AUTHORS AND THE META-LITERARY: THE POLITICS OF PUBLICATION IN CONTEMPORARY FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Literature written in the French language has often been divided into a hierarchical dichotomy valuing French literature (written by metropolitan French authors) over Francophone literature (other writers writing in French). Under the influence of postcolonial studies and of the works of Francophone writers themselves, this hierarchical dichotomy has gradually been deconstructed. Traces of the French colonial history that triggered this dichotomy linger, however. The codes, constraints and conventions of the French literary system influence and weigh upon global Francophone works published in this system. My dissertation focuses on how the history of French colonialism still manifests in contemporary Francophone texts from the Caribbean, North and sub-Saharan Africa, and how Francophone authors resist the ensuing conventions.

This dissertation thus considers contemporary works by transnational authors published in metropolitan France by major publishing houses such as Gallimard, Grasset or Le Seuil. Their texts engage and resist the national structures embedded in the way they are published, framed, distributed, and read. I identify three strategies that Francophone writers deploy to challenge the persisting colonial structures of the French literary system: they showcase contemporary colonial power dynamics in the stories they write, they challenge the genre of the novel that is intrinsically tied to the nation state; and they metamorphose the so-called standard French language, simultaneously also challenging the monolingual status quo tied to nationalism.

Ultimately, this dissertation strives to add to the literary and academic conversation in the field of Francophone literature, to consider both the conceptualization work authors do, and the haling and political influence of French publication houses.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A curious reader looking for novels written in French will not always find them under "French literature" in bookstores and libraries across France. She will find them separated in different zones. Often the classification across shelves (and pages of the numerous online platforms that also distribute literature) is a binary one: it separates French literature from Francophone literature, or groups Francophone literature with international or foreign literature. The FNAC, for instance, is one of the major distributors of cultural products in metropolitan France. The website of this distributor presents multiple categories of books. The divisions between literature from France and from abroad are presented in various categories. The fiction section draws a separation between "roman francophone" and "roman étranger." The first category is briefly presented as such:

> La littérature française existe grâce à de nombreux écrivains talentueux. A la Fnac, retrouvez tous les plus grands romans français à lire. Faites-vous plaisir avec les classiques, tels que les chefs-d'œuvre de Voltaire, Victor Hugo ou d'Albert Camus (souvent étudiés au bac de français), mais aussi avec les romans contemporains écrits par Marc Lévy, Guillaume Musso ou Maxime Chattam. Ils sont disponibles en livre de poche, en format broché ou en e-book ! C'est l'occasion de lire ou relire les best-sellers, les livres ayant reçu un Prix littéraire ou de découvrir les nouveautés. Vous pouvez même échanger vos coups de cœur dans notre Cercle Littéraire ![1]

Notable here is the paradoxical change of vocabulary to describe this section: the section supposedly dedicated to the Francophone novel is narrowed down in its description to "littérature française" and to "les plus grands romans français." This is the description of the second category, "roman étranger:"

[1] https://livre.fnac.com/s1899/Roman-et-Nouvelles/Roman-francophone#int=S:NonApplicable|Roman%20et%20Nouvelles|1899|NonApplicable|BL1|NonApplicable. Accessed 1/22/23

> Lire des livres étrangers vous permet de voyager. De la Scandinavie à l'Espagne, en passant par le Japon ou l'Afrique, les écrivains célèbres du monde entier savent vous faire rêver. De styles très différents, Anna Todd, Paulo Coelho, Ernest Hemingway ou encore Rabih Alameddine vous proposent des fictions originales. C'est le moment de découvrir leurs meilleurs romans ! Pourquoi ne pas se laisser tenter par un guide touristique en plus ? Nos experts Fnac en littérature vous invitent à un road trip littéraire en Californie ![2]

This section features, as two of its main titles, the two Goncourt-winning autors Djaili Amadou Ahmal (*Les Impatientes,* Prix Goncourt des Lycéens 2021) and Mohamed Mbougar Sarr (*La Plus secrète mémoire des hommes,* Prix Goncourt 2021). These two books were written in French. Both descriptions of these two sections and their content reveal the confusion that persists around the category of the "Francophone." Francophone writers who hail from outside of metropolitan France, even if they write in French, live in France and publish with metropolitan French publishing houses, are grouped with the literature "étrangère." The very definition of "Francophone" is muddled.

The FNAC's classification is representative of an intrinsic issue that is embedded in the marketing of literature in metropolitan France. Categorizations such as the FNAC's fail to reflect the growing complexity and diversity of Francophone literature. This categorization maintains a political and geographical dichotomy that separates authors born and raised in metropolitan France from other works written in French. Consequently, it sets up a separation between texts written by authors based in the colonizing nation-state of France, and authors who hail from former colonized spaces, some independent (North and Sub-Saharan Africa), some still part of the political entity that is France (its overseas territories). This dichotomy reveals the underlying

[2] https://livre.fnac.com/s1905/Roman-et-Nouvelles/Roman-etranger#int=S:NonApplicable|Roman%20et%20Nouvelles|1905|NonApplicable|BL2|NonApplicable. Accessed 1/22/23

stakes of the politics of the French literary system. This dissertation engages with the meaning and consequences of the politics of the meta-literary structures of publication and distribution in metropolitan France. These structures include all meta-literary institutions and organizations above and around contemporary Francophone literature: publishing houses, libraries, bookstores, universities, literary academies, literary prizes, and journals.

The importance of publication contexts cannot be ignored because it participates in a broader system of national conventions. But the meta-literary also encompasses Francophone authors' self-reflexivity and theorization of the literary within their fiction. Because publication houses determine how Francophone texts are read, and which of them fall under the category of "Francophone," the texts themselves are sites for Francophone writers to react to this pre-determination. This dissertation consequently also explores how authors creatively transform the national conventions embedded within publication conditions to contribute to the conversation about the field of Francophone literature. Francophone writers still contend with the weight of the national conventions of the French literary system when they depend on it for their publication and circulation.

At the heart of these conventions are the hyper-regulated French language and a centrifugal publication system most often based in Paris. The tie between Francophone literature and metropolitan France reflects the persistence of colonial structures in an officially postcolonial world. The meta-literary system that structures Francophone literature reveals forms of neocolonialism. Because of France's colonial history, Francophone literature was long theorized as a sub-field of French literature. An implicit hierarchy was set up as an inheritance of colonialism. Consequently, literature emerging from colonized spaces was, for a long time,

maintained in a minor position. The curation choices of bookstores and libraries reveals that there is a perpetuation of the former imperial and colonial world-order.

Scholars and authors alike have done important work to deconstruct this binary. Yet the practice to classify writers from outside of metropolitan France as a uniform "francophone" group, and/or to separate them from writers who hail from metropolitan France as the FNAC does, persists also in academic and literary institutions such as publication houses, reward systems and "Académies." Most Francophone texts are dependent on the metropolitan French literary system (Quebecois literature being an important exception) and owe their recognition to their publication in France, including to awards through the French literary prize system. Paradoxically, metropolitan French literary institutions play an active role in the dissemination of contemporary Francophone works and therefore shape their reception.

How, then, do contemporary Francophone authors engage with the codes, constraints and conventions embedded in this French literary system? I argue that the transnational and translingual qualities of contemporary Francophone texts are part of a literary strategy to engage both within and against the persistence of imperialism within a system that values certain styles, themes, and forms over others. This dissertation features contemporary Francophone works that demonstrate an awareness of the problematic limitations of the conditions of their publication. I explore the works of authors who demonstrate an engagement with the meta-literary conditions that shape the publication and circulation of their texts. Their originality lies in their creative engagement with forms of linguistic and institutional domination. I argue that the collaborative, transnational, translingual features of these works contend with and resist the national structures in which Francophone texts are published, framed, distributed, and read.

I therefore focus on writers who are from former French colonies or from areas of the world still administered by metropolitan France, who publish with French, Parisian-based houses. They hail from a variety of territories: sites of birth and sites of residencies cover multiple locations, characteristic of Francophone literature's diversity. Gisèle Pineau and Patrick Chamoiseau are both from French Départements d'Outre-Mer, Animata Aïdara is from Senegal, Hélène Cixous and Nina Bouraoui are from Algeria, Lydie Salvayre was born in France to political refugees from Spain, Gauz was born in the Ivory Coast. My goal in analyzing the most recent works of each of these authors from different generations and different backgrounds is to understand the stakes of Francophone literature today from the viewpoint of each of these generations, who each have their own experience of the French literary system. Notwithstanding the wide range of origins, these authors share two common traits: a transnational identity, with ties to France, and publication by metropolitan French publishing houses, most often based in Paris. I am interested in the tension between a common, albeit problematized, reliance on the metropolitan French publishing system and idiosyncratic styles, topics, language and form that pushes back against norms, and behind them colonial history. The material conditions of the distribution of their texts are problematic because authors rely on a rigid system that was originally one of oppression. My dissertation considers the texts of these authors to be a site of literary theory because of Francophone authors' awareness of this. By addressing this issue in their works, these authors open a space for their transnational works in literary structures that are shaped by the national. These authors' works all demonstrate, in various ways, an awareness of the problematic limitations of the conditions of their publication. My dissertation demonstrates how Francophone literature is curated through two different driving forces: the French literary

system and Francophone authors themselves. Publications houses and literary institutions perpetuate the traditional dichotomy that opposes French literature to Francophone literature.

This dissertation therefore opens the contemporary academic conversations about Francophone literature to its own creators. There is a persistent discrepancy between scholars' understanding of Francophone literature and the way it is framed by publishing houses, bookstores, and other literary institutions. Francophone authors often rely on the French literary system for publication and recognition; yet their work is often framed and distributed following obsolete criteria. My dissertation adds to the scholarly conversation about Francophone literature by interconnecting the self-theorizations present in Francophone fiction with a global Francophone literary scene that is increasingly complex. I demonstrate how Francophone literature is curated through both the driving force of the French literary system and the driving force of Francophone authors themselves. The conditions of publication and the texts themselves have been studied separately. But as I focus on meta-literary tensions between them, my work aims to shed light on the important role authors play as they engage with the meta-literary by examining the tension between both.

Key Concepts: World Literature, "littérature-monde," Francophone Literature, Translingualism

This dissertation contributes to contemporary theorizations of the field of Francophone literature by considering it at the intersection of World Literature, "littérature-monde," and translingualism. I focus on the tension between Francophone literature and the conventions inherent in the French literary system. Indeed, my dissertation assesses that an intrinsic tension defines contemporary Francophone literature and its academic fields. I read Francophone literature through the light of this inherent tension to understand the contemporary stakes of

writing in French, and the stakes of the field of Francophone literature itself. On the one hand Francophone literature is pre-determined by the national structures inherent to the French literary world where authors of previously colonized areas of the world are often published; these structures condition the publication of their works. On the other hand, Francophone literature is re-determined in contemporary Francophone literary works by the authors themselves in a multifaceted challenge to this neocolonial literary system.

I anchor my analysis in recent theories of World Literature because they consider the distribution, circulation, and reception of literary works beyond the framework of the nation-states. I also expand on these theories because little research has so far been done to understand how the meta-literary conditions considered by scholars of World Literature affect how authors write and how they, and their critics, conceptualize the field of Francophone literature. My dissertation aims to develop a pertinent theoretical framework to read the linguistic and formal tensions specific to Francophone works within the field of World Literature, while considering the ongoing impact of the ties between French and Francophone literatures. While theories of Francophone literature as postcolonial have been explored and questioned extensively (Clavaron 2018, Laroussi 2017, Hargreaves and Forsdick 2010), the material conditions that determine the distribution of the body of works that are now recognized as Francophone literature have not sufficiently been considered. Pascale Casanova's work in *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999) is an important point of entry into these institutional issues. Recently, other scholars have also considered the institutional structures that determine the publication of Francophone works (Karim Simpore 2018, Claire Ducournau 2019) or the tension between the international dimensions of works of literature written in French and the claims of these national structures (Holly Collins 2015). This dissertation considers their research alongside theories of World

Literature precisely because it argues that contemporary Francophone literature is intrinsically tied to both the national entity that is France and the global literary system. I introduce meta-literary structures to contemporary conversations about Francophone literature, with a specific focus on the demands of French publications houses which include language and genre. Theories of World Literature contribute to my reading Francophone texts precisely because they take into account the material conditions that determine the distribution, circulation and reading conditions of literary works beyond the nation-state. These pre-determining market forces are particularly salient in the case of Francophone texts which depend on the hyper-regulated French literary system.[3]

Francophone writers navigate a transnational context, between a nation that is, for many authors, the former colonizer (France) and other national entities, all the while positioning their works on a political, economic and literary scene that is increasingly globalized. Aspects of World Literature that help conceptualize Francophone literature include studies of the transnational structures that allow for the translation and circulation of literature (David Damrosch 2009), but also works which re-frame literature as functioning within global structures (Franco Moretti 2000). Within the more specific French context, theories of "littérature-monde en français"[4] (Michel Le Bris 2007) have been taking hold alongside or often in tension with the concept of Francophone studies. "Littérature-monde en français" attempts to bridge the gap

[3] The French language is officially regulated by the Académie Française, an institution first founded in 1635, which decides what the French language is and what it should include. It publishes a dictionary that is renewed every half a century or so.

[4] Michel Le Bris was a contributor to the literary manifesto published in 2006 in *Le Monde*. He continued his reflection on the concept of "littérature-monde en français" through editing, alongside Jean Rouaud, *Pour une littérature-monde*, in which he authored a more detailed essay on his vision for this field.

between Francophone literature and French literature. By contrast, Francophone studies maintains a separation (sometimes visible on bookstore shelves and in online classifications as demonstrated with the example of the FNAC's website) between metropolitan and non-metropolitan authors, historically and politically motivated.

My study of Francophone works in France today takes into account Michel le Bris' 2007 intervention declaring the end of Francophonie and the advent of "littérature-monde en français"[4]. My work acknowledges this attempt to bridge the gap between French and Francophone literature, but my research considers Le Bris' theory only in as much as it has shaped the field of Francophone studies in France and drew renewed attention to the field of Francophone Studies there.[5] It is impossible to separate Francophone literature from French literature completely for historical, linguistic and political reasons; for those same reasons, it is impossible to group them together as theorists of "littérature-monde en français" would have it. While it is undeniable that Francophone works are often published in metropolitan France, it also remains true that these works constitute a literary unit that differs from metropolitan French works. Regrouping all works written in the French language under the label of "littérature-monde en français" effaces the problematics, political and historical, that Francophone authors face when they write; doing so ignores the neocolonial structures in which these authors inscribe their works. While the aspirations of "littérature-monde en français" and World Literature are

[5] To complicate this transnational geography that characterizes Francophone works, it also has to be noted that, as well as being published and acknowledged away from their place of birth, analysis and criticism of these works, has very often been conducted yet elsewhere, in the United States where the academic fields of Francophone Studies and Postcolonial Studies first developed. Contemporary Francophone writers' texts are in a transnational situation through the juxtaposition of their authors' identities, their publication history, and their after-life on the international literary scene. My research straddles the American and the more recent French conversations about Francophone literature.

undeniably similar, they remain two separate approaches to reading contemporary literature. In the context of my dissertation, theories of World Literature are just as helpful.

Alongside the role publication houses play in structuring the field of Francophone literature is the metropolitan French institution of the Académie Française. Its history and developments underline its role in the regulation the language, and thus emphasize the significance of the new poetics and a new politics that Francophone novels offer. Francophone novelists creatively transform the French language in their works as a means of questioning this institution and the dominant language that it regulates. Theories of World Literature as a system, attentive to circulation and translation, help conceptualize the stakes of Francophone writing within a globalized world. In addition, I propose to consider another, alternative definition of World Literature, one which allows to read works of literature in and of themselves as World Literature, before considering circulation. Recently, scholars have re-framed the conversation about translingualism (which in its beginning was mostly framed within the field of Translation Studies) in the field of World Literature. In 2018, a special issue of the *Journal of World Literature* explored questions of literary translingualism, featuring interventions by scholars Steven G. Kellman, Michael Boyden and Douglas Robinson; in parallel to that issue a few others have considered, in individual publications, the potential of conceptualizing World Literature and Translingual Studies together (Jacqueline Dutton 2016). These works are some of the first to consider the overlap between these two fields, and my study of Francophone literature at this crossroad contributes to this conversation. Sarah Dowling's 2018 conceptualization of the monolingual paradigm in her work *Translingual Poetics* inspired my work on language, as Jerry Won Lee's work on the deconstruction of the notion of a self-contained, autonomous language in his 2017 work *The Politics of Translingualism: After Englishes*. Translingualism is a key concept

to understanding Francophone works today, because Francophone novels divert the conventional unity of the novel around one national language, which doubles and reinforces the national structure of the novel. This re-claiming and re-invention of the language is an aesthetic move that draws the French language out of the realm of its regulation by French institutions such as the Académie Française and allows us to read these translingual works as World Literature.

Methodology and Chapters Description

Contemporary Francophone authors creatively divert the meta-literary codes and conventions of the publishing system on which they depend, and throughout the four chapters of this dissertation I proceed to explore the back and forth between Francophone authors and the imperial system in which they write. I conjoin close and distant readings, allowing me to identify three literary practices through which Francophone authors challenge neocolonial structures and their meaning. First, they showcase contemporary neocolonial power dynamics in the stories they write; second, they challenge the genre of the novel that is intrinsically tied to the nation state, and third, they metamorphose the so-called standards of French language, which challenges the monolingual status quo tied to nationalism. As I highlight what remains of a colonial world in the contemporary literary system, I propose a new definition of Francophone literature that is relevant to today's globalized world. Francophone literature is, as each of my chapters demonstrate, intrinsically meta-literary in its understanding of the conditions that determine it, collaborative, transnational, and translingual. The methodology I follow for my dissertation is based on a reading of the interactions between conditions of publication and the content of selected contemporary Francophone works. I merge the analysis of the meta-literary conditions in which the texts are published, distributed and read with traditional approaches to literary texts, such as close readings, biographical insights, and critical analysis.

Chapter 2 is a case study of Gallimard's collection Continents noirs. In this chapter, I interrogate the practices of Gallimard in curating Francophone literature and I feature testimonies from authors in the collection. My primary sources include the collection website, its catalogue, promotional material, book reviews, and my personal interviews with authors. The following three chapters each present a unique literary practice, respectively the reinvestment of the trope of the motherland, the genre of the novel, and translingualism. To explore how texts creatively transform the neocolonial meta-literary conditions in which they are published, I draw on literary history, Caribbean studies, genre and gender studies, theories of World Literature and translingualism.

My second chapter investigates the editorial policy of the collection Continents noirs housed by Gallimard. Because Gallimard is one of France's most famous and well-established publication houses, I argue that the collection participates in curating a certain conception of Francophone literature, the details of which this chapter uncovers. Continents noirs brings together Francophone texts centered on works by authors from Africa or of African descent, according to Jean-Noël Schifano[6], one of the founders of the collection. Schifano launched Continents noirs in 2000 in consultation with Antoine Gallimard, and the collection now counts 111 published books. Interestingly, only 51 different authors share the publication of those books. Books published in this collection have between them been the recipient of 31 literary prizes. The texts are published in France because that is where Gallimard is based, but they reach beyond the French nations to include authors and stories

[6] ""Continents noirs" est devenue, au fil des années, une collection de découvertes et d'affirmations où, comme nous le souhaitions dès le départ, s'invente et se développe la pluralité des écritures dans la littérature de la diaspora africaine," reads Schifano's description of the collection on the web page of the Collection. [http://www.gallimard.fr/Divers/Plus-sur-la-collection/Continents-Noirs/(sourcenode)/116076]

that, in most cases, are from former French colonies, emphasizing the migrant and diasporic aspects of this literature.

This chapter includes a synthesis and analysis of the texts published in the collection to this day, an analysis of the editorial policy of the collection available on the collection's website and through the various statements made by Schifano in the past twenty years, a comparison between this collection and the other collections of the house, and finally an analysis of the graphic design of the collection which has evolved over the course of the existence of the collection. These various studies clarify what body of literature is being curated by the collection, and how this collection relates to the field of Francophone literature overall.

In my third chapter, I propose that Francophone writers invest the figure of the mother to illustrate the tension they experience writing in the context of a nationally determined literary system. The Francophone texts analyzed in the context of this dissertation reveal preoccupations with family history and identity; the mother plays a determining role in either bridging or stalling the development of the transnational identity of various characters. Inspired by the various mother figures which are present throughout Francophone literature, this chapter argues that the mother is a metaphor for the nation-state. She embodies Francophone authors' concerns with the conditions that determine their writing because she is to characters what the French literary system is to literature. Just as the French language determines the classification and conceptualization of French literature, the mother determines, through the mother-tongue, an identity for her children. Where the nation gives its literature a pre-determined identity, through national language, the mother also gives her children a pre-determined identity through the mother-tongue. The language, in both cases, is tied to the nation-state and is a component of the monolingual paradigm (Yildiz 2012).

Relations between mothers and children thus re-inscribe on a textual level the tension between Francophone texts and the monolingual paradigm that I question. The role of the mother is relevant in Francophone novels precisely because Francophone literature is constantly questioning the national structures in which it is embedded: the mother represents, explicitly or symbolically, the national conventions of the French literary system which Francophone novelists work to transform. The study of the figure of the mother in contemporary Francophone novels therefore sheds new light on the tensions intrinsic to the field of Francophone literature.

On the other hand, the mother also represents potentials for linguistic and aesthetic renewal. She is a reminder of the weight of monolingualism but also exposes a way out of it. In Francophone works the mother-tongue escapes its own linguistic and emotional boundaries and becomes a site of distortion that exposes the mother-tongue and the corresponding monolingual paradigm as institutionalized forms of language. The mother-tongue is a site for change and resistance, as is the figure of the mother herself. Relationships between mothers and daughters, in particular, re-inscribe the problematics of Francophone literature on a contextual level in the Francophone novel, but simultaneously become a site to explore alternatives, as Francophone literature does on a broader level. Francophone novels open a space for an alternative motherhood, in which the burdening roles and attributes of the Western mother are redistributed in a multiplicity. A cooperative story-telling process contributes to the creation of a female-sustained network of solidarity and re-founding of identities beyond the tensions that seem to originate within the figure of the mother. The novels of Francophone writers create a constellation of motherly figures characteristic of the genre of Francophone literature. In this chapter, I analyze two novels by the Guadeloupean author Gisèle Pineau: *Chair Piment* (2002) and *Fleur de Barbarie* (2005).

In Pineau's two novels, the mother is characterized by her absence: she is either dead (in *Chair Piment*), or has mostly abandoned her child (*Fleur de Barbarie*). This absence causes both first-person, female narrators to research their family history in order to resolve mental and emotional issues and allow the narrative to find a resolution. The story, and through this story their identity, is in both cases filled out by multiple voices. The role of the mother is dispersed in other family members, in a move that simultaneously disempowers and relieves the mother and empowers the family as an alternative collective structure. Both narrators feel lost because of the absence of the mother; resolutions come when they come to terms with this absence and learn to re-compose a different idea of the family. Storytelling and the transmission of family history is collectively composed. The mother's absence, portrayed as a betrayal or a tragedy, loses its power when the protagonists re-invent that relationship otherwise, in others. Pineau's narratives demystify the figure of the mother and display the need and potential of living an identity without the pre-determined keystone of that identity. Acknowledging and telling a story but disempowering its assumed keystone: this is what happens in Francophone novels in relation to the idea of the national.

My analysis continues with a focus on the genre of the novel: in Chapter 4 I explore works by authors from Martinique (Patrick Chamoiseau), Senegal (Animata Aïdara), Algeria (Nina Bouraoui) and the Ivory Coast (Gauz). This sample of novels demonstrates how contemporary Francophone novelists creatively curate an alternative for the pre-determined genre of the Francophone novel. The novels themselves are a site of theorization of field of Francophone literature against the weight of national conventions. Chapter 4 focuses on texts that publishers and authors themselves identify as novels. The genre emerged throughout the eighteenth century, parallel to the rise of the sovereign nation-state and imposed itself as a

predominant genre whose popularity and lucrativeness remains unwavering today. Although it has evolved throughout the following centuries, it remains tied to the self-contained, autonomous and monolingual sovereign nation-state, as theorists of the novel demonstrated (Jameson 1981). It is still the unit of the nation-state that determines literary structures today: within academia, within the publishing world, within libraries and bookstores, texts are read and organized mostly following national categorizations. On a theoretical plane, recent theories of the Global Novel (Kirsch 2016, Armstrong 2019) have helped reconceptualize the genre in its international context. While these theories help understand the global context with which Francophone works necessarily engage, they do not address the specificity of Francophone literature whose structures are politically and historically linked to metropolitan France. These novels are diverting the genre, making them difficult to seize, adapt to, categorize within the metropolitan system of publications, awards and studies that for many rely on decidedly organized and hermetic categories such as that of the novel. The Francophone novel is a site of metamorphosis, which diverts and refigures the national characteristics of the genre and the language in which it is written. The novel, because of its historical ties to the nation-state, is a relevant genre to explore how national paradigms are transformed into transnational ones.

Transforming the genre of the novel, by extension, is a way to question the limits of current definitions of Francophone literature. In Chapter 4 I consider novels published within the past two decades by Francophone authors to grasp how the field of Francophone literature is defined and curated today in light of its problematic ties to metropolitan France and to the concept of national literature. I seek to uncover how this specific tie to France, through the institutionalization of literature and the French language, manifests or is diverted in the novels of my corpus. Half a century after decolonization, Francophone writers deal with a language that

was once the language of the historical or political oppressor and with a literary genre, the novel, that colonizing nations developed and controlled. Through or despite their investment in the French language, these works creatively divert and transfigure two essential institutions of control and power, language and novel.

This chapter analyzes how Francophone novelists work through the national conventions of the metropolitan France literary system. I propose that the transformations of the genre of the novel are both a political and a theoretical gesture. I focus on two strategies which highlight how Francophone writers re-invest the genre of the novel: a blurring of the limits between fiction and theory and a deconstruction of the linear narrative that draws attention to the colonial past. Francophone novelists simultaneously challenge the novel as a pre-established genre and propose an alternative to both theories of the novel and theories of Francophone literature. These novels transform the genre in order to challenge the national characteristics embedded within this genre. They do so by disrupting the neocolonial structures that characterize the literary system that publishes them. The transnational dimension of their works highlights the limits of classic theories of the novel on the one hand (Jameson, Anderson), which tie the genre to the nation. On the other hand, they also challenge theories of the Global Novel which have emerged in relation to theories of World Literature in the past decades (Kirsch 2016, Armstong 2019). Francophone writers re-invest and re-invent the genre of the novel by deconstructing the boundaries between the genre of the novel and that of the essay. The novel is a self-reflexive laboratory in which the expectations of the reader are challenged, as well as being part of a larger theoretical project in which works of non-fiction are included.

I begin with a focus on the works of Martinican author Patrick Chamoiseau (1953-). A prominent literary figure on the French literary scene, having received the Prix Goncourt for his

1992 novel *Texaco,* Chamoiseau is published by canonical publication houses in France. His works flow in and out of the boundaries that are set by these houses. *La Matière de l'absence* (Le Seuil, 2016) is simultaneously a biographical homage to the author's mother, and a philosophical and literary essay on Francophone writing. *Ecrire en pays dominé* (Gallimard, 1997), by contrast, is presented as an essay but features novelistic and philosophical elements. It is written in a poetic language and plurivocal structure that distances it from the formal genre of the essay. The official genre that is staged by the publication houses does not fit the hybrid quality of Chamoiseau's texts. There is a resistance, in these texts, to being categorized or catalogued, and this is a conscious resistance as Chamoiseau proposes a new philosophy of literature within his works. A comparative reading of both *La Matière de l'absence* and *Ecrire en pays dominé* reveals a different approach to literature. Chamoiseau as other Francophone writers interrogates the conditions that structure the French literary system today and that are conditions that dominate the literary sphere around the world; Chamoiseau interrogates these conditions in a move that can be associated as participating in the "transcolonial imagination."[7]

In a second part, I consider how temporality is disrupted within Francophone novels by a more recent generation of Francophone writers to show that their non-linear imagination of time is also a manifestation of the transcolonial imagination. I historically situate each of the authors within their colonial and post-colonial context and tie this history to the need for a more fluid chronology to write their transnational and identity. Nina Bouraoui was born in Rennes, France,

[7] Olivia Harrison (2016) conceptualizes the "transcolonial imagination" as a "mode of renegotiating the colonial past and reactualizing anticolonial critique in the present" (103). Francophone authors' works are transcolonial because by questioning these conventions they also question the structures which brought about colonialism, and perpetuate forms of neocolonialism.

in 1967, to a French mother and an Algerian father; she spent most of her childhood in Algeria. Stock, a Parisian-based publishing house, published her work. Mainly autobiographical, classified by Stock as "littérature française," and initially published in the "La Bleue" collection, Bouraoui's works are embedded within neo-colonial structures that she addresses by disrupting temporality within her works. They embody the variety of stylistic and temporal variations that challenge the established genre of the novel. Bouraoui's work redefines narrative structures through fragmentation in her autobiographical novel *Garçon manqué*. By fracturing the linear story structure that usually upholds the novel, Bouraoui complexifies the national narrative of the genre of the novel. Her investment in extremely different forms of writing and in temporal fragmentation challenges the unified national narrative of the novel. Other works further expose the effects of established national boundaries on temporality within novels. Gauz's text *Camarade Papa* (2018) juxtaposes two different storylines that converge in space, a juxtaposition that causes colonial and postcolonial temporalities to find themselves aligned, drawing attention to the persistence of colonialism in a postcolonial era.

The fifth and final chapter considers yet another national convention, the French language. I draw on recent analysis in the field of linguistics to approach texts by HélèneCixous (*Défions l'augure*, 2018) and Lydie Salvayre (*Pas pleurer*, 2014) as sites of resistance to the monolingual paradigm. I analyze translingual occurrences as a creative challenge to the "standard" French language upheld by institutions such as l'Académie française. This chapter examines what happens to language when the national framework of the novel is challenged. Francophone works re-invent the French language on the one hand by challenging French as a dominant and monolingual language, and on the other hand, by exposing the artificiality of its self-sustainability and its self-containment. They do so by

investing a translingual mode: Francophone writers weave and juxtapose the French language and various other languages (creoles, Arabic, Spanish…) as well as distort the French language itself. Translingualism thus challenges the historical institution of French as a national language that started in the sixteenth century[8] and is perpetuated in monolingual structures today. I argue alongside Sarah Dowling (2018) and Jerry Won Lee (2017) that translingualism exposes the monolingual paradigm and therefore resists the national characteristics associated with it. The monolingual paradigm is foundational to the national structure of literature and is channeled through national publishing houses. Translingualism contributes to the metamorphosis of the genre of the novel and participates in what Chantal Zabus (2007) calls a form of "literary decolonization:" Francophone writers re-claim the language that was imposed on them, and challenge the monolingual structure that is tied to nationalism, and thus tied to colonialism.

I propose that the translingual mode, in literature, is an alternative to the monolingual paradigm. Both Cixous and Salvayre are well-established, prize-winning authors on the French literary scene[9]. Cixous' work as a scholar as well as a writer have placed her on an international literary scene. Her literary work is therefore even more relevant to consider in the light of reconceptualizing the field of Francophone literature. Both Salvayre and Cixous' transnational identities (Franco-Spanish for the first, Franco-Algerian for the latter) further question the categories of French and Francophone. I argue in this chapter that this combination of a transnational identity and the translingual quality of their works sheds new light on what it means to be a Francophone writer: Francophone writing is anchored in a hyper-awareness of the categories that constrain writing in French, be it the novel, as argued above, or the language itself, as this chapter will show.

Both texts defy the assumption of the monolingual paradigm by introducing variations of translingualism. These works invest a translingual mode that opens a space for minority voices. In Salvayre's text, the translingual mode is associated with the mother of the narrator, who, decades after, finally embraces her Fragnol voice to tell her story of war and immigration. The translingual mode is a condition for her to express this story. In Cixous' work, the mother, constantly travelling, unfixed and unfixable, also participates in the translingual mode of the novel. The translingual mode upsets the French language, but it also, in both texts, upsets the authority of the first-person narrator, who shares the narrative. While the narrator, in Salvayre's text, represented the institutionalized language and attempts to control this narrative, in Cixous' work, the freedom of the mother inspires the linguistic freedom of her daughter. She embraces the poly-vocal character of her narrative and gladly gives voice to other narrative strands.

Chapter 2: Continents noirs: A Case Study

In January1999, Jean-Noël Schifano, prominent writer and translator, and Antoine Gallimard, the head of the eponymous publishing house, were on a flight to Gabon when they started a conversation about African literature and its diaspora. The conversation led them to shape the idea of a new collection for the Gallimard house:

> Janvier 1999 : dans l'avion qui les mènent au Gabon, Antoine Gallimard et Jean-Noël Schifano imaginent de rassembler sous une seule enseigne des œuvres se référant, sans s'y limiter, à une origine et une aspiration commune : l'Afrique. « On s'est demandé s'il y avait un grand fleuve africain qui jetait sur la Seine le puissant courant d'écritures africaines. » La NRF[8] pourrait, sinon être ce fleuve, du moins en constituer un des affluents majeurs, un peu dans la continuité de ce qu'elle avait fait récemment auprès des grandes voix de la créolité (Chamoiseau, Confiant, Glissant…).[9]

This is the story told in a post titled "D'Hier à Aujourd'hui" published on the web page of Continents noirs. It is also the story Schifano always repeats when asked about the origin of the collection by journalists. Schifano and Gallimard, in their conversation, claim to have identified a gap in the French literary market, and create Continents noirs as a response to this gap. The net is cast widely and somewhat vaguely: the collection was to include works that have ties to Africa and its diaspora, and participate in the curation of African literature alongside other "affluents."

In order to better understand the stakes specific to Continents noirs, it is necessary to consider its history within the French publication scene in general, and within its mother house more specifically, Gallimard. The collection is inaugurated on January 21st, 2000, with the publication of its first five books: *Histoire d'Awu* by Justine Mintsa, *La Révolte du Komo* by Aly Diallo, *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* by Amos Tutuola, *Le Cri que tu pousses ne réveillera*

[8] NRF stands for Nouvelle Revue Française, the name under which first started the Gallimard house.
[9] https://www.gallimard.fr/Divers/Plus-sur-la-collection/Continents-Noirs/(sourcenode)/116076

personne by Gaston-Paul Effa, and *Lagon, lagunes* by Sylvie Kandé. The five authors hail from sub-Saharan African countries, corresponding to Schifano's ambition for the collection. Schifano and Gallimard's goal for Continents noirs was to "rassembler sous une enseigne des œuvres se référant, sans s'y limiter, à une origine et une aspiration commune: l'Afrique." The identity of the first published authors is a manifestation of that goal in action: Mintsa is from Gabon, Diallo is from Mali, Tutuola from Nigeria, Effa from Cameroon, and Kandé from Senegal. While four out of the five texts are written in French and are published for the first time with Continents noirs, Amos Tutuola's work has a slightly different profile, the only notable exception in this first batch of publication. His work is a translation and a re-publication. Originally published in 1952 under the title *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* it was translated a few years later by Raymond Queneau from English into French and published in another one of Gallimard's collections, "Du monde entier." Schifano, in various interviews and in another post on Continents noirs' website, is eager to remind readers of Continents noirs that this work was for a long time attributed to Queneau himself, rather than to Tutuola, and that Tutuola's death went relatively unnoticed;[10] for Schifano, this is a direct example of the reason why a collection such as Continents noirs was urgently needed on the French literary scene. The collection does give precedent to works written in French; however, the presence of a translation also indicates a desire for the collection to not restrict itself to the realm of Francophone literature, and to rather privilege ties to the African continent over a linguistic criterion.

[10] https://www.gallimard.fr/Footer/Ressources/Entretiens-et-documents/Paroles-d-editeur-La-collection-Continents-Noirs/

This chapter explores the presentation, content, and reception of Continents noirs on the French literary scene, taking into account the history of Gallimard, commentaries on Continents noirs in the mainstream press, as well as Schifano's own understanding of his collection and authors' take on their publication history in the collection. This chapter attempts to draw out how Francophone literature is represented and curated within one of the oldest and most prestigious publication houses of metropolitan France.

1. Gallimard: New Issues with Old Prestige

The Gallimard publishing house was founded in Paris in 1911 under the name of la Nouvelle Revue française by Gaston Gallimard. Since then, it has grown to become one the flagship publishing house of literature in metropolitan France, earning a prestigious international reputation through the publication of now mythical literary figures such as Albert Camus or Paul Claudel and multiple collections, including the prestigious canon of La Pléiade. Since its beginnings in the early 1910s, Gallimard has grown and incorporated other smaller publishing houses. It is now a part of the larger group Madrigall, owned by Antoine Gallimard. Throughout the past century, the various owners of the house have expanded its reach significantly, mainly by creating and absorbing other collections and publications venues. Claude Gallimard, its second owner, created the very successful Folio paperback collection in 1972; and among the most recent and notable purchases that occurred as recently as January of 2022, Antoine Gallimard took on Les Editions de Minuit, a significant new inclusion to the group Madrigall. Gallimard as a publishing venue is thus now one part of a very profitable and successful business.

A. A Family Dynasty

Gallimard has now existed for over a century; unsurprisingly, some aspects of the prestigious house can today appear to be somewhat conservative and outdated despite its unfaltering success. Gallimard is a family-owned business, each male head of the house transmitting the ownership (now measured in shares) to the next man in line when they are no longer able to perform their duties as CEO. The business has therefore been in the hands of the same family for its whole existence. Antoine Gallimard, at the head of the house today, is the third owner and main shareholder. He took over from his father Claude Gallimard (1914-1991) in 1988, who himself inherited the business from his own father Gaston Gallimard (1881-1975) when he died in 1975.

Antoine Gallimard, one of Gaston and his wife Simone's four children, was not the eldest. His inheritance caused family squabbles that resulted in a trial.[11] All four children, Christian, Antoine, Isabelle, and Françoise became shareholders of the Gallimard business, but Antoine became the CEO. Another wave of trouble came when his sibling Françoise decided, in 2013, to sell her shares of the business. This rocky family history reveals how important it is to the family to keep the business within their control. The Gallimards were not ready to see the business leave the hands of the dynasty they had contributed to establish. In that sense, though Gallimard now operates very much like any other business, it follows a conservative, not publicly-traded, dynastic model in which leadership is attributed to the insiders, in a gender-specific oligarchic system, the women of the Gallimard family having yet to have a significant

[11] https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/cab90013932/succession-gallimard

executive role in the family business[12]. The structure of the business has perpetuated, so far, a form of nepotism. The model, however, was and still is a successful one. Keeping Gallimard in family hands does seem to have worked for the business and this stability has most likely contributed to help Gallimard grow into the leading publishing house it is today.

B. Collection "Blanche," "Continents Noirs"

The stability of Gallimard also comes with a price: even beyond its dynastic internal structure, some aspects of the publishing house are in dire need of renewal. When considering the structure of Gallimard's collections a reader might be surprised to find an internal hierarchy at work that is a direct inheritance of a colonial and imperial world-order: Gallimard's flagship collection is called "La Blanche," a striking and problematic contrast with Continents noirs. Not only is staging the colors black and white problematic, but the hierarchy that implicitly subsists between these collections is also worthy of attention.

Gallimard features numerous different collections, the most prestigious being "La Pléiade" followed by "La Blanche." Continents noirs emerges alongside collections such as "Du monde entier," or "Connaissance de l'Orient," all targeting literatures from outside of metropolitan France with the goal of bringing foreign literature to a French readership. While "Du monde entier" and "Connaissance de l'Orient" mainly feature translations, Continents noirs functions slightly differently: a large majority of the texts published in the collection are written in French, as I noted above (Continents Noirs features only five works in translation).

In this context, the political and literary stakes of a collection such as Continents noirs are high. On the one hand, the risk of such a collection is that it might further a form of

[12] https://www.vanityfair.com/style/1990/06/gallimard-family-feud

neocolonialism that restricts the freedom and creativity of its authors by categorizing them and therefore pre-determining the reading of the texts themselves. On the other hand, the potential of being published by a house such as Gallimard has a great impact on authors and help them get recognition. How does Continents Noirs fare in this respect?

Collection "Blanche" is Gallimard's oldest collection, dating back to the initial foundation of Gallimard in 1911. A historical perspective on the collection published on Gallimard's webpage explains that the choice of the name "Blanche" is linked to the aesthetic of the volumes' front matter. Gallimard, then still known as *Nouvelle Revue Française*, adopted as a style a minimalist, light-colored cover, with the idea of contrasting with other styles that were then published:

> L'appellation « Blanche » fait référence aux couleurs revêtues par la plupart des premiers volumes brochés publiés par la maison d'édition, dont les couvertures étaient de couleur crème et non jaune paille comme aujourd'hui. La maquette retenue détonait dans les rayonnages des librairies où dominait une titraille noire sur fond jaune. Que l'appellation « Blanche », par tradition et connotation très littéraire (on pense à la célèbre *Revue blanche*), se soit imposée et maintenue jusqu'à aujourd'hui témoigne de cette singularité formelle.[13]

The cover of the books was supposed to echo its content (pure, distilled, and direct literary prose). The name of the collection is maintained as a token of literary quality; in a postcolonial world, however, the continued association of the color white and literary quality is problematic to say the least.

Continents noirs, on the other hand, was created much later. Partly because it is so much more recent, it does not benefit from the same prestige as its counterpart collection "Blanche"

[13] https://www.gallimard.fr/Divers/Plus-sur-la-collection/Blanche/(sourcenode)/116029

that has existed virtually since the beginning of the press. Gallimard has allowed a hierarchy to subsist through this dichotomy between its "white" and "black" collections. As scholar Julia Walters notes: the usual racist connotations associated with the color white persist in the organization of the Gallimard house, with prevalence given to the collection "Blanche:"

> Nowhere is a definition offered of what is considered to constitute 'la littérature française', with which La Collection Blanche is so insistently associated. Yet the recurrent references to history, origins, purity, tradition, excellence and centrality, in the portrayal of the collection's pivotal role in the development of the twentieth-century French canon, provide us with the essential components of such a definition, the neo-colonialist implications of which are particularly striking when considering the position of non-metropolitan writers within the collection and within its conception of 'French' literature. Put schematically, according to Gallimard's reasoning, La Blanche is synonymous with quality which is, in turn, synonymous with 'French' literature" (66)

The colonial associations of whiteness with purity, quality, excellence and directness are maintained and doubled with an association of whiteness with so-called French literature. In short, Gallimard continues to maintain a colonial hierarchy in literature published in French by creating two racially color-coded collections in its catalogue.

C. The Example of Ananda Devi's Trajectory within Gallimard: From "Continents noirs" to "La Blanche"

The associations of the collection "Blanche" with quality and success seem to be confirmed when a reader considers the trajectory of Francophone writers within the Gallimard house. Water takes the example of author Ananda Devi's publishing history to illustrate the idea that authors tend to gravitate to the collection "Blanche" once they are established as successful. Devi (born in Mauritius in 1957) published first with a small, local publishing house, then with Gallimard's Continents noirs, and thereafter shifted to the collection "Blanche:"

> Such a trajectory represents a gradual, step-by-step move from margins to center: from small, local publishers, to specialist (and therefore peripheral) French publishers, to a

> specialist (and therefore peripheral) series within the major French publishing house, finally to publication in the main collection of the most prestigious French publisher. (57)

Walter argues that the collection "Blanche" is "unmarked." The works published there will be read as French literature, whereas Continents noirs is marked by the foreignness or origins as "others" of its authors and their texts. Of Devi's work, she asks: "Does Devi's move, from marginal series, dedicated to francophone literature from Africa and its diaspora, to the central, keystone collection of France's major publishing house, represent – as the eloquent titles of the collections might imply – a shift from exotic to familiar, from other to same?" (57). Walter thus suggests that Devi, as she gained recognition on the French literary scene, became accepted and incorporated into the corpus of "unmarked" French literature. She became recognizable and recognized, and her progression through Continents noirs to La Blanche marks this process of recognition. Continents noirs, in a way similar to other smaller publishing houses, can thus be interpreted as a placeholder or a jumping pad: if authors and their text reach a certain degree of success, they may progress to the better-established collection that is La Blanche.

Devi is one example among a few authors who decided to leave Continents noirs. Underlying these authors' choices are reasons of visibility and marketability (case studies further in this chapter provide some examples). Sometimes they are trying to reach a different readership, or have an issue with Continents noirs as a collection. Walter's take on Devi's path through Gallimard is symptomatic of the broader issue of categorization that is at stake in the discrepancy between Continents noirs vs. La Blanche. Continents noirs, through its title alone, frames its texts with a certain degree of exoticism: indeed, the word "ghetto" is regularly used in the press to talk about the collection, as the next section of this chapter demonstrates. A recalibration of the author-reader-text triangle occurs when the Francophone author publishes in

metropolitan France (regardless of the question of the necessity of this recalibration, it happens anyway): a collection such as Continents Noirs frames itself as a mediator in the relationship. When an author such as Devi no longer needs a color-coding mediator, all traces of otherness are erased, and she can access the "unmarked," whitewashed, realm of "La Blanche." Gallimard retains to this day an internal hierarchy between its collections that is symptomatic of the colonial and racialized hierarchy that characterizes the French literary system at large.

2. Genesis and Evolution of the Reception of Continents Noirs: Two Decades of Critical Commentary in the Mainstream Press

The reception of the collection reflects ongoing discomfort with its origin story. Considering the reach of Gallimard as a whole, the collection received relatively little attention beyond its initial inauguration in 2000. Much of what has been written about Continents noirs during the past two decades brings up the issue of its title and the racialization that it represents, often drawing attention away from the commentary on the published works and authors themselves. The following pages present an overview of the articles written in the mainstream press about Continents noirs in an attempt to grasp if and how any evolution of the perception of the collection occurred, and how the general public was exposed to the collection through the media.

A. Initial Reception: Early 2000s

On the day of the launch of the collection, January 21st 2000, *Le Monde* published an article[14] about Continents noirs' beginnings. Journalist Emilie Grangeray opened her review with the

[14] https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/01/21/gallimard-parie-sur-l-afrique_3585538_1819218.html

statement “Gallimard parie sur l’Afrique,” before launching into a general review of the genesis of the collection and its ambitions. Very likely because the article was published at midnight on the day of the launch, its commentary focuses on the format of the collection rather than on the books themselves, which the journalist would not have yet been able to read. Her article translates her hope for the collection to take on a role that other publishing venues in metropolitan France have not yet embraced, that of opening and promoting a space for African voices: “Il existe une présence africaine chez Gallimard, Grasset, Hatier, l’Harmattan, Le Serpent à Plumes, entre autres, mais elle est sans doute trop diffuse pour pouvoir s’imposer aux lecteurs.” Her understanding of the collection therefore maps on to Schifano’s view of it, that it will fill a literary gap in metropolitan France. Continents noirs, contrarily to other publication venues and collections, explicitly regroups works from an African background and Grangeray seems to think it will promote these works more effectively. The second part of the article briefly presents the five works published and evokes the possibility for a collaboration with African publication houses that would allow the texts to circulate also on the African continent.

