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Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 38(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

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Publication Date

2015

DOI

10.5070/F7382025975

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Part II



Sketches for *Tales of Life and Death IV*, 1970, 9.5 × 7 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Skoto Gallery



Bar Beach, Lagos, 1972, woodcut, 20 × 15 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Skoto Gallery

Home to Hargeisa: Migritude, Pan-Africanism, and the Politics of Movement from *Banjo* to *Black Mamba Boy*

Christopher Ian Foster

Abstract

*French literary theorist Jacques Chevrier argues that immigration is at the heart of contemporary African literature. He calls this new corpus of African literature migritude. Migritude literature provides both a new and sophisticated way of understanding immigration in the era of global capitalism and a critical engagement with it; it lends new perspective to the study of African literature itself by bringing to the fore conditions of diaspora, movement, and migration. Further, these younger authors are often in conversation with earlier generations of the black radical tradition. Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed, for example, not only cites Claude McKay's 1929 *Banjo* in her acknowledgements but strategically weaves the wandering *Banjo* and his black orchestra into her own twenty-first century migritude novel. In this article I analyze the relationship between McKay's "story without a plot"¹ as a (proto)migritude narrative embodying a pan-African politics of movement and Nadifa Mohamed's 2010 novel *Black Mamba Boy* as a representative migritude narrative and critique.*

"Their faces were passports inscribed with the stamps of many places but in their countenances was something ancient, the variety of those who went wandering and peopled the earth"²

—Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*

"[Africa] was always a continent on the move."³

—Achille Mbembe, "Africa and the Future:
An Interview with Achille Mbembe.

At the end of a 2013 interview with Achille Mbembe titled "Africa and the Future," Thomas Blaser asked the following question: "What is the African contribution to the world?"⁴ The conceit of Blaser's interview is to intervene into an ongoing conversation

about the shift in discourse about Africa, from the pessimism of the last quarter of the twentieth century marked by the discourses of ‘crisis’ and ‘emergency’ to recent more optimistic sets of statements about an ‘Africa Rising.’ Critics of the “gospel” of an Africa rising argue that though there is evidence of continental economic improvement, this discourse at best ignores the complexities of the continent and at worst turns Africa into a brand.⁵ Interestingly, Blaser’s question concerning the African contribution to the world was also asked by Edward Wilmot Blyden over 130 years ago. One of the first pan-Africanists, Blyden delivered a speech in 1880 titled “Ethiopia Stretching out Her Hands Unto God (Africa’s Service to the World)” that was later re-printed in his tome *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* in 1886. Further, Mbembe’s response to Blaser’s question also echoes Blyden’s discourse, specifically in terms of *movement* and Africa.

Mbembe argues that movement is one of the major historical and cultural “attributes” of Africa.⁶ He offers the following remarks on particular modes of circulation and mobility stemming from “the African historical cultural experience,” arguing against Hegel and others who presented Africa as static, isolated, and primitive.⁷ “It was not at all true as Hegel, and those who rely on him, intimated that Africa was a closed continent—not at all. [Africa] was always a continent that was on the move.”⁸ Specifically, in terms of migration, Mbembe argues that in opposition to Europe’s continued racist practice of harsh immigration laws and the closing-off of its borders, Africa must “open itself up.” It must “become a vast regional space of circulation which means that it will have to dismantle its own internal boundaries, open itself up to the new forms of migration, internal as well as external, as we see happening, to a certain extent in Mozambique, and Angola where some Portuguese are coming back. As Europe closes its borders, Africa will have to open its borders.”⁹ Here Mbembe speaks eloquently to the economic and cultural configuration under globalization in which, for Vijay Prashad, “capital is mobile and race immobile.”¹⁰ In other words, mobility is not a universal attribute of globalism but is reserved for those with resources and light skin, and, above all, mobility is reserved *tout court* for capital. Against this model of asymmetrical global mobility with roots in colonial-era systems Mbembe proffers a new model in which

the constricting European nation-state becomes outdated and is replaced by an Africa always “on the move.”¹¹

Mbembe perhaps echoes Edward W. Blyden’s meditation on Africa in 1880. Blyden depicts an Africa in terms of a similar kind of movement and interconnectedness:

Africa is no vast island, separated by an immense ocean from other portions of the globe, and cut off through the ages from the men who have made and influenced the destinies of mankind. She has been closely connected, both as source and nourisher, with some of the most potent influences, which have affected for good the history of the world. The people of Asia, and the people of Africa have been in constant intercourse. . . Africans are continually going to and fro between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea. And as in the days of Abraham and Moses, of Herodotus and Homer, there is a constantly accessible highway from Asia to the heart of Soudan.¹²

He then mentions the high amount of intra-continental migration that he himself saw living in Liberia and Sierra-Leon for well over fifty years to suggest that Africa, due in part to its movement, indeed constitutes the “modern”¹³ world and is not at all the “Dark Continent”¹⁴ that Europe has deemed it. Blyden’s radical description of Africa as modern provides an antecedent for Mbembe’s Africa on the move.

Although the colonialism of Blyden’s era may nominally be over, European attitudes and economic practices continue to resemble the colonial epoch, particularly visible through the management of migration and the movement of capital. Mbembe continues

In relation to the continent, Europe has developed over the last 25 years or so an attitude of containment in the sense that the biggest preoccupation has been to make sure that Africans stay where they are. The fixation with the question of immigration has jeopardized to a large extent the development of more dynamic relations between Africa and Europe. The obsession with boundaries and visas, the emergence of racism in most parts of Europe, the strengthening of right wing parties in the context of an economic crisis that is quite obvious—all of that has been

detrimental to the development of productive and mutually beneficial relations between Africa and Europe.¹⁵

While Europe and America continue to develop an “attitude of containment”¹⁶ utilizing various techniques of power to manage immigration, capital itself, is conversely, freed at all costs from any burden of constraint. African countries are also burdened with structural adjustment programs, free trade agreements, and illicit Euro-American partnerships with African warlords. It is perhaps not surprising then that contemporary African literature significantly negotiates and challenges the Euro-American containment of Africa and African immigrants, while arguing for, like Mbembe and Blyden before him, another way of thinking about Africa, one that is better equipped to engage with the conditions, structures, and discourses that shape it.

