "From Self-Writing to 'Mondialité': Toward a Global Cultural Consciousness," Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi argues that globalization and transnational rhetoric are largely deployed in contexts related to economics, which accentuates an emphasis on migration's impact on material goods and markets to the detriment of cultures and identities (24). Whereas globalization remains more so part of the jargon of social scientists, the transnational has gained currency in the literary sphere, according to Francoise Lionnet, who insists on the difference between globalization and the transnational:

In the last ten years or so, we have seen a new field of inquiry emerging in the name of transnational studies…In general, it is understood that transnationalism as a consequence of the latest wave of globalization shares with globalization the historical moment of late capitalism, characterized by the logic of finance capital, flexible accumulation, and post-Fordist international divisions of labor…This definition of the transnational recognizes that transnationalism is part and parcel of the process of globalization, but also that the transnational can be less scripted and more scattered. (*Minor Transnationalism* 5)

While globalization and the transnational share much in common, I agree with Lionnet that the two carry significantly different connotations in terms of the interaction between the global and the local. If "the logic of globalization is centripetal and centrifugal at the same time and assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture to be tested by its norm…the transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal" (Lionnet and Shuh, *Minor Transnationalism* 4). I offer my own definition of the transnational as it pertains to literature and identity construction as the inscription within the text of stylistic and thematic elements that take into account historically-rooted global power dynamics without effacing resistant pathways and particular needs of formerly colonized spaces. I adopt McDonald and Souleiman's definition of the global as "interconnected, of cultural difference within and beyond the nation" that occurs during "transactions between and among cultures and peoples, both outside and inside France's national boundaries" (x). These "transactions" or encounters for the purposes of my dissertation are the result of a physical transnational journey between former colony and colonizer leading to interplays between the local and global that impact identity construction. I do not posit going to France as the local entering the global because the Hexagon is not the site of the world; rather, characters' transnational movement involves local dynamics traveling into global dynamics. The local, therefore, is not something to be left at home; as I argue, characters take their history, cultures, and identities with them when they leave. Representations of France where characters of various cultures or nationalities encounter one another can be considered a global stage in the sense that, like McDonald and Souleiman suggest, France becomes a site of transactions. The global and the local do not turn around a Western viewpoint, as I will argue in my third chapter concerned with a French man who leaves for Africa. In this case, Africa figures as the site of the global.

Another distinction regarding nomenclature must be made. Mudimbe-Boyi uses the word trans-national, with a hyphen, to describe how the French language "lives" outside of the confines of the French nation: "Francophone African literatures exceed the parameters of context and locality. Initially this takes place through a language that has its roots outside the local African setting–French–but that has been appropriated in order to become trans-border and trans-national, thereby allowing for an African presence" ("From Self-Writing" 24). Her use of the hyphenated term trans-national supports her view that African literatures in French anchor themselves in the local by use of a transnational device, the French language. Mudimbe-Boyi provides an interesting argument, but she does not give a definition of transnational or an explanation for why she hyphenates it.

Given the abounding debates on prefixes and what they mean as we see with the postcolonial and postmodern, I feel it necessary to go into depth on why the suppression of the hyphen is key to this present work. Mudimbe-Boyi seems to use the hyphen as many scholars have in the term "post-colonial" to denote a literal meaning in the chronological sense rather than as a way to signal the end to such dynamics (Donadey and Murdoch 4). The hyphenated trans-national uses the prefix to mean literal moving between two nations, or what Merriam Webster defines as "on or to the other side of, across, beyond" ("Trans-"). In other words, the literal meaning of movement is attached to the concept of nation, implying a literal or figurative crossing or spanning of multiple nations, with the meaning of nation itself unexplained. Trans-national can be applicable to the context of France and African nations, but can it work for territories that have distinct cultures but are not independent, like the Antillean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe? H. Adlai Murdoch takes out the hyphen and uses the word transnational in the Francophone Caribbean context to assess how Antillean migrants take “indigenous patterns of cultural *métissage* with them to the former colonial capitals, thus giving rise to a form of transnational affiliations” ("Negotiating" 131). Unfortunately, Murdoch does not define transnationalism, nor does he fully address the question of whether a term like transnational, englobing the word “nation,” can refer to the Dom-Toms given their status as French departments. Another definition Merriam Webster provides of the prefix, one at the core of this study, is "so as to change or transfer" (Trans-). A combination of both meanings encapsulates the underpinnings of the transnational. It means border crossing and movement, but also transformation and hybridization.[[7]](#footnote-6)

Rather than restrict the transnational to spaces considered nation-states, I rely on the concept of nation developed by Benedict Anderson in his seminal *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Birth and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). He conceives of the nation as “an imagined political community…The nation is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). With departmentalization occurring in 1946, people from the Antilles became legally French but continue to be seen as different by reason of language, culture, and race. Alec G. Hargreaves has argued, "Although migrants from the Dom-Toms are not formally classed as *immigrés*, that is nevertheless how they are seen by many members of the majority ethnic population. Their juridical status as French citizens is invisible to the man or woman in the street…and by the same token, a lesser degree of belonging or legitimacy within French society" ("Perceptions" 13). Insider by law, outsider by appearance and culture, the person from the Dom-Toms in France may not feel the horizontal understanding characteristic of a national citizen. Antillean literature from Césaire to Glissant to the Creolists has been exploring the power of its language and its unique geo-political and socio-cultural realities. Using Anderson’s sense of the term, but not neglecting the precarious status of the Dom-Toms, I propose a transnational experience in the Caribbean context as indicative of this trans-communal movement. This is not to ignore or gloss over the specificity of the situation in the Dom-Toms; rather, looking at the concept of the nation as an imagined community pushes us to both question the dynamics of belonging according to the French model of nation. The imagined community idea also encourages analyses of culturally distinct areas not recognized as independent nations, like the Dom-Toms.

The juxtaposition of "trans" and "nation" signals a productive paradox, one that points to transcendence and containment. In *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (2010), Peter Hitchcock provides an excellent explanation of how the nation in transnational takes into account the weight of the concept of the nation while also pointing to a traveling through or a transcending of the confines such a notion imposes:

It [the nation] parades its habitual out-of-timeness by raising flags in the face of transnationalism, regionalism, economic and political blocs, and continental integrity. But it does this in both senses of the phrase "raising flags"; it celebrates its longevity in the ritual of nationalistic display while also serving as a warning to all those who believe its fictive assemblage somehow negates the material substance of its collectivity. Rather than jettison the nation idea it is more useful to consider its ideologies and strategic interests on a case-by-case basis, particularly when specific nation formations have clearly stood for liberation from colonial subjugation. (Hitchcock 6)

Hitchcock compellingly points out how we can interpret representations of the nation along multiple lines in order to understand how characters may fight for inclusion in France without necessarily being for a figurative nation-less world. I explore how critiques of national identity can exist outside of attempts to undermine the very concept of a nation. In other words, when narratives explore double belonging and lay claim to both cultures, and authors proclaim themselves Franco-Senegalese or Franco-Congolese, are they not inserting themselves as members into the imagined community, thus reaffirming the very existence and idea of such a community?

My corpus of novels makes clear how literature teaches us about transnational belonging. I make the argument that the authors use literature to construct visions of the future where belonging can be forged in an imagined community despite being culturally different; they equally demonstrate that belonging in a culture and nation can be maintained despite being physically absent. In other words, while these authors speak out against real and imagined borders that exclude on the basis of bloodline, culture or citizenship, they do seek to preserve figurative borders that maintain cultural differences. A transnational identity represents negotiating openness to other cultures in a way that does not entail cultural dilution or assimilation.

Françoise Lionnet's and Dominic Thomas's extensive contributions to transnational theory in French and Francophone literary studies prove informative in understanding cultural hybridization. Before she began articulating her ideas of transnational approaches to literature, Lionnet developed a concept called *métissage* that served as a sort of pre-cursor to the transnational. *Métissage* in Lionnet's writings is located at the intersections of feminist, postcolonial and postmodern thought, and questions of identity and cultures take the forefront. "Understood as a dynamic model of relationality," *métissage* is a reading practice Lionnet formulates over the course of several articles and books to signal how the postcolonial subject is "quite adept at braiding all the traditions at its disposal, using the fragments that constitute it in order to participate fully in a dynamic process of transformation" (*Postcolonial Autobiographies* 4). In latter discussions of *métissage*, Lionnet underlines an image of the braid, a symbol of cohesion, but whose strands are uneven and in flux. She moves away from the idea of a neatly organized conglomeration to resist the idea of settled, fixed identities that colonial thought heralded. The various parts of self that *métissage* represent are more like the "interweavings of different fibers to create a heterogeneous social or cultural fabric leading to neither the organic fusion promoted by assimilationist ideologies nor the tragic doubleness of Manichean positions with their anxieties or phantasmatic otherings" ("Transnational, Postcolonial" 29).

Her insistence on the word "dynamic" and on the process of creation of identity draws in part on the postmodern theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who say in the beginning of *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie,* "Comme chacun de nous était plusieurs, ça faisait déjà beaucoup de monde" (9). Deleuze and Guattari's highly theoretical and abstract discussions on identity and the rhizome play a large role in this study's conclusions regarding the formulation of a transnational identity. Since “the easy, positive means of identity definition—based on ready-made categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nation—have become unsatisfactory” (Miller, *Nomads* 173) postmodern elaborations move away from static, predetermined categories. As opposed to a view of identity as rooted, contingent on where we are born or what we look like, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome places attention on "principes de connexion et d'hétérogénéité: n'importe quel point d'un rhizome peut être connecté avec n'importe quel autre, et doit l'être. C'est très différent de l'arbre ou de la racine qui fixent un point, un ordre" (13). In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard underlines movement, stating, "A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before" (15). The rhizome represents unrestrained expansiveness and fluidity.

This study draws on postcolonial theories to illuminate historical and present inequalities that render the rhizome unrealistic. I deploy the term postcolonial to refer to a “condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists, the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination” (Lionnet, *Postcolonial Autobiographies* 4). A postcolonial lens encourages an understanding of contemporary literary representations of colonial oppositions that inform identity construction and movement and block the path towards rhizomatic identity. Homi Bhabha’s treatises on mimicry provide a way to look at the ambivalence of colonial discourse and mimicry’s role in maintaining hierarchies. Bhabha shows that the civilizing mission’s forked discourse relied on a repression of difference that was impossible, which informs contemporary representations of characters trapped outside of categories of Frenchness. Mimetic practices also produce a difference that is unavoidable, which leads to a state of “almost the same, but not quite,” which he equates with “almost the same, but not white” (Bhabha 88). Postcolonial concerns connected to writing and questions of recovering, rewriting, or remembering memory and history play a large role in my analyses of the transnational.

Hitchcock discusses the benefits and usefulness of postcolonial concerns and offers a definition of transnational memory as space/time configurations that arise from the continuous process of decolonization (Hitchcock 43). He states:

In every space of postcoloniality, marked by nation or locale, movement or embeddedness, inscription or orality, culture refracts duration: not just that colonialism was endured, but that its figures of time did not absolutely displace or dismantle local forms of temporality. The transnational chronotope does not contend that time's arrow, a dubious chronologism of "post" as "after" in postcolonialism, confirms the end of colonialism, but rather accentuates the distillation of specific coordinates in its moment. (Hitchcock 5)

In other words, whereas postcolonial theory focuses on memory as being annihilated or in opposition to dominant memory (History), the transnational suggests analyzing representations of memory along multiple lines. When Hitchcock states that the colonial system "did not absolutely displace or dismantle local forms of temporality," he locates a certain space of resistance there where the colonial system is not the defining and totalizing center around which all representation revolves.

Postcolonial studies can be seen as crystallizing all sides involved in opposition, failing to encourage lateral and comparative frameworks outside of the colonial mediator. Whereas the postcolonial hinges on binaries, in Lionnet's view, "the transnational…can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center" (*Minor Transnationalism* 5). Hitchcock's definition of memory as a multiple-layered relationship between time and space breaks free from postcolonial binaries that focus solely on instances of domination and resistance. Furthermore, the site of dominant discourse is displaced at times. The oppressed and the oppressor can live in the same community, as we see in African narratives that discuss tyrannical leaders.

Postmodern intersections with the transnational also raise questions with their erasure of the importance of place and specificity. In *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Cinema* (1998), Christopher Miller calls attention to the problematic implications of rhizome theory in that it represents an extraction from any global historical or cultural contextualization. Miller demonstrates how an analysis of the footnotes in *Mille Plateaux* reveals the interdisciplinary references to be largely from Western works (182). If the rhizome refutes the idea of origins, it stands as a luxury, applicable to those whose roots have never faced systematic devaluation. For example, the Negritudist writers faced the necessary gesture of celebrating their roots in order to combat the colonial system’s view of Africans as uncultured. Deleuze and Guattari fail to take into account the function of the tree structure as a means of empowerment. Nomadic theory detaches itself from the confines of place and moves towards an erasure of barriers. In postmodern nomadic theory, "Nomadic movement whether physical or mental, is marked by displacement—movement from point to point in space without possessing any point of that trajectory…they have no definitive destination. For them there is no reterritorialization at the end of their trajectory" (Erickson 70). The postmodern suspicion of place as a marker of fixedness can prove helpful in our conceiving of identity, but it can also prove destructive for writers who explore the need for economic development in African countries, or in the case of the Antillean writer who seeks to re-define the historical violence signified by the topography of the land. Lionnet questions the applicability of "flexible or nomadic subjects" that "function as if they are free-floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces" (*Minor Transnationalism* 8). What about African and Caribbean narratives that showcase characters who seek out citizenship? How do we analyze anti-immigration discourses espoused by writers like Fatou Diome? My corpus does explore reterritorialization, both in the home and host lands from where characters have been estranged, exiled, or denied belonging. Transnational recognizes national and transnational relationships, and it is the emphasis on place that allows for multiple discourses to surface.

I use the term *multi-racination*, a combination of postmodern rhizomatic identity thought with postcolonial trajectories, to signal a transnational productive space that allows for fluidity and anchoring, and openness to global contexts without a disengagement from the local. *Multi-racination* draws heavily from ideas inspired by Édouard Glissant's writings, which provide ways of re-thinking the rhizome. Glissant spearheaded the Antillanité movement in the 1960s and articulated an identity at the junctures of Antillean social, cultural and historical realities. In his comprehensive study *Édouard Glissant* (1995), J. Michael Dash explains that in addition to Glissant's prominence as one of the most well known Caribbean writers

there is also evidence of his emerging status as a theorist whose concepts and terminology have gained widespread acceptance. The use of such terms as…*relation* is increasing as these notions have become the investigative tools of literary critics…Since one of the distinctive features of Glissant's work is the fusion of the imaginative and the theoretical, it comes as no surprise that his influence should transcend the narrowly literary. (1)

I follow Dash's argument that Glissant's writings can be seen as tools for conceptualizing movement and hybridization while also stressing the importance of place. Glissant's emphasis on place tackles "the difficulty of depicting the very nature of the colonized country, territory or island itself and the relationship its human inhabitants entertain with the natural world" (Arnold 2). While postmodern suspicions of place may deem ideas of anchoring essentializing or monolithic, "Glissant's evocation of landscape is never in terms of a static sense of belonging but rather in terms of movement and metamorphosis" (Dash 18). Glissant's development of the abstract notion of *Relation* is a way of describing the unexpected and infinitely changing chaos that ensues from cultural encounters, but with a distinction from nomadism, which he argues "dépasse l'effort des peuples dont le tourment est de s'enraciner" (339). Glissant posits that the rhizome is not a free-floating identity; "Le rhizome n'est pas nomade, il s'enracine, même dans l'air…mais de n'être pas une souche le predispose à 'accepter' l'inconcevable de l'autre" (340). *Relation* combines the two concepts of rootedness and hybridization, but these cultural encounters that are always occurring can never be contained. The use of "poétique" in *Poétique de la Relation* reinforces that "la théorie de la Relation ne saurait-elle se constituer en science, c'est-à-dire généraliser par statuts et définitions de rôles discriminés. Elle n'est pas sue; seulement connaissable" (430). In other words, *Relation* represents the unrepresentable; it embodies the abstract like a poetic metaphor. It is "impossible to name that totality, capture it, or descry, once and for all, its boundaries" (Prabhu and Quayson 227). Glissantian chaos resembles the idea of the transnational as a space of exchange where productive representations can unfold, because "it means the breakdown of systems of standardisation and uniformity" (Dash, *Edouard Glissant* 177). *Multi-racination* as a concept of multiple unfettered anchorings gives birth to discourses of resistance and empowerment. Glissant's writing focuses on the Caribbean, but he comes to talk about how all identities are necessarily heterogeneous: "Indeed, one could say that he sees the entire world in terms of a Caribbean or New World condition. The world, for Glissant, is increasingly made up of archipelagos of culture. The Caribbean has become exemplary in this creative global 'chaos' which proliferates everywhere" (Dash 23). Glissant's *Relation* relies on the idea that hybridity, "the impossibility of purity as both a theoretical category and especially as a cultural phenomenon" (Prabhu and Quayson 225), characterizes all identities and cultures. I locate textual instances, practices or values relating to Glissant's *Relation* by looking at characters who practice *multi-racination*, which prizes notions of place and openness, creating strategies of hybrid belonging, without denoting a finality to that representation of identity; to the contrary, *multi-déracination* points to static, monolithic and sterile representations. A transnational identity is what I deem literary representations of identity whereby the physical journey and global and local dynamics lead to the practice of this *multi-racination* or *multi-déracination.[[8]](#footnote-7)*

In order to locate transnational themes, representations of *multi-racination* and analyze what they say about identity construction, I suggest a reading approach that looks at dynamics on all sides, not just transnational questions but national questions, as well. Dominic Thomas has elaborated in his book *Black France: Immigration, Colonialism and Transnationalism* (2010) in which he argues that French and Francophone literary and cultural productions from colonial and post-colonial eras can be read in light of a bilateral approach in order to render a more complete image of the relationship between Africa and France. This bilateralism is a reaction to Thomas's book grew out of his observation of "the remarkable number of works set in both Africa and France characterized for the most part by the bi-directionality of the individual or collective experience, with multiple examples of transcolonialism and transnationalism, in which protagonists move between spaces, depart, descend, return, and leave again" (4). The reference to bi-directionality refers not only to the spatial coordinates of the journey but to the ways in which movement is inscribed into the text through certain literary devices and strategies. I call attention to the ways authors "decorate" the text in such a way that reflects moving identities and spatiality. Changing settings, polyvocalic narrators, suffocating styles, changing spatial anchors, and other elements provide fertile soil for examining the impact of migration from both sides of the ocean in terms of transnational themes.

In order to read this bidirectionality, Thomas develops an approach that:

can be put into practice in order to better understand the various ways in which all actors— the colonized and the colonizer, immigrants and receiving countries— are transformed by and in diasporic, multicultural, and transnational spaces through the constitutive dimension of cross-cultural encounters. The challenge comes from identifying and documenting the various ways in which diverse transnational cultural productions intersect and are reformulated within and across national boundaries. (*Black France* 3))

In the novels in my corpus, to write about life in France is to write about life elsewhere, and unearthing this double engagement bypasses postcolonial binaries and locates avenues where literature reflects "active participation in the production of local knowledges and global cultures" (Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism* 21). We can discuss ways in which characters outside of a representational field of victimhood reflect a participation in hegemonic forces or find empowerment from physical exile. For example, Fatou Diome's narrator firmly stands by her decision to emigrate from Senegal to France while also undertaking an anti-immigration stance that encourages the youth to participate in local development. By reading the impact of movement on both fronts, as Lionnet and Shih suggest, we draw attention to "participation in the co-authorship of the global order" (*Minor Transnationalism* 15).

By adopting Thomas's reading approach or lens based on looking at bilateral networks, I move away from scholarship that focuses purely on immigrant experiences. Lionnet has rightly noted that "very little has been said about the multidirectional travels by the other except in terms of immigration studies where the immigrants are granted subjecthood, albeit a problematic one, only when they enter the West" (*Minor Transnationalism* 13). A prominent scholar on African authors in France, Benetta Jules-Rosette argues in *Black Paris: The African Writer’s Landscape* (2000) that we can speak of the France-based circle of black writers during the 1980s in terms of a genre and identity discourse she calls Parisianism, with its adherents being “Afro-Parisians." Jules-Rosette indicates that one of the main themes of this Parisianism is the exploration of “barriers of nationality, race and class [that] are ever present. The authors continually question what it means to be Parisian, French and African through the adventures and existential struggles of their characters” (184). Her assessment of these rigid categories as affecting identity construction fits well with my corpus' questioning of belonging. Odile Casenave's *Afrique-sur-Seine* (2003) explores African writers of the 1990s who live in France and talk about immigration. She endeavors to separate her work from Jules-Rosette's, but both scholars focus on classifying a group of authors who are all African and who write from the perspective of being an immigrant. Do the generalizations that they make represent a generation, or do they apply more so to their solid but limited corpuses? These studies provide unilateral analyses and the insistence on Paris ignores the other areas of France where characters live. An author's choice of setting, whether in Paris or not in Paris, reveals something about the story s/he tells.

Both Jules-Rosette and Casenave, along with other immigrant studies books, interpret authors and characters as demonstrating a total disengagement and turning away from Africa. Jules-Rosette's Parisianism rejects the nostalgic views of Africa that characterize previous generations of African writers and “is not a literature of protest that exhorts readers collectively” (181). Casenave's group, “contrairement à leurs prédécesseurs…offrent un regard de nature and de portée différentes. C’est un regard non plus tourné nécessairement vers l’Afrique, mais plutôt sur soi” (8). Abdourahman Waberi remarks the same disengagement amongst his *enfants de la postcolonie,* a grouphe believes feels "débarassé de schémas idéologiques de leurs prédecesseurs dont la ferveur tiers-mondiste n'avait d'égale que la foi sans faille en une littérature d'engagement" (12). For Waberi, these new writers feel bitterness towards traditional imperatives of engagement and are "écoeurés par les errements politiques de leurs pays d'origine" (Waberi 12). Alain Mabanckou, whose book *Bleu Blanc Rouge* is explored in chapter four, seems to agree that writers of the new generation "have been held captive by these normative categories and value judgments for a very long time" (85). Despite the fact that Mabanckou attests to a desire for new authors to break free from expectations to be engaged, the reading approach I use to examine his book interprets a deep engagement with realities of emigration and immigration in France and in Congo within the narrative.  
I hope to show that a transnational reading approach that looks at textual bi-directionality, in the sense Thomas uses the word, reveals the books in my corpus demonstrate that the individual voice does not always signify a disengagement with the collective voice.

In all of the works, a personal story is told, but so is the story of those they have left back at "home" and those they are able to encounter, figuratively and literally. For example, Diome’s narrator in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* has not abandoned Africa in order to talk about her own life. To the contrary, she weaves together the stories of those she has left home in Africa with tales of her own lived experiences. In addition, Daniel Biyaoula’s narrator Joseph in *L’Impasse* decries certain practices of his Congolese compatriots in France and discusses the corrupted government officials in Africa. In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Gisèle Pineau's unnamed narrator charts a personal story of finding belonging on both shorelines that is interwoven into a collective story about the Antilles. They are not dehistoricized characters constructed in a vacuum but rather are loaded with lived experience and imaginings accumulated through the various spaces they traverse.

Much can be said about the lack of scholarship on Francophone Caribbean migration as opposed to African migration. Migritude,[[9]](#footnote-8) "enfants de la postcolonie," *Afrique-sur-Seine* and *Black Paris* all focus on the African continent uniquely, understandably so given the diversity of decolonization and post-colonial experiences. But in terms of dominant French discourses, Antillean and African both write about racism and ostracization in France. Despite the commonalities, there seems to be a lack of comparative analyses amongst contemporary Antillean and African narratives exploring migration to and from France. The need for deeply engaged scholarship truly invested in each space partly explains in part a preference, or rather a need, to consider the spaces differently. Undoubtedly, Africans and Antilleans have differing relationships to France. Pius Adesanmi explains that "for the African subject in Black Paris—as opposed to African Americans and Caribbeans in the same context—the inevitability of métissage as a resolution of the latent identity crisis comes at a greater risk: the African American and the Caribbean have an incipient, always present Westernness as part of their being that the African lacks" ("Redefining Paris" 964). If there is always a certain Westernness, or rather image of being "closer to French" than the African, yet they continue to be perceived as different in the Hexagon, what are the stakes at hand in talking about transnationalism in the Caribbean context?

As discussed, the transnational hinges on postcolonial and postmodern thought, but J. Michael Dash has written on postcolonial theory's neglect of the Francophone Caribbean in his article "Postcolonial Thought and the Francophone Caribbean." As we have seen, postcolonial theory questions and seeks out discourses of identity, memory and origins. Dash cogently points out that if postcolonial theory looks at subversion of binaries, the opposite of colonial in the Antillean context is complicated (233). An example of this is Michel LaRonde's analysis of the divisions between French and Francophone literatures as re-inscriptions of colonial hierarchizations (176). He urges a need to call all literatures written in French "Francophone," and to use the labels Arabo-French, Afro-French and Franco-French. His attempt to put forth a solution is admirable and insightful, but what about Francophone Caribbeans? He leaves them out, with us to assume that they are Afro-French or Franco-French, but does that not also place them in a lesser position?   
 I follow Françoise Lionnet's lead that we can use transnational theories to look at a range of different works where writers:

use the novel as a vehicle of diversity that simultaneously reflects and records in French the traditions and transformations occurring in many different localities…these authors appropriate the French language and produce palimpsestic narratives that reveal their transnational sensibilities and the eclectic models they bring to the practice of French. ("National Language" 1254)

I aim to explore the implications specific to Francophone Caribbean narratives and in a comparative vein, discern areas of convergence and divergence with French and African narratives on migration. By looking at transnational movement across a spectrum of different contexts, I hope to locate lateral networks that provide productive avenues of exploration in order to offset that "to be French is to relate vertically to an ideal image of the French nation, not to find common ground with other immigrants who have embarked on this process of 'becoming-French'" (*Minor Transnational* 2).

As the title of Lionnet and Shih's book suggests, in *Minor Transnationalism*, the emphasis is on minoritized discourses. What about French authors who take up the same issues as writers considered part of Francophone postcolonial studies, which focuses on "diaspora and hybridity, nationalism and transnationalism, gender and race, multilingualism, opposition and ambivalence, and the need to rewrite colonial history" (Donadey and Murdoch 1). I bring into my discussion J.M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain* to bring to surface symmetries and dissymmetries in experiences. Le Clézio's novel changes the parameters by locating France as "away," both textually through the narrator's literal journey to Africa, visually through the embedded photographs of Africa, and epistemologically[[10]](#footnote-9) as he re-writes French modes of representing the other. My goal is to juxtapose French and Francophone narratives while also taking into account particularities.

An analysis of the alignments and dis-alignments of narratives in French from diverse spaces reflects some of the goals of the 2007 *littérature-monde* movement, which has been seen by many as a neglecting of the reality of ever-continuing divisions between French literature and culture and the rest of the French-speaking world. The book *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde* (2010) edited by Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy provides much insight into the stakes involved in bringing together French and Francophone works. Without a solid definition, their take on the transnational is to imply a study of crossing two or more nations. They restrict the transnational to postcolonial thought and *littérature-monde*, both of which the editors consider to signify a "challenging of a perceived neo-colonial relationship between France and its former colonies via the institutions of *Francophonie*; the demand that French be recognized as a world language that has permanently escaped from metropolitan control; the celebration of rhizomatic hybridity and mobility over rooted national identities" (3). The movement's intention to bring together various parts and seek understanding in the differences, rather than force separation and deny any eventual equality amongst literary spaces of the Francophone world, is compelling. However, like the majority of the scholarship in *Transnational French Studies* ultimately demonstrates, we are forced to ask "whose world" is in *littérature-monde*. To group together all literature under a French aegis undermines the particularities of the various spaces and contradicts ongoing struggles for recognition. For that reason, the present work

**Chapter Synopses**Chapter One: "Critical Belonging Between Shorelines: The Power of the Chosen Transnational Identity in Fatou Diome’s *Le ventre de l’Atlantique"*

In a round table discussion published in *D’Encre et d’exil 8: L’Afrique...si près, si loin*, Fatou Diome emphatically states, “Si vous enlevez la Sénégalaise en moi, il n’y aura pas grand-chose pour écrire mes livres, mais si vous enlevez la Française, je suis désolée mais vous ne trouverez pas la même chose dans mes livres!” (31). Fatou Diome’s novel *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* (2003) is a tale woven with details from the author’s own life. Having moved to France to be with her French husband, divorcing several years later, Diome has spent much of her adult life living between Senegal and France. Stories of travel, alienation, rejection, and acceptance saturate the life of the narrator Salie who moves to France from Niodior, a small island off the coast of Senegal, to France. Echoing Diome’s declaration of her own transnational identity, when asked which country she would choose if she had to pick one, Salie responds, “Tu préfères qu’on te coupe la jambe gauche ou le bras droit?” (252). I argue that the narrator demonstrates *multi-racination* whereby she forges belonging in both France and Senegal and works toward the improvement of both spaces by holding a doubly critical gaze that allows for self-determination. Through her narrator, Fatou Diome presents a transnational identity that finds empowerment in exile. Diome illustrates that critical awareness proves necessary to leverage belonging on a global stage.

Chapter Two: "Growing Pains and Hybrid Memories in Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia"*

The tropes of memory and exile have long characterized the Caribbean literary landscape. Aimé Césaire’s groundbreaking *Le cahier d’un pays au retour natal* (1939), for example, brings to the forefront all of these terms; in physical and cultural exile in France, the poet wields his pen to reconnect himself to the voices of the collective group. Written almost sixty years later, *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996) by Gisèle Pineau showcases the themes of exile and memory in a transnational setting between France and the Antilles. Autobiographical details and fiction intermix and tell the collective story through the voice of the narrator who, like Pineau, was born in France. Her parents exhibit inculcated colonial values and refuse to pass on any Antillean heritage to the narrator. When her grandmother from Guadeloupe is brought to live with them in France, she transmits an Antillean worldview through oral narratives and symbolic gardens. I show how Pineau incorporates elements such as an epistolary exchange between the narrator and Man Ya, the usage of Creole, and textual representations of the oral play on traditional ideas of center and periphery and mobilize postcolonial questions of memory. Ultimately, the creating of memories combined with lived experiences traces a path for the narrator to gain the tools she needs to understand who she is as a French and Antillean. I argue that Pineau engages with Glissant's ideas of rooted rhizomes and *Relation* through the narrator's identity construction that demonstrates *multi-racination* as possible through creative negotiations of the past.

Chapter Three: "Writing Memory and Re-Writing Identity in *L’Africain* by J.M.G. Le Clézio"

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2008, Jean Marie Gustave Le Clézio’s *L’Africain* (2004) is a semi-autobiographical novel. A first-person tells of his transnational journey to Africa to meet his father for the first time. The narrator and his mother had been in France when World War II broke out. His father, a doctor for the British Army, had been working in Nigeria and was unable to cross into France until after the war. Father and son meet again through this momentous journey.

The narrator’s trek to become acquainted with his father parallels his entre into Africa, two events that collide and forever impact him: “C’est à l’Afrique que je veux revenir sans cesse, à ma memoire d’enfant” (101). Le Clézio shows how exploring his past and going back into time requires understanding the person his father was, since his father is the one he admits to calling *l'Africain*. The various photographs Le Clézio intersperses throughout the text supplement the textual images engendered by Le Clézio’s sensorial and poetic language. The black-and-white photos sharply contrast with the colorful images conjured by his words. These sharp contrasts between the visual and the textual underscore the nature of the literary project that is an attempt to use the presence of words on a page to offset an absent father and incomplete memories of childhood. More than the photos, the power of writing comes to the forefront. Le Clézio states in the introduction, “Il m’a fallu retourner en arrière, recommencer, essayer de comprendre. En souvenir de cela, j’ai écrit ce petit livre” (7), and he closes his book stating, “C’est en l’écrivant maintenant que je le comprends, maintenant” (103). Using French to textually represent a different worldview enables a reworking of French modes of representing the other, showing writing as a vehicle of personal and collective transformation.

Chapter Four: "The Tragic Transnational and the Struggle for Self-Determi(nation) in Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*"

Fatou Diome’s *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* tells a tale of embracing biculturalism, even if it involves the evocation of sorrowful memories. We encounter a different representation of transnationalism in Daniel Biyaoula’s *L’Impasse* (2000) and in Alain Mabanckou’s *Bleu Blanc Rouge* (1998). These two novels focus on protagonists who come from the Republic of Congo, a war-torn, politically and economically unstable country in Central Africa. The authors paint a rather morose image of African migration compared to Salie’s realities in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the main protagonist and narrator Massala-Massala winds up in jail for having sold stolen metro tickets. In *L’Impasse*, the narrator Joseph has a mental breakdown when he tries to assume an African identity that is based off of imitating European culture. Long stretches of social commentary on France, on Congolese culture, and on the individual experiences of the narrators fill the pages of both books.

The tragedy that the authors ultimately reveal is less about the ending than the journey to that point. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the narrator tells the story in a sort of flashback so that the setting shifts between Congo, where the mythical image of France floods the youths' minds, and France, where he winds up in jail awaiting deportation. In *L’Impasse,* the story begins with the narrator in France leaving to visit his family in Congo. After a tense trip, he returns to France and begins to have psychological breakdowns due to his feelings of anger at both Congolese and French people. Both novels address a practice known as *la sape*, a Congolese cultural "movement" or lifestyle that preaches an obsession with expensive clothing, skin-lightening practices and superficial transformations believed to externalize social status. I propose these narrators tragically fail to secure any self-empowering belonging in France because they lack meaningful connections to Congo that exist outside of neocolonial thought. I also draw from Mabanckou's book *Demain, j'aurai vingt ans…* published in 2004 to look at representations of the tumultuous 1970s in Congo, a time when tyrannical leaders in the post-decolonization years used Socialist discourses and engaged in neocolonial relationships, creating the basis for a complicated collective Congolese identity. I suggest that we can read *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse* along the lines of characters who experience *multi-déracination*, the opposite of a transnational space of nourishment, the kind of nothingness that results from mimetic practices and neocolonial mentalities.

**The Transnational: French, Francophone, or both?**

By outlining a transnational approach to reading rather than using an expression like "transnational novels" or "world novels," I hope to urge a questioning of traditional divisions of Francophone and French literary studies without effacing distinctions. If "Francophone studies is currently understood specifically to be the study of French-language literature, film, and culture from regions and countries outside mainland France," (Donadey and Murdoch 1) where do we place writers like Le Clézio? People born and raised in France like Gisèle Pineau have been included under the category of Francophone studies, but it begs the question of what are the criteria that separate French from Francophone. Is it where an author is born, or where they situate their narratives? Is it the content of their narratives? The transnational with its vertical and horizontal analyses of representations brings together French studies and Francophone studies, and permits us to ask questions about how the two concepts intertwine without calling for a complete erasure of such titles. I agree that we must consider how the "epithet 'Francophone' itself – in phrases such as 'littérature francophone' referring to all literature written in French except that produced in France itself–-suggests a neocolonial segregation and a hierarchization of cultures" (Forsdick and Murphy 3). This study challenges these hierarchical associations by looking at where the lines blur. I contend that Francophone as a distinction proves necessary, not only as resistance against globalizing and neocolonial forces, but also as celebration of the linguistic, cultural and geo-political particularities that come under the Francophone category. I agree with Lydie Moudileno who asks in her article "Francophonie: Trash or Recycle?":

Can we, then, afford to trash the particular *Francophonie* we have fought hard to impose?...Is *Francophonie* meant to be, as Sartre prophesied about Negritude, just the negative moment of a dialectical progression toward something more universal?...As a practitioner of *Francophonie* and someone who is very aware of the past, present and future battles in the fields…I, for one, do not think we can afford to trash it just yet. (123)

Moudileno convincingly argues that the real differences that exist between French and Francophone realities render the umbrella-term that is *littérature-monde* impractical. I argue we can use the transnational to bring together French and Francophone concerns, and question how boundaries are being re-negotiated by writers throughout the world today.

Chapter One: Critical Belonging Between Shorelines: The Power of the Chosen Transnational Identity in Fatou Diome’s Le ventre de l’Atlantique

**Introduction**

“Il court, tacle, dribble, frappe, tombe, se relève et court encore. Plus vite!” (11). Readers quickly become spectators of a European Championship soccer match with this lively description that opens Fatou Diome’s book Le ventre de l’Atlantique. On one hand, the evocation of sports at the beginning of the novel is a red herring given that, overall, Diome’s story on the experience of migration speaks little on soccer strategies. On the other hand, the image of opposing teams, each representing a national group that is often composed of people from other nations, seems apropos as an introduction to the narrative’s larger focus on national identity and migration in an era of globalization. The relationship between France and Africa and the migrant’s experiences in both spaces remain at the heart of Fatou Diome’s literary project. Originally from Senegal, she currently lives in France where she has pursued a career as a writer and worked towards a degree in French and Francophone literature at the Université de Strasbourg. In 2001, she published a collection of short stories, La préférence nationale, and went on to publish her first novel Le ventre de l’Atlantique in 2003. She has subsequently authored other short stories and novels that turn around the question of life in Senegal and France, and the relationship between the two spaces. She maintains a strong presence on the Internet, regularly participating in online interviews and has appeared numerous times on television, including as host of a literary program called Nuit Blanche that appeared on France3 in 2004 (Batumike 57).

Diome’s unique style has garnered praise from scholars like Xavier Garnier who aptly observes that “rien de ce qu’écrit Fatou Diome n’est vraiment nouveau dans le contexte de la littérature…tout avait été déjà dit et pourtant tout trouve ici une résonance nouvelle” ("L'exil" 30).As Garnier suggests, questions of identity and immigration are certainly not new. Mildred Mortimer explains in *Journeys through the French African Novel* (1990) that Senegal boasts a long history of writers who challenge traditional concepts of identity (55); she further insists that the travel motif can be found in African oral traditions dating well before colonialism (3). Diome inserts herself into this tradition and pays homage through intertextual references to seminal African works that discuss the journey topos, notably Cheikh Amadou Kane’s *L’Aventure Ambigüe* (1961). Kane’s work stands as an important literary treatise on the ambiguous nature of the colonial experience for Africans schooled in France. Kane’s protagonist Siambo Diallo, like Salie, the heroine of *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, struggles to understand and navigate the space created by competing ideologies after the return to Africa. While Diome dialogues with Kane in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* when the narrator claims she is living her own “aventure ambigüe” (66) and endeavors to enter into conversation with her predecessors who used literature to demonstrate the tenuous third space of the colonial subject, she frames the immigrant/emigrant question within a contemporary globalized context. For Samba Diallo, the experience of going to France and the resulting hybridity leads to rupture when he laments, “Il me semble encore qu’en venant ici, j’ai perdu un mode de connaissance privilégié” (162), but in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*, Salie ultimately gains from her transnational experiences. This chapter is concerned with how Diome reveals a narrator who wrestles with societal expectations from both sides of the ocean, but ultimately lays claim to both cultures, and finds empowerment in her freedom to choose.

Autobiographical details flood the book, a point that Fatou Diome has conceded, admitting in one interview, “Salie, c’est moi, il n’y a pas de mystère là-dessus” (Tervonen, "Partir"). Both author and narrator are from Niodior, Senegal and immigrate to Strasbourg where, after divorcing a French man, they decide to stay and develop their writing careers (Mbouguen). Both author and narrator also stand by the decision to live in France but refuse to enable younger family members to make the trip. Instead, they set aside money to give to their brother to start a business in Senegal, creating an opportunity for him to help develop the local economy.[[11]](#footnote-10) Despite all of these autobiographical elements, the author distances this work from the label of the autobiography—it is *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*: *un roman*. The tag *roman* reminds us that the book’s contents are fictional, diverting our attention from the author’s life to the stories that unfold within the narrative. This mixture signifies that the story will not be one individual’s tale, but rather a story that engages with personal and global contexts.