Journalist and writer Catherine Bedarida also published an article with *Le Monde* on April 21st 2000, just a few weeks after the launch of Continents noirs[15]. Her article, “Explorations du continent noir,” praises Sylvie Kandé’s poetry, which she qualifies as “la meilleure surprise de la nouvelle collection ‘Continents Noirs.’” About the collection itself, however, the journalist remains critical: it failed, according to her, to bring about enough discoveries of new voices from the African continent, which was Gallimard and Schifano’s

[15] https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2000/04/21/explorations-du-continent-noir_3539239_1819218.html

ambition for the collection. Amos Tutuola was already published with Gallimard before the re-publication of *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* with Continents noirs; Gaston-Paul Effa was already a well-established novelist who previously had published with Grasset. Of the first five publications, therefore, only three were actual discoveries on the part of the collection. Bedarida comments that "depuis une quinzaine d'années, en France, les éditeurs qui s'intéressent à l'Afrique sont à l'affût des nouvelles voix du continent, bien au-delà du pré carré des anciennes colonies françaises." Of the three new voices Continents noirs launched, only Kandé, according to the journalist, offers a literary voice: both Justine Mintse (*Histoire d'Awu*) and Aly Diallo (*La Révolte du Komo*) are allegedly caught up in a political discourse and fail to deliver a work of literary value. She describes Mintsa's style as "sage, presque scolaire" and of Diallo's writing she comments that it is "trop didactique" and that it therefore "nuit au roman." Her critique, more generally, is that "la dénonciation passe avant la littérature" – a debatable but frequent claim in French literary criticism and scholarship where militantism by minorities is thought to devalue artistic content. The collection, according to Bedarida, is off to a disappointing start. When compared to initiatives by other French publishing houses to empower voices from the African continent (the Serpent à plumes, the collection "Afriques" by Actes Sud, Dapper), Continents noirs "se situent en deça de cette recherche des talents les plus actuels et les plus aigus de l'Afrique" concludes Bedarida. Her view of the position of Continents noirs on the French literary scene is in opposition to Grangeray's. Bedarida sees Continents noirs as an insufficient project that does not do enough to justify its ambition of taking its place amongst the ranks of other collections dedicated to African literature, while Grangeray is a lot more hopeful that Gallimard's latest project will mark a turning point for the Francophone literary scene.

Published in March 2000, an article in *Libération*[16] offers an additional perspective on Continents noirs. Journalist Stéphane Bouquet acknowledges that Continents noirs "n'est pas un travail de pionnier," and mentions "Présence Africaine," "Dapper" and the "Serpent à plume" as examples of other publishing houses that had previously initiated the work of "diffuser la littérature africaine." With Continents noirs however, Bouquet sees the hope for revitalization and accrued visibility. Bouquet praises Schifano's goal of publishing five to seven works every year, seeming to imply that this alone will "rendre compte de l'effervescence de la diaspora noire." I read a discrepancy between the small number of texts and the hope that Bouquet placed in the collection: his praise seems paradoxical in view that five to seven works a year is a very small number relative to the very large field Schifano aims to embrace.

Bouquet notices the same elements as Bedarida: Continents noirs, with its first batch of publications, positions itself as an political collection. "Tous les livres publié par Schifano évoquent plus ou moins directement la domination des Noirs par les Blancs, de l'Afrique par l'Europe, la difficulté à construire un espace politique indépendant, juste et viable," notes Bouquet after commenting at length on Tutuola's novel. It's difficult to say if the journalist is aware of the irony that pervades that sentence: Schifano, a white man, publishing in Paris, a collection called Continents noirs, translating through its very existence the difficulty to build up not only an independent political space, but also an independent literary space. The title of Bouquet's article is also very ambiguous: "Réamorcer la pompe Afrique," (relaunching the African pump), a phrase that is a homonym of "réamorcer la pompe à fric" (relaunching the cash pump). Africa is cast as a monolithic continent whose resources the West should continue to

[16] https://www.liberation.fr/livres/2000/03/02/reamorcer-la-pompe-afrique-avec-continents-noirs-gallimard-apres-d-autres-editeurs-entend-rendre-com_319382/

mine and pump. I venture the hypothesis that Bouquet's article should be read under the light of this ambiguous title. Whereas Bouquet takes the collection seriously and appreciates the works published, his disparaging play on words and inadvertent irony beg for critical interpretation. Tapping into the rich mine of African literature is potentially financially beneficial to the collection Gallimard. The profitable capitalist endeavor continues within literature a post-colonial agenda of exploitation.

The year of the launch drew some attention to the collection, as the previous three articles demonstrate, though not as much as might have been expected from a new collection within Gallimard. Few articles were published about the collection itself in the following years, at least until the ten-year anniversary of Continents noirs. Up until 2010, the few articles that mention the collection generally do so in passing, rather than it being an object of direct focus. For instance, in 2002 an article[17] by Josyane Savigneau was published in *Le Monde* following her interview with Schifano. The journalist comments on the writer's career as a translator and a novelist, and emphasizes Schifano's well-known love for the city of Naples. The collection Continents noirs is only mentioned in the final paragraph, as one among many of his literary projects:

> Aujourd'hui, Jean-Noël Schifano vient de traduire Baudolino, d'Umberto Eco (Grasset), et dirige la collection « Continents noirs », qu'il a créée, en 2000, chez Gallimard. Un abandon d'Italie et un départ vers l'Afrique ? « Absolument pas. » Suit une explication, très convaincante, des relations et des « passerelles » entre ses deux passions […]

Schifano's words, mentioned in the last sentence of this quote, are not transcribed in Savigneau's article but rather paraphrased. Her article, however, translates well the idea, also present in the articles written for the inauguration year, that Schifano's role in the collection is a part of its

[17] https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2002/03/22/schifano-un-napolitain-de-paris_4241754_1819218.html

identity. As a prominent literary figure on the French and Italian cultural scene, the collection attracted attention at least partly *because* it was an endeavor taken on by Schifano. The fact that, in 2002, *Le Monde* features an article exclusively about Schifano, in which Continents noirs is mentioned in passing, continues to illustrate this.

A few years later, one of *Libération*'s journalists' attended a book launch in a small bookstore in Paris[18]: "dans une échoppe proche de la rue Mouffetard, face à une douzaine de curieux, Jean-Noël Schifano est venu présenter quelques auteurs de sa collection « Continents noirs »." Alongside Schifano are notably present Boniface Mongo-Mboussa and Antoine Gallimard himself. The small number of attendants (a dozen), despite Schifano and Mongo-Mboussa's presence, is indicative of the small reach of the collection six years after its launch. Journalist Edouard Launet emphasizes this in his brief description of the collection: "au total une quarantaine de titres parus depuis 2000 dont aucun n'a dépassé les 5 000 exemplaires." Launet's article is short (one long paragraph) and his attention focused on the somewhat turbulent book signing session:

> Schifano parle, traçant dans l'éther les contours d'un continent de légende. On se croirait au bord du fleuve Niger un jour de crue. Jusqu'à ce qu'un impoli l'interpelle : dites donc, votre collection pour écrivains d'Afrique noire, ça ne tomberait pas un peu dans le travers du communautarisme ? Et la typo des bouquins, pourquoi est-elle si moche (du Futura Book, un caractère bâton effectivement pas terrible) ? Suit un bref silence. Puis le flot Schifano repart, plus vif : mais non vous n'y êtes pas du tout, regardez, «Continents noirs» c'est au pluriel, la preuve que nous ne sommes pas dans la géographie mais dans l'écriture, dans quelque chose qu'on pourrait appeler le «baroque existentiel», de toute façon il y en a marre de ce procès permanent du ghetto.

Six years after the first publications of the collection, the concerns expressed by journalists at the time are still present, among the public as well as among the press, as the intervention of the

[18] https://www.liberation.fr/livres/2006/03/09/rentrer-dans-la-blanche_32557/

"impoli" on that evening suggests. Launet's cynical account of the incident continues with the responses of the authors themselves:

> Fin de l'incident ? Non, début. Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, auteur de *Désir d'Afrique*, s'en prend à l'importun : votre inculture est sidérante car des collections africaines, il s'en est déjà créé plusieurs, voyez «Les Afriques» (Karthala), «Monde noir» (Hatier), alors pourquoi s'en prendre à celle-ci ? Parce que Schifano est un italianiste plus qu'un spécialiste de l'Afrique ? Un autre auteur de «Continents noirs» monte au front : ce débat, c'est une diversion permanente, lassante, ça empêche de parler du fond des bouquins. Et quand bien même la géographie s'en mêlerait, lance un troisième, il y a des précédents très honorables : la collection «Croix du Sud» de Roger Caillois, chez Gallimard aussi, fer de lance des littératures sud-américaines, n'a-t-elle pas révélé Borgès ? Le ton monte, Boniface Mongo-Mboussa part en claquant la porte.

The remarkable querelle features all the actors who play a role in the publication and reception of the collection: editor Schifano, author Mongo-Mboussa, a small audience, a journalist from a left-wing daily, and even, present in the background, Antoine Gallimard himself. Launet's account of the reading gone awry captures the essence of the debates surrounding Continents noirs. Schifano's arguments will not evolve in the years to come as he continues to face challenges to his collection: the pluralization of the title of the collection signifies that it escapes essentializing and exoticizing its authors; he also counters the accusation of communitarianism and ghettoization by reminding the small crowd that being published in Continents noirs does not shut authors off from other collections, namely from "La Blanche:"

> Schifano tente de calmer le jeu : chez Gallimard il n'y a pas de frontières, plaide-t-il, « vous pouvez très bien être dans « Continents noir » et puis rentrer dans la « Blanche ». Là, quelques gloussements nerveux au fond de la salle. Est-ce au rayon Freud qu'il faut chercher les raisons de ce psychodrame ? La maison d'édition qui a pour figure de proue la collection « Blanche » de la NRF pouvait-elle délimiter en son sein un « espace noir » sans ouvrir la boîte à lapsus ?
>
> Là-dessus, on se met à parler bouquin et ce fut nettement moins drôle.

Launet's ironic, witty tone brings to light the deep-rooted ambivalences of dual black and white collections. It also brings to task both Schifano and the collection as a whole. His narrative of the audience's provoking questions and nervous laughter, as well as Schifano's defensive self-justification and Mongo-Mboussa's frustration and dramatic door slamming protest all capture the fact of a literary system that is obviously two tiered. It reflects the continuation of an understanding of Black writers, on the part their readership and, to a certain extent, on the part of the writers themselves, of a Fanonian conceptualization of race. The title of the collection, as its initial reception shows, is an embodiment of Fanon's theory that, under the Western gaze, a Black person, regardless of their identity, is first and foremost Black and is determined by this.[19]

The impossibility for the conversation between Schifano, the readers in the room and the authors to go beyond the politics embodied in the title of the collection reflects a general malaise directly linked to the racial issues that it represents. The title is a reminder of the racialized perception of the authors who write for the collection in an essentializing move that echoes Fanon's frustrated statement that the Blackness of a person determines them. The readership's discomfort with the title, the refusal of readers and journalist alike to let this title slide reflects the reality of a metropolitan France that has not solved its issues with racial disparities, something that continues to the present day, as further press interventions prove.

B. A Decade of Continents Noirs: The Press Takes Stock

After this short intervention in *Libération,* the mainstream press did not pay much attention to Continents noirs until its tenth anniversary. The end of the first decade of the

[19] Thinking back on the genesis of his work in *Peaux noire, masques blancs*, Fanon writes that considering the condition of the colonized West Indian person necessarily means considering the condition of the Black person at large: "[...] nous avons été obligé de *voir* que l'Antillais est avant tout un Noir" (170). He continues further down: "[...] nous ferons appel à une évidence: *où* qu'il aille, un nègre demeure un nègre" (171).

collection's existence was an opportunity for journalists and the literary world to take measure of what had been accomplished and multiple articles were published in, once again, *Le Monde*, but also *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Jeune Afrique* and *Réveil fm.*

These 2010 publications have a different tone than the ones published previously, though they raise similar challenges to the collection. The short review of Continents noirs in June 2010 by Bernard Loupias, journalist for *Le Nouvel Observateur* takes stock of the decade of its publications[20]. A quick retrospective of the creation of the collection is followed by an overview of the debate that has surrounded the collection since its inception:

> A ce propos, l'existence d'une collection spécifiquement dédiée aux littératures africaines a pu être contestée par certains. Pourquoi, disent-ils, ghettoïser ainsi cette littérature, provincialiser ses auteurs, quand beaucoup de grands romanciers noirs (Alain Mabonckou, qui publiera en septembre, ironie du sort, dans la Blanche de Gallimard,Ahmadou Kourouma, Dany Laferrière ou Lyonel Trouillot) sont tout naturellement publiés par les plus grands éditeurs, comme n'importe quels autres romanciers ?
>
> Ce à quoi d'autres ont répondu à juste titre que ce genre de collection peut fidéliser et servir de repère à un public particulièrement intéressé par telle ou telle littérature (après tout, pour rester chez Gallimard, personne ne s'offusque de l'existence d'une collection aussi prestigieuse que «Connaissance de l'Orient» ?)

The article is relatively short (a total of 311 words) and the two paragraphs above dedicated to the summary of the debate occupy about a third of the article. The final paragraph seems to indicate that Loupias sees the benefits of this collection: he ends by acknowledging the 70 or so works published by Schifano, and lists the names of major authors that the collection launched (e.g. Fabienne Kanor, Scholastique Mukasonga). His final sentence, however, brings the spotlight back to the "problem" of Continents noirs: "Certains l'ont aussi déjà quittée (Ananda Devi, Natacha Appanah ou Sami Tchak) pour des cieux éditoriaux qu'ils estimaient sans doute

[20] https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20100622.BIB5365/continents-noirs-a-10-ans.html

moins « marqués »...” Loupias’ article reviews the collection for its anniversary ; it also indicates that the initial concerns about the “ghettoïsation” of the authors in the collection are still present both amongst the public and the authors themselves. Loupias’ final comment draws attention to the authors’ agency: with ten years of publications behind it, Continents noirs had enough history that its authors could evaluate how it shaped and framed their work and literary careers and decide for themselves if they wanted their next works to be represented in the collection. I highlight authors’ agency with the case studies of Anne Terrier, Sylvie Kandé, Asya Djoulaït, Anne Terrier, Gaël Octavia, Fabienne Kanor, and André Djiffac to examine the trajectory of authors who first published with Continents noirs before moving on to different collections or to a different publication house altogether.

On February 10, 2010, Continents noirs formally celebrated its ten-year anniversary; Schifano and the five authors published that year (Théo Ananissoh, Libar Fofana, Fabienne Kanor, Koffi Kwahulé, and Scholastique Mukasonga) came together for a press conference at TV5 Monde followed by a reception at the New Morning, a jazz club. Two articles, published in Réveil Fm and *Jeune Afrique*, paint a rather positive picture of Continents noirs in their review of this event.

Journalist Freddy Mulongo wrote a long article[21] published on the website of the radio station Réveil FM, based in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo). The title of the article sets its celebratory tone: “‘Continents Noirs’ de Gallimard a soufflé ses dix ans!” Mulongo uses as a starting point the press conference. The director of the collection, as often in the various press articles published about Continents noirs, is placed front and center : “Mercredi 10 février

[21] https://www.reveil-fm.com/index.php?post/2010/02/11/703-continents-noirs-de-gallimard-a-souffle-ses-dix-ans

2010, Jean Noël Schifano, le directeur de la collection "Continents noirs" de Gallimard était déjà là tôt le matin pour le déjeuner de presse entre les journalistes et les 5 auteurs qui viennent d'être publiés en février, au siège de TV5 Monde sur l'avenue Wagram dans le l7è arrondissement." While the five published authors of the year are not named until much later in the article, each of them is individually featured, with their respective photo, and a short paragraph outlining the work they published that year.

The article also features a more general reflection and comment on the imagined identity behind the authors of the Continents Noirs:

> Avec la mondialisation, la multiculturalité des individus, il devient presque impossible aujourd'hui de catégoriser les auteurs tant les apports additionnels culturels de l'africanité ou de la créolité mettent en crise, l'essence originelle.
>
> Les enjeux des auteurs des années 1960, colonisation, esclavage, indépendance, etc. ne correspondent plus aux réalités des continents noirs d'aujourd'hui : problèmes de développement, sécurité, environnement, éducation, liberté d'expression...

Mulongo uses the plural in his writing to refer to "black continents" echoing his support to the project of the collection. He highlights that the stakes of publishing contemporary authors with ties to the African continent are radically different than they were during the second half of the twentieth century; consequently, the mission of publishers is also a different one: "il ne faudrait plus se contenter de l'envoi des manuscrits par les auteurs, ne plus rester derrière son bureau à attendre mais prendre son bâton de pèlerin pour aller dénicher la perle rare." The journalist clearly thinks Schifano, "un vrai découvreur de talents," is up to the task and praises both the collection and Gallimard as a whole in his concluding paragraph: "Publier un jeune écrivain inconnu au delà du style, il faut d'abord aimer les livres et ceux qui les écrivent. Et à Gallimard on sait y faire." Schifano is willing to take risks and publish yet unknown authors in Continents

noirs; the journalist sees the strength and potential in his carrying forward his project with an exploratory and risk-taking mindset.

Published on February 13, 2010, Tshitenge Lubabu M.K.'s article is much shorter[22]. The article raises the same question leitmotiv: "Fallait-il pour autant créer une collection spécifique, au risque qu'elle soit considérée comme un ghetto pour écrivains noirs?" asks the journalist. The debate returns to Continents noirs being a "ghetto," a catch phrase for taboo communautarism within French universalism. Lubabo M.K. quotes both Schifano and Fabienne Kanor. Schifano avoids the question raised by the journalist by praising authors instead: "Schifano s'en défend. Pour lui, ces romanciers sont 'une pointe de diamant dans la sensibilité mondiale'. Leur style propre et la qualité de leurs textes n'ont rien à envier aux autres." More interesting is Fabienne Kanor's take on the question :

> Fabienne Kanor, née de parents martiniquais, est, avec quatre romans publiés, l'un des auteurs phares de la collection. « Je suis une auteure Gallimard avant tout », dit-elle. « Dans Continents Noirs, je me sens moi-même. Je ne suis pas proche des autres à cause de la couleur de la peau. Ce n'est pas métaphysique. Nous sommes des sommes de cultures. Le plus intéressant, c'est la diversité : nous avons tous une histoire particulière. »
>
> A ses yeux, l'essentiel reste la langue. Aussi s'étonne-t-elle que l'on s'intéresse davantage à ses origines qu'à ses qualité littéraires. "On veut que je sois historienne, militante, on me demande ce que je pense de la situation dans tel ou tel pays africain. Cela me dérange. Certains voient la collection comme un convoi de Noirs."

The process of ghettoization and essentialization happens from the outside, Kanor argues; she herself experiences her publications in the collection as beneficial and sees herself as much a part of the whole Gallimard family as a part of the specific collection[23]. Kanor's comments send the reader back to the paradox of the question that is always raised by readers and journalists: it is

[22] https://www.jeuneafrique.com/186163/societe/continents-noirs-dix-ans-d-aventures/
[23] Kanor's positioning has since changed, as my interview with her further in this chapter will show.

through questioning the collection that the process of essentialization happens; it is in diverting the conversation away from literature and on to the political plane that the process of ghettoization happens.

The title of the article that *Le Monde* publishes[24] for the collection's anniversary directly references the question underlying most of the journalists' articles on Continents noirs: "'Continents Noirs', Sas ou Ghetto?" Alain Beuve-Méry's title captures the two schools of thought that usually prevail about the collection: either it is perceived as "un sas" (a zone of transit), i.e. a passageway, an opportune collection promoting eccentric authors towards the center of the French literary field; or it is criticized as a "ghetto" segregating minority authors within a peripheral, ill-advertised and limiting collection. Beuve-Méry's subtitle is surprising: he coins Continents noirs as "spécialisée dans la littérature de l'exil," which is a novel way to approach the works published in the collection. He draws his subtitle from a quote by Schifano, who, once again, is defending the name of the collection: "Chaque écrivain est un continent noir […]. Je mets en avant la littérature de l'exil, c'est le contraire d'un enfermement." Like Kanor, Schifano emphasizes diversity and plurality, there are as many black continents as they are authors. Beuve-Méry's relatively short article gives an overview of what the collection has achieved so far ("'Continents noirs' comprend aujourd'hui près de 70 titres et a publié une trentaine d'écrivains lié à l'Afrique"), provides information about the works published the year of the anniversary, and takes care to situate the collection on the French literary scene, comparing it to Le Serpent à plumes, l'Harmattan, Présence Africaine and Dapper. Much of the article (3 of the 7 paragraphs) is devoted to the question raised by the title. Beuve-Méry integrates the critique of collection as a "ghetto," quoting Eugène Ebodé: "Elle comprend un

[24] https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2010/04/15/continents-noirs-sas-ou-ghetto_1333891_3260.html

marqueur éthique incompatible avec la littérature," and hints at authors' reluctance to join the collection ("Elle fait surtout peur à certains auteurs africains qui redoutent d'être catalogués en publiant sous cette couverture"). While Beuve-Méry isn't explicit in his support of the idea that Continents noirs is rather a "sas" than a "ghetto," he does give Schifano the longest and last word in the article, ending his piece with a paragraph meant to illustrate the dynamism and diversity of publication:

> A l'avenir, Jean-Noël Schifano entend continuer l'aventure en publiant sept titres par an, dont deux traductions, car il s'est tourné vers les auteurs africains anglophones, hispanophones ou lusophones, comme il l'avait déjà fait en 2003 avec *La Saison des fous*, de José Eduardo Agualusa.

These three articles reveal that in 2010 the question of the literary ethics of Continents noirs is far from being resolved. The anniversary of the collection contributes to drawing attention to its ambivalence, but it also raises the same questions that were present at its inauguration. Neither the content of the collection nor Schifano's defense have managed to quell the critique surrounding its racializing name. As general editor from its inception, Schifano is constantly called upon to defend his curating of the collection. I will now turn to Schifano to examine in more detail his role within Gallimard and beyond.

C. 2014-2015: Interviews with Schifano for the 15-year Anniversary of the Collection

In 2014, Schifano participates in an interview with journalist Rose-Marie Bouboutou, from the AIAC (Agence d'Information d'Afrique Centrale).[25] Schifano starts by taking stock of the long road followed by his collection, estimating that now, in its fourteenth year of existence, "est venue la saison des lauriers" for Continents noirs, noting that many of the authors published with him in the collection were rewarded by prestigious literary prizes. He refers back to the controversy surrounding the collection, but does not linger on the topic, nor does Bouboutou press him on the matter. Instead, Bouboutou shows interest in specific works published such as Tchicaya U Tam'si's complete works. This provides Schifano with the opportunity to argue for the necessity of the collection : it fills an editorial gap. Thinking back to the creation of the collection with Antoine Gallimard, Schifano argues that the French literary field was missing this enclosure until Continents noirs started: "Cette jeune et forte littérature me semblait ghettoïsée avant 'Continents noirs' ou persillée chez les grands éditeurs," he says, adding "Ma politique est de découvrir et de publier des auteurs qui n'ont pas encore été publiés, mais aussi de publier les racines de cette littérature et de relancer des auteurs qui n'ont plus d'éditeur. " Bouboutou also asks Schifano about his fascination for African literature; the questions she raises allow Schifano to speak to the history of his ambition for the collection rather than justify its existence.

This is one of the first articles published where Schifano is not presented as being put in a defensive position. The collection is not questioned, the conversation presented allows for a more substantial overview of the collection to appear, allowing interesting details to emerge, such as the following:

> Gallimard NRF-Continents noirs n'est pas la collection d'un éditeur qui reste derrière son bureau, mais de quelqu'un qui voyage avec ses auteurs, tous les sens en éveil, pour aller à la rencontre des cultures et des civilisations d'où ils sont issus. Un petit exemple en

[25] https://www.adiac-congo.com/content/entretien-jean-noel-schifano-directeur-de-la-collection-continents-noirs-chez-gallimard

> passant : dans le manuscrit de *La Transmission*, Eugène Ebodé avait écrit *« l'orage tombe »*. Les correcteurs avaient justement corrigé par *« l'orage éclate »,* mais je m'y suis opposé, car effectivement, en Afrique, l'orage tombe comme un rideau de théâtre.

Questions of language and content appear in this article in a way that they had not so far in the press. This interview suggests Schifano knows the African continent from travel and experience unlike metropolitan copy editors unaware of the abrupt way a storm happens in Africa. Behind the claim of an "encounter with cultures and civilizations" there is a claim of legitimacy.

That same year, LivreHedbo also published an interview that journalist Souen Léger did with Schifano.[26] The interview is extremely short, only three questions and answers are offered, and two of these questions concern the usual issues journalists have been bringing up in the past 15 years of writing about Continents noirs, itself a clue about the stagnation of French critique. The title of the article reveals how intertwined Schifano is with both Gallimard and Continents noirs: "Gallimard, Jean-Noël Schifano: Quinze ans de voyages en 'Continents noirs'." The starting point is the controversy surrounding the collection ("certains l'accusent d'enfermer les littératures africaines, notes Léger in his opening question) to which Schifano answers with a historical perspective on what the collection has achieved so far and how it has modified the French literary scene, opening a space for authors instead of closing them in. Léger pushes Schifano a little further, asking about the cases of Ananda Devi and Natacha Appanah: "'Continents noirs' fait-elle office de tremplin?" he asks. Schifano replies by mentioning various cases of authors who left and have returned to Continents noirs, other authors who published with other publication houses before turning to Continents noirs. Schifano highlights the

[26] https://www.livreshebdo.fr/article/gallimard-jean-noel-schifano-quinze-ans-de-voyages-en-continents-noirs

diversity of cases present in Continents noirs, ending his statement with a mention that the collection intends to publish more translations. Léger's interview therefore mainly focuses on the controversial aspects of Continents noirs, putting Schifano, once again, in a position of having to defend the collection.

The 15-year mark reveals two elements. First, that the collection still has not surmounted the critique of ghettoization perceived in its name and practices; second, that the history of the collection itself, as it builds up throughout the years, allows Schifano to draw on examples of authors participating and keeping the collection alive. As Schifano notes in his interview with LivreHebdo, "Si une collection est artificielle, elle meurt. Or, nous sommes toujours là!" While some press venues such as LivreHebdo still mainly focus on the controversial aspect of the collection, this 15-year mark shows that a shift in the attitude towards the collection is possible.

The interview Schifano gives to RFI is another example of this.[27] Not only does the account of the interview begin with a very positive portrait of the collection, but the questions asked by journalist Tirthankar Chanda focus on the content of the collection and on its editorial line. The introduction to the interview mentions the 40 authors and the 90 or so books published by Continents noirs, and signals that the books published have received, altogether, over 25 literary prizes. Chanda does ask about the title of the collection, but without putting Schifano in a defensive position: "Le nom de la collection, c'est vous qui l'avez trouvé?" Bringing about the topic of the name in this way allows Schifano to repeat his motto: "Chacun de mes auteurs est un continent. D'où le nom de la collection," he explains after saying that the team around Continents noirs, himself included, came up with the name. He adds: "Par ailleurs, au pluriel,

[27] https://www.rfi.fr/fr/hebdo/20150320-france-litterature-gallimard-continents-noirs-schifano-ecrivains-afrique

‘Continents Noirs’ traduit cette pluralité de sensibilités dont nous voudrions être la vitrine. La collection accueille à la fois une expérience purement africaine ainsi que des récits nés des migrations et de l’essaimage de l’Afrique à travers le monde.” The pluralized title means to convey the plurality of a diasporic literature. Asked to define the “ligne éditoriale” of the collection, he reiterates his objective: “La ligne éditoriale, c’est l’Afrique et sa diaspora. Je voulais que cette collection donne à voir le monde noir dans toute sa pluralité. Ce qui fait aussi l’unité de l'ensemble, c’est peut-être l’écriture anti-minimaliste des auteurs que j’ai publiés.” On the one hand, plurality (vs Africa as a monolith); on the other hand unity via an “anti-minimalist” style.

The anti-minimalist writing Schifano refers to is certainly a jab at the writing of metropolitan French authors for the past few decades, including the writings published under the genre of the Nouveau Roman (e.g Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras) and the writings that followed that literary movement. To this type of minimalist writing Schifano opposes what he often coins as the “réalisme baroque” of the authors he publishes, praising types of writing that are “poreuses, en expansion, métamorphoses, contrastes infinis.” Fifteen years after the first publications, Schifano’s discourse has developed to include a reflection on the linguistic and literary quality of the texts he publishes as well as their origins and backgrounds.

D. Hundredth Publication and New Design (2017) and Most Recent Takes on the Collection

In 2017, Continents noirs reached a new milestone, the publication of its one hundredth book. LivreHebdo took this opportunity to comment, once again, on the collection.[28] Journalist

[28] https://www.livreshebdo.fr/article/des-habits-sobres-pour-continents-noirs

Isabel Contreras traces the story of the original design of the collection and draws on comments from Schifano to attempt to unravel the meaning of the new design. The original cover, according to Schifano, is supposed to be reminiscent of a tradition that exists in certain African villages: *"*on fait couler avant son départ sur ses mains une poignée de poussière de cette roche qui sert aussi à construire les maisons. On rappelle au jeune de quoi sont faits ses fondements pour qu'il ne les oublie pas." As is the case for the title, the cover of the collection has caused Schifano a few headaches: "[il] n'a pas compté le nombre de fois où il a expliqué ce choix artistique. " Contreras hints that the new cover was designed to be more coherent and closer in style to the collection "Blanche:" "un résultat qui rappelle quelque peu au final l'habit de la 'Blanche' par ses filets, et ses titres encadrés." The design change did not seem to attract any more attention from the press than this very short article in LivreHebdo (one single paragraph). As in most articles I have unpacked so far, the spotlight is on Schifano: he explains the cover, and justifies the choice of changing the design. It is his voice that is staged in this article.

Between its 15th and 20th anniversary, the collection attracted, yet again, very little attention from the mainstream press. Two articles appeared in 2020, one in *Le Monde*, one in RFI. Journalist Séverine Kodjo-Grandvaux wrote a piece for *Le Monde* titled "'Continents noirs' en quête de lettres de noblesse."[29] The main title does not mention the anniversary, but the subtitle does: "La collection de Gallimard dévolue aux littératures d'Afrique subsaharienne fête cette année ses 20 ans." The collection is here described as geographically limited. Kodjo-Grandvaux's review confirms that despite twenty years of publications, it is still struggling with

[29] https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/01/12/edition-continents-noirs-en-quete-de-lettres-de-noblesse_6025614_3212.html

its initial issues. The article provides the customary retrospective glance at the collection, noting that it was created, as Schifano often argues, to fill a literary gap. Kodjo-Grandvaux notes that at the end of the twentieth century, Présence africaine was losing its attractivity and therefore implies Continents noirs stepped in as a more viable alternative. The competing collections and editors who are doing similar work to Continents noirs are again named.

Characteristically, Kodjo-Grandvaux uses the key word "ghetto" in her article. She briefly outlines the issue that still haunts the collection:

> Ce qui choque, en 2000, ce n'est pas que Gallimard fasse de même, mais l'emploi de l'adjectif « noir ». Nombreux sont ceux qui y voient une essentialisation, pour ne pas dire une racialisation, de la littérature. Il faut dire que pour Jean-Noël Schifano, l'Afrique se réduit à sa part subsaharienne et à ses diasporas, le Maghreb n'ayant pas sa place dans sa collection. Avec sa maquette dédiée, elle est vite perçue comme un ghetto pour écrivains subsahariens qui peineraient à accéder à la prestigieuse collection « Blanche » de la maison-mère.

The implicit hierarchy between collection Blanche and Continents noirs is rearticulated here, and the journalist provides the example of Sami Tchak who, because of the weight of the controversy surrounding the collection, decided to leave Continents noirs for Mercure de France. The rest of the article, however, seems more optimistic. Kodjo-Granvaux quotes Schifano who outlines his ambitions for the collection and attempts to describe the style of his authors. The article gives most of its space to the editor, though, as opposed to most other articles, one author is also quoted.

RFI, for the twentieth anniversary, recorded a short piece dedicated to Continents noirs[30] and called "La collection 'Continents Noirs' fête ses 20 ans." Schifano is interviewed, and reiterates the same point when asked to look back on the history of the collection: Continents

[30] https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/20200329-litt%C3%A9rature-la-collection-continents-noirs-f%C3%AAte-20-ans

noirs was created to fill a gap on the French literary scene ("'Continents Noirs' a été un propulseur de publication d'écrivains de l'Afrique et de la diaspora. Tous les grands éditeurs se sont précipités ensuite sur ses littératures qu'ils négligeaient"). Eugène Ebodé, a long-term author of Continents noirs, is also called upon by the journalist:

> Certains, au commencement de la collection, avançaient le mot de "ghetto". C'est un vieux débat. Il y a des gens qui peuvent estimer que c'est une collection colorisée ou essentialiste, explique Eugène Ebodé. Puis d'ajouter : Ce n'est pas ce que je pense et je redoute parfois que l'on veuille tout assimiler. Si les lecteurs nous suivent, c'est précisément parce que nous essayons de perpétuer cet appétit qu'ils ont de l'ailleurs, de la diversité du monde.

Ebodé's testimony, alongside Schifano's short introduction of the collection and the journalist's overview of the publications of the collection at this stage of its existence all contribute to paint a positive picture of Continents noirs. Ebodé's brief testimony is the only reminder of the controversy surrounding the collection. 2020 also marks the return of Sami Tchak to the collection, having published with Continents noirs before leaving the collection for Mercure de France and Lattès, as Sarah Tisseyre reminds us. Tchak's return to a collection he had left because of the weight of the discussions surrounding its format, in the picture painted here by RFI, seems like one of the clear signals that Schifano has finally managed to bring the collection to have a successful life of its own beyond the controversies that had been dogging it for so many years.

3. Curation and Definition of Francophone Literature by Continents Noirs

A. "Continents Noirs:" The Catalogue

One way of understanding the stakes and ambitions of the collection beyond its description by its creators and the media is to look at its curation. The total number of publications as of 2022 amounts to 124 in the span of 22 years. Continents noirs publishes on average 5 to 7 books per year, a majority of them presented as works of fiction. The collection's publications stay consistent throughout the two decades since its creation, with only slightly fewer publications during the second decade of its existence (66 books published between 2000 and 2010, 56 books published between 2011 and 2021). Continents noirs publishes relatively small numbers, the average remaining between 5 and 7 works yearly, the most works published in one year being 8 in 2010. The collection's rhythm of expansion stays consistent. On the scale of other Gallimard publications, these numbers remain small. For instance, in 2021, Gallimard as a whole put out 1,601 books (this includes all of Gallimard's collection and annexed publishing venues such as Mercure de France, Folio, Gallimard Jeunesse); the collection Blanche published a total of 101 books among those 1,601, vs Continents noirs' 5 books.

The comparison between both decades sheds light on the collection's consistency, which is in line with the fact that the director of the collection has remained the same for these past 22 years. Novels and narratives are the primary genre supported by the collection: 92 of the books published between 2000 and 2021 are described as "romans et récits." Fiction is the most popular genre in the collection, other genres are few and far between: 11 essays, 7 short-story volumes, 2 memoirs, 2 volumes of fairy tales or legends, 5 works of poetry and 2 volumes classified as "oeuvres complètes."

The catalogue points to a collection that carefully selects its publications. It publishes little but seems to support its authors through their literary career: most authors who publish with

Continents noirs publish there several times. Only 55 authors have published with the collection, indicating that authors tend to stay with the collection for more than one publication. While some authors, as noted above, tend to leave the collection after a few publications to join the "Blanche" collection or to publish with another press, some authors seem committed to Continents Noirs. Gaston-Paul Effa, for instance, has published a total of five books with the collection between 2000 and 2021; Eugène Ebodé published eight books in that same stretch of time.

B. Schifano's Vision for Continents Noirs

The first works published in Continents noirs are framed by two paratextual elements which contribute to the reader's understanding of the texts published. The first is a quote by the French ethnographer and author Michel Leiris: "L'Afrique qui fit – refit – et qui refera." The second is a text by Schifano himself as he introduces the collection to the world. Leiris' quote is situated before the beginning of the book, and Schifano's text is placed at the very end, as a postface. Both present the common feature of being authored by two French white men, established in the literary system as authoritative figures. The cover of the book (initially redish-brown, earthy tones on a white background), the title of the collection, and the quote all strive to indicate to the reader that they are about to enter an unfamiliar world, the dark continent of Africa. The two paratextual elements by Leiris and Schifano frame each published text, signaling to the French metropolitan reader a text that is marked by its ties to a different continent.

However this framing is open to criticism. Leiris presents "L'Afrique" as a single and simple entity, that can be seized and understood as such, simplifying it to the extreme. It also paradoxically is in contradiction with what Schifano is trying to achieve by pluralizing the title

of the collection; Leiris' authority is perhaps more important here than the content of the quote itself. Schifano, in his postface, begins his commentary from a Eurocentric perspective: "Un siècle entier, tout le XXe, a vu ses représentations artistiques se métamorphoser sous l'influence de la sculpture africaine." He signals the influence African art, specifically sculpture, on twentieth century European artists but the art he calls upon is only acknowledged as a source of inspiration for European artists : "Fallait-il que ces représentations culturelles fussent puissantes pour bouleverser ainsi les artistes du monde entier si durablement, et plus durablement encore tous ceux qui contempleront leurs œuvres…" Schifano's vocabulary choices establish a subtle but real hierarchy between African art and all others: African art influences European artists; the works that are subsequently created by them, however, are even more powerful, more "durable" than the source of inspiration itself. The source is coined "représentations culturelles; " the results of these sources of inspiration are "oeuvres" created by "artistes," aesthetic masterpieces vs. ethnographic items.

Schifano's opening paragraph casts African art as something to be *discovered* by the Europeans, not for its own sake but rather because it benefits European art. When Schifano writes about "notre oeil" and "notre sensibilité," he accentuates the dual opposition between an unnamed people, the creators, and the group with which he identifies, those who see and evaluate, before creating an ameliorated version of it. It also reinforces the idea that by default, the readership of the book is of his own world. Seemingly "timeless" African sculptures are disconnected from their spacio-temporal context and their (anonymous) creators whereas European artists are named and attached to specific artistic movements: "Des expressionnistes allemands aux surréalistes, des fauves aux cubistes, de Picasso à Brancusi, de Modigliani à Braque, de Henry Moore à Alberto Giacometti…"

This opening paragraph prefigures and announces the use of the word "primitive" in the second paragraph, where Schifano moves on from commentary on sculpture to commentary on writing:

> Un siècle où, en Afrique noire, l'expression sculpturale et orale a largement dominé l'avènement récent de l'écrit. Les écritures africaines, d'Afrique noire et de sa diaspora, chargées de la primitive puissance créatrice et prenant sa relève, jouent magiquement des métaphores et des métamorphoses, sont pleines de liberté, de grâce rebelle, d'invention, de force, sans joug dans les mises en mots, de cette souvent perdue en France et en Europe depuis le XVIIe siècle. Elles mêlent avec génie 'la langue de la Sévigné avec des couilles de nègre', selon le mot du Congolais Henri Lopes.

Schifano presents African writing as in infancy: writing is an "avènement," a progress forward from the oral form that is reminiscent of the "fluidité langagière et syntaxique" that was present centuries ago in the French language. It is because of its temporal proximity with "l'expression sculpturale et orale" that African writing has something to contribute to the French literary scene and that Schifano is interested in bringing it forward with Continents noirs. Writing from Africa and its diasporic African authors is more explicitly re-affirmed as a benefit to French literature in the third paragraph: "nous parions sur l'écriture des continents noirs pour dégeler l'esprit romanesque et la langue française du nouveau siècle." Schifano is here hinting at the sclerosis of the French language: it needs to be shaken out of its safe and predictable state, and Schifano turns to Africa in the hopes of injecting the French language with something new.

A dichotomy between the French reader and the "African" author is clearly maintained throughout this postface. Schifano's fascination for alternative ways of writing seems sincere (and the authors I spoke with who worked with him confirmed this) but this postface banks on exoticism to draw the attention of his readers on the text: he used the adverb "magiquement" in the previous paragraph, which is echoed in this paragraph by the reference to the "fétiches" of African literature. He reaffirms primitivism as essential: "Nous parions sur les fétiches en papier

qui prennent le relais des fétiches en bois." The second person plural contributes to reasserting that both African art and African literature only come into existence through the role played by the European artist and critique. The expression "nous parions" is repeated three times in this paragraph, driving in the point that Gallimard via its representant Schifano is hedging its bets, and capitalizing on "African" literature to rejuvenate the literary field.

This postface rapidly disappeared from the works published in the later years of the collection. I was not able to find an explanation about the decision to withdraw it from the paratextual elements of Continents noirs publication; however it is likely that in the light of the controversial aspect of the collection, this postface appeared to be adding fuel to the fire. The part of the Gallimard website dedicated to Continents noirs on the Gallimard website does not feature, even in its archives, any mention or reproduction of the postface. Schifano published other texts on that platform, but none with language quite so problematic as the one used in this postface. The text remains, however, as it was published in all of Continents noirs' books for the first several years of the collection's existence. I consider the postface as the genealogical trace of Gallimard's imagining of the collection, one that necessarily evolved with the reception of the collection and its published works.

C. Web Text Analysis

How does Continents noirs's website stage its collection? The twentieth anniversary of the collection in 2020 was an opportunity for Schifano to add a retrospective article about the collection to their webpage[31]: "Continents noirs a 20 ans!" he titles his short article. He begins with reminiscing about the creation of the collection with Antoine Gallimard and citing the first

[31] https://www.gallimard.fr/Footer/Ressources/Entretiens-et-documents/Paroles-d-editeur-La-collection-Continents-Noirs/

five publications. He refers back to an anecdote about Amos Tutuola, whose translation by Raymond Queneau was published in the first batch of books, to represent the need for Continents noirs:

> La reconnaissance des littératures africaines était si maigre que certains, bien avisés dans les milieux éditoriaux, me mirent en garde : attention, tu vas faire une boulette, c'est Queneau, sous un pseudo, qui a écrit *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse*… Eh oui !… Comment pouvait-on imaginer que pareil roman, rabelaisien, villonien, mais surtout et avant tout, né d'un coït ivre entre culture grecque et culture yoruba, comment penser que pareil roman initiatique et initiateur pût sortir d'une plume de brousse ?!...

This anecdote concerning one of the first publications of Continents noirs has almost systematically been referred to by Schifano in the various press articles analyzed above. Also repeated is the pluralization of the title of the collection. In many ways, this post reads as a reiteration of the arguments Schifano has been making in the mainstream press for twenty years. Ultimately, their rehashing seems to betray "essoufflement" and stagnation.

A retrospective glance at the publications allows Schifano to draw out the three main directions of the collection ("trois voix sont clairement établies dans nos choix"): "les découvertes," "les renaissances" and finally "les racines des littératures africaines et des afro-descendants." For each of these categories Schifano provides specific examples of texts that have been published.

One of the other main aspects that are claimed about the collection is that it is a space of literary and linguistic freedom. As the testimonies of the authors interviewed in the following section of this chapter demonstrate, Schifano does not heavily edit the authors' texts and does very few modifications to the original manuscript that authors submit: "les auteurs […] s'approprient avec une exigence singulière la langue française, l'aiment, la pétrissent, la

métissent, l'exaltent et poussent son expression sans limites géographiques ni linguistiques," Schifano concludes in the last paragraph of his post. The collection is one in which the French language is provided with a space to grow and be explored in unconventional ways. Schifano radically rejects the idea that Continents noirs adapts the texts of their authors to a metropolitan French readership:

> Ainsi se développe, dans 'Continents Noirs', une littérature non frelatée, et qui est loin de toute dépigmentation — selon la si forte métaphore d'Asya Djoulaït dans son roman *Noire précieuse* — ; une littérature qui ne se retrouve pas dans le politiquement, culturellement, linguistiquement, sentimentalement, gestuellement, sociétalement, dans le littéraire correct où, par conformisme et paresse, se dépigmentent les mots, les sujets, les styles, la respiration créatrice même. Métissages, certes. Dépigmentations, nenni !

The language used in Continents noirs, and writing as a whole, is characterized by its otherness. The collection prides itself in giving its authors "une liberté totale" when it comes to form and content. The issue with this complete freedom is that it is then expected of the authors of Continents noirs that their writing be significantly marked. The complete freedom Schifano prides himself of creating is in fact already flawed: this post betrays the expectations the collection has for its authors. Their writing should be marked by its difference, by the creation of something new and wild that will fulfill the expectations of a French readership, the creation of a type of writing that is expected not to fit in. The following section provides specific examples of why this is paradoxically an unfreedom for the authors of Continents noirs. The collection, on the one hand, creates a space for their writing to exist and be published, a "plateforme" for their work (Fabienne Kanor), but, on the other hand, it also locks them into a set of specific expectations that stifles and that contributes to the process of ghettoïsation of not only the authors but also of the writing itself.

Schifano's various testimonies and interventions about his collection, as well as the consistency of his arguments and editorial work throughout the past two decades, paint the picture of a man who is passionate about the literature he publishes. As the years go by, he has established a corpus and clarified its editorial line; however justification and legitimization of the existence and format of Continents noirs is ongoing and draws attention away from the works published. This is one of the elements that is upsetting to the authors who publish with Schifano, as the testimonies that follow confirm.

4. Perspectives from Five Continents Noirs Authors

So far, I have established that mainstream press coverage is drawn to the controversial aspect of the collection. Consequently, very little attention is given to the content of the collection and to the writing that is being published. The following section provides a glimpse into the authors' take on Continents noirs where they have published in the past, or where they are still currently publishing.

To conduct these interviews, I reached out to as many of the published authors as possible. My selection was determined by my ability to find a way to contact them; I directly contacted those for whom I found an email address, or those who had a website on which I could message them. Among the twenty or so authors I contacted, I was able to set up interviews with five authors, all of them women, and one editor. I received answers from all of the female authors I reached out to; some were too busy to talk, or did not follow up on my second and third messages, however. The only male author I was able to set up an interview with was Dr. André Djiffack, who edited the works of Mongo Beti for publication with Continents noirs.

The interviews were conducted between January and February of 2022 and followed a semi-structured pattern. I sent the authors a series of questions a few days before the scheduled interview, indicating that these were designed as guiding questions. My goal was to listen to the authors talk about their experience of publishing with Continents noirs; most questions were answered quite naturally throughout the course of our conversation conducted via Zoom. The interviews generally lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the availability of the interviewees.

I found both commonalities and discrepancies in their stories. Most of them came to the collection somewhat randomly, having tried to place their works with other publishing venues beforehand, often not being aware of the existence of Continents noirs before Schifano contacted them. All were surprised and happy to find that Schifano was willing to publish their works with only very minor corrections and modifications. Most of them, too, are hesitant about the collection itself. While Schifano himself is rarely criticized directly, authors are often critical of the ways Continents noirs is framed within Gallimard as whole.