In this article, I argue that African migrature writers utilize the trope of movement—immigration specifically—as a hinge through which to address colonialism, racism, globalization and modernity with specific reference to Africa and the world. *Migrature* describes the work of a disparate yet distinct cohort of African authors born after independence, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Most often they have lived both in and outside Africa. They narrate the “Being-in-the-World” of the migrant within the context of globalization, yet they emphasize that the ‘past’ of immigration and conceptions of the immigrant are irreducibly entangled with the history of colonialism.¹⁷ Migrature authors, publishing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, confront issues of migrancy (forced or not), diaspora (forced or not), errantry, departure, return, racism against immigrants, identity, gender, and postcoloniality. Going beyond narrativizing the individual lives of people who cross borders these writers philosophize the modes, structures, conditions, and subject-positions of being migrant. They consider the Being of borders, both material and imagined, and what it means to move across them by the majority of the world’s population (non-white and poor or working-class, economic migrants, or refugees). This affords a critique not just of recent machinations of global capital and the abject inequity of people in the world but a re-thinking of colonialism and the ways in which its management of movement, predicated

upon the construction of race and tribe, remains constitutive of modernity.¹⁸

Migritude provides a new and sophisticated way of understanding immigration in the era of global capitalism; it lends a new perspective to the study of African literature itself by bringing to the fore conditions of diaspora, movement, and migration. And further, just as Mbembe's comments echo Blyden's, so migritude writers echo, mobilize, and refashion earlier pan-African works. In this essay I analyze the ways in which Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed strategically weaves Claude McKay's wandering protagonist Banjo from his 1929 novel of the same name into her own twenty-first century migritude novel, harnessing his pan-African politics of vagabondage into the deployment of a kind of literary nomadism critical of the colonial management of immigration and movement. Further, I argue that the reason she finds *Banjo* so important is that McKay anticipates migritude in various ways.

Part I: Claude McKay's *Banjo* as a (Proto)migritude Text.

I initially set out to read the intertextual and thematically-linked relationship between Claude McKay's 1929 "story without a plot" and Somali-British writer Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* as symbolic of the relationship expressed in Congolese novelist Emmanuel Dongala's productive phrase "from Négritude to Migritude,"¹⁹ titling his lecture at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2005. However, a careful reading of McKay's text shows that it is not a static representative of the 'then' of the Négritude era, but rather speaks to our 'now' illustrating how immigration was radically re-figured in the early twentieth century as an imperial project to be managed and was tightly bound up with racial capitalism and colonialism—it would prove Vijay Prashad's statement that immigration was "born in the era of imperialism"²⁰ correct. *Banjo*, then, as a (proto)migritude text, speaks directly to twenty-first century African authors who show that migration in the era of globalization and mobile capital is indeed constituted by and entangled with imperial-era structures of immigration, including the Nation, the immobility of race, and the movement of capital that has shifted in various ways into the present. *Banjo* accomplishes this through what I call *migrant pan-Africanism*.²¹

During a reading in New York City on September 25, 2012, discussant Peter Hitchcock asked Somali migrant writer Nadifa Mohamed about her reference to McKay's *Banjo* in the acknowledgements to her 2010 novel *Black Mamba Boy*, to which she responded that it represented, *par excellence*, the black pan-African experience during the colonial era of her father and other black nomadic working class seamen, drifters, immigrants. Indeed, McKay's classic 1929 text is thoroughly pan-African and yet migrant. It is set in the Ditch area of the great port city Marseille (an impoverished yet vibrant black and immigrant section of the city). "All shades of Negroes came together there. Even the mulattoes took a step down from their perch to mix in. . . But the magic had brought them all together to jazz and drink red wine, white wine, sweet wine. All the British West African blacks, Portuguese blacks, American blacks, all who had drifted into this port that the world goes through."²² In the Senegalese-owned bar in the Ditch, the eponymous Banjo strums an old "Aframerican"²³ tune on his banjo, Papa Charlie Jackson's "Shake That Thing," and dreams of starting a black orchestra with his fellow black diasporic vagabonds.²⁴

What McKay ultimately suggests is that it is not 'magic' that brings this transnational community of blacks together (though magic is created there), but the global system of world capitalism, specifically institutions controlling migration—colonialism, structures of racism, passport control, and the construction of citizenship—each embodied in his descriptions of the port of Marseille. McKay's concept and practice of *vagabondage* (both literary and biographical) discloses the Being-in-the-World of blacks in the diaspora as well as transnational immigrants during the colonial era. My close reading of *vagabondage* in *Banjo* parses modern world-systems of exploitation like imperialism and an increasingly global racial capitalism, both of which are fundamental to Western civilization, not adjunct to it. *Banjo*, I argue, asks its readers to carefully consider these issues by utilizing movement itself as a trope or hinge through which to negotiate the "violence of dispersal"²⁵ and its correlative structures—immigration for example.

"Immigration, as a concept," Vijay Prashad argues, "is born in the era of imperialism. Immigrants, in this context, are not just those who cross boundaries, but those who pointedly enter the advanced industrial states from lands of dusky skin. Immigration

is always already about mobile capital and immobile race.”²⁶ Immigration, then, denoting not simply movement but material world historical contexts, is born out of colonization itself and, in this sense, illuminates the relationship between the global North and its colonies. Accordingly, *Banjo*’s narrative follows McKay’s cast of black migrants through the vibrant port of Marseille and recounts tales of the pan-African characters from around the globe populating his novel. It also shows how the immigrant, as a category and subject-position, is produced by a variety of Western institutional settings (the “mobile capital”²⁷ of imperialism), how those colonial structures function to, among other things, control or manage non-white populations (“immobile race”²⁸), and how ideological and material effects debilitate not only black subjects but those from the “lands of dusky skin”²⁹ throughout the global South.

The novel begins by describing its protagonist in movement. The eponymous Banjo “was a great vagabond of lowly life. He was a child of the Cotton Belt, but he had wandered all over America. . . He had worked at all the easily-picked-up jobs—long-shoreman, porter, factory worker, farm hand, seaman.”³⁰ Yet for all his wanderings in America he had never been to the great sailor’s port, Marseille, and thus, after having returned from Canada he was again ready to move: “Seized by the old restlessness for a sea change while he was working in an industrial plant, he hit upon the unique plan of getting himself deported.”³¹ He had seen his friends, who had entered the U.S. illegally, held for deportation, and so Banjo calmly announces that he is not American. And although the immigration officers do not believe him as his “accent, attitude, and movement—shouted Dixie” he is eventually given a chance to work his way across the Atlantic to Marseille, where the majority of the novel is set, relating the experiences and conversations of the black beach boys and descriptions of the world at large.³² So Banjo moves.

And if *Banjo*, like the protagonist himself, embodies movement, then the novel is also about that which *impedes* movement—borders, checkpoints, deportations, immigration laws, police raids on the black neighborhood in Banjo’s Marseille, categories of citizenship or non-citizens, and racial barriers both material and ideological—all interdicting the black migrants from the global South or the United States in various ways. Taloufa, for example,

and many others of the black beach boys are caught, arrested, hounded, and deported. Some are branded *nationality doubtful*, a legal category in Britain, confirming their liminal (non-Western) positionality and subjecthood. Lonesome Blue, a character who is often arrested, lives in a sort of migrant purgatory between the threat of deportation, ill health, and the impoverished underbelly of the Ditch where he is not protected by law but subject to it.