In *Postcolonialisme et autobiographie* (1998), Françoise Lionnet attributes a surge in autobiographies written by authors and literary critics since the 1990s to an urge to “faire de sa vie son texte de recherche, une étape discursive inévitable à l’ère du transnationalisme et des ‘cultural studies’” (“Questions” 9).[[12]](#footnote-11) With a growing corpus of authors situating their narratives across national and aesthetic boundaries, the turn to autobiographies, for Lionnet, functions to “atténuer un sentiment d’impuissance devant une réalité qui dépasse les catégories traditionnelles et les repères faciles de l’habitude” (“Questions” 9). Given postcolonial preoccupations with deconstructing and re-writing memory and identity, and postmodern explosions of literary norms, autobiographies provide a space of familiarity and security, where writers can safely examine themselves without pulling away from the rest of the world. Works like *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* challenge the applicability of Philippe Lejeune’s definition given in *Le pacte autobiographique* of a “récit rétrospectif en prose qu’une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu’elle met l’accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l’histoire de sa personnalité” (14). This severing of the individual from the collective no longer applies because although “la philosophie classique tente de séparer épistémologie et ontologie,” contemporary autobiographies manifest “les liens inextricables entre le personnel, le politique et le théorique" (Lionnet, “Questions” 7).

In accordance with Lionnet’s assertions, *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* is structured in such a way that the author-narrator’s exploration of self undeniably entails an exploration of her communities. The first-person narrator’s reflections direct the diegesis but are interspersed with moments when the narrator’s gaze transcends realistic bounds and becomes omniscient, so that others gain agency and tell their stories, too. In addition to the multiplicity of narrative voices, the setting, without signal, oscillates between the shores of Senegal and France. The setting and voice (or voices) provide a platform upon which the narrator manages to speak as both an immigrant in France and as an emigrant from Senegal. If the narrator talks of insularity and ways her fellow Senegalese hinder their own success, she equally addresses French criteria of belonging and the Hexagon’s refusal to acknowledge its multiculturalism. The result is a criticizing and a celebrating of the complexities of belonging and identity in a post-colonial world.

Without forcing the book into the genre of autobiography, we can use Lionnet’s assertion that “le texte du ‘je’ devient celui où identité personnelle, contexte culturel, recherche poétique, discours métaphorique ou analogique, prises de position idéologiques ou épistémologiques convergent, se croisent, et s’entremêlent” ("Questions" 10) to examine how Diome uses autobiographical elements and, re-shaping the genre, turns to fiction to produce meaningful polyvocality. We can speak of the author-narrator in terms of convergences and possible motives for incorporating a certain aspect of her own life. We can also look at ways in which the author distances herself from her narrator in a gesture of including an element otherwise not present (or, equally, in an attempt to conceal a detail). That is not to say that the author’s intentions are more important than the produced representations; the point is to question the function of these fictional elements and what they bring to the narrative that would otherwise be absent.

Like all of the works in my study, Diome’s book speaks on transnational identities in terms of individuals moving through national and cultural borders. *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* proves unique in that Diome presents through her narrator an embracing of a transnational model of identity built on self-determination and chosen belonging made possible through the type of critical reflection writing and literature provide. In defining her approach to belonging as critical, I aim to show that the narrator holds a doubly critical gaze that engages with notions of acceptance and identity and allows her to map out coordinates of belonging in both. With this critical reflection, the narrator’s stories engage with past and present realities of inequality throughout the world while also paving the way for the possibility for self-determination and self-representation. Not only does Diome problematize identity as naturally defined, arguing that belonging stems from a critical, self-aware gaze, but she also sets out to de-problematize questions of multiply-rooted perceptions of self.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine representations of belonging and non-belonging in Senegal and France in order to distinguish practices and values the narrator rejects and those she embraces. Balancing out her empowered, critical narrator, Diome actively engages with the realities of emigration, as we will see in the second part. Adopting what Ayo Coly names an “anti-immigration” (99) stance, the author underlines internal and external forces that drive emigration. Ultimately, the author-narrator makes the case against leaving for reasons deriving from a disillusioned belief that France represents the land of success. Textual images of books and the blank page are explored in the last part of this chapter to examine how images of reading and writing flood the text and prove central to the construction of a transnational identity.

**Hanging onto the Shorelines: Exclusion and Inclusion**In *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*, textual representations of the local and global reinforce the narrator as a figure who traverses and transgresses boundaries. The narrator tells of her own birth story as unfolding at a moment of national and international resistance and insurrection, when “les barricades avaient transformé Paris et déferlaient maintenant dans les rues de Dakar, la jeunesse hurlait sa révolte, John Lennon n’avait pas encore imaginé un autre monde” (74). Imagery of global unrest and momentous, subversive events juxtapose a similar transmutation of the local landscape. While her mother goes into labor, images surface of a storm or whirlwind hitting the shores of Niodior as the mer/mère puts forth the contents of its/her stomach: “Un ciel borgne dardait l’Atlantique de son œil rouge et lui intimait de livrer au monde le mystère niché dans son ventre. Les premières ombres nocturnes épaississaient la chevelure des cocotiers et longeaient les palissades” (73). The local and global unrest introduces a key juxtaposition between the maternal figure and the ocean. Much like the ocean conjures up an image of never-ending, expansive connections, it can also represent the memory of disjuncture and disconnection, from historical deracinations during the slave trade to contemporary flows of people seeking a better life in Europe. Therefore, the haunted imagery of the ocean aligned with the narrator’s mother points to the underlying instability and conflict of their relationship. The powerful passages detailing the narrator’s birth as a sort of destabilization of the status quo underscore that her story of life in France begins with her perception of her place in Senegal. If her entry into the world brings chaos, readers learn that it is because Salie is an illegitimate child, born to an unwed mother and unknown father, which threatens her belonging in a place where “l’arbre à palabres est un parlement, l’arbre généalogique une carte d’identité” (79). As she sees it, bloodline guarantees acceptance in this space. The father figure remains textually absent for much of the book, but his presence lingers in the way that his last name emblazons Salie as an outsider. This moniker of heritage that the last name embodies serves as a scar that reminds all of her broken place in the family tree:

Insulaires géographiques, certains l’étaient aussi dans leur tête et reprochaient à ma mère d’avoir importé ce nom étranger dans le village: aucun des ancêtres fondateurs ne s’appelait ainsi. Les plus modérés se consolaient en déclarant dans un rire sarcastique: ‘Heureusement pour nous, c’est une fille, elle ne risque pas de propager son nom chez nous’. (78)

Inclusionary language such as “chez nous” reveals how her presence threatens the mental barriers believed to protect the village’s lineage and honor. In their eyes, she represents the incarnation of her mother’s sin that perpetually tarnishes her family. When a man agrees to take Salie’s mother as his second wife, he refuses to accept the child of this foreign last name into the family, designating her “la fille du diable” (75). A foreign name thus delegitimizes Salie’s place within this space, labeling her outsider in the only place she knows. Ironically this ostracism from the group conflicts with the communal nature of Senegalese culture that promulgates primacy of the group,[[13]](#footnote-12) since “l’individu n’est qu’un maillon de la chaîne tentaculaire du clan” (127). The narrator faces a particularly difficult situation since others see her as an outsider, but she is still expected to perceive of herself in relation to the group. In other words, Diome makes statements on the nature of communal models of identity that are based on exclusionary tactics.

In addition to her last name, Salie’s interest in intellectual pursuits leads to isolation, and she is cast as “un garçon manqué” (169) who stands apart from other young girls in her village. In choosing studies, she refuses to limit her identity to the traditional model of wife and mother that her peers seek to adopt. While she admires the first Senegalese female reporter Sokhna Dieng, “une femme qui avait droit à la parole” (186), other girls her age look to define their futures in accordance with established gender roles. One peer confidently states, “Mon père m’a dit qu’en faisant maman on peut gagner le paradis…Quand je serai grande, je ferai seulement maman, comme ma maman, et j’obéirai à mon mari pour aller au paradis” (187). This peer regurgitates the dominant discourse voiced by her father that ignores the idea of a woman having an identity outside of the mother and wife role. The peer’s assertions also work to implicate her mother as a model of appropriate behavior, thus underscoring how women, too, participate in the maintenance of gender roles. Indeed, Salie later testifies to other women, not men, seeing her divorce as indubitably a failure of her spousal duties. One woman declares that “si un homme quitte sa femme, c’est qu’elle n’a pas su être une bonne épouse” (60). The women of Niodior attribute the narrator’s divorce to a failure on her part and overlook any responsibility on the part of her husband. These threads of female discourse weave an image that Salie works against, to the point that “the multiple images of gender oppression in the novel define the place that Salie refuses to occupy” (Coly 112). Diome avoids a picture of total oppression by highlighting women’s participation, but she does show how opposition to traditional roles threatens one’s belonging to the community of women. Without disdain, Salie recognizes the gap between herself and her fellow females that the difference in their ambitions creates. Those “menhirs sur le socle de la tradition…Elles suivaient leur ligne, je cherchais la mienne vers une autre direction; nous n’avions rien à nous dire” (61). Through the narrator’s discussion of the difficulties of life in Senegal as an educated woman, Diome respectfully brings to the surface the tension in patriarchal discourses adopted by men and women that define and limit appropriate female trajectories.

Diome extends her critique of exclusionary patterns in Senegal from the personal to the collective by illustrating other characters who struggle to find acceptance. The figure of Salie’s schoolteacher, Mr. Ndétare, evokes an image of the African intellectual who experiences conflict on multiple fronts. Elite because of their French schooling, intellectuals posed a threat to leaders in the years after decolonization and often were exiled or censured (Thomas, *Black France* 23). In the case of Mr. Ndétare, we learn that he has been exiled to Salie’s community in Niodior because of his strong Socialist convictions and involvement in syndicalism.[[14]](#footnote-13) Like in the case of Salie, his last name serves as evidence that he is not originally from the community, which leads to an overall suspicion placed on him by the villagers who fear “ses manières, son air citadin, sa mise européenne, son français académique, et sa foi absolue en Karl Marx” (65). If Salie encounters exclusion because of her illegitimacy and intellect, Ndétare confronts it due to the associations of oppressive power his image engenders within the collective imaginary. Despite earnest attempts to insert himself into the small society—”il se rendait à toutes les cérémonies coutumières, saisissait toute occasion susceptible de l’entraîner dans le tourbillon de la vie villageoise” (79)—he never manages to shed his title of outsider that European clothing and perfect French concretize. Interestingly, even though the government has exiled him, the villagers perceive of him in terms of authority and equate his Frenchness with superiority; they watch what they say around him since “on ne sait jamais ce qu’ils peuvent aller raconter en haut lieu” (69). In this respect, the community’s preconceived ideas actually reflect a view of France and the Senegalese postcolonial government as in a position of authority. Exclusionary constructs thus reflect a devalued idea of the excluded and the excluder. Ndétare’s double exile, imposed by the government and by others in Niodior, penetrates his being: “Prisonnier, Ndétare l’était doublement: de cette île, qu’il lui était interdit de quitter, mais aussi de sa mémoire qui ne lui avait jamais donné le droit de vivre autre chose que sa mélancolie, depuis si longtemps” (126).

Through Salie’s and Ndétare’s struggles, the author makes clear that “l’exclusion n’est pas une denrée rare européenne, la bêtise est une des choses les mieux partagées dans le monde. Les Africains sont tout à fait capables de cette même tare” (Tervonen, "Partir"). Just as Diome brings to light practices and mentalities that cause ostracization, she equally sets out to anchor her narrator in Senegal and present ways in which she indubitably feels connected to her family, land and culture. This grounding takes place on a textual level through evocations of the narrator’s grandmother, whom she affectionately designates “le fil qui me relie à la vie” (76), recalling an image of an umbilical cord, to signify how her grandmother creates a place for her within her family and culture.[[15]](#footnote-14) Like Salie who disrupts the status quo, her grandmother departs from the norm and betrays tradition twice. Not only does she refuse to reject and abandon Salie as a baby to save the family’s honor, but she also insists that Salie keep her biological father’s last name. This gesture figures as a refusal to ascribe Salie a dishonorable and illegitimate status. Her grandmother’s story of her birth places her into the matrilineal line and forges a space for her within the land: “Mes racines poussaient sur la crasse du monde, à mon insu: diluant le sang de ma mère et le ruisseau de mon bain, l’eau de pluie s’infiltrait dans le sol jusqu’au niveau où l’Atlantique se mue en source vivifiante” (73). Evocations of blood mixing together with the natural landscape symbolize her belonging to this space and validate her position as another link in the familial chain. On another level, the association between grandmother and lineage also serves to underscore the narrator’s connection to her cultural heritage. Senghor’s ethnographic accounts in *Liberté 1: Négritude et Humanisme* (1964) stress the role of women as transmitters of tradition: “La femme, parce que ‘permanente’ de la famille et donneuse de vie, a été promue en source de force vitale et gardienne de la maison, c’est-à-dire dépositaire du passé et garante de l’avenir” (269). Senghor thus underlines how African traditions empower women as creators of stories and histories. The grandmother figure in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* thus works to symbolically anchor the narrator within her family and the country’s past and future.

Similarly, the author makes attempts to anchor her narrative and critical discourse within a Senegalese literary tradition by way of intertextual references to seminal African thinkers. Senghor, along with Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas, founded the Negritude movement that used literature to fight the colonial system’s repudiation of African cultures and civilizations. Senghor, in particular, set out to delineate an African humanism through theoretical writings that recuperated terms like rhythm, which takes on special significance for Senghor: “Cette force ordinatrice qui fait le style nègre est le rythme. C’est la chose la plus sensible et la moins matérielle. C’est l’élément vital par excellence. Il est la condition première et le signe de l’art, comme la respiration de la vie” (35). Diome dialogs with Senghor in Le ventre de l’Atlantique, notably through the narrator’s discussion of dance:

On peut remplacer nos pagnes par des pantalons, trafiquer nos dialectes, voler nos masques, défriser nos cheveux ou décolorer notre peau, mais aucun savoir-faire technique ou chimique ne saura jamais extirper de notre âme la veine rythmique qui bondit dès la première résonance du djembé…Elle est sensation, expression de bien-être, réveil à soi-même. (195)

The act of dance stirs up emotions like a sensorial reflex that takes place on a quasi-subconscious level, echoing Senghor’s idea of an *âme nègre*. Evoking the drum, a traditional African image of the collective group, she incorporates and echoes literary representations utilized by earlier writers. The clear reference to Senghor’s literary imagery thus counteracts a view of Salie as turning away from her Senegalese heritage, and of the narrative in general as severed from previous African literatures. Self-understanding or “réveil à soi-même” remains inextricably connected to the community and offsets the narrator’s feelings of non-belonging due to her illegitimate status and chosen path in life. At the same time, on a larger level, Diome provides a different view of contemporary writers, not as refusing or rejecting earlier formulations of blackness in the name of a counter-essentialist discourse, but as a continuation and reformulation of their prescriptions for an identity based first and foremost on revaluations.

Diome’s approach to criticizing belonging in Senegal while also asserting on a textual and metatextual level a connection to Senegal allows her to avoid one-dimensional analyses. While Salie abandons certain values and traditions, she praises others, thereby engaging in a horizontal analysis that gives rise to positive and negative representations. In this respect, Diome’s technique makes her stand out from other contemporary African authors who address the question of African migration to France, notably Calixthe Beyala, who has enjoyed much success in the Hexagon. Beyala has taken home numerous awards including le grand prix du roman de l’Académie française for her novel *Les honneurs perdus* (1996). Novels like *Comment cuisiner son mari à l’Africaine* (2000) epitomize Beyala’s knack for using a story about a female African migrant in France to focus on negative, stereotypical portrayals. At few points in the book (as in most of her works) does Beyala delve deeper and explore complex configurations of belonging and identity. Rather, her narratives reinforce French disillusions of African society as dehumanized, like the representation of African men as hyper-sexualized suggested by Monsieur Bolobolo, a character void of psychology. Ayo Coly argues that with Diome, however, “there is a conscious effort and determination by the author to balance out her Beyala-like representations of a sexist and materialistic Senegalese society” (107). Whereas Beyala paints in broad strokes, making her work more marketable to French readers who find their preconceived notions reinforced, Diome carefully examines the nuances of belonging and identity.

The author’s critical, nuanced approach equally brings to the forefront representations of exclusion and inclusion in France. At a round-table discussion published in *D’Encre et d’exil 8: L’Afrique...si près, si loin* (2009), Diome recounts an episode in France when, upon telling a man she is from Strasbourg, he responds, “Oui, mais avant?” (32). What she seeks to underline with this anecdote is that he assumes without hesitation that she is not French. He never doubts a different answer. Franz Fanon’s capital work *Peau noire, masques blancs*,written in 1952, poignantly zeroes in on the external nature of race whereby black skin functions as an unavoidable signifier of otherness. Echoing postcolonial preoccupations with racial categories of identity, Fanon points to the colonial subject’s inability to self-represent, since “aucune chance ne m’est permise. Je suis sur-détérminé de l’extérieur” (93). Some seventy years later, the same lack of self-representation pervades *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*. Diome heavily draws on experiences from her own life as an immigrant in France to detail the struggle to overcome categories of French national identity. A theme at the core of her literary project, the author calls attention to those ways in which colonial values live on in French society’s understanding of what it means to belong in the Hexagon. If the narrator is branded outsider in Senegal because of her last name, she is one in France because of her skin color.

This questioning of Frenchness takes place in the book through two main types of representations: those unfolding in the personal realm through depictions of characters’ everyday interactions with French people, and those taking place on a national level through imagery of the French nation. In terms of the narrator’s personal life, Salie’s discussion on her French ex-husband speaks volumes on how race plays a defining role in others’ perceptions of her. When Salie moves to Strasbourg to live with him, her dream of a blissful life crashes down after her husband succumbs to his family’s pressure and leaves her.[[16]](#footnote-15) Despite the impact of such an incident, only one paragraph contains the details: “J’avais débarqué en France dans les bagages de mon mari, tout comme j’aurais pu atterrir avec lui dans la toundra sibérienne. Mais une fois chez lui, ma peau ombragea l’idylle—les siens ne voulant que Blanche Neige—, les noces furent éphémères et la galère tenace” (43). The absence of a detailed explanation mirrors Salie’s perceived lack of power in the situation. She portrays herself as dehumanized, claiming to be part of her ex’s luggage. Expressing no self, she exists as an object defined by her skin. Salie’s black skin marks her as foreign in this place she deems “chez lui,” marking this territory as his, not hers. Her husband and family thus re-activate colonial discourse that conflates French national identity with race.

Diome also embeds a racial component into representations of French national identity through illustrations of the nation in terms of the State and the general politico-economic system. When Salie politely declines a customs officer's request to translate for an African couple on the basis that she does not speak their language, the agent retorts, “Mais enfin, c’est incroyable, et vous vous parlez comment chez vous, avec les pieds peut-être?” (205). The usage of the expression “chez vous” reflects a perception of their skin color as indicative of their nationality, or lack thereof, since this discourse also lumps together Salie and other Africans within one overarching category of otherness based on race, projecting colonial thought’s effacement of cultural specificity.

The detailed focus on the customs officers as representatives of the nation shows contemporary structures reenacting history by delegitimizing African cultures and civilizations and their inclusion in the Hexagon. Ayo Coly discusses colonial representations in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* and the inscription of the immigrant as “a corporeal threat to the French national body” (Coly 116). Diome’s characters undergo procedures that recall dehumanizing practices enforced upon slaves; the narrator talks of the State’s required rigorous medical exam that inspects for “disease and dirt” (Coly 116). The foreign body is thus a tarnished entity whose presence serves as a threat to a healthy society and a strong French nation. When the narrator cynically comments, “Remarquez, à l’époque où l’on vendait pêle-mêle le nègre, l’ébène et les épices, personne n’achetait d’esclave malade” (215), Diome nudges the reader on an extradiegetic level to reflect on this persistent delegitimization that unfolds on a national level. The process of verifying passports in the airport takes up similar terminology when “les voyageurs formèrent deux rangées devant les guichets de contrôle. D’un coup d’œil, je repérai celle qui avançait le plus vite et suivis le mouvement, avant de remarquer une inscription: Passeports européens. ‘Ah, zut! j’y étais presque! Je croyais que l’apartheid avait disparu’” (202). If the airport stands as a symbol of the liminal space between nations, the institutionalized division between citizens and non-citizens reinforces the relationship between nationality and race.

Despite racism and xenophobia that she encounters, Diome’s narrator manages to forge belonging and ultimately feel part of the French imagined community. Salie transcends negativity, social exile and melancholy by strategically drawing from her multiple affiliations. For example, she dances sadness away by listening to Yandé Codou Sène, Youssou Ndour, Piaf, Brel, Brassens, and Gainesbourg (37). This mix of famous French and Senegalese performers attests to the fact that certain French cultural products and practices become indispensable parts of her identity. When in France and experiencing melancholy, she does not automatically seek to quell the absences exile creates by looking to another place. Rather, she listens to Senegalese and French singers to feel “at home,” attesting to her use of survival strategies that come from both sides of the ocean.

Even more so than music, books in French have an impact on the narrator from a young age. The author’s own adoration of French literature shines through the bibliophilic narrator whose thirst for reading blossoms even before leaving for the Hexagon. The young student takes refuge in new forms of knowledge introduced by her exiled schoolteacher, Mr. Ndétare. As another outsider in the community, he exposes Salie to French literature, philosophy, art, and the French language, all of which become part of her intellectual repertoire and figure as gifts in her life: “Je lui dois Descartes, je lui dois Montesquieu, je lui dois Victor Hugo, je lui dois Molière, je lui dois Balzac, je lui dois Marx, je lui dois Dostoïevski, je lui dois Hemingway, je lui dois Léopold Sédar Senghor…il m’a tout donné: la lettre, le chiffre, la clé du monde” (66). Indicated by the use of the verb “devoir” that denotes indebtedness and gratitude, her exposure to diverse currents of thought plays a key part in her understanding of self and the world. In Senegal, this knowledge gives her a symbolic key to escape the closed community and access a space of refuge. The chosen array of writers from Balzac to Senghor unites canonical thinkers from various literary traditions and geographical spaces. Thus while the narrator feels disjointed at times, she nonetheless views herself as part of French society and the French and international literary worlds as indispensable to her identity. On a larger level, Diome establishes a horizontal view of French and Francophone literatures that deconstructs literary hierarchies and creates a space for her book within those traditions.

**(Un)telling the Story of France**

While postcolonial literature on African migration has taken up the issue of globalization’s impact on individuals and communities, Avtar Brah has suggested that the question of who leaves needs to be re-framed to also ask who has the luxury of staying home (7). Diome takes up in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* the question of using literature to name historical and socio-economic forces that contribute to the precarious situation of migrants and the continued maintenance of relationships of inequality. The author engages with her country’s realities by articulating what Ayo Coly calls an “anti-immigration discourse” that reveals and dismantles “neocolonial processes and effects of globalization, of which postcolonial African migration is a manifestation” (100). Diome takes the position that “postcolonial African migration obeys the asymmetrical flows of global capital” (Coly 101) that reinforce France as center of the Francophone world to the detriment of African countries’ economies.

Dominic Thomas uses the word “transcolonial” and “transhistorical” to describe Diome’s imagery in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* to urge a view of representations of life in Senegal as informed by the colonial past. Diome’s transhistorical references

are not arbitrary, but rather serve to underscore the fact that while French-African relations may have changed from colonial relations to postcolonial ones, African interests are not well served. Central to this phenomenon are more complex circumstances pertaining to the desperation and disillusionment of African youth, who are able to express their disillusionment with the local economy by engaging in transnational migration as part of an externalization process that involves identification with the perceived potentialities and possibilities of enhanced economic mobility. (*Black France* 292)

Thomas zooms in on the parallel between slaves’ forced departures and postcolonial realities that drive who stays and who leaves. Diome speaks on how a lack of opportunities and the overarching economic system propel migrants to leave, which benefits the West to the loss of newer nations. When discussing globalization’s impact on her community, the narrator takes on a tone of an activist who pens a manifesto and decries her country’s “dévaluation! Démolition de notre monnaie, de notre avenir, de notre vie tout court! Sur la balance de la mondialisation, une tête d’enfant du tiers-monde pèse moins lourd qu’un hamburger” (185). Here, the global economy builds strength by reducing newer nations to consumable objects, implicating economic factors in the overall *colonisation mentale* of her community. From angered activist to lyrical poet, she also expresses how national identity and other categories control access to opportunities by way of extradiegetic odes to these migrants, lamenting:

Relevé d’identité bancaire  
Adresse et origines

Critères de l’apartheid moderne

L’Afrique, mère rhizocarpée, nous donne le sein

L’Occident nourrit nos envies

Génération africaine de la mondialisation

Attirée, puis filtrée, parquée, rejetée, désolée

Nous sommes les Malgré-nous du voyage. (217).

In this passage, Diome characterizes the young generation as facing imposed movement, the only option for survival. They are “accrochés aux gencives de la terre, les humbles ne redoutent plus les tempêtes de la terre, ils savent que l’Atlantique ne les engloutit que par pitié” (186). Again, water imagery surfaces as an image of translatlantic movement; in this case, unyielding and overpowering, the “filet de l’émigration” (115) ensnares by being the only viable path to take.

While she outlines in the book external factors that sustain the myth of France, she also implicates the African public and calls for an awareness of the ways in which Africans participate and continue the “syndrome post-colonial” (221) or “colonisation mentale” (53). Evocations of sickness flood her discussions of those who, like her younger brother, turn to dreams of elsewhere to supplant their moribund reality: “Pourquoi je vous raconte tout ça? Eh bien, parce que tous les virus ne mènent pas à l’hôpital. Il y en a qui se contentent d’agir en nous comme dans un programme informatique, et le bug mental, ça existe” (12). Madické, the younger brother of Salie, represents the prototype of the disillusioned youth who think only of leaving for France one day. Through the narrator’s interactions with him, readers are able to see the world from the eyes of one of these young Senegalese. Pseudonyms come to play a huge role in the imagining of identity. Madické becomes Fabio Maldini, an Italian soccer player. Malické/Maldini follows his double’s every move during televised matches so as to act, talk and play like him. His assumed identity creates a space of imagined exile and he re-locates himself to the European soccer field without ever leaving Niodior.

Malické imagines himself Italian, but most of the others “become” French through their adopted persona. They envision France in positive terms and thus qualify their home in Senegal in terms of absence, re-enacting colonial discourse that posited the two spaces as binary and opposing. They seek to “partir; loin; survoler la terre noire pour atterrir sur cette terre blanche qui brille de mille feux” (165). The terminology associated with their dream destination, unnamed because synonymous with “blanche,” “brille” and “feux,” oozes colonial imagery of France as a beacon of light. The youth position their projected identities in those spaces historically characterized by power and status and thus fail to find any means of self-representation.

When the author speaks on the youths' perceptions of themselves and the world, she emphasizes their lack of ownership and ability to grasp reality. Their imagined identities prove as fictitious as the France they have constructed. Historically imposed as a sign of cultural superiority, the French language recalls notions of authority and power; for Malické, “Cette langue, il l’a souvent entendue et même vue. Oui, il l’a vue, chez lui, cette langue porte des pantalons, des costumes, des cravates, des chaussures fermées; ou alors des jupes, des tailleurs, des lunettes et de hauts talons. Oui il reconnait cette langue[...] mais il ne la comprend pas et ça l’irrite” (21). Speaking French and thus being French is juxtaposed with Western clothing, but not all clothing; specific and professional items of the workplace, like those of the administration, become signs themselves pointing to a construct of France. Diome consequently reveals the extent to which the youth remain enamored with Frenchness, yet they do not see themselves as part of that group. After all, the majority of the village does not speak French, evidenced by the fact that the girl who works at the *télécentre* and who has a rudimentary level of French must translate the news, commercials, and sporting matches, all in French, that the one TV in the community transmits.

Therefore, speaking French is seen as ideal while being a privilege outside of the majority’s reach. The revered place of the TV, loved by most of Salie’s village, reflects blind adoration of information and images that reflect another reality. Members of the community anthropomorphize the TV, explaining intermittent shortages in terms that make sense to them: “Je crois qu’elle est morte, il n’y a rien à faire, elle n’a jamais aimé la saison des pluies” (28). They rationalize what they fail to understand with their own system of thought in order to overcome the gap between the world the TV transmits and their own. Xavier Garnier speaks on African writers who use literature to reveal the impact of technological devices like the TV and “la façon dont la technologie fait désormais corps avec la vie des gens” ("Derrière le vitrine" 43). In the book, the television contributes to the mythification of France through mediated images from Europe and America that advertise As sproducts that remain luxuries in countries like Senegal, such as ice cream and Coca Cola. These images contribute to a commercialized view of France and a perception of Senegal in terms of absences. Mediums of cultural transmission like the TV establish a space where the young villagers like Madické become enamored by the spectacles they see; the youth “se concentre et s’imagine là-bas” (21). Since France represents “là-bas,” imagining exile circumvents the stagnation of the unnamed “ici,” Senegal. The television thus reinforces the privileging of “là-bas” as opposed to “ici” that serves as basis of the postcolonial bug per Diome. In this respect, the author draws a distinct parallel between the example of the television, adored yet ineffective, and the idealized view of life in France built on disillusion.

Albeit shared by all, the TV fittingly belongs to L’Homme de Barbès, whose false stories of life in France make him the object of the narrator’s scrutiny. He represents the *émigré réussi* who lives out the dream of going to France to work, saving enough money to occasionally return, and regularly sending back enough for his family in Senegal. Dominic Thomas touches on the way in which emigrants return to cash in on the status afforded by their “cultural capital,” affirmed by material goods (Thomas, *Black France* 56). L’Homme de Barbès buys his social status and solidifies it through the accumulation of signifiers that point to his “success” abroad, such as a fake Rolex, a refrigerator, a freezer, and leather furniture. The return for the emigrant is of vital importance because “one could argue that the *avenir* (the promise of enhanced social status in the future) lies in the *revenir* (the anticipated constitutive return that is both a physical journey and, of course, a symbol of economic advancement)” (Thomas, *Black France* 250). If the youth like Madické dream of elsewhere, the experience of actually emigrating imposes itself as the utmost sign of status. Eric de Rosny states in his analysis of young Senegalese emigrants that “peu de jeunes, me semble-t-il, partent avec l’idée de s’expatrier pour de bon. Ce désir de retour explique pourquoi les familles ne font rien pour décourager les départs. Au contraire, un séjour à l’étranger est considéré comme la promesse d’un gain pour le groupe” (7). The importance of bestowing honor on one’s family clearly stems from traditional African values that prize a group or communal identity. Diome shows, however, a perversion of tradition and a use of it for self-serving purposes at the hands of those who can effectively buy their status. L’Homme de Barbès projects himself as a French resident to young Senegalese, but he also voices unwavering loyalty to his culture when it benefits him, like with the practice of polygamy. In other words, he chooses to project himself as French or Senegalese depending on which label results in an elevated social status. When his family insists that he marry a girl from the village (rather than a white woman), he worries that their lifestyles will clash, since “il savait que cette fille n’accepterait pas tout de suite une fellation ou un cunnilingus, mais qu’à cela ne tienne, elle était de bonne famille et dressée pour être une épouse soumise. Il finirait par la modeler à sa guise. Pour le moment, il tenait simplement à prouver qu’il était resté un fils respectueux de la tradition” (32). A muddle of values, Barbès only truly belongs there where he stands to benefit the most.

Barbès taps into the tradition of storytelling to provide narratives of France that Diome and her narrator continually undermine. He manipulates *l’arbre à palabres*, a space where a collective imaginary is molded by discussions on life.[[17]](#footnote-16) Surrounded by avid listeners, L’Homme de Barbès misuses the space of authority at every opportunity to tell a story of riches and luxury, one built on lies and exaggeration that feed his hungry listeners details of a utopian France void of suffering: “Et tout le monde vit bien. Il n’y a pas de pauvres, car même ceux qui n’ont pas de travail l’Etat paie un salaire…Tu passes la journée à bailler devant ta télé et on te file le revenu maximum d’un ingénieur de chez nous!” (87). Through his talks, he charts out Paris and creates an imagined map of the city through references to popular monuments, from the Arc de Triomphe to the Eiffel Tower, all monuments that memorialize French imperial victories (Thomas, *Black France* 251). As Thomas argues, the book’s depiction of a gap between the lived reality of L’Homme de Barbès and the narrative he passes on casts him “paradoxically as an instrument of continued oppression: his master narrative both relegates him to a position of perpetual subjugation and triggers successive migrations that perpetuate a myth” (250).

The name “L’Homme de Barbès” alone proves ironic and points to the duplicity of the character in that it hints at the multi-cultural Parisian neighborhood that remains in the French imaginary a site of immigrant clichés (Thomas, *Black France* 193). Barbès’ name thus embodies the rift between myth and reality that he transmits. The narrator usurps his power of self-representation and reveals that Barbès in fact earned his money begging and working several short-lived odd jobs, eventually becoming a security guard. In this last position, we are told that he earned promotions by finding random African immigrants to blame whenever a theft occurred on his watch. Constructing counter-discourses to Barbès’ story, Diome writes into the narrative microstories, or embedded stories that diverge from the main diegesis recounted by the narrator. These microstories act as a sort of aside in that they present a complete portrait of someone independently of the narrator. These microstories permit her to provide a more complete image of migration outside of the limited scope of her narrator, as well as to inscribe other counter-narratives that deconstruct mythical views of France. One story in particular about a man named Moussa tears down the idealized story of Barbès. While the youth see Senegalese players in France as proof that the dream of emigration is possible, Moussa’s story reveals the dismal chance of success. Like others who see leaving as the only option, Moussa once saw the future as “une ravine, l’emportant vers un trou noir” (95). Seeing no other alternative, he allows a recruiter to convince him to join a soccer club in France, but he is unable to keep up with the intense trainings required of the “bétail sportif” (97). Dehumanized, he endures racist tauntings from his fellow players: “Hé! négro! Tu ne sais pas faire une passe ou quoi? Allez! Passe le ballon, ce n’est pas une noix de coco!” (100). Moussa’s story reveals to the youth of Niodior the realities of acceptance in French society and sharply corrects the mentality that drives them to plead, “Ben, si tu m’aides pour le billet, ça ira; après, dans un club, je gagnerai de quoi...” (140). When Moussa is kicked out of the soccer club and eventually caught by police, he is deported back to Senegal and incarnates the antithesis of the *émigré réussi*; not only does he fail to send money to his parents while in France, but he comes home with empty pockets, stripped of money and honor. The hierarchy that prizes leaving to go to France thus depends on the successful return, and for those who do not fit the criteria, they become the subject of contempt. Moussa’s experiences abroad lend him no social capital; even “l’idiot du village” (109) chastises him for not having built houses upon his return.[[18]](#footnote-17) In addition to expectations of working and saving in France, migrants must also maintain their African culture. Moussa’s father explains as such in a letter he writes to his son:

J’ai vu ta photo, maintenant tu ne portes ni thiaya (pantalon bouffant) ni sabador (boubou) et ça m’inquiète…N’oublie jamais qui tu es et d’où tu viens…Tu dois continuer à respecter nos coutumes: tu n’es pas un Blanc. Épargnez-nous la honte parmi nos semblables. Tu dois travailler, économiser et revenir au pays. (102)

Not only do they face harsh lives in France, but emigrants are expected to not allow the journey to change them. The difficulty of exile is left invalidated, and they face exclusion and exile if they are unable to meet impossible expectations.

Salie discloses the harsh realities that Barbès chooses to omit: “En Europe, mes frères, vous êtes d’abord noirs, accessoirement citoyens, définitivement étrangers, et ça, ce n’est pas écrit dans la Constitution, mais certains le lisent sur votre peau” (178). Her remonstrations fall on deaf ears because to these disenfranchised youth, life in France cannot be worse than their realities. Salie understands that the problems these youth face makes it so that they find being an immigrant impossible to envision, “Comment aurais-je pu lui faire comprendre la solitude de l’exil?” (44).

Salie fulfills her duty to help her family in different terms. She actively participates in speaking out against emigration by choosing the terms by which she aides her community. The narrator announces a plan to help her brother buy a business in Senegal, which would discourage him from leaving and contribute to the local economy, as well. She knows that:

désorienté devant le sien, Madické attendait que je serve de lièvre à sa course incertaine vers l’avenir. Je suivais obstinément une piste qui menait ailleurs qu’en France où lui voulait atterrir à tout prix. Un projet viable sur l’île, c’est tout ce que j’entrevoyais. Au bout d’un certain temps d’une vie malthusienne, j’avais réuni une somme, petite en France mais énorme là-bas, de quoi ouvrir une boutique sur l’île. (212)

In this respect, she keeps to her family obligations by aiding her brother in a way that works towards the betterment of the group. Salie’s solution to her brother reflects on the author’s own project and how she views literature as a “solution.”

**The Wax that Seals the Letter: The Role of Writing**

Written by a writer (Diome) who writes a story about a writer (Salie), *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* clearly brings reading and writing tropes to the forefront. As we have seen, books from all over the Francophone world contribute to the narrator’s perception of self and the world and to her ability to create a space of solace and belonging. Reading is thus cast as a transformative process, as is writing, which represents a way to map out her experiences, demonstrating literature as a powerful tool of personal and collective change.

Embedding multiple women’s microstories into the main narrative allows Diome to write against a lack of female self-representation. She has stated that “les écrivains hommes parlaient de nous, mais à la troisième personne. Ils faisaient leurs personnages en fonction des clichés qu’ils avaient et des critères qu’ils accordaient aux personnages féminins. En fonction de ce qu’ils voulaient faire incarner aux femmes et pas nécessairement ce que les femmes étaient réellement” (Mbouguen). Fighting against this tradition, Diome aligns herself with other Senegalese female writers like Mariama Bâ who have represented writing in their works as resistance to female silence. In her epistolary novel *Une si longue lettre* (1979), Bâ uses the form of the letter to convey intimacy yet connection; Mildred Mortimer emphasizes, “Represented as a therapeutic activity in the early pages of the novel, writing subsequently results in liberation as well as in healing…Bâ’s heroine has learned to use the written word as a creative tool of self-expression and as a weighty weapon against the patriarchy” (147).

In *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*, writing allows for this same fusion of the narrator’s voice and other women: “L’écriture m’offre un sourire maternel complice, car, libre, j’écris pour dire et faire tout ce que ma mère n’a pas osé dire et faire” (227). Diome has said of the above quote that it represents the one word or phrase she would like her readers to remember (Tervonen, "Partir"). If she instills a view of writing as breaking down barriers, her narrator Salie similarly sees writing as a transgressive strategy that allows access to “des mots-valises au contenu prohibé, dont le sens, malgré les détours, conduit vers un double soi: moi d’ici, moi de là-bas” (224). This choice to write against silence permits an unfolding of multiple identities and allows her to explore the realities of other women without compromising her own story. We have seen that as a female in Senegal, Salie risks social censure for not accepting the paths deemed appropriate for women. Her refusal to define womanhood in terms of motherhood and to occupy socially determined roles results in disjuncture and a lack of female companionship in her village. Yet despite the other women’s participation in the process of her exclusion, Salie refuses to continue the cycle, and writing becomes a space where self-expression intertwines with a re-connection to the group. When the narrator’s voice blends in with another female character’s story, the first-person point of view turns into a sort of free indirect style that enables readers to delve into others’ motivations.

In particular, a woman named Sankèle takes center stage when she is forced to marry an older man who seeks a second wife. In an act of dissidence, Sankèle purposefully becomes pregnant by the exiled schoolteacher, Ndétare. Sankèle’s father literally kills her empowerment by drowning the illegitimate newborn in the sea. Her story ends tragically, but in the re-telling of it, it is Sankèle who controls her body and her cultural values. She chooses to introduce a foreign body into the community. In a way, this embedded story of Sankèle unfolds as a counter-narrative to the narrator’s story, much like Moussa the failed emigrant offsets L’Homme de Barbès’ fantasies. The narrator was an illegitimate baby who escaped the fate of Sankèle’s child. Unlike Sankèle, the narrator had her grandmother to plant the seeds for her acceptance within the family. This microstory of another woman introduces an alternate ending to the narrator’s own story. Diome paints a heterogeneous portrait of Senegalese women’s lives, but she also insists on the project of self-understanding as linked to an exploration of others’ realities.