A. Being "sur un petit nuage:" Anne Terrier Savors her Publication with Continents Noirs

Anne Terrier was born into literature: her father was Roger Giroux, a well-established translator, and her maternal uncle was no other than Edouard Glissant. While she notes that the prestige of these two well anchored men in the literary field is most likely what caused her to make her own beginnings as a writer, it seems almost natural that eventually, Terrier would publish works of her own. Terrier was born and grew up in Paris, where she has spent most of

her life. Her mother was from Martinique, but Anne remarks that for the longest time, she didn't really associate with that part of her identity. In fact, it was the process of publishing with Continents noirs, she says, that allowed her to renew her ties with her mother's roots: "pour moi la Martinique c'était les vacances. Je ne parle pas créole. Mais quand même, le fait d'être publiée dans cette collection ça m'a rattaché à ces origines," she notes. Publishing her work in such a distinctly connoted collection caused her to reconsider her own identity, an example of the weight textual framing can play not only on readership but also on authors themselves.

Terrier has always had both feet solidly anchored in a world of words: among the numerous titles she can claim, she is a journalist, a translator, a teacher, and now, having published her first book with Continents noirs in 2021, a writer. Her text, qualified as a "roman biographique," was published just in time for the French "rentrée littéraire" of 2021. Titled *La Malédiction de l'Indien,* this first work was met very favorably by its readership: it was shortlisted for the literary prize Fetkann! Maryse Condé, and sold over 1,200 copies in the first four months of its publication. Terrier is currently working on a second publication, that she thinks will be right at home in Continents noirs.

My conversation with Terrier revealed her deep respect and admiration for Gallimard as a publishing house. It was, indeed, the house that employed her father, and the house that published her uncle Glissant. The reason why she didn't even consider taking her work to Gallimard first was out of modesty: she didn't think it was even a remote possibility that her work would be accepted by the renowned press. "Quand on publie son premier livre," she noted when we began our chat, "on ne choisit pas son éditeur." She called Gallimard "le temple de la littérature," a fitting phrase to capture its pantheonizaion of the French canon, adding, as she justified why she didn't think to send a copy of her work to the house, "on n'envoie pas

n'importe qui chez Gallimard." Our conversation took different turns, but Terrier's high regard for Gallimard always seemed to pop up here and there: Gallimard is "le top du top," she added later on; she jokingly quoted her sister saying "tous les chemins mènent à Gallimard," talking about their family's experience with the press. Just as Rome was the capital of the Roman empire, Gallimard sits at the center of the French literary field.

The conversation revealed a deeply anchored respect and consideration for the old institution that is Gallimard, a respect that transferred to the collection Continents noirs because it is a part of Gallimard, as well as to Schifano as an editor and as a person. Terrier's surprise and delight at receiving a call back from Schifano is commensurate to her admiration for the publishing house as a whole. Her attitude reflects the central place Gallimard occupies in the eye of the French readership and society. Gallimard is unquestionably the best-established publishing house in France, the prestige of its Pléiade collection is a magnet, and it is still growing, as explained in the previous pages.

Terrier's account of the collection painted the picture of one happy family grouped around its core member, Schifano. I interviewed Anne Terrier in January of 2022. We talked about her literary works, published and unpublished, about her family, about the publication process with Continents noirs and her general experience with the collection. Overall, Terrier was enthusiastic about her work with Schifano, whom she affectionately calls by his first name. Terrier describes her experience of publishing with Continents noirs as the process of being welcomed into a family. She had not heard about the collection before she researched Gallimard's various collections in depth before sending in her manuscript, something indicative of the short reach of the collection itself: even Terrier, a fervent admirer of Gallimard, and a person soaked in the literary world, did not know if its existence until she started researching the options Gallimard

had to offer. Her manuscript, at this point, had been rejected by ten other publishing venues, among which Les Escales, which seemed particularly well suited to the content of her work, and more general publishing houses such as Le Seuil or Stock. She only turned to Gallimard once all those options had run out. She had two copies of her work left: she decided to keep one for herself, and to send the other one to Gallimard, and more specifically, to Schifano, targeting the collection Continents noirs. Terrier's experience with Continents Noirs seems to justify the place that Gallimard occupies on the French editorial scene. Schifano played a large role in making her feel welcomed warmly into the collection. It took just five days for Schifano to call her after he received her manuscript. The message he left on her answering machine was enthusiastic about her work, of which he had already read about 40 pages. He worked closely with Terrier to make her project come to fruition. Her work still had to be read by a reading committee, he explained to her, but he assured her that his support would certainly be enough to vouch for her, and indeed it was. Antoine Gallimard himself read her work and suggested minor changes, which Terrier was eager to include, and which did not take more than a few days. Her only disappointment was that she was not able to include two paratextual elements: a genealogical tree of the various characters (her family members) and a map of Martinique to help guide the reader through the text. These were not included because of a timing issue: Schifano wanted the book to be published in time for the "rentrée littéraire" of September 2021.

Terrier's story of the publication process was overtly positive and she clearly felt encouraged and supported. She calls Schifano by his first name (she even used Antoine Gallimard's first name when talking about him), and her tone was always warm and affectionate when talking about him. She told me of her participation in the Salon du Livre Africain, held every September in Paris, to which Schifano invited her. After the Salon, Schifano took all "his"

writers (“ses auteurs” says Anne) out to a restaurant for dinner, introducing Terrier to her fellow writers for the collection, calling them “le noyau dur de mes auteurs.” Terrier was “sur un petit nuage” and remembers the evening as a dream. “J’étais totalement scotchée par la façon dont Schifano emmenait ses auteurs,” she said, adding that he “les bichonne comme c’est pas possible.” Terrier described Schifano as “quelqu’un d’hyper affectif,” and as having a similar personality to that of her uncle Glissant (whom Schifano actually knew well): “c’est le même genre de bonhomme,” said Anne, “à la fois ouvert, accueillant, bon vivant.” She said that during that evening she had “l’impression d’entrer dans une famille.” “Il y a une ambiance de collection, il y a quelque chose quoi,” she concluded after describing her experience.

This seems to be where the small size of the collection draws its strength: a small number of authors, intimate and personal relation to the main editor who knows the authors he works with and follows their work closely, supports them and brings them together. If a family there is, however, it seems to be molded to reflect the Gallimard structure: it is a patriarchal structure where the keystone is a white man presiding over his authors (the use of the possessive pronoun by both Terrier quoting Schifano, and by Terrier herself, is one of the main indications of this power structure).While Anne clearly appreciated being valued for a her work and being introduced into the Continents noirs “family,” our conversation also indicated how aware she is of the stakes and issues of such a collection.

During our interview, I raised the question of the name of the collection. For Terrier, it seems Continents noirs is a step in the right direction. The issue of the name of the collection was clearly one that preoccupied her and that she had worked through herself as a member of the collection. She had been asked the same question by a librarian colleague of her: why lock up her work, and that of so many others, in the “ghetto” of a collection with such a name? Anne’s

answer acknowledges the issue of the collection's name, especially in the light of its counter-part collection La Blanche. Engrained even in Schifano's discourse is the acknowledgment that La Blanche is the better collection, where authors aspire to enter: when presenting Continents noirs to Terrier, Schifano proudly mentioned the names of Nathacha Appanah and Scholastique Mukusonga who both started their literary careers alongside Schifano with Continents noirs before moving on: "passer à La Blanche," in Schifano's words. Schifano himself therefore acknowledges that his collection can be a steppingstone towards the more prestigious collection of Gallimard. One of the marks of his authors doing well is their admission into La Blanche. This hierarchy is engrained in Terrier's own discourse, though she is highly aware of the power dynamic that undergirds it. "Une fois qu'on est chez Gallimard, mieux que Continents noirs il n'y a que La Blanche," she admits willingly, from the point of view of an aspiring writer. She is aware of what this means, however : "autant entre Continents noirs et La Blanche qu'entre les noirs et les blancs, c'est une question de rapport de force."

Despite the unequal power relationship between Continents noirs and La Blanche, Terrier sees the former as a positive agent of change. She provides some historical perspective to justify her claim :

> […] la collection date d'il y a 20 ans, quand il n'y avait pas grand-chose à part des éditeurs revendiqués africains ou antillais, Présence Africaine, Khartala, mais elles sont petites et restreinte à un petit cercle ce qui n'aide pas à promouvoir cette littérature. S'il n'y avait pas eu des collections comme Continents noirs, il n'y aurait pas eu un prix Goncourt comme celui de Sarr […]

Continents noirs was created at a point in time when, at least on the French editorial scene, there were only very few venues for voices such as Terrier's and for stories such as her own. Collections like Continents noirs allowed for such stories to grow in number and be recognized on the French literary scene: "c'est le nombre qui va faire une différence," she argues.

Terrier also offers an interesting perspective on the reach of the collection. According to her, it is the content of the text and not the identity of the author that should decide how and where to classify texts and authors; therefore, being published in Continents noirs means the subject matter should have something to do with Africa or the Caribbean: "si classification il doit y avoir, c'est en fonction du sujet, de la géographie du livre, voilà […] pour moi c'est selon le sujet […] pour moi c'est vraiment que ça." She provides the example of the first, yet unpublished, manuscript she wrote: because the subject matter of her fiction does not concern the geographical spaces of Africa or the Caribbeans, "je ne vois pas ce que ça ferait dans Continents noirs." Her Martinican roots are not enough, according to her, to justify that anything she writes be published in a collection such as Continents noirs.

Terrier's thoughts on this matter fit into the more general debate about classifications across the literary world beyond the realm of publishing houses. Her logic displaces the question of who should be considered what (French or Francophone, for instance) and introduces the idea that the texts themselves are what should be considered in the process of defining categories. In some ways, Terrier believes removing the identity of the author from the picture, allowing texts to speak for themselves. If the subject matter alone determines its classification, and therefore its reception, then, in a move that is reminiscent of Barthes' death of the author, the identity of its author should not determine the life that the text might take on through publication and framing.

In this context, what does it mean to be a Francophone author vs a French author? If we follow Terrier's logic, authors themselves should not be in play in these classifications. We can read Francophone texts or French texts, rather than Francophone authors or French authors. When my conversation with Terrier approached this topic, she shared her views on the concept of Francophonie. About literature from the Francophone world, she notes that the vocabulary

used reveals the persistance of an imperial mindset : “j’ai l’impression que c’est comme si on trainait encore les casseroles d’autrefois; du colonialisme, parce que tous ces pays maintenant, c’est des pays indépendants. ” She adds that the word “Francophone” itself felt contemptuous.

Terrier’s attitude towards Continents noirs juxtaposed with her negative reading of the concept of Francophone reveals the paradoxes still at play within the Francophone literary system: the very system that is attempting to open space for Francophone voices in France is the one that perpetuates the imperial conditions that suppressed those voices in the first place. Continents noirs, as Terrier noted, is a well-meaning project but it maintains a discrepancy between two hierarchized literatures, a two-way road on which Francophone literature and French literatures do not cross paths. This hierarchy is criticized a lot more outwardly by authors from the younger generation who published with Continents noirs, as my interviews with Aysa Djoulaït and Gaël Octavia reveal.

B. Sylvie Kandé on the concept of Francophone and French: “des mots piégés”

Sylvie Kandé was born in 1957 to a French mother and a Senegalese father. She was among one of the first five authors to be published by Continents noirs in its first batch of publications in the year 2000. Her work stands out from the other works published that year: *Lagons, Lagunes* is a collection of poetry. Kandé’s way of talking about Continents noirs, throughout our interview, presents echoes from my conversation with Terrier: she also calls Schifano by his first name, she calls him a long-term friend and also counts other authors from the collection as friends. Her experience with the collection confirms what Terrier told me: the collection is small, and Schifano takes individual care of the authors he publishes, as well as fosters a sense of community within that group.

Kandé explains, throughout our interview, that she has always been interested in the concept of "métissage" and its academic conceptualization; this interest drives her writing and leads her to explore and push the boundaries of literary genres. Just like Terrier, Kandé's professional life is steeped in the literary world. She is a teacher and a researcher, currently based in New York where she teaches at SUNY Old Westbury. Her academic work contributed to the opening of a conversation around "métissage." She could not find satisfying answers to the question of her identity in French literature: she recalls, at the opening of our conversation, reading Baudelaire, for instance, and being left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. Later on, as well, through conversations with Edouard Glissant, she found his approach to that notion limited: "le métissage ne l'intéresse pas car c'est le produit d'une rencontre très ponctuelle," she explains. She, on the other hand, at the start of her literary career, thinks there is much to be learned from "ces conditions individuelles qui n'avaient pas encore été explorées autant qu'elles l'auraient dû être." One notable exception at the end of the twentieth century, she argues, is Marie Ndiaye's work *En Famille*, first published by the Editions de Minuit in 1991. Kandé therefore is left with the feeling that there is a larger conversation to be had around the concept of "métissage," which triggered her initiative of organizing a conference which was held in 1997 at NYU. The conference was titled "Looking for Ariel: Discourses on/of Métissage." She followed the conference by editing a collection of essays drawn from the conference, *Discours sur le métissage, Identité métisses*, published by l'Harmattan.

It was in this context that Kandé's first book of poetry was published: "je ne pouvais pas tout y dire" she says, referring to the academic context. Both her research, her academic work, and her creative work thus developed in parallel, circling around the concept of métissage, each speaking to it in a different way. Kandé proudly stated that, when she shared her manuscript with

Edouard Glissant, he stated “il n’y a pas une sottise là-dedans,” after which he encouraged her to submit it to Gallimard.

When I asked her about publishing with Continents noirs, Kandé shared that it had been a strategic choice above all else. “Les choses se sont faites de façon éditoriale,” she says. She had the choice of publishing with La Blanche and benefiting from its prestige, but also risk that her work be lost among the hundreds of other publications of that collection; or she could publish with Continents noirs the year of its launch and benefit from the publicity that was sure to follow the launch of one of Gallimard’s new collection. Hence the “strategic” choice for her to publish with the latter.

Kandé is one of Continents noirs’ authors who transitioned to La Blanche. When questioned about her opinion on the name of the collection,Kandé starts by noting that “c’est un débat complétement dépassé” before immediately nuancing her statement: “enfin non,” she explains, “il n’est pas dépassé mais il n’y a plus de bruit autour de Continents noirs comme il y en avait avant, avec des accusations de ghettoïsation, n’est-ce pas, des auteurs africains, et d’une collection qui serait de sous-qualité.” The collection drew attention to itself in its beginnings because of its name, and away from the published texts themselves, as the press review in this chapter demonstrates. That same section confirms Kandé’s claim that the controversy around the collection has mostly died out, while the collection itself continues.

Kandé herself does not have a strong opinion on the collection itself. She considers the collection to have grown into a “label de qualité” and adds that it is “une bonne collection.” She is aware of the stakes though :

> […] je vois très bien les arguments de part et d’autre. Idéalement il devrait y avoir la littérature tout court et puis les écrivains tout court mais dans la réalité, dans le contexte

> politique et historique, c'est peut-être parce que justement il y a eu une minorisation de l'Afrique en particulier et de la littérature africaine francophone - tous ces termes-là sont piégés - peut-être qu'il était important de faire cette stratégie de marketing et de mise en avant d'un corpus qui s'est largement étendu […]

In an argument similar to Terrier's, Kandé draws attention to the historical context of the creation of Continents noirs and sees it as having worked towards the goal of opening up a market for Francophone literature. Just as she decided to publish with Continents noirs for reasons of visibility, so she sees visibility as one of the missions of the collection. In this logic, publishing with Continents noirs is a strategic choice, both on a personal and a collective level. On a personal level, it allows writers such as Terrier and Kandé to place their works within the line of sight of their readership; on a collective level, it grows the number of Francophone works published and circulating, which, it seems both Terrier and Kandé imply, is how it will earn its place on the national and international literary scene.

In this logic, then, Continents noirs is a path to showcase authors and their works; Kandé decided, however, to publish with La Blanche for her third text. She did not speak of this change as an upgrade or transition of any sort; rather, she argues that Continents noirs is not the best place to publish poetry and that her hope, by publishing in La Blanche, was to "rencontrer un public amateur de poésie;" she also notes that the style and presentation of La Blanche conforms to poetry. Schifano, she notes, is still her editor. She was satisfied with the result of her choice, noting the only drawback was that when she was with Continents noirs, she had more opportunities to talk to the press, indicating, as could be expected by the difference of scale between La Blanche and Continents noirs, that authors are perhaps less supported throughout the process of marketing their work with the former than with the latter.

Throughout our conversation, Kandé referred several times to the word "Francophone" as a "mot piégé:" a trap word, in the sense that it embodies the contradictions that Continents noirs

itself illustrates. The concept of the Francophone author is one created to frame a certain type of author, one that becomes that type (i.e. not French) once that label is created. Kandé, on this topic, refers back once again to author Marie Ndiaye who rejected the qualification of "auteure Francophone." While Sylvie herself does not completely reject it, she does not embrace it either and does not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of how she would define herself as an author. Just as she understands both sides of the controversy surrounding Continents noirs, she also considers both the advantages and the pitfalls of the development of the concept of Francophone literature. "On est pas dupe de tout l'héritage," she says, referring to the exoticism and historical hierarchy that underlies the concept of the Francophone. She also adds that she "ne renie pas ce terme," but prefers to think of the paradigm of literature written in French through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of major and minor literatures:

> […] la littérature mineure est intéressante car permet de déconstruire – écrire dans une langue majoritaire une langue coloniale pour subvertir, déconstruire, pour créer un espace particulier de subversion, d'idée, de stéréotype, de catégorie, je trouve ça intéressant comme concept […]

Kandé's comments here usher back in the question of the French language with all its variations.

Kandé's experience with Continents noirs was, as Terrier's, positive overall. Like Terrier, as well, she sees the collection as a means to an end: a means to get published and earn the recognition of a French speaking readership, a means to grow the corpus of Francophone literature and contribute to its legitimacy in metropolitan France and beyond. Both authors are highly aware of the underpinnings and the stakes of publishing within such a collection and within such a venue as Gallimard; however the importance of the work done by Continents noirs, in practice, is more important that its philosophical and philological and paratextual flaws. In other words, both women seem to see Continents noirs as the product of a system and consider

the collection as contributing to change the leftover imperial traits of the publishing system in France, rather than consider Continents noirs as a perpetuator of those traits.

C. “c’est insuffisant:” Gaël Octavia’s Verdict on Continents Noirs

Gaël Octavia was born in 1977 in Martinique where she grew up until she left for Paris to join a Classe Préparatoire aux Grandes Ecoles, specializing in sciences. Her first job was as an engineer in telecommunications; she rapidly resigned, and took a few months off, living off her savings, and getting back to what she had always loved doing: writing. Octavia describes herself as a shy, introverted person whose childhood was filled with books. “J’ai très vite trouvé refuge dans les livres,” she says, noting that it was her own numerous readings that led her to scribble down her first texts, which she would always call novels. “J’avais un univers tout à fait colonisé par mes lectures” she explains as she remembers reading all of the French classics, which she would then imitate in her own writings. She laughs as she remembers writing texts about Paris, a city she has never visited, set during the winter, a season she had never known.

Continents noirs was for Octavia a place to claim singularity. Her perspective on the controversial title of the collection where she published her first two novels evolved throughout the years. But her first reaction was one of amusement, a position that sheds a new light on the title and its role alongside the authors published under its name. Octavia sees the title as of collection as a provocation, and her understanding of it is deeply rooted in her own history. When she arrives in Paris to join her higher education cohort, she is one of the only women there, and she is the only person of color. She reacts lightheartedly to all the instances of what she calls “racism ordinaire” she encounters. Rather than experiencing her difference as source of pain, she sees it as a strength and a way to easily assert her individuality:

> […] tant que j'étais en Martinique je me sentais française, je me sentais absolument française ce qui n'était pour moi absolument pas contradictoire avec le fait d'être martiniquaise mais on est quand même éduqué dans une culture nationale, française […] je me suis rendue compte en arrivant à Paris que j'étais singulière, que j'étais autre, que j'étais vue comme une étrangère – ce qui ne m'a absolument pas dérangée […] je faisais partie des seules filles dans ma classe et j'étais la seule noire […]

Her difference, she notes, is created through the gaze of the majority which brings out her singular identity; "moi, ça me faisait rigoler," she says. Her first novel, one that never got published but that she later transformed into a short story, was about a white girl struggling with finding her identity, feeling as though she had nothing to herself. Octavia felt strengthened in her own singularity, the fact that she stood out. "[…] vous êtes un modèle d'intégration" Octavia was often told. That and other similar lines, according to her, also means: "on oublie que vous êtes noire et ça c'est bien." She had no desire to make people "forget" her race, a huge part of her identity; consequently, being publshed in a collection that reminds the reader of exactly who she is was certainly far from an issue for her. She considered it almost as a defiant claim clearly written on the cover of her book.

However, as time passed, Octavia found herself less and less amused at the title of the collection because it had dire consequences on her readership:

> le malentendu était trop fort, il y a trop de gens qui sont soit rebutés par cette collection alors qu'ils ne savent pas vraiment ce qu'il y a dedans, soit attirés par cette collection pour des raisons qui en tout cas moi me desservent car ils attendent quelque chose que moi je ne fais pas dans mes romans. Ils attendent des romans qui vont parler de l'Afrique, moi je ne parle pas de l'Afrique et ils vont attendre des romans qui en plus exposent une certaine vision, en fait qui les confortent dans la vision qu'ils ont déjà de l'Afrique. […] une partie du public qui va vers cette collection ne va pas chercher ce que moi j'ai à leur donner […] ça me coupe d'un lectorat qui serait très heureux de lire mes romans mais qui n'ira jamais vers cette collection.

The controversy surrounding the title ends up taking up too much space and impacting the readership of her work. For some authors, she notes, this is not a problem because their texts answer the expectations of the readers who look to Continents noirs for stories about Africa (she

mentions the works of Gaston-Paul Effa and Eugène Ebodé). For her and others, however, the aspirations of the typical readers of Continents noirs do not line up with what she has to offer. Her work has no chance of reaching the readers she wants to reach because of the weight of the title of the collection.

Publishing with Continents noirs took Octavia from a state of euphoria to one of complete disillusionment. During the few months after she left her job as an engineer, Octavia was very productive. She finished writing her first novel, and she wrote her first play that was taken up by stage director Greg Germain and was published a few years later. This is the launch of her literary career. She begins working on a second novel that she sends out to ten of the main publishing houses in France (Le Seuil, Grasset…). The text was rejected by all, and she is still working on it. It is her third novel that was finally published. She sends this one off, after seven years of writing, to a similar set of publishing houses.

She begins by working with the publishing house Liana Levi. Their collaboration soon comes to an end when Octavia realizes Liana Levi wants to take the book in a direction that does not suit her. She works on her text a little longer, and sends it out again, this time, among others, to Schifano directly. She receives positive offers from both Grasset and Continents noirs. Grasset wants to implement some changes. “C’est un roman qui est vraiment sur un fil” says Octavia about her text, justifying her desire to work with Schifano instead of Grasset: the editor with Grasset did not quite realize, according to her, how much work even the slightest changes would imply. Schifano, on the other hand, offers to take her text as is.

“J’étais très novice donc tout ce qu’il se passait je trouvais ça merveilleux,” she says about her first experience publishing with Continents noirs. “Je suis beaucoup moins contente du deuxième […]” she explains when talking about her experience publishing her second novel with

Schifano. About the marketing of the book, she notes : “c’est terrible – c’est à dire qu’il ne s’est rien passé, quoi.” Octavia was extremely disappointed with the lack of support she received from Continents noirs for advertising her second book. The fact that the work of marketing her first book was done poorly, according to her, was less noticeable because it received attention for being a first published novel: “si la maison se bouge pas trop, c’est pas grave,” she estimates. “pour un deuxième roman, c’est fatal.”

However, she does not blame Continents noirs itself or Schifano. According to her (and her words here echo those of Djoulaït), it is Gallimard as a whole that is to blame: “on se rend compte que quand on est un petit auteur […], qu’on est pas une star, on est très mal défendu […] Gallimard s’occupe pas tellement de ses petits auteurs.” The process of publishing her second novel with Gallimard was an eye-opening experience for her: she became aware of the internal power dynamics at play within Gallimard itself, calling it a house that “vole au secours du succès” and consequently that “c’est des gens qui passent complètement à côté de leur mission.” The experience left Octavia with some scars that blocked her writing for a while; now she is certain of it: “ce troisième roman, il ne sera pas pour Continents noirs et il ne sera probablement pas pour Gallimard.”

What my conversation with Octavia revealed, once again, is that the issues with Continents noirs exist because of the overall structure of an institution such as Gallimard. According to Octavia, Schifano’s work is a victim of Gallimard’s patriarchal power structure and has a lot of unfulfilled potential: “cette collection avec cette liberté et si elle était défendue correctement ça serait vraiment super, parce qu’elle aiderait vraiment à faire émerger des belles choses, elle le fait déjà, quand même, mais c’est insuffisant.” Octavia highly values the freedom Schifano gave her to publish the exact texts she wanted to, and she is apprehensive that she will not have the

same degree of artistic license in another collection or house. The work Schifano is doing is important but it falls victim to inequalities within the publishing house and the literary system. Blame is displaced on to Schifano and his work:

> […] je me suis beaucoup agacée de certaines réactions très hostiles que j'ai pu rencontrer parce que je trouve que c'était beaucoup de mauvaise foi […] on imputait à cette collection des défauts ou des problèmes en fait qui n'étaient pas le fait de cette collection qui sont le fait de l'organisation de la culture en France et des préjugés des acteurs culturels français […] cette collection elle essaye de résoudre ces problèmes […] on l'accuse de les créer alors qu'elle ne fait qu'essayer d'y répondre.

For Octavia, the issue is not that the collection locks its authors away in a literary ghetto, but Gallimard does not invest enough resources into marketing the collection, thereby keeping its authors in a minority, invisible status.

D. Asya Djoulaït Opts for Continents Noirs Out of Necessity: "soit on me donne une voix dans une collection controversée, soit je n'existe pas"

Asya Djoulaït was born in 1993 in France to Algerian parents, and therefore is of a much younger generation than Kandé and Terrier. Unsurprisingly, therefore, her understanding of Continents noirs is also quite different than that of the two first authors I interviewed. She bought other elements to the conversation: the questions of visibility within the Gallimard house and the scale of the French literary field, and financial questions, which had not at all been touched upon by Kandé or Terrier, whose careers are already well established and who don't have the same financial concerns as a young author.

My conversation with Djoulaït began with a review of her literary biography, as it had also with both Kandé and Terrier. All authors seem to have a need to situate themselves and reflect on the elements of their personal histories that brought them to writing. Djoulaït followed

a conventional trajectory within the French academic system for someone interested in the humanities: a baccalauréat specialized in the humanities ("bac L"), followed by two years of Classe Préparatoire aux Grandes Ecoles (hypokhâgne and khâgne), before taking on Master's in literature and becoming a French teacher. It was during her khâgne that Djoulaït had a revelation that served as her first step forward toward writing: she discovers Ahmadou Kourouma and notes that she and other French students in general "découvre tardivement dans nos parcours littéraires des textes absolument incroyables." After years of studying and being introduced exclusively to metropolitan French authors, discovering Kourouma's writing makes her realize that "il est possible d'écrire comme ça, et d'être lu comme ça, et comme ça, ça veut dire en se donnant la liberté de dire autrement, d'agencer le français autrement." Djoulaït's experience is representative of the average French student's experience: the literary texts introduced throughout middle and high school are most often metropolitan French texts, with very little space left for Francophone voices and works.

In a similar way that Terrier was not thinking about Gallimard for her publications, neither was the house a priority for Djoulaït. Once she finished writing the full draft of her first novel *Noire précieuse*, she printed out 7 or 8 copies of it and sent them to the publishing houses that "lui ont fait aimé la lecture." She gives the example of Actes Suds, l'Harmattan, and the Editions de Minuit. She does also send one of her manuscripts to Gallimard, her last one, noting her father's support because of his particular attachment to the house, and adds: "c'est vraiment pour le geste parce que j'y crois pas du tout à ce moment-là."

Djoulaït did not know of Continents noirs, so she did not specifically send her work to Schifano. But he is the one who called her back a few months later. Her initial reaction is one of doubt: after talking to Schifano she does some research on the collection and feels generally

uncomfortable about it. However, she is convinced by the argument usually put forward by Schifano: the collection spans a plurality of identities and geographies, as the pluralization of the title indicates:

> […] mais c'est bizarre, pourquoi ce nom, pourquoi cette section au sein de la maison, et pourquoi cette opposition noire et blanche. Il y a quelque chose qui me rassure à ce moment-là, c'est le -s de Continents noirs […] c'est pas juste le continent noir de l'Afrique, ça m'évoque plein d'autres choses.

Djoulaït's reluctance to enter into a collection with a controversial name and history was eventually set to the side. Her understanding of the collection and of Schifano's work now is that it is necessary: without Continents noirs, her voice would not have been heard, and neither would have many others who could not find a place for their work in other, more conventional publications houses. The same scenario presented itself to Djoulaït as to Terrier: other houses and collections, which they expected to be receptive to their texts, turned them down, whereas Schifano was overly enthusiastic about their work:

> c'est vraiment comme ça que je vois cette collection – si Jean-Noël ne faisait pas ce travail-là, qui certes est controversé, qui certes pose problème aujourd'hui en 2022, ces auteurs n'existeraient pas […] les autres maisons d'éditions sont assez frileuses quant à la publication de récits qui mélangent le français avec de l'argot, qui prennent certaines libertés […] il y a des récits qui n'auraient pas trouvé leur place sans Jean-Noël […] pour moi cette collection soit on la considère comme la mise en valeur de voix particulières, particulières avec des guillemets dans le sens où on n'arrive pas à les classer ailleurs […]

In her wording, Djoulaït emphasizes the role Schifano himself plays in bringing these alternative voices on to the literary stage, once again revealing how closely knit Schifano himself and the collection are.

Finally, she adds that the "aura" of the name Gallimard itself "rend muette toutes les interrogations" and faced with the choice between having her work published by l'Harmattan, who was asking for the rights to her work to be ceded to them for free, and Schifano's offer to publish her, she decided for Continents noirs. Schifano's attitude towards her text was also key

in her decision: intrinsic to her work, she explains on several occasions, is the fact that she wants to write alternative voices, voices that exist in the real world but that do not exist within the literary world. Actes Sud offered to publish her work but only if she modified it significantly, taking out most of the "argot" she used. For Djoulaït, this would have meant "dénaturer le texte, donner une part plus importante à la narration classique, scolaire" which was precisely what she wanted to avoid. " […] j'ai préféré accepter une collection controversée mais qui accepte mon texte tel quel" she concludes.

Djoulaït sees a structural issue in the Gallimard house as a whole rather than with Continents noirs. While she supports Schifano's work and values it, noting that she has discovered incredible works through Continents noirs since she has been working with Schifano, she takes issue with Gallimard, specifically with both the tendency authors have to leave Continents noirs for La Blanche, and the fact that, according to her, Gallimard does not give Continents noirs enough attention and space, therefore damaging the literary careers of the authors that publish there. A vicious circle is therefore perpetuated not by Continents noirs, but by Gallimard: by neglecting this specific collection, Gallimard, as a publishing house, implicitly makes the statement that the works published there are not worth the trouble of advertising, therefore causing authors, to turn to La Blanche once they have established a name for themselves within Continents noirs.

Djoulaït clearly sees the issue of Continents noirs as a structural one that reflects poorly on Gallimard rather than on Schifano and the collection itself; she understands the structural hierarchies that pervade the French literary system and sees the financial aspect of the work of an author as a major red flag and a representative issue that is indicative of a form of neocolonialism within the French literary system. The widespread issue that Djoulaït and Terrier

faced of not finding a publication niche for their work other than Continents noirs is also symbolic of the profile of those who have the power to decide what is getting published and what isn't. Djoulaït gives the general example of the various "comités de lecture," the reading committees where the decision to publish or to discard a text are made: "pas assez de racisés au sein des comités de lecture, pas assez de femmes, pas assez de jeunes."

Djoulaït herself has decided to take her next text to a different publication venue; but for her, it was a matter of escaping Gallimard and not Continents noirs: "cette question du nom de la collection, de son histoire, de son origine, n'aurait pas suffit à me faire quitter cette collection s'il n'y avait pas eu le regard porté sur cette collection au sein de la maison et la dimension d'être pas soutenue." Ultimately, she adds, "les sujets qui nous préoccupent ne sont pas du tout liés à la collection et à sa ligne, c'est vraiment toujours des questions de représentation, de visibilité, ce sont des questions de hiérarchie."

Djoulaït draws out other stakes beyond the conceptual and structural ones throughout our conversation. For her, and for Gaël Octavia whose interview follows this one, the issue with Continents noirs is very clearly one of visibility and marketing. Djoulaït laments that as authors with Continents noirs, "on court derrière la maison pour que nos bouquins aient une vitrine alors que les auteurs de La Blanche n'ont pas à le faire." Djoulaït clearly raises the issue of labor and pay. Marketing one's work is extra labor for the authors; Continents noirs, and Gallimard as a whole, adds Djoulaït "te place dans une posture de gratitude qui fait que la question financière n'arrive jamais sur la table." This, in the case of Continents noirs, is partly due to Schifano's attitude towards marketing and money in general, which, according to Djoulaït, are "des non-sujets" for him; his interests are in the texts themselves, and he goes as far as telling Djoulaït that

she shouldn't concern herself with these issues because recognition for her work might come much later, that her text will outlive her.

Djoulaït has a very different reaction to such an attitude than other authors, Terrier, in particular. Where Terrier directly expresses the gratitude that Djoulaït says is expected from Continents noirs' authors, for Djoulaït, the publication under the name of Gallimard is not enough to justify what she sees as condescension and unfair treatment. The issue of visibility has two origins: on the one hand, it comes from Gallimard as a whole who does not showcase the authors and works from Continents noirs; on the other, it also comes from politically active bookstore owners who often refuse to sell works from Continents noirs out of principle. Djoulaït told me of conversations she has had with many of them who refuse to carry any books from the collection precisely because of the controversy surrounding its title.

My conversation with Djoulaït sheds light on very different aspects of the controversy surrounding Continents noirs; she brings to the table new issues, namely the financial aspect of publishing with Continents noirs or anywhere else, and the key issue of visibility both within Gallimard and in the French literary field in genera. Kandé did mention this issue as well, but circumscribed it to her specialty, poetry. She considered the lack of visibility of her work was due not to Continents noirs' status itself, but to the status of poetry within that collection. Djoulaït's concerns reflect habitual neglect of Francophone literature on the French literary scene today: despite the multiple collections and houses whose publication lines seem to indicate an openness to Francophone literature, alternative voices still struggle to be heard, to be treated equally, and to receive the same attention as metropolitan literature.

Nevertheless, Djoulaït also makes the point that Continents noirs continues to thrive: she notes that dozens of manuscripts are sent every day to Continents noirs specifically, rather than

to Gallimard as a whole, and that authors make the choice to publish with Continents noirs despite the controversy surrounding it: “les auteurs sont ceux qui font vivre la collection,” insists Djoulaït. Schifano is willing to take risks other editors are not, and to give a chance to younger voices that do not comfortably fit anywhere else. Djoulaït calls Schifano “un découvreur de textes” whose only shortcoming is that he works for a publication house that is too big and that he often believes young authors should accept the idea that being published at all is enough of a reward for their work. “[…] le but, peut-être, c’est que les textes soient publiés, qu’ils soient diffusés,” concludes Djoulaït.

E. Fabienne Kanor’s Take on Gallimard: “une maison d’édition-plantation”

Kanor was born in Orléans in 1970 to parents from Martinique. When she publishes her first work, *D’Eaux douces*, in 2003, Kanor says she landed into a world that was completely unfamiliar to her. The questions and issues raised around Continents noirs at the time completely escaped her. The publication game was new territory for her, and she was simply happy to have the opportunity to get published. Paris itself seemed like an alien territory to her: she says that her impression of the town was that it was a space “absolument blanc.” She feels foreign to this space and to the publishing world not only through her race but also through her social status: “je ne connais personne dans l’édition parce que je viens d’un milieu social absolument pauvre, des parents petits fonctionnaires avec un tout petit revenu à la fin du mois qui savent même pas ce que ça veut dire être un éditeur.” Consequently, she realizes in retrospect that her lack of experience meant that she also did not know how to negotiate with a big house such as Gallimard, she didn’t know who to talk to about what.

She initially sent out her manuscript to six different editors in 2002, including l'Harmattan, Sépia and Le Seuil. She was not aware of the collection Continents noirs; it is Gallimard that lets her know her work has been sent to Schifano. He then contacts her with a message very similar to that addressed to the other authors I have interviewed: he loves her work and will publish it with hardly any further edits. Kanor at this point takes a closer look at the collection itself and is happy to be included in it: she likes the profile of the authors published there, she likes that they represent "des pays différents, des cultures différentes, des façons d'être noir différentes." She sees it as an excellent opportunity for her work to be published alongside the other works of Continents noirs.

Kanor observes that when her first book was published, she was living in Senegal. She came to Paris once to meet Schifano and did not feel comfortable in Paris nor with Schifano. She avoided coming back as much as possible, and this is partly why, she says, she did not immediately realize the consequences of publishing with Continents noirs for her career as a writer: "et c'est comme ça que je suis très très peu venue et que je n'ai pas vu le piège dans lequel j'étais finalement, tombée." Just like Octavia, Kanor, in retrospect, is left with the uncomfortable and bitter feeling that she had been duped.

As time passes Kanor gradually comes to experience, more and more, Continents noirs as that "piège." She sees a major discrepancy between what the collection aspires to be, the way it presents itself, and what it actually is:

> […] il y a un fossé énorme entre le son de cloche du directeur et mise en scène de cette collection-là, jusqu'à la couverture, la latérite, on est forcément ailleurs mais quel ailleurs, mettre tout le monde dans le même sac alors qu'en fait il n'y a rien de plus distinct qu'un sud-africain qu'un mauricien par exemple, donc évidemment il y a réduction, c'est une niche, donc c'est pour ça que je parle de piège […]

It is only after publishing her third work with Schifano and the collection that the weight of being a Continents noirs author really sunk in for Kanor. What she first saw as an opportunity, the fact that she was a part of a world she loved and which triggered interesting conversations that she felt concerned her directly, turned into a repetitive dance to please her audience. Her main issue was that because Continents noirs stages the blackness of its authors, she felt called to perform that blackness: "parce que quand je rencontrai le public, les publics, les questions étaient les mêmes, vous pensez quoi de ce qui se passe au Congo, jamais une question sur l'écriture, ou alors ça allait de soi que cette écriture-là devait être écriture noire." For Kanor who is then developing as an author and exploring many different ways of writing, this boxing in becomes intolerable. " […] je me suis rendue compte que les attentes étaient complètement mais décalées par rapport à ce qu'elles auraient dû être," she notes, "on attendait de nous qu'on se prononce sur des sujets qui n'avaient rien à voir avec la littérature. " As an example, she tells the anecdote of a round table she attended in Italy during a festival. She participated alongside seven other Black authors; she felt the pressure to perform an identity that she does not carry. She watched as her fellow authors embraced what she calls the game of performing blackness, but she cannot do it and ends up leaving early, telling her audience "je ne porte pas vos attentes." This was a turning point for Kanor and also marked the day she decided to leave Continents noirs. "S'il s'agit de voir un spectacle," she concludes, "je ne veux pas être le clown."

Kanor's position on Continents noirs reflects Djoulaït's and Octavia's positions, namely, that while there are issues with the collection itself, those issues can be directly linked to broader, more systematic issues. For Kanor, the questions raised around the collection are directly tied to the way race is conceptualized in France. She compares the situation in Anglophone spaces, noting that most likely, a collection with such a title would not be problematic in the Anglophone

world. What would be more problematic, she emphasizes, is the fact that it is directed by a white man from an older generation.

The fact that Continents noirs, its title and its project both gave place to such a controversy in France is indicative of a fundamental problem in the perception of race. In many ways, Kanor's arguments echo Octavia's clear cut statement "le problème, ce n'est pas que j'écris pour Continents noirs, le problème, c'est que je suis noire, c'est tout." Kanor, referring back to her candid beginnings with Continents noirs notes that "à ce moment-là, je ne vois pas où est le problème parce qu'ils ont fait de nous des problèmes." She adds, further on that "ce n'est pas la collection qui est raciste, c'est ce monde dans lequel nous vivons." The fact that people's attention is drawn to Continents noirs indicates an issue with Gallimard as a whole; the problem should not be that Continents noirs exists, but rather that Continents noirs *needs* to exist. The problem is not Continents noirs itself, the problem is that it is criticized for what it is, rather than raising a broader conversation about the very fact that Gallimard felt the need to bring it into existence in the first place.

Kanor draws a picture of a metropolitan France in complete denial of its racist present, and that consequently cannot deal with the concept of race and therefore cannot accept the existence of a collection called Continents noirs: "on veut nous faire croire qu'on est dans la post-France des blacks-blancs-beurs en fait ce qui est absolument, évidemment, une mythification totale." France is still "racisée" and "raciste" and consequently, some serious questions, amongst which those raised by Continents noirs, cannot be addressed.

Kanor's position is clear on this topic: Gallimard needs Continents noirs because of its colonial structure. She describes the house as such: it is a "maison d'édition plantation, dans un système plantationaire total avec quelques personnes noires qui sortent un peu, qu'on fait sortir

plus exactement du lot en les inscrivant dans telle modernité, ou dans tel courant ou dans tel type d'écriture." The authors of Continents noirs, and their writing, are marked by the fact that they are black and exist through this lens for their audience.

As head of this collection, Schifano himself is the target of Kanor's critique. Notwithstanding his good intentions (and, as the other authors I spoke to noted, she thinks of him as truly being well-intentioned), his identity is a problem because it reproduces a colonial model. But for Kanor, it is not just his identity as an older white man that is problematic, it is also the attitude he has towards his authors, and the discourses he holds about the collection. She mentions the preface he published in the first few books, calling it "abominable" and later on adds :

> […] dans cette grosse maison, qui est quand même une vieille maison rance, avec un monsieur qui se glorifie d'avoir trouvé toutes sortes de, ah, celle-là elle vient de tel lieu, et avec ce bagou-là vous voyez, cette gouaille-là, il est évident que ça a porté, ce n'était pas du tout son intention, ça a porté préjudice […]

Kanor paints a paternalist Schifano discoverer of exotic talents. Kanor describes Schifano as someone who "[…] s'expose beaucoup et qui se grille beaucoup sans s'en rendre compte […] c'est quelqu'un qui au fond adore la littérature mais il y a tout l'autre aspect en fait et qui fait pas du bien, qui n'a pas fait du bien à la collection."

Kanor's conclusion on the collection is that it had a lot of potential, but it did not live up to that potential. She blames Gallimard for not having invested in this collection to make it politically and literarily significant. She notes, for instance, that the change of design that happened is representative of the misunderstanding Gallimard has of its collection: the design change was not what was needed, what was needed was a complete and radical repositioning of the collection within the structure of the house itself:

> […] vu que le monde veut changer, ou a un peu changé, est-ce que nous on peut pas aménager cela, plutôt que de changer la couverture […] faudrait supprimer ces noms de collections […] arrêtons d'attaquer que la niche un peu vulnérable et voyons, attaquons tout le groupe […]

There is an overall malaise of the authors I interviewed surrounding the collection, especially among authors from the younger generation. Continents noirs, to a certain extent, provided these authors with a dedicated space for their work. However, the way the works are framed and marketed has become outdated. The question of (in)visibility is key in all of the interviews I conducted: the authors are constantly torn between their desire to be published and to exist as authors, and their lack of visibility once published.

5. Dr. André Djiffack: "le problème de fond […] reste et demeure celui de l'autonomie de la création littéraire en Afrique"

Dr. André Djiffack's experience with Continents noirs differs from that of the other authors I interviewed in the sense that he worked as an editor rather than as an author. André Djiffack's research and publications work focuses on the Cameroonian writer and political activist Mongo Beti (1932-2001); Continents noirs published three volumes, all researched and edited by Djiffack, of Mongo Beti's yet unpublished texts. These three volumes (*Le Rebelle I* and *Le Rebelle II* published in 2007, *Le Rebelle III* published in 2008) are unique within the Continents noirs collection. They are the result of Djiffack's extensive research on and gathering of Mongo Beti's various written and spoken texts. I had the opportunity to interview André Djiffack in person in February of 2022 here at the University of Oregon, and he also took the time to answer some follow up questions via email.

His extensive work and knowledge of Mongo Beti naturally led him to edit the volumes that were subsequently published by Gallimard. The tryptic of the *Le Rebelle* volumes is the result of years and years of research both in France and in Cameroon. The publication journey for *Le Rebelle* echoes that of some of other authors I interviewed. Indeed, these books struggled to find their place on the French literary scene: « J'avais envoyé par la poste mon manuscrit (version papier) de deux mille pages environ à presque tous les éditeurs français dont la plupart basés à Paris. Je croyais pouvoir négocier un contrat de publication dans des meilleurs termes à la suite des offres qui se présenteraient. J'étais naïf comme un nouveau-né", Djiffack wrote to me when I asked him a follow up question specifically about the publication of his books. Beti's political positions, Djiffack explained to me during our interview, explain the lack of interest of many French publishers. And indeed, Beti's works call out the neocolonial dynamics that structure the relation between Cameroon and France. Mongo Beti's voice, just like the voices of the characters featured in the various novels by Continents noirs' authors, does not fit the traditional categorizations found in publication houses, because it is intrinsically and unavoidably political: "les idées de Mongo Beti dérangent l'establishment français", explained Djiffack as he reviewed for me the publication process of his works. It is this political characteristic of the works published by Continents noirs that also sets this collection apart from its counterpart La Blanche.

In other ways too, Djiffack's experience with Continents noirs was similar to the previous authors' one. One of the recurring features is, in this case again, the role Schifano played in the process of bringing these books to life. Djiffack, like most of the authors I interviewed, had not at first considered Continents noirs as a place for his work: he found himself, as the others, in the position of publishing with Continents noirs or not publishing at all: "Seul Gallimard, par

l'entremise de Jean-Noel Schifano, avec pour entregent Boniface Mongo-Mboussa, répondra favorablement." Djiffack appreciated that Schifano understood the extent of the research and work poured into the books. Continents noirs was a convenient place for Gallimard to feature Mongo Beti, a now undeniably major figure of the Francophone literary scene, who published none of his works with Gallimard. Djiffack wrote that Schifano explained to him that "ce serait incompréhensible qu'un si grand écrivain, qui a vécu et publié toute sa vie en France, soit totalement absent chez Gallimard, une référence mondiale dans l'industrie de l'édition. » Schifano helped, through the collection of Continents noirs, Gallimard to acquire a canonical author who was missing in their collections.

My interview with Djiffack, while it confirmed both the characteristic of the collection to publish writers who would not have found a place elsewhere, and the predominant role Schifano plays, also led to a different perspective on the title of the collection, and therefore more generally on the definition of Francophone literature. Most of the other authors I interviewed presented a perspective that was centered in metropolitan France, considering the issues of a collection with such a name on the French literary scene. Djiffack's answer to the issue of the title was radically different. The debates about the title are not the real issue, according to him: « le problème de fond qui reste et demeure celui de l'autonomie de la création littéraire en Afrique ». The title of the collection itself, adds Djiffack, "ne me derange guère." This shift of perspective also includes a shift of responsibilities: "Il nous revient à nous autres Africains de forger notre autonomie dans l'édition, la diffusion et la consommation des œuvres de l'esprit, » according to Djiffack.