Within the first few pages, the narrator, in describing the multi-racial and multi-cultural beach in Marseille, reveals the immigration laws that catalyze migration in the first place: “They were all on the beach, and there were many others besides them—white men, brown men, black men. Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes—deportees from America for violation of the United States immigration laws—afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands.”³³ The novel not only depicts U.S. immigration law, as above, but French and English laws as well—each tied in different ways to race and the colonial project. The beach is peopled by those coming from all over the global South in addition to European working-class migrants. Further, all of the environments in the novel are similarly diasporic. Thus, the novel not only suggests that diaspora itself provides the conditions of modernity, but it imagines the conditions and structures producing diasporic movement itself, such as the actual laws and techniques of power managing migrant populations.

The character Taloufa, for example, clearly narrativizes how immigration is central to the biopolitical³⁴ management of the imperial state. Taloufa is West African, and, like the other black migrants from around the world in *Banjo*, he moves through the colonial capitalist system through shipping routes and other apparatuses connecting the global economy in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Taloufa “went to America after the riots and jumped his ship there. He lived in the United States until after the passing of the new quota immigration laws, when, the fact of his entering the country illegally getting known, he was arrested and deported.”³⁵ He eventually joins Banjo and the beach boys in Marseille as the narrator tells his story, relating how immigration as a colonial product shapes his movement: “When Taloufa arrived in England, the authorities would not permit him to land, but wanted him to go home direct to West Africa. Taloufa did not

want to go there. Christian missionaries had educated him out of his native life. A Christian European had uplifted him out of and away from his people and his home. His memory of his past was vague. He did not know what had become of his family.”³⁶ Frantz Fanon has famously argued that when one speaks, one uses a certain syntax and must grasp the morphology of the language one has learnt, and that “it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”³⁷ Taloufa’s relationship with English as a colonial language represents the ironic double-bind of cultural alienation and immobile race. The colonized are, in this case, British ‘Subjects,’ so long as they labor under the colonial system extracting surplus-value, but are at the same time not Subjects, as they are targeted rather than protected by sovereign law, and less so citizens in terms of the global racial hierarchy of imperialism. Though they can move throughout the world essentially as slaves, they are immobile in terms of race. Taloufa as an individual for example, is not allowed in England, but the value of his labor power is.

The second irony in this double-bind is ideological. Taloufa is alienated from his local African traditions, language, and culture by the colonizing mission as “Christian missionaries had educated him *out* of his native life,” yet he is not allowed *in* “civilization [emphases mine].”³⁸ When he arrives in England he is given an official paper that bears his name and fingerprint and reads, “The above-named is permitted to land at this port on condition that he proceeds to London in charge of an official of the Shipping Federation, obtains document of identity at the Home Office, and visa (if required), and leaves the United Kingdom at the earliest opportunity. (Signed). . . Immigration Officer.”³⁹ Taloufa’s deportation exemplifies Prashad’s phrase concerning mobile capital and immobile race and indicates my earlier argument about the colonial construction of, and at the same moment interdiction of, the immigrant. These issues would later become a preoccupation for migrant writers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Many of the conversations in *Banjo* revolve around the beach boys relating their tales such as Taloufa’s above. These narrativized moments of arrested black movement create a shared sense of unity against repression among the black migrants in McKay’s novel, as in the opening pan-African passage cited earlier, for example. Yet going beyond this productive black internationalism,

which appropriately signifies international workers' movements, McKay phenomenologically images and critiques what I call *moving globality*—a high level of imperial-era fluid, yet asymmetrical, interconnectedness of places, things, and people.

Gary Wilder eloquently argues, “McKay’s representation of black migrants [in *Banjo*] demonstrates that global capitalism created a multiracial imperial city through which commodities, laborers, and ideologies circulated.”⁴⁰ I build upon Wilder’s important work and posit that *Banjo* suggests that global capitalism creates a multi-racial imperial *world*, from McKay’s Indian archipelago to the Caribbean Sea. *Banjo* images the economy within which colonial exports and imports, a nomadic black workforce, as well as philosophies and various radicalisms, are circulated. Ray, a friend of Banjo in the novel, details not only the flow and movement of commodities from the global South, particularly Africa—rubber from Leopold’s Congo, for one—to the global North (here the ports of Marseille), but also the labor and flow of black bodies as commodities eternally “under the whip, under the terror”⁴¹:

There any day he might meet with picturesque proletarians from far waters whose names were warm with romance: the Caribbean, the Gulf of Guinea, the Persian Gulf, the Bay of Bengal, the China Seas, the Indian Archipelago. And, oh, the earthy mingled smells of the docks! . . .rice from India, rubber from the Congo, tea from China, brown sugar from Cuba, bananas from Guinea, lumber from the Soudan, coffee from Brazil, skins from the Argentine, palm-oil from Nigeria, pimento from Jamaica, wool from Australia. . .Barrels, bags, boxes, bearing from land to land the primitive garner of man’s hands. Sweat-dripping bodies of black men naked under the equatorial sun, threading a caravan way through the time-old jungles, carrying loads steadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads hardened and trained to bear their burdens. Brown men half-clothed, with baskets on their backs, bending low down to the ancient tilled fields under the tropical sun. Eternal creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, *under the whip, under the terror*. Barrels . . . bags . . . boxes. . . [emphasis mine]⁴²

McKay's language pictures movement—a sort of moving globality: the waters of the various sunny Southern gulfs upon which commodities flow, the black workers' bodies loading and unloading the goods upon the Occidental dock that the world goes through, and those under the equatorial sun threading a caravan way. Ray's tone here, as he describes the warmth and bustle of the port within the city that he loves, as well as the exotic and "earthy" smells of the commodities flowing through the dock from the global South, belies his sophisticated awareness of the violence of processes of colonialism and world capitalism.