To talk about the act of writing in *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* requires an inspection of how Diome textually translates the oral, “those nonliterate verbal arts and forms of expression that sustained cultures for centuries before writing came along” (Miller, *Theories of Africans* 69). Diome incorporates oral elements by transforming Salie into a storyteller throughout *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*. Carmen Boustani’s linguistic analysis of African novels posits that African authors adorn the written with traditional conventions of storytelling through exclamatory and interrogative interjections, words from ethnic languages, and the rhythmic repetition characteristic of oral expression (239). The transformation of narrator into *conteur[[19]](#footnote-18)* occurs with the insertion of elements such as proverbs. Throughout the book, maxims such as “Chaque miette de vie doit servir à conquérir la dignité” (98) are randomly repeated for emphasis and trace a circuitous route atypical of linear, written narratives. Similarly, the visual representations of the African landscape pull us into each microstory’s setting. Acting as *conteur*, Salie frames the schoolteacher Mr. Ndétare’s story by first insisting on images of the landscape: “Cette année-là, Dieu avait béni la terre, multiplié les pluies et libéré les hommes de toute crainte de famine…L’optimisme était de saison, on ne pensa plus qu’à se multiplier” (126). Rather than anthropomorphizing the geography, she describes people by way of the natural elements: “Leurs voix de rossignol caressaient la cime des cocotiers” (126). The insistence on the visual serves to transform readers into spectators, and we become members of her audience.

The oral that infuses the text proves doubly resistant. It serves to highlight women’s prominent role in storytelling and demonstrate an appropriation of the French language and written words. Orality creates a space of female power by emphasizing women’s place in transmitting history, “not only as performers but as producers of knowledge, especially in view of oral literature’s didactic relevance, moral(izing) imperatives and pedagogical foundations” (Nnaemeka 2). These oral elements suggest that the narrator reinvigorates women’s roles as creators. In terms of Salie as an illegitimate child, oral elements also legitimize a voice declared invalid to speak (and write). This orality that infuses the work also signals an insistence on a certain pre-colonial tradition since “the advent in Africa of writing as we know it was the direct result of the European conquest and colonization” (Miller, *Theories of Africans* 69). The incorporation of the oral in African literature has been a prominent trope in Francophone and postcolonial studies. The textualization of the oral permits a revalorization of African cultural traditions that the colonial system devalued and signals an appropriation of the French language.

In her 2009 book *Oralité et gestualité: La difference homme/femme dans le roman francophone*, Carmen Boustani reminds us that the *conteur* as a traditional figure carries out a didactic and adhesive function in the construction of a collective imaginary (31). The *conteur* draws inspiration from other stories to generate oral narratives that are singularized by each storyteller’s verbal artistry. Stories are told and re-told, and their meaning depends on the question of who is talking as well as who is listening. Through sporadic use of the second-person plural pronoun, Diome reaches out to readers when her narrator asks, “Pourquoi je vous raconte tout ça?” (12). The question’s syntax and use of “ça” reckon an informal, conversational tone, yet the question comes across as a startling break in the narration and begs the question of who constitutes “vous.” Questioning Salie’s audience and how she sees her storytelling connects to the larger question of who constitutes Diome’s target audience. We have explored the anti-immigration messages that the narrator passes on to the youth. However, her readership will most likely be located outside of Senegal. Taking advantage of this foreign readership, she teaches by way of ethnographic descriptions detailing Senegalese food, drinks, customs, landscapes, and cultural practices that a member of her community would undoubtedly know. She explains the importance of references like the “premières pluies de juin, souvent brèves mais surtout imprévisibles, qui annoncent aux Sahéliens le début de l’hivernage et des travaux champêtres” (27). These descriptions of customs anchor the narrator within the Senegalese community and give her full agency to speak for those traditions and practices she elaborates. Spatial references position her within Senegal, looking out: “Ici, le repas n’est pas réservé aux seuls habitants de la demeure, tous ceux qui sont là, au moment du service, y ont droit et se voient naturellement conviés à le partager” (26). Not only are young Africans the recipient of her messages, but so are outsiders who receive a lesson on what life is like elsewhere.

The author-narrator also engages in storytelling and writing to accomplish a personal project of coming to terms with her own experiences. Diome does not engage her narrator in misguided idealizations of writing where literature is cast as a solution. Rather, she represents writing as an imperfect process in which she explores and maps out the emotions associated with her experiences. The process of writing, which naturally involves constant re-reading, mirrors the many negotiations that lead to an understanding of identity. As writer, she must confront the blank page and create the story of herself. This writing thus entails giving form to painful memories: “La nostalgie est ma plaie ouverte et je ne peux m’empêcher d’y fourrer ma plume” (224). In this respect, writing explorations of the past, although painful, allow her to negotiate the meanings she draws from those experiences. Writing nostalgia proves as painful as living it, but Salie chooses to overcome victimization. Instead, she deals with absence by turning the blank page into a safe space. This confrontation of the painfulness of the past has the power to lead to a clarified present, marked by self-representation. In a subversion of the sadness inherent to exile, nostalgia becomes her muse and sustains her writing: “La solitude lèche mes joues de sa longue langue glacée qui me fait don de ses mots. Des mots trop étroits pour porter les maux de l’exil; des mots trop fragiles pour fendre le sarcophage que l’absence coule autour de moi; des mots trop limités pour servir de pont entre l’ici et l’ailleurs” (224). Textual representations need to be constantly re-worked to fit her lived experiences. In other words, Diome does not present reading and writing as a panacea for Salie, but she makes clear how textually testifying to the difficulties of her life permits her to reflect on her ideas on her own terms. The author ultimately shows writing as a form in constant flux that allows for a chance to wrestle with the past without being confined and trapped by it. It is a means of giving form to a whole that is characterized by different but not necessarily opposing parts.

**L’Être-additionnée**

If writing and reading represent modes of self-expression, the narrator finds empowerment through the words and emotions she chooses to represent. In *Le ventre de l’Atlantique,* choice and having the freedom to choose play a dominant role in questions of identity and migration. In interviews, Diome has staunchly stood by her freedom to choose what and where she writes. In her life, only she has the power to chart her trajectory: “Personne ne pourrait m’empêcher de vivre à l’endroit où j’ai décidé de vivre. Je le répète, je n’ai pas quitté un endroit idéal sous la pression d’une force extérieure, mais je suis dans un endroit différent que j’ai moi-même choisi et où j’ai décidé de rester” (Arielle, Magnier and Verdeille-Osowski 11). She stresses that choosing to live in France remains for her an act of choice, as opposed to those who leave with nothing but unrealistic expectations. As an educated female, she realizes she is able to make such a choice and sees living in France as a chance to self-create without the associations her last name has given her: “Je vis en France, on ne me demande pas qui est mon père, qui est ma mère. On s’en fiche complètement, et c’est génial parce que cela me permet de reconstituer ma propre histoire, de faire un flashback et d’assumer ce que je veux en garder, de me l’approprier, de reconstruire mon identité” (Arielle, Magnier and Verdeille-Osowski 24). For the author, the ability to choose her future relies on an ability to come to terms with her past. In *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*, Diome inscribes this re-configured idea of leaving into the narrative through Salie, who has the luxury of practicing such self-assumption. She, too, chooses “l’angoisse de l’errance à la protection des pénates” (225). Her illegitimate status weighs on her as a young girl, when “petite déjà, incapable de tout calcul et ignorant les attraits de l’émigration, j’avais compris que partir serait le corolaire de mon existence” (226). For the narrator, she chooses to leave to seek out a tabula rasa: “L’exil c’est mon suicide géographique. L’ailleurs m’attire car, vierge de mon histoire, il ne me juge pas sur la base des erreurs du destin mais en fonction de ce que j’ai choisi d’être; il est pour moi gage de liberté, d’autodétermination” (225). Whereas other immigrants leave in search of financial stability, Salie shows a different configuration where leaving constitutes a necessity for emotional stability. Exile in France conjures melancholy and nostalgia, but also solitude and freedom. I argue that Diome shows a protagonist who escapes absolute un-belonging of double exile and sees it more as a state of double belonging, since “partir, c’est avoir tous les courages pour aller accoucher de soi-même, naître de soi étant la plus légitime des naissances” (226). Diome thus demonstrates the departure and subsequent exile as a sort of privileged re-connection with oneself. If re-creation occurs abroad, France, too, figures as a homeland. Indeed the lines between home and abroad blur for Salie and weaken the demarcations between the two spaces: “Irrésistible, l’envie de remonter à la source, car est rassurant de penser que la vie reste plus facile à saisir là où elle enfonce ses racines. Pourtant, revenir équivaut pour moi à partir. Je vais chez moi comme on va à l’étranger” (166). The idea of recoiling into oneself and one’s roots is presented as instinctual yet unrealistic. She proves suspicious of a definition of home based on origins, seeing it as false security. Instead, she opts for the possibility of *multi-racination*, where many forms of home and roots intertwine.

This blurring of here and there proves empowering because it points to her choice to be autonomous and refuse to limit herself to society’s expectations. Diome’s depiction of a protagonist who takes hold of her identity echoes the urgings of the Négritudist writers who projected re-evaluated representations of the African collective consciousness. Aimé Césaire showcases in his poetic masterpiece *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939) the power of his own gaze in the creation of his identity. Césaire writes, “[à] force de regarder les arbres je suis devenu un arbre.../à force de penser au Congo je suis devenu un Congo” (94). The alignment of the poet with nature reveals his metaphysical transcendence of reality and history. Césaire puts into place an anti-colonial discourse that gives the colonized the power to re-inscribe the self within an African framework that is not solely defined in terms of the colonial experience. Christopher Miller uses the term “associative becoming” to describe Césaire’s insistence that “the logic of becoming that which you contemplate is part of the process of thinking yourself into freedom” (*Nationalists* 91). Diome incorporates Césaire’s “associative becoming” to detail Salie’s own process of forging her transnational identity:

Métamorphose! Je suis une feuille de baobab, de cocotier, de manguier, de quinquélibra, de fegné-fegné, de tabanany, je suis un fétu de paille. Faux, puisque le vent ne m’emporte pas! Métamorphose! Je suis un bloc de ce mur, un carré de marbre, de granit, une boule d’onyx. Je suis un buste de Rodin, une statue de Camille Claudel. Le temps de la vie me contourne et je suis ce trou dans la dentelle du temps. Faux, puisque ma main fait ce va-et-vient qui participe au tissage du temps! (142)

This passage, ekphrastic in its poetic and dramatic visualization of the process of self-imagining, exhibits the ways in which Salie assumes full agency of her identity that she creates and re-creates in a perpetual process. By evoking the African landscape, she ties herself to the fruits of the land, much like Césaire who conjures the African trees. This passage of metamorphosis comes from a vivid moment in the story when a *marabout[[20]](#footnote-19)* forces Salie to take part in a sexual scheme. She liberates herself from the confines of the moment, transcends reality and retreats inward to a safe space. When she declares in the above quote, “le vent ne m’emporte pas,” and that she is the creator of her life, she refuses the position of victim and asserts her empowerment. But while Césaire roots the journey of the *Cahier* into the African landscape, Salie’s string of objects reveal the transnational dimension to her identity, as she passes from a baobab leaf to a statue by Camille Claudel. This shift from the natural elements of the African world to a French artistic creation reveals the ways in which she defines herself by the sum of her associations. Despite the exclusion and pressure from both sides, she chooses to overcome liminality towards an asymmetrical whole. In this process of creating and re-creating, Salie borrows from both worlds: “Je préfère le mauve, cette couleur tempérée, mélange de la rouge chaleur africaine et du froid bleu européen” (254).

The way in which the author emphasizes choice and the inevitability of change resonates with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who differentiate in Mille Plateaux (1980) the postmodern rhizome that rejects the existence of origins from the “arbre-racine” schema that views identity in terms of contrasts: “La logique binaire est la réalité spirituelle de l’arbre-racine. Même une discipline aussi ‘avancée’ que la linguistique garde pour image de base cet arbre-racine, qui la rattache à la réflexion classique… Autant dire que cette pensée n’a jamais compris la multiplicité” (2). In taking up the falsity of oppositions, Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts can be used to show that cultures do not represent two opposing entities defined in terms of what the other is not. Binaries no longer suffice to explain contemporary relationships. Deleuze and Guattari insist that the rhizome is not an identity concept precisely because they see identity as a synthesis of differences:

Une telle multiplicité ne varie pas ses dimensions sans changer de nature en elle-même et se métamorphoser.[...]le rhizome n’est fait que de lignes : lignes de segmentarité, de stratification, comme dimensions, mais aussi ligne de fuite ou de déterritorialisation comme dimension maximale d’après laquelle, en la suivant, la multiplicité se métamorphose en changeant de nature. On ne confondra pas de telles lignes, ou linéaments, avec les lignées de type arborescent, qui sont seulement des liaisons localisables entre points et positions. (3)

Deleuze and Guattari further obfuscate any clear definition of identity by giving the equation “y + z + a + ...” (xiii) to represent the connected difference that acknowledges heterogeneity without erasing it (Miller, Nationalists 174). In Le ventre de l’Atlantique, we see the author’s inscription of postmodern rhizomatic thought through Salie’s self-perception that metamorphoses and changes in relation to the whole of her experiences. Resonnating Deleuze and Guattari's reference to multiple yet inseparable points of connection, Salie is unable to choose between her national identities: “Tu préfères qu’on te coupe la jambe gauche ou le bras droit?” (252). Salie’s discussions of the intersection between French national identity and racism put into light the colonial project’s use of tree-like identity constructions. If identity hinges on static, rooted notions, then claims of racial or cultural essentialism can be manipulated to legitimize colonial oppositions. By refusing to choose between one or the other, Salie thereby refuses the tree structure and instead subscribes to a view of herself that continually unfolds in the moment. Deleuze and Guattari go on to say: “Le rhizome est une antigénéalogie. C’est une mémoire courte, ou une antimémoire” (3). In this sense, the author who calls herself “Franco-Sénégalaise” denies all concrete imposed spatio-temporal restrictions for her narrator: “Tous les replis de la Terre. Date et lieu de naissance? Ici et maintenant. Papiers! Ma mémoire est mon identité” (227). This free-floating perception of self allows for movement to inform self-perception, enabling multiple configurations of self to develop along the lines of the journey. Her transnational identity allows her to straddle the two spaces without privileging one, which she uses to break free of restrictions within both the Senegalese definitions of identity and the French system’s view of immigrant as other.

The narrator creates and re-creates her perception of self along the lines of her experiences, anchoring her identity along the way without feeling confined to fixed, static definitions. In much the same way, the narrator wields the pen to textually present and represent her experiences that, delineated, provide meanings that continue to evolve with each re-writing. A space of free expression, writing engenders a constantly changing view of the past and present, and provides a lens through which the narrator deciphers positive meanings from her experiences:

Chez moi? Chez l’autre? Etre hybride, l’Afrique et l’Europe se demandent, perplexes, quel bout de moi leur appartient. Je suis l’enfant présenté au sabre du roi Salomon pour le juste partage. Exilée en permanence, je passe mes nuits à souder les rails qui mènent à l’identité. L’écriture est la cire chaude que je coule entre les sillons creusés par les bâtisseurs de cloisons des deux bords. (254)

Writing provides her the ability to textually give body to her experiences and write her existence. Her choosing to forge belonging within both worlds strategically grants her inclusion in an otherwise exclusive world. She is located “là où l’Afrique et le Sénégal perdent leur orgueil et se contentent de s’additionner: sur une page” (182). If the process of writing represents the possibility for self-understanding, she is both writer and reader of her own tale. Charting out the words that she pens, she writes to negotiate her place in the world and gain full agency. As we have seen, Diome acknowledges the painfulness of a transnational identity by deconstructing the comforting simplicity of home and belonging as clear-cut notions based on origins. Instead, she makes clear that the possibility of multiple homes and *multi-racination* grows out of the choice to be critically aware of exclusionary practices she dislikes, such as those based on geneology or racial categories. Similarly, she makes clear that she remains connected to her family and Senegalese culture. At the same time, she loves literature and the French language, which she benefits from in order to re-write her experiences and understanding of self. From this stance, the choice to live and write the painful and the joyful generates a new awareness of the past that serves as a source of empowerment for the future.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, Le ventre de l’Atlantique reveals nationalist and anti-nationalist discourses. Some scholars, such as Wanda Njoya, see Diome’s narrator as another agent in the disillusionment of France as an educated female living abroad. Njoya argues that the narrator refuses to acknowledge the ways in which her self-proclaimed transnational identity serves to second a mythic view of France: “The protagonist in Fatou Diome’s Le ventre de l’Atlantique attempts to evade her implication and responsibility in the imperial framework” (58). I argue, however, that Diome’s anti-immigration discourse does not contradict her narrator’s chosen life in France because of the nature of her chosen movement. For her, the migrant or the creative artist should not know national borders: “Personne ne dira que ce n’est pas chez moi si je décide que c’est chez moi!...Quand un écrivain européen ou un ressortissant de l’Occident, d’un pays riche en tout cas, va s’installer en Afrique, on ne parle pas d’exil! Lui, il est libre, il détient les clés du monde, il s’installe où il veut. Il crée parce qu’il est libre! C’est un artiste libre à qui on ne demande jamais de se justifier” (Arielle, Magnier and Verdeille-Osowski 31). She thus does not remove herself as an agent in the process, but rather is fighting two battles at once. Contrary to what Njoya asserts, Salie’s life in France supports her anti-immigration discourse because this leaving figures for her as resistance against insularity in Senegal and imposed movement. In a continuous balancing act, Diome validates Salie’s individual transnational identity while also engaging with the collective. I have shown that the narrator promotes economic growth in Senegal and dispels the myth of France in an attempt to thwart cultural hegemony. She profoundly believes in helping the African youth escape the economic situation that pushes them to cling to the shorelines, only to be figuratively lost at sea.

Diome’s literary project ties into the personal and collective to critique on a bilateral level neocolonialism and insularity in both France and Senegal. Salie’s assumed transnational identity evolves at the gaps and imbrications of these two spaces. Diome incorporates the theme of writing as a unifying act that Salie uses to reconcile her biculturalism. The boundless identity Salie subscribes to represents the path she wishes to emblazon for the youth of Senegal who are inhabited by a mental colonization that sees living in France as the only option. To the contrary of the generalizations about contemporary writers that scholars like Binetta Jules-Rosette and Odile Casanave have posited, Diome's novel actively explores life in both Senegal and in France for the migrant. Instead of showcasing a protagonist who feels she belongs nowhere, Diome inscribes in Le ventre de l’Atlantique positive representations of a transnational identity as an ideal model to strive for because it is built on self-representation and choice.

Chapter Two: Growing Pains and Hybrid Memories in Gisele Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*

**Introduction**

According to Claude-Valentin Marie’s 1999 study of Dom-Tom residents, one-fourth of the people born in the Antilles are now living in France (100). In fact, "a number roughly equivalent to the population of Martinique or Guadeloupe...constitutes a de facto *troisieme île*" (Dobie 151). Displacement for Caribbean[[21]](#footnote-20) writers remains as relevant a question today as it was in the 1930s and 1940s when future politician Aimé Césaire was setting in motion his poetic formulations of a black identity. Despite the change Césaire had envisioned, departmentalization in 1946 did not bring about equality in citizenship. Richard Burton explains in his book *French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today* (1995) that since 1945 and even more so the mid-1960s, “French goods, French thought-patterns, French lifestyles, and not the least, the French language itself, have swept into areas of life” (140). Writers since Césaire have been reformulating questions of Antillean identity in response to French citizenship's new set of issues that reflect old preccupations dating back to colonialism. The Creolists Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, who published their manifesto *Éloge de la Créolité* in 1989, have put forward their own conceptions of an Antillean identity, one that must be articulated "dans un espace spécifique, celui de l’île, enraciné́e dans une culture propre, celle de l’oralité et de la tradition des conteurs, dans une langue, le créole, dans une histoire, celle de l’esclavage" (Bérard 495). The entrenchment in a region-specific identity has led Madeleine Dobie to observe that "the 'Antilleans' in metropolitan France have not been a source of inspiration for French Caribbean writers" (150). Maryse Condé deems that the Creolists and their prescriptions to anchor identity within the islands' historic, cultural and linguistic commonalities comes at the expense of other explorations, especially since "we live in a world where, already frontiers have ceased to exist. Guadeloupe and Martinique, for better or for worse, have entered the European Common Market...Half of the population of each island lives abroad. Part of it no longer speaks the Creole language" ("Disorder" 130). Far from preaching a breaking away from the islands, Condé compellingly raises the question of how to problematize Antillean identities located elsewhere without being trapped in dichotomies.

This chapter is concerned with Gisèle Pineau's semi-autobiographical novel *L'Exil selon Julia* published in 1996 that addresses contemporary questions of identity in the Antilles, in France, and for those who find themselves figuratively and literally located in both spaces. Pineau has written several award-winning novels including *L'Espérance-macadam* (1995) and *La grande drive des esprits* (2000), as well as numerous children's books and fiction for young adults. Along with Marie Abraham, she also worked on a collection of women's stories entitled *Femmes Des Antilles: Traces et Voix: 150 ans après l'esclavage* (1998) as a commemmoration of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. In his article "Perilous Symmetry: Exoticism and the Geography of Colonial and Postcolonial Culture," A. James Arnold identifies a handful of Caribbean writers who are exploring "strategies designed to thwart the dilemma of colonial binarisms," including Gisele Pineau, "the only female, Guadeloupean representative of the Créolité movement" (22). My interest in *L'Exil selon Julia* stems from this semi-autobiographical novel's illustration of various representations of identity constructions that range from past models based on assimilation to future conceptions that do as Arnold suggests and break from colonial oppositions. Born and raised in France after her parents immigrated to Paris, then leaving for the Caribbean when de Gaulle loses power, Gisèle Pineau's life experiences form the foundation of her first-person narrator's stories:

This novel [*L'Exil selon Julia*] begs for love, begs for inclusion in a community because, you know, when I was in France, people rejected me because of my black skin; when I arrived in the Antilles, I was also rejected because I was a "Negropolitan": This Guadeloupean woman is black, but she speaks very bad Creole, rolling her “r”s. So, I was never at the right time, never at the right place, always a misfit. (Loichot, "Devoured Writing" 335)

Pineau's experiences of navigating exile as a first-generation Antillean are translated into the narrative's double setting that brings questions of belonging to the forefront. Priscilla Maunier has convincingly pointed out that the Antillean in France faces a situation of double exile: first as a descendant of slaves uprooted from Africa, and second as a resident of France physically exiled from the islands (167). In the case of the narrator who was raised in France, we can speak of a cultural exile in that she has no memory nor trace of an Antillean identity. She has only the values associated with the French imagined community, but her membership there proves complicated when she continually confronts racist remarks that place her on the outside of this community.

Like the plight of African immigrants in France explored in the first chapter, *L'Exil selon Julia* demonstrates how contemporary notions of French national identity revolve around colonial alignments of race and nationality. However, the Dom-Tom's status as French regions changes the stakes for Antillean authors. Whereas Africans from decolonized areas seek to define themselves in congruence with or against national borders, Antilleans battle persistent colonial views of national identity that continue to relegate them to the status of inferior other. In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson frames national consciousness as the process by which an expansive yet limited group of individuals finds cohesion through a collective imagination. Anderson stresses that this imagined belonging proves strong enough to self-sacrifice for this group: "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). In the context of France, the colonial past and the current status of the Dom-Toms as French regions complicate the idea of a horizontal axis of belonging amongst those deemed French in nationality. This chapter ultimately seeks to explore what is at stake for a contemporary Antillean narrative that speaks on multiple rootings and transnational identities.

I hope to show how Pineau highlights persistent colonial ideology behind standards of French national identity and destabilizes the idea of a homogeneous nation by illustrating multiple imagined communities within the parameters of what is deemed French. She equally puts into question how one can represent the construction of an Antillean identity rooted in the islands for those who are situated elsewhere. Touching on both French and Antillean identities, Pineau's work reveals a variety of relationships to place that become apparent through an analysis of the representations of memory. Pineau plays with the autobiographical project deemed by her a “gathering of memories” (Veldwachter 181) and transforms the narrative from a straightforward story of self into a story on local and global issues.

*L'Exil selon Julia* demonstrates multiple constructs of memory at work, since, as the title suggests, the narrator's coming-of-age story parallels the moment her grandmother (Julia or Man Ya) comes to live with her in France. In other words, the narrator's growing up and escaping exile depends on her grandmother's physical exile. In order to engage Pineau's different models of memory and how they interact, I look at all of the main characters' identities including the narrator's parents, who exhibit inculcated colonial values. I examine how their memories differ from the narrator who has grown up post-departmentalization. Considering memory in this light guides my examination of how local memories can be forged from afar and serve as resistance in global contexts What characters remember, what they are willing to remember, and how they interact with explored and unexplored memories are questions that direct my analyses.

While she has largely been categorized as a Creolist writer because of her textual explorations of landscape and the subversive, negative representations of France she incorporates into her works, I aim to highlight those ways in which Pineau wrestles with the question of cultural particularities in global contexts by dialoguing with multiple Antillean thinkers, ultimately offering her own dynamic model of a creolized transnational identity. In using the term creolized, I draw inspiration from Glissant's writings that configure identity at the intersections of postmodern rhizomatic ideas and postcolonial calls for rootedness within the islands' topography. Glissant has been reproached for his abstract style, but Maryse Condé sees it "the consequence of his essential belief: language for the West Indian writer is the only way of shaping the future" ("Disorder" 127). I suggest that the transnational identity that the narrator ultimately espouses is reflected in the book itself as a hybrid space of French and Creole textual and stylistic encounters. In this way, my study aims to demonstrate that Pineau portrays a configuring of memory that requires active examination and interpretive openness, and provides a commentary on literature's role in creating and re-creating points where past, present, and future converge within an unenclosed system of representation.

In the first part of this chapter, I undertake an analysis of representations of colonial and post-colonial identities in the book to show how Pineau presents past and present relationships to France for the Antillean. The second part of this chapter is devoted to demonstrating how the narrator imagines belonging within the Antillean community by way of her grandmother's stories that expand the horizons of her imagination and belonging. The worldview that Man Ya transmits echoes Glissant's emphasis on exploring memory and history through landscape imagery. When young Gisèle moves to the Antilles and her lived experience in the islands conflicts with the imagined memories she has created, she goes through a painful othering process. In the third part, I will show how she escapes entrapment of oppositions and embraces a meeting of history and memory, reality and fiction, French and Creole. The web of symbols dealing with reading and writing and their relation to identity weaves into the book a statement on the power of literature in the formulation and understanding of transnational narratives.

**Pride and Prejudice in the Hexagon**

The three sections that make up *L'Exil selon Julia* trace a path that follows Man Ya's appearance in the narrator's life. The first, entitled "Noir et blanc," proves revelatory of the ostracization the young girl experiences in the suburb of France where her family lives, a place that Pineau has classified as "very racist" (Veldwachter 128). Memories of her time there are interspersed with details of her parents' lives, so that the contrasting representations reflect changing generational attitudes towards France and the Antilles. While the diegesis often quickly changes from one memory to another, Pineau provides concrete historical markers as frames of reference, pushing readers to consider how these historical contexts inform our understanding of each character. The juxtaposition of generational differences in their specific backgrounds also serves to establish a continuity whereby colonial ideology is shown to continue to shape identity beyond departmentalization. Whereas the narrator is born in 1961, her mother Daisy and father Maréchal have experienced the French-Antilles relationship as colonial subjects, and their strong loyalty to France reflects a mentality of those who deemed assimilation the only viable option.

In 1952, Franz Fanon delved into the psychology of the colonial subject in his seminal book *Peau noire, masque blanc* in which he explores manifestations of colonialism’s assertion of white (and French) superiority in the Antillean consciousness. Fanon shows how the unstable economic situation of the islands coupled with internalized racial inferiority propel assimilation: “S’il y a complexe d'infériorité, c’est à la suite d’un double processus: économique d’abord; par intériorisation ou mieux épidermisation de cette infériorité” (8). In the book, the narrator incorporates an economic angle by discussing Daisy's and Maréchal’s lives well before they leave for France. In their respective villages in Guadeloupe, the lack of options for both parents precipitates a need to locate their futures elsewhere. Daisy's family enjoys modest success but loses their fortune to a scheme that leaves them "dans une case misérable, face à une savane où les gens sans terre venaient attacher boeufs, cabris, cochons" (24). Maréchal is originally from a village in the woods cast as quasi-magical: "Une terre riche et noire. Tu jettes une graine, il pousse une forêt qui serre méchants zombis et magies de sorcières" (23). Maréchal's mother Man Ya hails from this magical landscape, as we will see later on, but her son is different than most in his village. Whereas "les gens qui vivaient là, sous l'ombrage des dos-mornes de la Soufrière, ne cherchaient pas leur destinée ailleurs que dans la perdition des champs à sucre" (23), Maréchal does well in school and receives a "brevet en 41" (23), when the course of his life and ultimately of his family changes with the eruption of World War II.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson posits that being part of an imagined community entails for some the willingness to give their life up for this group out of a sense of belonging and fraternity (17). Maréchal's willingness to fight in the name of the French nation proves revelatory of how he perceives of himself in relation to France. He feels "tellement pétri d'honneur" (23) to be part of this institution, and he knows that he will return to the Antilles victorious, “dans la gloire du Seigneur” (18). Religious references cast fighting for the French nation under de Gaulle’s direction as a fulfillment of a sort of Christian duty. The alignment of salvation and the nation rings of colonial discourse that used religious justifications for slavery and the *mission civilisatrice*; Arnold explains that law required "forced conversion to Catholicism of African slaves within one week of their sale in the colony…motivated as much by the anxiety over the possible spread of the Reformation as they were by concern for the salvation of the souls of creatures who might not, in fact, possess souls" (4). Fighting for France was thus a godly duty, one that Maréchal proves he is more than willing to undertake to validate his belonging and self-worth.

If Maréchal and his group of friends see “l’armée et leur credo, la France et ses et caetera de colonies leur univers” (13), they experience a psychological exile that results from the distortion of their perceptions. Fanon calls out the dangers of such thinking through the title of his treatise, *Peau noire, masque blanc,* whichevokes an image of a vacant black body covered by a white mask of French culture. The lack of a conjunction in the title reinforces that for Fanon, juxtaposing the two calls for an inscription of disjuncture or fragmentation. The mask remains an impermanent accessory with no real transformative power to render the skin underneath invisible. Fanon elucidates how the French language figures as one of these masks in that “le Noir Antillais sera d’autant plus blanc, c’est-à-dire se rapprochera d’autant plus du véritable homme, qu’il aura fait sienne la langue française" (Fanon 14). Speaking French provides a way to externalize being French, which is directly equated with being white. When Fanon knowingly states that one can be "d'autant plus Blanc," he changes the meaning of race from a clear-cut category to a spectrum with no end. In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Maréchal and Daisy strive to convey and externalize French national identity, particularly through language. The abandonment of Créole as a medium of communication with their children allows Maréchal and Daisy to feel cultivated: “Daisy ne leur a pas enseigné le créole. Pour quoi faire? C’est seulement dans la colère qu’il lui échappe...Un homme qui te parle en français est un monsieur civilisé...Un bougre qui te crie en créole est un vieux nègre de la race mal élevée” (210). Choosing one language over the other, Daisy and Maréchal follow the rules of French universalism that demand a suppression of other cultures (Dobie 161). Only in moments of irrationality when she cannot control repressed impulses does she speak in Creole. Aligning themselves with colonial discourse of the other, Daisy and Marechal propagate "binary oppositions that structure France's view of its culture over against that which is not-France" (Arnold 13). The parents transmit their beliefs to their children to whom they tell, “Profitez de la France! Profitez de votre chance de grandir ici-là! Au Pays, la marmaille parle patois. Profitez pour apprendre le français de France...Non, y a rien de bien bon au Pays” (28). Maréchal and Daisy's belief in the superiority of France thus generates negative representations of Guadeloupe that position the two in opposition.

Maréchal's propagation of colonial discourse extends from the Hexagon to the islands and back when he returns to Guadeloupe to bring his mother Man Ya, or Julia, to France. Pineau represents Maréchal’s total inculcation of colonial ideology as a psychological exile and figurative mind/body disconnect. In a chapter symbolically entitled “Délivrance,” Maréchal plans to rescue his mother from his abusive father who is haunted by visions of World War I. Her adamant refusal to leave her husband stems from her belief that God has chosen this life for her; "elle a dit oui à monsieur l'abbé pour le meilleur et pour le pire" (31). Nevertheless, Maréchal forces his mother to leave with him in secret and return to live with them in France. Ultimately, this forced departure permits Man Ya, as a staunch symbol of the islands, to be present during the narrator’s childhood in France and shape the entire narrative. If it were not for this forced departure, the book would not exist. Transcolonial imagery of her leaving links Maréchal’s actions to the original forced departure from Africa. Maréchal believes his mother will benefit in the long run from being in “un pays de grande civilisation” (39). He casts his family as "ses sauveurs" (31), at least in their mind. The narrator delves into Maréchal’s delusional thoughts to reveal his plan:

Le général de Gaulle lui est apparu étreignant une Marianne de pierre soustraite à la malediction de Hitler. Lui-même, Maréchal, est redevenu le petit négrillon de Routhiers-Capesterre de Guadeloupe. Il a dix ans ou peut-être douze. L’étonnant, il regarde tout ça comme derrière un grand voile, c’est qu’il porte déjà la tenue militaire. Enchainée, baillonnée, meurtrie, humiliée, Man Ya est une

Marianne aussi, ou plutôt une idole africaine-- parce que noire et taillée dans un bois d’ébène comme il en a vu au Sénégal. (32)

As de Gaulle holding the Marianne stands as the liberator of the *mère-patrie*, Maréchal sees himself as the hero who delivers *la mère* from an uncivilized world. One could interpret the union of Man Ya and a reference to Africa as an assertion of roots. The suppression of any Antillean reference seems odd given the nature of Man Ya as firmly rooted in her islands, but it reveals the extent to which he perceives her from a European representational space. Maréchal’s gaze comes across as that of a tourist or visitor, as he has seen these statues or idols during service for the French army, and thus in the role of colonizer. The evocation of Africa is a way to express that he looks down on her; Fanon posits that colonial logic believed “l’Antillais est plus évolué que le Noir d’Afrique: entendez qu’il est plus près du blanc; et cette différence existe non seulement dans la rue et sur les boulevards, mais aussi dans les administrations, l’armée” (Fanon 21). Next to this African idol is the figure of the Marianne, the ultimate revolutionary symbol of a country that fought for universal rights but later re-instated slavery and expanded its grip on the islands. The irony of this national icon pervading his dreams reveals his disjointed view of the world and lack of self-awareness that has global implications.

The events of May ’68 serve as a turning point in the narrative and bring to surface the cleavage between former colonial subjects like Maréchal and those of generations after, like that of the narrator. Maréchal no longer finds belonging in the newly ordered Hexagon that the events of May ’68 help to shape; that is to say, a country that finds traditional values under fire. When Charles de Gaulle loses the referendum, the worldview espoused by Maréchal crumbles, as he takes the nation’s rejection as a personal attack: “La France n’est plus tout à fait la même sans le Général. Papa n’est plus le même non plus. Une partie de lui a perdu foi en l’armée, en la France, en la vie, en l’honneur” (163). The deconstruction of the empire brings about a destabilization of his identity, and he seemingly suffers an existential crisis from the dismantaling of all that he knows. In the epigraph to Glissant's *Le discours antillais*, he quotes de Gaulle during a visit to Martinique as having said, "Entre l'Europe et l'Amérique, je ne vois que des poussières" (9). Maréchal's idolizing of this great French figure is reflective of his self-alienating values.

The narrator who recounts these memories of her life as a young girl growing up in France provides a different view of identity in the Hexagon. She can be classified as what Pineau calls in an interview with Nadège Veldwachter a *négropolitain*, or Antillean born and raised in France (182). The reference that combines *métropolitain* with a racial marker points to the perceived paradox that this generation incarnates, for while they may not speak a word of Creole, they continue to be categorized as other. Edouard Glissant indicates in *Le Discours antillais*, “Visiblement étrangers, les enfants de cette génération sont définitivement assimilés à la réalité française” (129). Foreignness proves synonymous with blackness, a problematic idea for first-generation children born in France but perceived as non-citizens because of cultural difference and skin color. Pineau insists on this question of identity and race throughout her literary works in which she often shows life in France as “a run down locus of utter, insurmountable despair and hopelessness for immigrants” (Githire 76). In *L'Exil selon Julia*, the narrator confronts discourse that centers on the difference she exteriorizes:

Négro. Négresse à plateau. Blanche-Neige, Bamboula/Charbon/et compagnie.../Ces noms-là nous pistent en tous lieux. Echos éternels, diables bondissant dans des flaques, ils nous éclaboussent d’une eau sale. Flèches perdues, longues, empoisonnées, traçant au coeur d’une petite trêve. Crachats sur la fierté. Pluie de roches sur nos têtes. Brusques éboulements de nos âmes....(11)

These verbal and physical assaults come at the hands of other children, but the lack of specific assailants creates a feeling that Pineau is implicating society as a whole. The choppy fragments create palpable tension to reflect her dispair. Racist discourse extends from the general public to national institutions, much like in the first chapter of this work where I discuss representations of institutionalized xenophobia and racism in France. In *L'Exil selon Julia*, the school stands out as a site of isolation for the narrator. Kamal Salhi elucidates the function of the school in the forming of collective identities in formely colonized areas in his article "Rethinking Francophone Culture: Africa and the Caribbean between History and Theory”:

Institutions have the power to shape the attitudes and behaviors of the people who operate within them, since they prescribe norms and rules of conduct. An example of the staying power of colonial influence is in education...Education is the means by which a society learns about itself and others, and creates knowledge of culture, tradition and identity, providing a basis on which to negotiate other cultures and accept, reject, or integrate their ideas. (10)

If the school as a site of inculcation articulates and instills national identity, the racist discourse that the head schoolteacher spews towards the narrator serves to deepen her social exile. Designated "la Noire" (160), she is cast as different because of her race. One teacher ignores her when she tries to participate (151); another makes her sit under the desk (152). When she writes on the blackboard using her left hand, the teacher diligently wipes away traces of the narrator's writing, as if to ignore her presence. This attempt to suppress through ignoring or negating is coupled with an animalizing of the black body when the teacher says, “Cette main-là, cette patte gauche, n’est pas la main de l’écriture!” (61). While the narrator's grades place her at the top of her class, she never does win the teacher’s respect, echoing colonial logic that ensured intelligence or social status could never trump race where accessing "Frenchness" is concerned (Arnold 4).

In addition to the public space of the school, racist discourse permeates the private space of the house through certain media like the television. Much like Benedict Anderson underscores the importance of the printing press to the dissemination and defining of national consciousness, the television in *L’Exil selon Julia* establishes visualized narratives of the nation that put on stage French identity. When a black newscaster that she admires is fired because viewers see her as incongruous with the French world, the narrator feels disgust that a Frenchwoman’s validity in a position of power has been questioned because she is black: “La télé cesse de nous fasciner. RACISME devient le mot unique qui sous-titre nos feuilletons favoris...Leur monde nous ignore d’une évidence nouvelle. Et nous guettons l’apparition d’Un de notre complexion-un seul!- qui viendra effacer Le Mot sur l’écran de la segrégation” (103). By saying “leur monde,” the narrator shows she views herself as placed on the outside of the French imagined community, barred from belonging. If we consider home to be “an anchoring point, a place of security, of relative safety and comfort (Githire 87), France certainly does not meet the definition for the narrator, despite that it is the only home she has physically experienced.