Djiffack's enormous archival work is of a very different nature than all other publications of Continents noirs. One last element draws Djiffack's situation and the situation of the other

interviewees together: the very minimal financial support he received from Gallimard itself. Djiffack indicated that most of the archival and research work was done by the time Schifano decided to bring it into the collection. Djiffack was relieved, more than anything else, that his work did not go to waste and that Schifano promoted the book and recognized his work. In an follow-up email, I asked Djiffack specifically about the types of support he received from Continents noirs, and he answered that

> Jean-Noël Schifano était impressionné par la dimension exceptionnelle du travail. Il se demandait comment jamais pu mener tout cela à bout. J'ai été aussi très sensible à mon invitation à Paris par Jean-Noel Schifano, pour le lancement du livre. […] Ces marques de reconnaissance symbolique me suffisaient largement d'autant plus que mon objectif consistait à préserver la somme de pensées de Mongo Beti produite pendant un demi-siècle (1950-2000). Imaginez le cas de figure où ce manuscrit était resté dans le tiroir... Cela aurait été un énorme gâchis, un appauvrissement certain de débat d'idées.

Djiffack also indicated that his work received financial support from various American and German institutions. He highlights, in a similar way to Anne Terrier, the importance of the symbolic support that Schifano provided, all the more important that his work (and consequently Beti's work) was shunned by all other publications houses.

6. Conclusion

Continents noirs seems to have had a consistent editorial line throughout the twenty years since its creation. It is a small collection, in terms of numbers, but because of it is tied to Gallimard, and because of the attention and care it receives from its longstanding chief editor, it appears a successful collection in terms of reach and rewards. What does this mean for Francophone literature at large? In metropolitan France, the collection certainly has an impact on the field. Some major authors were discovered by Continents noirs: Ananda Devi, Fabienne Kanor, Eugene Ebode to name but a few. The collection has not addressed two longstanding

issues: its racializing name and its inferior status vis-à-vis the collection “Blanche.” The collection has played an important role in precisely transforming the literary field in metropolitan France. It could be argued that the literary field is better off now than it was twenty years ago, in part thanks to the contributions of a collection such as Continents noirs. However, as the authors I interviewed clearly state, this does not mean that the politics and practices of Continents noirs should not be questioned to change and decolonize its dynamic.

This case study clearly points to the fact that on the metropolitan literary scene, a collection called Continents noirs is controversial, now more than ever. It also demonstrates that the issue does not necessarily lie with the collection itself. The mainstream press, in the past twenty years, has again and again taken up a line of questioning of the collection that deflects the underlying, structural issue. The reason Continents noirs is so problematic and controversial, my conversations with Terrier, Kanor, Djoulaït, Octavia and Kandé reveal, is in great part because it is part of a system that needs a collection such as Continents noirs, but does not have the appropriate space for it. Continents noirs exposes a literary system in metropolitan France still rife with racism and inequalities. Pointing the finger at the collection itself allows journalists and Schifano himself to bypass the important conversation that should be happening around a literary system perpetuating hierarchies and prejudices.

Authors published by Continents noirs have the most intimate understanding of these inequalities. One of their biggest complaints is that drawing attention to blackness distracts readers from the content of the collection, as well as, as Djiffack notes, from broader international structural issues in the world of literature. However there are profound divergences between authors as well. Kanor leaves a Black-only roundtable when she feels pigeon-holed by

the audience. By contrast, Octavia finds pride in the bold emphasis on blackness in the collection's title. Terrier, of an older generation, is the least critical and self-reflective; her position is closer to that of Djiffack's as she makes her appreciation for the work Schifano does known. On another hand, Kandé's interest in métissage and poetry bypasses dichotomies. Kanor, who emphasized her non-Parisianism and initial lack of French cultural capital, and Kandé, who lives and teaches in the US, have a critical distance that makes them the most vocal and severe in their indictment of Gallimard's shortcomings. By contrast, Octavia, who self admits to being "well integrated," has embraced blackness. Though never explicitly stated, Terrier's lineage as Glissant's niece gave her a familiarity with the world of letters and its male figures that makes her more positive. The social and economic background of each author impacts their reading of the collection and influences how much they are willing to tolerate being flagged as Black authors by the title of the collection. Their experience and ties to the literary world also impact the editorial choices they make for their works, as well as, more simply, their ability to make those choices (for many, such as Djoulaït and Octavia, Continents noirs was the only choice).

Ultimately, these authors emphasize their frustration at the content of their works being set aside because the conversation tends to revolve around the collection as a whole. In the following chapters, I dive into the content of Francophone works to continue this line of questioning. My analysis of the collection Continents noirs revealed that the metropolitan French literary field is still a racialized one. The French literary press that is Gallimard perpetuates a hierarchy between French authors who write in and about France, who are mostly white, and authors from the Francophone world who explore wider topics and are more creative with the language they use. The fact that Gallimard is one of the biggest, most profitable, most prolific

and arguably most popular publishers in metropolitan France is a strong indicator that the French literary system is still inherently plagued with its colonial inheritance. The interviews I conducted reveal authors writing with Continents noirs are highly aware of the racial politics at play within the press.

The press coverage of Continents noirs reveals that a) the authors of the collection are rarely given any space to speak up about their works or about their general opinions about their publishing press, b) that the focus of journalists is monopolized by the original controversy surrounding the racialized title of the collection, therefore obliterating the possibility for any conversation about the texts themselves. Negating both the voices of the authors and the content and form of the texts published in Continents noirs excludes from the conversation the very voices that a collection such as Continents noirs claim to highlight. It also corners the controversy about Continents noirs in a spiral that, as the press coverage shows, endlessly repeats itself, as it blocks out the discourses that have the most to contribute to the conversation. My project on the meta-literary now takes a turn toward the "meta" as embedded in representative works. As I move away from metatexual conditions of publication and authors' candid first-person interviews, I acknowledge a methodological shift toward literary analysis.

The following chapters are an attempt to identify how Francophone authors circumvent the impossibility they face of participating in the conversations that concern them the most. I argue that their texts become their main intervention space, and consequently, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 investigate the qualities of contemporary Francophone writing that reveal their authors' political intervention. My analysis of contemporary Francophone texts, including but also beyond those published by Continents noirs, aims to demonstrate that the structural issues of the

French literary field unavoidably manifest in these texts. The colonial and racialized paradigm that structures the field in which they publish haunts Francophone writers. The following chapter focuses on the figure of the mother in Francophone writing.

Chapter 3: Mothers Unhinged: How Contemporary Francophone Women Writers Hijack the Trope of the Nourishing Mother(land)

"[…] what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others."

Nicolas Abraham, *The Shell and the Kernel*

1. Introduction: Mother on the Edge of Individual and Collective Past

In her 2010 work on the Guadeloupean author Gisèle Pineau, Bonny Thomas focuses on intergenerational and historical trauma. She calls on Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," defining it a: "the unbearable transmission of memories down the family line, so powerful that they sometimes stop future generations living their stories" (25). Hirsch's own work had its roots in the psychological inheritance of the Holocaust. Thomas' recontextualization of post memory to read Pineau is the starting point of this chapter because it highlights the ongoing struggle of contemporary Francophone literature with its inheritance from a colonial world. In this chapter, I explore how contemporary Francophone writers, often women, call on the figure of the mother to represent this struggle. These writers articulate preoccupations about their own histories as writers and readers through a mother figure, thus reinvesting a literary trope with a new meaning. She embodies duality: a point of access into the past history of characters and families and a point of closure: she has the power to bar access to family histories and perpetuate trauma.

Important work on intergenerational trauma emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War to understand the ramifications of the trauma caused by the Holocaust on younger

generations. Psychoanalyst and scholar Nicolas Abraham developed in the 1970s the concept of the "phantom." His work, alongside that of Maria Torok with whom he collaborated on many pieces, were grouped and published in *The Shell and the Kernel* edited in 1994 by Nicholas T. Rand. In his commentary on Abraham's concept of the "phantom," Rand defines the stakes of this figure resulting from trauma: "[…] the phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious – for good reason. It passes – in a way yet to be determined – from the parents' unconscious into the child's" (173). Abraham developed the phantom to put into words transgenerational trauma. In this approach however, trauma is not located only within the scope of the family: Abraham's work opens the possibility to consider the transmission of trauma through several generations and even beyond the filial realm:

> Abraham and Torok's work enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past – whether institutionalized by a totalitarian state (as in former East Germany) or practiced by parents and grandparents – is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations. (Rand,169)

The work here, as the reference to former East Germany implies, is focused on World War Two and its ramifications into the following decades. Similarly, the trauma of imperialism and colonialism based on the slave trade still resonates through time and generations. A critical approach focused on trauma allows us to read contemporary Francophone works in a new light. On the one hand, they re-tell implicitly or explicitly traumatic history, and on the other they re-create a literary aesthetic that gives an identity to communities concerned. These, I argue in this chapter, are the two steps taken by contemporary Francophone women writers. I have identified a collaboration across generations and collaborative narrative patterns or voices. The chapter focuses on the figure of the mother and her role as a catalyst for these two processes of re-telling individual and collective histories and of creating a novel aesthetic.

The historical and institutional trauma embedded in the imperial moves of the Western world resonates in societies as a whole and also on a more intimate levels and on a smaller scale. The sphere of the nuclear family is where contemporary Francophone writers often feature this historical trauma, because traumatic events (slavery, rape, murder, incest) that affected these families are directly linked to colonial dynamics. A recovery of collective identity and memory past the trauma of societal colonization and its ramifications throughout time in neocolonial patterns is necessary; in contemporary Francophone works this recovery is driven by writing about intergenerational trauma that is acted out on the level of the family. For collective identity and memory to be recovered, individual identity and memory must be recovered as well. Scholar Christine Duff's work on history and memory details the link between collective and individual history:

> The word "identity" has at its root the Latin idem, (same) which implies a degree of coherence in time and space. For there to be coherence in time, the individual must have a past, a present and a future to call his or her own. […] Without a personal history, one cannot claim membership in a collective which, in turn, possesses its own past and system of historical representation. A dialectic relationship thus exists between the individual history and the collective history whereby one informs the other. (Duff 24)

Duff highlights the importance of recovering History, but also demonstrates that individual recovery also needs to take place. The nuclear family structure is both a metaphor for communities as a whole and a unit that is simultaneously affected by transgenerational trauma.

The nation-state as it developed in the nineteenth century is imaged as a unifying force, one that holds a community together and contributes to the security of its individual members. It was also imagined and instrumentalized to represent an ideal to believe in, and even to fight for. However, the imperial reality of the nation-state tells an obviously different story. The figure of the mother, similarly, is traditionally associated with nurturing care, with protection and love. These are the qualities associated with the mother and socially constructed expectations that are

still taken for granted today. In contemporary Francophone works, however, the trope of the nurturing, nourishing mother is deconstructed to highlight the traumatic nature of family history, and therefore, simultaneously, address the broader trauma that stems directly from colonization and that is still a reality today.

Contemporary Francophone writers thus invest in an alternative attention to motherly figures. They stage family dynamics in which there is a crisis between mothers and their children. Each generation represents a different take on individual and collective trauma. The mother is associated with an acceptance of the imperial status quo vs. the child is unable to sustain existing in such a world. The conflict causes an existential crisis that can only be resolved, as the examples in this chapter show, through a process of retelling histories and family stories. In this context, the tension that occurs between mother and child is both literal and symbolic of the struggle of birthing a new aesthetic and way of seeing the world. The identity struggle of the child is also both literal and symbolic of the broader struggle of a community to give itself an identity.

Rather than being depicted as the traditional provider and protector, mothers in contemporary Francophone texts are characterized by the psychological (and often physical) damage they inflict on their progeny. This is a side of the mother figure that is often underexplored, because it is an uncomfortable one that upsets expectations. Their agency, in these contemporary texts, hinges not on the support they provide as would be expected, but on an absence of support in an area where it is crucial. As their offspring struggle to deal with their traumatic inheritance, that is more of less directly associated with the status of their family, past or present, as colonized, the mother unexpectedly perpetuates the pain of this status by her absence of support. The figure of the mother stands in, physically and metaphorically, as a

barrier to recovery from trauma on community and individual levels. She prevents her children from being able to embrace their own identity. She can be silent or absent, therefore blocking the transmission of family and community histories to the next generation; this results in the identity crisis of the newer generation.

By investigating an alternative story of motherhood, contemporary Francophone writers highlight the perpetuation into present day of an imperial world order in which the (past and post) colonizing nation-state (metropolitan France) claims a narrative, a story, and people to subsume their existence under its own. Whether voluntarily or unconsciously, mothers in the texts analyzed in this chapter prevent their children from understanding and experiencing their heritage and keep them subsumed within a colonial world order. This move simultaneously prevents their own stories, and the stories of previous generations, from being recognized and acknowledged. This double repression of storylines is illustrated in the struggles of daughter figures staged in the texts featured in this chapter. The mother is therefore a symbol of the nation-state itself in an imperial world order. The knowledge she does not transmit perpetuates both historical and individual trauma that her children face.

The texts analyzed in this chapter feature a character, most often a woman, struggling with identity because of their mother's silence. An unspoken trauma generates yet more trauma, to the point where it causes psychological distress and damage that builds up intolerability. The mother's absence or silence indicates the absence of a voiced history and identity, which the narrative reflects as a struggle with identity. I argue that the role played by these absent, silent, or even destructive mothers is a metaphor for the weight of the inheritance of colonialism in the literary realm. The mother indirectly propagates trauma, passes it on to her children by refusing to address and speak of her own traumatic past. This traumatic past is often directly tied to

colonialism and its ramifications into the present day, be it a traumatic past of her own or rooted further back in the past of the family. The mother, by staying silent or by imposing silence through her absence, perpetuates the denial of forms of neocolonialism and thus allows for its continuity. Her children are shaped by this silence which equates with an acceptance of both the past and the present.

A focus on the relations between mothers and daughters and the tensions existing between them reveals the need for an alternative history and aesthetic. I take inspiration from scholar Tanya Déry-Obin who highlights how history bears on the storylines and relationships of characters in three contemporary female playwriters, Gerty Dambury, Pascale Anin and Gaël Octavia:

> Elles ne prennent pas la parole pour traduire en mots les violences de la Traite, de l'esclavage, du colonialisme, puisque leur théâtre repose sur la compréhension collective et intrinsèque de ces ravages. Ce théâtre refuse de s'inscrire dans une entreprise de dénonciation et de révision pour plutôt mettre en scène les affects lancinants, plusieurs générations plus tard, d'un épisode si traumatisant qu'il définit l'ensemble des relations communautaires. Les rapports intimes et interpersonnels des personnages des pièces restent marqués par le traumatisme collectif dont ils portent l'héritage. (134)

Déry-Obin speaks of the need to recover a collective history not simply through accusatory discourse, but also in the staging of trauma in its present forms. Their performative move is to simultaneously illustrate, embody and resolve trauma on both an individual and collective level. In the world of theater there is limited opportunity for deep dives in psychological and psychoanalytical dissection of characters' trauma; overcoming trauma happens in its direct experience and the cathartic possibility, for characters and audience members alike, to see this experience embodied in relationships. A similar move often happens in contemporary Francophone works in the relationship between mothers and daughters. This literature indirectly

stages, through this relationship, the effects of the historical trauma of slave trade and colonialism.

In her 2010 study of two of Pineau's works, *Chair piment* (2002) and *Mes quatres femmes* (2007), Thomas notes that trauma is transferred down through generations both on a cultural level and an individual one: Pineau's works bring to the forefront the fact that a societal trauma also resonates and has repercussion on smaller scales. The work of individuals in their struggles for recovering an identity need to be understood in a historical and collective context: "Pineau's meditations on individual suffering are set against the backdrop of historical trauma in the French Caribbean and she consistently underscores the intersection of social and individual histories" (Thomas 25). The manifestation of colonial original trauma ("le traumatisme de l'arrachement à la matrice originelle," writes Glissant, 148) is replayed in the private sphere of the family and individuals. Within the private sphere, the mother embodies alienation and re-creation.

In the contemporary novels by women Francophone authors, the protagonists work through a maternal absence to understand a family history that often has roots in a painful history, to unearth silenced voices and resolve deep-rooted identity issues. The absence or silence of the mother needs to be resolved for the main characters to own their stories. The drive to resolve an identity crisis propels the narrative forward, as we will see from a variety of examples from different colonial and postcolonial contexts. In this chapter I examine three novels by Gisèle Pineau, a well-established Francophone author from Guadeloupe: *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996), *Chair Piment* (2004), and *Fleur de Barbarie* (2005), as well as Animata Aïdara's first novel *Je suis quelqu'un* (2018) and Nina Bouraoui's autobiographical text *Garçon manqué* (2000). In the five narratives, the mother cannot or will not share her story or that of her family,

but she paradoxically also needs her story to be told, for her sake and that of her child's. Whereas mothers are expected to play the role of a natural transmitter of family history, the mothers under study block the communication of this story, deny children easy access to the building blocks of their identity, and force other means to be deployed for overcoming trauma. The mother is always problematic in these novels because she is an obstacle to the process of psychological healing: where she should play the role of a natural transmitter of family history, she blocks the communication of this story. In these five texts, it is the daughters, who are often the narrators and main characters of the story, who are struggling with their identities. This chapter therefore focuses on relationships between mothers and daughters. Communication between them is flawed and daughters turn to other means, such as travelling to geographical locations of traumatic events, or calling upon other family members, to overcome their individual trauma and simultaneously put an end to intergenerational trauma.

Why is the alleged "natural" conduit of transmission of identity between mother and daughter flawed in these narratives? Because the figure of the mother is tied to metropolitan France, her silence feels like an expansion of neocolonialism in the sense that her non-telling severs her progeny from their roots, maintains racism, and reproduces unequal power dynamics. As a consequence, the narrator/daughter seeks her genealogical story from other sources, she turns to other family and community members to understand where she comes from and who she is. Most often, she seeks help from other women who collaborate with her to create a family and community history that is an alternative to the mother's.

The source of Pineau's story in her autobiographical work *L'Exil selon Julia* is her grandmother's unwavering quest to escape France. In *Fleur de Barbarie*, the main character, Josette or Joséphine, bounces between France and Guadeloupe to recover her story and write her

own text, while her mother is referred to as the person who uprooted her to France as a young child before abandoning her there. Mina, in *Chair piment*, travels back from France to Guadeloupe to recover her family story and make peace with it. Animata Aïdara's 2018 novel *Je suis quelqu'un* features a similar pattern: Penda, mother of four daughters, left Senegal with three of them, tearing them away from their father and their whole lives, to bring them to France to follow the man with whom she fell in love. Her youngest daughter Estelle, ultimately finds answers when she visits her maternal grandmother in Spain. The mother's silence is given weight in each narrative with literary strategies deployed by their first-person narrators. This chapter outlines some of these strategies. I first focus on forms of absences that are portrayed in these narratives and explore the idea that these absences correspond to an absent history. Then I turn to repetitions and anaphoric patterns present in these narratives to analyze how they reflect intergenerational trauma. Finally, I consider how alternative motherhood figures are called upon to take on the roles the mother cannot embody; collaboration between these motherly figures and the main characters allows for stories to emerge and traumatic events to be overcome.

2. Writing the Absentee Mother: Colonial Patterns of Effacement

A. The Mother Absent in Death: Displacement of Family History in Pineau's *Chair Piment*

In Pineau's 2002 *Chair Piment*, Mina, the main character and first-person narrator, has an absent mother. It is the most obvious type of absence: Mina's mother Médée died when Mina was ten. This death was quickly followed by that of her father, Melchior, and then, a few years

later, by that of her half-sister Rosalia (whose own mother, Melchior's previous wife, died shortly before Melchior remarried). This dramatic and rapid succession of deaths left Mina alone at the age of 14. Her only remaining family is her other half-sister, Olga, who lives in metropolitan France and decides to send for her after Rosalia's death. Mina is thus charted over to a foreign place under the authority of Olga, who takes over the role of a mother. Mina is cut away from her family story through the death of her mother, and from her native land following her sister's command as her caregiver. At her sister Olga's home, where she lives with her husband Douglas, Mina is faced with unanswered questions from the woman who assumes maternal authority. The following dialogue, that takes place during dinner a few years after Mina's arrival, encapsulates Mina's frustration at Olga's choice to perpetuate silence:

> -Pourquoi tu parles jamais de Rosalia ? coupe Mina.
>
> Elle regardait sa sœur aînée droit dans les yeux.
>
> -Mais pourquoi tu veux que j'en parle ? demanda Olga d'un ton sec.
>
> Elle se resservit une rasade de vin.
>
> -Pourquoi on pourrait pas en parler ?
>
> -Parce que c'est le passé, voilà tout ! répliqua Olga avant de se tourner vers Douglas… Oui… Qu'est-ce que je disais… Ce matin monsieur et madame arrivent, bras dessus, bras dessous. Tu penses, Bernstein ne voulait pas les recevoir. Il les a fait poireauter dans la salle d'attente et…
>
> -C'est pas le passé ! lâcha froidement Mina.
>
> -C'est quoi, alors ? (Pineau 57)

Mina's bold claim "C'est pas le passé!" frustrates her older sister in her desire to forget her past story and stages the tension between refusal to deal with the past and refusal to talk about it. Growing up in Olga's household, Mina also ends up attempting to bury the past, until it comes back to her as an adult, in the form of her sister Rosalia's haunting ghost, who pursues her until

she resolves to unlock her family secrets. The loss from Mina's mother's death is doubled by Olga silence once she becomes a substitute mother figure for Mina.

The narrator's bold claim of reorganizing temporality ("C'est pas le passé!") is directly related to the expression of trauma. Glissant's *Le Discours Antillais* developed a new aesthetic of time rooted in both the rejection of linear narratives and in the impossibility to conform to these due to the absence of history:

> Notre quête de la dimension temporelle ne sera donc ni harmonieuse ni linéaire. Elle cheminera dans une polyphonie de chocs dramatiques, au niveau du conscient comme de l'inconscient, entre des données, des « temps » disparates, discontinus, dont le lié n'est pas évident. L'harmonie majestueuse ne prévaut pas ici, mais (tant que pour nous l'histoire à faire n'aura pas rencontré le passé jusqu'ici méconnu) la recherche inquiète et souvent chaotique. (Glissant 344)

Glissant traces back why historically and individually, the past needs to be uncovered. Where he explicitly ties trauma to colonization, Pineau offers a theory of time within literature that conceptualizes her writing of time in more intimate terms, as she explains in an interview:

> […] I tell myself that for us human beings, the present is tied to the past through our memories. We carry in ourselves forever the people we have lost, loved… moments pf joy, pain, doubt… loves that we project into the future. All times are linked, and I try to make use of this amalgam of sensations, without a very solid mechanism. I had to write this novel by weaving together periods of time, mixing them together to show a human being in his or her entirety, since we function in the present but this functioning is nourished by our past experiences. (Veldwachter 182)

Pineau's claims here echo Glissant's. They also introduce a different perspective that helps shed light on her novels. Though Pineau does not evoke colonial history and the slave trade in the same way Glissant and Chamoiseau tackle it in their theorization, her stories make it clear that this past is often the actual source of present trauma. More precisely, this past is repressed by the

mother. In Pineau's novels, the mother figure is incapable of ensuring continuity or refuses to, therefore what needs to be bridged is the break between past and present.

In *Chair Piment*, the boundaries between the world of the dead and the world of the living are blurred. Mina's psychological distress manifests in various ways, all of them escalating to the point of becoming unbearable, which triggers her return to Guadeloupe. She is a nymphomaniac, she has obsessive compulsive disorder tendencies (an obsession with numbers that appears in the text by recurring patterns of three), and, perhaps the most obvious of all her symptoms, she has visions of her sister, Rosalia, burning:

> C'était toujours après la jouissance que Rosalia faisait son apparition ; visite fugace. Rosalia remontée de ses ténèbres le 11 septembre 1998 ; jour anniversaire des vingt ans de l'incendie dans lequel elle avait péri. Nattes en couronne de feu dressées sur la tête. Visage brûlé étonné. Peau grillée. Chemise de nuit en Nylon fondue dans ses chairs. Cris muets. Rosalia, un astre déboulant de la case incendiée. Peau grillée… (13)

The direct association between climax and Rosalia's "apparition" ties Mina's sex addiction to the phantom of her past. Rosalia "fit des allers-retours entre son monde et celui d'ici" (15): she breaks down the boundaries between the world of the living and the world of the dead, manifesting as she does in the state that caused her death. Her condition is an outside manifestation of Mina's own trauma: she reflects the state of Mina's psyche. Mina's unstable psychological state is reflected in the narrative, for example, in the repetition of the nominal sentence "Peau grillée" that translates a sensory overload. Commenting on *Chair piment* in 2012, scholar Bonnie Thomas describes Mina as suffering from PTSD:

> For Mina […] the past remains very much alive and she is unable to resist its force. In effect she displays the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) where memories of traumatic events are experienced as uncontrollable, intrusive and inflicted rather than chosen. […] The trauma of Rosalia's death manifests itself for Mina in ongoing, intrusive images of her burning sister, supernatural visitations and a numbed approach to relationships that drives Mina in the streets of Paris looking for sex with anonymous men. (Thomas 29)

Thomas in her work reminds us that Pineau herself worked as a psychiatric nurse for many years while being a writer, and her insights on the mechanisms of trauma and their manifestations inform this narrative. The repetitive nature of Rosalie's apparitions points to Mina' trauma. Glissant writes that "L'accumulation est la technique la plus appropriée de dévoilement d'une réalité qui elle-même s'éparpille" (17). In *Chair piment,* this accumulation manifests through the multiplication of Mina's symptoms of psychological distress; this accumulation is both a symptom and "dévoilement" in Glissant's sense of the word, it is the catalyst that allows for the revelation of the truths from the past.

B. Collaborative Narration and The Use of Repetitions to Counter Effacement in Aïdara's Novel *Je suis quelqu'un*

The role of the mother is displaced by her colonial heritage: her voice and even her presence are effaced to the point where transmission of history and family stories becomes an impossible task. In the case of *Chair Piment,* the mother is absent in her death; absence sometimes more complex, as in Aïdara's novel *Je suis quelqu'un,* where absence is written as a form of silencing silence.

In *Je suis quelqu'un,* the main characters who carry the narrative are from different generations. The voices structuring the novel are those of Estelle, a young girl struggling with her mental health, and her mother's, Penda. In this story, absence manifests as secrecy. Penda does not help her daughter understand their highly fraught and problematic family history; her silence also means she is not able to identify the source of Estelle's mental distress nor help her through it. Penda's silence creates a void that triggers the psychological uneasiness with which Estelle struggles throughout the novel. The purpose of the narrative is an overcoming: telling a story is equivalent to recovering it. The process of storytelling does not exist in and of itself: it

comes into being through a deeply rooted need of characters such as Estelle to bridge a genealogical and existential gap by facing the negation/avoidance of their family history.

The narrative of *Je suis quelqu'un* is structured to give voice to the various characters who play a role in the missing part of family history or in its recovery. The second section, called "Les Délires," is written from Estelle's point of view. Throughout the 131 paragraphs that constitute this section, Estelle makes use mainly of the present tense, and begins almost all her paragraphs with the incipit "Je suis quelqu'un" in so many attempts to define herself. Her fragments of identity cover her present and her past, in no particular order. In the following passage, she remembers her adolescence:

> Je suis quelqu'un qui se fait ballotter par-ci par-là contre sa volonté. Ma mère chercher à me donner une discipline, mais elle est Faible, très faible. Les mains à fleur de nerfs. Trop de choses lui sont arrivées, avant et après le Voyage, pour qu'elle ait juste un brin de force. Je prends possession de toutes ses absences. Et je lui rends la monnaie de la Surprise. Surprise ! Je suis quelqu'un qui aime surprendre : j'apprends par cœur le code de sa carte de crédit. Je fais mine de voler le flingue d'un policier dans la rue. Je me choisis un paquet de cigarette pour mes treize ans, avec l'argent que ma mère m'a donné pour m'acheter un petit cadeau.[3] (Aïdara 71-72)

The mother's absence in this passage is not a physical but mental one. Her identity is constructed from silence, to the point where it becomes so unbearable that Estelle suffers a mental breakdown which is staged in "Les Délires." This passage ties together Estelle's resentment of her forced displacement from Senegal, her rebellious behavior as a teenager, and her present state of mental distress. Her use of the present tense, which is a constant throughout her "Délires," ties her present self to her past self as is embodied in the anaphoric expression "je suis quelqu'un:" whatever she describes of her past self is still true of her present self. In addition to collapsing temporalities, Estelle also displaces language, displaces French expressions. Her use

of language bears the trace of her constant underlying feeling of not belonging countered by creative escape strategies. The expression “à fleur de peau” is reinvested to read “à fleur de nerfs;” the expression “rendre la monnaie de la pièce” becomes “rendre la monnaie de la Surprise.” Certain epithets and substantives are capitalized to become emblematic of the characters they are attributed to and encapsulate their core identity. Penda is thus characterized as “Faible” and her weakness is linked to the “Voyage” which references Penda’s journey (and her daughters’) from Senegal to France. Estelle herself here is determined by the “Surprise” that punctate her life. Estelle’s use of the present tense resists linear temporality, an effect enhanced by her frequent use of nominal sentences that further remove what is described from a set temporality. The present appears as a web Estelle is trapped in and the present tense translates her psychological angst. The novel opens on this impossibility to move forward, whose source Estelle locates in her mother, and the narration stylistically mimics her running in place.

The stylistic choices in the novel are a translation of Glissant’s description of temporality. Beyond the family secret that haunts Estelle, it is colonial history that haunts the narrative structure. The roots of Estelle’s angst can be read as reaching further than the secret that eventually is revealed; it symbolizes the untold stories of colonization. The mother’s silence makes her complicit in preserving the silence around both the family secret and these untold stories. By fostering silence, she is also denying herself her story and her voice, which is the story of an immigrant from a former colony and her experience in France as an immigrant as well as her past in Senegal. It is Estelle who then takes on the role to uncover and restore her mother’s story, it is Estelle who does not accept the story that has been pre-written for her.

The absence of the mother, or her silence, is paired with a forced displacement. Female characters are separated from the cognitive knowledge of their past and from the physical

location of the events of their past, which is also the physical location of their birth and part of their upbringing. The displacement is never a choice of their own and this imposition eventually has to also be countered by these characters. Mina travels back to her home island of Guadeloupe; Estelle does not go all the way back to Senegal but travels back to her grandparents in Spain to recover what she lost as a child through the arbitrary decisions of adults.

Mansour, Estelle's cousin, faced with the silence of his own deceased mother, nicknamed La Princesse, and of his extended family, decides to travel back to Senegal to find answers to his questions about his own identity. His journey reveals that his reconnection with the motherland is not enough because of the silence that surrounds his mother's death. He writes to Estelle about the unfulfilling experience of being back in Senegal:

> Ça te semblera absurde, peut-être, que je ne me sois pas encore résigné. Pourtant je n'arrête pas de penser que le Sénégal devait être comme la Princesse: un berceau de souvenirs. J'aurais voulu que cette terre vomisse des roses et des tulipes pour moi, qu'elle rugisse d'amour. Dans mon imaginaire, elle a toujours été une lande de fruits doux, juteux. (84)

He looked to the nation of Senegal expecting it to deliver a motherly, nourishing care, associating himself with a childlike figure as the reference to "un berceau de souvenirs" indicates. He hoped his motherland would embody the qualities he was deprived of through her absence, but his trip to Senegal does not bring about feelings of protection and love he had naively associated with it. When he returns to France, Mansour is forced to face his disappointed expectations. He crumbles, sinking into a depression.

The silence of the mother figure, be it through her absence in death or through simple lack of communication, is what creates for characters such as Mina, Estelle and Mansour an identity crisis. Their past, and the past of their families, is effaced through this silence and perpetuates the impossibility of a coherent and functional historical lineage. The impossibility

for a historical "harmonie" described by Glissant is directly embodied in the silence of the mother. The effacement of colonial history by the colonizer is at play here: effacing the mother's voice, through death or silence, is a symbolic way for Francophone authors to indicate the effacement of their own family history and trauma.

As a consequence of their mother's effaced story and voice, characters' in contemporary Francophone narratives deal with forms of trauma that affect their identity and their ability to express this identity. With the exception of *Chair Piment*, the five texts I analyze in this chapter are first-person narratives. This narrative strategy allows for a specific process of recovery and re-creation: the integrity of the "I" remains in question until the past has been recovered and the silence of the mother has been countered. The first-person narrators in these texts do not conform to readers' expectations of a first-person narrator in control. Where readers expect to be guided by this first-person narrator, the authors of these contemporary Francophone first-person narratives challenge these expectations by introducing characters whose identities are too complex and unstable to be contained within the expected autonomous and self-sustained "I." The challenge opens a path for a different mode of storytelling, one in which collaboration is key and in which the discovery of the past is not simply a story but also a healing process. Authors play with the readers' expectations of the "I" of the narrator because their expectations map on to a version of the first-person narrator that is a relic of the past and a patriarchal model. The "I" in these narratives does not dominate and control the storyline but rather depends on collaboration and community to justify their existence.

The alternative use of the first-person narrative is one of the stylistic choices made in contemporary Francophone texts to counter the effects of colonial trauma on individual characters and communities. Identity destabilization is also expressed through the use of

repetitions and anaphoric patterns. In *Chair Piment*, it is a specific event that is repeated: Mina's sister manifests as a ghost at specific moments of Mina's life. In *Je suis quelqu'un*, these repetitions are stylistic as Estelle attempts to seize and understand her own identity.

In Aïdara's novel, intergenerational trauma is expressed through an anaphoric style. Estelle's work of "dévoilement" happens through an accumulation, in this case even more directly relatable to Glissant's conception: throughout "Les délires" section, Estelle's identity appears exactly as "éparpillée." It is scattered throughout time and space; it is scattered throughout the course of the 131 paragraphs of the section in which she attempts to seize, to define herself through the repetition of the formula "je suis quelqu'un." The eponymous repetition of the formula "Je suis quelqu'un" structures Estelle's "délires:" her first-person narrative guides us through the process of her mental breakdown. The trigger for this breakdown is the revelation by her father of a part of a family secret.

This section of the novel is structured around three different discourses. The first is Estelle's first-person narrative. This narrative is interrupted first by voicemails left by her cousin Dialika who lives in Italy, then by emails written by another cousin, Mansour. Dialika's voicemails translate an outsider's gaze on Estelle, but also tell us about her absence to the outside world. She lacks words for others in this section, the words are directed inwards as she goes through the formula of "Je suis quelqu'un." The formula holds an inherent paradox: it affirms identity while denying it because it is repeated 107 times throughout the passage. The anaphoric topic sentence simultaneously translates the complexity of her identity, and Estelle's struggle to understand who she is, because she is missing a part of her own story. Her anaphoric language is a "tatonnement" around an identity that she senses but cannot quite seize because of missing information. She

accumulates bits of information about herself without being able to connect them together to form a coherent whole.

Underlying Estelle's breakdown is an unnamed family secret, guarded by her mother. Estelle bears the weight of this family trauma without being aware of its origin. Penda, her mother, in keeping this secret from her daughter, acts as a protective but destructive *id*, to use Freud's terminology. Their relationship is characterized by silence and tension: as Estelle heads back to her mother's home to seek safety and help in her crisis, she wonders if they will manage to "abandonner notre combat, notre silence exténuant" (page 48). Underlying their relationship isan exhausting silence and unanswered questions:

> « Dis-moi pourquoi nous nous sommes enfuies » je voudrais dire, mais en dessous de nous il n'y a rien, juste de l'air gris, des pensées vagabondes. Je respire cette inconsistance et ma bouche souffle des mots si petits que ma mère n'entend rien. N'est grand que ce que je ne dis pas. Soudainement elle me regarde, mais tout de suite après elle me tourne le dos. « Maman, tu ne peux pas faire semblant de ne pas m'avoir vue. » (50)

The question floating through the air between both women, the elephant in the room, taints their whole relationship. Estelle cannot be seen by her mother, because seeing her, really seeing her, would imply seeing her struggle with the questions Penda does not want to answer. Penda's own trauma is unwillingly transmitted to her daughter. The gap between both women expresses what Estelle calls "notre combat," and for Estelle, reveals an inability to be what her mother imagines for her. Her mother's inability to look at her own daughter translates into an inability for her to understand her. Estelle describes in detail what her mother imagines her life should be like; the contrast between who she really is and what her life is about is therefore all the more striking. "La netteté de ses rêves est constamment mise à l'épreuve par ma réalité. Son envie de me voir rangée, confrontée à ma peur d'être cloisonnée," (63) Estelle writes.

The family trauma reaches beyond Estelle herself. In his emails to her, Mansour guides her through his own mental illness that took hold of him as soon as he returned from his first ever visit to Senegal. He is profoundly depressed and the work he is doing with a psychiatrist he mentions multiple times does not seem to be helping. At the heart of his distress, too, is the same family secret. Just like Estelle, he was forced away as a child from his place of birth in Senegal and brought to France. His mother died giving birth to him; his journey to Senegal revealed a deep silence surrounding her death, a silence that eventually silences him:

> Le silence a gagné. Il n'y a rien d'autre à dire. Ah oui: je ne fuis plus le mutisme de la planète: je l'autorise à prendre ma voix. Je lui donne chaque chose que je ne dis pour qu'il la range dans la caverne la plus secrète, dans la grotte la plus sombre et humide. (75)

The silence he found surrounding his mother in Senegal transferred to him and called for more silence and secrets. "Estelle, le passé que je ne connais pas me rend fou," he writes in his next email (87).

Estelle and Mansour both immigrated as children from Senegal to France; their displacement was traumatic in and of itself and results in a feeling of unstable identity. A family secret complicates this displacement. Both mothers are the cause of the displacement: Mansour's mother's death caused his father to leave Senegal, and Penda's love for another man than Estelle's father caused her to follow him to France. In both cases, the family secret is guarded by the mother: Mansour's mother is silent in her death, Penda remains silent, forcing her daughter first to seek information elsewhere. Aïdara's novel features characters who are cut off from their geographical and symbolic roots. The mother is an obstacle to psychological recovery from family and historical trauma in the cases of Mansour and Estelle because she is unable (psychologically or physically) to deal with her own trauma, thus perpetuating intergenerational

trauma. Intergenerational trauma is directly tied to historical trauma, as the following example of Pineau's *Fleur de Barbarie* demonstrates.

C. Intergenerational Transferals of Guilt and Trauma in Pineau's *Fleur de Barbarie*

Pineau's *Fleur de Barbarie* is an identity quest, in which the main character Josette (or Joséphine, or Jo) is the first-person narrator. Just like the daughter Estelle in Aïdara's novel, her life is marked by a series of involuntary displacements. She has no say in the decisions that take her from France to Guadeloupe and then back again. In Estelle's case, her childhood displacement fostered a form of resentment towards her mother and contributed to an identity crisis at the age of 26. Where Estelle's mother is silent, Josette's mother is simply absent, having abandoned her to a foster family as an infant, only briefly re-appearing not to claim Josette but to send her back to her own mother Théodora in Guadeloupe. Josette feels trapped by her absence of knowledge of her own story and by her mother's rejection as she travels back and forth between France and Guadeloupe, between two families and various substitute mothers. Josette struggles throughout the narrative with both her desire for recognition and acceptance from her mother and her confusion surrounding the mystery of her mother's story that includes her own abandonment. Both the mother's guilt of this abandonment and her own traumatic story are passed on to her daughter unwillingly. Pâquette's story is revealed gradually, helping her daughter deal with the weight of the trauma.

The absence of the mother, from the very beginning of the novel, is a source of conflict, worry and psychological distress, for Josette and for the other characters who have taken upon themselves to raise her. The distance between Josette and her mother is established in the very first pages in the language Josette uses to refer to her mother Pâquette. Where most other

characters are introduced in their family relation to Josette (her substitute family features Tata Michelle, Mémé Georgette, Pépé Michel, and Tonton Hubert), Josette refers to her mother, her closest biological family member, by her first name. She is introduced as her grand-mother's daughter, "sa fille Pâquette" (16). This refusal to write "ma mère" is doubled in the grand-mother's refusal to say "ma fille", referring instead to her daughter as "ta mère" (19). Neither grand-mother nor daughter want to acknowledge their biological ties to the guilty mother.

The second mention of Pâquette in the text further portrays her in a negative light: the very mention of her causes Théodora, Josette's biological grandmother, to suffer from a panic attack, an event, notes Josette, that happens five time throughout their lives together:

> "Tamère ! » Deux mots, qui, séparés, pouvaient passer pour innocents, voire même inoffensifs. Mais accolés, ils s'avéraient abominable. « Tamère ! » Leur pouvoir de nuisance était phénoménal. Et la douleur que l'association engendrait se révélait cent fois plus violente que celle qui secouait Théodora lorsqu'elle songeait que Selbonne Titus, son époux devant Dieu et les hommes, ne lui avait concédé ni dépouille ni squelette. (19)

Not only does the reference to her daughter as her grand-daughter's mother set a distance between them, it also causes the association between the grand-daughter and her mother to be a source of blame and guilt. The collage of the possessive "ta" and the noun "mère" translates distress. The character of Pâquette is reduced to this phrasal noun; because she is absent, it is her child who, forced to witness her grandmother's breakdowns, endorses the weight of the blame that is placed on the mother.

The very first pages of the narrative build up an image of Joséphine's mother as a bad mother. To her grandmother's panic attacks are juxtaposed Josette's foster family's comments on her mother. Tata Michelle qualifies Pâquette as "ta mère, la fleur du mal" and takes over the narrative completely following Pâquette's decision to take Josette away from her:

> Tu l'as vue combien de fois en cinq ans, hein ?... Trois, quatre fois… Pas davantage… Pour moi, ça compte pour du beurre. C'est comme les coups de téléphone à Noël ou pour ton anniversaire : du pipi de chat, de la fiente de merle, je me comprends. C'est une honte, oui madame. Ça équivaut à cinq ans de silence. Ni plus ni moins. Tu t'imagines ! En cinq ans ! Faut quand même être sacrément culotté… ! (23)

Michelle's tirade expands over a whole page and is directed at Josette immediately before she sees her mother again, immediately before she is to be sent back to Guadeloupe. The daughter is indirectly forced to bear the brunt of the mother's fault: just as in Théodora's discourse, Pâquette is referred to as "ta mère." Josette is also the subject of the first sentence of the passage quoted above: "Tu l'as vue combien de fois en cinq ans, hein ?" Because the mother is absent, the daughter becomes the unconscious and implicit target of deprecating discourse on the part of other family members. Of her grandmother, Josette writes that "Longtemps, aux yeux de ma grand-mère, je crois avoir représenté à moi seule une foule grouillante de questions sans réponses, aussi le fruit du déshonneur et de la honte" (17), a passage in which she acknowledges the transfer of the mother's guilt to the daughter in the eyes of those around her. If Josette bears the weight of her mother's guilt, she also bears another traumatic weight that the story gradually reveals: her sexual abuse when she was an infant.

The absence or silence of a mother figure is problematic to the following generation, as the narratives analyzed above reveal. There is something particularly painful in that silence that can be assimilated with and is perceived by the children as an unsolvable and traumatic rejection. This linguistic, geographical and physical abandonment has to be understood in a context that goes beyond the realm of the private sphere of the family. The structural and metaphorical role the mother plays in that sphere causes her silence to be particularly meaningful.

The narratives are the expression of the result of traumatic events from generations past snowballing until they are no longer sustainable. The mother is still in a position of repression

and denial while the daughter, in these narratives, psychologically can no longer tolerate the silence surrounding her own story. Breakdowns (in their various form) are the ultimate expression of a transgenerational trauma that is no longer sustainable, that the mother's generation could still sustain but that is not tolerable to the daughter. Abraham's work, Rand underlines in his commentary, demonstrates the impact of transgenerational trauma:

> In Abraham's view, the dead do not return, but their lives' unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants. […] in the psychoanalytic realm, laying the dead to rest and cultivating our ancestors implies uncovering their shameful secrets, understanding their nameless and undisclosed suffering. We should engage in this unveiling and understanding of the former existence of the dead not because we may want to appease them or prevent them from perpetrating their nocturnal pranks, but because, unsuspected, the dead continue to lead a devastating psychic half-life in us. (167)

The mother's physical absence or silence does not equate with her psychological absence of with her effacement. She carries within her stories of previous generations that are unknowingly passed down to her daughter. The difference between the mother and the daughter in the narratives of contemporary Francophone women is that the daughters are willing to engage with the underlying secrets and with the process of "unveiling."

Focusing on the silent mother and the consequences of that silence through the lens of Abraham's concept of the "phantom" opens up this discussion of transgenerational trauma and also opens up a possibility for the redemption of the mother. Psychiatric disorders are not caused by the mother herself but by the weight of trauma in different forms that have been transmitted down from one generation to the next.

> The concept of the phantom moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherited the secret psychic substance of their ancestors' lives. The "phantom" represents a radical reorientation of Freudian and post-Freudian theories of psychopathology, since here symptoms do not spring from the individuals' own life experiences but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets. […] The concept of the phantom redraws the

> boundaries of psychopathology and extends the realm of possibilities for its cure by suggesting the existence within an individual of a collective psychology comprised of several generations, so that the analyst must listen for the voices of one generation in the unconscious of another. (Rand 166)

The "cure," as Rand here puts it, needs to be rooted not only in the individual pursuit of factual truth but also in a collective deep dive that will eventually tie past generations to present ones. In the following part of this chapter, I focus on ways narrators rehabilitate the mother. Stories which stage transgenerational trauma are also ways forward into new narrative strategies.

3. Alternative Mothers: Constructing a Female Network of Solidarity Beyond and For the Mother

I have followed so far Thomas' turn to Glissant to understand how trauma can be transmitted from one generation to the next; but Thomas also reads Glissant to understand how trauma might be overcome:

> Glissant defies expectations by transforming a period of deep trauma into one that can be ultimately freeing. […] As a result of this imaginative strategy Glissant succeeds in subverting a state of historical determinism where trauma's negative effects persist unrelentingly down the generations. By insisting on the liberating possibilities of Relation – the outward-looking, free-floating approach to the past that rejects bonding to a single moment or place in time – Glissant is able to face the future with fresh eyes. (27)

Thomas here translates the idea that in the writings of Caribbean authors, trauma is indeed overcome, but what happens in this process is more than just a recovery. Glissant's "Relation" brings something new out of historical and intergenerational trauma: it brings about novel creative avenues for artists bogged down by the weight of this past. I am interested in strategies deployed by contemporary women writers that allow them do develop a groundbreaking creativity and bring to life a literary expression beyond trauma, and thus beyond the obstacle that

the mother can represent. With this in mind, I examine contemporary Francophone narration as a performative action: by narrating the story that recovers the individual and the collective past, contemporary Francophone narratives embody an artistic renewal. They simultaneously push back against a conventional, previously unquestioned narrative (that assumes a colonial version of history), while freeing voices and rebuilding the protagonists' identities. In doing so, these narratives explore new literary avenues and offer their own self-theorization.