Ray first charts the long reach of colonialism through his cast of picturesque proletarians from colonies scattered across the globe in the Caribbean, the gulf of Guinea in Africa, and the Persian gulf describing, interestingly, not the countries from whence they come but the waters (or gulfs) that connect them to the global economy. He also describes the regions by their respective extracted commodities, rice from India, rubber from the Congo, for example. It is no coincidence that McKay mentions the Congo here. As Walter Rodney notes, from the Berlin conference in 1886 to 1906, "King Leopold II of Belgium made at least \$20 million from rubber and ivory."⁴³ What stood out was not the standard extravagant European profit at the expense of Africans nor the brutality of Leopold's reign (one can simply look to Britain's concentration camps in Kenya as a contender in brutality), but the fact that it was *not* exceptional. For McKay, and later Césaire, Western brutality is central to modernity, hence his description of black men "trained to bear their burden" existing "under the whip, under the terror."⁴⁴ In *Banjo* and his autobiographical works, McKay responds to this violence embedded in the racial capitalism and global imperialism of his moment with a politics of "vagabondage," which I argue embodies something like a precedent to *migrITUDE*.

In both *Banjo* and McKay's 1937 autobiography *A Long Way From Home*, *vagabondage* and *vagabond* are McKay's specific terms signifying his politics, ethics, poetics, and ontology. The English term *vagabond* derives from Latin and Anglo-Latin sources; it literally means "to wander from bondage; but more idiomatically to escape from bondage."⁴⁵ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Middle English root word *bondage* harkens back to the system of bondage in which a serf farms the land of the Lord

and is taxed heavily, thereby is beholden to the lord. It also connotes “the condition of a serf or slave,”⁴⁶ famously illustrated in Hegel’s dialectic sometimes translated as “The Lord and Bondsman” other times “Master and Slave.”⁴⁷ The prefix *vaga* derives from the Latin *vagārī*, “to wander.”⁴⁸ Not coincidentally McKay opens his autobiography with his “lust to wander” where the “spirit of the vagabond” takes hold.⁴⁹ McKay may well have been aware of the etymology here as he chooses this term, vagabondage, to represent his politics and poetics of movement, opening up a critical space through which modernity itself is re-conceptualized.

In the novel alone there are twenty-one appearances of the word. Latnah, for example, likes Banjo because he “*was* vagabond”⁵⁰ which takes the form of a condition or attitude, not a noun, and Ray dreams of “vagabonding”⁵¹ with Banjo, an instance of ‘verbing’ the noun.⁵² Black migrants as well as the poor and working-class whites of Marseille are described as vagabonds, while Ray, mirroring McKay, is named “vagabond poet.”⁵³ In addition, the form vagabondage (both a condition and an action) gets two mentions in *Banjo*: Ginger is arrested for “vagabondage,”⁵⁴ while Banjo’s life is described as the always incomplete but never unsatisfactory “dream of vagabondage”⁵⁵ which is tied explicitly to the global movements of poor and working-class black migrants moving upon colonial routes and structures of world-capitalism.⁵⁶

The last line of the novel sees Banjo and Ray (of *Home to Harlem* fame) setting off again out into the world: “Come on pardner. Wese got enough between us to beat it a long ways from here.”⁵⁷ In *A Long Way From Home*, McKay’s autobiography, he remembers his own migratory desires.

After a few years of study at the Kansas State College [arriving from Jamaica in 1912] I was gripped by the lust to wander as I wonder. The spirit of the vagabond, the daemon of some poets, had got hold of me. I quit college. I had no desire to return home. . . I desired to achieve something new, something in the spirit and accent of America. Against its mighty force, its grand energy and power and bigness, its bitterness burning in my black body, I would raise my voice to make a canticle of my reaction. And so I became a vagabond—but a vagabond with a purpose.⁵⁸

His reaction to the intense racism of the U.S.—“its bitterness burning in my black body”—catalyzes his vagabondage, which contains both physical movement and a political or philosophical attitude evinced in the need to write poetry “with a purpose”⁵⁹; one purpose being a race-conscious struggle against the barriers of institutional racism. McKay’s own peregrinations, from Jamaica to the United States, to England, Russia, France, and Africa, enliven the narrative movements and descriptions in *Banjo* while necessitating a macro-structural perspective—like the concept of Being-in-the-World—to imagine immigration, internationalism, and transnational capital.

If *Banjo* does not himself voice an etymological challenge to bondage in *Banjo*, Ray, his writerly counterpart and stand-in for McKay, does. For Ray, the vagabond “lover of life” becomes a “challenge to the clubbers of helpless vagabonds—to the despised, underpaid protectors of property and its high personages. He was a challenge to civilization itself.”⁶⁰ If bondage represents not just the Antebellum institution of slavery but racial capitalism and global colonialism in McKay’s 1920s and 30s, the prefix *vagāri* (a term originally describing movement) anticipates the anti in anti-colonialism and anti-racism; it represents a revolutionary linguistic *cum* political-ontological gesture that opens up the possibility of a new way of Being-in-the-World. The wandering poet’s politics of vagabondage and *migrant* pan-Africanism would be re-imagined some eighty years later as migritude in Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy*.

Part II: Nadifa Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy* as a Migritude Text

Nadifa Mohamed’s 2010 novel is a semi-biographical account of Mohamed’s father, Jama, as a young boy and his journey to find his father, which took him across and between the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Sudan, North Africa, and Europe (including stops in Palestine and an intertextual foray into McKay’s Ditch in Marseilles). I will show that, as a migritude text, *Black Mamba Boy* narrates not just the story of an individual who crosses borders, Jama, but the Being-in-the-World of the migrant—including the structures and conditions of immigration that shape both how migrants move and the production of their subject-positions.

Mohamed argues that the violence of colonialism creates dispersal at the same moment it interdicts, redirects, and re-educates that very dispersal of peoples in and through late-imperial technologies managing movement. These technologies will then proliferate in the postcolonial present.

Black Mamba Boy's narrative begins in tandem with the rise of Italian colonialism in Africa and its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Jama's mother migrates from Somalia to work in a coffee factory in Aden, Yemen, after Jama's father, her husband Guure, leaves for Sudan to find work as a driver for the *ferengis*, an Arabic term for white Westerners referring to white British colonial soldiers. The novel opens in Aden, Yemen, a diasporic port city and nodal point of colonialism and global capitalism. The itinerant Jama wanders into the coffee factory that his mother works in:

The smell of tea, coffee, frankincense, myrrh swept up the hill and swathed him in a nauseating, heady mix. As Jama reached the first warehouse, bare-chested coolies chanted while they pushed heavy wooden crates onto the backs of lorries. After standing outside Al-Medina Coffee Stores for a moment, Jama walked through the stone entrance and peered into the darkness. Sunlight splintered through the roof, illuminating the dust rising from the coffee beans as they were tossed to loosen the husks. A field of underpaid women in bright, flowery Somali robes were bent over the baskets full of beans, spreading them on a cloth and removing stunted ones before the coffee was exported.⁶¹