Nameless peers reinforce the feeling of unhomeliness in France and act out the assignation of her as an outsider when they yell, “Retournez dans ton pays!...” (80). If the verb “to return” denotes a point of origin, this particular insult underlines the complexity of the ideas of roots and home. Where is she to return? Pineau textualizes the void or the irretrievable by playing with textual presences and absences. Dominique Licop examines in her enlightening article “Origi/nation and Narration: Identity and Épanouissement In Gisèle Pineau's *L*'*Exil selon Julia”* how Pineau uses the palimpsest as a symbol of linguistic suspension to textualize historical absences. For example, in the previously cited quote, “Retournez dans ton pays!...,” the ellipses give body to the cultural void that weighs on the narrator: “J’ai longtemps gardé le sentiment d’avoir perdu quelque chose: une formule qui perçait jadis les geôles, un breuvage souverain délivrant la connaissance, une mémoire, des mots, des images. J’ai nourri en moi cette perte, pesant comme un deuil, manque sans définition” (20). When she looks at photographs, she seeks out answers to questions of origins that black-and-white pictures fail to provide. More than images, she wants a certain geneology complete with specifics: “Je voulais des noms sur des visages… Des humeurs. Des mots pour dire l’impalpable et l’immatériel, l’insignifiant et l’oublié” (20). Unable to access this information, she looks for words to describe the un-representable that others have forgotten. In this respect, Pineau draws an important parallel between the personal story of the narrator who desperately wants to know more about the past and the Antillean collective group’s severed history that has been largely ignored by French institutions.   
**Gardens of Memory and Painful Histories**The major movements succeeding Négritude owe to Césaire the first formulation of an Antillean identity, but different realities inform his successors’ literary focus. The differences in the needs of newly-independent African nations versus the French-but-other label imposed on Antilleans led theorists and writers to move away from the question of race and mythical origins towards an identity based on the cultural commonalities and particularities of the islands. Édouard Glissant's Antillanité movement formed in the 1960s sought to articulate an identity at the junctures of Antillean social, cultural and historical realities. Throughout his theoretical writings in *Le discours antillais*, Glissant emphasizes the repercussions of lost collective history and memory for Antillean society. With slavery having thwarted the possibility for an uninterrupted collective history to form, “le ratourage de la mémoire collective” has resulted in what he deems a “non-histoire” (Glissant 224). He calls for recognition of the African past without “un pleur nostalgique” (226) to paint the continent as part of the collective Caribbean experience rather than a point of origins. Exploring the situations particular to the islands involves "symbolic if not ideological" (Condé 126) literary representations of the landscape as playing a main role, much like a character, in a way that forges a created history within the land. For the Creolists, their avowal that “Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles” (13) expresses their adoption of an identity construct that is particular to the Caribbean. Whereas Césaire and Glissant recognized the African past as inseparable from the collective identity, albeit in different ways, Creolist writers conceive of it as a distraction from the plural Caribbean identity that formed from the slave trade and plantation system.

In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Pineau embeds references to Africa into unsettled and unsettling representations. Pineau represents Africa in such a way that her narrator does not entirely turn her back to the continent, but rather frames it in terms of an impractical return. Textually present, Africa evokes unanswered questions. In the days after abolition, “L’Afrique était déjà trop loin. Perdue derrière les voilures du temps. Enterrée dans les fosses des mémoires...Où aller? Dans quel village et en quelle famille remettre son corps? Le nom des tiens? La langue qu’on parle là-bas? Dis un, deux mots que tu as gardé pour le jour des retrouvailles!” (112). A textual anxiety takes over, but still, questions give body to otherwise vacant spaces of text. Pineau repositions her focus on Africa from an anchor point to a point of juncture in Antillean history:

L’idée de l’esclavage habita mes nuits. Je voyais la terre d’Afrique. Un village de la brousse. Retour de la chasse des hommes. Négresses à plateau pilant le mil. Marmaille coursant des singes et des gazelles. Un village si tranquille. Et puis les négriers...Lequel de mes ancêtres avait connu ces fers? D’où venait-il exactement? Son nom? Sa langue? Tout était effacé...Interroger Man Ya ne renseignait guère...Elle laissait ça à ceux qui ne se consolaient pas d’avoir quitté leur famille de rois et reines en Éthiopie ou en Guinée. (115)

Her imaginings about the past prove revelatory for several reasons. She automatically turns to French modes of representation of the other by evoking a quasi-exotic image of a traditional Africa where people play with wild animals and all is peaceful. It is as if her gaze comes from the exterior, looking onto this space. On a semantic level, the short, punctuated statements at the beginning second the feeling of a pacific, free time. Suddenly, the ensuing images of the slave trade violently disrupt the scene. Periods are supplanted with ellipses and question marks. The focus thus turns from an idyllic setting to one cut short by absences, representing Africa and the past as irretrievable and unrepresentable. Either she interprets Africa through an alienated frame of reference, or, the continent's "home" appeal is destroyed by the ensuing displacement.

Furthermore, the narrator’s grandmother does not look to Africa for stories, but rather contents herself with her identity rooted in the islands, as will be explored. Like Glissant, Pineau textually acknowledges Africa and its role in the formation of a unique Caribbean identity. For Glissant, the Antillean writer must "'fouiller' cette mémoire, à partir de traces parfois latentes qu’ils a repérées dans le réel” (228). Exploring memory involves literary representations of the landscape as a character in the narrative. He locates within the landscape an identity grounded on resistance: “Notre paysage est son propre monument: la trace qu’il signifie est repérable par-dessous. C’est tout histoire” (30). Here, Glissant calls attention to the historical dimensions of the land that serve as reminders of slavery and the plantation system. An inscription into the landscape thus represents an act of resistance by the seizure of power to re-define Antillean history and identity. Glissant highlights in a chapter entitled “A partir du paysage” in *Le discours antillais* the landscape as site of resistance by juxtaposing it with the maroons who fled to escape slavery:

Au nord du pays, l’enlacement de verts sombres que les routes n’entament pas encore. Les marrons y touffèrent leurs refuges. Ce que tu opposes à l’evidence de l’Histoire...La souche, sa fleur violette. Le lacis des fougères. la boue des premiers temps, l’impenetrable originelle. (30)

Glissant thus places the islands in opposition to the history that has been determined by outside forces. He articulates an identity that takes root in the landscape and thus in the islands as a figurative intrenchment in a prelapsarian time that escapes French definition.

Locating a figurative pre-modern time within the island topography works to redirect the focus on the unique Antillean experience.

Pineau inscribes an island identity and transnationally locates it in the Antilles as well as in France by way of the figure of Man Ya, or Julia. When Man Ya moves in with the family, she symbolically brings the Antilles with her and introduces her granddaughter to the identity she has never known. Once in France, Man Ya refuses all cultural and psychological transformation that would distill her as an Antillean or Creole symbol. Instead, she practices a sort of "reverse ethnography" where the gaze is subverted and characters provide observations of Paris that recall European modes of representing the other (Mudimbe-Boyi, "Travel" 29). She sees the French people who pass as ill-mannered and odd: “Elle a déjà remarqué que cette race est drôlesse” (70). A. James Arnold deems this reversal of positions as "inverse exoticism" that is "practiced by the learned colonial or postcolonial traveler who describes the geography of colonial metropolis meticulously but with feigned naïveté" (16). In this narrative, Man Ya as an uneducated woman holds power and puts forth representations of France as a cold and uncivilized place: "Mon Dieu, la froidure entre dans la chair et perce jusqu’aux os. Tous ces Blancs-là comprennent pas mon parler. Et cette façon qu’ils ont à me regarder comme si j’étais une créature sortie de la côte de Lucifer. Faut voir ça pour le croire. A mon retour en Guadeloupe, je raconterai à Léa que Là-Bas, la France, c’est un pays de désolation" (55). Man Ya understands her position in this place. When French officers interrogate her for wearing her son’s military coat outside, she stays calm so as not to cause a scene: “Man Ya ne voulait pas outrager la France” (73). Her firm beliefs lead the narrator to describe Man Ya as the one with the upper hand in the situaton: “Elle a de l’education. De toute facon, son esprit n’est pas tourmenté par les Blancs” (70). She resists intimidation and relies on her firmly rooted identity to survive exile.

Whereas Maréchal and Daisy strive to adopt French ideology, Man Ya transforms the Hexagon by growing a garden in their backyard where she cultivates plants that act as substitutes for Caribbean flowers that she cannot find there. Pineau has spoken about the importance of landscape in her own conception of what it means to be Antillean: “When I arrived in Martinique in 1970, I couldn’t tell a mango tree, a ginep tree, or a guava tree apart. So I had to learn all this, discover all this, listen to people, to stories, enter the land” (Loichot, "Devoured Writing" 335). Garden themes in *L'Exil selon Julia* become a space of belonging and symbolize the narrator’s growing consciousness of an Antillean identity that hinges on imagined connection. The figurative act of sowing seeds underlines Man Ya's importance to the narrator as a cultural nurturer who paves the way for her grandchildren to create belonging. Pineau uses Man Ya to embody nature and the islands so that the anchored identity she transmits through oral narratives allow for a point of access to a figurative pre-colonial time that resists the French gaze. The narrator muses, “Nous-mêmes, enfants, voyons Man Ya comme une personne anachronique. Venue d’un autre siècle, d’un autre temps, comme d’un autre pays. Les dimensions de son temps à elle, qui n’est pas celui de France, nous déroutent...Son temps à elle se déroule à l’infini...” (85). Man Ya and the visions of the landscape she teaches provide an atemporal space within which a re-writing of history exempt from French influence takes place through the narrator's imagined memory.

Man Ya’s Antillean worldview transmitted through oral narratives provides a counterpoint to the Western education that the children receive in school. An entire chapter entitled "L’éducation" begins with an enumeration of Man Ya’s values, including “obéissance,” “politesse,” “vérité,” and “travail” (109). These concepts based on respect stand in stark contract to the dehumanization the narrator experiences at her school. Also included in Man Ya's list of lessons is “peser les silences,” encouraging inquisitiveness and interrogation into the past. This reformulation of education and history on the part of Man Ya subverts colonial ideology and privileges Antillean forms of knowledge, forging for the children a place of belonging while in exile. Furthermore, the imagined identity as resistance surfaces in juxtaposition of the written with oral knowledge that Pineau uses to address the situation of diglossia that has historically placed French as superior. Diglossia refers to:

situations of language conflict whereby one of the languages is termed the ‘high’ variety in contrast to the other which is considered ‘low’ with the former being used in communication situations considered ‘noble’ (writing, formal usage, and so on) and the latter being used in more informal circumstances (conversations with close family etc.). Speakers have sometimes been known to question whether this second variety is, in fact, a real language. (Diglossia)

Viewing language within a hierarchy reflects and continues similar concerns with culture that align French language and French civilization. The narrator affirms as much when she discusses her subscription to the primacy of the written before Man Ya moves to France to live with them: “Lire, Écrire, Compter représentent la sainte trinité au Panthéon du Savoir. Nous éprouvons une gloire à marcher dans ces mangles. Nous nous découvrons savants, érudits, philosophes, grands alphabètes. Et nous sommes reconnaissants au ciel de nous avoir déposé sur cette terre bien après que Schoelcher eut tiré les Nègres de sous l’esclavagisme en 1848” (111). Like her father feels honored for fighting in the French military, so does the narrator when she speaks French. Language is conveyed as a construct of the nation, so that speaking French becomes analagous to being French, which she ironizes by referencing slavery, since regardless of their linguistic abilities, their skin color threatens acceptance. However, once Man Ya arrives, the narrator's perspective changes due to her grandmother's stories that align the written word with inequality and forced submission: “La loi venait de France, c’était écrit, signé, tamponné...Alors, on eut beau imprimer des mots de papier pour dénoncer la loi, il fallut lever des armées au nom de la liberté” (113). Pineau transhistorically frames the language question and uses it to hint at the celebrations of 1848 as a false freedom that brought further economic dependence and oppression (Glissant 26).

Through Man Ya, Pineau demonstrates a counter-discourse to the tradition of forgetting espoused by the narrator’s parents. For Maréchal and Daisy, “Interroger, c’est lever un embarras. Se questionner, c’est perdre pied dans les grandes eaux de l’Histoire du monde...On nous demande seulement de vivre au jour présent, laisser reposer la lie du passé, ne pas descendre ces sacs miteux où l’on a enfermé la honte” (111). Mariana Ionescu shows in her article "L'*ici-là* selon Gisèle Pineau" how Man Ya builds a bridge that crosses space and time through very real stories as well as magical ones when she takes the "occasion de parler en créole des merveilles de son île, mais aussi de la cruauté de l’Histoire dont elle veut que ses petits-enfants se souviennent des années plus tard" (7). This mix of historically-based stories of slavery with imaginative drawings of culture through visions of landscape permit Pineau to manifest access to that which has been forbidden as a positive experience for these children: “Seule, Man Ya ose nous instruire. Quand elle dit Le Mot, des rivages sans soleil s’ouvrent devant nos yeux” (111). The capitalization of “the word,” referring to the spoken word, shows the shift from pure French knowledge based on written words to the inclusion of a re-valued Antillean savoir based on the senses and visual representations. The narrator synthesizes the two so that the competing ideologies complement and correct one another. Indeed, orality now has the power to modify the written: “Les récits de Man Ya ourlent d’autres visions tirées des Contes et Légendes des Antilles de Thérèse Georgel, bâties des debris et brocards de la télévision: vieux films américains colorés d’explorateurs et de nègres dociles” (116). Here, Man Ya's stories serve as a counterpoint to European exoticized depictions. Man Ya as a mediator ultimately succeeds in passing on knowledge that allows the exiled grandchildren access to the Antillean imagined community, and with this created feelings of belonging, they navigate sometimes treacherous situations in France, too. Maeve McCusker convincingly argues in her article entitled "Small Worlds: Constructions of Childhood in Contemporary Postcolonial Autobiography in French" that real and constructed imaginings of collective memory and history that are signaled by landscape imagery reflect a personal awakening. Playing on the word island, McCusker shows how "the confluence of geography and history means that the island functions, on a metaphorical level, as both a powerful child-land and an I-land" ("Small Worlds" 203). The remembering of a cultural identity specific to the islands thus also denotes personal growth.

For the autobiographical project, childhood reflects a postcolonial fascination with a search for a sort of worry-free, idyllic time. Pineau writes childhood along the lines of Glissant who evokes a sensorial and spiritual connection to nature and memory: “Je me souviens des odeurs tenaces qui encombraient l’espace de mon enfance. Il me semble qu’alors tout le pays alentour était riche de ces parfums qui ne vous quittaient pas” (138). The exotic representations are appropriated by Glissant and turned into an awareness of social and historical memories. In contrast, the child narrator understands that adults have a different grasp on the past: “L’esclavage! c’est un mot honni des grandes personnes” (111). In her space of connection to the islands, the child knowingly looks at adults with an understanding that “les grandes personnes portent des masques” (60). Here, the mask is used in Fanonian terms as a symbol of the mind and body disjuncture produced from such attempts to cover and change oneself that comes as a result of a disconnect from reality and history. Adults such as her parents and their fellow army men become blind to history as a way to cope: “Ils font des tresses de l’oubli qui allonge ses racines dans le carnaval du bien-être” (13). Adults are cast as “acteurs” (13) who repress memories and refuse to deal with the pain of the past. In this sense, adulthood entails participation in the tradition of forgetting and an attempted abandonment of that which causes shame ("Small Worlds" 441). Her desire to visit the islands while young connects to her desire to inscribe her body into the garden and landscape before being pulled into the blind world of adults: “Mes pieds ont encore grandi. J’ai peur d’arriver toute grande là-bas. Mon Dieu, faites que je sois encore une fille sans règles” (165).

Returning to the islands while still a child and in that prelapsarian time incarnated by Man Ya mirrors a desire to not only resist French definition, but also to experience Antillean culture that faces extinction in the wake of globalization. The theme of childhood explored through the autobiography serves as a form of resistance and as cultural preservation, or what McCusker calls “a nostalgic return, combining the desire to recover both a pre-globalization past and a time of personal innocence” (McCusker, "Small Worlds" 5). Man Ya warns her granddaughter, “Ma fille, viendra un siècle où les gens de ce monde n’élèveront plus leur âme. Les regards chercheront à courir au-delà même de l’horizon... Il faut se nourrir de l’enseignement des ans, et apprendre à lire les pages des nuages, les humeurs du soleil, les dessins ronds du ciel...” (47). The desire to take root in the Antilles during childhood serves to encourage remembering and preserving, which shows a fight for equality and recognition of cultural particularities. **Growing Into the Transnational**  
Pineau inscribes this foray into the past encapsulated by childhood's safeguarding from realities, but she also moves away from a tranquil image to showcase those ways in which imagination and lived experience clash in the transition from child to adult. In the final chapters of *L'Exil selon Julia*, Pineau re-positions the setting to the Antilles when the family moves after de Gaulle lost the referendum in 1969. This transatlantic movement takes the form of both a return and a departure in that the narrator perceives of her movement to the Antilles as a symbolic return. She has imagined herself as part of the Antillean imagined community and believes that she will fit in well because of her forged feelings of belonging and of racial sameness: “Je me disais: là où l’on va, les Noirs sont chez eux...Jamais plus je ne cacherai la noirceur de ma peau sous un bureau...Et je serai moi-même au pays des miens” (167). The use of the imperfect and location of the speaker as outside of the islands ("là où l'on va") forewarns of an eventual change in thinking. The knowledge that they have of the islands and their constructed feelings of belonging are put to the test, and Pineau reveals that Antillean identity goes beyond racial similarities.

When they first arrive in Martinique, the narrator and her brother see the deplorable conditions that surround them as reflections of their inner turmoil, as if common suffering alone denotes a connection: “Toute la misère des lieux nous parle et nous console, nous dit: 'Vous êtes d’ici!' (178). However, Man Ya’s grandchildren slowly come to grips with the ways in which they differ from their peers. Language represents one of the main barriers of acceptance, with other Antillean children making fun of the narrator’s "créole grené de RRR, de tous les mots français qui comblent les trous de la méconnaissance" (188). The children experience an assignation of other because of appearing "too French." The focus changes from exile's othering processes in France to exile's othering processes in the Antilles. The neat image of this place violently comes up against the chaos that they see in Antillean life:

Soudain, la peur nous prend. Trop de chemin parcouru. Nous ne savons pas lire l'heure du ciel...Trop d'expressions sur le visage...Des yeux qui parlent. Des bouches qui se tordent d'une souffrance crue...Des figures où s'inscrivent les sentiments forts qu'on trouve dans les romans...Paroles qui disent le monde en trois mots, paraboles, sentences, semonces...Non, nous ne sommes pas acclimatés à ces débordements, à ces visages parlants, à cette fièvre qui habite la rue. (180)

Lines of communication break down as she occupies a position of other in the theater of the street where "l'energe s'exalte dans le seul délir coutumière" (Glissant, *Le discours antillais* 683). As Glissant signals, the street is a prized site in Antillean life, where chaotic scenes encapsulate drama and fragmentation. The narrator cannot navigate this street, "Et puis, il y a tous ces Noirs autour de nous. Tellement de Noirs" (181). She sees blackness as a single category, whereas race for the Antillean comprises a wide spectrum of complexions. She does not notice complexion, only race, because she occupies a European frame of reference as a stranger in this space.

The meeting of imagination with real experience culminates in textual and diegetic rupture in a pivotal chapter where, suddenly, the formatting stops and unexplained ekphrastic biblical passages are inserted. Pineau titles this chapter “Les cinq plaies du retour au pays pas natal” and announces a departure from Césaire’s conception of Caribbean identity as part of a collective black civilisation. For Césaire, the struggle for a re-connection to the land proves at once an affirmation of self and an awakening of the group. For the narrator, returning to her imagined roots leads to a painful process by which she understands those ways in which she does not belong to the Antillean imagined community. The biblical quotes are taken from the book of Exodus in the Old Testament in which God inflicts the ten plagues upon the people of Egypt to punish Pharaoh for not freeing the imprisoned Israelites. One such passage starts out: “...Il vint une quantité de mouches venimeuses dans la maison de Pharaon et de ses serviteurs, et tout le pays d’Égypte fut dévasté par les mouches...” (193). After the biblical quote, the narrator regains voice and describes the family’s incessant battle against insects that seep into every corner of their house, covering them with bites. The evoked plagues take the form of natural disasters of the island, all of which stifle and devour the narrator and her family. Stories from scripture and historical events take them over; their livestock die and Hurricane Dorothy wipes out Maréchal’s crops (205). If the family is overtaken by these figurative plagues, then Pineau places them in the position of Pharaoh, the oppressor, who resists believing in God’s power and who suffers as punishment for his blindness. Pineau subverts the power dynamic by showing these *négropolitains* and the indoctrinated Maréchal and Daisy as overpowered by the islands. Whereas the Antilles were over-defined by history and by Western thinkers, here, it proves a difficult and rugged terrain to navigate for those considered outsiders.

This painful phase of being devoured by the island coincides with the end of childhood for the narrator, who declares, “Lisa et moi avions quitté nos chairs d’enfants” (211). Her entry into young adulthood thus parallels the phase that forces her to re-negotiate how she feels. She at first feels angered at the difference between the images she had constructed and the painful reality she lives. The scars she bears from the insects that invade her house serve as reminders, and she wonders, "Est-ce que les taches disparaîtront plus tard, quand je serai une grande femme?" (196). Whereas before, she seeks to experience the Antilles while a child, the painfulness of life pushes her to seek out adulthood's comforting amnesia. When she visits her grandmother Man Boule for the first time since her arrival in the Antilles, she laments, “Ces images naïves, gondolées sous leurs vitres, avaient perdu leur fascinant pouvoir de protection. Le charme était brisé. Et tout semblait maintenant vulnérable et fragile, à l’abandon, soumis aux éléments” (212). Whereas in exile in France, she relies on her imagination to find belonging, here in the Antillean space she struggles to overcome the othering process that marks her out as foreigner.

At first confused by the gap between her expectations and her real-life experiences, a visit with Man Ya reaffirms her belonging and squashes her fears. She realizes that the validity or authenticity of her memories prove less important than the act of remembering: “Personne ne se souvenait de la case de Man Ya. Peut-être n’y étions-nous jamais allés. Nous l’avions inventée dans nos rêves” (215). She realizes that now that she has explored the past, she can free herself from its weight by turning towards a model that keeps traditional culture alive without restricting her parameters. The emphasis shifts from the anxieties engendered by gaps to a moment of transition where she understands “que le moment était aussi venu pour moi d’abandonner les regrets qui pesaient mes épaules” (212). She moves from childhood filled with imagination and security to being a young adult in a consumer-driven world. With the narrator growing up, so, too, are France and the Antilles undergoing change. After Hurricane Dorothy, "la ville reprend sa figure de bon commerce" (206) and the Syrian-Lebanese merchants of high heels and new clothes convincingly tempt shoppers (207). Along with her siblings, the narrator worries about dating, dancing and clothing. Nonetheless, with this ushering in of a new time, the past never leaves. While “nous étions assises devant la cuisinière à raidir nos cheveux au fer chaud. A étaler le vernis sur nos ongles,” she wonders, "que faisait donc Man Ya?" (211). Pineau re-defines home, the past and memory by showing them to be in dialog rather than in opposition:

Alors, nous comprîmes réellement ce que Man Ya nous avait apporté...Sentes défrichées de son parler créole. Sentiments marcottes en nous autres, jeunes bois étioles. Elle nous avait donné: les mots, visions, rais de soleil et patience dans l’existence. Nous avait désigné les trois sentinelles, passé, présent, futur, qui tiennent le fils du temps, les avait mêlés pour tisser, jour après jour, un pont de corde solide entre Là-Bas et le Pays. (217-218)

The Antillean identity rooted in the islands that she signifies does not prove to be the end point for Pineau's illustrations of identity, but a "point of insertion in the world," to use Michael Dash's explanation of Glissant's own "impulse to move outwards and not back" (*Glissant* 21). Her narrator breaks from binaries to see the Antilles as home in the sense Françoise Lionnet means when she states "home is a place of departure" ("Transnationalism, Postcolonialism" 27). Brenda Mihta convincingly argues that Man Ya "is not an archetype confined to the symbolic fixity or conceptual value of a national/normative ideal found in representations of the ‘mother country.’ On the contrary, she figures as the maker and preserver of a dynamic pre-history of cultural productivity who reconfigures the exilic disposition of the ‘discovered’ Caribbean landscape into a site of creative possibility" (29). Here, the island identity is a rooted rhizome, a paradoxical way of refusing representational closed systems while also acknowledging that roots open up to cross-fertilizations. As opposed to a linear image of memory as extending in a straight line, Pineau inscribes a circular trajectory where leaving and returning, imagining and experiencing first-hand, mix in to show identity as a coexistance of configurations of memory. Njeri Githire deems this circular movement “an inbound journey to the source" that characters undertake for healing and connection "followed by a journey back to their habitual world with a ‘reshaped’ reality” (86). The Antillean transnational resembles circular trajectories that escape binaries and demonstrate how "the ‘dual-centredness’ of her geographical location and cultural inheritance that redefines Frenchness through the insertion of Caribbean Creoleness as a part of mainland and island identity" demonstrates that "Pineau lays claim to both countries simultaneously" (Mihta 27).

This openness to other possibilities is what some have accused the Creolists of lacking. Condé sees the numerous rules that constitute a text deemed Creolist as restrictive of artistic expression. Pineau has voiced similar concerns, even though she is often classified as a Creolist writer. In an interview with Valérie Loichot she admits, "I don’t want to stare at my own bellybutton. I don’t want to be self-centered. I also don’t want to write only about the Caribbean community and remain imprisoned in that community and on the island" ("Devoured Writing" 330). In this respect, Pineau follows Condé’s thinking more than the Creolists' prescriptions that locate and restrict identity. Pineau elucidates an identity open to the possibility of experiencing the world in both languages, resonnating with Glissant that "the question is not Creole or French, but Creole and French" (Condé, "Disorder" 128). Pineau does not, in the end, demonstrate French and Creole as competing but rather complementary. Instead of seeing the French language as a threat, the narrator embraces it as a form of knowledge: “La lettre a saveur de connaissance. Chaque son est une evocation” (59). However, Pineau equally expounds on the power of Creole as a form of cultural preservation. The narrator's mother finds it funny that “voilà qu’à présent, le palé a vyè nég intéresse ces enfants qui sont nés en France. Ils mettent le créole haut comme ça” (210). Writing in French and storytelling in Creole prove acts of power: “A mon commandement, les mots se défont. Chaque lettre devient arme, instrument de torture” (64). Words serve as protection because they provide her a feeling of empowerment that counters the ostracizing discourses she confronts. She manages to equally inscribe Creolist elements of orality. While the story is told primarily in first person by the young narrator, there exist several passages where Man Ya gains voice and takes over the narration, becoming the “je” of the story. The voice shifting to Man Ya only occurs in conjunction with an eruption of repressed thoughts. Man Ya is represented as seeing it her duty to God to accept her position as the wife of her husband, despite his abuse that has earned him the name *Le Bourreau*. However, in the few passages when Man Ya allows for her true emotions regarding her husband to surface, a subtle shift announces a change in voice, and whereas young Gisèle largely speaks for Man Ya, here she speaks for herself:

Pendant ses campagnes, le coquin envoyait des lettres où les flammes de l’amour flattaient le coeur de Julia. Il annonçait une vie de délices, des promenades bras dessus, bras dessous. Il promettait une case neuve où nicher leurs étreintes. Monsieur disait rêver d’elle, sa Julia adorée…Belles paroles mon Asdrubal! Tu as toujours su voltiger et faire briller le français sur papier…Voilà l’époux qui m’est revenu! voilà le miel et les douceurs, le Bourreau, ses coups, ses pompes, ses oeuvres et sa malédiction. (69)

Here, the narrator describing Julia's prayers and sorrow sharply turn into a first-person recounting of her real feelings. This shift reflects the ability for all forms of expression to give voice to the repressed and the forgotten.

Furthermore, in a chapter entitled "Les lettres d'en France," the narrative shifts to epistolary form with the narrator writing Man Ya who recently returned to Guadeloupe. While she addresses each one "Chère Man Ya," she confirms that these letters will never be sent: "Finalement, je me rends compte que je ne t'envoie plus du tout de courrier. Je suis une copieuse. J'imite Anne Franck et j'´écris à un cahier. Toi, tu remplaces Kitty, sauf que tu existes vraiment" (156). The epistle as a form of interpersonal communication becomes a sort of diary so that writing to Man Ya signifies that the narrator also writes to herself. Reading and writing become the same act and the book that inscribes multiplicities and circular routes figures as a mark of Glissant's *métissage* that we can understand as the "encounter that serves as a cognitive shock that can then allow us to track difference; it is also a moment in a process in reality that opens up the possibility of creolization" (Prabhu and Quayson 227). The book as a space of encounter where new possibilities are born depends, for Pineau, on the unearthing of memories that reading and writing exige. The narrator admits to her love of reading, a process aligned with the nature of memories:

Les pages...ont laissé leur encrage dans ma mémoire. Ces livres-là ne trainent pas au vu de tous. Ils rassissent au grenier, certains dans des cartons, d’autres enfermés dans une cage spéciale fermée à clé. La clé est sur la porte. Mes dimanches après-midi s’épuisent à ces lectures. Maman tricote pour l’hiver prochain. Je monte au grenier. Je ne comprends pas tout ce que je lis. Mais je souris aux phrases, j’ai le sentiment de piéter dans un chemin d’écrits défendus. (63)

Stories are like memories: some remain vivid, others fade, and those that are too painful remain hidden away. The image of Daisy knitting, a repetitive, mindless act, mirrors the mother's refusal to delve into memories represented by these forbidden narratives. Daisy sees remembering as troubling, but the narrator feels a certain happiness in reading, even if she does not fully understand. The young girl establishes a complicity with books which grant her a space of belonging: “Les livres et tous les personnages qui les habitent me parlent, me laissent entrer dans leurs conversations” (62). In this quote, she acknowledges that the unfolding of the stories hinges on her reading of them. The act of reading and writing memory represent a re-constitution of time and self. In the space of reading, “Là, rien ni personne, pas même le temps, ne meurt jamais tout à fait. Il y a toujours une résurrection possible, un envol probable” (117). Indeed, the narrator says about her racist teacher, “Je n’ai pas besoin de son regard pour vivre et grandir. Je me dis que la marquise de Meurteuil et la princesse de Clèves ont et et caetera de temps a vivre. Même si le papier jaunit et se tache de vieillesse, ces dames resteront belles” (200). Here, literature creates a form of history that is always retrievable in that each reading generates new imaginings. Similarly, Pineau presents a configuraton of memory for Antilleans that is not based on authenticity and fixedness but rather relies on constructed and re-constructed representations open to change. As opposed to containing the past, she acknowledges that created memory and interpretations of stories and histories are constantly in a state of flux.

Memory, the landscape, and books all take the form of hybrid spaces of creation. Maria Ionescu argues that Pineau "se joint à d’autres auteurs antillais qui annoncent la culture pluraliste de l’avenir où l’on devrait mieux valoriser le métissage et les identités hybrides" (13), but I argue that Pineau follows Glissant's idea that all cultures are hybrid. Pineau not does illustrate the Antilles as the exception, but as the rule. For Glissant, "The Caribbean has become exemplary in this creative global 'chaos' which proliferates everywhere" (Dash, *Glissant* 23). Pineau creates a powerful place for the islands within the global order by presenting a hybridized transnational identity built on roots and routes.

**Conclusion**

Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* represents a pivotal work in the re-drawing of Antillean identity in a globalized world. The protagonists allow for the discernment of differing relationships and degrees of convergence with the Hexagon’s imagined community. By detailing the lives of the narrator, her parents Maréchal and Daisy, and her grandmother Man Ya, Pineau touches on several generations, taking readers on a journey though Antillean history. The ranging notions of belonging that evolve in conjunction with history and personal affiliations permit Pineau to offer a model of self-understanding that turns around questions of memory. Challenging collective amnesia, Pineau values inquisitiveness and exploration as ways of reconnecting to that which has been lost.

Through oral stories and symbolic landscapes passed on by Man Ya, the narrator creates a local Antillean identity before even arriving in the islands. Going through a painful process of adaption, she emerges stronger and is able to assert a transnational identity built from the combination of lived experiences and rooted memories. This model of identity allows Pineau to re-define identity from a debilitating focus on France into a transcendence of static notions of identity. Once exiled everywhere, she figuratively roots herself across borders. Pineau's book paves the way for formerly colonized areas that have experienced rupture to engage with other imagined communities on a global stage in a way that preserves local particularities.

Chapter Three: Writing Memory and Re-Writing Identity in *L’Africain* by J.M.G. Le Clézio

**Introduction**

In October of 2008, upon J.M.G. Le Clézio’s receiving of the Nobel Prize for Literature, then President Nicolas Sarkozy responded to the author's success with a laudatory speech: “Enfant de l'Ile Maurice et du Nigeria, adolescent niçois, nomade des déserts américains et africains, Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio est citoyen du monde, fils de tous les continents et de toutes les cultures. Grand voyageur, il incarne le rayonnement de la France, de sa culture et de ses valeurs dans un monde globalisé où il porte haut les mots de la francophonie” (Sarkozy).[[22]](#footnote-21) Sarkozy correctly underlines the multiculturalism that marks the author's life, including his parents' Mauritian and British roots. Sarkozy implies, however, that the author acts as an active participant in the global dissemination of French values. Le Clézio’s literary focus spans many continents, but it is not to deliver a message inspired by France’s "rayonnement." Sarkozy positions Le Clézio within a framework that reinforces the idea of the Hexagon as center that sheds light on its peripheries. Far from participating in the transmission of a certain French message, Le Clézio's style and themes defy classification, reflecting both the originality of his approach and his nonconformist tendencies.

Despite the awards he has amassed, he often finds himself on the margins of the literary world. Le Clézio's works remain undervalued by many scholars who hold him at arm's length. His entrance into the spotlight began when in 1963, he won the Théophraste Renaudot Prize awarded to first novels. In her metacritical review "From the Renaudot Prize to the Puterbaugh Conference: The reception of J.M.G. Le Clézio," Sophie Jollin explains how the author immediately stood out from previous Renaudot winners. The simple yet obscure style of *Le Procès Verbal* clashes with the type of reader-accessible texts that sell.[[23]](#footnote-23) While the Renaudot acknowledges bourgeoning authors, the award also holds a significant commercial function that aims to generate book sales and media recognition. Although *Le Procès-Verbal* sold fairly well, Le Clézio's popularity sharply declined soon after (Jollin 5). In fact, Jollin cites an almost two-decade lull in Le Clézio's career between the publication of *Le Procès-Verbal* and *Désert's* appearance in 1980. Media attention surrounded the author again when the Académie Française awarded him the Grand Prix Paul Morand for *Désert* and its poignant depiction of colonialism and immigration. Jollin attributes the novel's success with a "return to a more traditional style, often close to that of the adventure novel" (19). Another explanation for the popularity of *Désert* lies in how well its themes dovetail with the political and social climate of the 1980s. Espousing a discourse that questions the potential consequences of French colonialism allowed Le Clézio to tap into the issues at the heart of the Hexagon. Immigration "became an important issue for the intermediate level of French society, the average 'progressive middle-class' person who came to political power through the elections of 1981" (Jollin 20). *Désert* became a best-seller after the Paul Morand Prize partly because it presented themes enjoyed by these middle-class readers interested in humanitarian causes and the country's current situation. Le Clézio's previously written books, especially *Mondo et autres Histoires* (1978), picked up publicity as a result of *Désert*'s success. Around this time, Le Clézio's works began attracting the eye of French educators, too. The hermeneutic coding and social relevance of his works meshed well with reading lists and exercises like the *commentaire de texte* so common in French classrooms (Jollin 16). Academic interest on the university level took shape in the mid-1980s in the form of conferences, journals, and dissertations on Le Clézio (Jollin 8). In 1997, scholars launched the Puterbaugh Conference on World Literature, the first colloquium dedicated to Le Clézio (Jollin 1).

Yet despite a certain canonization and increased readership, scholars agree that Le Clézio remains more popular outside of France. When he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2008, academics and critics, in addition to the author himself, were shocked (Archambault). P.J. Archambault explains that before 2008, "although most of Le Clé́zio’s books, essays, and short stories—more than fifty titles in all—have been published by Gallimard, which has offices situated in the very heart of the Parisian literary world, just off the Boulevard Saint-Germain, Le Clézio had remained a virtually unknown figure in the French capital" (3). It is clear that even though the Paul Morand award in 1980 sparked renewed interest in the author, he still lacked and lacks full acceptance in the French literary world.

One article published in *Le Monde* in 2008 particularly stands out as an example of the type of criticism hurled at Le Clézio. Entitled "Jean-Marie Le Clézio ou le Nobel immérité," Frédéric-Yves Jeannet argues that the author's works cannot compare to the contemporary classics of French literature written by Annie Ernaux or Nathalie Sarraute. Taking the position of a "professeur de littérature française," he denounces the academy's decision on the grounds of poorly representing the nation:

Le Nobel de Le Clézio fait rétrograder la littérature française de plusieurs décennies, et l'appréciation que fera le reste du monde de notre littérature, pourtant fertile, car on jugera à l'aune de l'Académie suédoise que ce qu'on a fait de mieux depuis Claude Simon est d'écrire qu'en effet, nous sommes tous le résultat d'un père et d'une mère. (3)

Jeannet targets his sneers at *L'Africain,* which opens with the line "nous sommes tous le résultat d'un père et d'une mère" (1). The implication is that Le Clézio's simple writing style somehow differs from traditional French writing. Archambault weighs in on the perceived difference between canonical classics and Le Clézio's works: "It may be, as some critics argue, that his language lacks the economy, the wit, the sense of surprise, word play, and paradox that one associates with French writing since Voltaire and the Enlightenment. His detractors, usually in metropolitan France, have characterized his language as 'too simple, too naked'" (4). Jeannet's searing critique supports Jollin's claim that "Le Clézio stands accused in the name of a classical ideal of order and clarity. From simplicity and sobriety, it is tempting to infer poverty and so favor a negative connotation produced by the doxa, which valorizes intellect and complexity" (24). Criticism like that of Jeannet's reflects that the relationship between nation, language and literature continues to exist in France. By saying he betrays French literary norms, Jeannet implies that his writing is not French enough; the author's transnational novelistic settings are deemed inferior to works marked by "l'universalité, l'originalité, la rupture novatrice" (2), those elements Jeannet believes encapsulate classic French books.

Thus while the French president lays claim to Le Clézio, others push him out of the literary sphere in France. Like so many of the protagonists he pens, the author hangs between inclusion and exclusion in the Hexagon. To the contrary of Jeannet's assertions, I believe that Le Clézio's books, in particular *L'Africain*, showcase pertinent and unique statements about complex issues like national identity and multicultural affiliations. An analysis of the many transnational crossings and identity configurations in *L'Africain* reveal the rather singular perspective of a European laying claim to an African identity outside of exotic and colonial reasoning. This chapter is essentially concerned with the question of how Le Clézio as a white French man avoids falling into the trap of exoticizing representations of the other. In his book *J.M.G. Le Clézio and La Métaphore Exotique*, leading Le Clézio scholar Bruno Thibault argues Le Clézio uses the metaphor as a "déplacement du sens et du sujet" and distances exotic from being "grossier, anecdotique ou pittoresque" to mean a displacement of meaning that comes from "un voyage vers un Ailleurs et vers le Dehors" (14). My aim is to complement the current scholarship on Le Clézio and demonstrate how *L'Africain*, a lesser-studied work of his, takes up postcolonial issues by working within French modes of representing the other, but assessing and re-defining those terms in order to put into place a re-evaluation of French and African cultures. How does Le Clézio write Africa without falling into idealized representations? What are the asymmetries involved in a French man looking at this other world and representing a place where he is not from, and that has been over-determined by colonial ideology?

Through a first-person narrator, he delves into his memory to recollect experiences before, during and after his momentous transnational journey to meet his father in 1948. As the narrator tells stories of life in Africa, details of the father's life also surface, combining biography and autobiography, but fictional details intersperse true accounts. In *L'Africain*, the narrator's father serves as a doctor for the British government and is stationed in numerous countries throughout Africa, mostly Cameroun and Nigeria. When his mother returns to France while pregnant with the narrator's younger brother, World War II erupts, and his father is not allowed to leave his station to be with his family. The father's stories accompany remembrances of life in Nazi-occupied France that turn around immobility and fear. Because of their ties to the British government, Le Clézio's family is at times forced to go into hiding. The trip to Africa recounted in *L'Africain* represents the first time the narrator goes to meet and live with his father in Nigeria. This meeting thus enables a break from the nightmare that is life in the Hexagon and marks an entry into a new way of living. In addition to the plot, *L'Africain* also stands out because of the black and white photographs interspersed throughout the book. The photos sometimes add to the text; other times they conflict with the words on the page. I argue that, alone, the photos tell no story. They urge us to look at the textual images that Le Clézio paints with his sensorial style. More than just fillers, these photos entertain a relationship with the text and with readers, and I will show how they function to reveal and conceal information so as to demand a look at that which lies beyond the page.