Reading these narratives from this perspective reveals the pain and suffering of the figure of the mother herself. The process of storytelling does not only allow the latest generation of children from families impacted by colonization to overcome the traumatic past of previous generations, it also opens the opportunity for the story of the mother to be told. The silence of the mother, whatever shape it takes, is broken by the children in these narratives; this allows for the mothers themselves to be assigned a voice and a story. I have already demonstrated that the figure of the mother acts as an embodied form of continuing colonialism by cutting her children away from their collective and individual stories and roots. Her silence leaves children burdened with recovering a voice and an identity through other means. The act of transmission commonly associated with a parent is also made impossible, because the father, very often, is not present.

The absence of the father, however, is curiously not depicted as problematic; there is a discrepancy between the attitude of characters towards maternal vs. paternal absence. I interpret this double standard in two ways that both explain why father figures are rarely investigated in contemporary Francophone works. First, it is indicative of the burdensome roles that characters need their mothers to play, indicative also of the responsibilities they automatically consider their mother should endorse. The mother's absence in its various forms is an issue for her children because it is expected that she should be a caring, nurturing, protective figure to her children.

None of these nurturing roles or genealogical responsibilities seem expected of fathers, though they also presumably carry the weight of their community's history. The second reason why father figures might not be of as much interest to contemporary Francophone writers is perhaps because as women, mother figures carry not only the weight of the trauma of colonization, but also the weight of a patriarchal system that produces yet more trauma. In the following pages I shed light on why the silence or absence of the mother is portrayed as detrimental, and how the characters' quest to recover their own stories also rehabilitate the mother by shedding light on the individual traumatic events of their lives that are directly related to their condition as women.

A. From Subaltern to Postcolonial Subject: Mother and Daughter Co-constructing the Possibility for a New Poetics

In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores the figure of the subaltern with a specific focus on women:

> Women outside of the mode of production narrative mark the points of fadeout in the writing of disciplinary history even as they mine "writing as such," footprints of the trace (of someone? something? – we are obliged mistakenly to ask) that efface as they disclose. If, as Jameson suggests, the mode of production narrative is the final reference, these women are insufficiently represented or representable in that narration. We can docket them, but we cannot grasp them at all. (21)

Spivak's description of "women outside of the mode of production narrative" captures the phenomena occurring in the narratives I consider in this chapter. The mothers, in their silence or absence, are elusive or even intangible. There are the voiceless subalterns: reading them as such accounts for the weight of their silence in a way that flips our understanding of them from perpetuators of an imperialist order to the ultimate casualties of this world order. The consequence of their silence is, a perpetuation of this power imbalance; the underlying cause of this perpetuation, however, is the fact that this very world order created their silence in the first

place. The burden of responsibility, from this perspective, shifts from the mother to the child: by claiming a narrative space, the child has the possibility to counter the neocolonial dynamics replicated in their private family dynamics. The responsibility is to give the subaltern a place to speak by creating a new world order, away from imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and a patriarchy that undergirds all three, in which the subaltern no longer exists. Francophone women writers open this hope within their narratives by showcasing the collective dimension of storytelling and of processes of recovery. They do so also, more simply, by exposing the process through which the mother is cast as the subaltern and the child's refusal to let her remain in the subordinate position attributed to her. The narrators in Pineau's and Aïdara's novels fight to recover their identity; while at first glance they are not fighting *for* their mothers, their narratives reveal the mother to themselves and to the world in a process that releases the mother from her subaltern status. I propose that it effaces this status altogether by binding their stories together inextricably.

In *Postcolonial Representations,* Françoise Lionnet draws on Spivak to ask a set of questions specifically about the woman writer:

> […] *how does how does she name* herself in her own narratives? And how does she find meaning in her own experiences, and how does she understand the role of language in her effort to name these experiences? How is she constructed by the paratextual apparatus that accompanies the marketing of her book and that may well contradict this self-naming? Finally, how does she articulate her relationship to a global system (of knowledge, of representation, of capital) within which her narratives are inevitably inscribed, yet not fully contained? (3)

Not only is the process of writing a way for woman writers to dwell in these questions, seeking answers, but the narrative itself illustrates these issues on two different levels. The narrator directly embodies the process that results from wrestling with these questions; the mother, on the other hand, embodies a denial that these problematics even exist. The narrator's work is thus not

only to seek answers for herself, it is also to help the mother to start to exist in these questions, thus casting her as no longer a subaltern, but as a postcolonial subject. For the mother to emerge as a postcolonial subject, the daughter takes on the role of drawing her out of her default position which is that of the subaltern in Spivak's understanding of it. And through this narratorial work a new form of storytelling emerges, as well as a new aesthetic.

Sitting with these questions triggers what Glissant coined a "poétique forcée" in "Poétique de la relation." Glissant, writing just a few years after Spivak, defines "poétique forcée" as "toute tension collective vers une expression qui, se posant, s'oppose du même coup le *manque* par quoi elle devient impossible, non en tant que tension, toujours présente, mais en tant qu'expression jamais accomplie" (401). Glissant's definition of a "forced" or "(con)strained" poetics echoes Spivak's description of the voice of the subaltern and adequately reflects the mode of expression of the child as they attempt to force out a narrative that has been suppressed, repressed or imposed with the belief that it is simply does not exist. The emphasis of this poetic as a collective tension that exist as a lack (and therefore paradoxically does not exist) is captured perfectly in the narratives of Francophone woman writers. Their narrators, as they grapple with their collective and individual stories, exist in this paradoxical, impossible space: they exist, yet exist in the shadow of a lack of existence embodied by their mother. The narrative encapsulates this paradox and seeks to resolve it, resulting in a "poétique forcée." "Il y a poétique forcée là où une nécessité d'expression confronte un impossible à exprimer" Glissant explains as he describes precisely the position of narrators vs. their mother in contemporary Francophone works (402).

Lionnet also explores the idea of an alternative aesthetic in her analysis of Francophone works from the 1970s and 1980s and considers these works' role in creating a new aesthetic not only as a form of resistance, but also as a way to exist beyond this resistance, because resistance

is not sufficient to constitute and claim an identity: "They create new paradigms that represent, through innovative and self-reflexive literary techniques, both linguistic and geographic exile, displacements from the margins to a metropolitan center, and intercultural exchanges" (7). The contemporary works examined in this chapter continue the work described by Lionnet of creating a new paradigm for their own literature to exist. The text itself becomes both a new literature and a theory of that literature, while simultaneously engaging, through the figure of the mother, with the modalities that led the authors to the need for this new space. Glissant's notion of "poétique forcée" names a practice of literary creation that contemporary Francophone authors expand and are constantly recreating as they grapple with the various contradictions and paradoxes that characterize their identity. This is especially true for women authors, as Lionnet's text highlights.

Contradictions and paradoxes can be recast in a positive light. Lionnet crafted the notion of transculturation to account for the phenomena at work in contemporary Francophone texts. Basing her definition in Jean-Loup Amselle's work, Lionnet develops the idea that the categories used to read and understand the world are subjectively divided and do not allow for an understanding of subjects such as the narrators in these texts (nor the authors themselves). Transculturation is a way out of the dichotomies and categories that structure the ways the readers understand individuals and cultures both inside and outside academia: to the neat and convenient classification of nations, languages, and cultures, Lionnet opposes a métissage of cultures, voices, and literatures. Amselle's "logique métisse" claims that anthropology defined different areas of study to understand reality; however, reality resists this classification:

> To isolate a community by defining a set of characteristic "differences" can lead to the possibility of its territorial confinement, and its eventual expulsion. Ethnic labeling and the assignation of differences are self-fulfilling prophecies. They do not just correspond to the

> acceptance of cultural specificities, but are also correlative with the coercive affirmation of one identity […]" (Amselle quoted in Lionnet, 16)

The characters in Pineau and Aïdara's novels struggle because a separation, inherited from colonialism, is created. That separation manifests explicitly in the separation between the child and the mother, in the forms I described in the previous section of this chapter. The mother, through her absence or silence, embodies the separation because she embodies something that is not attainable, something that holds the child at a distance from part of their identity, culture and history. Various protagonists, including the mother, force their family members to exist in a world that is still colonial because it perpetuates the dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, between the insider and the outsider. Mothers seek to protect their progeny from the trauma they experience by an absence of acknowledgement of this dichotomous world order. The narrators complicate this dichotomy and reject it: their own identity is a rejection of this ontology.

Hence the importance of creating a new paradigm in the process of writing. The narrative that recovers one's story by diving into family history is never just a recovery: it re-constructs the relation between mother and daughter, between cultures that have been artificially kept separate, and therefore creates a new paradigm that acknowledges the existence of a damaging power dynamics, while simultaneously offering a new way of approaching the world. This new approach includes making room for the mother to be someone other than the subaltern she has been confined to. By opening an access to the mother, by allowing separate realms to co-exist in the family sphere, the relation to the mother is reconstructed, and, most important, her silence is broken. This happens, I argue, by the means of the creation of a collaborative network of voices. It means there should be a considerable shift on the part of the scholar approaching these texts. Lionnet writes that "[…] our task as critics, I suggest, is to describe the complex interweavings of traditions that the texts and voices of postcolonial women map out and interpret for us, and

that philosophers and anthropologists theorize and propound in their own disciplines" (15). I consider the various narratives explored previously through this lens in the next few pages. Lionnet develops the idea that these narratives are their own theory; following her lead, I attempt to listen to their voices and unpack what more the mother might represent beyond how I originally cast her; beyond categorizations of subaltern and subject; beyond categorizations of colonizer and colonized and into a collaborative and intergenerational network of voices.

Lionnet also reads the novels of Francophone women writers as sites to reconsider the universal values and structures that come from the French Enlightenment: she offers that women authors are prone to rewrite diversity as a form of anti-ethnocentriscism. She argues for the need to find "a common theoretical and ethical ground from which to argue for political solidarity without objectifying the 'other' woman, or subsuming collective goals under the banner of sameness" (Lionnet 3). I propose that a form of political solidarity and defiance of universal canons is achieved in the texts written by contemporary female Francophone authors, and that both hinge on the figure of the mother. Indeed, intergenerational communication opens spaces for the stories of yet other women to be told and allows us to understand the silence of the mother.

B. Intergenerational Narrative Co-Constructions: From Grandmother to Granddaughter in *L'Exil selon Julia*

The stories narrated by contemporary Francophone women authors acknowledge the past; this acknowledgement is most often a necessity for the narrators' survival, as the previous few pages have demonstrated. If transmission of stories and histories does not occur through the voice of the mother, other women serve as conduits to the past. The cooperation between different generations of women is ultimately how the narrators are led to shed light on family

histories. This collaborative form of storytelling allows for yet untold stories to emerge in a form of métissage, to adopt Lionnet's conception. It is a political cooperation because not only does it result first and foremost in a form of healing of the narrators' damaged selves, but it also results in a rehabilitation of silenced voices and stories – including mothers'.

Because of this collaborative and healing dimension, these narratives are not simply about recovering a lost or concealed past. They are about the interaction of the present with the past, about the engagement of present protagonists with their collective and transgenerational stories. Christine Duff analyzes the opening poem in *L'Exil selon Julia*:

> Rather than the "truth" of a given experience, it is the way in which the experience and its memory are interpreted and incorporated into the character's self that is significant. […] her self extends beyond her own lifetime, even though she does not have personal memory of time before her. […] Identity, rather than being a neat, self-contained package with clear parameters, comes out as a process, with ties to the future, to the present, and most remarkably to the past. (30-31)

Duff highlights how Pineau herself, the first-person narrative of this autobiographical work, is the point of connection between past and present; the past is present within her, even if there are elements of it that she does not see. Pineau's opening poem asks :

> Hasards de la mémoire, inventions ?
> Tout est vrai et faux, émotions.
> Ici, l'essentiel voisine les souvenirs adventices.
> Il n'y a ni héros ni figurants.
> Ni bons ni méchants.
> Seulement l'espérance en de meilleurs demains.

As Duff noted, Pineau's poem places the whole text under the sign of experience. This shifts the relationship to past facts as objective elements to be "discovered" or "recovered;" it draws our attention to the echo of the past in the present and consequently to the echo of the past in the future. In Pineau's text, the present of the narrative interacts, describes, and grapples with the past. In this section, I focus on *L'Exil selon Julia* to demonstrate that the experience of telling the narrative of the past has present and future ramifications; I show how the process of the narrative

itself contains all at once past (the content), present (the moment of narration) and future (the new poetics that emerge in the very process of the narrative).

With *L'Exil selon Julia,* Pineau writes a transgenerational narrative that ties her narrator (herself) to her grandmother Julia. The narrator cannot turn to her mother in this story because she simultaneously rejects both the past and the geographical location of Guadeloupe where that past had its stage. This is yet another example of a mother figure that buries family and collective history in the past and chooses to carefully ignore it. The mother's discourse blends into that of her husband and others of her generation:

> …Enfants! Rien, il n'y a rien de bon pour vous au Pays, disaient les grandes personnes. Antan, ce fut une terre d'esclavage qui ne porte plus rien de bon. Ne demandez pas après ce temps passé ! Profitez de la France ! […] Les Nègres suent dans les champs de cannes et ne voient jamais un seul soleil se lever sur leur vie. Les enfants s'en vont à l'école sans souliers. On connaît ni linge à la mode ni bonbons-réglisses… Mais quant à déterrer ces histoires d'esclavage, ça vaut pas la peine. Et laissez les Blancs raconter leurs affaires! Ne vous occupez pas ![4] (Pineau, *L'Exil* 28-29)

Attributed to no one in particular and thus to an entire generation, the speech seems to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Guadeloupe as well as refuse to "unbury" its history as a plantation system based on slavery. It is linked more directly to the narrator's mother as the final sentence ("Ne vous occupez pas!") is repeated by the mother several times throughout the novel, the first time on the very first page. As in *Je suis quelqu'un*, the mother's silence bypasses colonial history, chooses to leave "buried" a painful past, and in doing so creates a rupture between the daughter and her past. But rather than the healing gesture as it might be intended, it causes for the daughter an erasure of identity. It also continues the severance of the tie to the physical location of Guadeloupe, in a gesture that confirms the displacement of the family. The figure of the mother in *L'Exil selon Julia* is brought up only in this perspective, to highlight the attitude of the post-World War II generation who, after having fought alongside French soldiers, are

grateful for their new ties to metropolitan France (Guadeloupe was made a "Département d'outre-mer" in 1946, alongside Guyana, Martinique and La Réunion). In this case, the mother is willingly silent and seeks to impose that silence on her children; this silence translates as an almost complete absence of the mother in Pineau's narrative. One of the key figures of the narrator's childhood, even as she narrates that childhood, is missing. In her place, though, emerges the figure of the grandmother.

Julia, the grandmother, is indeed central to the narrative. Duff notes about her that she "[…] acts as a powerful counterbalance to the hurtful words, teaching her granddaughter about the history of slavery and abolition, and transmitting her wisdom in daily life. She effectively embodies the collective memory of her people" (31). As the narrator goes through the challenges of growing up as a black woman in a racist France, the grandmother is the one that allows for both the family and the collective history to emerge and be told. The narrator thus builds her identity by skipping a generation and connecting with her maternal grandmother.

The processes of silencing and displacement unite granddaughter and grandmother: Julia's coming to France was not voluntary; her departure was imposed on her by her daughter in an attempt to "save" her from her violent husband. The narrator is cut off from her psychological roots and history; Julia is cut off from her physical roots and from her whole world, including her husband. A collaborative form of storytelling then emerges, granddaughter and grandmother giving voice to the other as they both feel victims of the good intentions of the generation that separates them. By both dragging Julia away from her home and by refusing to speak the history of colonization, the mother (and her entire generation), despite her original good intention of removing Julia from an abusive husband, replicates colonizing moves. Julia experiences the removal as a power play that replicates colonial power dynamics: her free will is disregarded and

her daughter takes it into her own hands to decide what is best for her. It is the collaboration between the narrator and her grand-mother Julia that allows for a common history to be re-written and a literary space to be claimed by the narrator – and simultaneously, for a better understanding of the mother and her generation.

The narrator drags her grand-mother Julia (nicknamed Man Ya) away from her husband and garden: she wants to teach her to write, automatically replicating the logic that literacy is a reflection of intelligence. Instead, the knowledge worth learning, the grand-daughter gradually discovers, is of a very different nature and it is the grandmother who has the most to teach her grandchild. The child's identity gets shaped by her exposure to her grandmother and her relation to Guadeloupe is partly mediated by this almost mystical character:

> Savants, nous voulions, à toute force, lui apprendre à lire et écrire, pour la tirer des ténèbres où nous la sentions embâclée. Selon nous, poser les dires sur du papier, tracer des lettres à l'encre définissait la connaissance dans son entier, marquait l'évolution. Et là, quelques années plus tard, au bas de cet arbre, nos certitudes périclitaient. Tout notre beau savoir déboulait derrière les prunes que Man Ya voltigeait. Et soudain, nous étions parés à tout entendre, à écouter et empiler pour l'avenir. (218)

In this passage that concludes the novel, Julia has returned to Guadeloupe and is receiving the visit of her grandchildren who, in this particular moment, can be characterize as postcolonial subjects following Lionnet's definition. It is only in the combination of the presence of the grandmother standing in for alternative values and their own physical presence in Guadeloupe that this transformative moment can occur and be the genesis of the text.

The poetics of the semi-autobiographical novel restore her dignity to Julia. The determining moment at the end of the novel quoted above restores value to Julia's knowledge and consequently her voice. The form of the text and its language reflect this alternative way of being by introducing forms of collective storytelling, traces of which are present in the use of the

second person plural in the previously quoted passage. The narrative features both breaks from the traditional prose that characterizes the genre of the novel, and passages marked by orality, in which the reader has direct access to the thought process of the characters involved, juxtaposing the voice of the narrator and those of other characters:

> La pluie s'en va en petites rivières dans le dalot. Il n'y a personne près du portail de l'école. Man Ya attend. Combien de temps lui faudra-t-il attendre ? ça ne fait rien. Vaut mieux qu'elle attrape un refroidissement plutôt que ces enfants-là. Elle ouvrira le grand manteau et les prendra sous ses ailes de vieille maman-poule. Cela fait combien de temps qu'elle est debout là, toute seule sous ce képi qui couvre mal ses nattes ? (71)

In this short passage, Julia is waiting for her grandchildren to finish school so she can escort then back home through the rain. The narrator oscillates between her grandmother's viewpoint (perceivable in the first question and the use of certain expressions such as "refroidissement" and "enfants-là") and her own perspective (perceivable in the second question). This passage highlights the proximity and the intimacy that exists between the grandmother and her granddaughter. Orality reflects an internal thought process suggestive of an implicit collaboration between both women, one that continued beyond the narrator's childhood.

A few lines later, a passage in verse concludes Man Ya's reflection on the difference between the rain in France and the rain in Guadeloupe:

> Pluie et soleil
> Comme deux mains
> La droite et la gauche dans le ciel
> L'une lave l'autre
> L'une amarra l'autre en prière
> L'une tient le ventre
> L'autre soutient la tête
> Tu as besoin du soleil, de la pluie
> Comme tu as besoin de tes deux mains. (71)

Small poems such as this one are interspersed throughout the narrative and bring together the voices and perspectives of the granddaughter and the grandmother. Their collaboration, their dual voices, their double perspectives allow for the mother's silence to be circumvented and for a new "Relation," to borrow Glissant's capitalized notion, to emerge.

The narrative gradually reveals more of the grandmother's background, and accounts for her forced displacement. As it turns out, good intentions can be damaging. The mother imposes her control over bodies and their movement through space, and in parallel she controls discourse and attempts to bury history to forget colonial practices. However, her doing so is experienced and interpreted as a replication of the violence she sought to eliminate. Only by effacing Guadeloupe's past can the mother and her generation cope. A paradoxical dichotomy is established between France and Guadeloupe: rejecting Guadeloupe places the trauma of its history in Guadeloupe, while an idealized version of France has to emerge for life to be sustainable for Julia's daughter's and her generation.

Part of the mother's silence can be explained by the historical context at play. The narrator grows up shortly after World War II in which her family was deeply involved, fighting for France under Général Charles de Gaulle who, in the aftermath of the war, has become a quasi-mythical figure in France. Fighting on behalf of France makes the metropole the ultimate reference point, the ultimate positive place to reach the freedom fought for. But supporting France implies effacing Guadeloupe; the pre- and post-colonial dynamic between France and Guadeloupe cannot be considered precisely because it would put into question the belief system of the generation who fought for France.

The narrator values her grandmother, gives her a voice and a presence, by writing about her pain of being torn away from her home.In doing so she reveals the unsustainable tension inherent

in the denial of the generation of her mother. The narrative plays between prose and poetry, between French and Creole, between perspectives, which creates a space for this tension to exist, embodied in the figure of the grandmother. Julia's constant pain and disorientation while she is in France channels the pain that her daughter and the members of her daughter's generation prefer not to feel and witness. When Julia falls into a deep depression, in another imposition, the family attempts to heal her with Western medicine, wholly unsuccessfully.

The controlling role of the mother is countered by the form of the narrative itself. It is a symbolic and metaphorical recovery of the lost homeland and the stories and histories that are associated with it, but it also goes beyond an act of recovery as Pineau invests new literary spaces and explores innovative literary strategies. The narration, while technically attributed to a single narrator, upon closer analysis reveals itself as a collaboration that gives a voice and a place to Julia. Julia is illiterate, which does not mean she is incapable of telling her story. It is the granddaughter who picks up the task of translating her voice into the written word. Julia' granddaughter is not simply telling her story, which could potentially be associated with yet another form of usurpation of voice. On the contrary, the granddaughter's narrative makes space for her story, translating her voice into the written word, simultaneously highlighting the fact that Julia is not incapable of telling her story simply because she cannot write.

4. Conclusion

Expanding on his concept of a "poétique forcée," Glissant traces back the roots of the conditions of this form of writing to slavery. While his focus is on the Caribbean context, his analysis is pertinent in a broader perspective. The colonial history of France, that is, the underlying historical conditions in which the stories of Francophone women writers unfold,

simultaneously determines and explains the silence of the mother. While slavery in the Caribbean and hierarchies between colonizers and colonized are theoretically over, the figure of the mother embodies their legacy of pain and trauma. This is how Glissant describes the state of silence of the slave: "C'est que le corps aliéné de l'esclave, au temps du système servile, est en effet privé, comme pour l'évider entièrement, de la parole. S'exprimer est non seulement interdit, mais comme impossible à envisager" (405). Mother figures perpetuate this alienation of body and voice but daughters refuse its being passed down to them, a trigger of much psychological distress. By refusing it for themselves, they also refuse it for their mother. By speaking up, they recover their history, they imagine a new way of being in the world, they create a new aesthetic, and in the end they draw the mother out of a (quasi) imperial paradigm in which she had no voice.

Contemporary Francophone writers are aware of the racialized and neocolonial dynamics in which their writing exists in metropolitan France; they are also aware of the ways the inheritance of colonialism and imperialism shape their lives and the lives of their family members. Their response to an oppressive literary system develops within their texts: they call, for instance, on the figure of the mother to represent the structural impasse in which they find themselves. Allying both a literal and metaphorical reading of the figure of the mother allows Francophone writers to draw attention to the neocolonial structures of the system in which they publish. But Francophone authors also re-write the literary conventions that are obstacles to their free expression. In the next two chapters of this dissertation, I explore how contemporary Francophone writers re-invest the genre of the novel (Chapter 4), and transform the French language itself (Chapter 5).

Chapter 4: Contemporary Francophone Writers Craft a New Origin Story for the Novel: Beyond Individual and Colonial Structures

1. Perspectives on the Novel

The genre of the novel has its origins in the epic and in the romance; originally considered a sub-genre, not worthy of being classified as literary, it evolved throughout the centuries to become one of the most well-established and respected genres in which fiction is written. Today, a lengthy work of fiction is usually classified as a novel by publishing houses; most literary prizes awarded to works of fiction target specifically novels. The rise of the novel as a prominent genre can be traced back to the rise of the nation-state. In the context of Francophone works, derived from many different geographical locations with varying colonial and postcolonial ties to the nation-state that is France, the concept of the novel is embedded within the history of colonialism. This chapter examines how contemporary Francophone authors contend with the genre of the novel and re-invent a history for it. In this first part I briefly outline the history of the novel as it is intertwined with the concept of the nation-state, and highlight the role of the narrator in maintaining this concept in the novel.

A. Progression and Narrative in the Novel

Benedict Anderson's 1983 work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* characterized the genre of the novel as being caught between the decline of religious communities as organizers of society and the rise of national projects and ideologies. The novel as the genre that contemporary readers recognize emerged at this crux in history: "[…] in Western Europe the eighteenth-century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought" (415). The concept of the nation and the political and

social organization that is the nation-state emerge at a historical moment, driven in part by the writers and philosophers of Enlightenment era, when the overarching dominance of "religious modes of thought" are destabilized. A displacement of faith is operated: meaning shifts to become embodied in the nation as opposed to religion. There is no disappearance of the religious as such; rather, it is subsumed into nationalism. The balance between different parts of communities' identity shifts to a primary identification with the nation.

The novel is a form that both responds to and participates in creating this new world organization. The novelty of the nation-state and the rise of nationalism and national identity are forming alongside a monolingual ideology in which languages become tied to a singular nation-state, crystalizing the equation between nation, language and culture that persists to this day. The nation-state thus simultaneously appropriates both language and literature; the novel becomes the mode of expression through which stories of becoming a nation as a community and forming a national identity are expressed in linear narrative.

Anderson's work pinpoints the newspaper and the novel as the sites that allow for an imagining of the new community that is the nation-state. The novel, specifically, allows for simultaneous and seemingly disconnected events to take place, tied together by the consciousness of the reader who approaches the novel as a social, continuous space: "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (423) Simultaneity of events also implies meaning and progression; if several events can occur at the same time, if several characters can *be* at the same time, the orchestration of this simultaneity becomes key to constructing meaning throughout the novel. Bridging the gap that apparently exists between disconnected people and events mirrors the role that the imagining

and conceptual construction of the nation plays in Western societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And it is the narrator who, in the case of the novel, plays the role of connector, but it is the leap in the reader's imagination that collaborates in the creation of a continuous world in which separate events or characters are connected in meaningful ways, even if they themselves are not aware of it. Disconnections are smoothed over in the reader's imagination by two key elements: the progression of the narrative and the narrative itself. The progression of the narrative is controlled by the narrator; temporality is ultimately also controlled by the narrator.

The reader imagines the world of the novel as continuous through linearity and the narratorial voice. But it takes a leap of faith on the part of the writer as well. The reader projects themselves into the imagined community of the novel, and the novelist writes the imagined community of the readers into the narrative. Anderson's comments on the opening of the 1887 Filipino novel *Noli Me Tangere* accurately describes writers' leap of faith: "While Rizal has not the faintest idea of his readers' individual identities, he writes to them with an ironical intimacy, as though their relationships with each other are not to the smallest degree problematic" (424). The author, through the narrator, connects readers with one another through the imagined community of the nation.

The form of the novel and its constitution as an established and respected genre (as opposed to its bad reputation until the eighteenth-century) participate in the emergence of a consciousness of the nation-state in civil imaginings, as Anderson demonstrates. Language also plays a role ushering literature into this new ideology that is nationalism. As languages are claimed in the context of national ideologies, literary works, by default, also become nationalized, and, naturally, the writer becomes a participant in this process. The Romantics

throughout Europe are perhaps the epitome of this transformation of the literary scene: many were directly involved in politics and both their prose and poetry alike become marked with this characteristic. The narrator of the novel, in this context emerges as either a fully aware, omniscient voice, that controls the story through the selection of events that is made, or as a first-person voice, an inheritance of the *Bildungroman*, whose subjectivity develops within a fixed world through which the "I" moves. The figure of the hero, despite the evolution of the literary field, persists as the condition for community imagining: the hero of the novel is a "solitary hero" who "is juxtaposed to a socioscape described in careful, *general* detail" (426). The "solitary hero," be they represented by the third-person narrator or through a focalized narration, is the key to forming this imagined community that is the nation. Because they become reincarnated in the genre of the novel, the novel becomes the main conduit for forming this imagined community.

B. Seeking a New "Totality"

In a similar move to Anderson, Lukacs' work underlines the societal and spiritual transition that leads to the novel emerging as a new genre. The novel emerges as a response, or perhaps as a consequence of, the Enlightenment era. Commenting on literary developments as a whole, Lukacs writes that "The genre-creating principle which is meant here does not imply any change in mentality; rather, it forces the same mentality to turn toward a new aim which is essentially different from the old one" (185). The "new aim" of the emerging genre of the novel in the eighteenth century is a reconstruction of the "imagined community" that the principles of the Enlightenment era have upset. The "imagined community," throughout Europe, which had for centuries been based in religion and faith, suddenly sees that base questioned and rejected in the name of science and reason. The need for meaning, drive and direction, which had been

identified with religious communities, do not disappear within societies; the Enlightenment era, however, as it debunked superstition (Voltaire's "l'infâme") and attacked institutionalized religions, weakened the spiritual force of religion leaving a gap where meaning was for most communities, a gap where religion used to play the role of community binding and structuring. The concept of the nation-state gradually emerges to fill that gap; European societies gradually, throughout the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, move towards a society that is anchored in nationalism and provides individuals with a new sense of identity. This radical shift also impacts literature, and in parallel to the nation-state the genre of the novel emerges.

This is a simplified understanding of the origins of both nationalism and the genre of the novel. The process happened over the course of decades. The genre of the novel is inherited from the genre of the epic. Lukacs traces the novel back specifically to German Romanticism: its shift towards individual and personal histories as a respectable point of focus of the novel is transformative. Lukacs insists on the importance of the biographical form that is key to the novel: "In the biographical form, the unfulfillable, sentimental striving both for the immediate unity of life and for a completely rounded architecture of the system is balanced and brought to rest: it is transformed into being" (198). In other words, the pursuit of totality rests on the shoulders of the individual; Ian Watt, in 1956, describes it as such: "[…] the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought, and indeed as more likely to be arrived at by a departure from it. The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation" (366). The novel features the struggles, not only outer but also inner, of the hero grappling with the process of meaning-making of the world around them.

Lukacs' work focuses in part on highlighting that transition from the epic to the novel and distinguishing the new traits that emerge with the novel. A key idea that emerges in his work is that of totality: "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (186). In other words, the understanding of the world as a unified, organized and signifying space remains in reader's consciousness; the principle underlying this, however, at the time of the emergence of the novel, is missing. The novel is the genre in which this issue is tackled:

> The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover the concealed totality of life. The given structure of the object (i.e., the search, which is only a way of expressing the subject's recognition that neither objective life nor its relationship to the subject is spontaneously harmonious in itself) supplies an indication of the form-giving intention. All the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation must be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means. (189)

The novel embodies this "search." This changes the way heroes are represented and what they embody. Where in epic poems, a hero is a defined character, in the novel the "search" is not only directed towards the outside but also turned towards the inside. In Homer's epic poem , Odysseus' characteristics are determined from the very beginning and follow him throughout: this is the function played by the epithets, which assure the stability of the character (even where the text itself, first transmitted orally, was unstable). Odysseus is "the Cunning" or the "man of many turns." The novel, on the contrary, presents heroes that are at least in part introspective and whose nature is to be malleable and changing; the aim of the novel is to give them their true form, for them to discover their role (or fail to) within the totality of the world that is simultaneously revealed.

The role played by *Bildungsroman* and by the Romantics in transitioning towards the novel such as we know it today is then clear: just as in the epic, the heroes traverse the world in search of something; the difference is that where Odysseus has a clear idea of where he wants to go and why, the hero of the *Bildungsroman* and of the early novel does not. The purpose is not to arrive, to return, but to go through the process of that search, of that meaning-making. Lukacs characterizes the hero of the novel as a "seeker." The hero must reveal not only the binding property of a world the totality of which needs explaining, but also discover their own purpose in that signifying world. The transitionary role of early novels such as Cervantes' picaresque *Don Quixote* (1605) and Denis Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste* (written in the 1770s and first published in 1796) is important: they feature mock-epic heroes, who do not need to explain themselves to themselves or to others, in an age where the explanation, the seeking of their own identity is actually needed.

The novel is the result of a disenchanted world: it is a genre trying to grapple with the absence of a determined and determinable end. The figure of the unique hero is still present, and the novel is organized around them, but their story builds up in an uncertain world, in which the totality of the epic world needs to be constantly recreated. The world is no longer reliable nor finite in the way it was portrayed in the epic. Contemporary works still grapple with an incomplete world order, but Francophone works take a different and unique approach to the issue that totality has become in the past centuries.

Identity remains at the core of contemporary novels. In the specific case of contemporary Francophone works, the destabilizing effect of the narrative rests on the fact that the *possibility* of totality itself is brought into question. The meaning-making process in the novel then takes on a whole new dimension: both heroes and narrators see their role dispersed, debunked, or split

between several voices or protagonists *because* of this refusal to acknowledge the totality of the world as meaningful. The hero of the contemporary Francophone novel is not a seeker as much as a collaborator; the very idea of the hero seems to become irrelevant, just as the narrator itself, with its overarching power over the narrative, collapses and dissolves into several voices, rendering the very idea of a totality inaccessible. It is this refusal of the meaningful totality that seems to be embraced by many contemporary Francophone writers. Another conceptual and ontological shift seems to have happened in the past decades with post- and decolonialism. The form of the novel evolved with the interventions of contemporary Francophone novelists. There is on their part an inflexion of self-reflexivity within the genre that takes on a political dimension because of the historical and social aspects of the genesis of the genre. Lukacs writes that

> The novel comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of one who must create an entire world through his experience and who must maintain the world in equilibrium […] just because the novel can only comprise the individual in this way, he becomes a mere instrument, and his central position in the work means only that he is particularly well suited to reveal a certain problematic of life. (201)

Contemporary Francophone novelists reject an approach to the individual hero that determines a story-line. The individual is relieved of the responsibility of meaning-making in their works. A *collective* story-telling process rises in its place, one that does not call for a story bookmarked between the beginning and the end.

C. The Twenty-First Century Novel

In 2015, an issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* tackled the contemporary configuration of the genre of the novel. This literary genre, Jernej Habjan suggests in the introduction, has been associated directly with nationalism in line with Anderson's conceptualization; however, Habjan adds, "while nationalism is being increasingly replaced by

post-nationalist identity politics, the novel is not being sublated by any new form." The social and economic conjecture that determined the rise of the novel as a genre have been challenged in the light of the history of the past decades: the fall of the various European colonial empires in the aftermath of World War II, the rise of the European Union as a transnational entity, the extreme mobility and migration patterns of the world population in the second half of the twentieth century and up to today in 2023. Nationalism is no longer a principle taken for granted nor a defining trait for a majority of the world's individuals. The foundations of the genre of the novel are thus shifting.

Habjan's point about post-nationalist identity politics lines up with the shifts that have been occurring in literary scholarship in the past decades. The rise of the concept of World Literature places emphasis on the limitations of reading works within a national context. Nationalism itself, however, is far from having disappeared from today's conjecture, as the rise in nationalist political parties around the world demonstrates. World Literature, if we consider it as a way of *reading* texts, is emblematic of the changes operated: while national entities remain a reality on a political, economic, and social level, as well as in communities' imagination, the way we see these entities engaging with each other and communicating happen between people who identify with these various entities differs. Habjan writes that "there exists accounts of the withering-away of the nation-state in a time when one would search in vain for an account of the decline of the novel form; quite the opposite, discourses on the hegemony of the novel are themselves almost hegemonic, and probably rightly so." The word "accounts" here is key: just as World Literature tells the story of a boundless, all-encompassing literary realm, so do certain political discourses tell the story of the effacement of the nation-state. The novel is reminder, in the literary field, of the persistence of a form of nationalism.

The novel, as Habjan rightly notes, remains a major literary genre, but it is also important to note that it is a genre being transformed from the inside. The literary system, upheld by national literary entities such as the Académie Française in the specific case of France, but also publishing houses and reward systems throughout the world, needs the genre of the novel to stay stable in order to a) organize their approach to literature, and b) make it more accessible to the public, namely marketable. In reality (yet another paradox) many texts presented and classified as "novels" are stretching the definition of the genre so much that it has to be reconsidered.

This happens in the contemporary Francophone novel. When Anderson defined the novel as a national community builder, it would seem to make it the most fitting genre to be embraced by nations recently formed. The novel, in its adherence to a single narrator, a unified story and a linear progression was indeed a form that was privileged among early post-colonial writers as they consciously worked towards forming a body of literature for their newly founded country. These novels were often eminently political, one of the most famous examples being Ivory Coast writer Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* first published in 1968. In the past decades, however, as later generations of writers emerged in a postcolonial world, the form of the novel began to morph decidedly. This metamorphosis makes sense: the Andersonian concept of the novel lays the ground for a world organized by the system of the nation-states, the very system that gave rise to colonialism and exploitation. While publishing houses, and more generally all the structures that allow for the production and selling of literature, need the specific *genre* of the novel to be able to label and recognize a work, within the works of Francophone writers, the genre itself is being restructured and reconceptualized *from the inside*, creating a gradually growing tension between the marketing of these work and their actual content.

The form of the novel structured around a single, reliable, omnipresent, and often omniscient narrator and a linear story, persists today, as Habjan writes. Rather than it being a surprising observation, however, I argue that it is an indication of the persistence of a nationalist ideology engrained in not only the political and social sphere, but also in the literary one. This structuring of the novel is still mostly acknowledged as the reference against which the quality of a work is measured; any changes or deviations are examined from that starting point.

Alexander Beecroft focuses on the issue of writing marginalized voices into a narrative in the context of the novel. His article, titled "The Narrator and the Nation-Builder: Dialect, Dialogue, and Narrative Voice in Minority and Working-Class Fiction," raises the question of how to incorporate different languages while maintaining high literary quality:

> The representation of social class and other forms of social centrality and marginality (race, regional identity, rurality, etc.) presents a dilemma for literature. Since in most contexts the literary language is, or is at least held to be, a monopoly of elites, to report characters from the margins speaking and thinking in such a register can seem like an egregious violation of the tenets of realism. On the other hand, to have such characters speak as they would in daily life mars the smoothness and literariness of the text's language, in way most often thought suitable only for comic effects, from Aristophanes to Dickens. The question of how to balance these issues, marking marginal characters enough to make their status legible without interfering with the expected literary qualities of the text, has been, and remains, a challenge.

Literary language, he notes here "is […] held to be" the language of the elites. The whole dilemma he exposes rests on the premise that characters can only speak in a language recognizable by the elites as their own, and that *that* specific register of language is high, a literary language. The issue he raises in the rest of his work, that of bringing in alternative voices, is legitimate. However, there are many examples of characters throughout the past two centuries who carry marginal voices without these being introduced solely for a comic effect, but rather for the sake of realism. The early American novel features many such examples, from Mark Twain's characters to Harriet Beecher Stowe's. I propose to reframe Beecroft's argument

to apply it to the narrator. Indeed, the narrator is the safeguard of this language; giving the narrator an alternative voice is a problem, because if not performed in the high linguistic register of the elites, it would lose its "smoothness and literariness." The narrator plays the role of an orchestrator who needs to preserve control over the various voices featured. The genre of the novel generally features such a narrator speaking in a language that is recognizable as that of the elite.

This approach to the figure of the narrator reveals the fact that what is considered literary language is subjective and is the result of social power dynamics that do not hold alternative language uses, dialects, or regional variations as having much literary potential. This in turn points to the elitism the narrator in the genre of the novel. The narrator, because of its control over voices and the story progression, is a figure of authority; this authority is justified by its "higher" use of language. Beecroft goes on to explain that "[…] the voice of the narrator performs a structural role not unlike that of the nation-state itself" (411). The narrator sets the standard for language and unifies the storyline around that standard. Deviations from this standard language cannot originate from the narrator itself; alternative voices can co-exist within the nation, but the standard is what unifies the nation, and also what allows a certain social order to be maintained. In that sense the social order that structures the nation is mirrored in the structure of the novel. The language used by the narrator, as Beecroft explains, is in a certain sense a safeguard for the nation: it represents and characterizes the nation from the inside:

> Founders of nations and narrators of novels alike build imaginary worlds linking disparate individuals and their actions, creating out of these materials stories that are compelling and meaningful. Nations must each be distinct from the other, and yet must share a family resemblance: no two nations can have the same language, religion, history, and geography (although nations frequently share one or more of these things), and yet they must also be built out of these same ingredients, and their structures and practices must be homologous. Similarly, each novel must be different from every other novel, and

> yet must share enough of the structure and practice of the novel to be recognizable as a participant in the form. One of those practices, it seems, is the use of narration in the standard language. (417)

Here Beecroft narrows his analysis down to the narrator rather than considering characters as a whole group. The concept of the standard language, as linguists have been demonstrating in the past decade, is a construct that creates hierarchies and inequalities within a given society[32]. The standard language is imposed and used as a reference by a certain part of a broad community (the nation) that encompasses several dialects but that present one of these as standard. The role the narrator plays in upholding this standard is then all the more authoritative, as it seems to maintain a monolingual paradigm in which is promoted a specific type of narrator, one that expresses themselves in the standard dialect of a nation, one that controls the narrative. The standard dialect is what Beecroft refers to as literary language, or what is acceptable as literary language, a language that will be valuable as high quality. This directly, as Beecroft's work articulates, links the narrator to the nation.

It would seem, then, that the narrator, because they safeguard a language and a social order, should be the main target of transformation and potential deconstruction in attempts to resist a social (and literary) system built upon the nation-state (and consequently the monolingual paradigm). The shift in language use was defined as one of the key components of the rise of the novel in Anderson's work: "[…] the fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized" (419). The shift from Latin as a reference language, a seal of quality, to the vernacular, which in the written form then becomes national languages, can help us think through the issues of class and dialects posed by Beecroft in his article. Beecroft argues that

[32] See Chapter 5.

there is a specific language in which narrators need to express themselves in order for a piece of writing to earn the status of literature; the narrator can stage other dialects, other voices, but the narrator themselves, in the novel, controls and dominates these alternative voices. For these alternative voices to take over the narrative itself would decrease the literary value of the work. The literary language of the narrator is "sacred," to be protected, separated clearly from other dialects, in the same way that Latin was sacred, because linked to religion, before it progressively lost its standing. Simultaneously to the establishment of the novel as a respected genre, so did the French vernacular become respected as a literary language in its own right, with a sacred potential of its own. Beecroft concludes his work with: "To speak a novel in anything other than the national language is, it seems, tantamount to speaking a new nation into existence" (422). What then does it mean for contemporary Francophone writers to write within the genre of the novel? Are they speaking a novel in an alternative version of the national language that is French? What does this mean for the genre of the novel as a whole? Are they creating, as Beecroft argues, a "new nation"? The concept of nation itself is questionable in the context of postcolonial spaces such as former French colonies, the French Caribbean and the French Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer.

2. The Novel as a Theorizing Space: The Example of Patrick Chamoiseau's Writing

In 2016, the Goncourt-winning author and essayist Patrick Chamoiseau from Martinique published *La Matière de l'absence* with the French press Le Seuil. The text is subtitled as a novel (his tenth), but his work is actually a fond reminiscence of and homage to the author's recently

deceased mother. The various strands of the text, which range from a philosophy of writing to childhood memories, organize neatly around the figure of the mother. Chamoiseau's work is an example of reappropriation of the genre of the novel beyond its colonial history. Chamoiseau introduces an "esprit jazz" into the narration, developing a collective story-telling mode that moves away from the traditional autonomous and controlling narrator. His novel is a space of self-reflexivity on modes of narration. The narrator is better conceptualized as a "conteur," a story-teller, who plays a historical and symbolic role in the development of Chamoiseau's alternative theory of the novel.

A. The "esprit jazz" of Narration in the Contemporary Francophone Novel

The novel in Lukacs' reading, emerged in a historical moment where what bound people and communities together shifted from the religious to the national. In the following passage, Chamoiseau highlights the specificity of a literature that emerges in the face of colonialism, in which the leap to nationalism as a community builder is not obvious nor even applicable. Where the novel steeped in the history of the nation is traditionally controlled by a unique narrator whose role is to hold the text together, to guide the reader from the beginning to the end of the narrative, Chamoiseau here presents a different style of writing, indeed a different way of approaching art, based in improvisation:

> Face à l'en-dehors tel qu'il a surgi dans la « circonstance nègre » aux Etats-Unis et dans la Caraïbe, n'a pu se dresser que l'expérience individuelle, la solitude forcée de créer en elle-même ses sources et ses fondements, *d'aller à l'improvisation.* […] L'esprit jazz est par essence un esprit religieux, je veux dire qu'il *relie infiniment* et qu'il libère ainsi : dans l'alchimie implosive de l'instant, les improvisations se fécondent sans cesse. (Chamoiseau, *La Matière de l'absence,* 135)

The "esprit jazz" that Chamoiseau describes is intrinsically linked to a religious dimension: this "esprit religieux" refers directly back to the Latin etymological sense of "religere" – to link

together. The process of improvisation, though anchored in a "solitude forcée" is a collective process that brings people together and that creates community. The modern novel privileges individuality in a historical time when the power of religious communities loses its grip on societies; paradoxically, in the Francophone novel, as Chamoiseau's work both explains and illustrates, the collective and communitarian aspects of the religious are foundational.

A displacement of the traditional narrator is achieved in Chamoiseau's writing. Control over the progression of the text is no longer relevant; the narration is thrown back into a circular temporality reminiscent of the totality exposed by Lukacs, the readers and the text connecting in that space rather than through the unique authority of a single, omnipresent and omnipotent narrator. This "esprit jazz" described by Chamoiseau is typical of his writing: he models what he conceptualizes.

The "esprit jazz" is, to a certain extent, as a response to the "problem" of the national novel in the context of spaces that are marked by colonialism. The situation is all the more complex in the case of spaces such as the French départements et territoires d'outre-mer or DOM-TOM. In the opening pages of his 2001 work *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel*, scholar H. Adlai Murdoch notes the particular situation of most Francophone Caribbean writers. The postcolonial approach considers that

> when links of domination and subservience with the colonizing country have been severed, then the subject territory can exercise that freedom of action and of expression inhibited by the colonial framework. (2)

But in the geopolitical context of the French Caribbean, of course, these condition of domination and subservience persist:

> one of the hallmarks of contemporary French Caribbean discourse is the very fact that pressing sociocultural and geopolitical paradoxes of its ties to the French mainland have led its thinkers to explore alternative models of discursive self-articulation that can mine the terrain of difference that sets the imagined community against the metropole. (2)

In this section I consider how Chamoiseau embeds theory within *La Matière de l'absence* (2016) but also in one of his previous works, *Ecrire en pays dominé* (1997). These works both function as examples of how the form of the novel is informed by theories generated by the author himself that allow him to both navigate and acknowledge dislocation. Murdoch highlights the historical paradox in which the French Caribbean are; this paradox can only be resolved by a reference to the past which Chamoiseau develops in his works. In *La Matière de l'absence* and *Ecrire en pays dominé* alike, Chamoiseau re-writes the history of the novel.