South Yemen had been a British colony since 1839 and thus Aden would have still been under British rule in *Black Mamba Boy's* 1930s. The British East India Company, also present since the 17th century, would have set up coffee factories like the one Jama's mother works in. Antony Wild notes that, "by the 1620s [the British East India Company] were actively trading coffee from Yemen throughout the Arabian Sea."⁶² It is unknown whether or not Ambaro, Jama's mother, is employed in a British-controlled coffee factory. Yet, the factory Ambaro works in represents a microcosm of the global order of things and cannot be disentangled from the colonial project and its vast reach both in terms of international trade and conquest. An international nodal point, Aden is one of many centers upon a grid of global capital, colonialism, and

conquest. It is a port city partly because it represented a halfway point between Britain and its 'crown jewel' colony, India.⁶³

There are three important points in the above passage that illustrate the trope of movement and migration produced in the novel. First, that like *Banjo* it describes commodities to be exported from the global South (a context narrated from the perspective of Africa and Yemen) to the North via colonial structures already in place, such as factories exploiting labor like the one above, or shipping routes and roads (both economic and military). Here the conditions producing the possibilities of the narrative cannot be separated from the unsetting sun of colonialism. Second, reminiscent of McKay's vibrant yet impoverished ditch and the black beach boys of Marseilles, the cultural signifier in the workers' bright flowery robes becomes a metonym for the Somali diaspora in Yemen. Mohamed has already described the port city as fundamentally diasporic: "Market boys of all different hues, creeds, and languages gathered at the beach to play, bath, and fight."⁶⁴ In this way the narrative takes the condition of diaspora as its object illustrating in different ways the being-in-the-world of migrants. Finally, Mohamed's picture of the coffee factory is clearly gendered as she describes fields of "underpaid women" providing the labor and surplus-value upon which world capitalism thrives. This representation of women in the diaspora both corrects the absence of women from colonial histories and male-centered literature, and strategically gestures towards our contemporary context of globalization in which workforces in the sweatshops of the global South for example—neatly erased from filiation with transnational corporations (TNCs) in the global North via creative use of subcontracting—are predominantly young women. In Sonali Perera's important work *No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization*, she argues that, "in the contemporary historical moment, the 'new proletariat' is best represented by the figure of the woman worker in the periphery. Separate from organized labor in industrialized countries of the North, the occluded agent of production in this 'postindustrial' age is the super-exploited worker in postcolonial, 'developing' countries with extraverted, rather than autocentric, economies."⁶⁵ Although Mohamed's novel is set during the late colonial period, it strategically signals the contemporary epoch of

globalization, showing that women have *always* been the occluded agent of production.

Movement indeed guides *Black Mamba Boy's* opening passage. From the winnowing of the coffee beans that will then be moved to the port by the "bare-chested coolies"⁶⁶ where they will enter into the global circulation of commodities and capital, to diasporic communities having emigrated from Somalia or India to Aden producing for the global North, and finally, Jama's own itinerant circulations around the city looking for food or excitement with his fellow multi-ethnic street urchins. It is movement in this contextual frame that Mohamed pictures in her novel in addition to what she calls the *violence of dispersal*, figuring not only those who cross-borders, the products of their labor, and the circulation of commodities, but also and necessarily the technologies of power producing and managing migrant movement.⁶⁷ For example, Mohamed embeds colonial constructions like checkpoints, borders, and passport checks (as I show below) into her novel as a way to tell the story of black migrants, who, though analogous to McKay's pan-African vagabonds, differ in geographical and generational perspective.

The passage above also demonstrates the articulation between the warmth and vibrancy of the diasporic port-city-slum and the violence of the global system Mohamed represents. The "coolies" slave away for the global North pushing heavy wooden crates on the backs of lorries, mirroring McKay's "creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, under the whip, under the terror."⁶⁸ The picturesque Somali coffee women in bright flowery robes that Mohamed beautifully describes belie the execrable conditions under which they toil. The centripetal force of colonialism and international trade indeed holds Aden in its constellation just as the piquancy of the passage itself is held together by the sentences describing imperial world-systems and their forces at play. The globality represented in *Black Mamba Boy* in which people, things, and capital circulate is structured by colonial technologies that manage movement and which imbricate Jama's own peregrinations in the novel.

After the death of his mother in the beginning of the narrative, Jama is called home to Hargeisa from Aden. He is taken in by an aunt and briefly works at a slaughterhouse until, after

a misunderstanding with a relative, is again homeless and on the move. He finds that his father was last seen in Gederaf, Sudan and decides to set off in that direction knowing neither in which direction Gederaf lies nor how to get there: "He only knew to walk away from Hargeisa."⁶⁹ The narrator describes a post-Berlin conference scene subtending the first footsteps of Jama's journey: "His land had been carved up among France, Italy, Britain, and Abyssinia."⁷⁰ Italy had claimed Southern Somalia while Britain claimed the section above that. France took what is now Djibouti, while Ethiopia (Abyssinia) conquered the ethnically Somali Ogaden area. Along with the colonial carving up of the Horn comes infrastructure. As Jama hitches a ride on a British lorry headed to Djibouti, the narrator again traces Jama's diasporic paths stenciled upon colonial routes: "The British had built the road to ease their passage into and out of their possession, and now Jama trundled along it, making slow progress toward the artificial border between Somaliland and Djibouti."⁷¹ Evoking founding Négritude author Léopold Sédar Senghor's provocation that "all borders are artificial,"⁷² Mohamed highlights the violence of dispersal, warranting the following questions: to what extent does the violence of colonialism create dispersal, and to what extent does the colonial interdiction of that very dispersal of peoples and things at or across borders represent a structure of violence?

Mohamed's novel shows that the violence of colonialism creates dispersal (migration) at the same moment it interdicts, redirects, and re-educates that very dispersal of peoples. As Jama rides on the lorry to Djibouti in the hopes of eventually getting to his father in Sudan, Mohamed reveals this structural colonial violence in terms of the materiality of borders and European infrastructure seemingly "picked up and dropped" onto its colony.⁷³ In French Djibouti "European soldiers manned a checkpoint and were nearly taking apart the vehicles in search of smuggled goods... This town was conjured up from the fantasies of its conquerors, a home away from home despite the anti-European sentiment; a provincial French town picked up and dropped into the hottest place on earth."⁷⁴ Checkpoints here signal borders or boundaries, both of which produce the very thing they attempt to contain and to exclude. Karim Mattar and David Fieni argue that:

the checkpoint functions not only to control the flow of migrants, illicit goods, and insurgents/terrorists, but also to divide contiguous lands and to reproduce politically and legally encoded distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Thus performing sovereignty, the checkpoint appears to be symptomatic of fears of catastrophe, whether economic, political, or social, in various national and global contexts.⁷⁵

If the colonial and postcolonial checkpoint is symptomatic of national anxiety about the *other* beyond the pale, then borders themselves are symptoms of the European Nation-State picked up and dropped onto “the hottest place on earth”⁷⁶—here Djibouti, but generalizable to colonial Africa. Like other migrant novelists, Mohamed represents national borders, checkpoints, and segregated cities and towns, like the neighborhoods in Djibouti, with French quarters and black shantytown counterparts. The uniqueness of her text is that it confronts these still-urgent concerns through illustrating earlier precedents as Jama faces colonial era structures of immigration.