In the first part of this chapter, I bring to light multiple layers of voice, memory and image. I argue that Le Clézio adapts the autobiography genre to his own needs by making his life story depend on the re-telling of others' stories. In the second part, I elucidate the techniques that Le Clézio utilizes to tell these stories. I discuss Roland Barthes' seminal *L'Effet de réel* to reveal Le Clézio's own theoretical ideas of the relationship between reality and literature*.* I situate the role of objects and the ordinary in the third part by looking at ways the author diverges and converges with his contemporaries like Alain Robbe-Grillet and George Perec. I propose that in *L'Africain*, Le Clézio embeds into the narrative his theories of the *réel* and of objects within an African context in order to de-center France and make global statements about the relationship between the West and Africa. Lastly, in the fourth part, I define the numerous configurations of memory that the author uses to show the construction of identity as a work in process. By exploring these various elements of the book, I argue that *L'Africain* showcases postcolonial representations of the French-Africa nexus that re-work from a French point of view new ways of interacting with the world.  
**(Auto)biography in Text and Image**In an interview with Jérôme Garcin in 2008, Le Clézio boldly avows that he will never write a memoire. Keeping true to his mysterious nature, he then goes on to admit, "En vérité, j'ai le sentiment de n'avoir jamais rien écrit d'autre, depuis le *Procès-verbal*, que des autobiographies. Mes livres mettent toujours en scène des moments de mon histoire. Car je n'ai aucune imagination. Ce que j'invente, c'est ce que l'on m'a donné"(Garcin 2003). If Le Clezio's assertion were true, he would have written more than forty autobiographies, a feat for even the vainest writer. While it is true that he has never published an explicit memoire clearly outlining his life, *L'Africain* does belong to one of Mercure de France's collections entitled *Traits et Portraits*. The collection's theme is outlined on their website: "Chacun s'essaie à l'exercice de l'autoportrait. Les textes sont ponctués de dessins, d'images, de tableaux ou de photos qui habitent les livres comme une autre voix en écho, formant presque un récit souterrain"(Mercure de France). Readers thus presuppose the book to be an autobiography or discussion of self. However, a sense of ambiguity is inscribed in the title itself. At first glance, one would assume since it is an autobiography, Le Clézio is referring to himself; he is "l'Africain" of *L'Africain*. Semantically, "the African" as a designation is an adjectival noun that describes a person by way of his or her origin, or by where that person lives. The evocation of an entire continent as opposed to a specific country or area within Africa makes it a broad generality. The use of the direct article further obfuscates its signification, making it so that the author specifically refers to a singular, masculine person summed up by a very broad term. The conundrum can be clarified by leading scholar Warren Motte who examines Le Clézio's representations of Africa in his article "Writing Away" that appeared in a *World Literature Today* issue dedicated exclusively to Le Clézio. For Motte, naming strategies used by Le Clézio provide a clue to understanding his works. In particular, a novel's title stands as a "floating signifier, waiting to be invested with meaning. As such, it is the first cipher in the hermeneutic code of the text, for it serves to pique the reader's curiosity. Clearly, the word is a "foreign" one whose resonances, to a French ear at least, are exotic…the evocative force of the word is undiminished, within the same connotational field" (46). Motte refers to Le Clézio's novel *Onitsha* published in 1991, but I believe his assertions regarding the title equally apply to *L'Africain*. Framing the title as both a generality and a particularity in an ambiguous way recalls European discourses dating back to colonialism that negated the African continent's rich diversity. The title is provocative in the sense that it brings to the surface readers' associations with Africans and Africa before we even delve into the book. We must sit with these images as we begin the book, so that from the onset, the journey symbolized by the reading of the book entails an examination of our own preconceptions.

A traditional journey in the literal sense involves a point of departure, evoking questions of origins. Le Clézio begins the book with a simple statement on family: "Tout être humain est le resultat d'un père et une mere" (7). However, his use of the words "être humain" as opposed to "je" creates a sense of detachment. The narrator's distance from the introductory line that juxtaposes identity with biology reflects that such reductive terms prove insufficient for someone like Le Clézio, who did not have his father in his life for so long and whose roots extend from Maurice to England to France. To meet his father and explore the question of origins requires another type of journey that intervenes, one encapsulated by memory and going into the past. The physical journey thus connects to a temporal journey enabled by the autobiographical project he undertakes:

J'ai longtemps rêvé que mère était noire. Je m'étais inventé une histoire, un passé, pour fuir la réalité à mon retour d'Afrique, dans ce pays, dans cette ville où je ne connaissais personne, où j'étais devenu un étranger. J'ai découvert, lorsque mon père, à l'âge de la retraite, est revenu vivre avec nous en France, que c'était lui l'Africain. Cela a été difficile à admettre. Il m'a fallu retourner en arrière, recommencer, essayer de comprendre. En souvenir de cela, j'ai écrit ce petit livre. (7)

In the cited passage, isolation and difference take on many forms. The narrator feels out of place when he returns to France, which shows how this trip to Africa has changed him; his father stands apart from his family and from France when he finally returns a tired, worn-down man. The writing of the book functions to explore the myths he has developed to deal with the changes his encounters with Africa and his father produced. The personal myth of a black mother serves to forge belonging in the Hexagon and attests to his desire to keep with him a part of Africa. Lydie Moudileno sees his visions of a black mother as representative of a desire to bring the African continent with him in the Hexagon ("Trajectoires" 71). Imagining her as African, the narrator uses her as a symbolic anchor to a far away space as well as to a moment in the past: "Désormais, pour moi, il y aurait avant et après l'Afrique (15). I suggest that the black mother myth also reveals the distance he feels between himself and his father. After all, his father is the person he later identifies as the African, the man for whom Nigeria is "son pays d'adoption" (79) and where "pendant plus de quinze ans, ce pays sera le sien" (77). Looking to make his mother black softens the truth that this African heritage the narrator claims results, in part, from a man he barely knows. He remembers, "Je ne l'ai pas reconnu, pas compris….un étranger, et presque un ennemi" (90). The man he did not know shows himself to be "inflexible, autoritaire, en même temps doux et généreux avec les Africains…il n'avait aucun contact avec le reste du monde" (90). Discussing beatings for minor infractions and their structured, minimalist lifestyle, the narrator's envisioning of a black mother permits him to feel less guilty about their commonalities. Even later in life, he says, "La période où il est rentré d'Afrique a été la plus dure. Aux difficultés d'adoption s'ajoutait l'hostilité qu'il devait ressentir dans son propre foyer" (94). Throughout *L'Africain*, Le Clézio throws around possible ideas for his father's ill temperament: the war, the inability to cross into France and see his wife and children, the isolation, and the never-ending disease and sickness are offered as justifiable rationalizations. Indeed, his father, as any person would, was warped over time by his solitude, inability to reach his family, and constant interaction with the sick and dying. Moments where the author wrestles with these reasons pierce the usual flowery, abstract style with direct interrogatives, manifesting textual anxiety: "Etait-ce la guerre, cet interminable silence, qui avait fait de mon père cet homme pessimiste et ombrageux, autoritaire, que nous avons appris à craindre plutot qu'à aimer?" (44). Posing these questions allows the author to manifest a need to deconstruct this childhood myth and the apparent disconnect by investigating the man who, upon retiring later in life, "a apporté avec lui cet héritage africain" (94). Le Clézio's self-portrait thus uses as a point of departure his father's story in order to gain self-understanding. Autobiography and biography come together to paint a double journey, both textually through descriptions and visually through photographs.

In terms of the text, the book's organization plays into the mise-en-abime of journeys in several chapters that mimic his father's travels throughout Africa. One chapter is entitled "De Georgetown à Victoria," tracing his steps from England to French Guyana to Nigeria. The following chapter named "Banso" discusses his father's time in Nigeria, particularly during his honeymoon with the author-narrator's mother. The author specifies with a footnote that Banso is now called Kumba (67). Sticking to the area's former name, he textually imbeds the narrative within his father's past, as he would have lived it. The photographs interspersed throughout the book serve the function of seconding the multiple journeys taking place. Readers begin the book and follow along textually and visually with Le Clézio who embarks on a trip towards self-understanding that relies in part on his father's story. As opposed to photos the author has taken himself, readers join in visually through those taken by his father during his early trips: "Il prend des photos…il collectionne des clichés en noir et blanc qui représentent mieux que des mots son éloignement, son enthousiasme devant la beauté de ce nouveau monde" (51). The black-and-white photographs have a look of sepia, a treatment that prolongs a photograph's durability, thus its use in archives starting in the 19th century. This archival feel casts the photos as historical artifacts, or vestiges of the past that allow readers to dive into the narrative and African world. As his father begins his trek throughout the continent, so do we as readers through the writing and photos. On one hand, Le Clézio tries to use the photographs to serve as a sort of verification of the famous *pacte autobiographique*: "Le document photographique suggere la presence, participe du processus authentifiant du récit autobiographique" (Roussel-Gillet 72). According to Philippe Lejeune, the autobiography requires the author to enter into an agreement whereby the events told by a narrator, "je," will be true and accurately represent life. T. .he photos attest to the objective of remembering another time, validating the text and supplementing "la fonction testimoniale de la photographie, archive du passé individuel et collectif" (Salles 132). They are collective in that they serve as vehicles through which one can gain access to another's past by staring at a fixed moment in time. Through the chosen photos, the narrator is able to "dépasser le vécu individuel, angoissant et paralysant, afin de pouvoir intégrer un vécu personnel dans une expérience collective" (Salles 169). I add that with the sepia feel reminiscent of colonial photographs, Le Clézio embeds into this personal tale a historical dimension.

Le Clézio particularly emphasizes a connection between father and son and text and image when he re-creates the father's reality in the book. At one point, he explains, "Il y a une photo qui m'émeut particulièrement, parce que c'est celle qu'il a choisi d'aggrandir pour en faire un tableau" (61). He takes the photo his father had enlarged and mimics the gesture by placing an enlargement of the photo within the book. Whereas the majority of the photos take up a small part of the page or, at the most, one entire page, this photo that his father himself enlarged takes up two entire pages and breaks up the text. Wedding his father's life and photos to his journey and text, he creates from multiple journeys one larger search for meaning that begins with Africa. This particular, blown-up photo "traduit son impression d'alors, d'être au commencement, au seuil de l'Afrique, dans un endroit presque vierge" (61). The author will write a return to the beginning of his father's life, before he became crestfallen by disease and solitude, in order to go to the beginning of his own life. In the writing and the photos, he tries to "imaginer ce qu'aurait pu être sa vie (donc la mienne)" (49).

However, the relationship between photo and text proves more complex. Le Clézio at times creates tension between the photos and words. Isabelle Roussel-Gillet argues that the photos in *L'Africain* can be somewhat confusing and play a role of resistance towards an understanding of the text: "Elles n’offrent aucune indication référentielle au moment de la lecture puisque les légendes sont situées en fin d’ouvrage. Le texte et les photos paraissent dissociés laissant donc le lecteur en ignorer la signification jusqu’à la fin du récit" (7). In other words, readers do not situate the photos according to the legends while reading because any specific details are provided on the last page. The photos also do not match up to the surrounding passages. Marina Salles has spoken about Le Clézio's distaste for consumer-society and its love of images that he deems empty of dialog or stimulation. An avid drawer, Le Clézio appreciates visual arts (Salles 112), but as we see in *L'Africain*, the author engages in the need to assert writing's primacy. Le Clézio makes use of these photos and pays tribute to them in a way, but I suggest that there are clear attempts to privilege the writing as the real source of information. Rather than relying on the photographs, Le Clézio deploys sensorial, vivid language, as we will see, to paint pictures and tell his story. The author thus inscribes a double function of the photographs in the book, as both an artifact of truth and a reminder of the need for textual intervention.  
**Textual Sense**In addition to the photographs, the black text on the white page presents images that guide readers. The sometimes abstract, extended descriptions of random feelings and objects create textual images. In his comprehensive book *Le Clézio: temoin du monde* published in 2009, Claude Cavalleros insists that, "Pour l'auteur en effet, la litérature ne constitute pas une entité close, refermée sur elle-même, détachée du réel" (15). As the title of Cavalleros's book indicates, Le Clézio's entire oeuvre can be analyzed in light of his literary representations of the world and the *réel* he depicts*.* T.. . he author considers the trip to Nigeria a catalyst for his love for writing (Cavallero 16) as if to show that writing, for him, began as a reaction to external events. If critics give unfavorable reviews of Le Clézio's realism, it raises the question of what is realism and whose reality is deemed appropriate to represent. In his famous essay *L'Effet de réel* published in 1968, Roland Barthes sheds light on the function of details seemingly extraneous and unimportant to the overall plot that stand as:

des notations qu'aucune fonction (même la plus indirecte qui soit) ne permet de justifier : ces notations sont scandaleuses (du point de vue de la structure), ou, ce qui est encore plus inquiétant, elles semblent accordées à une sorte de luxe de la narration, prodigue au point de dispenser des détails "inutiles." (84)

The barometer in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* serves as Barthes's model par excellence of seemingly unimportant objects that serve the function of reflecting the characters' reality. Whereas Flaubert emphasizes class or intelligence, like in the case of Charles Bovary and his ugly hat, for Le Clézio, the *réel* that he wishes to textually represent lies in sensing and experiencing the every day and that which appears uneventful. The author reconstructs through writing a view of the *réel* that merges with a worldview based on touch and the senses. *L'Africain* puts into application many of the author's philosophies that started to form around the same time as his first book, *Le Procès-Verbal* in 1967. Scholars who specialize in Le Clézio's works, like Bruno Thibault and Marina Salles, often return to the formative time of the 1950s and 1960s to discuss how his style has changed over time. Le Clézio's career started at a time when French thinkers were rewriting the very foundations of the novel, like Alain Robbe-Grillet and the Nouveau Roman writers who sought to challenge traditional narrative techniques (Salles 133). The 5th Republic's ushering in of a consumer-driven society set in the backdrop of the economic prosperity the *Trente Glorieuses[[24]](#footnote-24)* would come to signify brought writers to question the role of literature and the role of objects. Pioneers of the Nouveau Roman style pushed to the extreme the notion of author, reader and perspective. Transforming the narrator into a lens, they made objects the focus of both their protagonists and the narrative itself (Salles 233). Robbe-Grillet's *La* *Jalousie*, for example, presents less of an active plot told by a narrator than the image of a plot unfolding through changing perspectives, undermining the possibility of any one "true" reality. Other experimental thinkers of the time linked to Le Clézio include Georges Perec whose works push and play with the limits of language. In his book *Les Choses* published in 1965, readers meet Sylvie and Jérôme, the two main characters who seek to define themselves by their possessions to the point of becoming consumed by them. Series of objects dominate the narrative and take over as signs that point to themselves, void of representational value. Objects consume the characters, and the objects consume the narrative. These objects are not superfluous details because without them, there would be no narrative, no Sylvie, no Jérôme.

Like Robbe-Grillet and Perec, Le Clézio took to literature to manipulate the object in new ways. Miriam Stendal-Boulos highlights in her book *Chemins pour une approche poétique du monde:* *Le roman selon J.M.G. Le Clézio* published in 1999 that Le Clézio rejects the "chosification" of people propelled by consumer society in order to suggest a new way of interacting with objects. Traditional plot and dialog are replaced with detailed descriptions of the small, daily objects. Stendhal-Boulos's study focuses on Le Clézio's works up until the publication date of her book in 1999, but I believe her ideas equally apply to *L'Africain*. The author-narrator demonstrates that understanding who his father was (and who he is) depends on a particular stance in regards to objects:

Je ne l'ai compris que beaucoup plus tard, en partant comme lui, pour voyager dans un autre monde. Je l'ai lu, non pas sur les rares objets, masques statuettes, et les quelques meubles qu'il avait rapportés du pays ibo… Ni même en regardant les photo qu'il a prises…je l'ai su en redécouvrant, en apprenant à mieux lire les objets de la vie quotidienne qui ne l'avaient jamais quitté. (53)

In other words, understanding requires not merely looking at objects from afar. What is needed to capture the *réel* comes from interaction, embodied by the physical, literal journey that leads to introspective journeys into the past. Objects demand interaction rather than removed analysis. In *L'Africain*, there is a clear effort to distance representations of objects away from purely visual, non-stimulating descriptions towards a more interactive, multidimensional experience. Opposed to flat, one-dimensional views, he prefers showcasing the *réel* by plunging readers into the sensations of an object by experiencing it and feeling it. As Stendal-Boulos states, "Pour le Clézio il s'agit de faire vivre la matière, de nous y immerger vivants à travers une évocation sensorielle du monde" (150). Le Clézio's *notations*, to use Barthes's term, reflect an attempt to bypass the limits of language and the flatness of the text on the page to fully engage the reader; it is "un désir de fusion matérielle qui imprègne toute l'œuvre de Le Clézio" (Stendhal-Boulos 149). Le Clézio seeks to transmit to readers reality as an experience of an object through the emotions and sensations, that which is beyond words. His father's possessions thus are described by their appearance and texture rather than use. By stating, "Tous les autres objets, marqués, cabossées par les cahots, portant la trace des pluies diluviennes et la décoloration particulière du soleil sous l'équateur" (55), he draws attention to an object's imprint on a life.

The African setting provides the perfect vehicle through which Le Clézio puts on stage his obsession with the senses and the *réel*. Within a space rid of superficial materialism, Le Clézio zooms in on a different physicality, that of the natural world. In *L'Africain*, trees, the wind, the breeze and lightening, to name a few, become active objects and characters. This interactive association with nature is seen as liberating, from the constraints of the page and of the mind. Remembering and re-constructing events through "la nature…propose à travers la solicitation des sens une libération de la conscience prisonnière des personnages" (Stendhal-Boulos 172). In this sense, Le Clézio's realism that uses anthropomorphism of natural elements often comes across as part of the fantastic, as in a passage where he sees nature as a difficult force to reckon with: "C'était visible dans chaque détail de la vie et de la nature environnante. Le ciel d'encre zébré d'éclairs, le vent qui pliait les grands arbres autour du jardin…tourbillonnait dans la salle à manger en passant sous les portes et soufflait les lampes à pétrole. Une force électrique qu'il me fallait accepter, apprivoiser" (17). Being able to fully live within the natural world and experience the intense sensations engendered coincides with childhood, when a lack of mastery of language permits the sensations to guide the child's experience within the world: "Je suis en ce temps-là très loin des adjectifs, des substantifs. Je ne peux pas dire ni même penser: admirable, immense, puissance. Mais je suis capable de le ressentir" (11). The uninhibited, unburdened mind of the child interprets and interacts with his world much in the same way the author wants readers to abandon their preconceived ideas and engage with his re-writing of Africa. He distances this interaction from the realm of the fascination inherent in colonial models of exoticism based on an idealization. To the contrary, "Pour moi, ces objets, ces bois sculptés et ces masques accrochés aux murs n'étaient pas du tout exotiques. Ils étaient ma part africaine, ils prolongeaient ma vie et, d'une certaine façon, ils l'expliquaient" (65). Perceiving of masks and traditional African objects through the gaze of one who belongs to this group, he sees them as special due to the sensations of freedom and wholeness that they evoke. The objects' value depends solely on the experience of interacting with them rather than seeing them for their consumer or pragmatic function. Le Clézio uses the French language to transmit a different understanding of reality, thereby re-ordering the French language to be the expression of another world.  
**Reconstructing Africa and the Transnational**With two formative experiences occurring simultaneously, that of meeting his father and of arriving in Nigeria, the narrator reductively states in child-like terms: "En partant pour l'Afrique, nous avions changé de monde" (24). Deeming Africa and France as two different worlds corresponds to the narrator's understanding of them as in opposition. From his point of view, Le Clézio puts on stage European modes of representing the other, and then sets out to deconstruct them. Warren Motte explains that the transnational trip pushes him into a completely different environment and lifestyle: "Gradually elaborating his novelistic vision of Africa, Le Clézio relies on a discourse of opposition: seen through European eyes, Africa is a place where everything, from social conventions to the most trivial protocols of daily life, is different" (60). Readers only know of his life in France by the way he intersperses details into his thoughts on Africa. There is a certain dialectic whereby this European reveals Africa, but Africa also reveals the European.

Readers encounter continual attempts on the part of the author to balance the narrative and depict African representations free of a traditional, colonial connotation written and re-written by French writers. Bruno Thibault uses the term "post-exotique" to describe the author's re-working of representations of *ailleurs*.[[25]](#footnote-25) The "post-exotique," according to Thibault, describes works in which authors contest representations of *ailleurs* that form from a belief in the authority of the Western gaze (139). I add to Thibault's ideas that the "post" in post-exotic is like the "post" in post-colonial; the prefix does not denote an end to the exotic or an end to the colonial and its effects. "Post" emphasizes a taking up of the question of the exotic in order to re-evaluate it and create new meaning. When Archambault cites criticism that "Le Clézio also tends to indulge in 'exoticism,' that is, a tendency to idealize 'primitive' cultures at the expense of the technological cultures of the West. In doing so, he disparages the destructively dynamic features of Western cultures while naively—and falsely—portraying 'primitive' cultures as picturesque but immobile" (283), he is both right and wrong. Le Clézio does take up elements formerly defined by exotic representations, like the significance of landscape, but I argue that he reconfigures them in order to contest French meanings attached to such representations.

In *L'Africain,* abundant descriptions of nature guide readers through the memories. In Africa, his gaze does not over-define or represent nature. Instead, nature directs time:

Vers le nord et l'est, je pouvais voir la grande plaine fauve semée de termitières géantes, coupée de ruisseaux et de marécages, et le début de la forêt, les bosquets de géants, irokos, okoumés, le tout recouvert par un ciel immense, une voûte de bleu cru où brûlait le soleil, et qu'envahissait, chaque après-midi, des nuages porteurs d'orage. (16)

Instead of dates and concrete details, descriptions come via the wind, the sky and the environment, painting a picture for readers to contemplate along with the narrator. The photos also center on nature, depicting empty fields, flowing rivers, rock formations, hills, and trees. In some pictures where people figure, the faces are indistinguishable amongst nature, so that the background (the natural elements) come to the forefront.

Memories of life in France play out in a background of immobility, sterility and oppression. World War II and the Nazi occupation, the numerous forced departures to go into hiding, the intense fear, and the absence of a father who could not reach his family, trigger representations of life in France as sickly and deficient. An inscription of the body in these representations of France articulates the difference between Africa and France. Not just France but the West in general is cast as having an unrealistic obsession with superficiality: "En France, en Europe, pays des gaines et des jupons, des soutiens-gorge et des combinaisons, les femmes sont normalement exemptes de la maladie de l'âge" (13). Such societal desires clash with lived experience. Upon accidentally seeing his grandmother coming out of the shower one day, the narrator is shocked at the sight of this older woman's naked body. While attempts to look younger imply a view of old age as unnatural and undesirable, the young eight-year-old sees the naked body as an awakening to a truth. Concealing or modifying the body is equated with a view of old age as a disease. Upon seeing this naked body, a sort of bare truth, he mourns the loss represented by "ce corps que la France m'avait caché dans la douceur anémiante du foyer de ma grand-mère, sans instinct, sans liberté" (14). Imprisonment and covered bodies prove antithetical to what he deems the truth: "Je ressentais non pas de l'horreur ni de la pitié mais au contraire de l'amour et de l'intérêt, ceux que suscite la vue de la vérité, de la réalité vécue" (12). Here, the unveiled body is juxtaposed with an ability to access the *réel,* thus placing his memories of France outside of the realm of the truth.

Living in Nigeria allows him to experience uninhibited physicality, which renews the body as a positive signifier for the boy. Opposed to the disguised body in conflict with the surrounding world, the nakedness of Africa is fruitful, abounding, and sensorial: "En Afrique, l'impudeur des corps était magnifique. Elle donnait du champ, de la profondeur, elle multipliait les sensations, elle tendait un réseau humain autour de moi. Elle s'harmonisait avec le pays ibo, avec le tracé de la rivière, avec les cases du village, leurs toits couleur fauve, leurs murs couleur de terre" (11). No longer living under constraints and the fear of the Nazis, he finds true meaning in the freedom of movement and of the body. Whereas in France, external forces could mean death, in Africa, bodies are represented as one with the outside world. He emphasizes their unity in nature and their way of living that pays respect to all living and non-living things. The free body that is one with nature provides a truth for the narrator. For both children and Africans, "C'est leur relation étroite à la matière qui les rend particuliers…une conscience du corps qui est à la base des actes et des attitudes (Stendhal-Boulos 160). This mentioning of children and Africans seems dangerously colonial. Colonialism depended on the idea of a generous France that, like a mother to its children, stood as a provider and nourisher; according to the logic of the *mission civilisatrice*, “il s’agit de générosité et non pas de goût pour la domination et la rapine…il s’agit de guider ‘les peuples dans la nuit’ plutôt que de les asservir” (Bancel, Blanchard and Vergès 69). Le Clézio takes up French exotic representations and works within them to change their meaning. In juxtaposing the African world as childlike, he forces a subversion of Western understandings that adults, not children, have the answers. A. James Arnold posits that the *bon sauvage* representation formed as early as Columbus's journeys and depicted African slaves in the Caribbean as nonchalant and jovial (7). Arnold signals that representations of the colonial other were either utopic or dystopic, depending "heavily, if not exclusively, on the needs of the colonizer" (5). In *L'Africain*, Le Clézio stays within a French representational sphere by sticking to concepts like child and nature, but he re-defines the meaning.

Violence as a theme intersects with the body to contribute to an overall painting of France as unnatural. Again inscribing sickliness into the narrative, violence in Europe is "sourde et cachée comme une maladie. Terrorisante" (17). The usual effusive language gives way to fragments and rupture. The contrary of this malicious and destructive violence lies the violence of the natural world in Nigeria that proved "ouverte, réelle" (17). It comes in the form of the natural elements imposing their mighty will on the land and people, whether in the form of strong winds or torrential downpours: "C'était la violence des sensations, la violence des appétits, la violence des saisons" (13). Feelings, hunger and the rhythmic cycles of nature tie violence into a larger scheme of the cosmos: "C'est ici…que j'ai vécu les moments de ma vie sauvage, libre…Presque dangereuse. Une liberté de mouvement, de pensée, et d'émotion que je n'ai plus jamais connue ensuite" (20). The juxtaposition of the adjectives "sauvage," "libre" and "dangereux" demand reader's attention. His use of the word *sauvage* can seem to be reminiscent of the exotic or colonial. According to the *Trésor de la Langue Française*, *sauvage* has indicated in the past a rather benign love of solitude and peacefulness. Over years, its meaning has changed to include a notion of evolution, "qui vit à l'écart des formes de civilisation dites évoluées, qui est proche de l'état primitif," which rings of biological claims of racial superiority. A more injurious and explicitly subjective definition defines *sauvage* as "qui rappelle la violence, la cruauté des peuplades primitives" (Trésor). Le Clézio, as one who chooses his words carefully, seems to purposefully use a term like *sauvage* with multiple meanings to make readers think beyond the words on the page. When descriptions of a meager, sad life in Nazi-controlled France oppose a free, open, unrestrained Nigeria, the author nudges readers to question which place is really savage in the primitive, violent sense. Opposed to the control and immobility imposed by the Nazis, the *sauvage* stage in Africa allows for interaction between nature and man.

Several detailed passages implicate the narrator and his brother as parts of the larger whole, one of which is a somewhat coded recounting of times when they violently destroyed hills upon hills of termites. Strong sensations inspire in the narrator and his brother feelings of twisted power: "Une sorte de possession, que nous inspiraient l'étendue de la savane, la proximité de la fôret, la fureur du ciel et des orages" (27). The author at first analyzes his act as an attempt to get back at a father who was too strict. The explanation follows with a counterargument to the destroying of the termite hills, as if he debates the question himself: "Mais peut-être qu'à l'écrire je rends trop littéraire, trop symbolique la fureur qui animait nos bras" (29). He seeks not to show it as an act to be psychoanalytically critiqued later, although choosing not to erase it from the text shows a conscious attempt to leave the door open to multiple interpretations. He later re-asserts decisively that those incidents were in fact due to "la savane, l'orage qui s'accumulait chaque après-midi, la brulure du soleil sur nos têtes, et cette expression trop forte, presque caricaturale de la nature animale, c'est cela qui emplissait nos poitrines" (29). The author decides to give due respect not to psychology as would the intellectual, but to nature. His destructive violence falls in line with what Stendal-Boulos interprets as a sign of the narrator's true immersion in his environment. She sees their willingness to decimate the bugs as transference of aggression: "Il suggère également une transmission des forces destructrices des objets à l'homme lui-même. En effet, dépossédé et agressé par les objets, l'homme à son tour exprime envers autrui cette même agression qu'il a subie" (153). Termites offer their name to one of the chapters in *L'Africain*, which reflects the importance of the destructive creatures. Both the termites and the boys assail each other, unwelcomed and harassingly, and in this man versus nature encounter, man does not prevail but rather is "bitten back."

Remembering the destruction of the termites' homes entails an interaction with the outside world, but it also signals a difference between the narrator and the other children. Drawing on the peacefulness of the young African boys' approach towards the environment, he believes, "Sans doute cette rage de démolir les aurait-elles étonnés, eux qui vivaient dans un monde où les termites étaient une évidence, où ils jouaient un rôle dans les légendes" (27). The use of the past conditional points to a hypothetical as if he cannot truly state what they would or would not do. In addition, he purposefully understates the view of living as one in the world as part of a legend, later affirming that "la réalité était dans les légendes" (17). Re-positioning truth as legend destabilizes the relationship between legend or myth and reality. It also reflects the author's subversion of the colonial gaze that posits the way of life in Nigeria as an awakening to a truth formerly hidden by the controlled environment in the Hexagon.

Such coded ways of subverting representations are sometimes coupled with the author's explicit critical stance that strongly denounces colonial and neocolonial power relationships. He decries European countries' continued neocolonial power tactics that abound, and factual information and details supplant his flowery metaphors. He acts as historian, discussing the War of Biafra (97), Shell-British Petroleum (98) and American, British and French participation in the exploitation of the continent's resources. The author also takes the time in writing to give ethnographic descriptions of geographical, cultural and religious differences within the continent: "Le Nsungli, par exemple, aux abords de Nkor: une Afrique qui n'a rien de commun avec la zone côtière, où règne une atmosphère lourde, où la végétation est étouffante, presque menaçante" (71). He works against colonial thought's nullification of Africa's diverse peoples and cultures and invalidates assumed generalizations, stating, "cette Afrique-là" (57) and questioning "Alors, quelle Afrique? Certainement pas celle qu'on perçoit aujourd'hui, dans la littérature ou dans le cinéma, bruyante, désordonnée, juvénile, familière" (41). He acknowledges the gap between mediated images of Africa and those that he passes on: "Pour la première fois, le pays où j'avais passé la partie la plus mémorable de mon enfance était montré au reste du monde, mais c'était parce qu'il mourait" (99).

The author-narrator distances himself from the European gaze and represents his father in the same way. Being that his father works in medicine, we could interpret him as in a position of authority. The author takes great pains to locate his father outside of such a power relationship:

Il est probable que personne ne l'aura mieux ressenti que lui, à ce point parcouru, sondé, souffert. Rencontré chaque habitant, mis au monde beaucoup, accompagné d'autres vers la mort. Aimé surtout, parce que, même s'il n'en parlait pas, s'il n'en racontait rien, jusqu'à la fin de sa vie il aura gardé la marque et la trace de ces collines, de ces forêts et de ces herbages, et des gens qu'il y a connus. (69)

Discussions on his father's practice fail to recount miracles he performed that would play into an idealization of the land or a negation of the reality of sickness and disease in areas outside of the West. Le Clézio distances his narrator from colonial life: "J'étais seulement un enfant, la puissance de l'empire m'indifférait assez" (19). Placing the narrator's gaze outside of the colonial lens, readers understand he is engaging in a re-writing. However, his father provides him the information to make critical statements:

Je ne sais rien de ce qu'il décrit, cette lourdeur coloniale, les ridicules de la société blanche en exil sur la côte, toutes les mesquineries auxquelles les enfants sont particulièrement attentifs, le dédain pour les indigènes, dont ils ne connaissent que la fraction des domestiques qui doivent s'incliner devant les caprices des enfants de leurs maîtres, et surtout cette sorte de coterie dans laquelle les enfants de même sang sont à la fois réunis et divisés, où ils perçoivent un reflet ironique de leurs défauts et leurs mascarades, et qui forme en quelque sorte cette école de la conscience raciale qui supplée pour eux à l'apprentissage de la conscience humaine - je puis dire que, Dieu merci, tout cela m'a été complètement étranger. (19)

The unending series of sentences mirror the injustices perpetrated over hundreds of years that could not be neatly summed up in one book. In several instances similar to the above passage, despite a narrator removed from colonial life, the author calls out and criticizes inequalities based on nationality or race. Criticisms of the colonial system and its "injustice outrecuidante, ses cocktails parties et ses golfeurs en tenue, sa domesticité, ses maîtresses d'ébène prostituées de quinze ans introduites par la porte de service, et ses épouses officielles pouffant de chaleur et faisant rejaillir leur rancoeur sur leurs serviteurs" (59). The black prostitutes ushered into the servants' entrance juxtapose the Western world at leisure, playing golf and drinking cocktails. From this illustration of the French viewpoint, the black body exists as an extension of the European's life; they live to serve the emotional and sexual needs of European men and women. In this respect, father and son share the same distaste for colonial life: "Mais ces manières africaines qui étaient devenues sa seconde nature apportaient sans doute une leçon à laquelle l'enfant, puis l'adolescent ne pouvait pas être insensible" (95). Seeing the world in such a way re-defines his father into a positive figure who refuses to pass on to his son a heritage or identity based on others' inferiority. For example, the narrator tells of his father's disagreements and distaste with the British authorities for whom "un homme ne valait que par sa carte de visite" (58). This disdain of the colonial system mirrors the son's later assertion, "Naître ici ou là n'a pas dans le fond une importance considérable" (42). Although he spends little time unpacking such a statement, he essentially questions the relevance of where we are born to an understanding of who we are.   
**Unraveling Memories in Writing**Given that *L'Africain* figures as both autobiography and biography, memory plays an important role. Le Clézio brings to the forefront multiple forms of memory that compete, overlap and interact. The push for reflection is the author's way of questioning linear, chronological views of memory that he first debated in the 1950s: "Certains dérèglements du temps chronologique sont consécutifs dans un premier temps de l'ère du soupçon qui remet en cause la linéarité du récit puis dans un second temps de la primauté accordée à ce temps cyclique et au temps primordial" (Roussel-Gillet 75). As discussed, the Nouveau Roman writers challenged subjective reality by displaying changing perceptions of objects. With changing perception and reality, "We cannot locate what we read in relation to any objective chronology since it is impossible to distinguish the protagonists' perceptions as such from memory, fantasy and projections" (Walker 138). Le Clézio inscribes into *L'Africain* a questioning of the subjectivity of memory and demonstrates that voluntary and involuntary memory do not provide linear, historically-accurate accounts. When the author forces himself to remember, he finds the conjured images that come to mind are blurry: "Si je fais un effort de mémoire, je puis reconstituer les frontières vagues de ce domaine. Quelqu'un qui aurait gardé la mémoire photographique du lieu serait étonné de ce qu'un enfant de huit ans pouvait y voir. Sans doute un jardin" (15). He interestingly juxtaposes the lack of clarity and imprecision of voluntary memory with photographic memory, as if to privilege the type of "real" memory a photo captures. Yet, as we have discussed, the photographs found throughout *L'Africain* appear equally as blurry as his memories. He sees his child-narrator's memories as mistaken, distancing what he remembers from what they may have actually looked like: "La memoire d'un enfant exagère les distances et les hauteurs" (22). Further on, he debates the accuracy of the heat he feels in his memory, "Faisait-il chaud vraiment? Je n'en ai aucun souvenir"(25). In other words, the author continually recognizes a fissure between memory formed through bodily sensations and memory based on actual descriptions. He goes so far as to admit that memory is subject to distortion and ambiguity, putting the entire project's compliance with the *pacte autobiographique* at stake: "Les souvenirs trompent, sans doute. Cette vie de liberté totale, je l'aurai sans doute rêvée plutôt que vécue" (20). This admission comes near the beginning of the book as if to disarm readers of their expectations.

In her book *J.M.G. Le Clézio: écrivain de l'incertitude* (2011), Isabelle Roussel-Gillet analyzes how Le Clézio manifests ambiguity through certain stylistic devices like "l'expression 'comme si' qui revient si souvent sous la plume de Le Clézio" to demonstrate "une hésitation à fixer définitivement" (61). The author justifies such incertitude by succinctly pointing out, "Le temps ne se remonte pas, même dans les rêves" (53). Time cannot be reversed, but it can be explored through narratives, like oral stories and the books we read. In *L'Africain*, memory and identity of the protagonists depends on the interweaving of lived experiences and stories: "Toute son œuvre témoigne que nous sommes traversés et construits par des récits: que l'identité repose sur le tissage de plusieurs récits, tissage toujours en cours, et toujours à l'épreuve du vécu" (Thibault 12). Borrowed and appropriated memories come to the forefront, as those that are recounted become part of a person's memory and identity. The author-narrator's mother does not remember nor know her family's past, but she retains her heritage nonetheless: "Elle en a toujours entendu parler par son père, ça fait partie de son passé pour elle" (50). Exploring the past by borrowing from others' stories allows for different perspectives to rise from one sole event, underlining one of Le Clézio's main arguments. Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert explains that "le déchiffrement du passé n'est jamais un mouvement de restitution univoque et à sens unique…il renégocie et révise le passé en fonction du présent à la lumière du passé" (17). Fluctuation in verb tenses mirror this present re-living of others' past memories; narrator and object of the study intertwine when he feels as if he knows a father's colleague that he admittedly has never met: "Je me souviens comme si je l'avais connu" (78). Additionally, phrases like, "J'imagine son exaltation" show a clear use of fiction interwoven into non-fiction to fill in the gaps. This shows that the author prizes borrowing and constructing meaning to fill in the gaps to surpass temporal barriers, thereby working towards his project of cementing the father-son connection. Memories for the author depend less on fact and possession than on the need to continually embrace and renew past experiences.

Part of this play with memory and the past is a subversion of what forgetting and remembering mean. Throughout the work, the narrator invokes remembering in order to imply voluntary memory and linear thinking, whereas forgetting requires unearthing unconscious memories, appropriating others' memories and constructing meaning to fill in the gaps. Le Clézio forces readers to second-guess the positive connotation of the word "remember" by re-defining it as an inability to understand and come to grips with the past. Using his father as an example, he states, "Il y a eu sans doute au moment de son départ une détermination qui ne l'a jamais quitté. Il ne pouvait pas être comme les autres. Il ne pouvait pas oublier. Il n'a jamais parlé de l'évènement qui avait été à l'origine de la dispersion de tous les membres de sa famille. Sauf de temps en temps pour laisser échapper un éclat de colère" (50). The inability for his father to forget his own family's exile from Mauritius juxtaposes an inability to speak about a major event. When remembering, he can only communicate in irrational terms. Forgetting paradoxically entails a deeper level of understanding for the narrator. He states about living in Africa, "C'est là que j'ai appris à oublier. Il me semble que c'est de l'entrée de cette case à Ogoja, que date l'effacement de mon visage, et des visages de tous ceux qui étaient autour de moi" (10). The act of forgetting comes with this immersion in a new culture. If living in Nigeria results in a metaphorical removal of the world's mask, letting go of past memories allows him to move beyond Nazi-controlled France, fear and forced departure, to finally live what life should really be like. It also bestows him with a new type of memory: "Ce que je recevais dans le bateau qui m'entrainait vers cet autre monde, c'était aussi la mémoire. Le présent africain effaçait tout ce qui l'avait précédé" (14). Receiving a new memory then involves a figurative suppression of his past in France. Wishing that he had never moved back to France, he laments that he could have even become adjusted to the biting termites: "J'aurais appris à percevoir, ressentir …au bout d'un temps, je les aurais oubliés" (29).

Forgetting thus signals complete immersion in this free world and symbolizes the continual renewal and reconnection of memory to the present moment, to the point of obliterating the need for memory: "Je n'ai jamais ressenti un tel élan depuis ce temps-là…C'était un moment de nos vies, juste un moment, sans aucune explication, sans regret, sans avenir. Presque sans mémoire" (29). The immersive, all incorporating worldview he embraces in Africa proves atemporal in the sense that it is less an event to be remembered than a way of living. The last chapter is in fact entitled "L'Oubli," as if to show the end of this project of memory culminates in forgetting.