The narrator takes on the characteristics of the figure of the "conteur" in Chamoiseau's writing. The traditional narrator emerged in the novel as an individual voice (sometimes embodied in a character) whose role is to guide the reader through the story; however, in Chamoiseau's writing, the narrator is an original figure – a figure at the origin. The Caribbean narrator is an inheritor of the very specific figure of the "conteur," a figure who emerged in the specific context of slavery. Murdoch comments at length on the figure of the *conteur* that he describes as an "emancipatory, tricksterlike figure" and its anchoring in the particular historical and social setting of the slave plantation in the Caribbean. The *conteur* had and retains a political role:

> With the *conteur créole* now inscribed as a primary figure of opposition, and the creative power of the *paroleur* made even more intrinsic to the elaboration of identity, it is critical to note that combatting the colonial will through the articulation of deception and disjunction is in fact the role of the conteur. (203)

The *conteur's* role is one of resistance (and Murdoch also notes the parallels between the *conteur* and the *marroneur*, both figures of resistance): the *conteur* is the first conduit through which

humanity is re-claimed and re-established through linguistic discourse (the previous stages being dance and then music). The process of storytelling is a process of active resistance against the inhumane status that was given to enslaved persons.

The characteristics of storytelling by the *conteur* are thus inherited by narrators in Caribbean texts, and we see this in Chamoiseau's various works. The question then becomes one of identifying which characteristics from this process of storytelling by the *conteur* are reflected in the narrative process in Caribbean novels.

B. Co-construction

In the opening of her work *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, scholar Celia Britton notes that the way community is portrayed in Caribbean fiction is correlated with the form of the narrative. Where there is "a tightly knit, purposeful community," it is paired with a "linear narrative that ends in definitive resolution," whereas a "narrative structure that avoids linearity and closure" is paired with "a dispersed or heterogenous community" (6-7). *La Matière de l'absence* features characteristics of this second category. While it bridges together the individual story of a family and the greater history of the Caribbean, the narrative features dialogues and is co-constructed, avoiding, as Britton puts it, linearity and closure. The following pages draw out a few examples and explanations of this co-construction. The narrator being associated with the figure of the *conteur* builds up the narrative in dialogue with other voices.

i. Collective pain

La Matière de l'absence is structured as a dialogue that stages the main narrator, "le Négrillon," and his sister "la Baronne" as they collaborate to try and deal with the pain caused by the death of their mother. The text is based on this back and forth between brother and sister.

This sibling partnership is particularly striking in the first part of the text titled "Légendaire du grand âge," where it develops around the repeated chorus of "ceux qui vivent longtemps." This opening section of a little over four pages is divided into six paragraphs, four of them attributed to la Baronne, two of them to le Négrillon. Turn-taking is clearly indicated throughout this part by explicit references: "me confie la Baronne," (15), "continue la Baronne,"(15), "Je lui soupire" (16), "me répond la Baronne" (17), "Je lui dis" (18), "me prévient la Baronne" (18). The dialogue is not indicated by punctuation or quotation marks but by paragraph changes and by these turn-taking indications. La Baronne, the eldest, is given the first and the last say as both characters grapple with the following issues:

> […] l'absence fondamentale, nous l'avons éprouvée, et nous la partageons. Qu'en avons-nous fait ; et quelle est cette douloureuse provende ? D'accord, oublions les questions, désertons les réponses, mais essayons malgré tout d'entrer dans cette ronde restée comme grande ouverte, d'y risquer une parole, même sans mander de répondeurs, juste soucieux de respirer et de sourire aux souffles de ce qui n'est nulle part et qui pourtant subsiste… (18)

While the discourse is here attributed to the narrator associated with Chamoiseau, the use of second person plural, in one of the final statements of this section, binds the two characters together as the narrator makes an appeal to his sister, referring to the shared burden of their loss. The narrator wants to dive into this "absence fondamentale," to explore it, but la Baronne refuses: "Je n'ai rien à dire et je ne m'en soucie guère !" (18), she answers to his appeal. The prose of the narrator becomes poetic in the section previously quoted as he develops both a regular rhythm of hexasyllables cluster as well as two alliterations in [r] and [s]:

> Oublions les que**s**tions (6)/ dése**r**tons les **r**épon**s**es (6) / mais / e**ss**ayons malg**r**é tout (6) / d'ent**r**er dans **c**ette **r**onde (6) / **r**e**s**tée comme g**r**ande ouve**r**te (6) / d'y **r**i**s**quer une pa**r**ole (6) / même sans mander de **r**épondeurs (8) / ju**s**te **s**oucieux de re**s**pi**r**er (6) / et de **s**ou**r**i**r**e aux **s**ouffles (6) / de **c**e qui n'est nulle pa**r**t (6) / et qui pou**r**tant **s**ubsi**s**te (6)

Only two sections of this long sentence interrupt the lyric hexasyllabic rhythm, the much shorter "mais" and the slightly longer section towards the middle that is octosyllabic. This poetic, musical rhythm contrasts sharply with the closing comments of la Baronne who seemingly puts an end to the dialogue. La Baronne sets the text in motion with her opening remarks and is more present than the narrator in this first section, but the closing paragraphs prefigure the structure of the subsequent dialogue: the narrator associated with Chamoiseau takes over the text with his own thoughts and musings, la Baronne only periodically interrupting with short, pointed comments or questions. A primary narrator is thus established by the end of the opening section; but he is a flexible narrator, open to interruptions and corrections.

ii. Inter-generational dialogue

In *La Matière de l'absence*, the narrative is shared between the voices of a younger brother and his older sister in an attempt to work through the earth-shattering moment of the death of the mother. The collaborative function of the narrative helps both siblings to deal with the past. In addition, a variety of voices, anchored in the past, structure Chamoiseau's writing as not only collaborative, but also transgenerational writing. In her work on three of Chamoiseau's earlier texts, *Chronique des sept misères* (1986), *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (1997) and *Un Dimanche au cachot* (2007), scholar Milena Fučíková highlights Chamoiseau's attempts to write an invisible past, or to imagine it.

> Le système énonciatif autour de l'obligation, personnelle et collective, de se souvenir ("Erinnerungskultur") ainsi qu'autour de la simple nécessité de nommer y est très développée: les images, les scènes sur les traces invisibles du passé, s'agencent et s'accompagnent de façon complexe. Il y a des retours, des reprises et des développements de sens divers, des jeux parodiques, retentissements de plusieurs voix de figures fictives ou historiques. (149)

Recoveries of "past invisible traces" are always a collective effort. In *La Matière de l'absence* Chamoiseau relies on his sister to help recover and sustain the memory of the mother. A variety

of other voices and characters feature in other texts that help recover not only a private, intimate story, but also the history of the Caribbean writer. This is particularly striking in his essay *Ecrire en pays dominé.* This text is not presented as a novel, but it participates in the theorization of fictional and poetical writing, which is why it is of interest here. Tormented by questions about his own writing and writing in general, Chamoiseau summons a voice from the past to navigate the writing process in his situation of a writer "en pays dominé:"

> Ces questions harcelaient mon écriture. Elles troublaient le roman en cours, tracassaient mes projets, paralysaient mes rêves. Elles suscitèrent un étrange personnage, une sorte de vieux guerrier, venu de tous les âges, de toutes les guerres, de toutes les résistances, de tous les rêves aussi qu'ont pu nourrir les peuples dominés. Il semblait porter les plaies de ce monde et mes blessures les plus intimes. (22)

The figure of the "Vieux Guerrier" becomes a second narrator throughout the pages of this text, guiding the reader and Chamoiseau himself through the recovery of the process that gave those in the colonized paradigm a voice. Whether Chamoiseau's "Old Warrior" shares characteristics of the epic warrior is what I will seek to discover.

C. Chamoiseau's Work Between Genres

Exploring the figure of his mother and the impact her death had on his life also gives Chamoiseau the opportunity to explore the link between his personal story and communitarian history, as was the case in the novels examined in the previous chapter. Indeed, alongside his personal memories, Chamoiseau also develops a reflection on what it means to be a Caribbean writer, and articulates the stakes of this status:

> Comment écrire alors que ton imaginaire s'abreuve, du matin jusqu'aux rêves, à des images, des pensées, des valeurs qui ne sont pas les tiennes ? Comment écrire quand ce que tu es végètes en dehors des élans qui déterminent ta vie ?
>
> Comment écrire, dominé ?

Chamoiseau here highlights the issue of not having one's own voice in an imperial context which he identifies with the French DOM-TOM. These territories are officially attached to a long-standing nation, one that has its own literary history and established traditions; however, the writers originating from these territories do not recognize their work as fitting into this tradition because of the colonial history that has oppressed them. The novel becomes an exploratory space and is theorized and metamorphosed through writings such as Chamoiseau's *La Matière de l'absence*. For Chamoiseau, the novel is a theoretical space as well as an aesthetic space: the aesthetic of the novel is in itself a theorization, and a political stand. Chamoiseau reinvents the novel as a site that splits away from its original ties to nationalism; it becomes a site that questions the dominance of nationalist ideologies that has its roots buried deep in the literary world as well as the political world.

iii. From Fanon to Chamoiseau, or From the "réveilleur des peoples" to the "Marqueur de Paroles"

In *Les Damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon writes a chapter about the evolution of literary creation in the colonial and postcolonial context. Chapter 4, "Sur la conscience nationale," specifically outlines three different phases. The first phase is imitation: during this phase, the colonized writer attempts to embrace the culture and literature of the colonizer and replicates the models that the colonizer presents to them:

> C'est que l'intellectuel colonisé s'est jeté avec avidité dans la culture occidentale. Semblable aux enfants adoptifs, qui ne cessent leurs investigations du nouveau cadre familial que dans le moment où se cristallise dans leur psychisme un noyau sécurisant minimum, l'intellectuel colonisé va tenter de faire sienne la culture européenne. (156)

This "culture européenne" is what is presented as a model by the colonizer. It is what is presented as having value and it is what the intellectual, artist, writer, should aspire to, and thus imitate. Fanon's approach here, as throughout most of his work, is a medical one, as he notes the

psychological processes that led the colonized author to seek the approval of the colonizer. Literary genres like the novel are established as models to follow and imitate. The second phase, continues Fanon, is one of rejection and resistance to those conventions that have been internalized by the colonized writer. During this phase, "le colonisé est ébranlé et décide de se souvenir" (158): authors reject the forms formally embraced and turn to elements that are anchored in their own culture. This results, writes Fanon, in putting at the fore-front "les coutumes, les traditions, les modes d'apparaître et sa quête forcée, douloureuse ne fait qu'évoquer une banale recherche d'exotisme" (157). This is only a temporary stage, a stepping-stone on the way to what Fanon sees as the final phase which he coins "période […] de combat" (158) during which a national literature emerges as a literary and political resistance to the colonizer. This is when a new literature emerges, one that is neither entirely determined by the colonizer nor by the local culture: a literature that transcends and resists both, while also acknowledging that it comes from both. The writer then becomes a "réveilleur de peuple" (158).

Fanon, while he is mostly associated with the role he played in the Algerian war of independence which frames his writing, was from Martinique. Martinique did not go through the political stages of independence as Algeria did, but its literature, according to Chamoiseau, followed a progression very similar to that described by Fanon. In fact, *Ecrire en pays dominé* stages these three phases, and *La Matière de l'absence* also describes the process. This process seems to be embedded in most of Chamoiseau's writing as he retells this history of literature in multiple texts, the texts themselves also illustrating the process. This three-fold pattern occurs throughout most of Chamoiseau's works and I propose to tie it back to Fanon's three stages of the emergence of what Fanon sees as a truly national literature and what Chamoiseau sees as the move toward poetics.

Where Fanon sees a process that is specific to the colonized writer, Chamoiseau's text indicates a broader perspective and a desire to understand the literary process from a broader viewpoint. In "Légendaire de la grappe," the first section of the "Ejectats" part of *La Matière,* Chamoiseau describes the process through which human creativity and poetics come to fruition. The first stage is that of mirroring: "il doit tout assimiler avant même de comprendre et de savoir parler. […] l'enfant Sapiens devient un insatiable miroir" (112). Next emerges the hero, explains Chamoiseau, prolonging the metaphor of the mirror:

> Pour échapper au pouvoir pétrifiant de la Gorgonne, Persée la regardait en usant de l'oblique protectrice d'un miroir ; c'est ainsi qu'il put la vaincre et utiliser sa terrifiante faculté de détruire ses ennemis. Persée devint donc un héros juste en maniant un miroir et en le soumettant à ses propres désirs. Le héros est toujours un individu détaché de sa communauté, il est extraordinaire, hors normes. (113)

This is the second stage, in which the tool that is the mirror takes on a different role, one that opposes its first role. The mirror originally represented the imitation; in this stage, it becomes a tool, an object through which resistance is implemented. From its use emerges the hero, the individual that emerges out from a community as an exception, carrying with them that resistance. The final stage is described after an intervention by la Baronne, who notes that "les héros ont passé leur temps à démolir des monstres, et donc à éliminer tout ce qui se trouvait hors normes, et donc à normaliser le monde… Ils ont stoppé bien des individualités, bien des diversités !" (114). Chamoiseau comes to the following conclusion about the final stage: "Aujourd'hui : ni héros ni vérité possibles, rien que le partage sans fin des expériences, des poétiques et des intelligences… dans un jeu de reflets et de lueurs… nous sommes tous des héros !" (114) The hero here is radically different from the traditional hero of the novel: the plurality of heroes makes the concept of the hero irrelevant, just as the plurality of voices that co-construct Chamoiseau's texts takes away the power of the single narrator.

iv. An Alternative Aesthetic Steeped in Musicality

The threefold stages in the development of the former or current colonized writer theorized by Fanon is reflected in the structure of Chamoiseau's works as well as their internal aesthetic. This text, as many of Chamoiseau's works, presents a clear ternary structure. Following the running metaphor of a meteor landing on a surface to symbolize the impact of his mother's death, Chamoiseau structures this text in three different sections titled "Impact," "Ejectats," and "Cratère." Each section has a subtitle, and each section is further divided into respectively three, three, and six subsections, in keeping with the ternary rhythm of the structure.

Ecrire en pays dominé was published much earlier in 1997, and was not presented as a novel, yet similar characteristics between both texts highlight the paradoxical discrepancy between their categorization. The musical tripartite structure of the text is as notable in this essay as in *La Matière*: the essay is structured around three sections titled "Analogie," "Anabase," and "Anabiose." The musical, structural pattern (the ternary pattern is found throughout the essay) is enhanced by the title of the table of contents that precedes the text: "Cadences." Interpreted through the musical lens, this is an interesting choice for a title: a cadence implies that a piece of musique is coming to an end, it prepares that ending. There are several different types of cadences, some which allow transitions within a piece of music, but a cadence generally indicates the end of a musical phrase or the end of a piece. In this case, Chamoiseau pluralizes the word, and applies it to his sections. While there is progression throughout the essay, that begins with "l'enfant qui lisait," who progresses towards becoming "l'ethnographe" in the second section and finally the "Marqueur de paroles" in the final section, considering each of these steps as cadences shifts the perception of this progression away from a linear reading and

complexifies this progression. Each of these cadences represent a different moment that is both transitionary and final in itself.

The progression is embodied in the metaphor of childhood through adulthood, childhood and old age being featured with the narrator and the Vieux Guerrier throughout every section. The genre of the essay here is complexified by the omnipresence of the metaphor of aging. The symbolic progression from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to knowledge, is a way of fictionalizing theory while also featuring the story of the writer struggling through the legacies of colonialism to find a free voice. The boundaries between theory and fiction are blurred.

Alongside the regular ternary rhythm that structures *La Matière*, the musical quality of the text also emanates from its poetical prose. The following passage describes the moment shared by Chamoiseau and his siblings as they gather around their mother's body:

> Nous fîmes cercle autour d'elle.
>
> Nous fîmes vie autour d'elle.
>
> Nous fîmes amour, tristesse, détresse.
>
> Nous fîmes refus, protestation, résignation, disparition.
>
> Nous fîmes courage et lâcheté.
>
> Nous fîmes tout ce que l'on fait quand on ne sait pas quoi faire.
>
> Tout en nous s'efforçait de lui restituer ce qu'elle nous avait donné, de conjurer ainsi l'immobilité abyssale qui n'était pas elle mais l'ultime socle de ce qui restait d'elle… Il y a ce geste des paupières que l'on abaisse sur le miroir déclassé des pupilles : celles qui fixent l'inconcevable, qui se perdent dans rien, et que plus rien n'habite. (81-82)

In keeping with the ternary rhythm, the anaphoric phrase "Nous fîmes" is repeated six times. Each sentence is a line of its own: the structure of the paragraph here gives place to free verses. This sestet progresses by expanding each line to be slightly longer than the next, beginning with two six-syllable lines and culminating in a fourteen-syllable line. In the final paragraph, the poetical nature of the text comes from another poetic strategy, the development of internal

alliteration, the first one around the phoneme /l/, symbolic in that the sound is homophonic to the word "elle" which here refers to the lost mother: "elle […] l'immobilité abyssale […] elle […] l'ultime socle […] elle." The personal pronoun "elle" structures the alliteration in this sentence. Once again, it is marked by the ternary rhythm, being repeated three times. The omnipresence of musicality through sounds and rhythms directly plays with the boundaries of the traditional novel by introducing poetical elements to a genre that traditionally is exclusively in prose.

v. An Aesthetic Anchored in History

Chamoiseau's texts give us an overview of the process that opened up for him the possibility of telling Caribbean stories. Before any story can be told, or before any literature can emerge, the conditions for the possibility of a story need to be addressed. Both the table of contents of *La Matière* and *Ecrire* testify to that. At the core of Chamoiseau's novels is a historical and philosophical reflection on the processes that made possible the invention of a new literature, one that exists independently of former colonial structures but that engages them.

In an interview given shortly after the publication of *La Matière de l'absence*, Chamoiseau explained how the strands of his work fit together.[33] He iterated explicitly the structuring logic of his text: there is a link that is "pratiquement naturel et evident[3]" between the chasm ("l'abîme") that is created by the death of the mother, and the absence of a history of the Caribbean community, which naturally triggers questions of identity. Writers from former colonized countries have to contend with the issue that their past has been tampered with, that a

[33] Interview by Valérie Marin La Meslée. "Rencontre avec Patrick Chamoiseau au musée Dapper." 19 septembre 2016, Musée Dapper, Paris, France. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3gOznj5Nds. Last accessed 11/1/2019.

history has been written for them, and that their subjectivities are necessarily affected by a past written by dominant others. It is not surprising, then, to find many Francophone writers from the Caribbean and from former French colonies elaborating stories that spam several generations or that reach back in time in attempts to reclaim this past. The quest of the Caribbean writer, and of the postcolonial writer more broadly, has been put into words by Chamoiseau before, and by many other writers. In *Ecrire en pays dominé,* Chamoiseau deploys a plurivocal narrative that traces his own representative journey as a writer:

> Autour de moi, la colonisation avait mené discours. Elle avait nommé. Elle avait désigné. Elle avait expliqué. Elle avait installé une Histoire qui niait nos trajectoires. Elle s'était écrite sur nos silences démantelés. M'immerger dans ces silences gisant sous la proclamation. En minutie, vivre les paroles tombées sans voix sous l'écriture. (Chamoiseau 97)

Chamoiseau has to position his own writing, his own story, within a history written by colonization that negates the "trajectories" of the colonized and their descendants. The issue described here by Chamoiseau is also taken up by Edouard Glissant in his 1990 essay *Le Discours antillais*. "Beaucoup d'entre nous n'ont jamais fréquenté leur temps historique ; nous l'avons seulement éprouvé. C'est le cas des communautés antillaises qui accèdent seulement aujourd'hui à une mémoire collective" (Glissant 344). Glissant and Chamoiseau theorize contemporary Caribbean literature to argue that the recovery of their history and the confrontation of the cultural and intellectual colonization that the Caribbean community has been the object of is necessarily a part of their writing.

The metaphor of the impact of the meteor and the metaphor of the child writer coming of age are both to be understood in this context. The progression, in both cases, is threefold. Telling the story of the coming of age of the writer outside of the colonizing nation-state also means telling the story of slavery; both are tied together closely in both texts addressed here. Chamoiseau's

work demonstrates the impossibility of understanding his writing without understanding where it comes from because his words contain and continue to contain "the dismantled silences" of their origins. The origin story of his works are fundamentally different from the origin story of the Western, canonical novel. It is founded in a collective approach to telling, transmitting, and understanding a past of enslavement, violence, racism, and survival – which brings up the provocative question of whether this collective overcoming might not be the new form of the heroic. The figure of the conteur becomes the conduit through which this literature is born:

> Lors des veillées, le conteur créole rassemblait les survivants esseulés autour d'une parole composite dans laquelle tous se reconnaissait, et à laquelle tous participaient. (125)

Associated with this first process of storytelling, the context of which is the "habitation esclavagiste" or the plantation, are drums that build what Chamoiseau calls a "polyrythmie" (126):

> Dans les rassemblements qui s'éternisaient alors autour des épiceries, le tambour surgissait comme un totem sonore. Toute la fièvre née de la paye, du rhum et des longues frustrations se cristallisait autour de ce dieu grondant, ce dieu mélancolique qui ne renvoyait à aucun sacré, juste à la polyrythmie où pouvaient s'émulsionner toutes les émotions. (126-127)

The concept of "polyrythmie" complicates the process of storytelling and places rhythm and musicality at the heart of it. The process described here is at the heart of the origins of the narrative forms that Chamoiseau historicizes and implements in his writing. Deprived of the power to articulate their own stories, the ensalved populations first used music as a means to create meaning for their community. Rhythms and food (as well as alcohol) combine to form this polyrythmie: the drums appear "autour des épiceries" and it allow for feelings to "s'émulsionner," a verb directly taken from the culinary field.

Chamoiseau, in *Ecrire en Pays Dominé* and *La Matière de l'absence,* highlights alternative ways of writing a narrative, and to do so, he historicizes this narrative. He

demonstrates that the colonial patterns inherent in the Western novel are in direct contradiction with his own writing and he creates a new genesis, a new history for the genre of the novel. His analysis and its immediate application reveal the dark underpinnings of the genre of the novel and simultaneously transforms it. In Chamoiseau's writing, turning to the past, going through the process of historicizing the genre he is creating is a way to write *an alternative origin story for the novel*. In the following part of this chapter, I turn to two other authors who originate from former French colonies to show how the conventions of the modern novel are reinvented through strategies different from that of historicization.

3. Alternative Spaces, Temporalities, and Narratives in the Francophone Novel

A. Circumventing the Novel: Genres of the In-between in Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*

Nina Bouraoui's autobiographical work *Garçon manqué* was originally published by Stock in their collection "La Bleue." It was subsequently re-published as a paperback by Le Livre de Poche in 2002, two years after its original publication with Stock. Le Livre de Poche, a pioneer and number one in the paperback market in France, publishes books from various genres and periods and its hallmark is affordability (due to a cheaper paper and smaller print type). The edition of *Garçon manqué* by Le Livre de Poche does not specify the genre of the text anywhere on the front and back matter of the book; however, the description of the book on the website presents it as a "roman," a novel. I argue that *Garçon manqué* resists the structure of the canonical novel with three different strategies: it inscribes the narration in space rather than time;

it develops a circular narration rather than a linear one, and it fashions an unstable, multifaceted narrator, resulting in a plural rather than singular "I."

i. Inscription of the Narration in Space rather than Time

Rather than being organized along a linear timeline, *Garçon manqué* is structured around three locations. Each location represents a section of the text. The two first sections are almost exactly the same length: "Alger," the opening section, is 84 pages; "Rennes," the second section, is 92 pages. The final section organized around a location, "Tivoli" (a small town in the vicinity of Rome), is barely four pages long and it precedes one final, even shorter section titled and dedicated to "Amine," the narrator's counterpart throughout the text. Another drastic difference, beyond length, separates the two first sections from the two final ones. In the two first sections, the systematic use of present tense seconds the geographical organization of the text in creating a non-linear storyline. By contrast, in "Tivoli" and "Amine," the narrator switches to using past tenses.

The first two sections of the text embody the tension that defines the narrator's identity. The present tense traps both geographical locations in a constant "both here and now:" these geographical locations co-exist, constantly, they are present together and simultaneously for the narrator, in an impossible form of ubiquity that is reflected in the use of the present tense. "'Tu n'es pas française.' 'Tu n'es pas algérienne,'" she is told by nameless, countless voices. They are voices from the outside, that embody social and political expectations of national identity. These outside voices produce contradictory feelings for the narrator: "Je suis tout. Je ne suis rien. Ma peau. Mes yeux. Ma voix. Mon corps s'enferme par deux fois." The initial contradiction of the first two sentences here is repeated throughout the text. Because there is a confusion, a loss, a

paradox, an impossibility contained in the gaze of others on her, her body becomes her only reliable reality, which explains the importance of the physical senses throughout the text.

The instability of genre is reflected in the instability of the Nina's identity. The text is organized, as the structure indicates, around a constant tension that is only resolved outside of those two poles that represent both parts of Nina's identity, France and Algeria. It is only in Tivoli that she can become herself and insert herself in a chronological progression. This transformation is foreshadowed earlier in the text:

> Longtemps après j'effacerai la séparation. Par mes voyages. Sur les traces de mon père. A Boston. A Cape Cod. A Provincetown. Longtemps après je me sentirai enfin chez moi. Loin d'Alger. Loin de Rennes. Sous les arbres immenses du New Hampshire. (51)

Because her childhood is scaffolded between the two locations that are supposed to determine her, it leaves her in a sort of in-between, her childhood becoming a time and space of everlasting present where identity tensions manifest, always unresolved. Her liberation comes when she escapes the time/space of childhood and inserts herself into a chronological temporality, which is foreshadowed by the repetition of the adverbial phrase "longtemps après." The opening sentence of "Tivoli" immediately projects the reader in a different temporal space: "C'est arrivé à Tivoli." The initial verbal phrase in the passé composé, "c'est arrivé," is repeated four times throughout the paragraph, marking an emphasis on a single, clearly identified and transformative event. This event is, first and foremost, a performative one: the insertion of the past tense here is the event itself. The narrator, in this affirmation, already resolves the issue of what it is that happened: an insertion into linear temporality, a separation from childhood, and a resolution of the constant tensions that characterized her childhood.

The omnipresent tension experienced by the narrator in between the two national spaces of France and Algeria is a mirror to the historical tension between both countries. Not only does

Nina have to find her place between French vs. Algerian perceptions of her identity, she also has to contend with the fact that the world perceives her as a living paradox, an abnormality because she was born of a French mother and an Algerian father who met in the aftermath of the Algerian civil war. In her work on *Garçon manqué,* Martine Fernandes highlights these tensions by reading Bouraoui's body as the site of these conflicts:

> *Garçon manqué* met en scène l'enfance en Algérie et en France de Yasmina Bouraoui l'Algérienne, Nina la Française ou encore Ahmed et Brio, des facettes de la narratrice qui rendent compte de sa multiplicité culturelle et sexuelle. Née d'une union entre un Algérien et une Française dans le contexte de la guerre d'Algérie, Bouraoui dénonce le rejet dont elle et sa famille ont été victimes en Algérie et en France où les mémoires du conflit restent vives […] En tant que «métisse» Bouraoui devient, à son corps défendant, *l'incarnation* du conflit: « Je suis la France avec l'Algérie. » (Fernandes 68)

The heritage of the Algerian civil war in the text is highly complex. My focus here is to relate the tensions at play in the genre of the novel to the tension within Nina's identity. In the case of both the text and Nina's identity, categories of reading are imposed from the outside. The text itself is where these tensions join up and where Nina operates a form of resistance. The text cannot be read through the lens of the novel or the lens of an autobiography. Nina's identity cannot be seized or read by defining her as "French" or as "Algerian." It is indeed more complex than just the categories of France and Algeria. By choosing to title the sections not "France" and "Algeria" but "Alger" and "Rennes," Bouraoui complicates notions of national identity. To the social pressure of expressing and living by a national identity, Bouraoui opposes the actual physical, lived, and local spaces of the towns of Alger and Rennes (and implicitly their inhabitants, the Algérois.e.s and the Rennais.e.s). The dichotomy that socially determines her is thus nuanced by lived experience that is not determined by an abstract nationality but rather by two concrete, local, urban spaces.

ii. Lexical cyclicity

Bouraoui's text is characterized by fractures and repetitions, by variations around certain themes. Her style features constant interruptions of the text; sentences are short and most often nominal. A corpus analysis confirms the fragmented nature of Bouraoui's narrative. The text, in Stock's 2000 edition, counts a total of 189 pages and 37 235 words. This makes for an average of 197 words per page, with a small range of vocabulary used: only 4708 different words. Among those 37 235 words are interspersed with 6758 periods. This means the text is interrupted by a period on an average of every 5.5 words, an exceptional frequency of punctuation.

A closer look at the use of nouns in this frequency analysis reveals the central strands around which Bouraoui develops her text. The first three most frequently used substantives in Bouraoui's text are representative of the themes of the book: sexual identity and physicality ("corps"), national identity ("algérie") and the more general theme of childhood, which structures the text and is encapsulated within the word "mère." The two other foundational characters, the father and the childhood friend Amine are mentioned respectively 94 and 115 times (in 66th and 54th place in the frequency count).

Bouraoui's prose is characterised by lexical cyclicity that could, on the one hand, be interpreted as her struggle to express her identity in a world that requires categorizations she does not fit into. It could even be read as expressing a form of mental blockage. On the other hand, this struggle also results in the elaboration of a style that directly challenges the traditional linear structure of the novel. The circularity of both the structure of the text and of the language demonstrates the limits of language itself: by repeating the same themes and the same vocabulary, Bouraoui highlights the powerlessness of words and of the categories they are supposed to stand for, and repurposes them to fit an aesthetic and musical style. Progress is

halted through the use of repetitive language; progress from one point of a narrative to the next is therefore no longer the goal of the novel. The genre of the novel therefore takes on an alternative dimension in which the narrative mode is characterized by exploration rather than progression. An alternative form of story-telling is developed in Bouraoui's, one that embraces complexity and allows for it to exist rather than presenting it as a problem to be solved.

iii. A Plural First-Person Narrative

Bouraoui's language use highlights the impossibilities of writing herself into a dichotomous gender identity as well as a dichotomous nationality. The narrator bypasses or surpasses gender binaries by refusing to manifest a male or a female identity. Ultimately, her parents embody the "quatre problèmes" distilled into the categories of gender and national identities: each embodies one specific form of this identity, French or Algerian, woman or man. "Demain, on m'examine," explains Nina when she is with her grandparents in Rennes: they are taking her to the doctor for a check up. "Mais moi je vais très bien," she continues. These two sentences describe the very beginning of her stay in France, namely this "examen," a double-edged word in French that both refers to the visit at the doctor's office and to a test. The narrator's slight protest, "Mais moi je vais très bien," voices their resistance to being judged, to being categorized, or to being questioned through certain categories. In her work on Bouraoui's texts, Helen Vassalo analyzes this refusal as a failure:

> Bouraoui fails to negotiate any 'new' mode of identity: at the incipit of her life narrative in *Garçon manqué*, a constant fear of rejection, and a recollection of traumatic childhood incidents associated with her otherness, means that Bouraoui instead wants to escape from everything that marks her out as different or 'other', and instead moves towards a cult of «sameness» or *indifference* […] rather than evidently seeking identity, what the narrators seek is *identification*; rather than affirming difference, they crave indifference. (Vassallo 50)

Vassalo's interpretation raises the issue of categorization; from a plural identity, from an identity fraught with tensions, she considers the absence of negotiation of these tensions a failure to create identity. To Vassalo's interpretation can be opposed William Spurlin's reading of Bouraoui's text:

> […] the critical form of translative work here lies in Bouraoui's exposition of any causal or natural link assumed to (pre)exist between sex and gender as a political invention. Bouraoui accepts neither her cultural belonging nor her gender as natural or given, but links them; that is to say, she accepts neither her Algerian cultural background nor her biological sex as originary, and therefore as her destiny, but recognizes and explores their constructions, ruptures, and fragmentations in *Garçon manqué*. (Spurlin 114)

Spurlin's words here provide an adequate response to Vassalo's interpretation of the narrator's identitarian failure. The key phrase here is "political invention" which can be applied to national identity as well as gender identity. Bouraoui certainly fails to embrace an identity in the traditional sense of the term; her writing never made a claim to do so, however, quite the contrary.

Lionnet opens her 1995 work *Postcolonial Representations, Women, Literature, Identity,* with a fundamental question about the so-called "other" woman: "*how does she name herself* in her own narratives? How does she find meaning in her own experiences, and how does she understand the role of language in her effort to name these experiences?" (3). She continues by describing the postcolonial subject "as 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" (5). Bouraoui's text embodies the flexibility described by Lionnet both in the identity she builds up for the narrator and in the form of the text itself. She experiments with the autobiographical genre and the genre of the novel and with her own experience of the self. Her text resists categorization through the rejection of the single, determined, autonomous, "I" as a

determinable identity. Bouraoui writes this resistance to the "I" of the autobiography and the "I" of the narrator in both this specific text and throughout her work as a whole. Her identity is in constant construction, deconstruction, reconstruction throughout the text. She resolves the issue of naming herself by creating multiple names that reflect the different parts of her identity: Nina, Brio, and Ahmed.

Bouraoui's work challenges the modern novel by embracing a multiple and complex identity that cannot be contained within a traditional narrative in which the "I" of the narrator is either already stable, or in which the "I" of the narrator is becoming stabilized through an identity quest throughout the novel. Bouraoui creates a narrative that is characterized by instability, this instability being a way of being for the narrator and the text rather than an issue. For both the narrator and the text, issues arise through the gaze of the outsider. The text needs to be classified, organized and categorized in order to be marketable by the French press Le Seuil; the person needs to be recognizable as belonging to traditional categories (national identity, gender identity) in order for interactions to be comfortable for the outsider. *Garçon manqué* blurs the limits of the novel with the genre of autobiography; it also blurs the limits of prose and poetry through the musicality of Bouraoui's repetitive style in a move that is reminiscent of Chamoiseau's conceptualization of polyrhythm.

B. Postcolonial Historical Fiction in Gauz's *Camarade Papa*

In 2018 Gauz published his second novel, *Camarade Papa* with the French publishing house *Le Nouvel Attila* originally founded, and still headed by Benoît Virot.This recent and unorthodox press that published its first book in 2007 focuses on "traductions et rééditions ; romans

graphiques ; auteurs français contemporains." Gauz published his first novel, *Debout Payé* with *Le Nouvel Attila* in 2014, and published a third novel in 2020 with the same press (*Black Manoo*).[34] The novel *Camarade Papa* tackles the colonial history of the Ivory Coast through the innovative lens of a complex double narrative. Where Bouraoui's work toyed with the boundaries of the genres of the novel and autobiography, revealing the limits of each categorization, Gauz innovates by bringing history and historical voice into his text. His work echoes Chamoiseau's methodology: the present cannot be written without reference to the past, and the process of doing so unavoidably leads to questioning the structures in which contemporary Francophone authors write. The novel is reinvented by Gauz as he writes the colonial history of the Ivory Coast into the present.

Throughout the novel, two story-lines and time-lines are intertwined. The first is that of a child, set in an undated but contemporary context, as he is sent by his parents, for obscure reasons, from his home in Amsterdam to Paris where he lives with his aunt and uncle and attempts to navigate this new world. The second story features Dabilly, a young man who, during the second half of the nineteenth century, decides to join the French colonizing forces in Africa and is sent to the Ivory Coast.

i. Notule and dedication

The opening two pages of Gauz's book feature a "notule" and a dedication, each on one page, facing each other, in an interesting tension. The "notule," a neologism formed by the combination of the noun "note" and the Latin diminutive suffix "ule," gives a very brief overview of the history of the French colonization of the Ivory Coast where part of the novel is

[34] http://www.lenouvelattila.fr/

set. The importance of the events described (the delimitation of the territory; the establishment of a governor in the Ivory Coast; the official "creation" of the Ivory Coast as a colony on March 10th, 1893), contrasts with the idea of the "notule," a small note. This tension is further accentuated by the content of the dedication on the following page, that takes the form of a quatrain:

> *Pour Lounès, Aléki, l'Ange et les Visiteurs*
> *L'Histoire est un leurre*
> *Au mieux le compte rendu rieur*
> *D'un temps et son humeur*

The "notule" sets up a historical background for the novel, yet the dedication orients the reading in a different direction that debunks history as a trick and invites us to a more playful, light approach to it. This contrast between historical facts vs. poetics that do not take history too seriously, creates a tension that determines the whole project of Gauz's novel. The dedication is an invitation to reconsider the historical notule and to propose an alternative approach to history, one that acknowledges its subjectivity and that offers to poeticize it.

When asked by Laurence Houot, journalist for French radio France Info, how his project for this novel came about, Gauz elaborated on the years of research that led to the project's fruition:

> C'était une très vieille idée. Déjà quand j'étais ado, je voulais écrire une grande fresque coloniale. Et puis ça a traîné longtemps. En vieillissant, j'ai commencé à prendre des notes. Puis j'ai écrit d'autres choses. […] Bon bref, quand j'ai enfin pu me poser, j'ai réalisé que c'était pas trois notes que j'avais, c'était carrément une bibliothèque. Comme le projet était très ancien, ça faisait des années que je prenais des notes, des années que je lisais des bouquins, des années que je me faisais une bibliographie, des années que je regardais des photos… Je me suis dit : mais qu'est-ce que je vais faire avec tout ça ?[35]

[35] https://www.francetvinfo.fr/culture/livres/roman/interview-quot-camarade-papaquot-gauz-ecrivain-rouge-dans-la-peau-d-039-un-colonisateur-blanc_3286531.html

Gauz's project developed around historical research, and traces are present throughout the novel in both the fictional storylines and in historical sections that give voice to historical figures such as the interpreter Louis Anno whose writings figure in some of the "Légendes," or the French governor Louis-Gustave Binger.

This novel belongs to a genre we can call postcolonial historical fiction in the sense that Greg Forter defined it:

> The genre represents a revisionary, postcolonial appropriation of the historical novel developed in Europe in the early 1800s and theorized in the 1930s by Georg Lukacs.[...] they are *about* colonial processes in a more explicit or elaborated sense. […] The novels particularize colonialism both historically and geographically, beckoning us to learn anew what exactly it was, how it dynamically functioned, what it felt like to live under it. And behind this gesture is an intuition that the "historicity of the present moment" that characterizes postcolonial fiction must be supplemented by an explicit exploration of the colonial past if we are to untangle the meaning of our present and invent a genuinely *post*colonial future. (Forter 2)

Gauz's work tinkers with this definition in two ways. First, because of the viewpoints and temporalities present in the two storylines: past and present are explicitly tied together with the two storylines. Second, Gauz embraces the viewpoint of the colonizer, which gives a different twist to understanding how colonialism functioned and "what it felt like to live under it."

ii. Staging a Historical Moment: 1893

The starting point for Gauz's novel is 1893, the year the Ivory Coast officially came under French government. The event is told twice: a first time in the notule, the historical dimension of which, as noted above, is nuanced by the dedication; it is told a second time in the opening chapter of the novel. This opening chapter is called "La Plage" and is unique in its presentation and function. The chapter is the only one with a title in bold. The other chapters are either titled with a two part name that alternates unmarked font and bolded font ("Chapitre rouge

CRAC," or "Chapitre romain **Dabilly"** for example), or they are shorter chapters the title of which is always italicized and starts with "*Légendes"* ("*Légende du Prince et de Parisien,"* or *"Légende de la première débarqué"*).

"La plage" opens with a description of the dramatic Guinean bar[36], setting the scene for the highly symbolic arrival of the first French governor of the Ivory Coast, Louis-Gustave Binger. This arrival is staged: the backdrop is the dramatic coastline that only the agile sailors who are the Apolonians and the Kroumens can navigate, and the audience, on the beach of Grand-Bassam, looks to the horizon for the arrival of the governor. Whereas in the "Notule," the key date is March 10th, 1893, date of the official creation of the colony, in this introductory chapter the date is September 5th, 1893:

> *C'est officiel, le* Capitaine Ménard *envoie aujourd'hui son premier gouverneur à la Côte d'Ivoire. On sait depuis quelques années que dans ce pays les fouets et les balles peuvent soumettre, mais que seuls les symboles conquièrent. Parmi eux, l'entrée en scène est d'importance. Nous l'avons préparée. Nous ne répéterons pas les erreurs de l'Histoire. Aujourd'hui, la barre sera avec nous.* (13)

Regardless of the "official" creation of the colony and its recording by historians, it is through the experience of directly witnessing the arrival of the governor that a date is established. The arrival plays a performative role; in the symbol of this arrival are mingled history and fiction.

The chapter, as opposed to the "Notule," is written in the second person plural. The second person plural is used three times throughout the three last sentences above. It is the

[36] A bar, in the nautical context, is a passageway that is notoriously difficult to navigate. Usually the difficulty is created by the opposing incoming current of the ocean and the outcome current of another water flow such as a river. The difficulty can be enhanced by an uneven land at the intersection (rocky bottom of the ocean, or an elevated sand level).

subject of two of those sentences, determining the two elements of history and the natural world as subjective. This subjective presence is not noticeable in the first paragraphs of the chapter however: it first appears with the use of a possessive on the second page, but this possessive is significant: "*Chaque mois, un paquebot de la* Compagnie de Chargeurs Réunis […] *quitte le port du Havre en direction de nos possessions de Cochinchine"* (12). This initial indication of an internal focalization plays a double role. It both gives us to rethink the reading of the first few paragraphs: while the natural and historical descriptions of these first three paragraphs was seemingly objective, the introduction of this possessive very clearly associated with the colonizer forces us, once again, to think about the subjectivity of historical discourse, and even of the description of the natural landscape of the bar. The possessive "nos" is subtle because it is the only indication of an internal focalization; it is also very powerful because associated with the word "possessions." Also noticeable in this passage is the use of the present tense. This gives both the "Notule" and the dedication yet another role: that of providing a historical context, allowing the narrative itself to diverge from the official historical line, to give it a subjective anchoring. In his interview Gauz comments on his choice of adopting the viewpoint of the colonizer; the use of the present tense in these sections contributes to explaining this choice. Gauz' project is steeped in history; but it brings history into the present, illustrating the complexity of neocolonial practices.

Gauz's research on colonization is more explicitly present in the six short "Légendes" that are inserted between certain chapters and presented in the form of direct quotations. Three of these quotations are from the interpreter Louis Anno, a historical figure who worked for the French governor of the Ivory Coast at the end of the nineteenth century. These quotations contribute to the hybrid genre of the text, between history and story. In the same way that

Bouraoui explored the boundaries of autobiography and the novel, here Gauz explores and breaks down the limits between history and fiction, between non-fiction and the novel. His strong background in history also allows him to take a critical distance. He manifests this distance by infusing his writing with irony, making his style radically different from Bouraoui's and Chamoiseau's. Gauz juxtaposes his historical knowledge and stories written in the first person singular, thus highlighting the subjectivity of the individual storylines throughout history; highlighting, as well the subjectivity of the metropolitan version of French colonial history.

Gauz explores alternative possibilities to the genre by deploying strategies similar to Chamoiseau and Bouraoui: he a) uses history as a way to shed light on the artificiality of the genre of the novel and, b) he rejects traditional linear narratives in favor of a deconstructed storyline that alternates between different times and spaces. The text is not held together by a singular narrator but rather by History itself: his work offers the possibility to consider an alternative way of telling the story of French colonial history. In Gauz's writing, exploring anew the genre of the novel goes hand in hand with a retelling of colonial history.

C. Intermediality in the Francophone Novel

The theme of intermediality in the context of the Francophone novel has also been considered by critics as a creative means of changing the codes that regulate the genre and the reader's expectations of the genre. In the introduction to *Médias et littérature, Formes, Pratiques et postures*, the editors Philip Amangoua Atcha, Roger Tro Deho and Adama Coulibaly note that the strategy of bringing in media in the novel is one used by younger generations of writers:

> Ils affichent une ferme volonté de rompre avec les habitudes de leurs devanciers et avec l'écriture normée pour produire des œuvres originales, inédites. Leurs recherches de nouvelles voies pour des formes novatrices d'écriture s'appuient sur les expériences contemporaines dont, entre autres, l'utilisation des médias et des arts. On comprend dès lors pourquoi l'intermédialité est un nouveau mode d'écriture, une pratique artistique que de plus en plus d'écrivains adoptent et adaptent pour innover et trouver de nouvelles formes. (*Médias et littérature* 7-8)

Here, the scholars highlight this practice as, mainly, a creative way to imprint the genre with the seal of their generation and to shape it to better correspond to the realities they live in.

Although it is not stated explicitly in this introduction, the Francophone novel from Africa is the main target of *Médias et littérature*: the end of the introduction features a quote from Robert Fotsing Mangoua's article "L'écriture jazz:"

> En effet, le renouveau de la pratique romanesque entraîne un travail d'invention et d'intervention sur l'ossature du roman, car « l'écrivain africain recule les bornes de son inspiration et sa pratique de l'écriture de territoires comme [les médias et (…) offre] à la littérature mondiale, en toute liberté, des productions inédites. (10)

Almost all the essays of *Médias et littérature* concern African literature, though this fact is nowhere stated in the introduction. The central section of the book ("Traversée du roman par les medias") is entirely devoted to African literature, although, once again, there is no indication of this in the title of the section. The reasoning behind this is unclear, just as the reasoning behind the collection "Continents Noirs" is: the Francophone world, and, consequently, the literary Francophone scene, is a lot vaster than the African continent. Nevertheless, the African context is the focus of *Médias et littérature*.

The reader discovers, in addition to an absence of justification for the corpus, negative language regarding the novel relation between media and literature. Traces of this language are already present in the introduction: the critics write of the "intrusion des médias" (9) in literature, an expression which is taken up by Coulibaly in his own essay ("l'intrusion médiatique dans le tissue romanesque," 154), followed up with the belligerent word of

"invasion." In the essay "Les tissages médiatiques dans le roman africain Francophone," Atcha uses the expression "injustes noces" (166) to qualify the new combination of media and the genre of the novel. The concluding lines of this essay confirm Atcha's discomfort with the phenomena of intermediality in literature:

> Pour tout dire, reconnaît Jurgen E. Muller : « Il faut voir un signe des plus positifs dans la nouvelle tendance grandissante de la littérature (…) à se pencher d'un point de vue intermédiatique et interartial sur ses propres racines culturelles ». (167)

While Atcha's quote of Muller is one that explicitly demands that intermediality be considered positively, Atcha is dragging his feet about it, as the choice of the verb "reconnaître" shows. Another essay presents this same tendency even within its title: Gervais- Xiver Kouadio contribution is "Roman et medias électroniques: un exemple de l'impureté des codes chez Emmanuel Boundzeki Dongola." While the essays of *Médias et littérature* consider and acknowledge the creativity of contemporary African authors, their framing discourse of this acknowledgement translates a discomfort with the changes that Francophone African authors are participating in bringing about.