Although Jama’s geographical errantry provides narrative thrust to the novel it is precisely what stops him—borders, lack of papers or passports, and the always-already segregated colonial infrastructures—that proffers a postcolonial perspective or critique by engaging movement. For example, after being conscripted as an *askari* (black soldier) in the losing Italian army, under which he is consistently subject to racism and squalid conditions at the hands of the Ferengi soldiers, he sets off again towards Egypt in search of more gainful employment as a sailor on British ships. At this point in the narrative he has received word that his father has passed away and so he heads north. As Jama travels through Sudan towards Egypt, he is met with the contradictory materiality of borders as artificial constructs: “Crowds were walking toward the station, where uniformed policemen stopped and searched them. Jama had never needed identification before, he had no paper saying who he was and where he belonged, but from now on, his *abtiris* would not be enough to prove his identity. In this society you were a nobody unless you had been anointed with a stamp by a bureaucrat.”⁷⁷ His *abtiris*, a list of his grandfather’s names—a sort of memorized genealogy of kinship—no longer suffices as an identity marker within what Fanon calls the Manichean

world of the colonizer and colonized,⁷⁸ which produces Jama as an Other, as a non-citizen and thus a criminal to be deported. The above passage in the novel discloses an immigration law bound up with the production of race and the arbitrary delineation of geographical location, all of which inform Jama's subjecthood.

Jama manages to circumvent the police and Wadi Halfa terminal by walking into Egypt along the banks of Lake Nasser; however, he is soon caught in Alexandria: "At the end of the interrogation the policeman told Jama that he would be deported back to Sudan and banned from entering Egypt again. . . the whole carriage was full of Somalis who had also entered Egypt illegally, all roamers who had known only porous insubstantial borders and were now confronted with countries caged behind bars."⁷⁹ Jama is furious and remarks that "he hadn't left Gerset just to be treated like dirt again," as he and his fellow deportees are relocated to a Palestinian border town.⁸⁰ Jama's bewilderment in the passage above evokes the imaginarieness of the nation form mapped onto geographical area of North Africa, while his anger is suggestive of the violent materiality of borders—passport checks, deportations, or imprisonment—that Africans are subjected to. Mohamed's description poignantly asks us to question the 'illegality' of diasporic movement insofar as the narrative names a foreign legal structure arbitrarily imposed upon a peoples and geographical area, while also metaphorizing the concept of the nation itself as a "cage. . . behind bars."⁸¹

The narrative therefore produces a transnational critique of the nation as it historicizes and problematizes the violence of both the nation form as well as its concept and the ways in which it produces subjects via structures of immigration—exclusion, inclusion, citizenship, right to mobility, property, etc. A town crier in Omhajer, Eritrea in the following passage calls into question colonial property rights, which in this context essentially sweeps away any native rights, expropriating resources, land, and even animals for the Europeans. These processes create dispersal, refugees, and catalyzes economic migration at the same moment that it legislates not just property but the right to move. The town crier laments to a crowd that, "all possessions held by the natives of Italian East Africa will be adjudicated by colonial legislators. . . O people hear me, they are telling us we own nothing, and we cannot kill a thing for our mouths without asking them first.' The crowd

laughed uncertainly.”⁸² European liberal property rights, beginning with John Locke’s statement that land or raw materials mixed with labor equal property are only observed in the African context with an absolute bias towards Europeans,⁸³ illustrating the arbitrary and violent dispossession of human rights afforded natives-as-Others causing, as the novel shows, almost chaotic transmigrations.⁸⁴

The following passage however narrativizes black resistance showing that white power indeed constructs itself dialectically in terms of masters and slaves, which then leads to dispossession and movement: “A group of [askaris] disguised themselves as Sudanese traders and snuck off in a truck, pissed off with the Italians and their stupid white-man, black-man laws. They want you to step into the gutter when they approach, say master this, master that... The longer you stay the less of a man you become.”⁸⁵ Remember Fanon’s statement that “the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself” from the apartheid-like colonial system.⁸⁶ As soon as the askaris toss away the racist labels of colonialism and leave—“the longer you stay the less of a man you become”⁸⁷ human being and anti-colonial resistance become possible. This theme of anti-colonial resistance situated within the larger context of migration and movement becomes symbolic of a similarity between *Banjo* and *Black Mamba Boy*, two critical texts about colonialism and migration, separated by eighty years in time, a continent, and the Atlantic.

Part III: Banjo in *Black Mamba Boy*

Towards the end of the narrative of *Black Mamba Boy*, Jama, after having lived through the perils of immigration and war in the 1930s and 40s, receives a British passport and finds work as a stoker upon a British steamship. Jama stops in Marseille, France and is thrust into McKay’s world of the Ditch where, in a particularly interesting intertextual move, McKay’s characters from *Banjo* appear in Mohamed’s novel. Jama and his friends ended up in the seedy Ditch, in an African bar run by a Senegalese man. An American named Banjo sat by them and played wild songs, ‘Jelly Roll,’ ‘Shake That Thing,’ ‘Let My People Go.’ Jama danced Kunama-style to the strange music and the bar filled with black

sailors from the West Indies, United States, South America, West Africa, and East Africa. Banjo introduced them to his friends Ray, Dengel, Goosey, Bugsy, and a pretty Abyssinian girl called Latnah, and Jama smiled as he shook their hands, wondering if Bethlehem would believe that there were Habashi girls in France.⁸⁸

Here Mohamed recalls the promise of black transnational relationships in the 1920s-30s, that “magic” that McKay conjures in the opening refrain of *Banjo*. These relationships were forged upon and against the structures or paths of colonialism and thus constitute a politics as well as an affiliation, also depicted in *Banjo*. Further, Mohamed’s move here provides one piece of evidence supporting my initial claim that migrITUDE writers are often not only in conversation with earlier black radical texts but revise them as well.⁸⁹