Figuratively forgetting his life pre-Africa and pre-father gives the narrator agency to explore a time even before his birth. Construction of memory and appropriation of it comes to the forefront as he inscribes a sort of pre-memory into this re-writing. He relates in the present tense the night his parents conceive him:

Mon père et ma mère sont couchés dans leur lit de sangles, sous la moustiquaire, ils écoutent battre les tambours, selon un rythme continu qui tressaille à peine, comme un cœur qui s'emballe. Ils sont amoureux. L'Afrique à la fois sauvage et très humaine est leur nuit de noces. Tout le jour le soleil a brulé leur corps, ils sont pleins d'une force électrique incomparable. J'imagine qu'ils font l'amour, cette nuit-là, au rythme des tambours qui vibrant sous la terre serrés dans l'obscurité, leur peau trempée de sueur, à l'intérieur de la case de terre et de branches qui n'est pas plus grande qu'un abri à poules. Puis ils s'endorment à l'aube, dans le souffle froid du matin. (76)

The setting of his conception is firmly anchored in an African rhythmic world as Leopold Sédar Senghor would describe in his poem *Que m'accompagnent kôras et balafong*: "Paradis mon enfance africaine, qui gardait l'innocence de l'Europe./Quels mois alors? Quelle année? Je me rappelle sa douceur fuyante/au crépuscule…Et quand sur son ombre elle se taisait, résonnait le tamtam des tanns obsédés" (*Chants d'Ombre* 37). In Senghor's poem, childhood and the drum's beating announces a gathering or ceremony of celebration and birth that connects the poet to the cosmos. For Le Clézio, going back in time through poetic descriptions connects him to an Africa outside of his memory and the French realm.

In another light, losing memory and forgetting also work to reveal the narrator's anxiety of the past. He acknowledges that he may not correctly remember details, yet it appears that he also does not want to adhere to traditional storytelling. When accurate descriptions may prove too painful, writing provides a vehicle through which he can construct safer meaning. Forgetting becomes cathartic by enabling a re-writing of a disruptive history: "Si j'entre en moi-même. Si je retourne mes yeux vers l'intérieur, c'est cette force que je perçois, ce bouillonnement d'énergie…Et avant même l'instant de la conception, tout ce qui l'a précédée, qui est dans la mémoire de l'Afrique….ces images sont celles du bonheur, de la plénitude qui m'a fait naître" (78). The emphasis on positive emotions plays into his desire to use *L'Africain* to tell the story of his father as a caring and compassionate man, one whom he did get the chance to know. Returning by way of memory to events in his father's life brings him back to the question of origins, doubly reinforced by Africa as a symbol of "le lieu-symbolique de la terre-mère" (Cavalleros 21). Journeys and memories collide as the father looks at the vastness of his future in Africa much like the son, later on, sees his literary work: "Peut-être a-t-il cru, au moment où il arrivait, qu'il allait retrouver quelque chose de l'innocence perdue, le souvenir de cette ile que les circonstances avaient arrachées à son Coeur?...une terre originelle, en quelque sorte, où le temps aurait fait marche arrière, aurait détricoté la trame d'erreurs et de trahisons" (611). Africa and his father align and collide as positively re-valued figures and inaugurate a new worldview that figures as a personal truth for him as he looks back as an adult.

The author clarifies time and time again that his musings are not idealizations. He recognizes that you can never truly go back to a place to find it the way it was: "Le monde change, c'est vrai, et celui qui est debout là-bas au milieu de la plaine d'herbes hautes, dans le souffle chaud qui apporte les odeurs de la savane, le bruit aigu de la foret, sentant sur ses lèvres…celui-là est si loin de moi qu'aucune histoire, aucun voyage ne me permettra de le rejoindre" (101). Deeming it faraway, the Africa he knew of the 1940s surely has changed; to deny that would be to crystallize African culture in time. His solution to the impossibility is to turn to the imagination to re-live the past and experience it differently each time. The far thus becomes closer with this approach: "Tout cela est si loin, si proche. Une simple paroi fine comme un miroir sépare le monde d'aujourd'hui et le monde d'hier" (99). The author embraces inaccuracies of memory, produced from the inability of voluntary memory to unearth the forgotten. He draws a picture of memory and our perceptions of people, places, time and space as constantly changing and evolving.

A positive re-evaluation of his transnational identity results from his re-living a *réel* through imagination and memory: "Si mon père était devenu l'Africain, par la force de sa destinée, moi je puis penser à ma mère africaine, celle qui m'a embrassé et nourri à l'instant ou j'ai été conçu, à l'instant où je suis né" (104). Mother and Africa, maternal symbols, merge to affirm his personal myth given in the beginning of the book. Identity proves to be like memory, flexible, always changing, and in a constant state of construction. When Le Clézio views a photo of an open field, he sees the ambiguity, the openness as symbolic of identity and memory that are always in the process of being made: "L'immensité qu'on voit au fond, c'est la plaine sans fin" (71). While he acknowledges his African part that contributes to his perception of self and of the world, he admits, "Aujourd'hui, j'existe, je voyage…je me suis enraciné dans d'autres lieux" (104). This declaration that he belongs elsewhere, too, comes on the last page of the book, as if to tell us that there are other parts to his identity that have yet to be explored. Writing configures a point of access to the past and opens up creative possibilities, signified by his use of the future tense for the remainder of the book. He promises that no matter where he is, "Je vais regarder la fièvre monter dans le ciel…j'écouterai les pas du tonnerre" (102). The writing of the book has led him to positively affirm his transnational identity as a mix of heritages from lived experiences and memories. Not only does he prize what his African heritage affords him, but he places value on the exploration *L'Africain* represents.

Forgetting, however, can only come at the end of the book, since the road to that point involves remembering. Rather than practicing a figurative amnesia in regards to the colonial past, Le Clézio implicates himself by revealing dates and places that historically anchor the narrative. Lydie Moudileno supports a view of Le Clézio as a postcolonial writer because he makes his colonial memory a part of his writing: "Le sujet véritablement postcolonial serait alors celui qui aurait géré ce retour du refoulé, pour définitivement intégrer l’héritage colonial dans son présent et dans son écriture" ("Trajectoires" 81). Scholars like Benjamin Stora have been pointing out a tendency in France to demonstrate a sort of collective amnesia about events in the past like the collaboration with Germany during World War II that led to the deportation of Jews or the Algerian War that resulted in massacre along the Seine.[[26]](#footnote-26) Le Clézio manages to inscribe history into the narrative, but then forgets and remembers in a process that reconstructs and deconstructs. Scholars have not spoken about the larger significance of the termite hill to this process of remembering and forgetting, but a different reading of the scene sheds light on the question of playing with memory while insisting on history. In the scene where he violently destroys the termite hills but admits that African children would never do the same, he marks out this aggression as his instinct. The termite is a creature known for its destructive tendencies to relentlessly eat away at whatever comes in its path. When the boys persistently seek to destroy these termites, they symbolically fight against such destructive tendencies, seeking out preservation and regeneration. Similarly, *L'Africain* elicits readers' preconceived notions of Africa and literature, tears them down, and re-builds them using the French language as a tool of expression of a different worldview.  
**Conclusion**To the dislike of his most ardent detractors, Le Clézio's writing shows to be simple but coded, natural but alive. While the title *L'Africain* evokes the image of a singular person, the narrative proves polyphonic in the multiple stories re-constituted. The narrator describes his father's life with spatio-temporal markers like dates and places that root his stories to the space of Africa, but the narrator also takes liberties in re-creating memories outside of his reach. The photographs support the written journey by serving as momentos of fixed time, but their simplicity and lack of detail force readers to turn to the writing on the pages to navigate father and son's trek. These photos play with the space on the page, calling out for our attention but distracting us from the larger picture. Readers are urged to look beyond the page and the material to delve into a different way of experiencing the book. Sensations are translated into the text along with new ways of experiencing objects. Le Clézio essentially displaces knowledge from being within the realm of people and the tangible, and locates it in experiences and perceptions that come from interaction. Unlike photographs, reading and writing go hand-in-hand with the view of memory as subjective and in constant fluctuation. In Le Clézio's world, literature represents a prized form of expression that can be changed and played with to create and re-create realities outside of our own.

If French national identity relies on defining itself in terms of what it is not, Le Clézio demonstrates a rupturing of dichotomies, between father and son, language and nation, France and other, self and the external world. However, he manages to inaugurate such change in *L'Africain* by also insisting on his connection to the colonial legacy; he uses dates and places to historically connect his father's story and his own story to the colonial legacy in Africa. The photos resembling historical archives supplement a historicization of the text that Le Clézio deconstructs and de-privileges through representations of memory as changing but also fruitful.

Chapter Four: The Tragic Transnational and the Struggle for Self-Determi(nation) in Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*

**Introduction**

From Sony Labou Tansi and Jean Malonga to Sylvain Bemba, the Republic of Congo has produced a large number of writers and famous literary critics. Claire Ducournau's study of African writers grouped by nationality demonstrates that Congo has produced the fourth largest group of writers (55). Alain Mabanckou and Daniel Biyaoula are two prominent Congolese writers whose works have gained significant literary attention in both the French and African publishing worlds. Mabanckou has won numerous prestigious literary awards, including the Grand Prix Littéraire d'Afrique Noire in 1999 for his first novel *Bleu Blanc Rouge*. He also received the Prix Renaudot in 2006 for *Mémoires de porc-épic* and has since published over ten books translated into over fifteen languages. Now a professor in the United States, Mabanckou is one of the most well known Congolese writers and remains active in literary criticism. Daniel Biyaoula also hails from the Republic of Congo and has garnered attention from literary critics, but to a lesser extent than Mabanckou. As opposed to Mabanckou whose profession involves writing, Biyaoula is a microbiologist by training, and he turned to literature only to mobilize what he calls "le constat d'une réalité" (Tervonen*, "*L'Impasse"). His first book *L'Impasse* (1996) earned him the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire in 1997, and he has since written three novels, various short stories and essays.

In my analysis on Senegalese author Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, I address many of the questions pertaining to emigration and immigration particular to Africans. The continent's economic exploitation and the need to re-build after decolonization play a role in Diome's book and in the books analyzed in this chapter. Despite shared tropes, the three authors approach representations of identity in remarkably different ways in their narratives, and the overall depictions of transnational identities greatly vary. Whereas for Diome's narrator, a transnational identity proves productive and liberating, in Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's books, the main protagonist become tragic non-heroes in the sense that they wind up much worse after their physical journeys than they started. Therefore, these African works merit a separate chapter, if not for the difference in the literary works but for the regional, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and geographic differences. Diome's Salie is from Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country in West Africa. Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narrators are from the Republic of Congo, a Central African country that is largely Christian. Salie's family speaks Wolof, whereas Mabanckou's Massala-Massala and Biyaoula's Joseph speak Lingala. Beyond those categories, the biggest distinction between the protagonists concerned in this chapter and Diome's Salie is that the former are part of the disenfranchised, economically and psychologically; with no opportunity in Congo, Mabanckou's Massala-Massala leaves for France believing it will make something of him, even if he must commit illegal acts. Biyaoula's Joseph leaves for France to work in a factory. Diome's narrator is an educated writer who stands on the periphery looking onto the youth of Senegal. Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narrators are within the group they criticize. In Diome's story, there is a certain control the narrator exhibits over such chaos created by a lack of opportunities and post-colonial fragmentation. As I explore in this chapter, Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* demonstrate failed representations of transnational journeys and identities that I believe reflect the destabilized, neocolonial values the authors depict as part of their Congolese collective group.

Diome's home nation of Senegal has stood as a stable nation and paragon of peaceful leadership for some time, recognized by President Barack Obama in 2013 when he visited Dakar:

Many African nations have made tremendous strides in improving democratic governance and empowering citizens…And that’s why I’m beginning my trip here in Dakar. Senegal is one of the most stable democracies in Africa and one of the strongest partners that we have in the region…Senegal has never suffered a military coup. There are free and fair elections, repeated transfers of power—peacefully—a vibrant civil society. (White House)

To the contrary, the Republic of Congo has been home to multiple dictatorships and coups. The countries also diverge in the relationship between literature and the State in the years after decolonization. In the Congo, leaders exerted control over literary productions for nearly two decades. While Senegal benefited from Leopold Sédar Senghor's legacy as a poet and politician, Congolese authors grappled with severely restricted forms of literary production. Alain Mabanckou's 2004 *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…* provides an excellent illustration of the chaotic beginnings of the nation in Congo. Taking place in the 1970s, the first-person narrator is a child whose stories reflect the dominant discourse on the nation and on France at a critical time in Congo's growing process. I do not intend to do a full analysis of *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…*, but rather bring to light pertinent literary representations of national identity that set the stage for the tragic tale of immigration that makes up *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*.

Numerous scholars have analyzed *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse* together, but only to look at their representations in terms of immigration. Lydie Moudileno's book *Parades Postcoloniales : La Fabrication Des Identités Dans Le Roman Congolais* (2006) uses the parade metaphor to look at identities that characters perform, which proves helpful in discerning the role appearance plays in both novels. Dominic Thomas also calls attention to such performances in his discussion on *la sape*, a Congolese practice of rendering one's appearance "more French" through clothing and skin whitening. He calls attention to the colonial dimensions of *la sape* but highlights spaces of resistance within it. His writings inform my discussions on how these representations of *la sape* impact migration and how migration impacts such practices. However, I will argue that Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's books counter any capacity for such displaced ideologies to be resistant.

In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the first-person narrator Massala-Massala details the poverty of his native village in Congo where he grows up in a relatively stable family. Hope comes to the village on an annual basis when emigrants return to Congo for a short time for vacation. Much of the narrative points to the false stories of life in France that these emigrants disseminate back in Congo and the ways that they express their status through European clothes. When one of these emigrants, Moki, suggests to the narrator to leave for France, he succumbs to the mirage that emigration represents. When he illegally arrives in France, he realizes that the stories told back at home mask the actual living conditions of African immigrants. Once his tourist visa has expired, he is lured into participating in criminal activities in order to obtain identity papers. Continually conflicted, the narrator brings to light the hard realities of life in France. He ultimately ends up in jail awaiting deportation, from where he begins the story. The narrative thus figures as a flashback, bringing the theme of memory and the past to the forefront.

In Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*, the first-person narrator Joseph starts out his story in the airport in France as he prepares to go home to Congo. It has been fifteen years since he has been back in Pointe-Noire. The story is told in an almost suffocating style, with long sentences mimicking the increasingly frazzled mind of the narrator. Tirades about the racism of whites mix in with anger at his compatriots who practice *la sape*. Unlike Mabanckou's narrator, Biyaoula's narrator has a tense relationship with his family members back in Congo who deride him for his dark skin. After a mental breakdown, he undergoes therapy with a French psychiatrist who convinces him to go along with his "people." Needing to belong, he eventually turns into a *sapeur*, which leads to psychological alienation. In this regard, *L'Impasse* demands a more intense read as the complexities of the mind and body are explored.

Some critics have denounced Mabanckou and Biyaoula as having turned their back on Africa; others say the failure at the end of the books poses no solution and merely continues negative perceptions of Africans. Odile Cazenave interprets the tragic ends as "disengagement" from African realities (113). Ambroise Kom speaks of "procrastination" (55). I intend to show that the authors are engaged precisely because of these tragic heroes. I argue that Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's representations of tragic characters actually prove symptomatic of the unstable history of national identity that Congo has known.

I make the argument that the narrators' ultimate state of alienation relates to the representations of national identity in Congo and in France as unstable and oppressive. The caustic relation between the narrators and the world in which they live mirrors the role of the Congolese author who writes transnational perspectives and juggles expectations from both sides of the ocean. I see *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse* as deeply engaged with the realities of Africans in Congo and in France. Through the figure of the tragic non-hero, they pose postcolonial questions of memory and identity and mark out paths of resistance against complying with neocolonial power dynamics.

The first part of this chapter is concerned with a brief background of the nation-building project in Congo and how literature, as a state-sponsored production, was used to foster national identity. My analysis relies in part on Mabanckou's *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…*(2006) in order to bring to light literary manifestations of the chaos of the 1970s that help to put into perspective portraits of contemporary life in Congo and in France. In the second part, I examine Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* to bring to light those themes and techniques that describe contemporary identity dynamics adopted by the Congolese and French communities in Congo and in France. The third part is concerned with the meanings of the failed narrators who wind up in an in-between state of nothingness whereby they lose all sense of self. The social exile and self-alienation they experience results from a lack of a transnational space where cultures nourish one another. Without an anchoring in the Congo, the narrators fail to create belonging in France.   
**Nation-Building and the Destruction of a Nation**In the 1930s and 1940s the Negritude writers Leopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire initiated a literary tradition of resistance by putting forth a positive re-evaluation of black identity. Some of the best examples include how Senghor affirms the vitality and beauty of Africa in poems like "Femme nue, femme noire" (1944). He appropriates the French language and uses it to describe African cultural elements in "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong" (1945). Césaire, too, used his individual journey towards liberation to give voice to the collective in his seminal work *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). In *Une Tempête*, he anchors Caribbean people into the African landscape to re-write their historical annihilation. These examples reveal how literature served as a vehicle for the writers of Négritude to generate counter-hegemonic discourses. By naming an African equivalent, they protested centuries of cultural negation and the idea of European superiority. Senghor's and Césaire's theories elaborated a collective black identity, but they also "became increasingly politicized and came to play a significant role in the politics of nationalism" (Thomas, *Black France* 6). But the chaotic years after decolonization and the nation-building imperative would impose the need to question past and newly developing spaces of belonging. Lydie Moudileno posits that as early as the late 1960s African intellectuals were voicing increased suspicion of "the essentialist ideas of Negritude" (*Parades* 62) and shifting their attention to new models of identity. Socialist language provided a new link between African nations. As opposed to blackness as a common point, "the struggle against imperialism…provided the fundamental shared sociological experience in the movement toward national autonomy" (Thomas, *Nation-Building* 23). If intellectuals spoke less of race as a joining force, it came as the result of a united front against colonialism and class struggle that Socialist ideologies cast as the new enemies to the success of African nations.

What Senghor or Césaire never did, however, is use literature to make Socialist discourse the official ideology of the State. Thomas analyzes the ways in which the new anti-imperialist, pro-national agendas in Congo used "considerable governmental interference in the cultural domain … to promote political and cultural unity" (5). As he outlines, power changed hands numerous times in the years following decolonization in Congo, and proved more violent than in other countries like Senegal. Several different leaders, notably Marian Ngouabi and Dennis Sassou Nguesso, grasped hold of the power of literature by implementing state-sponsored writers in the Congo from 1969 all the way to 1991. The Socialist politics that found popularity in the fight for the oppressed already had a tradition of disseminating ideas through writing. Ngouabi and Sassou Nguesso followed suit and saw literature as a way to forge a national identity. Through books, leaders could transmit myths and traditions that delimit the imagined community and foster a sense of collective memory. Whereas Negritude writers worked towards establishing a "black" identity, the term now was "nation." Books were used to establish a "traditional nationalist and patriotic iconography, shared heritage and common framework of references" (Thomas, *Black France* 9). Official writers of the state underscored a hero's nationality before his race and painted triumphant fighters of the nation. In his book *Roman congolais : tendances thématiques et esthétiques* (2007), Alpha Malonga highlights the role of positive representations of the nation in creating patriotic sentiment: "Les écrivains entretiennent l'espoir et enseignent l'immortalité de leur *congolité* en créant des personnages qui survivent à la repression" (50). These narratives force the emergence of national heroes who achieve immortality only through their loyalty to the nation. Approved literary productions zoomed in on the national space and crafted an identity contained within national borders along the lines of the European construct of the nation. Echoing Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and the processes by which a nation is created and imagined, these official Congolese demonstrate the citizen as a servant to this country and a willingness to sacrifice all.

If the state oversaw representations of national identity, it exerted control by threatening censorship, castigation, or exile (Thomas, *Nation-Building* 18). Non-official writers attacked literary regulations, which equally worked to fortify the focus on national identity. Their critiques of the wrongdoings of leaders focused on the harm inflicted on the nation and spoke in the name of a Congolese identity, which *"*can wind up creating and courting a national culture by attacking particular regimes; these publications can contribute to an emergent 'universe of discourse' that is specific to that nation-state" (Miller, *Nationalists* 147). Throughout former colonies, expressions of disillusionment came to full force in the 1970s with the nation portrayed as generally negative (Malonga 54). The critiques exhibit "l'irresponsabilité des nouveaux dirigeants qui ignorent leurs devoirs premiers qui consistent à oeuvrer pour le bien-être de leurs compatriotes" (Malonga 54). In other words, these authors depicted men who promised freedom in the years after decolonization as continuers of the colonial system's policy of oppression. Political independence did not sow the seeds for a new conception of identity, but one based on similar perceptions of power: "Si les évolués prennent un plaisir à ressembler le plus possible au blanc, c'est pour devenir les blancs à la peau noire…c'est pour pouvoir prendre là le moment venu, c'est-à-dire occuper la même position de domination par rapport à la masse populaire" (Djungu-Simba 164). Books of disillusionment highlighted leaders who maintained the same system of oppression and control.

Out of these new nations, "les écrivains congolais en particulier…se sont montrés réticents à embrasser les théories de la Negritude et ont été parmi les premiers à prendre position contre toute doctrine racialisante" (Moudileno, *Parades* 62). The hesitation to embrace Negritude stems in part from Congo's special relationship with France during colonization, according to Dominic Thomas. The current capital of Congo, Brazzaville, served as the capital of French Equatorial Africa from 1910 to 1960. Charles de Gaulle chose the Congolese city to host his famous Brazzaville Conference of 1944 where he and other leaders discussed, amongst other topics, the future of France's colonial empire; hailed as a decisive moment in decolonization, this event paradoxically also showcased black colonial leaders like Felix Eboué, governor of Chad at the time, who climbed the ranks by working for the administration (The Brazzaville Conference). Their special status reveals the Congo's relationship to France as one that afforded them a privileged position, what Thomas deems "the elite nomenclature generated by colonial mechanisms" (*Nation-Building* 4). It also foreshadows chaotic changes of power and national instability resulting from these "'promiscuous' power relations in the Congolese postcolony" (Thomas, *Nation-Building* 5). In addition to literature as a vehicle of national sentiment, it also was used as a way to assert Congolese culture to be on the same level as French culture. This gesture encapsulates leaders' continuing of colonial ideology based on France's cultural superiority. Malonga explains:

Pendant la période coloniale, l'écrivain s'adressait au Blanc—avec un recours à l'écriture anthropologique qui lui imposait de faire usage de notes infrapaginales…Après les indépendances, ce même écrivain a continué cette pratique scripturale anthropologique, mais en cherchant à écrire comme le Blanc, question de lui prouver, dans un souci d'émulation intellectuelle, qu'il est tout aussi capable de faire comme lui. (11)

Writers of the past combined the political and the poetic to write their existence and fight their cultural annihilation. But in the post-independence era, political writings with a strategy of "faire comme lui" fail to resist dominant discourse. The push to mimic inscribes the project of writing Congolese national identity within the same colonial opposition. In other words, writing to prove one's capability reinforces the idea of a dependency on France for guidance.

Outside of the state's official narratives, Congolese authors have built a solid tradition of representing the volatility and rockiness of the Congo and national identity, and of offering alternative visions on what it means to be Congolese. Published in 2006, Alain Mabanckou's *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…* furnishes many representations of national identity in Congo during the tumultuous years of the 1970s. The fictional story unfolds through the perspective of a nine-year-old narrator who speaks on himself, his family, and his country. Mabanckou artfully inflects the narrative style with signature marks of a child's speech. Fragments, run-on sentences and malapropisms lend a humorous tone to an otherwise sad tale. The resulting style gives readers a glimpse into history through the unassuming, honest lens of a child. References to transnational cultural icons like Superman (21) and Blek le Roc (47) juxtapose his telling of dramatic world events like the Iran Scandal (257). In a way, *Demain…[[27]](#footnote-27)* figures as a sort of bildungsroman marking a growing process for both the narrator and the Congolese nation.

The child's simple descriptions of his family make bold statements on the complexity of life in Congo. He never clearly states that he does not know his father, but readers deduce as much when the young boy reports hearing his uncle remind his mother that by providing his last name to the narrator, "Je t'ai délivrée de la honte, Pauline!" (52). An ardent Socialist, his uncle known as tonton René heatedly speaks of politics with the narrator and anyone who will listen. Having been educated in France, tonton René is an intellectual who decries imperial forces and idolizes Lenin and Marx: their paintings hang on his walls. However, the narrator's descriptions of his uncle depict him as hypocritical: "Mon oncle prétend qu'il est communiste. Normalement les communistes sont des gens simples, ils n'ont pas la télévision, le téléphone, l'électricité, l'eau chaude, la clim et ils ne changent pas de voiture tous les six mois comme tonton René. Donc je sais maintenant qu'on peut aussi être communiste et riche" (18). The hypocrisy is evident in the accumulation of material wealth and possessions for someone who believes in class struggle. Mabanckou shows a forked nature to this figure of authority as pretending to be engaged with the group but acting self-serving instead. The meager life of the narrator's mother Pauline clashes with the image of her elitist brother. Unmarried and pregnant with the narrator, she finds herself in a vulnerable position when an older, married man solicits her hand in marriage. Michel gains a stepfather whom he calls Papa Roger, and his mother gains a husband and co-spouse. Mabanckou's novel is one of a kind in its treatment of polygamy in the Congo, a mostly Christian nation. While polygamy is not permitted by Christian doctrine, it is practiced in Congo, although it seems a taboo subject. At a United Nations conference held by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2003, Congolese authorities clarified the law: "A woman was free to choose before the marriage union whether she agreed to polygamy. Couples often opted for monogamy. However, the husband might later start planning to contract a second wife. He could not do so, however, if his first wife did not give her consent. It all depended on the women’s ability to say 'no'" (United Nations 2003). The policy posits that the first wife is the person in control, yet external factors clearly impact those choices the first and potential second wife face. In *Demain…*, Mabanckou touches on polygamy by focusing on the strife of the second wife. For Pauline, she accepts the marriage because she sees it as a way to escape the shame of having a child out of wedlock and as a measure of security, "car un homme qui me sourit comme ça ne peut pas nous abandoner un jour" (106). Despite the fact that Papa Roger has good intentions of sharing his income equally between his two wives, Michel talks of the financial woes that eventually force Pauline to leave during the week to work at a faraway market. Ultimately, the narrator benefits from the arrangement because he gains brothers, sisters, and a stepmother, all of whom never fail to be accepting and loving towards Michel. Mabanckou seemingly chooses to not demonstrate the institution of polygamy in a completely negative light, but rather to focus on the hypocrisy of men like Papa Roger. Like René, Roger talks incessantly of politics and sees himself as engaged. In reality, he works in a French-owned hotel. Papa Roger completed limited schooling and has never been to France, as opposed to tonton René, the intellectual with an education and who speaks French well, hence why he sees his brother-in-law as less powerful (114). Because of his meager status relative to his brother-in-law, Roger constantly tries to overcompensate by imagining himself as a participant in the political world. When the Shah of Iran is overthrown by the Ayatollah Khomeini, he cries, "Pourquoi ils m'ont fait une chose pareille!" (122). Although he voices strong opinions, he largely acts out of pretense for money and recognition. In order to please his French boss, he names his daughter after her, which results in a generous raise. He decides to name his next daughter after his boss's sister, ironically named Marie-France, but she refuses the honor since "ça devenait ridicule à la fin." (231). Despite claiming that he is anchored in the Socialist cause, he seeks to gain status by aligning himself with France. Therefore, two major male forces affect the narrator's evolving understanding of self and of the world: tonton René, the intellectual anchored in contentious pro-national, anti-capitalist discourse who lives a luxurious life, and Papa Roger, an average citizen who pretends to be active in the bettering of his nation. Both come across as conflicting in the message they send, but their words and actions impact the narrator's perceptions of his nation and of the global imagined community.

In addition to the discourses on the nation revealed through familial dialog, Mabanckou shows the school as a site of the dissemination of official State discourse. He draws a parallel between the educational institutions that shaped the Congolese citizen and the French colonial school that inculcated colonial ideology. At *l'Ecole populaire*, access to the classroom is limited to those who properly recite national narratives, which literally frames the threshold of the school as a space of the state: "Tu ne rentres pas en classe si tu ne récites pas les quatre premiers articles de la loi du Mouvement national des pionniers" (183). Failure to do so results in punishment: "Tiens, Adriano, frappe vingt coups de chicotte sur cet élève qui ne peut pas réciter le plus célèbre discours de l'immortel Marien Ngouabi" (202). Reciting Ngouabi's speech at the door roots this institution in the national agenda and magnifies the power of the State as the center of history. In terms of the curriculum, numerous examples show a manipulation of official history and discourse, like the assassination of Ngouabi. The narrator says about it, "On nous a appris comment parler de cette histoire triste. On doit répéter: 'Il a été lachement assassiné par l'Imperialisme et ses valets locaux" (205). Mabanckou's irony comes through the naïve child's admission that they have *learned* how to speak of an assassination. In reality, many believe Ngouabi's friend and successor Sassou-Nguesso was the force behind the killing despite the fact that he put on trial men he deemed responsible (Thomas, *Black France* 164). The school system's adoption of the dominant discourse also manipulates facts to keep control. The teacher Mr. Mutombo, as a voice of the state, discourages intellectual curiosity that threatens authority; the schoolteacher "a dit que le dictionnaire c'est pour les tricheurs" (256), as if to promote rote knowledge over true understanding. In this regard, the schoolteacher's lessons actively engage and groom the students for the national project. Reflective of Communist discourse based on Marxist and Leninist thought, Ngouabi's famous speech urges a focus on the future in order to surpass the tumultuous changes of power the country has known:

*Après une éclatante victoire sur l'impérialisme et les traitres de la nation, notre jeune et dynamique peuple a osé poser ce jour l'acte le plus audacieux de l'histoire de notre Révolution: le Parti Congolais du travail….Aujourd'hui et demain nous ne chanterons plus faux* l'Internationale*….le Congo-Brazzaville entre dans le palmarès de la grande Révolution prolétarienne mondiale.* (202)

The revolution transforms from a bloody chain of events into a story of patriotic myths. Depictions of the enemy in these anti-imperial, pro-national discourses align the nation with forces of goodness and justice. The narrator regurgitates this story: "Quand ils tiraient les graines éclataient on dirait des grenades de la guerre mondiale. Et il tirait, tirait, tirait pendant que les ennemis de la Nation tombaient les uns après les autres" (81). Here, the child's words lend a radiant or almost magical quality to the invincible defenders of the nation. The students feel great admiration for these heroes and are pushed to imitate them: "On nous dit par exemple que nous sommes l'avenir du Congo, que c'est grace à nous que le capitalisme ne gagnera jamais " (19). The extent to which he internalizes the school and state's rhetoric shows in his dreams: "Je ferme les yeux, j'imagine que je suis quelqu'un qui servira demain notre pays, que c'est grace à moi que le capitalisme ne gagnera pas sa victoire chez nous" (183). Dominant discourse thus claims a reliance on students' participation to foster a space of belonging.

Mabanckou's display of the state's manipulation juxtaposes representations of a black or racial identity as problematic. He weaves in the Mohammed Ali and George Foreman story to show that national and racial affiliations come second to greed and status:

Selon Papa Roger, ce Don King avait reçu des millions et des millions du dictateur Mobutu Sese Soko pour organiser ce combat mais le Noir américain ignorait que si le président zaïrois avait donné tout cet argent c'était pour faire sa propre publicité et laisser croire au monde entier que lui il était un homme bon alors qu'il est méchant, qu'il fait peur à son people, qu'il vole l'argent de l'Etat et le cache dans les banques d'Europe. (191)

Mabanckou's reference to former Zaire allows him to touch on this neighboring country's history of "nationalisation sauvage…connue sous le vocable de 'zaïrianisation'" (Djungu-Simba 157). Mobutu professed loyalty to his people by extinguishing those who were not "authentic" Zairians, which led to economic disaster (Djungu-Simba 162). Mabanckou underlines the falsity of his intentions when the narrator tells that at first, "Les Zaïrois aimaient pourtant George Foreman: il avait la peau plus noire que Mohammed Ali, donc il était le vrai Africain" (191). When Foreman shows up with dogs that remind them of colonial days, they quickly switch to Ali as the desired winner. The racial alliance with Foreman is thus shattered when his image conjures memories of past oppression. Colonial associations adjoin references to African oppressors, linking the two as systems of domination.

The duplicity and artifice of leaders translates into a conflicting comprehension of the world for the narrator. As described above, he learns and repeats rhetoric that turns on the greatness of the nation. Outside of the classroom, however, he demonstrates a perception of France and the French language within colonial terms in a post-colonial setting. He innocently believes, "Les Français nous aimaient bien et nous aussi on les aimaient bien. Ils nous aiment encore aujourd'hui parce qu'ils continuent à bien s'occuper de notre pétrole (76). The child's simplistic manner of making observations works well to clearly display representations of persistent néocolonial dynamics. The French language also takes on colonial meaning when he locates it in "une très petite tribu d'Europe qui parle encore le vrai français parce que c'est là-bas que le français est né" (87). Origins, language and truth circulate in a web of symbols that depict his lack of ownership to a language that was imposed through the colonial system.

The narrator occupies a precarious situation in a culminating scene when his mother continues to have miscarriages and a *marabout[[28]](#footnote-28)* whom she consults tells Pauline that her son is the cause of her infertility. She had sought help from European and African doctors, but their scientific knowledge proved futile. Michel finds out the marabout's story and is shocked when his friends tell him, "Quand les enfants veulent venir, ils trouvent la porte fermée et ils meurent juste devant cette porte. Or la clé qui ouvre le ventre de ta maman c'est toi qui l'as" (321). The bizarre story serves as a sort of allegory that plays on the past and the future. The symbol of the key that opens the womb and allows for births is like the missing variable needed for new beginnings and a solid future. The *marabout*, a traditional African figure, does not know the answer to the problem and turns to lies to place the responsibility on another. Family and friends fail to question a man of such honor, and so they perpetuate the story. The pressure proves too strong: "Comme il insiste trop, comme je ne sais plus ce que je vais répondre, j'accepte tout" (323). He finds two old keys and gives one to his mother who immediately feels relief and joy. In other words, he is forced to go along with the farce and pretend to have the answer. However, this gesture of the youth placing the future in the hands of the older generation proves symbolic. The answer to her fertility lies within her, so that the mother as a figure of Africa and origins requires the focus to turn inward rather than outward.

As for Michel, the burden he feels pushes him into dreams of living elsewhere: "Dans mon sommeil je vais désormais très loin. Je ne suis plus le petit Michel qu'on voit dans ce quartier…Je porte des pantalons en Tergal, des vestes en lin, des chemises blanches avec un nœud papillon" (372). With no descriptions of events, the narrative closes with oniric imaginings that fill the space left by uncertainty: "Oui, je suis comme je voudrais être quand j'aurai vingt ans…Dans ces rêves, j'ai la tête bien haute, les épaules bien droites, on me respecte, on me salue…je parle d'autres langues que nos langues à nous. Je les parle très bien on dirait que je suis né dans les pays où je me retrouve" (375). The social pressures from within Congo that urge participation in the farce clearly inform the representations of contemporary identity in other works.

In *Demain…,* the political and societal spheres prove restrictive and conflicted. Representations of leaders and, on a closer level, figures of authority in the narrator's life create a view of duplicity, with a sentiment of national identity overshadowed by greed and neocolonial associations. This portrait of a country and the world in the 1970s sheds light on other contemporary works that make statements on national identity. The imagined journeys and psychological ambulation that take place in *Demain…* concretize in *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse* through the narrators' voyages from Congo to France and back. As Mabanckou and Daniel Biyaoula show, the nation, too, has changed since the 1970s of *Demain…*. The chaos of Congo during the 1970s in the beginning years of the nation-building task remains in the context of the 1990s, but within a transnational framework of migration.  
**Performing Identities**   
Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* (1996) and Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* (1998) are often cited as prime examples of literature on immigration and attest to what Dominic Thomas calls a "transnational matrix" (156). These narratives illustrate the story of those who attempt to forge belonging but encounter restrictions from both sides of the ocean. If the individual's literal and figurative journey takes the forefront in these books, the problems the narrators encounter speak volumes on the group's perception of evolving definitions of identity in both Congo and France. As outlined in chapter one, Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* gives voice to the self-proclaimed French-Senegalese narrator Salie who speaks from outside of the immigrant group in France. Salie works as a writer and admits that her socio-economic status and education distinguish her from other Africans in France and back in Senegal. However, Mabanckou and Biyaoula reduce the distance and locate their narrators along the same socio-economic axes as their compatriots in France and in Congo. They come from poor villages, like Salie, but Biyaoula's Joseph first works in a tire factory and then becomes unemployed, , a, and Mabanckou's Massala-Massala takes part in illegal activities to stay in France. Whereas Salie feels ostracized amongst other women because of her success, Joseph and Massala-Massala can only hope to achieve such respect amongst their male and female compatriots. Their position within the community affords them the ability to act as close critical spectators who question what it means to be Congolese or French. Mabanckou's narrator spends much time discussing his preparations for France. Biyaoula's inversely elaborates more on the difficulties of the return. In both instances, the narrators speak on notions of identity that their compatriots adopt and reinforce in both Congo and in France, which, in turn, sheds light on their own perceptions of self and the world.

Lydie Moudileno coins the term "parade postcoloniale" to refer to a performative model of identity that various Congolese authors showcase in their novels, including Mabanckou and Biyaoula to whom she dedicates an entire chapter. The parade describes characters who "profèrent leur identité, c'est-à-dire se rendent visibles et se distinguent en exploitant les ressources sémiotiques de la théâtralité, de la corporalité, du rêve et de la métamorphose" (Moudileno 7). The parade is inscribed stylistically and thematically as a tool that authors use to show characters and their performance of self. Her reference to theater meshes well with Mabanckou's narrative that he structures as a play, with parts entitled "Ouverture" and "Fermeture." Additionally, he includes a list of characters at the beginning, as if they were actors. Textual inscriptions of the spectacle as a parade-like succession of images fill the pages of *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse* through descriptions of characters' appearance, notably clothing. Dominic Thomas draws a link between literary representations of clothing and appearance and a Congolese cultural practice known as *la sape*, or "la Société des Ambianceurs et Personnes Elégantes;" Thomas defines *sapeurs* as people who "travel to France in order to acquire designer clothes as part of a broader identitarian agenda associated with the shifting cultural, political and social coordinates of the colony and post-colony as determined by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices" (*Black France* 157). Thomas mentions the colony and post-colony to underline how *la sape* reveals much about France's relationship to the Congo since it is rarely practiced outside of those spaces (156). An analysis of the displays of the practice proves worthy given that it is informed by the history between the two countries and continues to speak on contemporary realities.

Thomas calls our attention to ways in which the system of values espoused by *sapeurs* in Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narratives strikingly resonates with those of the *évolué* of the colonial period. Products of the colonial school system, these elitists often returned from France to seek positions with the administration and would demonstrate their elevated status by wearing Western clothing (*Black France* 163). While *évolués* did represent the educated class, participants in *la sape* in the post-colonial years make up part of the poorest of the country—in the 1970s, "its adherents were primarily working- or lower-middle-class youth and high school drop-outs, although membership grew considerably among increasingly disenfranchised youth under Marxism-Leninism in the Republic of the Congo" (*Black France* 160). In Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narratives, clothing serves to carry out the same function to mark out identity. If certain colonial subjects wore French clothing to point to their elite status, Mabanckou and Biyaoula prove that post-colonial citizens continue to dress the part.