A further problematic aspect is the scope of media that is considered: while the participating scholars take into account the emergence of newspapers, the radio, television, cinema, they do not consider forms of communications which also occur through media. For instance, in the same essay mentioned above, Atcha devotes one section to each of the following media: the newspaper ("Roman et journal," page 157), the radio ("roman et radio," page 158), the tape recorder ("roman et magnétophone," page 159), and photography ("Roman et photo," page 160). Atcha develops the concept of "écriture jazz" mentioned in

the introduction of the book. This concept becomes a way of thinking about the metamorphosis of the novel penetrated by media:

> Le roman africain francophone est en pleine mutation. Tels des potiers, les romanciers africains créent des formes inédites en intégrant les médias dans l'architecture du roman. Cela donne des textes qui sont bâtis sur le modèle des médias imprimés, des médias sonores et audiovisuels. (166)

All the "médias imprimés" and "médias sonores et audiovisuels" contribute to the renewal of the genre of the novel a political interpretation of this phenomena is missing. Atcha concludes: "L'odyssée des médias dans le roman situe ce dernier dans la tendance ekphrasistique" (166-167), confirming an aesthetic, apolitical interpretation. I argue here that formal, aesthetic changes are politically driven, especially in the context of the novel the form of which is inextricably linked to the nation. My claim is that younger generations of writers choose transmediality as a way of writing precisely because it allows them to escape the conventional codes of the genre of the novel. Animata Aïdara's text *Je suis quelqu'un* was published in 2018 when she was thirty-four: her text features intermediality as a way to subvert the canonical first-person narrator of the novel and move towards a collaborative form of storytelling, and to subvert the genre of the novel itself in a rejection of its self-contained totality as defined earlier in this chapter.

Aïdara's first novel fits the Continents noirs collection's aspirations[7]: she has ties to the African continent, as do her characters, and the theme of diaspora and migration are at the heart of her characters' struggles. Her novel is thus promoted by this collection, and in turn mediates the themes and values upheld by the collection. Aïdara's novel navigates a family story, at the heart of which is the story of a mother and her four daughters. The mother, a woman from Senegal named Penda, lives in the suburbs of Paris and is a cleaning lady in a high school. She left her life and her husband in Senegal after she fell in love with a

Frenchman named Eric. She followed him to France, where he ended up leaving her. Her oldest daughter chose to stay in Senegal with her father, where she is raising children of her own. Her other, younger, daughters are now grown up but are still struggling, in their own way, with the choice their mother imposed on them. One of them, for instance, fully embraced her new life in France, to the point of rejecting her Senegalese identity and corrects her mother's accent when she speaks French. The youngest, Estelle, dropped out of college and decided to live her life away from home. However, when the novel starts, Estelle is suffering from depression and has made her way back to her mother's to recover. Other family members gravitate around the central stories of Penda, the mother, and Estelle: two cousins, Dialika and Mansour, who are also struggling with their immigrant status. Driving the plot is a family secret, one that weighs heavily on all the characters, and which causes mental and physical distress to them. Most characters know some part of the secret, but it is only when it is eventually spoken that characters find peace, and the story can end.

Aïdara's text subverts the genre of the novel so that her characters' voices are heard as individuals tied to a collective story. The story is shared; this text challenges the notion of an overpowering, controlling narrator. The role of a narrator who determines the text is lost in her work. Aïdara deploys new means of communication to stage resistance to the codes and conventions of the novel and to allow for reality to shine through with different stakes. Fanon demonstrated in *L'An V de la Révolution algérienne* with the case of the radio, that media, which first served as an instrument of domination and appropriation, can be subverted and reinvested as a form of resistance. Aïdara's story is transnational: her characters are found in France, England, Italy, the United States, Senegal, Spain and Mexico. Geographical and emotional distance implies that relationships between characters are mediated: the means of

communication to connect locations and characters creates a plurivocal text, where the overlap of voices is achieved by bringing various media into play. The novel presents five parts which are all structured differently, alternating between different narratorial strategies (third person narrative, first person narrative, letters and journal forms). Shifts in perspective happen through the use of letters, diaries, voicemails, and emails. A modern take on the genre of the epistolary novel, these forms of communication are all present throughout the novel, but do not feature the responses that would be expected. Communication is mediated, voices are heard, but there is no dialogue between characters: letters, voice mails and emails are embedded in the narration and always seem to be one-directional.

The second section of the text, for instance, stages this. This section is titled "Estelle, Les Délires," and focuses here on Estelle. She becomes the first-person narrator, but her narration is interrupted eleven times by voicemails from her cousin who lives in Italy, and twelve times by emails sent her other cousin Mansour, who decided to return to Senegal where he was born, to trace the story of his mother who died at his birth. While the voicemails are generally short, the emails are longer and constitute whole sections of the narrative. This section weaves together three different characters, and the voice of each one of them is mediated differently. For the main protagonist, Estelle, it is narration: her voice, in the first person, structures this section. Dialika, or, as Estelle calls her, "la Cousine du Cœur," sends voicemails, which always remain unanswered, but which propel Estelle's narrative. Finally, Mansour, or "le Petit Cousin Fragile," writes e- mails, to which Estelle reacts in her narrative, but never through a direct response to Mansour. Estelle is the link between Dialika and Mansour, who do not communicate with each other. Estelle

is in Paris, Dialika in Italy, and Mansour is also in Paris, but mainly writes of his recent journey to Senegal.

Because Estelle never responds to the voicemails or to the emails, the communication networks in this section appears to be one-sided. The physical distance between the three cousins seems to be reinforced by this absence of an exchange. The modern means of communication thus seem to have failed. The characters have different attitudes towards Estelle's consistent silence. At first Dialika is impatient with her cousin's lack of response and ends her voicemails with various pleas for her to call her back, first gentle, but growing more and more irritated: "Appelle-moi quand tu le sens!" (Aïdara 43), "Viens on en parle, allez… Rappelle." (46), "Allez, rappelle-moi, allez…" (51). After a few of these messages, she seems to get used to the idea of a one-sided conversation, and simply ends her voicemails with salutations such as "à plus"(49), "Je t'envoie plein de bisous!" (58), "Bon ben, à bientôt hein…" (67). Dialika slowly gets used to the absence of response from Estelle and seems to get into a routine of sending her updates without expecting a response.

Mansour's emails, on the other hand, do not bear the trace of any expectation of an answer from Estelle, and he even concludes his first email by demanding from her that she not respond:

> T'as aimé ma prophétie? Mais surtout, un jour, malgré ces mots, viendras-tu me voir ?
> Je t'en prie, ne réponds pas.
> Mansour. (77)

Mansour's last sentences of his first email to Estelle contain a paradoxical juxtaposition of a request and rejection of contact: he wants to see his cousin, but does not want her to write to him, or more accurately, does not want her to react to what he wrote to her in the email.

Why is Estelle ignoring her cousins' attempts to contact her? What is the purpose of these voicemails and emails if they do not trigger a conversation, if they are just flowing in one direction? What does this say of these forms of mediation? Is this an example of them failing? They certainly do not seem to be functioning as they usually do, which means there is a double twist of media, the first one being a twist on the genre of the novel, which here features other media instead of the traditional direct dialogue or epistolarity to which readers are more accustomed, the second being the twist of the function of these new media in themselves. These disfunctions are linked: introducing technology as a mediation between characters affects both the form of the novel and these technologies themselves, because their primary function, that of communication, seems unsuccessful. Communication fails because of dysfunctional communicators. The use of instant forms of messaging such as emails, voicemails and texts signal the inadequacy of technologically mediated personal interactions.

The novel, however, does not stage a failure of the modern technologies. Indeed, although there is an absence of direct response, the reader has access to Estelle's internal responses. The narration becomes the response, even though the first addressers, Dialika and Mansour, do not have access to these responses. In a stream of consciousness-like narrative, Estelle shares her "délires," her psychological distress with the reader, and her voice responds poetically to her cousins' interventions. All three cousins are going through a similar identity crisis; all three are dealing with it as they can. Chains of meaning and leitmotivs are thus created between three different voices. In one of her earlier voicemails, Dialika remarks that Estelle has disappeared from social media:

> C'est chiant ce truc de message vocaux. J'sais que tu les écoutes hein, mais je ne suis pas sûre à cent pour cent comme avec WhatsApp. Pourquoi tu ne l'as plus d'ailleurs ? J'ai l'impression que t'es retournée à un vieux Nokia et que ton smartphone est décédé

> quelque part. Tu n'as même plus Facebook. C'est un peu radical, non, tout ça ? Bon… à plus. (49)

This is one of Dialika's earlier messages, in which the reader senses her frustration at her cousin, and in which the reader can understand she still hopes to hear back from Estelle despite the clear signals Estelle is sending by retreating from social media. In the passage immediately following this message, Estelle indirectly answers Dialika's concerns:

> Je suis quelqu'un qui quitte Facebook par un trop-plein de commotions. Je choisis de voir les conversations fragiles rebondir de bouche à oreille, face à face, mais de ne plus suivre leur recherche d'un sens sur la toile. Mes yeux picotent quand je vois à quel point nous sommes tous à la recherche de Dieu, sur les réseaux sociaux. De Dieu ou de l'Amour, avec nos grandes phrases, nos photos de bonheur ou de désespoir, nos provocations, nos attentes d'une approbation de la part de l'Autre. (49)

Estelle is outside of all conversations: the oxymoric expression "voir les conversations fragiles" testifies to her refusal to join any form of communication, even remote ones: she observes them, she does not listen to them. In this passage, she places herself as outsider, one who listens but who is not heard, something Dialika will progressively come to accept. So, Estelle does not disappear; dropping out of social media does not isolate her, as contact is maintained. She becomes a passive rather than active consumer of media: she listens and thinks about what her cousin tells her. Her voice is not silenced because of this absence "sur la toile." It emerges in the narrative of the novel.

In the hands of a Francophone writer such as Aïdara, the novel is a space to highlight the limits of conventional narrative. Dysfunctional communication is a trait shared by her characters and inherited from colonial and neocolonial trauma. The traditional, self-contained genre of the novel itself, is ill suited to feature this dysfunctional communication nor can it feature a resolution of intergenerational trauma, itself carrying out a part of the cause of that trauma. Communication, its mediation and

framing, is a central theme of the novel. All characters, as they deal with their respective psychological crisis, communicate indirectly with one another, through various technological devices, as the previous example show. The contemporary Francophone author explores transmediality as an aesthetic, for psychological and political reasons intrinsic to their status as marginalized writers on the French literary scene.

Interestingly geographical distance does not justify this form of communication. Penda and Eric, both living in Paris, communicate through letters before they are able to face one another. Mansour writes emails to Estelle although they also live in the same area. Even Penda and Estelle, living under the same roof, do not talk to each other; dialogue is engaged, here as well, through other media. For instance, Penda attempts to reach and talk to her daughter by gifting her two CDs to listen to. As the characters start resolving and facing their issues, they start coming together and engaging in face-to-face conversations. Dialika, Mansour and Estelle all end up under the same roof at the end of the novel. Penda decides to return to Senegal after fifteen years of absence to visit her daughter. Penda and Eric, former lovers, end up having one last conversation together at the end of the novel. There seems to be an evolution throughout the novel, one that aims towards unmediated communication as a form of resolution.

In Chapter 2 I highlighted the persistently racial characteristics of the French publishing system with the example of Gallimard, and Francophone writers' awareness of the hierarchical nature of the field in which they publish. In Chapter 3, I analyzed how, within their works, contemporary Francophone writers explore literary tropes to develop a content that exposes the present consequences of colonialism: the figure of the mother, both literally and metaphorically, represents the struggles of twenty-first century Francophone writers with

the inheritance of imperialism. In Chapter 4, I developed how one of the most commonly recognized genres of literature, the novel, is historically linked to colonialism and imperialism; Francophone writers are re-investing the genre of the novel, creating a new genesis for it that allows for the expression of the singularity of their experience as writers. In the final chapter, I now turn to an investigation of how the most fundamental of the writers' tools, language, is also an instrument of oppression. Therefore the works of Francophone writers seek to deconstruct the French language as a means of reappropriation.

Chapter 5: How the Translingual Mode in Francophone Literature Transfigures the Monolingual Paradigm

One of the main characteristics of literary writing is its ability to retweeterinvent and re-create a language. Authors have been recognized and praised for their knowledge of language and their creative appropriation of it. For contemporary Francophone writers, the stakes of deconstructing the French language go well beyond aesthetic concerns and have inherently political ramifications. Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé (1937-) capture the stakes of writing in the language of the colonizer:

> A fundamental element, according to the cosigners of *L'Eloge*, is that freedom cannot be obtained without challenging the linguistic apparatus whereby the subaltern expresses his violence. Because Negritude had no complex expressing itself in French, it did not make this challenge. This is no place to initiate a debate on linguistics. We can, however ask ourselves whether Weber's concept of language is truly justified – whether the dichotomy – colonial tongue/mother tongue is absolute. Has not the work of Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrated the power of hybridization and of language's double entendre? In the end, does not language belong to the one who speaks it? Does it not adapt itself depending on the ethnicity, gender, and individual history of the speaker? (158-159)

She comments on the 1993 collaborative work by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant: she situates it in the aftermath of the Négritude movement and highlights the shift of the authors's attitude towards language. Where the Négritude authors (Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor…) embraced the French language, the Créolité movement brought about a more critical approach to it. Contemporary Francophone authors draw on this critic to deconstruct the French language and make it an object of questions and analysis within their writings. Condé's questions reveal the potential for a re-appropriation of language: I argue this linguistic reappropriation happens in contemporary Francophone writing.

In this chapter I draw on theories of monolingualism to highlight the political stakes of writing in a language that, understandably, is still associated with colonization. I first demonstrate that monolingualism is a perpetuation of an imperial model and that, countering this, theories of translingualism allow us to read and understand contemporary Francophone texts as deconstructions of the monolingual paradigm. I move on to the analysis of two specific examples: Hélène Cixous' 2018 work *Défions l'augure*, and Lydie Salvayre's award-winning text *Pas pleurer*. In both, translingualism is featured as a theme that allows the authors to address the topic of colonial language. Finally, I focus on the stylistic effects of translingualism: contemporary Francophone writers develop their style with the awareness of the political stakes of writing in French.

1. From Monolingualism to Translingualism: Definitions and Stakes

A. Historical Perspectives on Standard French

i. The Creation of Monolingual French: A "Mémoire Inventée" of Linguistic Unification

In March of 2017, a little before his election as French president, Emmanuel Macron visited the castle of Villers-Cotterêts situated on the outskirts of Paris, accompanied by a group of students.[37] During the visit, the guide explained the important historical role this castle played: at this location King Francis I signed the Ordonnance Villers-Cotterêts in 1539. A video posted

[37] Develey, Alice. "Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts: quand Macron refait l'histoire. " *Le Figaro*, September 18th, 2017. www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/2017/09/18/37002-20170918ARTFIG00111-ordonnance-de-villers-cotterets-quand-macron-refait-l-histoire.php. Accessed October 6th, 2022.

by Macron on his twitter feed shows him explaining to the children that it is thanks to this legislation that they all are speaking French, instead of the many dialects that were present ian the territory at the time when the Ordonnance was adopted. Macron went on to declare, after his visit, that he intended to make the castle a center for the Francophone world: “Nous en ferons l’un des piliers symboliques de notre francophonie,” he wrote in another tweet. In the video and through these tweets, Macron emphasizes an aspect of the Ordonnance that he seems to have misunderstood: the purpose of the decree was not directly to unify the French language across the country. However, what he chose to emphasize reveals an unquestioned and unquestionable attachment to the monolingual orientation. French is upheld as a model, and the unification of the language is presented as a positive event.

The Ordonnance itself contains a total of 192 articles, two of which pertain to language specifically, and which are the only two still in place today. These are articles 110 and 111 which read as follows:

> Article 110
>
> Et afin qu'il n'y ait cause de douter sur l'intelligence desdits arrêts, nous voulons et ordonnons qu'ils soient faits et écrits si clairement, qu'il n'y ait ni puisse avoir aucune ambiguïté ou incertitude ne lieu à demander interprétation.
>
> Article 111
>
> Et pour ce que telles choses sont souvent advenues sur l'intelligence des mots latins contenus esdits arrests, nous voulons d'oresnavant que tous arrests, ensemble toutes autres procédures, soient de nos cours souveraines et autres subalternes et inférieures, soient de registres, enquestes, contrats, commissions, sentences testaments, et autres quelconques, actes et exploicts de justice, ou qui en dépendent, soient prononcés, enregistrés et délivrés aux parties en langage maternel françois et non autrement.[38]

[38] “Ordonnance du 25 août 1539 sur le fait de la justice (dite ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts).” Légifrance, October 20th, 2020. www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000006070939/2020-10-20/. Accessed October 6th, 2022.

Article 110 emphasizes the need for clarity; article 111 details the means through which this clarity can be achieve: by imposing French as the language of the law. A close reading of these article reveals nothing about a nation-wide imposition of the French language however.

Historian Paul Cohen (2003) writes that to this day, the general understanding of the Ordonnance is that it marks the beginning of a nationalized, unified and prescriptive language ideology in France:

> Les historiens, littéraires, linguistes et hommes de lettres qui ont tissé la mémoire collective de la langue et de la nation françaises ont souvent attribué à la célèbre loi un rôle de tournant dans l'essor de l'idiome national. Selon eux, elle représente le moment où l'État a adopté une politique linguistique pour faire du français la langue nationale. Dans les manuels scolaires aussi bien que dans les travaux scientifiques, l'année 1539 constitue une étape décisive dans l'unification linguistique du territoire, voire sa date de lancement. (21)

Gilles Boulard, in a 1999 article, notes that the goal of these articles was above all to bring clarity to the language of the law in France, as well as to eliminate Latin from it. However, he also notes that the "langue maternel françois," as such, does not exist.

> Certes, il y a bien un langage françois que l'on peut qualifier de langage maternel, mais son aire géographique est vraisemblablement circonscrite à la région parisienne et alentours, mais son rayonnement social se borne aux élites cultivées ; en vérité, il est patent que la majorité de la population a pour langue maternelle autre chose que le « françois ». (47)

While the goal of the articles was not, as such, to unite the French language and to disappear regional dialects and language variations, it contributed to that effect. Boulard shows further on that if the intention was not to efface regional dialects, it was nevertheless the effect that it had (50).

Other key texts contributed to its assertion and spread: shortly after the 1539 Ordonnance, Joachim Du Bellay, French poet and member of the group known as La Pléiade, published a

manifesto in more explicit support of a uniform and national language. *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*, published in 1549, outlines the need to protect and preserve the French language.

The 1539 Ordonnance was one of the first steps in a centralization and linguistic prescriptivism process that scholar Anthony Lodge identifies as "the most powerful underlying force promoting the standard language in France" alongside "the continuing dominance of Paris in French political, economic and cultural life" (236). The Ordonnance is an example of a text that contributed to building up a specific relation in France to the French language and is a milestone in the process that progressively led to what Lodge calls "French linguistic *dirigisme*" (237) which is prevalent today in France more than in any other country:

> the rigid codification imposed upon the written language and the powerful institutional pressures promoting standard ideology […] have brought about a greater rigidity in the standard form of French than is to be found in many languages in the modern world. (260)

Renovations have now started on the building of Villers-Cotterêts, organized by Macron who went forward with his project after his election.[39] The Ordonnance is a part of what Paul Cohen coined, in 2003, a "'mémoire 'inventée':" its significance today is indicative of the deployment of a linguistic ideology of which the Ordonnance itself was not yet a part. The contemporary reading of the Ordonnance is telling of the persisting weight of monolingualism today that is maintained on the level of the state. Today in 2023 as during the sixteenth century, maintaining control over the language of a people is a way of asserting and maintaining control over people themselves. In an era of intense migration, it is also a means to define and mark the limits of an "insider" group (those who belong, who speak the "correct" version of a language)

[39] https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2020/10/12/patrimoine-villers-cotterets-le-chantier-tres-politique-de-macron_6055646_3246.html Accessed 10/13/20

and an "outsider" group (those who speak a variation of a language and therefore explicitly and obviously are marked as outsiders). Maintaining monolingualism on the scale of a nation is also a way to preserve its identity, to "protect" it from outside influences. Highlighting the importance of a monolingual version of the French language reasserts the identity of the French nation-state. It excludes from the nation-state, or at the very least creates a hierarchy between the Francophone speaking world and the metropolitan French speaking world.

ii. Institutions and Contemporary Stakes in France

Lodge notes that there are multiple institutions in France whose role it is to preserve the French language and to minimize outside influences from changing it (237): the *Office de la langue française*, the *Office du vocabulaire français*, the *Haut comité pour la defense et l'expansion de la langue française* and the *Haut Conseil supérieur de la langue française*. These institutions maintain the value and viewpoint of a stable French language and disseminate them to the French population through a system that is in great part public, therefore directly associated with the government and its politics. The public education system in France, the seemingly untouchable Académie Française, and the publishing industry all contribute to maintaining the illusion of a monolithic French language.

Lodge notes that the "most powerful institutional vehicle for the promotion and maintenance of the standard is probably the centralized education system" (235). The French education system rests upon a centralized battery of exams (the "brevet" at the end of middle school and the baccalauréat at the end of high school) in which French, as a discipline, is one of key evaluated elements. Educators themselves go through a similarly centralized training in which they need to pass the competitive exam of either the CAPES (Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second degré) or the Agrégation.

The Académie française, founded in 1635, is one of the most prominent defenders of the French language. Its mission, upheld by 40 "immortels," is to dictate clear grammatical rules for the French language and to keep it as "pure" as possible: article 24 of the "règlement" of the Académie states that "La principale fonction de l'Académie sera de travailler, avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possibles, à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences.[40] " A footnote to this article emphasizes its importance: " Article essentiel qui formule la raison d'être de l'Académie, lui prescrit sa mission et fonde son autorité." The adjective "pure" connotes the idea that French should not be tainted by outside influences (the influence of the far-reaching English language, for instance: words coming from English should be Frenchified). This adjective implies that outside influences are to be rejected, or tamed to fit in with the French monolingual project.

The Académie publishes a dictionary and today has an extensive website on which can be looked up rules and vocabulary. The prescriptive approach to the French language is clearly marked still today: the communication page of the Académie is called "Dire, ne pas dire" and another page also concerns itself with the "emplois fautifs" of the French language. The website is regularly updated and the Académiciens respond to questions from the public in that space. This prescriptive dimension is also notable in the alternative name given to the académiciens, the "immortels," referring to the first moto of the Académie chosen by Richelieu, "A l'immortalité." This refers to the status of the académiciens who keep their status for life, but it also refers to the French language they are supposed to protect and foster. The body of the Académie is today

[40] Académie française, "Statuts et règlement." July 1995. www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/statuts_af_0.pdf. Accessed October 6th, 2022.

constituted by 33 members; the most recent addition was Barbara Cassin who took the place of musicologist and writer Philippe Beaussant in 2018.

This practice of protectionism, both of the French language and of its members, is arguably what participates in a process of racialization or even of whitening of the French language. Of the forty members of the Académie, thirty-seven are white, the notable exceptions being Dany Laferrière, François Cheng and Mario Vargas Llosa. The protectionist attitude of the Académie builds upon centuries of expansionist practices through colonialism and imperialism, with the overlying logic of spreading the metropolitan version of the French language while simultaneously protecting it from outside influences. Contemporary Francophone writers publishing in France therefore find their writing embedded in an officially controlled system that automatically claims to reject any contributions they may have.

The Académie's mission is certainly upheld to this day; however, the nomination of a scholar such as Cassin is indicative of a slight change of attitude. One of the very rare women to be appointed an "immortelle," Cassin is notably famous for her edition of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (first published in 2004), in which connections between concepts in different languages, and therefore languages themselves, are explored. As a motto (which all académiciens have to choose and engrave on their personal sword), Cassin decided on the phrase "Plus d'une langue" taken from Derrida[41], indicating that her own linguistic ideology is not quite aligned with the original project of the Académie. She explained in her introductory speech that

> « Plus d'une langue », c'est faire entendre qu'à l'intérieur de lui-même le français est multiple, divers. Il provient d'autres langues, composé des éléments venus d'ailleurs. Il évolue avec l'histoire, se réinvente avec la géographie. Ce « plus d'une langue » conduit de l'étymologie et de la grammaire aux emprunts et aux assimilations ; il mène aussi des

[41] Cassin, Barbara, "Discours de Réception." www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/barbara-cassin?fauteuil=36&election=03-05-2018. *Académie française*, October 17th, 2019. Accessed October 6th, 2022.

> terroirs et des régions à quelque chose comme une langue-monde. On ne dira jamais assez l'importance, pour la France et pour le français, des langues parlées en France, toutes ; ni l'importance de la francophonie, des étudiants qui viennent étudier en France et en français.

She is starting here from the position that French is a complex language rather than approaching it as a standard language the variations of which need to be controlled. She talks of « des langues » spoken in France rather than of the French language as a controlled entity. In that regard, already, her position is strikingly different from that of the traditional Académie. She continues with a note on a perspective of French as being a part of a language system that includes many other languages:

> Mais « plus d'une langue », c'est signifier aussi, depuis le dehors, que le français est une langue « entre autres », parmi d'autres. Pour parler une langue et pour savoir que c'est une langue que l'on parle, il faut en parler, ou en flairer, plus d'une. Plus d'une langue en Europe, et plus d'une langue dans nos classes. C'est là que la traduction, savoir-faire avec les différences, travail entre les cultures, arrêt « entre », est une pratique qui s'impose. Avec hospitalité et patience.

Here she underlies the importance of linguistic awareness, or the importance of situating French not as opposed to other languages, not as a language to be protected from outside invasion or influence, but as a language that, as linguists have noted, is alive and thus constantly changing, adapting, and being influenced by the languages that are already "inside" it, inside the country. "Plus d'une langue en Europe, et plus d'une langue dans nos classes," she says. "Classes" can here be doubly interpreted: it can refer, perhaps most obviously, to the classroom, the educational space that for centuries has been a monolingual space, a space in which a standard French was upheld as a model to be emulated. It can also refer to social classes, among which different variations of the French language are spoken. Cassin, it could be ventured, is also referring to the English language as well as to the languages from the main countries immigrants to France originate from (Arabic and Chinese, for instance).

The Académie française sets a standard for the French language; its linguistic policies are often considered somewhat obsolete and the French language, in its everyday use, does not necessarily reflect the standards of the "immortels." However, the Académie has tight ties to the literary world: it distributes numerous literary prizes every year and many of its "immortels" are highly prestigious literary figures themselves (Erik Orsenna, Danièle Sallenave, Florence Delay, to name but a few). The Académie influence therefore extends to the contemporary literary world; other major actors in the field are publishing houses. Books are a mass market today, making the publishing industry a key player in shaping the literary field in France. In a 2014 article published in *Romance Notes*, scholar Holly Collins examines the standards maintained by the most well-established publication houses in France and notes that the "French literary institution is bound by self-constructed rules, hierarchies and etiquette," showing that this system influences the publication industry. "A monopolizing publishing industry not only dominates the business of publishing, but can also control the voice of what is published," she further writes (498), referring to the three giants in the publication industry in France, Gallimard, Grasset and Le Seuil, sometimes referred to together as "Galligrasseuil" to highlight their dominance. While Collins ends her article on a more positive, hopeful note,[42] her work points toward the issue of centralization which is one of the ways the French language is limited and controlled in a top-down approach to language, originating and spurred by decisions such as that of the 1539 Ordonnance and its subsequent reinforcements.

[42] "The empire only continues to exist in the Parisian literary imaginary; it is a fading star, while the constellation of world literatures in the French language lives and breathes deeply into the spirits of people around the world." (507).

Literary texts are often thought of as spaces of linguistic freedom and creativity; however, the dissemination of texts, despite the emergence of online literature, is still controlled by the French publishing industry. Behind the window of the largest brands in the metropolitan publishing world are editors, reading committees and reviewers that have been shaped by their French education and who are seeking, mainly, a product that will sell. These texts must therefore conform to a certain standard and certain expectations; "good" literature is often associated with certain linguistic standards just as subjective as the standards that dictate what forms and accents of a language are acceptable. The publishing industry usually maintains this standard by selecting for publication works in which the language is recognizable as "literary:" they publish works that use a language familiar and accessible to their contemporary target readership.

This standard is also maintained by various other institutions such as the educational system in France, and the system of literary awards (among which can be counted the Prix Goncourt, for instance). Just as in any other field, literature has its own dialect that usually does not question the status quo of monolingual French. The institutions that structure the literary field in metropolitan France tend to have a protectionist attitude towards the French language. The monolingual standard they uphold is in tension with the literary production of contemporary authors; the stakes of this tension are better understood when framed within the current research conducted in sociolinguistics. In the next section, I provide an overview of the current state of research in the field of linguistics, pinpointing the concept of translingualism as an alternative way to consider the writing of contemporary Francophone authors.

B. The social and political stakes of translingualism: a sociolinguistic approach

i. The unsustainable model of monolingual policies in a translingual world

The history of the French language led it to become highly regulated and codified; simultaneously, though, it was also encountering many other languages as the French empire expanded through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The institutionalized efforts to contain and control the language were then up against multiple challenges: the challenge of preserving a language in the face of its natural evolution, and the challenge of keeping control over a language while it was being adapted, revisited and recreated throughout the world as it came in touch with other populations and cultures. In *English with an Accent*, first published in 1997, writer and sociolinguist Rosina Lippi-Green highlights that there is still much that linguists have differing opinions on, but that the following five principles are agreed upon throughout the field:

> All spoken language changes over time.
>
> All spoken languages are equal in terms of linguistic potential.
>
> Grammaticality and communicative effectiveness are distinct and independent issues.
>
> Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally and functionally fundamentally different creatures.
>
> Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level, and much of that variation serves an emblematic purpose. (6-7)

Theories in the field of linguistics are often based on these principles as linguists tackle the socioeconomic dynamics of languages, as well as the socio-political organization of language. Recent research reveals that many social and economic inequalities are tied to language use and variation. Languages and their variations are equal in their effectiveness when it comes to

communication within communities of speech; however this effectiveness does not translate to the equality of language users. In fact, most of the premises presented by Lippi-Green contradict the linguistic beliefs upon which are built these inequalities. Applied linguist Suresh Canagarajah coined these linguistic beliefs the "monolingual orientation:"

> We believe that for communication to be efficient and successful we should employ a common language with shared norms. These norms typically come from the native speaker's use of the language. We also believe that languages have their own unique systems and should be kept free of mixing with other languages for meaningful communication. I consider these assumption as constituting a *monolingual orientation* to communication. (1)

The monolingual orientation thus reflects principles and beliefs that are in direct contradiction with the science of linguistics. They also very directly reflect the work the Académie française claims to be doing. The monolingual orientation is thus solidly anchored in metropolitan France; it influences language policies and language instruction, and, consequently, the French reader's approach to literary texts. The monolingual orientation, however, runs parallel to an alternative reality that tells a very different story: the linguistic reality experienced in most communities is not one of monolingualism. Monolingualism is not, and in fact has never been, the norm, Canagarajah explains: "Communities and communication have always been heterogenous. Those who are considered monolingual are typically proficient in multiple registers, dialects, and discourses of a given language. Even when they speak or write in a single 'language,' they still have to communicate in relation to diverse other codes in the environment" (8). He exposes that monolingualism is a social construct, the result of a national identity building process. I demonstrated in the previous section how the French language was gradually built up as a monolingual entity; the process became one of the stakes of the nation-state during the eighteenth century, continuing the spread of a monolingual ideology in the name of national

unification. It resulted, in France and across Europe, in a teleology which held up a linguistic standard as an aspiration for a *united* nation and the ultimate mode of communication.

The retention of this ideal, pure language, is incompatible with the premises articulated by Lippi-Green. While the monolingual orientation is factually in place, and has greatly influenced how identities are constructed throughout the world, the growing multilingualism of communities and individuals, the growing circulation of languages throughout the world, the growing connections between languages through new technologies makes it more difficult not to question this orientation. To this orientation Canagarajah opposes the translingual orientation.[43]

ii. Standard Languages and Translingualism

As Canagarajah's work (2013) reveals, the concept of translingualism has begun to draw attention from linguists, alongside theories of code-switching and code-meshing. It stems from the observation and acknowledgement that if language practices are not monolingual, neither are they exactly multilingual. As Canagarajah noted, the concept of multilingualism is not necessarily an alternative to monolingualism. However, code-switching, or code-meshing, are both practices which intrinsically challenge the monolingual paradigm because they challenge the implicit assumption of languages being self-contained, autonomous, and separate. The monolingual assumption upholds the pretense of a united, self-sufficient and autonomous language, that does not tolerate linguistic variations, which in turn means that there are specific dialects within each language that are considered standard. A standard dialect, usually that of an elite, is then held up as a model that validates the voices of that elite, relegating other dialects to

[43] Rather than the multilingual one the underlying premise of which is the juxtaposition of languages rather than their contact and exchanges (7).

the inferior ranks of an artificial hierarchy. In linguistics, the study of dialects is based on the premise that there is no referent version of a language, no model to follow, but rather a variety of dialects that are more or less accepted and respected among a variety of speech communities, *even though there are no grounds on which this hierarchy is established*. In an introductory textbook put together by the faculty of Linguistics at Ohio State University, the authors make clear that in their field, the approach to language is descriptive rather than prescriptive:

> Contrary to the common view that every language consists of one "correct" dialect from which all other "inferior" or "substandard" dialects depart, all dialects are linguistically equivalent. This misconception has arisen from social stereotypes and biases. It is very important to realize that a person's use of any particular dialect is not a reflection of his or her intelligence or judgement. Linguistically speaking, no one dialect or language is better, more correct, more systematic, or more logical than any other. (*Language Files* 420)

Each language is declined on a dialect continuum, which means there are different, overlapping dialects of the same language. Languages are described as existing on spectrums which overlap and combine, influencing one another. The contact between different dialects of different languages, between different speech communities that often do not map on to a national entity, creates constant changes and shifts between the dialects themselves as well as in the social hierarchy between these dialects.

The result is that languages are very much community-based, which means that they span a great variety of geographical dimensions but that they also sometimes exist locally and function as a form of community-building. Despite centuries of legislations and institutional regulations such as that of the Académie française, in France there persists, as in all places, dialects and variations of French. These are sometimes indicators of fractured socio-economic communities: the French spoken in the playground of an underprivileged school from the Parisian banlieue is a different variation than that of the French spoken in the corridors of an elite institution such as the Henri IV high school, for example. Linguistic variation, in France as

elsewhere, is often an indicator of socio-economic disparities and inequalities. Linguistic variations are intrinsic to any language; in the context of a prevalent monolingual ideology, however, they reinforce socio-economic disparities and linguistic discrimination.

In an immigrant country such as France, linguistic variations are also influenced by the inputs and contributions of other languages, resulting in translingual practices. In her 2018 work, Li Wei writes that:

> Whilst there has been significant progress in many parts of the world where multilingualism, in the sense of having different languages co-exist alongside each other, is beginning to be acceptable, what remains hugely problematic is the mixing of languages. The myth of a pure form of a language is so deep-rooted that there are many people who, while accepting the existence of different languages, cannot accept the 'contamination' of their language by others. (14)

The idea of "contamination" is key here. Linguistic influences are seen as a threat, as the arrival of something new into something stable or even "pure." The idea of mixed languages or of cross-pollination between languages is perceived as a threat most likely precisely because it upsets the monolingual paradigm and everything it upholds. The role literary institutions play in safeguarding a "standard" French language against a transformed version of French is shaped by the political weight of monolingual ideologies. Despite literature being conceived of as a space of linguistic freedom, the ideological background of French, constructed throughout the past five centuries, weighs on the metropolitan French literary system. This ideological background begs the question of how Francophone voices, often of an immigration background and with roots in former French colonies, can claim a linguistic and literary space as their own and also be recognized for it.

iii. From standard language to standard literature

One of the key elements listed by Lippi-Green is that "Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally and functionally fundamentally different creatures." While the formats supporting that form are changing and becoming more flexible, it remains that the only internationally sanctioned form of literature is one that is fixed on the page. While minor, local change can be made, once a text is written and published the text exists as an unbreachable entity. Commenting on that aspect of literature, Lodge highlights the opposition between the written form, which by its very nature has the potential to maintain the standard language, and the spoken form which by nature is more likely to resist it.

The written form, following Lodge's classification, is presented as conforming, maintaining a standard, which is the exact opposite of what literature's purpose is. Literature is supposed to push the boundaries of language and explore its possibilities. Writers search for their individual style, which means inflecting the language with their own orientation of it. Writers can be seen creating their own variation of language which spans across their works as they develop their style, ultimately contributing to linguistic variation. Commenting specifically on the case of French, Lodge touches on the topic of literature and writes that some specific authors of the past are held up in institutions that uphold standard French, as models to follow:

> The French language is commonly seen to exist in its quintessential form in the words of the writers whom French people have come to value so highly – Corneille, Pascal, Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau, Stendhal, Flaubert, Gide, Mauriac and so on. It is widely felt that the French language was indeed 'created' by such writers as these. This rich literary heritage confers high prestige on the norms of the standard language, and these have to be mastered by anyone wishing to be identified with 'cultivated people'. (236)

At the time they were writing, most of these authors were considered innovative and their language quite creative, and this is part of what motivates literary studies. This highlights the artificiality of the idea of a standard language: writing held up as a standard, which is supposed

to be a fixed form, was not considered standard in its historical context. Linguistic change occurs slowly; as time passes the style of these authors becomes canonized and upheld as a literary standard and model. The texts of the authors quoted by Lodge are therefore gradually used in the process of implementing the version of the French language that is upheld by linguistic and literary institutions in France today. The canonical authors mentioned by Lodge are diverse but share common values: grammatical correctness and structured sentences, and a use of French that is far away from orality. Their texts are studied as models throughout school curriculums. The literary standard is perpetuated by a cultural elite and their representatives through literary institutions, paradoxically limiting language in the very field that claims linguistic innovations and creativity.

Because the literary forms that determine the writing process and determine the publication and analysis of literary works are also caught in linguistic power dynamics, I aim to seek and track forms of resistance to the dominant literary language, specifically in the writings of contemporary Francophone writers. The social preference of the standard dialect and its implementation as the model language is a result of a linguistic ideology directly tied to France's history of nationalism and colonialism. The monolingual ideology is contrary to findings in linguistics, where, as noted previously, it has been established that no dialect is superior to another, the prestige of one language over another or of one dialect over another is the result of a historical process but has nothing to do with the quality or efficiency of said languages and dialects. Languages are porous and overlap through their multiple dialects: there is no beginning or end to a language, there are rather zones of languages that coexist, overlap, feed each other, develop and change in relation to each other or in reaction to each other. What does this mean then for literary works, which are published and received with the expectation that they are

written in one language, and that seek to attain the "best" form of that language? If we do away with the idea that there is one good form of a language, if we do away with the idea of a language as a limited, self-sustained whole, then the codes and conventions through which literary works are written, published, read and analyzed all fall apart.

C. Translingualism in Literary Theory

Scholars in the field of linguistics highlight the political stakes of such a linguistic hierarchy across the world; the case of metropolitan France is particularly discriminatory because of the institutionalization of the French language. Contemporary Francophone writers publish in a literary system that values a version of the French language that does not necessarily map on to their own, making it a challenge for their work to be recognized and circulated. How is the research conducted in linguistics relevant to literary scholarship? How do themes of multilingualism and translingualism appear in recent research in literature? Running parallel to research in linguistics, the "multilingual turn," originally coined within the field of SLA, is now conceptualized within literary studies. A complex web of concepts has emerged to address non-monolingual literature, or, differently put, literature that does not use the standard language as a default way of writing: plurilingualism, multilingualism, postmonolingualism, postmonolithicism and translingualism. There are overlaps and discrepancies between these concepts and approaches to language, but they all strive to achieve the same goal of destabilizing the parameters of the Herderian triad. This section focuses specifically on the institutional manifestations of the monolingual paradigm which affect or influence literary writing and

literary scholarship in order to understand how the "multilingual turn" can help recontextualize and promote contemporary Francophone writing.

i. Impossible Literary Translingualism? The Role of the Publication Industry in the Promotion (or Lack Thereof) Contemporary Francophone Works

The previous pages demonstrated how French institutions associated with literary studies such as the Académie française have historically played a major role in protecting standardized language. Consequently, they also have fully participated in the rise of a standard language ideology. This section focuses more specifically on the metropolitan French publication industry to highlight how important it is to destabilize the monolingual paradigm within that industry, and how challenging that process is. With the case study of Continents noirs, the collection analyzed in Chapter 2, I highlighted the internal issues of racialization and hierarchization present within one of the largest publication venues in France. Questions of language practices and standards also contribute to the processes that maintain a hierarchy between different profiles of writers. The publication industry plays a crucial role in maintaining language standards: because they tailor publications to the broadest readership possible, it is financially and reputationally risky for most presses to allow their authors to explore alternative linguistic forms. Standard language ideology was thus not only the result of the Herderian triad; it was, and still is, deliberately fostered and encouraged by for-profit publication houses who have issues of reader expectations and accessibility in mind.

Consequently, any deviations from that standard are usually staged as deviations rather than structurally embedded within narratives. This means that deviations from the standard French language are not legitimized in literary works. In the opening chapter of *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*, Rosina Lippi-Green demonstrates

the logic of the for-profit publishing industry by going back to its very beginnings. She writes about the difference between the written word and the spoken word, and focuses on how, from its beginnings in the fifteenth century, publication venues tended to favor a single variants of language over multiple:

> Earlier printers had some things to work out, including the question of norms and standardization. If Caxton had to print the Bible in ten different dialects of English, there would be little or no profit in the venture, which was, of course, not acceptable. The solution was to print the Bible in one variety of English, and then to convince everybody that that was the best kind of English. Thus began the movement toward language norms and standardization of the printed (and then, written) language. (15)

William Caxton is known for bringing the printing press to England and publishing the first printed texts in that country. The printing press thus reduced English to one version of it, legitimizing that version over others, creating a hierarchy that, as Lippi-Green's explanation here demonstrates, is artificial and arbitrary. Monolingualism is ideological, but it is also more profitable than multilingualism.

In his 2010 book *In the Shadow of Babel: Multilingual Literature, Monolingual States*, scholar Brian Lennon also highlights the artificiality of monolingualism. He tackles the issue of the discrepancy between institutional monolingualism and the practice of multilingual voice and text. Lennon focuses on the contemporary institution of the publication house to highlight the tension between a growing tendency towards plurilingualism but that the market for literature is still resolutely monolingual (2), not so much, anymore, because of governmental or institutional pressure, but rather because they are driven by for-profit motivations. The goal is for as many readers as possible to buy their books. A monolingual text is more accessible to a greater number of readers, and will be easier to translate, hence growing that readership some more (9). Literature remains tributary to its means of publication and the possibility of literature reflecting the social realities of non-standard linguistic practices is therefore reduced to almost nothing.

Lennon emphasizes that scholars have an important part to play: their role has to go beyond a critical approach of literature itself and scholars have to see themselves as potential activists within the global system of literary production given that they too participate in it.

Occurrences of translingualism and multilingualism are therefore understandably relatively rare in contemporary literature. Lennon emphasizes this by drawing a direct link between linguistic and national processes of unification:

> What the nationalized languages of book publishing cannot tolerate, on the other hand – and where the line dividing trade from scholarly and independent presses is drawn – is departure from the national standard: moving inward, in one direction, toward idiolectic private or invented language, and outward in the other, toward extranational, public plurilingualism. (11)

Lennon develops the concept of plurilingualism by opposing "strong" and "weak" versions of this concept. Phenomena of "strong plurilingualism," he notes, are not common, because they do not have the venue to be so. Descriptions and theorizations of alternatives to monolingualism within literary theory are therefore in a complicated position: while linguistics and Second Language Acquisition scholars can observe these phenomena at play in language used, literary scholars instead have to rely on "stagings" of the translingual and multilingual rather than actual translingual and multilingual events themselves. The study of alternatives to monolingualism in literature then looks very different from what is observed in linguistics, although, most importantly, the goal and the reach is the same: resistance to the monolingual paradigm saps the authority of standard language and allows, ultimately, for a whole other range of voices to step in, allowing for alternative voices and histories to emerge. The legitimization of non-monolingual voices is what is at stake within works of literature and scholarship on alternatives to monolingualism today.

ii. Literary Translingualism as Political Resistance

The publication industry generally maintains what Jerry Won Lee called "traditional ontologies through which communicative repertoires are compartmentalized into categories of one language or another" (11). And indeed, although sociolinguists have assessed the reality of translingualism and its various forms, it is a reality that does not necessarily exist in literary work without being embedded within a linguistic reflection on that phenomenon. The approach to translingualism in literary studies, therefore, has to acknowledge it as a form of resistance to the monolingual paradigm and trace how that resistance occurs within a monolingual structure that determines publication and that is the condition for the distribution and existence of the text itself.

Translingualism in literary studies must be read as an approach to the various and varied forms of unstable language within literary texts while also acknowledging the deliberately political intention behind this instability. Various scholars interested in the parameters of the monolingual paradigm as well as in translingual manifestations propose an understanding of translingualism as a form of resistance that forces the questioning not only of monolingualism as an ideology but also of the literary forms that condition the very existence of the works themselves. The "monolingual paradigm" as a concept was coined in Yasmine Yildiz's 2012 *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, where she examines forms of resistance to the monolingual nation-state. Her analysis of various German writers allows her to tie the concept of the mother-tongue to that of the nation-state, thus revealing the artificiality of both. She does not articulate the concept of translingualism in this text, but her work proves to be foundational to scholars who, following her and following the lead of sociolinguists, started to consider alternatives to monolingualism. It has been previously established that multilingualism

was a social reality in past centuries; the prevalence of the monolingual ideology today, however, makes it necessary to consider the emergence of translingual phenomena in literature as a form of resistance. Yildiz conceptualizes this resistance as postmonolingualism; following her lead, more recent scholars such as Jerry Won Lee and Sarah Dowling draw out the concept of translingualism to analyze that embedded resistance.

Lee, in *The Politics of Translingualism: After Englishes* (2017) works to unpack the historical and contextual nature of the monolingual nation-state. Just like Yildiz, he does not turn to the idea of multilingualism as an alternative to monolingualism. He argues that multilingualism, because it preserves the boundaries between languages and persists in considering languages as separate and finite entities that exist independently, actually maintains the monolingual paradigm (6). Translingualism, on the other hand, does more than creatively modify the languages it calls upon: it is a concept that allows us to question the very entity that is language, because it blurs the limits of languages. Lee and Yildiz's work complete each other conceptually in the sense that Lee's notion of translingualism is a part of what Yildiz calls "postmonolingualism:"

> […] "postmonolingualism" in this study refers to a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge. This term therefore can bring into sharper focus the back-and-forth movement between these two tendencies that characterizes contemporary linguistic constellations. Focusing on the tension rather than on one or the other pole helps to account for many phenomena that initially appear to be contradictory. (Yildiz 5)

Yildiz identifies a "tension" that persists when multilingual forms emerge. Translingualism participates in creating and maintaining that tension. While translingual texts are creative, play with linguistic codes, expose the artificiality of the national and linguistic boundaries that support literary forms, translingual texts still exist within the boundaries of monolingual forms that participate in the monolingual ideology. One of the very conditions of translingualism,

therefore, is political resistance; even when content is not deliberately political, a translingual text is always already resisting the codes in which it is embedded.