Interestingly, Mohamed adds to the musical repertoire of *Banjo*’s beach boys in *Black Mamba Boy* as they do not play “Let my People Go” in McKay’s original. I argue that this represents neither a cursory reading nor a mis-remembering but rather a strategic *mistranslation* that illustrates both *Banjo*’s and *Black Mamba Boy*’s emancipatory politics.⁹⁰ Mohamed uses the productive placeholder of the African-American Spiritual working in her novel as a nodal point anchoring the discourse of black liberatory struggle. That is, “Go Down Moses” becomes a trope or image in the black diaspora mobilized as an emancipatory gesture. Mohamed’s pan-African mistranslation indeed shares the emancipatory spirit of McKay’s original while updating it in one way by connecting the Horn of Africa to radical African-American liberation struggles. This signifies the temporal and geographical hopping necessarily underlying Dongala’s genealogical phrase “from Négritude to migrITUDE.”⁹¹

Another example of Mohamed’s use of strategic mistranslation appears in her iteration of Latnah. In McKay’s version Latnah is not Ethiopian per se but ethnically indeterminate. She has olive skin and Malt, a West Indian, confesses that, “I don’t know if she is Arabian or Persian or Indian. She knows all landwigs.”⁹² McKay’s Latnah was born in Aden to either a Sudanese or Ethiopian mother and an unknown father, likely Middle-Eastern or South Asian. So why does Mohamed place McKay’s prostitute polyglot’s origin squarely in Ethiopia, which on the surface appears to limit the import of McKay’s original racial creolization? For

one, it is possible that Mohamed gestures towards another black transnational nodal point in Ethiopia itself, which, from Blyden's citation of the biblical 'and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God' as a pan-Africanist rallying cry, to Haile Selassie and the outcry in the African diaspora against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia beginning *Black Mamba Boy*, represents another meaningful discursive marker in the black diaspora and Africa. For Europeans in the pre-colonial epochs Ethiopia represented all of Africa and Ethiopians all Africans, while in the colonial and post-colonial eras Ethiopia symbolized anti-colonial African struggle. However, early on in the narrative of *Black Mamba Boy*, Somalis in Aden discuss African-American reactions to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in seemingly startling ways: "'Colored Americans raise money in churches but the rest of the world looks on'. . .[exclaims one Somali] 'Good! They turned their gaze when the Abyssinians stole our land in Ogaden, handed over to them by the stinking English. If the Habashis can take our ancestral land then let the Ferengis take theirs'"⁹³ Far from an aggrandizement of Ethiopia as representative of Africa in anti-colonial struggle, Ethiopia gets called out, from a Somali perspective, as the semi-imperial power that it is.

Perhaps most importantly, Mohamed's depiction of Latnah conforms to her political and aesthetic project of representing African women in the diaspora. Therefore, it becomes important that among McKay's cohort of transnational black males, the lone woman in his text be recuperated as an African migrant woman in hers. Mohamed's text indeed represents communities of African migrant women in diaspora, from the Somali coffee women in Aden, to migrant women like Arwala, to her iteration of Latnah and the other Habashi girls in France. And indeed her most recent novel, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, tells the stories of three Somali women from three different generations.⁹⁴ The subtle shift in focus or meaning, from *Banjo* to *Black Mamba Boy*, is suggestive of the ways in which migrature writers both borrow from the politics of early twentieth-century pan-Africanist thought and literature, but depart from it, shift, or mistranslate its meanings for tactical effect, essentially updating the black radical and transnational politics of that epoch to their own, or as Dongala phrases it, "from Négritude to migrature."⁹⁵

Black Mamba Boys's narrative ends with Jama on a ship as he begins to make the long journey back to Africa from Wales as fellow seamen dance to Louis Armstrong's "Let My People Go." "They would pack up their bags," muses Jama as he imagines his future with his wife Bethlehem, "and move like nomads over Africa, over Europe, discovering new worlds, renaming them Jamastan and Bethlehemia if they wanted."⁹⁶ The African-American protest song furnishes the diasporic notes and movements upon which Jama's imagined nomadic futures travel, between Africa and Europe, Jamastan and Bethlehemia. Echoing the reverberations of *Banjo* one final time "Jama let his legs move to the swinging jazz, let his hips whine a little, his shoulders shimmy, anything to free the music trapped within his soul."⁹⁷

Conclusion

In close reading these two texts in terms of migration and movement, the first an odd "story without a plot" in McKay's 1929 *Banjo* and the second a twenty-first century migritude text, I have demonstrated four interrelated points in and through suggesting that McKay's novel can be read as a (proto)migritude text and that Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* is pointedly migritude. Firstly, I have illustrated the theoretical underpinnings of "migritude" itself both as a body of contemporary African literature and as a politics. Secondly, I proffer a new way of reading McKay's classic text arguing that it is fundamentally about migration and movement in both form and content. I additionally argue that migritude literature provides a necessary hinge through which to analyze immigration under global capitalism in the twenty-first century as entangled with colonial pasts. And finally, I detail the ways in which migritude, as its name suggests—a conjunction of Négritude and migration—is indeed predicated upon a sophisticated and complex relationship and engagement with historical-literary flashpoints in the black radical tradition, i.e., pan-Africanism or Négritude, and that this politics of intimate repurposing marks an important new movement or moment in African literature and the novels of recent African diasporas in global literature.

Notes

- ¹ “Story Without a Plot” is the subtitle to Claude McKay’s *Banjo*. See Claude McKay, *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929).
- ² Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 232.
- ³ Achille Mbembe interviewed by Thomas M. Blaser, “Africa and the Future: An Interview with Achille Mbembe,” *Africa is a Country*, Nov 20, 2013, <http://africasacountry.com/africa-and-the-future-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/>
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Solome Lemma, “Against the Gospel of ‘Africa Rising,’” *Africa is a Country*, Nov 6 2013, <http://africasacountry.com/against-the-gospel-of-africa-rising/>. Also see Emma Dabiri, “Why I’m Not an Afropolitan,” *Africa is a Country*, January 21, 2014, <http://africasacountry.com/why-im-not-an-afropolitan>; and Stephanie Bosch Santana, “Exorcizing Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina explains why ‘I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan’ at ASAUk 2012,” *Africa in Words*, February 8, 2013, <http://africaninwords.com/2013/02/08/exorcizing-afropolitanism-binyavanga-wainaina-explains-why-i-am-a-pan-africanist-not-an-afropolitan-at-asauk-2012/>.
- ⁶ Mbembe, “Africa and the Future,” paragraph, 16.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Vijay Prashad, “Speaking of Saris,” in *Migritude*, ed. Shailja Patel (New York: Kaya Press, 2010), ii.
- ¹¹ Mbembe, “Africa and the Future,” paragraph, 16.
- ¹² Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994), 131.
- ¹³ Ibid, 134.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 148.
- ¹⁵ Mbembe, “Africa and the Future,” paragraph 12.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ “Being-in-the-World” is Heidegger’s term used to theorize what all humans have/are ontologically, departing from Cartesian metaphysics. Heidegger philosophizes Being in terms of shared conditions, modes, and structures rather than in terms of the isolated individual. Heidegger then, I argue, provides a productive philosophical vocabulary for this project. See: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962).
- ¹⁸ For an illuminating discussion of indirect colonial rule and the construction of race, tribe, and migration see Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- ¹⁹ “Story Without a Plot” is the subtitle to Claude McKay’s *Banjo*. See Claude McKay, *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929); Emmanuel Dongala, “From Négritude to Migritude: The African Writer in Exile,”

conference presentation, *Exil: mode(s) d'emploi—Experiencing Exile in Literature and the Arts*, University of California Los Angeles, 2005.