Like in theater, these characters clothe and modify the body with external adornments and superficial transmutations to transmit an identity. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*, characters who espouse the mentality of *sapeurs* clothe the body in expensive brand name suits and luxurious accessories like ties, scarves, and belts. Natural African hair is covered or modified with wigs, hairpieces, and extreme straightening techniques. Both men and women apply blush to simulate a healthy glow, and look to gain weight and have big stomachs to show wealth. Perhaps most importantly, skin-lightening creams whiten the skin as much as possible. In this way, the black body is a vehicle or site of a hypothetical French, white identity that is concretized by these transmutations. Moudileno's parade of presence can be envisioned like a succession of images. In Mabanckou's book, the most "affluent" emigrant Moki, is described by way of his look and provides an excellent example of the link between *sapeurs*, appearance, and France: "Il était vêtu d'un costume sur mesure de Francesco Smalto. Une chemise très transparente laissait deviner sa peau blanchie une fois qu'il avait tombé la veste publiquement. Sa cravate en soie arborait des motifs minuscules de la tour Eiffel. Il ne chaussait que des Weston et était le seul au pays à en posséder en crocodile; le prix d'une paire était l'équivalent du salaire d'un ministre d'Etat du pays" (68). Biyaoula similarly details appearance as primordial and completely detached from functional purposes: "Ces gens ont presque tous la même allure. Ils ont un manteau en cuir, en laine ou une fourrure. Certaines des filles ont même mis des gants. S'habiller comme ça, avec une température de dix-huit degrés dehors!!!" (30). The modifications only take place on the outside and thus visible part of the body. Wigs, skin lightening creams, and clothes thus become props in the spectacle and exteriorization of an identity. If these bodies parade in order to be seen, they are "destinés à confirmer le mythe par des transfigurations visibles" (Moudileno 117). In other words, the sartorial adornments and chemical transformations become signifiers that point to a certain status conferred on people who have traveled to the Hexagon. The term both books use consistently is *Parisien*, or someone who dresses the part of the emigrant.

Merely dressing like a *sapeur* does not in and of itself guarantee one will obtain the title. In *L'Impasse*, Joseph admits that he attempts to change his appearance and seem like a *sapeur*, but he lacks one major requirement in order to obtain the title of *Parisien*: "J'avais beau m'agiter, je n'étais que moi-même. Le pèlerinage à La Mecque me faisait défaut. Un Parisien, quoi qu'on en dise, c'est avant tout celui qui a vécu à Paris" (92). The departure for France is the next step to truly obtain the title of *Parisien*. The flimsiness of the descriptive word is apparent in that the more one adopts French clothes and appearance, the more Parisian one becomes, like the ringleader of the sapeurs Moki: "Il avait pris du poids. Encore plus Parisien que jamais. On distinguait ses veines, tellement il avait blanchi sa peau. Il portait des lentilles. Ses yeux étaient bleus. Il fumait une pipe. Il disait que c'était le look bourgeois" (Mabanckou 106). Moki clearly seeks to look like his ideal *Parisien* as much as possible, with blue eyes and white skin. Mabanckou continually points to humorously point to the artifice and almost silliness of such attempts. In *L'Impasse*, the opening scene reveals Joseph's paranoia when he looks around at other Africans in the airport. Noticing all of the extravagantly dressed people, he sees them as mocking him for his insignificant clothing. His compatriots insult his externalized identity and see him as a poor reflection of the Congo: "Regardez comme il est habillé, c'est des gens comme ça qui font honte à l'Afrique" (14). Despite claiming he doesn't care, he fills with anger upon hearing these derisive remarks. He, also, underscores that these compatriots define an image of the Congo that derives from one that resembles a Frenchman as acceptable. An emigrant's appearance is seen as a reflection of the individual and a reflection of the nation.

Emigrants who leave for France are expected to come back and "wear" their success. This externalization is deemed primordial since it is the return, or what is called the *descente* that supports one's title as *Parisien* (Thomas 171). Moudileno calls the return a "processus de réactivation" (*Parades* 111) whereby an emigrant must temporarily return to Congo to display visible markers of success that activate and reactivate a perception of them as superior. Becoming Parisian, therefore, paradoxically requires going back to Africa. From Congo to Paris to Congo, the imperative reflects "the symbiotic dimension of the experience, and the inextricable link to the homeland…in order to maintain the status of the myth" (Thomas 183). The anticipated visual representations stamp the successful and name the rejected, known as the *refoulé*, the term used to describe those who leave for France and return without visible success. As a noun, *refoulé* means "Celui, celle qui est rejeté(e) du groupe ou mis(e) à l'écart pour une raison precise," or "Pousser avec force en arrière" (TLF1). As an appellation, *le* *refoulé* defines a person in terms of their relationship to France, which infers personification of the Hexagon, humanizing it and magnifying it as a powerful entity that sweeps away the unwelcomed.

If *la sape* entails representations aligned with Frenchness as embodiments of success, can it also act as a counter-hegemonic discourse? Postcolonial studies discern sites of resistance, with Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) a seminal work. He informs us that mimetic practices both strengthen and menace power dynamics: "It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (86). In other words, being forced to adopt another's values opens the door to accessing that power that marks authority. Following that logic, if *sapeurs* are conscious of their status as "almost but not quite," they can gain power by claiming these clothes as their own. Thomas uses Bhabha's framework to analyze clothing as a form of resistance and states, "The adoption of alternative aesthetic codes presents itself as a symbolic gesture aimed at reclaiming power" (*Black France* 161). He discusses the dictators of the 1970s who disliked *la sape* because of its association with European and imperial powers; therefore, one possible view of the *sapeur* mentality is that they are defying local systems of power (161). Appropriating clothing that was enforced by the colonial system and then forbidden by corrupt leaders can serve the purpose of knowingly creating difference and resisting authority. However, I disagree with this reading and argue that Mabanckou and Biyaoula clearly choose to bypass representations of empowered *sapeurs* in *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*. Those who are obsessed with appearance do not wield true power; rather they simulate power through false stories on the beauties of life in France. In this regard, the authors bring to the forefront false discourses on life in France and the impact it has on the youth. I argue in chapter one that Diome points to similar false discourses. In the context of *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*, the visual side is stressed much more so as an agent in the mythification of France than in Diome's novel. Despite his meager life, Joseph in *L'Impasse* tells how his young family members "continuent de me chanter sans fioritures que tout le matériel qu'il y a chez les Blancs…c'est un peu le paradis" (64) and "je représente la richesse puisque je vis là-bas!"(63). In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the myth notably spreads through the many performances of Moki who, when he returns to Congo for vacation, "mangerait à l'aire libre. En réalité, c'était pour qu'il prenne ses repas au vu et au su de tous" (51).

To clarify the forked nature of performances and the role they play, Jean Baudrillard's definition of simulation in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1991) proves helpful. He distinguishes between simulation and dissimulation:

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending… Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary." (4)

As Baudrillard states, simulating is not pretending because it presents itself as reality or as the truth. In other words, simulating attempts to erase the difference that threatens or challenges this subverted truth. Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narratives depict *sapeurs* not as models of resistance, but as representatives of those false discourses that present themselves as truthful. Mabanckou explicitly hints to this subversion with the character Moki who is called le *Parisien* in Congo, but *l'Italien* in France. His nickname comes from the belief that the suits he sells come from Milan, although the narrator admits, "Nous savions que ce n'était qu'un simulacre" (146). Simulation also manifests itself in the depiction of those *sapeurs* who claim to travel to France to partake in the cultural sophistication, as opposed to those who leave for economic reasons. Those who do not worship Paris and the way of the *sapeur* are "relegated to an inferior status that recuperates prior colonial hierarchies of rural and urban communities and the various associations and encodings associated with popular perceptions and constructs" (Thomas 161). Mabanckou and Biyaoula continually challenge tactics of simulation and point to *la* *sape*'s artifice through the use of stylistic techniques. In *L'Impasse*, Biyaoula relies heavily on naming strategies to more than hint at double meanings; the fictional town where he lives, Pourry, plays on the word *pourri,* which fits well with his perception of the run-down community of immigrants. One frequently visited bar is named Salle Denfer and his psychiatrist is Docteur Malfoi. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, names are equally descriptive but more encoded; the name of the village's most successful migrant, Moki, is short for *milikiste*, denoting a person who has moved to Europe, although the word also means the world or Europe (Thomas, *Black France* 170). The interchangeability of world and Europe speaks to the view of France as not only center, but all. In addition, the narrator's name Massala-Massala translates to "ce qui reste restera, ce qui demeure demeurera" (127). These wordplays encourage reflection and point to multiple layers of meaning that hide under the surface. The narrative order inscribes subversion, too. In *L'Impasse*, the opening scene debuts a nervous narrator at the Roissy airport in Paris. He will be returning to Congo after a period of fifteen years of absence; thus, the opening begins with the return, and it is not until later on that readers learn why he left Congo to go to France. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the diegesis starts with an introduction entitled "Ouverture" that actually recounts the end of the narrator's travels. Finding himself in prison in France, he announces that he will tell his story, which then oscillates back to Africa with part one entitled "Le pays." The second and last part, "Paris," begins in Paris but closes in Congo.

All of these distortions of names and narrative order find cohesion in their portrayal of a spectacular world marked by marred notions of the real. The authors demonstrate these participants as manipulators who construct myths in order to gain power. Successful immigrants use strategic discourses to cement their status while squashing all questioning of the veracity of their tales. *Bleu Blanc Rouge* particularly zooms in on this effect with the narrator believing "les vrais Parisiens prévenaient le pays. Ils nous conseillaient de nous méfier des *faux prophètes* qui parleraient en leur nom" (89). Those who try to reveal truthful depictions of immigration are cast as liars. This works to conflate the Parisians' image and assert their superiority over others. By constantly reaffirming their stories as truth, they negate any dissension from the image they paint.

Their words hold weight when they actively groom and court others to bring to France. Dreams of leaving foment in Massala-Massala's mind when Moki plants the idea: "Il me dit que j'avais *une bonne geule de Parisien*...L'effet fut immédiat. J'avais la grosse tête" (92). He looks the part, which pushes him to play the part. Allowing Moki' to deem him prepared for the trip, he relinquishes control over his own identity and fate. Once he has arrived in France, the narrator finds himself in a vulnerable state after his tourist visa expires. Moki introduces him to a man named Préfet, "le Parisien le plus recherché" (156) who guides him through the process of using stolen checks to buy tickets. Despite his intense fear of getting caught, the narrator continues under his surveillance. Each time his conscience grabs hold of him, he catches sight of the ubiquitous figure: "Certes, il y avait l'œil du maître tapi quelque part dans l'ombre. Un œil que je devinais derrière moi. Cet œil au regard sanguin était là. Il guettait la moindre défaillance" (180). Massala-Massala feels more and more alienated from others in his group who go along with the acts, but he participates because he cannot imagine disappointing his family. He states, "On nous attend là-bas, il n'est pas question d'y retourner les mains vides. Qui commettrait un tel crime? Seuls les paysans" (136). This reference to the paysan is telling in that they are "relegated to an inferior status that recuperates prior colonial hierarchies of rural and urban communities and the various associations and encodings associated with popular perceptions and constructs" (Thomas, *Black France* 161). Joseph of *L'Impasse* lives in Poury, a province of Paris, which reflects and contributes to his internalized feelings of inferiority. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the narrator discusses at length the ridicule directed at the *paysan* who finds himself reduced to a nickname. With no dialogue, he exists without voice in the book. Moki and other successful emigrants perceive him as a failure and bad son because his life in the provinces brings no honor; his return is "sans echo, sans tombour ni trompette. On ne se rendait pas compte de son arrivée....Il prétend qu'on ne sort pas facilement, en France. Surtout pas à Paris…Le paysan ment. C'est un grand menteur" (90). Those who oppose the stories the *Parisien*s tell are cast as inferior, and their voices are discredited.

Mabanckou and Biyaoula reveal the community and family unit in Congo as promoters of the departure for France. Their discourse explicitly frames the trip as an act that bestows honor on them. In this regard, they maintain the prized group identity in African cultures that binds the individual to the common good of the group. But that tradition becomes distorted when it relies on the simulation of success. Massala-Massala explains the expectation: "Tous ses yeux écarquillés, toutes ses mains déployées qui m'attendent. C'est une promesse que chacun de nous porte comme la tortue sa carapace (12). These narratives show how the lack of opportunity in Congo and false stories lead to the belief in immigration to France as the ultimate means of honoring one's family. Massala-Massala's father comes across as a humble, good man without pretense, but even for him, the illusions of France take on mythic proportions: "Mon père avait la larme à l'oeil. Il se justifie de n'avoir jamais pu construire une maison en dur ni installer une pompe à eau. Il était épuisé et certain que le Seigneur ne le lâcherait pas. N'était-ce pas Lui qui m'avait insufflé l'idée du voyage en France?...ce serait pour le bonheur de la famille" (94). This man comes across as humble, having worked to support his family. His evocations of God depict him as religious, but the implied religious justification of leaving for France, as if God planted the idea in his son's head, shows that he is turning to religion to rationalize something he would normally not preach.

His father's distorted understanding stems in part from the false stories he witnesses. He watches as Moki's family gains status by association: "Les frères de Moki profitaient du règne de leur ainé pour imposer le leur" (66). Here, this honor bestowed on the family applies to emigrants who adopt modern signs of success founded on European ideals. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, Moki builds a home in Congo for his father that serves as a landmark in the village. Like a monument, the physical home testifies to the greatness of his son's life in France. The house is personified and appears quasi-royal:

Elle apparaissait là, devant nous. On pouvait la contempler et mesurer le labeur de ces ouvriers…Elle se dressait impériale, en quatre pentes. Ses tôles en aluminium luisaient avec les rais de soleil. Elle se distinguait de loin et dépassait en hauteur les bicoques avoisinantes qui n'étaient plus qu'un capharnaüm dont le désordre sautait aux yeux. (44)

This house as a major space figures as a landmark within the community's and narrator's collective imaginary, and serves as a tangible reminder that greatness is located elsewhere. If the structure mimics European architectural standards, it reinforces a hierarchy between France and Congo, established by the shoddy houses of the rest of the community.

The connection between the family, country, and individual proves particularly apparent in *L'Impasse*. More intensely than Mabanckou, Biyaoula's narrator talks about the instability of his home in Congo. Nicknamed "Goudron," he finds himself defined by his skin color even amongst his own family members. As discussed in the first chapter, Diome touches on lineage and how the narrator's "foreign" last name stigmatizes her as different. However, in *L'Impasse*, the critical familial gaze does not derive from traditional cultural values. Biyaoula's family mocks him for his dark skin, reflective of self-alienating values. In fact, he says of his mother who has never left Congo, "Faut comprendre que mère a fait partie de l'avant-garde en matière de maquillage qui dans le français de chez nous signifie décoloration de la peau" (36). As symbol of Africa and of cultural transmission, the mother-turned-*sapeur* destabilizes his ability to claim belonging to this home. After his absence of more than ten years, Joseph encounters immediate condemnation from his family for not wearing a suit. He is viewed as dishonoring his family because he is not "reactivating" his acquired status by adorning himself properly. He is berated and told:

Le Parisien a une image à défendre, que pour eux, les gens de ma famille, ce sera la honte insoluble qu'il y ait parmi eux un Parisien qui ne ressemble pas à un Parisien, qu'il faut que je pense aux miens, que je l'ai peut-être remarqué à l'aéroport combien ils ont été peu enthousiastes en voyant comme je suis alors qu'autour de nous les autres Parisiens font l'honneur au pays d'où ils venaient ainsi qu'à leur famille. (39)

A link is made between his expressed identity, the country, and his family. By not conforming to the visual standards required to reflect well on the family, Joseph disgraces himself, and reflects poorly on the Congo. The national reference encapsulates him in a Congolese national identity. However, his family endorses and expects a certain appropriation of French identity, one that must be visibly shown. At the same time, they cling to tradition when it is convenient. When Joseph tells his older brother Samuel that he doubts his religion, his brother sees it as a disrespectful repudiation of his culture and puts his criticism in terms of a breach of the age hierarchy: "M'appeler Samuel moi? Me dire Samuel à moi??? Mais nous sommes nés le même jour toi et moi ou quoi? Tu sais ce que c'est le respect, toi? Tu sais le respect que tu me dois, toi? Tu crois que tu as passé quelques années à l'étranger que tu peux te permettre de marcher sur les traditions? Tu es blanc, toi? (137). Samuel thus demands respect because he is older, as if he clings to African tradition. The racial reference proves ironic given that this same brother urges Joseph to marry an African woman, but only one who looks white: "je t'en trouverai une qui est bien claire de peau et qui a des cheveux très lisses! Une qui ressemble à une Blanche" (112). The narrator's brother urges a French exterior and appearance of status, but he relinquishes no power he derives from traditional values.

Mabanckou and Biyaoula demonstrate this amalgam of European and African values to be far from a new way of empowerment. Their narratives portray it as a perpetuation of the view of French culture as superior. Characters lighten their skin, but they can never truly become white, which resonates with Bhabha's idea that "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). The effect of this "slippage" is noticed in the characters' interactions with white people. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, Massala-Massala has few encounters with white people except for the police who eventually take him to prison. In a way, he forebodes his future struggle for membership in this space by failing to realize that, as an African, he does not meet the very criteria he puts forth of a French person: "La France…elle avait besoin d'individus agiles, avertis et débrouillards…Je ne correspondais pas à ce profil" (38). Once he is face-to-face with these French men, he perceives of them in hyperbolic, almost cinematographic terms: "Le plus grand des deux devait mesurer au moins deux mètres…Ses bras de primate arrivaient jusqu'à ses genoux et il avait dû me détacher de lui pour se mouvoir à son aise. Le deuxième homme était moins grand. Il se retournait, me visait dans les yeux avec un regard rouge de fermeté. Sa corpulence de trapu musclé dévoilait une pratique assidue de la culture physique" (22). Their savage, powerful traits place them in a position of strength and dominance. It also highlights their inhuman manner of interacting.

In *L'Impasse*, the narrator details more frequent encounters with whites, but they turn around tension and struggle. He has a white girlfriend but increasingly feels anger towards her. When he returns to France from his trip to Congo, his anguish at her inability to understand racism leads to his emotional disconnect from her. He cannot understand that she does not consider race as part of her identity. As a white person, she lives blind to race and is able to declare, "Je ne vis ni ne me pense en Blanche" (191), without understanding the implications. Eventually, this torment engulfs him and leads to a physical disconnect: "Parfois c'est comme si mon corps se refusait à aller naturellement vers elle. Et je dois faire des efforts sur moi-même pour la prendre dans mes bras" (186). When he overhears two women speaking about him, he erupts in anger: "C'est là que je comprends que le dernier des Blancs, le plus laid, le plus pourri, le plus scélérat, il croira toujours qu'il est mieux que le meilleur des Noirs" (192). Replete with superlatives, the writing expresses his utter despair and complete mistrust of whites. His relationship with Sabine crumbles as does his ability to tolerate the perceived threat embodied in others' gaze: "La plupart du temps je ne veux pas sortir avec elle comme si je voulais éviter qu'on ne nous voit ensemble. C'est sans doute surtout que je n'ai pas envie de sentir que les Blancs posent sur moi leurs regards étonnés ou courroucés" (189). By ending his relationship with Sabine, he alienates himself from larger French society.

Biyaoula incorporates a notable representation in his narrative that is absent from Mabanckou's story. He questions the implications of a white Frenchman appropriating an African identity. The narrative questions if Bhabha's idea of slippage creating ambivalence works if a white European lays claim to an African identity. While Joseph normally provides an embittered view of the world, he speaks in grandiose terms about his French psychiatrist Dr. Malfoi who supposedly has extensive experience with Africans: "Le docteur Malfoi, l'Afrique et les Africains il les a là dans le cœur…Leur gentillesse, leur naïveté… Il était si gentil qu'on l'avait surnommé 'le Blanc qui nous aime'. Peut-être à force de fréquenter les Noirs il s'était laissé aspirer par leur manière d'être, par leurs âmes" (261). Here, the doctor-patient relationship functions in such a way that Joseph's usual skepticism gives way to an almost idealization of Dr. Malfoi. When Joseph enters his office, he observes "plein de masques africains accrochés au mur" (261) and notices that the doctor is wearing African shoes and a *boubou,* a type of traditional clothing worn throughout Africa. The African props surrounding his room function like those of the *sapeur*; they serve as visible signifiers or signs themselves. The *sapeur* turns to European modes to promote an appearance of socio-economic status achieved by immigrating to France. The white doctor similarly uses the masks and clothes as evidence or proof of his entrenchment within the African imagined community. However, in the case of the *sapeur*, true power in this space eludes them, despite the props, because skin color always works to differentiate and thus render total assimilation impossible, as the authors show. Yet the doctor's white skin becomes negligible because of his props and externalization of identity. White skin as a visible difference actually works to reinforce his knowledge, so that he occupies the position of mediator between Joseph and his own mind. His theoretical research backs up his power and bestows him with a knowledge of Africans that Joseph, himself, fails to hold:

C'est alors qu'il faisait ses études de médecine qu'elle avait commencé, sa passion. Il était tombé par hasard sur un bouquin traitant les Noirs, de la manière qu'ils se faisaient posséder…Il s'était documenté dessus pour comprendre le pourquoi de la chose….Il en sait beaucoup sur comment nous autres on pense et pourquoi on pense comme ça. Sans doute qu'il a pénétré jusque dans nos têtes, notre être, notre âme. N'y a qu'à voir les livres qu'il a écrit à ce sujet. Avec tous ces titres! "Construction des structures mentales et développement psychologique de l'Africain"… J'ai essayé d'en lire, moi, , , un de ses livres. Pas au-delà de la première page que j'ai été. Tellement je n'y comprenais rien, tellement c'était savant. (261)

Dr. Malfoi lays claim to *knowing* African cultures, as if culture is a fixed entity or consumable object. His capacity to materialize an African identity underlines the doctor's ability to choose. Biyaoula stresses the unequal dynamics of imitation and depicts the white gaze as one of authority. The black man cannot be white, but the white man can be both. Charles Djungu-Simba highlights this figure in his article "Errance et migration littéraires en Afrique: Cas du Congo-Zaïre." He touches on a manifestation he calls "faux Noirs" that are products of the postcolonial school, "dotés de connaissances sans aucune prise sur les réalités de leur société, perçus comme des agents de reproduction du modèle socioculturel étranger" (166). Biyaoula's representation of the "faux Noir" unveils the way in which dominant discourse has the power to access other modes of knowledge. That white people have the choice drives Joseph mad: "Libérés des entraves de la peau! De ne pas crever à cause d'elle. Ça m'envahit de plus en plus la tête que nous autres on n'est pas libres de nous-mêmes! Que notre viande à nous, elle est dans une prison éternelle dont on ne peut s'échapper même en usant des artifices!" (192). His reference to prison foreshadows the state in which both Massala-Massala of *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Joseph of *L'Impasse* conclude their journeys.  
**Tragic Entrapments**In the first chapter, I concluded that Fatou Diome's narrator benefits from her transnational trip by forging belonging in both spaces. To the contrary, Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narrators lack such resourcefulness, and they fail to forge real belonging in France and amongst their Congolese compatriots. They have no grandmother who links them to their heritage, like in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Diome's evocations of the natural landscape as part of her narrator's memories find no place in Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's novels where the narrators' expanded horizons lead to the opposite of expanded roots. For them, they wind up in a suffocatingly restricted, immobile space with no choices. The conclusions of both narratives encapsulate the tenuousness of the in-between space that engulfs the narrators. Their stories vary greatly and their choices regarding identity diverge, with Joseph becoming a *sapeur* and Massala-Massala being deported. The two tales ultimately converge in the representation of the narrators' total alienation—psychologically, physically, socially. Mabanckou's narrator begins his story with the conclusion to his Parisian adventure as he awaits deportation in a cell. Before arriving, he travels through an interstitial space with the guardians of the nation, two French policemen. Alone in a car with them, the journey seems to take forever, and the more they drive, the further he feels he is being pushed into a state of isolation. When they refuse to answer any of his questions, the narration oscillates from first-person to second-person: "Méritais-je cet isolement? D'ailleurs, étais-je un détenu pour subir un tel traitement? J'en avais l'air. D'abord, je vous le demande, dites-moi pourquoi nous sommes ici? Que vous ont-ils dit quand vous m'avez embarqué dans la voiture, répondez-moi messieurs, répondez!...Silence. (21) Whereas before, the first-person implied a conversation with readers, now the policemen take over and become the object of his words. The lack of quotation marks reflects the silence and isolation they impose upon him. The dialog-turned-unanswered monologue that occurs during the journey towards the jail announces the cell as a space of complete alienation from society. He is alone, with no cellmates, speaking to himself: "L'odeur du moisi…La pièce dans laquelle je me trouve est restée inoccupée longtemps" (25). As a deportee, he has no rights in the Hexagon and figures as an invader on its territory. He loses spatial cognizance and hangs in a no man's land: "Je n'ai plus aucun repère ici (11). Cut off from the world and from his audience, his formerly paraded body no longer has any representational value and begins withering away. The descriptions of his deflated physical appearance incarnate the antithesis of the image of a successful man: "Je me trouve amaigri, les maxillaires proéminents, les joues creuses et les lèvres sèches" (14). In addition to the denatured state of his body, he loses control of his bodily functions and becomes emasculated: "Nu, je regarde ce sexe rétréci, ces bourses retirées. Ces excréments qui flottent dans l'eau, à mes pieds. Je ne suis plus un homme" (215). His mind seemingly detaches itself from his body, severing the two to the point that he ne longer recognizes himself; when he looks at his reflection in water, he is "pas convaincu que ce reflet dans la cuvette était le mien" (14). The social and psychological alienation he faces results in a splintering of his concept of self, so that he no longer even recognizes his own shadow: "Je me retrouve dans cette pièce sobre, face à mon ombre que je vois déambuler sans me prévenir. Elle va, elle vient" (23). In total despair, he speaks of himself as if referring to another: "Dans le noir, l'homme n'a pas d'autre réflexe que le repliement. Le noir lui rappelle qu'il n'est qu'un point infime sans la bénédiction de la lumière du jour" (25). Because his trajectory traced a path along the values and expectations of others, he no longer has a grasp on who he is. This alienation from others crosses national borders and follows him back home to the Congo. He knows that, "Bien-sûr, ceux qui sont de notre sérial me traiteront de poltron, de blanc-bec, de *débarqué*" (16). The ostracization leads him to experience a self-alienation whereby only outside perceptions define his self-worth: "Je ne suis plus qu'un bon à rien. Je ne suis plus qu'une loque. Un raté. Je ne m'étais pas prépare à cela" (215).  
 The breaking down of the physical body that occurs in *Bleu Blanc Rouge* similarly takes place in *L'Impasse* but is coupled by a psychological breakdown. Intense migraines and feelings of madness result from his desperate desire to belong to a group that nonetheless disgusts him. His head pain increases in severity whenever he thinks of the appearance-obsessed mentality of his compatriots. The clothing and skin color appear as deformations to the body: "Je ne supporte plus cette corruption de notre être, cette autodécomposition, que tout ça me secoue les tripes" (255). Yet as discussed, white people also do not permit him to forge a space of belonging in the Hexagon. He increasingly feels alienated from both communities, and he admits as much: "J'en veux de plus en plus à mes semblables, mais aux Blancs aussi" (188). He acts out his aggression and misplaces his anger by breaking up with Sabine, one of the few people he spends time with. As a result, he enters into a period of total social alienation.

Like Massala-Massala in his cell, Joseph turns inward and exiles himself from others: "Il m'arrive de rester enfermé chez moi trois ou quatre jours de suite" (188). Social alienation turns into psychological alienation. He winds up in a psychiatric hospital where he must turn to Dr. Malfoi for guidance. He feels trapped between France and Africa, with no solid footing in either place: "Quand je suis à Poury je le supporte à peine cet espèce d'anonymat que je rencontre partout … Je rêve de Brazza de la chaleur dans laquelle on y vit. Mais sur place, je m'aperçois que ce n'est pas mieux, que c'est juste la nature de l'anonymat où on nous confine qui change, qu'à Brazza on nous veut anonyme et réels à la fois, inexistants et matériels" (97). His feelings of *multi-déracination*, or multiple unbelonging or unanchorings, are the result of his own deficient worldview. The doctor's advice is to not think much about his place in the world in the vein of the popular phrase "go with the flow": "N'allez pas à contre-courant de ce qui se passe, des réalités…, Vivez avec votre temps" (268). The flow, for Joseph, means partaking in *la sape*. He takes the doctor's advice and decides to cut his hair and beard, he starts a diet and focuses more on his appearance, but he still feels empty: "Ça me laisse de plus en plus avec la sensation qu'il y en moi un trou qui a pris forme et qui grossit et s'agrandit chaque fois un peu plus….Faut que je le comble" (267). This emptiness pushes him to make more changes to his appearance, which brings him more feelings of emptiness. In an act of self-desctrution, he ultimately becomes just like a *sapeur*. The narration changes suddenly and instead of first-person narration, the story is told as if he were outside of himself, looking in: "La tête et les épaules sont tenues bien hautes. Les yeux, sous des lunettes teintées, vont à gauche, à droite, saisissent rapidement l'expression des passants. L'attitude générale du corps pourrait paraître hiératique, mais non, il est juste droit sans raideur aucune…qui lui donnent, j'en suis sûr, un brin de classe" (280). Like the narrator in *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, he ends by living a life determined by others. This body becomes a consumable object, signaled by vocabulary that seemingly describes products. Massala-Massala similarly sees himself "comme des marchandises" (220).

The ultimate state of alienation of the characters is represented through references to their body and the exterior, like the skin, face, cheeks, and clothes. Absent are references to their minds and brains, which denotes their inability to think independently (or at all). Joseph vows to find belonging with his compatriots, which requires him to desensitize himself: "Oui, je crèverai mes yeux, je brûlerai mes tympans, j'anesthésierai mon nez…j'y demeurerai avec mes semblables" (267). As a *sapeur*, he loses all mental capacity and turns into a sort of zombie: "Je ne m'interrogerai plus que pour la forme, je ne regarderai plus, je ne verrai plus, je ne penserai plus, je me déconnecterai les neurones" (67). Massala-Massala's broken down physical state mirrors the lack of clarity of his mind, as well: "Il est des fois où la mémoire ne ressemble qu'à une montagne d'immondices à démêler patiemment pour débusquer cet objet minuscule, ce déclic qui fait que tout dérive et s'enchaine en une succession d'événements qui échappent à la volonté de l'homme" (26). For him, the past appears as a befuddled series of events that escape his control. He sees his fate as the result of an external chain of circumstances, putting himself in a position of victimhood. In this state, he broaches the topic of memory and aligns his state of failure with his inability to remember: "J'ai oublié d'être celui que j'ai toujours été" (11). Designated *le* *refoulé* when he returns similarly entraps him in the past, stripping him of all agency or possibility for change. The term *refoulé* also has the connotation of repressing, as if to forget. The entire book takes place in a sort of flashback as he tells of life in Congo, then in France, and then back in Congo, supporting his crystallization in the past. He has no grasp on time: "J'ai le sentiment que tout ceci ne s'est déroulé qu'en une seule journée, en une seule nuit. Une longue journée" (11). This vulnerable state leads to total confusion: "Il m'est impossible de séparer le songe de la réalité" (26). Without memory tied to the past and careful reflection for the future, he is condemned to this nothingness with no identity: "N'être plus qu'un homme anonyme. Sans passé. Sans avenir. Condamné au présent immédiat, à le porter jour après jour…un homme sans repères" (203). He fails to recognize promises of a great future as echoes of past oppression, the chance for self-determination evades him. Trapped in the cycle, he leaves open the possibility, or perhaps probability, that he will leave for France again one day.

In *L'Impasse*, Joseph's becoming of a *sapeur* demands a total obliteration of the past brought on by his psychiatrists. Rather than bringing to the surface repressed memories, Dr. Malfoi pushes him to forget. He can go on "grâce à la petite amnésie qu'il a installée dans ma tête" (266). Now, women with bleached skin that used to bother him are "Modernes. Noires. Africaines. Régulièrement fourrées chez le momificateur. Surtout que c'est elles l'avant-garde! Intellectuelles. Future journalistes, future avocates, futures professeurs…Vite! Vite! Dans les mœurs, dans l'être, dans l'âme, l'amélioration…Oui rapidement dans le peloton de l'Avenir!" (302). Progress and modern discourse denote a refusal to look into the past and into his memories. He becomes subsumed by the *sapeur* mode of life until one day, he happens to cross Sabine's path after a period of two years of silence. When he notices she has a two-year old son who appears to be biracial, he has a psychological breakdown from the alienation he feels from his own flesh and blood. He becomes drunk, numb, and alone, reflecting his inability to deal with the present. Having lost any ability to guide his own life, he can only turn to Dr. Malfoi and plead for "une méthode plus rapide, plus efficace, plus radicale pour m'effacer la memoire et me donner de bons souvenirs…" (327). The ellipses announces a space of absence and the novel concludes with language failing him and self-expression rendered impossible.

What Mabanckou and Biyaoula illustrate is the danger of a lack of self-determination that emigrants face if the past is not inspected and re-evaluated. In *L'Impasse*, the final choice of Joseph lies in his assumption of his compatriots ideals: "Je suis redevenu le ver de terre que j'ai choisi d'être. Totalement" (303). The anthropomorphism reveals his acknowledgement that this new identity debases him as a person, yet he fails to find another viable option. His choice of metaphor, a "ver de terre," plays on the image of an earthworm embedded in the mud, as if this newly espoused identity of the sapeur harks back to root signs, like the postmodern tree that Deleuze and Guattari equate with roots (11). The choice he has made may come across as a way to reconnect him to origins, but compared to a rooted tree, an earthworm crawls on the surface within the mud.

In *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, Massala-Massala makes one final decision, as well. To the contrary of Biyaoula's novel, in *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, the narrator returns to Congo to reveal the truth: "J'ai choisi d'assumer jusqu'au bout. Je serai la risée du quartier. Mais je serai chez moi" (215). This reference offers the only glimmer of hope of having a home in either narrative. Whereas Joseph begins drinking to escape memories, Massala-Massala begins his story when he is in prison, so that the book comes from his looking back on the events of his life. He seeks to chronicle them: "Je voudrais que tout retrouve l'ordre chronologique. Que chaque maillon de la chaine brisée reprenne sa place… Que cesse cette confusion dans les pensées (13) and that "tout soit clair. Qu'il n'y ait pas d'ambiguités" (27). He admits that this recollection must be a close inspection of self and of life that allows for the time to consider the consequences and repercussions of an act rather than reacting as if one's fate was already mapped out: "Je dois absolument dompter cette fâcheuse habitude de réagir promptement au gré de mes pulsions, face à un événement, sans prendre le temps de murir la réflexion. Ainsi je verrais plus clair et peut-être débusquerais-je une voie de sortie, même si mes chances, c'est peu dire, sont dérisoires" (14). Switching to the conditional tense underscores that the future hinges upon this reflection. Only with critical self-assessment can he possibly find a way to redeem himself. His reference to clarity of mind connects back to dismantling the myths told by those who have traveled to France. His story seeks to go against the distorted stories that simulate truth to the point of becoming it. For him, he wishes to set out to discern this truth, and "tout regarder sans pour autant tronquer ou falsifier les faits. Je ne voudrais plus revivre l'illusion qui m'a engagé dans cette voie" (27). In choosing to tell a story that goes against the grain, Massala-Massala acknowledges that he will be ridiculed and severely judged for unraveling the lies of his compatriots' tales: "Je présume que je serai taxé de faux frère, accuse de traitrise" (27). But he is willing to sift through his memories and deconstruct the illusions he had created. Looking inward for explanations provides the only opportunity for new possibilities to come about: "Et puis tout cela passera. Un ciel nouveau apparaitra" (215).

Odile Cazenave has classified both Biyaoula's and Mabanckou's novels as within a category that "can be described as a literature of detachment" (155). She says specifically of *Bleu Blanc Rouge* that it is in between a "roman de déracinement" and a "roman d'immigration" (27). Ambroise Kom believes that in Biyaoula's work, "L'Afrique est évoqée simplement parce que Joseph Gaakatuka qui vit en France…retourne pour quelques semaines de vacances dans son Congo natal" (43). However, I argue that these books demonstrate an engagement in both French and Congolese realities. Protagonists become failed, tragic heroes because of the lack of any anchor point. What these books show is a desire for *multi-racination*, or multiple rooting that would allow the protagonist a transnational space where they draw from cultural and national affiliations from both sides of the ocean. The protagonists are unable to negotiate belonging in France because of their unstable relationship to Congo. Similarly, with no capital gained from their time in France, they cannot negotiate belonging in either space. Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's are not turned away from Africa. They seek to locate new spaces, transnational spaces, built on multiple belongings. In order to access such a space, they demonstrate a need for the individual and Congolese society to look inward and realize which values and practices are destructive in their perpetuation of self-alienating ideologies.   
**Conclusion**In conclusion, Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* remain linked in the various ways in which the authors textually inscribe the question of national identity and belonging for the African who leaves France. Their representations of narrators who fail to forge belonging in France and in Congo are illuminated by the chaotic relationship between literature and post-colonial leadership that sprouted in the 1970s. I hope to have shown that in *Demain j'aurai vingt ans*, Mabanckou reflects the ways in which national identity grew out of restriction, oppression and fear. The narrator Michel bears witness to the inculcation of a collective memory and history with leaders controlling literary discourses. His uncle René and stepfather Roger figure as major voices of people who speak in engaged manners, but demonstrate a continued mentality that seeks out success through neocolonial means. Mabanckou underscores the difficulty of the task of maintaining tradition and the repercussions of focusing on the future with no consideration of the past.

In *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*, the narrators who leave for France reflect the instability of their country told in *Demain j'aurai vingt ans*. Whereas Fatou Diome writes an optimistic conclusion to her emigrant's story, Mabanckou and Biyaoula frame their narrators in a state of alienation and imprisonment. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge,* narrator is now *un refoulé*, socially alienated and self-alienated in the sense that only others and his outside experience define his identity. In *L'Impasse*, Joseph breaks down mentally because of his in-between state. He desperately seeks belonging to the point that he turns into a *sapeur* and becomes completely self-alienated, like an empty body uncapable of critical thought.

Fatou Diome elaborates on the role of writing as the force through which she writes and understands her identity, a topic largely absent in Mabanckou and Biyaoula's works. However, Mabanckou spotlights moments where the narrator speaks on the importance of critical reflection, and that he *can* see a future where the situation will be different. Rather than following in the footsteps of other scholars and determining these tragic ends as a refusal to engage with Africa realities, I hope to have demonstrated that the narrators' eventual despair derives from their inability to navigate the transnational experience. The total alienation both narrators experience is symptomatic of a troubled Congolese national identity that relies on France for definition, and of a French national identity that ignores its heterogeneous quality. The narrators who become non-heroes announce in this case a struggle for self-determination amidst a history of colonialism that continues under present leadership that proves just as oppressive.

**Conclusion**

As this study demonstrates, literary studies of the transnational prove invaluable to our understanding of the ways in which contemporary French and Francophone novels traverse and re-formulate national, cultural and literary borders in a globalized world. In recent years, literary critics have marked out ways of conceiving of the transnational in terms of global contexts and in area-specific literary discussions. Françoise Lionnet and Shuh-Mei Shih move away from the transnational in a specifically French and Francophone context in *Minor Transnationalism* to urge a look at minoritized transnational discourses in a comparative vein. Similarly, Peter Hitchcock comparatively analyzes authors from around the world in his book *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form*. These works have provided important contributions to understanding the transnational in diverse settings. However, I argue that before embarking on such universalizing approaches, we must first delineate those questions that are particular to the transnational in French and Francophone literary fields. Dominic Thomas has been one of the most important contributors to an understanding of the transnational in Francophone contexts, but he focuses strictly on a corpus of African writers in *Black France: Postcolonialism, Immigration and Transnationalism*.

The present study fills in a major gap in scholarship by discerning the transnational in novels written by French, Antillean and African authors. The focus on literary works from those spaces connected by slavery and the colonial experience permits a mapping out of a transnational experience that unfolds within a relationship historically marked by oppression and inequality. Refusing to view the former colonized and the former colonizer within a dichotomy, these authors inscribe the transnational into their works as a powerful rupture in the prevailing dynamics that have governed the relationship between France and its former colonies.

In the first chapter, I explored Franco-Senegalese author Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* in which multiple discourses on identity interweave together to form the narrative. The narrator Salie tells of her life in France, but her voice often seamlessly shifts to an omniscient viewpoint that tells the stories of others, resulting in a doubling of the setting. Through Salie, Diome criticizes certain Senegalese traditions that are based on exclusion. As an illegitimate child, she has lived the painfulness of being cast on the margins. However, emigration is represented as a fruitful venture, and the narrator proves her resourcefulness. Diome's representation of the transnational presents a multi-faceted notion of exile. It represents the pain of absence as well as the joy of escaping labels. Diome's depiction of exile ultimately reveals the ability to forge and maintain belonging even when physically absent, biologically unrelated, and socially ostracized.