Sarah Dowling, in her more recent work *Translingual Poetics*: *Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism*, reasserts the conclusions drawn by sociolinguists:

> […] monolingualism is not simply a numerical designation referring to the presence of only one language. Monolingualism is an ideology, a structuring principle that touches every aspect of social life. It shapes how we understand ourselves and our units of belonging by constructing homologous relationships between our mother tongue, ethnicity, and nation. Integral to the foundation of modern nation-states in Europe, monolinguist ideologies produce singular national languages as powerful measures of who belongs to a given society – and who does not. (Dowling 3)

This passage highlights the consequences of having a monolingually oriented publication industry: literature written in this context continues to reinforce linguistic dominance, therefore discrimination and inequalities. Dowling's work emphasizes the dual dimension of translingualism in literature. It is a way of playing creatively with language, demonstrating the "capacity of languages to interact, influence, and transform one another" (5). Translingualism, in that sense, is very literary, it is the ideal creative outlet for the multilingual author. However, it is also a literary strategy that advances social change: it is a political act of resistance to the monolingual paradigm that structures the world in which translingual texts are published.

The first works on translingualism in literary studies reveal that translingualism is always necessarily political. They also reveal that the definition of translingualism, in this field, fluctuates and cannot specifically, formally be defined as a literary device. On the contrary, it seems to be defined by its multiple forms, multiple forms that come into play in different ways depending on the context. What they have in common, however, it the reality of their resistance to the monolingual paradigm.

The concept of translingualism has more recently been considered within the field of World Literature. In a 2018 special issue, the *Journal of World Literature* asked scholars to tackle the question of translingualism. In their introductory article "The Theory Deficit in Translingual Studies," Michael Boyden and Eugenia Kelbert take stock of the recent interest in the concept on the part of scholars and writers, but also note that "what is still largely lacking in this rich scholarship and compilation work is a sustained theoretical reflection on the nature and function of literary translingualism" (128). The subsequent articles explore various interpretations and manifestations of the translingual in an attempt to fill that gap. I argue that the reason there seems to be a gap is not necessarily because of the recent nature of the concept, but rather because of the diversity of its application: it responds to various socio-economic conjectures and subsequently manifests differently in different literatures. It challenges conceptualization, and it is this resistance that is of interest to me. Where translingualism can receive a stable definition within the field of sociolinguistics, within literature, there is no such stability. Scholars are grappling with the concept of translingualism and articulating it with related ones such as multilingualism or plurilingualism. The written word in the literary field is contingent upon the monolingual structure that is the publication industry and the expectation of a readership that has been trained to read monolingual work. I suggest that we expand the definition of translingualism to include all forms of linguistic resistance to the monolingual paradigm. A working definition then emerges that can be used to read contemporary Francophone literature. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on understanding the conjectures that lead to translingualism being a characteristic of Francophone literature.

A prescriptive language ideology keeps being reinforced on the level of the French state: a "standard" French language is still very much presented and used as a model in a prescriptive

approach to language. The knowledge and use of this standard is a measure for success in France, fostered and encouraged in an educational system that tends to present as canonical only certain forms of writing. This approach to language is historically and socially situated and values one style, one type of voice, over all others. Consequently, the literature that is acknowledged, rewarded and circulated in metropolitan France is one that conforms to the historically white and privileged voice. The renewed interest in multilingual and translingual forms reveals a preoccupation that goes beyond literature. It questions the status quo of language teaching, language practices and usages that is upheld as a standard today.

2. Embodied Translingualism in Hélène Cixous's Défions l'augure and Lydie Salvayre's Pas pleurer

A. From Body to Language: Biographical Translingualism

I read contemporary Francophone works through the lens of translingualism because the concept of translingualism brings into play the politics of writing in the French literary system today. In this section I explore how translingualism is inscribed in individual identities, which is then reflected in language use. Contemporary Francophone authors feature various forms of translingualism: they embody translingualism within their own identities, and their works feature translingual characters who individually embody translingualism through their voices and their actions. Indeed, in contemporary Francophone texts, translingualism goes beyond a linguistic occurrence and is a featured form of resistance to the linguistic hierarchy embedded within the French literary system.

One of the very first scholars in the field of literary studies to take up the concept of translingualism was Steven G. Kellman. In his 2000 book *The Translingual Imagination*, Kellman focuses on transnational and multilingual writers having chosen to write in one of their languages, sometimes a language that they learned later in life as opposed to the language of their place of birth. In a 2019 article, Kellman again defined translingualism as "the phenomenon of writers who create texts in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one" (337), giving the examples of Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov. Here he considers how political and social conjectures impact authors into a translingual situation, mentioning migration and imperialism (340). Translingualism, in Kellman's approach from 2000 to 2019, is tied to identity and to a linguistic choice that is made by a writer at some point in their career. This choice reflects the pressure a monolingual world exerted on these writers, as it does not seem like an option, in the texts Kellman explores, to be "in between" languages.

In this approach, the authors are valued for their ability to perfectly master several languages. Translingualism in Kellman's definition refers to this ability to be perfectly monolingual in several languages. There is no trace, in this case, of internal or textual translingualism: these authors are valued because neither of their languages is affected by the other. Kellman's understanding of translingualism makes it indissociable from the transnational author. He considers biographies: the linguistic and geographical journeys of these authors tie translingualism not only to identity but also to territory. The geographical location of these authors, their movement across space determines their translingualism. This approach grounds translingualism in the body and in space. This is an important aspect of literary translingualism in the sense that it reminds us that translingual practices are anchored in the world, in the circulation and movement of the body through the world and through linguistic spaces.

Contemporary Francophone authors embody Kellman's understanding of translingualism: their identities are complex and often bridges several geographical spaces and several languages, or, at the very least, several variations of the French language. Transnational and translingual identities are indissociable from material and historical conditions. Here I explore the cases of Hélène Cixous (1937-) and Lydie Salvayre (1946-), two women writers whose translingual identities have been fashioned through a history of immigration. They both have a translingual biography that translates into their writing.

Born in Algeria in 1937 to a French father and a German mother, Cixous' background is multilingual; her identity thus reflects Kellman's understanding of translingualism. In this chapter, I focus on the ways Cixous' embodied translingual identity is written into one of her most recent text, *Défions l'augure* (2018). Lydie Salvayre was born in 1948 in the South of France after her Spanish parents fled the Spanish Civil War.[44.] She grew up in a bilingual household, speaking both French and Spanish. Her Goncourt-winning 2014 biographical novel *Pas pleurer* features a translingual character, Salvayre's mother Montse. Cixous' writing reveals the situatedness of translingualism, and Salvayre's writing reveals that the textual practice of translingualism is not a choice, as in can be in the case of the authors Kellman explores, but it is rather a political and identitarian necessity for these women.

In this part of the chapter, I combine an awareness of Cixous' and Salvayre's embodied translingualism with an analysis of their written work. I demonstrate that because it is the result

[44] Salvayre's profile is quite different from that of most the contemporary Francophone authors featured so far in this dissertation, mainly because she is not from a former French colony nor from a colonized space as one of the French DOM-TOM (Département d'Outre-Mer and Territoire d'Outre-Mer). However, her profile is still relevant to my research because she comes from an immigrant background and her use of the French language in her writing is affected by this background.

of their personal and family histories, translingualism, for these women, is not a linguistic nor a stylistic choice, but it is always already political and inscribed in their writing as a necessity.

Kellman considers literary practices in one language or another, but does not analyze how languages sometimes interact, overlap and influence each other. Cixous and Salvayre, however, as a result of their biographical translingualism, inhabit the spaces in-between and beyond languages. Kellman's approach to translingualism is crucial because it highlights the conditions under which translingualism occurs, and because he was one of the first literary critics to explore this concept. However, the textual practice of translingualism, I argue, is broader than Kellman's definition. I analyze textual examples from *Défions l'augure* and *Pas pleurer* in this section to a. demonstrate the variety of translingual practices among contemporary Francophone writers, and b. propose that translingual practices are not only a creative reappropriation of the French language, but also eminently political ones.

i. Translingual Characters

The novel is theorized as a monolingual form that is tied to the nation-state, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4. Within this genre, then, occurrences of translingualism are simultaneously a challenge to the monolingual ideology anchored in the French literary system, and a challenge to the national and colonial history of the genre of the novel. In this section, I explore how this political translingualism manifests in literary texts. Lydie Salvayre's 2014 novel *Pas pleurer* and Hélène Cixous's 2018 novel *Défions l'augure* provide specific examples of the textual practices of translingualism.

My analysis focuses on translingual characters and their staging within the broader narrative. Indeed, Cixous' and Salvayre's texts are not structurally translingual, but their

translingual practices are embodied within specific characters and voices. The main narratorial voice, in both texts, organizes secondary characters and voices: the narrator stages translingual occurrences. Translingualism is thus doubly embodied, in the authors themselves, and in the characters their texts feature.

ii. *Eve "à l'anglaise" in Défions l'augure*

Défions l'augure navigates Cixous' memories of her journeys and of key traumatic events as the narrator grapples, in a non-linear narrative, with the painful memories of lost loved ones. Drawing its title from a line in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ("We defy augury"), Cixous' novel weaves strands of time and memories together around a few main characters, almost exclusively female ones. The two most notable exceptions are both deceased: Isaac, a lover who is addressed by the first-person narrator as both past and present, and the father of the narrator whose memory is mainly summoned through the character of his own mother. Female filiation thus plays an important role: the mother, the grand-mother, and the aunt of the narrator are all in dialogue and alive throughout the text. The narrator's discourse shifts between these characters, between different and overlapping timelines, and between a few key locations to create a poetic reflection on memory, loss and the process of writing.

The first-person narrator mainly uses French but also employs instances of English, German and even Latin and in this process also engages in linguistic self-reflection. The main translingual character, however, is not the narrator but Eve, the narrator's mother. The exchanges between Eve and her daughter are mainly conducted over transnational phone calls. In the following passage, Eve is talking to her daughter from London:

> ma mère est en Angleterre, avec sa sœur, elle est à l'anglaise, *nice weather nice travel lots of food* j'ai mangé tout le temps *We are at the Docks*, c'est extraordinaire *we went to*

> *the British Museum*, le soir on est allées dans un bon restaurant, l'Empire State Building, c'était pas assez haut pour eux, *pour vivre heureux vivons cachés, goodbye so long* (117)

The limits between languages and voices are blurred in this passage. The use of italics structures the conversation: they do not mark a distinction between two voices but rather between the two featured languages, French and English. The juxtaposition of the two languages creates a translingual mode of communication and a translingual mode of being that the mother embraces in her dialogue with her daughter. French and English are here juxtaposed in a series of fragments of discourse only unevenly separated by punctuation or by capitalization in the case of "*We are at the Docks*." The oral aspect of the discourse is emphasized by this lack of written markers. There is some consistency in the discrepancy between the English and French use: the English is marked by italicization. However, this trend stops in the last two segments of the passage where "*pour vivre heureux vivons caché"* is also in italics, which disrupts this original logical pattern.

Before the narration shifts to a direct citation of Eve's discourse, the narrator introduces her with the expression "elle est à l'anglaise." The choice of the preposition "à" here can be noted: language and nationality become a mode to adopt, and Eve in this passage is embracing her "English" mode, which comes with various attributes such the English language that manifests next to the French language and the nationally marked locations that are the British Museum and the Docks. The character of Eve, the mother, is a translingual character, one who moves fluidly between two languages and allows for them to co-exist within the same discourse. This paragraph is distinctly marked by a break in the text. However, that break is the only conventional structural marker. The paragraph forms a sentence in itself, with no clear beginning or end in the sense that it does not begin with the usual capital letter nor does it end with a full stop. This too, participates in and enhances the fluidity of the conversation, breaking down the

limits between both women's consciousness. The end is contained within the text itself, in the "*goodbye so long*" that is a part of Eve's "English" mode, and therefore does not need to resort to the traditional marker that is the full stop.

This is the transcription of a translingual conversation, one whose fluid form expands into the narrative form. Translingualism thus becomes a form in and of itself, one in which each characters' language merge. The expression "elle est à l'anglaise" reveals a translingual relation to languages, one in which a language is tied to a mode of being. The monolingual paradigm, the unity of the novel around one language, the unity of a conversation contained within one language, is broken and a new paradigm emerges within the text. The breakdown of monolingualism is doubled by a breakdown of the traditional narrative structure that usually revolves around a single narrative thread. Cixous' specific use of punctuation in this passage and in others enhances this effect by getting rid of the traditional markers of turn-taking within a dialogue.

This linguistic fluidity and mode of being is reminiscent of Derrida's relation to language in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, where emerges the image of "habiter" a language rather than that of possession or control. It is this alternative language to describe one's relation to language that emerges in both texts. Translingualism is embodied and this appears within the text, in its content, but also spills and modifies the narratorial conventions, challenging the form of the text itself, forcing a translingual mode on a form that is structured as monolingual and therefore modifying it.

B. Translingualism as a Condition for Voice in *Pas pleurer*

In Salvayre's work, like Cixous', translingualism is associated (at least in part) with the figure of the mother. In *Pas pleurer*, the main narrator, Salvayre's alter ego, opens a space for

her mother to express herself in her translingual voice, a mix of French and Spanish, "Fragnol." Translingualism is the condition for the story to be told: Montse claims a translingual voice to tell a translingual story. She stages the monolingual paradigm through the voice of the narrator and the form of the novel itself. The following passage is from the first pages of the novel: Montse has just been dragged by her mother to meet the Burgos, a well-off family of their village, because she is to take up a position as a maid there. Montse leaves the interview furious at the family's condescending tone and at her mother attempts to calm her as they walk home:

> Seigneur Jésus, murmure ma mère la mirade alarmée, plus bas, on va t'ouir. Et moi je grite encore plus fort : Je me fous qu'on m'ouit, je veux pas être bonniche chez les Burgos, j'aime mieux faire la pute en ville ! Pour l'amour du ciel, me supplique ma mère, ne dis pas ces bêtises. Ils nous ont même pas invités à nous assir, je lui dis révoltée, ni même serré la main, je me raccorde (moi : je me rappelle), je me rappelle brusquement que je souffre d'un panadis au pouce et que j'ai le doigt panaris si tu veux, mais ne me rectifie pas à chaque mot sinon j'y arriverai jamais[9]. (Salvayre 13)

This passage features various occurrences of translingualism. The French language is modified in Montse's voice: she introduces the verb form "supplique" instead of "supplie," a "panaris" becomes a "panadis," and the verb "assoir" becomes "assir." When words themselves are not directly rewritten in Montse's voice, they are misused: the verb "ouir" is placed in both Montse's and her mother's discourse. While the verb itself does exist in the French language (although its correct version is written a little differently: "ouïr"), it is not a commonly used verb and we would here expect the character to use the verb "entendre." Further occurrences of translingualism include the noun "mirade" (the Spanish word "mirada" means "look" or "gaze") and the verbs "raccorde" and "grite" are respectively forms of the Spanish "recordar" and "gritar." This short extract illustrates that translingualism is claimed by Montse and exists in the novel through her voice.

This also signifies that translingualism is not assumed to be the default position of the narrative and indeed, translingualism is even pushed back against by the main narrator who seeks to control her mother's language. The previous passage features an intervention on the part of the narrator ("(moi: je me rappelle)") that bears witness to this and causes a recast on the part of Montse as she repeats the phrase by including the modification suggested by her daughter. Other passages demonstrate more subtle versions of this prescriptive approach to language on the part of the narrator:

> L'Histoire ma chérie est faite de ces *enfrontements*, les plus cruels de tous et les plus *infelices*, et aucun des pères du village n'en est prémunisés, pas plus le père de Diego que celui de José, la justice immanente n'*obédissant* pas aux décrets de la justice des hommes (dit ma mère dans un français sophistiqué autant qu'énigmatique). (Salvayre 43) (Italics mine)

Montse is here directly addressing her daughter who supports the frame narrative, giving us to hear what Lidie calls Montse's "langue mixte et transpyréréenne" (Salvayre 16). Out of the three words italicized in the previous passage, one of them is a direct borrowing of the Spanish language ("infelices" instead of the French word "malheureux"), and two of them are the result of a juxtaposition of the French language and the Spanish language. The first, "enfrontements," seems bring together the Spanish term "enfrentamientos" and the French term "affrontements". The beginning of the word is clearly drawn from the Spanish word, using the suffix "en" instead of the "a", whereas the end of the word drops the Spanish "i" and uses the French making for the masculine and plural. The second word presents us with a French "participe présent" of the verb "obéir;" it is slightly modified by the addition of the "d" in the middle of the word, thus making it a derivative of the Spanish verb "obedecer."

The voice, in this passage, is clearly that of Montse, as the beginning apostrophe to her daughter ("ma chérie") and the content of the ending parenthesis (in which the narrator

comments on her mother's original use of the French language). But even here, a careful look at the text allows us to see the main narrator's voice at work, in the story-telling and identity building process. The narrator's transposal of her mother's voice from the oral discourse to a written discourse calls for certain choices to be made; even when the narrator is not shaping her mother's discourse to make sure it is up the standards of the French language, she is mediating it through this form of translation and we see traces of this appearing. In the previous passage, for instance, choosing to use a single rather than a double "f" in the word "enfrontements," something that could not have been heard in her mother's actual speech, highlights the narrator's will to split the word equally between the French and the Spanish languages, loading the first part of the word with Spanish, the second part of the word with French.

The whole text is a delicate balance between languages and between the mother's and the daughter's discourse. The narrator always makes sure to underline the fact that her mother is the voice in which Spanish and French collide and gives birth to neologisms; however she is also very careful provide the reader with reminders that her role as a narrator is that of a mediator between the French reader and this language of her mother's, given that her only access to this story is through her mother's language. This gives birth to a text which is a cooperation between the mother and the daughter:

> José a ébloui les jours passés par ses paroles magnifiques, aujourd'hui c'est Diego qui impressionne par un bon sens dont peu le soupçonnaient (el tiempo hace y deshace, un tal gusta un día y disgusta otro día, hay que acostumbrarse, commente ma mère qui parle quelquefois comme un publicitaire). (Salvayre 66)

The role parenthesis play in the text is important, and the passage quoted above is one example of how parenthetical asides are working to provide some delimitation between Montse's direct discourse and the part of her discourse mediated and critiqued by her daughter. The creativity of

the linguistic and textual innovations are the result not only of the encounter of the Spanish and French languages, but also of the encounter of the mother's and the daughter's voices.

In the passages quoted above, Lidie's tone seems on the border between affectionate and irritated: she comments that her mother speaks "comme un publicitaire" (66) and that her use of the French language is "aussi sophistiqué qu'énigmatique (43). Throughout the narrative, Lidie oscillates between being judgmental about her mother's use of translingualism, reflecting the dominant monolingual ideology that she was taught in school and through her own experience, and being amused by it. However, Lidie's experience of her mother's voice does not align exactly with Salvayre's view on translingualism. In an interview about her book for the online version of the magazine *Le Temps*, the journalist Eléonor Sulser notes that this text, for Salvayre, is a way for her to return to her mother's lost voice and to value and recognize it. Salvayre explains that her mother's voice is both a source of creativity and a political intervention:

> J'ai adoré recréer cette langue dans laquelle elle parlait. Je l'appelle le «fragnol». Cela répondait aussi à un désir politique de poser la question suivante: les mots immigrés sont-ils une menace pour la belle langue française? Question à la fois politique et littéraire. Eh bien non. Les mots immigrés, étrangers, revisitent le français et même s'ils l'estropient ou le malmènent, ils y font naître des sens nouveaux. Ils poétisent la langue française.

Salvayre readily admits that she proceeded, in her text, to the recreation of her mother's "fragnol." She directly criticizes the conservative view of the French language and sees the creative and progressive potential of a translingualism that results from foreign language inputs.

3. Linguistic Prescriptivism: The Challenge of Circumventing a Monolingual Narrative Structure

Translingualism necessarily complicates the concept of the mother-tongue. In both *Défions l'augure* and *Pas pleurer*, mothers are translingual characters. Consequently, they escape their role as a stable linguistic referent for their daughter, complicating significantly the concept of the

mother-tongue. In Chapter 3, I explored the way mothers often fail, in their daughters' narrative, to provide them with historical and filial stability; linguistic instability also contributes to the complex relationship narrators have with their mothers. However, daughters are not left language-less: the existence of the narrative proves that. How do narrators, children of a translingual character, navigate languages and create a translingual paradigm within the frame of the novel? How do they write their translingual mother and heritage into existence in a system that intrinsically denies them an existence because of their alternative use of language?

In both Cixous' and Salvayre's texts, translingualism is embodied by female voices. The voice of the mother is shared by the daughter and, arguably, transformed in the process of being put into writing. Translingualism occurs as a transmission of language and of content. With the act of repetition through the passage from orality to writing, the daughter carries *la langue maternelle,* in its translingual form, through the text. The mother-tongue, originally characterized by its stability, is featured in Francophone writing as a porous and unreliable but creative element, one that does not satisfy the "standard" French language. Filiation is established through the passage of a translingual voice (the mother's) to a translingual text (the daughter's). The experience of the translingual mother translates to a general translingual orientation in Cixous' and Salvayre's work. This does not make the whole text itself translingual, but it stages translingualism so that it draws attention to the artificiality and the limits of the monolingual frame. In this section, I consider first how the duality of translingualism and monolingualism orientations is embedded within the narrative structure of *Pas pleurer.* I then highlight how translations of *Pas pleurer* convey the translingual orientation despite the challenge of translation translingual occurrences.

Lidie, Salvayre's alter ego, writes the narrative frame of *Pas pleurer*. She frames her mother's story while also letting her interrupt it regularly. Both women tell the story in different ways and the combination of their narratives builds up the text in a co-construction of the story and a re-claiming of the historical events that are narrated. However, a closer look at the interactions between both women reveals Lidie to be a rather controlling narrator, and this is where there is a distance between Salvayre and her narrator, because she stands in and represents the monolingual paradigm which, as the interview mentioned earlier proves, Salvayre herself does not believe in[10].

Throughout the narrative, Lidie corrects her mother's use of French to make it correspond to standard French, proposing to serve as an intermediary between her mother and the readers. She highlights that it is her role, as a narrator and as a daughter, to correct her mother's French:

> Ma mère me raconte tout ceci dans sa langue, je veux dire dans ce français bancal dont elle use, qu'elle estropie serait plus juste, et que je m'évertue constamment à redresser. (Salvayre 89)

The possessive pronoun "sa" emphasizes the idiosyncratic nature of Montse's language. Her French is "bancal," she "estropie" the language, both of these words implying that there is something missing or malfunctioning within Montse's use of the French language, meaning she needs help correcting it. While the narrator, who ultimately controls the story, is the conduit through which the alternative history and alternative voices such as Montse's can be heard, she also represents the parameters that prevent these voices from being valued and hear in the first place. Lidie, while she does allow for her mother's voice to be heard, also stands by as a judge and defender of the French language. She reproduces the social and institutional patterns and this pressure is still experienced by her mother who constantly turns to her daughter for corrections.

In this passage previously quoted, Lidie's process of correction unfolds:

> Seigneur Jésus, murmure ma mère la mirade alarmée, plus bas, on va t'ouir. Et moi je grite encore plus fort : Je me fous qu'on m'ouit, je veux pas être bonniche chez les Burgos, j'aime mieux faire la pute en ville ! Pour l'amour du ciel, me supplique ma mère, ne dis pas ces bêtises. Ils nous ont même pas invités à nous assir, je lui dis révoltée, ni même serré la main, je me raccorde (moi : je me rappelle), je me rappelle brusquement que je souffre d'un panadis au pouce et que j'ai le doigt panaris si tu veux, mais ne me rectifie pas à chaque mot sinon j'y arriverai jamais[11]. (Salvayre 13)

This passage features a double mother-daughter interaction that both feature acts of silencing. Montse's mother (who is never named) is trying to silence her, for fear that the neighboring houses will hear her indecent remarks, and Lidie, her daughter, also operates a form of silencing that manifests through her corrections. These corrections are a way for Salvayre to code the monolingual paradigm within the text itself and to signal the text's resistance to its own form. The double dialogue between the mother and the daughter here is accompanied by a double attempt at silencing the translingual character that is Montse: the mother, for fear of what her community will think of a young girl from a relatively poor family refusing a respectable position and protesting her treatment, the daughter, playing the role of the French editor and correcting her mother's use of the French language to make it conform to the monolingual entity that founds the genre of the novel. Neither of these forms of silencing are effective on Montse however. She answers her daughter in even further indecent language (« Je me fous qu'on *m'ouit*, je veux pas être bonniche chez les Burgos, j'aime mieux faire la pute en ville ! ») and finds ways to resist Lidie's corrections: when Lidie corrects her pronunciation of "panaris," Montse corrects herself but also includes the corrected word into an incorrect structure, creating a new expression: "j'ai le doigt panaris."

Translingualism is thus illustrated here as a form of linguistic resistance to the literary codes that are in place. Montse embodies this resistance. She simultaneously challenges her social status being dictated to her (being placed as a servant in a well-off household), and she

challenges being silenced by both her mother and by Lidie. She doesn't let Lidie's interruptions prevent her from telling her story in her own words. Translingualism makes visible some forms of language, forms of being, histories that have been silenced. The issue, as Lee and Lennon point out, is with the form in which this resistance develops. Salvayre writes her story within the form of the novel, but she draws attention to translingual processes by having her narrator police them, and by doing so also draws attention to the artificial nature of a bounded and separate linguistic unity. *Pas pleurer* is a translingual text not necessarily only because it features translingual characters: it is also a translingual text because it features various forms of resistance to linguistic oppression. It stages the tensions between monolingualism and translingualism in the interactions and tensions between the two approaches to language embodied by Montse and Lidie. The structure of the narrative itself preserves the illusion of monolingualism, but it is interrupted and challenged monolingualism

4. The Singularity of the Translingual Voice: Sources and Stylistic Effects

In the previous pages, I established that while it is difficult to qualify a whole text as translingual, translingualism is embodied in characters and their discourses. These aspects of Francophone texts in turn challenge the monolingual structure in which they are embedded. Translingualism upsets the monolingual paradigm that is upheld in literature, and especially in the context of literature written in French, as the history of the language shows. Translingual characters are innovative and groundbreaking because they resist the codes and conventions of the world around them: they take the risk of being misunderstood, of being outcast, of being criticized. But they also, through their translingual position, embrace a voice that is unique to

their position in the world and tell a story that could not be told monolingually and that does not adhere to the monolingual ideology.

This leads to another issue with the translingual character: if translingualism is by definition the result of a personal experience and is unique to those that embody it, there are no two similar translingual voices. Translingualism is not fixed: it is a constant re-creation of language and does not have a set of identifiable rules. Montse's Fragnol in Lydie Salvayre's *Pas pleurer* results from her experience of both French and Spanish, and is mediated by her daughter, for instance, and this configuration results in a singular voice that, while it may be understandable to the French reader, could not possibly be replicated: Montse herself is in a constant act of creation throughout the novel. This instability is a further indication of the difference between translingualism and monolingualism. Throughout the following pages, I explore the roots of this unstable translingualism through Translation Studies, and continue to explore *Pas pleurer* and *Défions l'augure* to track this instability and the effects it has on the reader.

A. Translingualism within Translation Studies: From Foreignization to Instability

Scholars in the field of Translation Studies consider the ways a monolingual orientation within literary texts is limiting, their questioning stemming from an exploration of translation as a political act. Not all consider translingualism within their approaches to translation, but the concept seems underlying in many and conversations within the field of Translation Studies provide a conceptual and philosophical approach to ways of and reasons to question the monolingual paradigm.

The concept of foreignization such as it was developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century has similarities to that translingualism. In his 1813 essay "On Different Methods of Translation" Schleiermacher had already begun investigating how, in translations, languages have the potential to draw attention to themselves and to their origin. Foreignization recognizes the reality and stakes of the existence of different languages within one established language, even if in the case of Schleiermacher's approach, these overlaps are invested in the context of a translation.

In his essay, Schleiermacher defines the opposition between domestication strategy, one which brings the text to the reader and adapts to the form of language that they are familiar with, to foreignization, which implies bringing the reader to the text instead. In her chapter "Friedrich Schleiermacher: Heralding a New Paradigm," Nadia D'Amelio writes that Schleiermacher's approach to translation is "both as an intra- and as an inter-linguistic communication phenomenon." And indeed, Schleiermacher defines the foreignization strategy as transmitting a "feeling of foreign," and outlines the method as such: "the more precisely the translation adheres to the turns and figures of the original, the more foreign it will seem to its reader" (54). The consequence of this is that the reader's attention is grabbed not only by the content of the text, but also by the language itself. The reader is constantly reminded that the text they are reading is a translation, and, while, throughout the process of reading, they might get used to it, it presents a reading challenge and calls for a reflection on language. Language is transformed to acknowledge and refer to the language of the original text. Just as we have said that translingualism always triggers a reflection on language because it upsets the monolingual paradigm that we expect when we open a book, a foreignized translation operates a

transformation of the target language for the text to reflect its multilingualism. Foreignized translations fall into the category of translingualism.

Foreignization, in terms of both the effect that it has on the reader, and in terms of language ideology, is similar to translingualism. While in the case of translingual characters such as those we have seen, the monolingual form is challenged, in the case of foreignization, it is the translator themselves who embody that translingualism: they are on the cusp of two languages and their position is reflected not only in the discourse of one character that then affects the rest of the monolingual structure of the text, but the whole text itself becomes a manifestation of the overlap and mixing of languages.

Schleiermacher, so many decades ago, at the moment when the monolingual ideology was taking root throughout Europe and beyond, was already advocating for a more flexible, creative approach to languages, while acknowledging the limits of such an endeavor:

> […] it is clear that this method of translating cannot flourish equally well in all tongue, but rather only in those that are not confined within the narrow bounds of a classical style beyond which all else is deemed reprehensible. Let these bounded languages seek to expand their territories by including foreigners who require more than their native tongues to speak to them, something to which these languages are no doubt admirably suited; and let them appropriate foreign works by means of imitations or perhaps translations of that other sort: but this sort of translation they must leave to the freer languages in which derivations and innovations are more readily tolerated, such that these derivations may, in the end combine to produce a new characteristic mode of expression.

In this passage Schleiermacher notes that some languages are more apt than others to be receptive to foreignization in translated texts; some others may be more readily suited for domestication. We can now recognize that what qualifies one language or another to embrace foreignization is directly tied to linguistic policies in place and the history of these policies and ideologies; however, the reality that foreignization has limits remains, precisely because of prescriptive approaches to language such as the one embodied by the Académie française.

Underlying Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, then, we already see emerging the monolingual paradigm in his consideration of separate, unequal languages. He already gives up those languages that consider anything unorthodox as "reprehensible," showing through this that it is a question not of language, but of perception of language. This passage shows Schleiermacher balancing between two perceptions of language, one in which the languages themselves are more or less flexible, another in which the politics surrounding those languages are what determines how flexible and open to change these languages are. It is interesting to note, as well, that Schleiermacher also writes what could be considered to be Kellman's definition of translingualism here: "Let these bounded languages seek to expand their territories by including foreigners who require more than their native tongues to speak to them," he writes.

Karen Emmerich, in her 2017 work *Literary Translation and the Makings of Originals*, questions the stability of source texts. Emmerich's argues that all texts are inherently unstable, and that, consequently, there is no such thing as an original text that may serve as a point of reference for a translation. By questioning the notion that there is a stable, unique, untouchable original that serves as an ultimate reference, Emmerich opens the conversation about what translation is and what it can potentially do, and complexifies the relation existing between a text and its translation. This implies considering even apparently monolingual texts through a translingual lens. By questioning the stability of the original in order to further developments in the field of translation, Emmerich inscribes the translingual paradigm within the monolingual. By doing so, she also draws attention to foreign quality of language and upsets the foundation of monolingualism. In her chapter on Emily Dickinson, she notes that the American poet "makes English already strange to itself" (113). Translingualism is this very quality: when language draws attention to itself, when language upsets its own meaning and creates new meaning, or

refuses to mean, it simultaneously upsets the monolingual paradigm. This has consequences both for the monolingual ideology and for translation within this ideology. When Translation Scholars reject the notion of equivalences, as Emmerich does in her work, they are also rejecting the stability of language and the monolingual paradigm. The question then is how does this instability manifest in literary texts and to what extent is it written into them or interpreted out of them. Schleiermacher's concept of foreignization implies putting at the forefront of a text its transnational, translingual dimension by rendering it unfamiliar. Foreignization can be found manifesting elsewhere throughout literary theory. One of the alternatives was conceptualized as "étrangèreté" by scholar Oana Panaïté in her 2004 article on Hélène Cixous, Nina Bouraoui and Leila Sebbar.

B. Défions l'augure and "étrangèreté :" drawing attention to language itself

In a 2014 article, scholar Oana Panaïté coins the neologism of "étrangèreté" in her reading of Hélène Cixous's, Nina Bouroui's and Leila Sebbar's writing. She considers the various ways these women writers explore alternative ways of writing the self and the past. This quality of the text can also be understood as a linguistic quality that reflects, without the move of translation, a foreignization of the language. In the next pages, we will give a few examples of how this quality manifests in Cixous' work.

i. Morphological modifications resulting in significant neologisms

The foreignization or étrangèreté of Cixous' text is anchored in language and its self-referentiality. As established previously, one of the characteristics of translingualism is that it draws attention to language in an attempt to draw attention to the inadequacy of the monolingual

paradigm. Throughout *Défions l'augure*, Cixous draws constant attention to language not only by its multilingual quality (through the juxtaposition of different languages), but also through an operated modification of language. In the following passage, Cixous proposes a variation on the letter "o" as well as on the sound [o] itself:

> en 2000 comme en 1940 on se rend toujours au même appel, on remonte à la même source, on reçoit dans tout le corps le message perpétuel de la création, nous sommes sommés, nous saumons, nous sommes des saumons prêts à traverser sept morts pour revenir au point de départ
>
> nous o béissons sans o béissance sans savoir que tout se répète nous suivons l'or dre (29)

Language and words become lived experiences in *Défions l'augure*. The narrator here starts sketching out her affinity for the letter O, that she further develops in the following paragraphs, referring to her lived experience of both Oxford and Osnabrück. The "o" is a circle to which there is no beginning nor end, that is caught in an endless repetition of itself, as illustrated by the narrative in the previous passage ("en 2000 comme en 1940"), and as such it is the perfect sound to illustrate or represent the point being made in this passage, that of a constant return to the same point, which is the logic that drives her writing (as opposed to a linear logic). The text is organized into paragraphs but the sentence structure is broken: the usual capitalization and full stop are missing, participating in this sense of eternal repetition which the letter "o" here captures. That central sound is repeated, and its spelling transformed, drawing attention to the different forms a same sound came manifest as, but also to draw attention to the multiplicity of other significances embedded within words. When Cixous writes "nous suivons l'or dre," the word ordre is fractured, a gesture that itself in is contradiction with the meaning of that noun. It also brings attention to the semantic possibilities of the word that contains within itself the word for gold, "or," giving a whole new dimension to the phrase "nous suivons l'or dre." The

metaphor of a salmon swimming back to its birth place, over and over ("on remonte à la même source") is triggered with the verbing of the noun "saumon" which itself is never actually used in the passage. Out of the coupling of the image of the salmon ("on remonte à la même source") and of the verb "sommer" ("nous sommes sommés") emerges the neologism "saumer" ("nous saumons").

Within this variety of new structures, grammatical and semantic, Cixous' language produces this effect of "étrangèreté."

ii. Homophones

Cixous develops a network of homophones throughout her text, their proximity used as a way to draw attention to the orthographical discrepancies of the French language. The floating page called "Prière d'insérer" ("Please insert") already contains this attention to homophones, investing them with new meaning:

> Nous mortels, c'est-à-dire vivants, ne sommes-nous pas toujours tout près du Paradis, c'est-à-dire bien *prêts* dans un premier temps *à le perdre*, afin, dans un deuxième temps, d'en voir la résurrection ? dit ce Livre. *« The Readiness is all »*, Shakespeare est ici d'accord avec Montaigne.

Cixous here explores the phonological identity of the adverb "près" and the adjective "prêt" and invests them with semantic proximity. Being close also means being ready; similarly, being ready also means being close. She ties them together in yet another quote from Hamlet, emphasizing the state of "Readiness," and emphasizing its meaning by the use of capitalization here. The original play, in verse, breaks the sentence after "the," justifying the use of capitalization. Here Cixous re-assembles the line as prose, and creates a network of meaning with the three words "près," "prêts" and "Readiness." This opening thus emphasizes the instability of meaning through this network, one that then reflects on the rest of the text (for

instance, the "Livre" in this paragraph could refer to the Bible, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Montaigne's *Essais* or Cixous' book itself).

iii. Punctuation: "étrangèreté" of genre

Cixous' work is notable for absence of full stops at the end of some sentences, which is also very often doubled by an absence of capitalization at the beginning of the next segment, placed as a new paragraph on the page. This specific use of punctuation (or the absence of it) participates in the "étrangèreté" of this text by contributing the blurring the generic expectations for this text.

The frequent absence of punctuation allows for a flow and overlap between voices, times. Generations, participating in Panaïté's original definition of "étrangèreté" that has to do with how memory and history are written. The limits between the narrator's story and her mother's, between their pasts and presents are intertwined closely and the limits between them unclear, which is created as an effect in the text through this absence of punctuation. These ellipsis can be explained in different ways. Occasionally it is because the discourse continues on the following line in a new paragraph, giving the impression of the integration of verse within prose:

> Quelqu'un
>
> qui n'a jamais lu un livre-de-papier, qui lit à moitié à moitié ne lit pas, chacun son tour à l'école une semaine les vaches une semaine l'école
>
> toute la forêt de l'Eden, la fougère du pauvre, elles adoraient ça, les vaches, elles savaient à quel endroit il faut aller […] (75-76)

In this passage the narrator writes about one of the characters she has just summoned in her text, Marcel. The broken paragraph, seemingly left unfinished (all the more so because "Quelqu'un" is the last word on page 75), gives way to snippets of description of Marcel, each of them separated by the structure of the text in an almost list-like form.

Another example gives a different view on the function of the absence of punctuation. On one of the final pages of the book (an unnumbered page), three of the four paragraphs are left without final punctuation. Only the very last paragraph features a full stop. The other paragraphs are left seemingly unfinished, open:

> "Je ne dis pas […]
>
> Défions la notice aux effets secondaires […]
>
> […] j'arrive je t'aime encore plus tu es l'amour, tu n'arrêtes pas de m'ourir, et je l'écris comme ça : m'ourir"

This strategy is reminiscent of poetry. It also participates in what Panaïté calls "étrangèreté" because it leaves the reader with this sense of something unfinished, defying written conventions, just as the unnumbered pages mark the continuation beyond the text itself, beyond the conventions of the literary text such as it is determined in the format of the book. It makes sense in the context of the retrieval of the past and the overlap of times, places, voices throughout Cixous' voice. The refusal of linearity, the juxtaposition of temporalities results in a refusal of chronology within the form of the discourse itself. The full stop implies progress towards another sentence, progression forward, closing off one part and opening up to another, which is exactly the opposite of what Cixous does.

It is prose that is constantly being challenged throughout the text. In this passage as in the one examined in the previous pages, Cixous plays with words as well as with punctuation. The play on the word "m'ourir," transforming the verb "mourir" into a reflexive alternative, transforming death into an event that directly impacts one's self.

Panaïté writes in her conclusion that in Cixous's work just as in Sebbar's and Bouraoui's,

> Le verbe est à comprendre doublement. Pris dans son acception grammaticale courante, il fait signe vers les modifications narratives et variations figuratives du mouvement qui conduit l'écrivaine du pays natal, de la peau et de la langue indivise au dehors de l'altérité impure des peaux et des langues. Cette forme de déclinaison en rend possible une autre, au sens juridique du verbe. Elle indique ainsi un refus: le refus de s'enfermer dans la mécanique répétitive du souvenir et dans la mélancolie du factuel. (810)

The deconstruction of language, writes Panaïté here, is what guides the narrative. The form guides the content, guides towards a writing that is reflective of a specific experience. As a consequence, the text itself, its overall form is one of instability. Panaïté writes of a "refus" on the part of the writers to write their stories in a conventional way, addressing the content here; form and language participate in a retrieval of the past that reflects a reality that is theirs, that liberates them of conventions and allows them to explore language itself as an unstable referent. The instability of language is part of the source of this desire to write alternatively.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

A study of the meta-literary structures of the French literary system in this dissertation revealed how deeply rooted the colonial, racialized and patriarchal patterns and dynamics still are in the literary system of metropolitan France. Ultimately, there is no better way to take stock of its current politics and state than to consider the question of *who*: who oversees the selection of works (and therefore authors) to be published? Who decides which works are worthy of being rewarded (and therefore recognized on the national and international literary scene)? Who are the most prominent figures of this system? Who organizes the main literary events in metropolitan France? Whose works are translated and circulate beyond the borders of France? Regardless of the intentions of those in charge of the meta-literary institutions in France, their profile is indicative of the persistent and inherent bias of a literary system that remains haunted by its colonial past, as the following final example demonstrates.

As a final, conclusive illustration, I offer a brief exploration of the Prix Goncourt. A key component of the French meta-literary system is its system of prizes and rewards, and one of the most prestigious ones is the prix Goncourt. This prize has been awarded every Fall since 1903 by the Académie Goncourt. In order to be considered for the Prix, two conditions are required: the text should be in French and it should be published by a Francophone publishing house[45] : "il faut écrire en français et être publié par un éditeur francophone," states the official website of the Académie Goncourt, the institution that hosts the prize every year.

Up until very recently, the Académie stated "éditeur français" rather than "francophone." When I accessed their website in July of 2018, it was still "éditeur français." I first noticed the

[45] https://www.gallimard.fr/Divers/Plus-sur-la-collection/Continents-Noirs/(sourcenode)/116076#. Last accessed April 4th, 2023.

language change in May of 2020. The shift would seem to indicate a desire to broaden the scope of the recipients of the prize. Historically, indeed, the profile of the recipients is indicative of a patriarchal and metropolitan French-centered system: almost all prizes were awarded to white men from metropolitan France. Only twelve women to this day have been awarded the prize. The first Goncourt prize was awarded in 1903 to Jean-Antoine Nau; this year in 2023 the jury will awarded the 120th prize. Among these prizes, 38 of the works (almost a third) were published by Gallimard. The profile of the "académiciens" who award the prize is also indicative of a systemic racialized and patriarchal system: among the ten members, only three are women (Françoise Chandernagor, Paule Constant, Camille Laurens), and only one member is non-white (Tahar Ben Jelloun).

The Académie Goncourt has ties to both the French government and to the publishing industry. It is financially and judicially dependent on the French Ministère de la Culture and the Ministère de l'Intérieur, but also receives financial support from businesses such as the FNAC, a major distributor of cultural products in France. The Académie defines itself as an 'institution littéraire nationale,'[46] and at the heart of its mission is the promotion and preservation of the French language. Conceptually, then, and in the same vein as the Académie française, the Académie Goncourt presents itself as a protector of the integrity of French, and by extension, of France itself. The discrepancy between the huge prestige of the prize (and its popularity among French readership) and its disappointingly safe selection of white authors is indicative of the functioning of the French literary system as a whole. The most prestigious literary prize in metropolitan France propagates inequalities. The winners of the prix Goncourt, who are awarded

[46] https://www.academiegoncourt.com/statuts-de-la-societe-litteraire. Last accessed April 5th, 2023.

a symbolic prize of ten dollars, usually go on to becoming best-selling authors, whose work is guaranteed to be translated into multiple languages, thus assuring them a reputation and an income that allows them to continue to thrive on the national and international literary scenes.

None of the authors in the collection Continents noirs have received the Goncourt. Nevertheless many of its titles were rewarded by numerous literary prizes, a total of 35 prizes which are detailed on the website of the collection. Though none of them are a Goncourt, these other prizes play an important role in the economy of the French meta-literary system; the fact that some authors from the collection were rewarded with a variety of prizes is indicative of a relative success of the collection and highlights the fact that the collection, on the metropolitan French scene, is doing well and meeting the expectations of the French readership. As the interviewed authors in Chapter 2 point out, it is also a way for them to put their name on a meta-literary map that isn't necessarily set up to recognize them.

Two authors included in this dissertation have been awarded the Goncourt: Patrick Chamoiseau in 1992 for *Texaco,* and Lydie Salvayre in 2014 for *Pas Pleurer.* In 2014 Bernard Pivot, a well-established figure of the French literary and cultural scene, was at the head of the jury of the Prix Goncourt (his first time that year). He noted that, by rewarding this novel, the jury recognized its "très grande qualité littéraire," but that he "regrette qu'il y ait parfois trop d'espagnol."[47] The implications are clear: the choice for the Goncourt that year was made in spite of, and not encouraged by, the translingual quality of the text. Pivot made it clear that the

[47] Various journalist reported on this statement when covering the Prix Goncourt at the time. Locoge, Benjamin, 'Lydie Salvayre, un Goncourt de circonstance', <http://www.parismatch.com/Culture/Livres/Lydie-Salvayre-un-Goncourt-de-circonstance-650262> *Paris Match* [accessed April 5th, 2023]. 'Le Prix Goncourt à Lydie Salvayre pour *Pas pleurer*', <https://www.letemps.ch/culture/prix-goncourt-lydie-salvayre-pleurer> *Le Temps* [accessed April 5th, 2023]. A-Ch. D. 'Lydie Salvayre, la surprise du Goncourt', <https://www.lejdd.fr/Culture/Livres/Lydie-Salvayre-la-surprise-du-Goncourt-2014-698918> *Le Journal du Dimanche* [accessed April 5th, 2023].

Académie still strives to protect the French language. Still, when *Pas pleurer* won, a translingual text finally moved into the spotlight.

The metropolitan French literary system is full of contradictions. The recognition of a translingual text remain rare. The institutions that safeguard the French literary world generally have a protectionist attitude towards not only the French language, but also towards its participating members. The French elite (Parisian, white, male) seems to auto-renew and auto-maintain itself for the most part, despite a few progressive changes here and there, such as the telling shift in vocabulary in the description of the Prix Goncourt. The lack of diversity at the helm of collections like Continents noirs and institutions like the Académie Goncourt betrays postcolonial anxieties. Pivot's remarks about language use in *Pas pleurer* demonstrate, that the French literary system fears contimation and métissage. Francophone authors themselves are highly aware of the stakes of writing and publishing in France, as my interviews with Asya Djoulaït, Anne Terrier, Fabienne Kanor, Sylvie Kandé, Gaël Octavia and André Djiffack highlight. This dissertation explored how these six writers, and numerous other contemporary Francophone authors engage with the conditions that influence how their works are received and read by French and international readerships: It revealed how, beyond this engagement, the meta-literary system in which texts are entangled still overshadows the work that is done within the texts themselves. Contemporary Francophone works are indeed spaces to explore, question and challenge the assumptions that underlie the conventions of this system.

This dissertation raised the question of what the categorization of Francophone signifies and of how the meta-literary institutions in France contribute to shape that category, both within and in opposition to that of "French" literarture. The literary institutions in France, from publishing houses to the literary awards and the Académies that host them, all act upon the

understanding of French and Francophone literature in France and abroad. In the case of a former colonial Empire such as France, it is important to consider these meta-literary institutions to understand how the literary system as a whole thwarts equal representation and promotion. Historical perspectives are often considered in contemporary studies of Francophone literature; however, the structures of publication venues are seldom considered to explain the continuing imbalances within French and Francophone literature. My research attempted to demonstrate that Francophone authors are highly aware of the inequalities of the system within which they write. Their subject matter is "meta:" it engages, more or less explicitly, in a struggle with the neo-colonial structures of the French literary system.

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