²⁰ Prashad, "Speaking of Saris," ii.

²¹ This term should become clear over the course of my reading of *Banjo*, but here I briefly define migrant pan-Africanism as anti-colonial and anti-racist pan-Africanism that foregrounds colonial structures of immigration as well as the being of migrants within its philosophy and practice.

²² McKay, *Banjo*, 45-46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19. "Aframerican" is McKay's term.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12. The banjo instrument itself is pan-African, as it was originally West-African but was further developed by slaves on West Indian and American plantations. In my larger project I consider the banjo at greater length. I argue that the instrument is symbolic of migitude in the following ways: it moves or migrates from Africa during the slave trade to the Caribbean and the American South. It is diasporic, then, but it also necessarily interrogates the conditions that catalyze its movement—the slave trade and the plantation economy where it is initially surreptitiously developed by slaves. Its history also calls into question its use in minstrelsy by a racist white public. It is then recast by Banjo in *Banjo* as inextricable from *himself*—"mahself"—as a black agential subject as well as representative of radical black transnational networks guided by the saxophone jazzing and music of the Ditch.

²⁵ "Violence of dispersal" is Nadifa Mohamed's phrase. Nadifa Mohamed. Reading. "Black Mamba Boy: Reading and Discussion with Nadifa Mohamed," Center for Place Culture and Politics, The Graduate Center, CUNY. Sept 25th 2012.

²⁶ Vijay Prashad "Speaking of Saris" in Shailja Patel, *Migitude* (New York: Kaya Press 2010), ii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ McKay, *Banjo*, 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ Michel Foucault defines biopower as "a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is roughly what I have called biopower." See: Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell, Ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 1. In this sense then, just as, for Foucault, the "homosexual" was invented as a species in 1889 (See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction* [New York:

Random House, Inc. 1978], 43.), so is the immigrant produced as such in the same era of high imperialism. Migritude literature shows how terms like *sans papier* or “undocumented” in Alain Mabanckou’s France in his novels *Blue White Red* and *Black Bazaar*, for example, *immigrant* or *illegal alien* in the U.S. context, or as we saw in McKay’s *Banjo*, *Nationality Doubtful* all become categorical terms, “species,” and are discursively weighted and legislative.

³⁵ McKay, *Banjo*, 101.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

³⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1967), 28.

³⁸ McKay, *Banjo*, 311.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 177.

⁴¹ McKay, *Banjo*, 67.

⁴² 42 *Ibid.*.

⁴³ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), 153.

⁴⁴ McKay, *Banjo*, 67.

⁴⁵ *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., vol. 8, ed. William A. Darity, Jr. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008), s.v. “Vagabonds,” 566.

⁴⁶ *OED Online*, s.v. “bondage, n.,” accessed August 22, 2013, <http://www.oed.com>.

⁴⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111.

⁴⁸ *OED Online*, s.v. “vagabond, adj. and n.,” accessed August 22, 2013, <http://www.oed.com>.

⁴⁹ Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home: An Autobiography* (New York: Harvest Books, 1937), 4.

⁵⁰ McKay, *Banjo*, 61.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁵² Nathaniel Mackey, “Other: From Noun to Verb,” *Representations* 39 (Summer 1992): 51-70.

⁵³ McKay, *Banjo*, 65.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁶ This is shown mainly through borders and citizenship on the one hand, and water (gulfs, seas, bays, etc) upon which commodities and black bodies flow, on the other.

⁵⁷ McKay, *Banjo*, 326.

⁵⁸ McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ McKay, *Banjo*, 314.

- ⁶¹ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 9.
- ⁶² Antony Wild, *Coffee: A Dark History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 69.
- ⁶³ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 45. This is perhaps why the novel references the Rupee as currency in Aden instead of the pound.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁶⁵ Sonali Perera, *No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 79.
- ⁶⁶ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 9.
- ⁶⁷ Nadifa Mohamed. Reading. "Black Mamba Boy: Reading and Discussion with Nadifa Mohamed," Center for Place Culture and Politics, The Graduate Center, CUNY. Sept 25th 2012.
- ⁶⁸ McKay, *Banjo*, 67.
- ⁶⁹ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 72.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.
- ⁷² Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: Praeger Paperbacks, 1964), 92.
- ⁷³ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 81.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ⁷⁵ Karim Mattar and David Fieni, seminar, "The Global Checkpoint: 'Rights' of Passage, Performance of Sovereignty," American Comparative Literature Association Conference, March 29-April 1, 2012, Brown University, Providence, RI.
- ⁷⁶ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 81.
- ⁷⁷ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 215.
- ⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 41.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 147.
- ⁸³ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (N/A: Maestro Reprints), 87.
- ⁸⁴ See Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- ⁸⁵ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 123.
- ⁸⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 37.
- ⁸⁷ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 123.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.
- ⁸⁹ Another example is Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazaar*, which is explicitly in conversation with the Négritude of the 1930s and 40s. Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazaar*, trans. Sarah Ardizzone, (London: Serpent's Tail, 2012).
- ⁹⁰ I use the term *mistranslation* as theorized in Brent Hayes Edwards to reflect the ways in which discourses of black internationalism not only traveled and

were translated, but were predicated on constitutive difference and were thus (productively) mistranslated within and across the black internationalism of the 1920s and 1930s. See: Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge: Duke University Press, 2003), 7, 128.

⁹¹ Emmanuel Dongala, “From Négritude to Migritude: The African Writer in Exile,” conference presentation, *Exil: mode(s) d’emploi—Experiencing Exile in Literature and the Arts*, University of California Los Angeles, 2005.

⁹² McKay, *Banjo*, 10.

⁹³ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 33.

⁹⁴ Nadifa Mohamed, *The Orchard of Lost Souls: A Novel*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013).

⁹⁵ Emmanuel Dongala, “From Négritude to Migritude: The African Writer in Exile,” conference presentation, *Exil: mode(s) d’emploi—Experiencing Exile in Literature and the Arts*, University of California Los Angeles, 2005.

⁹⁶ Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*, 284.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*