The narrator's rejoicing of exile is accompanied by a strong counter-discourse that argues against emigration when leaving is based on disillusionment. Salie vehemently decries the mental colonization fed by overarching global economic systems and neocolonial power dynamics. Also participating in this mental colonization are those migrants who return to Senegal and cash in on the elevated status afforded by the trip to France. Salie differs from these migrants and instead seeks to reveal the truth about the difficulty of life in France to those who remain blindly fixated on leaving.

In this regard, Diome questions how to balance on a global stage local imperatives as well as individual desires. The narrator's ultimate tale of belonging does not eclipse other characters' stories of tragedy and oppression, but rather exists alongside them. As we have seen, critics have tended to describe contemporary African literature on the experience of migration in terms of a disengagement from the realities of the continent. To the contrary, Diome's narrator refuses to envision identity as a choice to be made between her Senegalese and French heritages. Rather, the narrator takes a critical stance and stands by certain values while rejecting others. This critical gaze that lays bare belonging and non-belonging does not signal groundlessness or cultural dilution but a strategic re-connection to self and the other. Diome's transnational reveals the potential for Africans to actively participate in the defining of their future and in the re-working of their relationship to France.

In the second chapter, I explored Guadeloupian writer Gisèle Pineau's *L'exil selon Julia,* which brings to the forefront the importance of recreating an Antillean identity and memory in order to not perish from the transnational experience. In Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, the narrator critiques and thereby re-affirms her belonging in Senegal. However, in *L'exil selon Julia*, the metropolitan-born narrator faces the difficulty of reaffirming an identity that is foreign to her. In the Antillean context, the establishing of multiple spaces of belonging thus proves complicated due to the Dom-Toms' complex history dating to slavery. The present situation in which Antilleans are French in nationality yet considered too different from the national standard further problematizes what is at stake for an Antillean author to write a bicultural identity.

Pineau's transnational relies on a mixing of autobiography and fiction to ultimately prize a view of memory as in constant recreation. Through the themes of writing and reading, literature occupies a vital role in the process of creating meaning from absences. The turn to fiction thus marks a move away from a need for accuracy and historical fact in order to insist on imagined anchoring points. Through such creative explorations of the past, a model of identity that proves rooted in the islands yet branched out to other influences becomes possible. In other words, Pineau's novel demonstrates through re-writings of the past the possibility for an Antillean identity that is historically grounded yet spatially unbound.

This transnational representation proves unique given the island-based prescriptions for literature that the Creolist movement espouses. While the Creolists seek to write an identity specific to the history, language and culture of the islands, other writers like Maryse Condé explore areas of the world outside of France. What makes Pineau's illustration of transnational identity construction noteworthy is that she questions how to overcome the difficulty of representing belonging in France and in the Antilles without sacrificing one for the other. Pineau takes a risk but manages to break the dichotomy to show an embracing of all cultural heritages as possible with creative reimaginins of a local identity.

J.M.G. Le Clézio's *L'Africain* is analyzed in the third chapter to illuminate the transnational from a less commonly studied perspective, that of a French author who writes, or re-writes, Africa. Le Clézio's work, like the other novels in this study, showcases an intimate connection between the personal and the collective. French literary discourse's tendency towards exotic representations reflects colonial thought's dehumanization of Africans. In order to distance himself from such thought processes and styles, Le Clézio does not ignore the historical dimensions of the white person going to Africa. Instead, the narrative lays bare colonial representations of Africa that delegitimized African culture and associated blackness with negative ideas of violence and savagery. Le Clézio inscribes the colonial past into the personal life of his narrator, since arriving in Africa coincides with meeting his father who is part of the British colonial army. The narrator's journey of self-discovery thus parallels an awakening to an African worldview and to an understanding of the colonial past.

The randomly inserted photographs that have a sepia look resemble historical archives that create an effect of weaving remnants of the colonial past into this personal tale. The one-dimensional, black and white photos contrast with Le Clézio's style that translates a certain experience based on the senses. The writing on the page becomes the privileged source of meaning. Abandoning concrete details or linear narration, Le Clézio uses the French language to write Africa and a different way of experiencing the world. This style of writing is precisely what critics have deemed "un-French" about Le Clézio's works. The transnational in *L'Africain* clearly exhibits an undoing of the relationship between nation, language and culture. Le Clézio makes clear that for the French person journeying to a former colonial space, fruitful meaning can be gained if historical inequalities are acknowledged and re-worked.

Transnational studies of Francophone authors tend to not focus on French writers, as if to insist on a view that migration is a one-sided literary conversation. Le Clézio's narrative demonstrates a need to re-think the concept of the transnational in a way that not only asks how African and Antillean authors write belonging in France, but also how French authors write belonging elsewhere in a way that breaks with former colonial representations. The participation of writers from both sides of the ocean announces powerful new literary discourses on the cross-cultural experience.

In Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*, the focus of chapter four, the absence of empowered narrators and of fruitful intercultural experiences speaks louder than words. The transnational identity that surfaces in these two novels reveals psychological distortion and isolation. On one hand, the narrators detail how the Congolese community participates in a disillusioned adoration of France and French culture, much like we see in Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*. However, Diome problematizes the notion of home differently than Mabanckou and Biyaoula; for Diome's narrator, she struggles to find belonging in a community whose cultural values place her on the periphery. In *Bleu Blanc Rouge* and *L'Impasse*, the narrators struggle to discern a sense of home within the Congolese community. There, identity is wrought with distorted, self-alienating French values that date back to the beginning of the post-decolonization era. Mabanckou's *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…* reveals how in the 1970s Congolese leaders manipulated the nation-building project in order to gain power. Continuing a politics of oppression, these leaders profited from working with the French. We can read Mabanckou's two books and Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* together to comprehend how the failure to break with colonial hierarchies during the early years is represented as a precursor to today's disillusioned migrants and young Congolese who strive to look French. As these Franco-Congolese works illustrate, the lack of a local culture and identity complicates the ability for a migrant to negotiate a transnational identity that is bilaterally critical like in Diome's work, re-constructed like in Pineau's, or re-valued like in Le Clézio's. In Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, memory provides the transnational traveler a cultural and familial anchoring point. In Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, the narrator strategically avoids the fate of *multi-déracination* by forging resistant pathways through the heritage her grandmother transmits. In *L'Africain*, J.M.G. Le Clézio insists on re-defining concepts associated with collective memory in order to delve into personal memory. These novels reveal that the transnational points to travel and movement, but it also conjures representations of backwards movement, spatially through physical returns and departures, and temporally through reconstructions of the past. For the authors who explore hybridization's capacity to generate personal and collective growth, their narrators must retreat into memory to tell the story.

Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's narrators, however, have no such tools at their disposal. These protagonists do not mention memory; rather, the *sapeurs* and the disillusioned are unable to think or remember. Their lack of critical thought makes it so that they become mindless, like an empty shell. Memory plays a role in the plot in terms of its obfuscation, not exploration like in the other works. The tragic conclusions to both narratives stress the importance of being grounded in a local identity, history, and culture before going into the global exchange.

The French and Francophone transnational experience thus reveals fruitful cross-cultural interaction to be possible if a connection, through memory, is maintained to local identities. This connection occurs within the narrative, but it also reflects the extent to which the author's experiences are inscribed within the narrative. In those novels where the narrators strategically forge multiple spaces of belonging, the theme of memory accompanies the writing of the author's lived experiences. Mabanckou's and Biyaoula's novels, the only ones who contain tragic conclusions, also lack an inscription of autobiographical details into the narratives. The lack of the author's lived experiences mirrors the lack of characters who are cognizant of historical processes. From the correlation between memory and autobiography, work and author, we understand that a transnational identity involves imagining creative ways of offering solutions to real-life challenges.

Clearly, writers are choosing to bypass the idea that the type of cultural hybridization that occurs because of transnational movement inevitably leads to cultural dilution. Their stories equally contradict the fear that accepting other values and traditions results in homogeny. Édouard Glissant has stated in an interview with Andrea Schwieger Hiepko that mutually-enriching cross-cultural experiences cannot be possible "as long as people are not convinced that contact with, and tolerance of, the other is not automatically the cause of dilution and disappearance; better yet, that we can change, no longer be the same, and exchange something with the other without losing or diluting oneself, without vanishing into a kind of nonspace" (257). The authors in my corpus engage in the very problem that Glissant describes. Through their refusal to continue colonial thought's prizing of purity and fear of dilution, these authors are constructing a new way of looking at cross-cultural experience. This dissertation makes clear that the transnational announces French and Francophone thinkers' active participation in the re-ordering of global dynamics. The transnational thus becomes a powerful tool to break from a purely postcolonial view in which the dichotomy of oppressed versus oppressor is never broken. Instead, the transnational indicates a shift in the control of knowledge whereby French and Francophone authors are contributing to a positive reevaluation of transnational culture.

The transnational provides fertile grounds for understanding future narratives that inevitably will question transnational movement's impact on identity and on borders. However, the conclusions that have been made in this dissertation can also provide new ways of thinking about contemporary literature's relationship to the Negritude writers. Scholars have long considered current Francophone literatures to be turned away from Negritude's imperatives. Senghor's and Césaire's reformulations of blackness have been relegated to the contested category of essentialist discourses. As explored in chapter four, Lydie Moudileno dates the turn away from Negritude thought to the beginning of the 1960s, when national imperatives overshadowed collective black identities (*Littératures africaines*). However, Senghor and Césaire both wrote about a future time when people of all cultures could equally interact and exchange values and ideas. Senghor 's *métissage culturel* relies on the idea that because of the colonial devaluation of black culture, a black identity must be re-ordered before an equal exchange can begin. Aimé Césaire echoes Senghor's concerns, stating, "Notre engagement n'a de sens que s'il s'agit d'un ré-enracinement certes, mais aussi d'un épanouissement, d'un dépassement et de la conquête d'une nouvelle et plus large fraternité" (*Discours* 92). Rather than dismissing the Negritude project as irrelevant to today's world of barrier-breaking writing, research is needed to clarify how earlier literatures paved a way for identity to begin with the local and extend outwards. How can we look at Senghor's and Césaire's concepts as a precursor to contemporary authors' conceptualization of a transnational identity that is rooted in the local in order to be empowered globally? While the Negritude thinkers were prolific writers of poems, today's African and Antillean writers largely turn to the novel. How does genre impact representations of a local grounding? What does it say about the intended audience and the role of literature in the formulation of identity? Which literary practices and cultural values espoused by the Negritude writers are still revered today?

My goal in writing this study was to look for a way to analyze connections between French and Francophone literatures without implying an idealistic union of the two. Whereas the *Littérature Monde* concept puts forth a model that is admirable in its attempt to dislocate literary hierarchies, many scholars have concluded that it fails to recognize productive divisions—not the kind of barriers that reflect and reinforce colonial notions of cultural hierarchies, but divisions in the sense of designations that reflect long devalued particularities. My study of the transnational in terms of vertical and horizontal analyses of representations brings together French studies and Francophone studies to question how authors write the space where the two fields intertwine and are in dialogue.

**Works Cited**

Abraham, Marie R. and Gisèle Pineau. *Femmes Des Antilles Traces Et Voix : Cent Cinquante Ans Après l'Abolition De l'Esclavage*. Paris: Stock, 1998.

Adesanmi, Pius. "Of Postcolonial Entanglement and Durée : Reflections on the

Francophone African Novel." *Comparative Literature* 242 (2004).  
---. "Redefining Paris: Trans-Modernity and Francophone African Migritude Fiction**."**

*Modern Fiction Studies* 51.4 (2005): 958-975.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: The Rise and Spread of Nationalism*.

London: Verso, 1983.

Anderson, Debra L. *Decolonizing the Text : Glissantian Readings In Caribbean and*

*African-american Literatures*. New York: P. Lang, 1995.

Anselin, Alain. *L’Émigration antillaise en France: la troisième île*. Paris:

Karthala, 1990.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Public*

*Culture* 2.2 (1990): 1–24.

Appiah, Kwame. "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Еds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. 119-124

Archambault, Paul J. "Jean-Marie Le Clézio and the 2008 Nobel Prize: can France really claim him?" *Symposium* 63.4 (2009): 281-297.

Arielle, Florence, Bernard Magnier, and Rousselle Verdeille-Osowski. *D'encre Et D'exil 8 : L'afrique-- Si Près, Si Loin : Huitièmes Rencontres Internationales Des Écritures De L'Exil.* Paris: BPI, 2009.

Arnold A. James. "Perilous Symmetry: Exoticism and the Geography of Colonial and Postcolonial Culture." *Foreign Language Series* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and*

*Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

Bâ, Mariama. *Une si longue lettre*. Paris: French & European Pubns, 2001.

Bancel, Nicolas, Pascal Blanchard and Françoise Vergès. *La République coloniale: essai sur une utopie*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2003.

Banzar, Chimegsaikhan. "Entre Le Passé, Le Présent Et Le Futur: Quête De l'Identité Féminine Dans La Littérature De La Guadeloupe." *Women in French Studies* (2009): 147-55.

Barkan, Elazar, and Marie-Denise Shelton, ed. *Borders, Exiles Diasporas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Batumike, Cikuru. "Fatou Diome entre littérature et 'Nuit Blanche', son émission sur

France 3 Alsace." *Amina* 431 (2006). <http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/AMINAdiome2006.html>. Web. 5 March 2006.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation.* Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1995.

Belugue, Geneviève. "Entre ombre et lumière, l'écriture engagée de Gisèle Pineau." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 138-139: 84-90.

Bérard, Stéphanie. "Pour une littérature-monde et Eloge de la créolité: deux manifestes, deux visions de la littérature incompatibles, concurrentes, consécutives? *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12.2-3. (2009): 493-503.

Bernabé, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. *Eloge*

*de la Créolité*. Edition bilangue. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins,

1990.

Beyala, Calixthe. *Comment cuisiner son mari*. Albin Michel: Paris, 2000.

---. *Les honneurs perdus*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996.

Biyaoula, Daniel. *L’Impasse*. Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1997.

Bonnet, Véronique. "Gisèle Pineau: L'Ame prêtée à l'écriture." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 138-139: 91-97.

Boustani, Carmen*. Oralité Et Gestualité : La Différence Homme-femme Dans Le Roman*

*Francophone.* Paris: Karthala, 2009.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996.

"Brazzaville Conference, 1994." *Blackpast.org*. Web. 20 June 2013. http://www.blackpast.org/gah/brazzaville-conference-1944.

Britton, Celia. *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory : Strategies of Language and Resistance.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999.

Casteel, Sarah Phillips. *Second Arrivals : Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

Cazenave, Odile. *Afrique sur Seine: Une nouvelle generation de romanciers africains à* *Paris*. Paris: Harmattan, 2003.

Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/ Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* *French-English Bilingual Edition*.Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 1995.

---. *Discours sur le colonialisme suivi de Discours sur la Negritude*. Présence Africaine:

Paris, 2004.

Chevrier, Jacques. *L'arbre à Palabres : Essai Sur Les Contes Et Récits Traditionnels* *D'afrique Noire*. Paris: Hatier, 1986.

---. "Afrique(s)-sur-Seine: autour de la notion de "migritude." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 155-156 (2004): 30-5.

Coly, Ayo. *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood: Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010.

Condé, Maryse, and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage. *Penser La Créolité*. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1995.

Condé, Maryse. "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer." *Yale French*

*Studies* 83.2 (1993):121-135.

Cortanze, Gérard. "J. M. G. Le Clézio: 'Mon Père l'Africain'." *Magazine Littéraire* 430

(2004): 68-70.

Dabla, Jean-Jacques S. "Alain Mabanckou, Sous Le Signe Du Binaire." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Litératures du Sud* 146 (2001): 46-8.

Damamme-Gilbert, B. "Les Enjeux De La Mémoire Dans Onitsha Et L'Africain De J. M. G. Le Clézio." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 45 (2008): 16-32.

Dash, J. Michael "Postcolonial Thought and the Francophone Caribbean." *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy. London: Arnold, 2003. 231-241.

---. *Edouard Glissant*. Oxford: Cambridge Press, 1995.

Debord, Guy. *La Société du Spectacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guettari. *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schoziphrenie*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980.

"Diglossia." Creole.free.fr. Creole.free, n.d. Web. 7 Aug. 2013. <creoles.free.fr/Cours/anglais/Diglossia.pdf‎>.

Diome, Fatou. *La préférance nationale*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 2001.

---. *Le ventre De l'Atlantique*. Paris: Anne Carrière, 2003.

Djungu-Simba, Charles. "Errance et migration littéraires en Afrique: Cas du Congo-Zaïre." *Imaginaire africain et mondialisation: littérature et cinéma*. Eds. Kasereka Kavwahirehi and Vincent K Simédoh. Paris: Harmattan, 2001.

Dramé, Kandioura. "Bwanapolis or Africa-on-the-Seine." *Research in African Literatures* 26.1 (1995): 97-110.

Diop, Papa Samba. "Astres Et Désastres Dans l'Écriture Romanesque De Fatou Diome." *Ponts* 4 (2004): 249-55.

Diouf, Mbaye. "'J'Écris Pour Apprendre à Vivre': Entretien Avec Fatou Diome." *Vienna Journal of African Studies* 17 (2009): 137-51.

Djungu-Simba, Kamatenda. *Les Écrivains Du Congo-Zaire: Approches D'un Champ*

*Littéraire Africain*. Metz: Université de Metz, 2007.

Dobie, Madeleine. "Invisible Exodus: The Cultural Effacement of Antillean Migration." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 13.2 (2004):149-183.

Donadey, Anne and H. Adlai Murdoch. "Introduction." *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2005.

Ducorneau, Claire. "From One Place to Another: The Transnational Mobility of Contemporary Francophone Sub-Saharan African Writers." *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011).

Erickson, John D. "Nomadic Thought, Postcolonialism, and Maghrebian Writing." *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies.* Eds*.* Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch*.* Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2005.

Fanon, Frantz. *Peau noires masques blancs*. Paris: Points Essais, 1971.

Felski, Rita. "Introduction." *New Literary History* 44. 4 (2013): v-xii.

Forsdick, Charles. *Travel in Twentieth-Century Literature French & Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity.* New York: Oxford, 2005.

Forsdick, Charles and David Murphy. *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Reader.* Eds. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy. London: Arnold, 2003. 231-241.

"French in West Africa: Early Contact to Independence." *University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center*. University of Pennsylvania, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2014. <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/K-12/French\_16178.html>.

Fulton, Dawn. "The Disengaged Immigrant: Mapping the Francophone Caribbean Metropolis." *French Forum* 32 (2007): 245-62.

Gallagher, Mary, ed. *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*. New York: Rodopi, 2003.

Garcin, Jérôme. "Les révolutions de Le Clézio." *Nouvel Observateur* 9 Oct. 2008. Web. 19 Aug. 2012. <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20081009.BIB2166/les-revolutions-de-le-clezio.html>.

Garnier, Xavier. "Derrière le vitrine du progress." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 157 (2005): 38-43.

---. "L'Exil Lettré De Fatou Diome." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 155-156 (2004): 30-5.

Gauvin, Lise. *Écrire, Pour Qui? : L'écrivain Francophone Et Ses Publics*. Paris: Karthala, 2007.

Githire, Njeri. “Horizons Adrift: Women in Exile, at Home, and Abroad in Gisèle Pineau’s Works.” *Research in African Literatures* 36.1 (2005) 74-90.

Glissant, Edouard. *Le discours antillais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

Gyssels, Kathleen. "L'Exil selon Pineau, récit de vie et autobiographie." *Récits de vie de l'Afrique et des Antilles: Enracinement, errance, exil.* Ed. Suzanne Crosta. 1998.

Haigh, Sam. "Migration and Melancholia: From Kristeva's 'Dépression Nationale' to Pineau's 'Maladie De l'Exil'." *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 60 (2006): 232-50.

Hanneken, Jaime. "Mikilistes and Modernistas: Taking Paris to the 'Second Degree'." *Comparative Literature* 60 (2008): 370-88.

Hargreaves, Alec. "Perceptions of Ethnic Difference in Post-War France." *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*. Eds. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2011.

Hargreaves, Alec and Charles Forsdick and David Murphy. *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*. Liverpool:Carnegie, 2010.

Hazaël-Massieux, Marie-Christine, and Michel Bertrand. *Langue Et Identité Narrative Dans Les Littératures De L'ailleurs : Antilles, Réunion, Québec*. Aix-en- Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2005.

Hellerstein, Nina. "Violence, mythe et destin dans l'univers antillais de Gisèle

Pineau." *LittéRéalité* 10.1 (1998): 47-58.

Hitchcock, Peter. *The Long Space : Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Ionescu, Mariana. «L’ici-là selon Gisèle Pineau.» *Voix plurielles* 4.1 (2007).

Ireland, Susan, and Patrice J. Proulx. *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Jeannet, Frederix-Yves. "Jean-Marie Le Clézio ou le Nobel Immérité." *Le Monde*. 18 October 2008. Web. 7 February 2012. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2008/10/18/jean-marie-le-clezio-ou-le-nobel-immerite-par-frederic-yves-jeannet\_1108474\_3232.html.

Jollin, Sophie. "From the Renaudot Prize to the Puterbaugh Conference: The reception of J.M.G. Le Clézio." World Literature Today 17.4 (1997).

Jules-Rosette, Benetta. *Black Paris: The African Writers’ Landscape*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1998.

Jurney, Florence Ramond. "Transgresser l'insularité: Inscriptions de l'espace antillais dans Chair Piment de Gisèle Pineau." *LittéRéalité* 16.1 (2004): 31-43.

Kane, Abdoulaye. *Migrations and Creative Expressions in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Ed. Adérónké Adésolá Adésànyà. Durham: Carolina Academic, 2008. 471-481.

Kane, Cheikh Ahmadou. *L'Aventure ambigüe.* Paris: 10-18, 2003.

Kom, Ambroise. "Pays, exil et précarité chez Mongo Beti, Calixthe Beyala et Daniel Biyaoula". *Notre Librairie: Revue des Littératures du Sud* 138-139 (1999-2000): 42-55.

Laroche, Maximilien. "Displacement, Repositioning, Metamorphosis." *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*. Ed. Mary Gallagher. New York: Rodopi, 2003.

Laronde, Michel. "Displaces Discourses: Post(-)coloniality, Francophone Space(s), and the Literature(s) of Immigration in France." *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies.* Eds*.* Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch*.* Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2005.

Le Bris, Michel and Jean Rouard. *Pour une littérature-monde*. Paris: Gallimard, 2007.

Le Clézio, Jean-Marie Gustave. *L’Africain*. Paris: Mercure, 2004.

---. *Mondo et autres histoires*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

---.*Onitsha*. Paris: Gallimard. 1991.

Lejeune, Philippe. *Le Pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.

Licops, Dominique. "Origi/Nation and Narration: Identity as Épanouissement in Gisèle Pineau's Exil Selon Julia." *MaComère: Journal of the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars* 2 (1999): 80-95.

Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. New York: Cornell, 1989.

---. *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization.* Ed. Haun Saussy. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2006. 100-113. Print.

---. "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Oceans and Insular Identities." *Profession* (2011): 23-24.

---. "Introduction." MLN 118.4 (2003): 783-786.

---. "Languages, Literatures, Pedagogies: The MLA, Africa, and Diaspora Studies." *Comparative Literature Studies* 50.2 (2013): 219-227

---. "National Language Departments in the Era of Transnational Studies." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 117 (2002): 1252-5. Print.

---. "Plus ça change…? Global, Transnational, and Interdisciplinary Studies within National Language Departments." *ADFL Bulletin* 42.2 (2013): 7-12.

---. *Postcolonial Representations : Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell, 1995.

---. *Postcolonialisme et Autobiographie*. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998.

---. "Questions de méthode: Itinéraires ourlés de l'autoportrait et de la critique." Postcolonialisme et autobiographie. Eds. Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998.

---. "Transnationalism,Postcolonialism or Transcolonialism? Reflections on Los Angeles, Geography, and the Uses of Theory." *Emergences* 10.1(2000): 1-11.

---. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Julia Watson. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1998. 325-336.

Lionnet, Françoise and Dominic Thomas. "Francophone Studies: New Landscapes." *MLN* 118 (2003): 783-1110.

Lionnet, Françoise, and Ronnie Scharfman. "Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms, I." *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993).

Lionnet, Françoise and Shuh Mei. *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.

Loichot, Valérie. "Reconstruire dans l’exil: la nourriture créatrice chez Gisèle Pineau’, *Etudes Francophones* 17.2 (2002): 25-44.

Lyotard, Jean-Françoise. *The Postmodern Condition*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: University of Minnesota, 1984.

Mabanckou, Alain. *Bleu Blanc Rouge.* Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1998.

---. *Broken Glass*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2009.

---. *Demain j'aurai vingt ans*...Paris: Gallimard, 2010.

---. "Edition Des Littératures Africaines En France: Mutations Et Perspectives." *Notre Librairie: Revue des Litératures du Sud* 142 (2000): 46-52.

---. "Immigration, Littérature-Monde, and Universality: The Strange Fate of the African Writer. *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011).

---. "'The Song of the Migrating Bird': For a World Literature in French." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45 (2009): 144-50.

Mabanckou, Alain and Dominic Thomas. "Introduction." *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011).

Makward, Christiane. "Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau." *The French Review* 76: 6 (2003) 1202-15.

Malonga, Alpha Noël. *Roman Congolais : Tendances Thématiques Et Esthétiques*. Paris, France: Harmattan, 2007.

Marie, Claude-Valentin. *Travail Clandestin, Trafics De Main-d'oeuvre Et Formes*

*Illegales D'emploi*. Paris: Ministere des Affaires sociales et de l'Integration, 1992.

Maunier, Priscilla. "Odyssey of a Double Consciousness: Commonalities and

Disjunctions in Contemporary French Caribbean and Réunionese Novels." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 8 (2005): 165-81.

Mazauric, Catherine. "Fictions De Soi Dans La Maison De l'Autre (Aminata Sow Fall, Ken Bugul, Fatou Diome)." *Dalhousie French Studies* 74-75 (2006): 237-52.

Mbouguen, Hervé. "Interview de Fatou Diome, Auteur de *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*." Grioo.com. N.p., 25 Nov. 2003. Web. 20 Feb. 2011. <http://www.grioo.com/info1151.html>.

McCusker, Maeve. "Small Worlds: Constructions of Childhood in Contemporary Postcolonial Autobiography in French." *Romance Studies* 24.3 (2006): 203-214.

---. "Troubler l'ordre de l'oubli: Memory and Forgetting in French Caribbean Autobiography of the 1990s." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 40.4 (2004): 438-450.

McDonald, Christie and Susan Rubin Suleiman. *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*. New York: Columbia Press, 2010.

Mehta, Brinda J. "Culinary Diaspora: Identity and the Language of Food in Gisèle Pineau's *Un papillon dans la cité* and *L'Exil selon Julia*." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 8 (2005): 23-51.

---. Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Miller, Christopher. *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays On Francophone African Literature and Culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

*---.Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology In Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Milne, Lorna. *Postcolonial Violence, Culture and Identity in Francophone Africa and the Antilles*. 7 Vol. Oxford ;New York: Peter Lang, 2007. Cultural Identity Studies Web.

Mitchell W. J. T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Mortimer, Mildred. *Journeys Through the French African Novel*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990.

Motte, Warren. "Writing Away (the novelistic elsewhere of Onitsha by J. M. G. Le Clézio)" *World Literature Today* 71.4 (1997): 689-694.

Moudileno, Lydie. "Francophonie: Trash or Recycle?" *Transnational French Studies*. Eds. Alec Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy. *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Litterature-monde.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011.

---. “Fame, Celebrity, and the Conditions of Visibility of the Postcolonial Writer.” *Yale French Studies* 120 (2011).

----.“Le colonisateur de bonne volonté: Trajectoires et apories.” *Cahiers J.-M. G. Le Clézio 3-4, Migrations et métissages*. Paris: Editions Complicités, 2012.

---. *Littérature africaines francophones des années 1980 et 1990*. Dakar: Codesria, 2003.

--. *Parades Postcoloniales : La Fabrication Des identités Dans Le Roman Congolais : Sylvain Bemba, Sony Labou Tansi, Henri Lopes, Alain Mabanckou, Daniel Biyaoula*. Paris: Karthala, 2006.

Mudimbe-Boyi, Elisabeth. *Empire Lost : France and Its Other Worlds*. Lanham:

Lexington Books, 2009.  
---. "From Self-Writing to 'Mondialité' Toward a Global Cultural Consciousness." *Yale*

*French Studies* 120 (2011).  
---. "Travel, Representation, and Difference, or How Can One Be a Parisian?" *Research in African Literatures* 23.3 (1992):25-39.

Mugnier, Françoise. "La France dans l'œuvre de Gisèle Pineau." *Etudes Francophones*  15.1 (2000): 61-73.

---."Structure de Femmes des Antilles de Marie Abraham et Gisèle Pineau." *LittéRéalité* 14.2 (2002): 39-49.

Muratore, Mary Jo. "Emancipating Narratives: The Diasporic Struggle Reframed in Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*." *Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature di Lingua Francese* 26.51 (2006): 3-14.

Murdoch, H. Adlai. "Negotiating the Metropole: Patterns of Exile and Cultural Survival

in Pineau and Dracius-Pinalie." *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*. Eds. Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Murdoch, H. Adlai, and Anne Donadey. *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005.

Niezen, Ronald. *A World Beyond Difference Cultural Identity In The Age Of Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Njoya, Wandia Mwende. "In Search of El Dorado? the Experience of Migration to France in Contemporary African Novels." Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences 68 (2007).

---. "Lark Mirror: African Culture, Masculinity, and Migration to France in Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 46 (2009): 338-59.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. "From Orality to Writing: African Female Writers and the (Re)inscription of Womanhood." *Research in African Literatures* 25.4 (1994).

Ormerod, Beverley. "Displacement and Self-Disclosure in Some Works by Gisèle Pineau." *Ici-Là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*. Ed. Mary Gallagher. New York: Rodopi, 2003.

Oscherwitz, Dayna L. "Writing Over, Overwriting History: Politics and Language in Gisèle Pineau's L'Exil selon Julia and Femmes des Antilles." *North-South Linkages and Connections in Continental and Diaspora African Literatures*. Ed. Edris Makward, Mark Lilleleht, and Ahmed Saber. Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2005.

Pierre, Émeline. *Le Caractère Subversif De La Femme Antillaise Dans Un Contexte (Post)Colonial*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008.

Pineau, Gisèle. *Chair Piment*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004.  
---. *L’Exil selon Julia*. Paris: Editions Stock, 1996.

---. "L'Identité, la créolité et la francité." *La Culture française vue d'ici et d'ailleurs: Treize auteurs témoignent*. Eds. Maryse Condé, Edouard Glissant and Thomas C. Spear. Paris: Karthala, 2002. 217-24.

Pineau, Gisèle, and Marie R Abraham. *Femmes Des Antilles : Traces Et Voix : Cent Cinquante Ans Après L'abolition De L'esclavage*. Paris: Stock, 1998.

Popkin, Debra. "Growing up with Julia: Gisèle Pineau and Her Grandmother, a Caribbean Girl's Journey to Self-Discovery." *Francophone Women Coming of Age: Memoirs of Childhood and Adolescence from France, Africa, Quebec and the Caribbean.* Ed. Debra Popkin. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2007.

Prabhu, Anjali and Ato Quayson. "Francophone Studies/Postcolonial Studies: "Postcolonializing" through *Relation*. *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies.* Eds*.* Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch*.* Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2005.

Ramazani, Jahan. *A Transnational Poetics*. Chciago: University of Chicago, 2009.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain. *La Jalousie*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981.

Rosello, Mireille. "Introduction." *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal/ Notebook of a Return to My Native Land.* Ed. Mireille Rosello. French-English Bilingual Edition. Wiltshire: Cromwell Press, 1995. 9-62.

Rosny, Eric de. "L'Afrique des migrations: Les échapées de la jeunesse de la jeunesse de Douala." *Etudes: Revue de culture contemporaine* 3965 (2002): 623-633.

Salhi, Kamal. "Rethinking Francophone Culture: Africa and the Caribbean between History and Theory." *Research in African Literatures* 35.1(2004): 9-29.

Sankara, Edgard. *Postcolonial Francophone Autobiographies: From Africa to the*

*Antilles*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Sarkozy, Nicolas. "Déclaration du Président de la République." 9 October 2008. Online. < <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Felicitations-du-President-> Sarkozy,11272>

"Sauvage." Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé. n.d. Web. 10 Jan. 2012. http://atilf.atilf.fr/dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=4111087050.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. *Chants d'Ombre*. Paris: Seuil, 1945. Online.

---. *Liberté 1: Négritude et Humanisme*. Paris: Seuil, 1964.

Stora, Benjamin *La gangrène et l'oubli*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005.

Suárez, Lucía M. "Gisèle Pineau: Writing the Dimensions of Migration." World *Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma* 75.3-4 (2001): 9-21.

Tati-Loutard, J. B, and Philippe Makita. *Nouvelle Anthologie De La Littérature Congolaise D'expression Française : Textes, 1977-2003 Et Histoire 1953-2003*. Paris: Hatier, 2003.

Tervenon, Taina. “Partir pour vivre libre.” Interview with Gisèle Pineau. *Africultures*. n.p., 2003. Web. 15 February 2009.

----. Interview with Daniel Biyaoula. *Africultures*. n.p., 1 April 1998. Web. 23 June 2013.

<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=362>.

Thibault, Bruno, and Catherine Perry. "'Senghor Était En Avance Sur Nous': Entretien Avec Alain Mabanckou." *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones* 21 (2006): 9-13.

Thomas, Bonnie. *Nowhere is Perfect: French and Francophone Utopias/Dystopias.* Ed. John Sooby. Newark, DE: University of Delaware, 2008.

Thomas, Dominic. "Africa/France: Contesting Space." *Yale French Studies* 115 (2009): 141-53.

---. *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration and Transnationalism*. Bloomington: Indiana, 2007.

---. "Global Francophone Africa." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45 (2009): 121-215.

--- *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2002.

"Trans-." Merriam-Webster.com. n.d. Web. 10 Jan. 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trans->.

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Republic of Congo Responds to Questions Raised in Women's Anti-Discrimination Committee. 27 January 2003. Online. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/wom1383.doc.htm>

Veldwachter, Nadège. "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau." *Research in African Literatures* 35.1 (2004): 180-86.

Waberi, Abdourahman. "Les enfants de la postcolonie: esquisse d'une

nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire." *Notre*

*Librairie* 135 (1998): 8–15.

Walker, David H. "Formal experiment and innovation." The French Novel. Ed. Timothy Unwin. Camridge: Cambridge, 1997.

White House. President Obama Visits Senegal. 2004. Online. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/06/27/president-obama-visits-senegal>

1. See, for example, Ronald Niezen, *A World Beyond Difference: Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. The *mission civilisatrice* and colonization did not just merely transport French identity; they distributed a strategic model of French culture and identity, one that differed from the mainland Republic ideals of equality, in order to cast France as a beacon of civilization and nullify any value associated with colonial others. See Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Françoise Verges, *La République coloniale: Essai sur une utopie*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. My choice to look at novels stems from the genre's popularity amongst contemporary French and Francophone authors. It also proves to be a rich starting point given postmodern attacks on traditional narrative techniques and postcolonial questions dealing with the appropriation of language and literary forms as notions of resistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. "Frenchness" is a loose term I use to describe those traits inferred by dominant discourses (like of the State or the collective group). In my corpus, representations of Frenchness largely reflect a perpetuation of colonial ideological beliefs in the superiority of certain traits and values. Images of people with blond hair, blue eyes, and light skin are evoked to symbolize French and generally Western notions of beauty. Superior intelligence and economic stability also are often aligned with representations of France. At the same time, negative traits come to represent French culture, as well. Racist, inhospitable, and close-minded also figure as adjectives that come together to symbolize French culture. In each chapter, I elaborate on the specific notions of Frenchness that the novels exhibit. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. The many debates about the distinction between "postcolonial" versus "post-colonial" that have taken place since the 1980s reflect critics' insistence that the dynamics involved in colonialism did not come to an abrupt halt after decolonization. See H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey, *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. For the present work, I use neocolonial and transcolonial interchangeably to signify processes or values that derive from *the mission civilisatrice* and colonization. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. I define hybridization later in this introduction as "the impossibility of purity as both a theoretical category and especially as a cultural phenomenon" (Prabhu and Quayson 225).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. I use the term in French because the English equivalent does not have the same meaning. Multi-belonging is different than *multi-racination* , where characters interact and participate in multiple literary, cultural, familial, national or other types of communities while also retaining values or heritages specific to each of their spaces of belonging. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. "Migritude" is Jacques Chevrier's contraction of "negritude" and "migration" to refer to the African immigrant who "se désengageant simultanément de la culture d'origine et de culture d'accueil" (14) are trapped in a liminal space. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. I define epistemology in terms of knowledge; in other words, Le Clézio proposes a new way of understanding reality and the world that comes from the senses. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. At the University of South Carolina’s French Language Conference in March 2014, Abdourahman Wabéri noted that Diome did, in fact, set aside money for her brother to start a business in Niodior, like the narrator does in the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
12. Lionnet enumerates a long list of writers and literary critics who have written autobiographies, including Anthony Appiah, Alice Kaplan, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Philippe Lejeune, amongst others. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
13. For a discussion on the community in the West African context, see Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
14. The dynamics of the nation-building project and the government's relationship to individual and national belonging is fully explored in the last chapter of this project, which focuses on Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* and Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
15. Diome often brings up the important relationship she had with her grandmother, who was her main caregiver and continues to be a source of inspiration. In an interview with Taina Tervonen published on *Africultures*, she says, "C’est elle qui m’a éduqué, elle connaît mon état d’esprit… Elle a une idée de moi que je ne veux pas démentir car je ne veux pas la décevoir. C’est mon guide. J’ai l’impression qu’elle m’a installée sur un grand chemin et que je dois continuer par respect pour elle et pas pour moi-même" ("Partir"). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
16. Diome has spoken on her French ex-husband in *D’Encre et d’exil 8: L’Afrique si près, si loin. Huitième rencontres internationales des écritures de l’exil,* Paris: Bibliothèque Centre Pompidou, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
17. For a discussion on "l'arbre à palabres," see Jacques Chevrier, *L'arbre À Palabres : Essai Sur Les Contes Et Récits Traditionnels D'Afrique Noire*, Paris: Hatier, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
18. The figure of the "fou" or village idiot in African literature post-decolonization is often a sign of social disorder. For an interesting study, see Valentina Tarquini, "Les fous en marche. La figure du fou dans le roman d’Afrique noire d’après les Indépendances," *Publifarum* 19 (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
19. To stick to the meaning as close as possibly, I will use *conteur* instead of the English storyteller, which seems broader and carries less of a cultural function than the African *conteur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
20. For a description of the traditional *marabout* see: http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Marabout.html [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
21. In stating Caribbean, I refer specifically to Francophone areas, although I acknowledge that similar issues are at work in Hispanophone and Anglophone literatures. In this chapter, when I use words like Antillean, Caribbean, the islands, and other general terminologies, I specifically refer to French-speaking areas, and even more specifically, those areas still under France's control. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
22. President Nicolas Sarkozy responded to Le Clézio's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature with an address entitled "Déclaration du Président de la République" on October 8, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
23. Jollin argues, "Le Clezio is a rather atypical Renaudot winner, for not only was he a complete unknown in the literary and publishing worlds, but his novel hardly conformed to the criteria necessary for commercial success" (5). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Les Trente Glorieuses* refers to a period starting after World War II extending to the mid-1970s of economic growth. See Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures: The Persistence of Diversity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I use *ailleurs* in French to keep to the meaning that the English equivalent "elsewhere" fails to capture. *Ailleurs* denotes a spatial category of elsewhere represented as not-France or not-French. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For clarity, I will refer to *Demain j'aurai vingt ans…* as *Demain…* for the remainder of the chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The marabout is a traditional African figure who gives spiritual guidance and, depending on the area, religious training. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)