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Display on Display:

Migrating Identities in Contemporary Francophone Literature and Music

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in French and Francophone Studies

by

Katelyn Elizabeth Knox

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Display on Display:

Migrating Identities in Contemporary Francophone Literature and Music

By

Katelyn Elizabeth Knox

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Dominic Thomas, Chair

“Display on Display: Migrating Identities in Contemporary Francophone Literature and Music” examines Francophone cultural works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that grapple with constructions of sub-Saharan African immigrant identity in France. Its cultural studies methodology responds to a current lacuna in traditional philology-based literary studies that divorces literary expression from its wider cultural context, bringing to the fore questions of corporeality, history, and identity formation. The texts this project analyzes—broadly defined to include literature, music, fashion, dance, and visual art—lay bare the ways in which articulations of alterity, paradoxically, helped to solidify images of Frenchness. The works, I argue, critique rigid notions of identity in two principal ways. The texts examined in the first half of this study—by Didier Daeninckx, J. R. Essomba, Salif Keïta, and Meïway—call into question how 1990s French political discourse ignored the ways in which the larger histories of colonization and the slave trade laid the foundation for

contemporary migratory pathways. By resuscitating these historical moments in conjunction with sub-Saharan African immigration, the works call into question immigrants' exclusion from historically-based notions of national identity. Yet by associating the black body with these historical moments, these works risk suggesting that there exists a homogeneous black community in France that would share such histories. In the second half of this study, thus, I turn to more recent works by Alain Mabanckou and Léonora Miano that both establish and question the existence of a black community in France (and its relationship to diaspora and origin), scrutinizing the criteria upon which such a community would be based. Each of the works selected for this study also exposes how specters of the borders the immigrant figures cross are remapped onto the landscape in which cultural objects (including the texts themselves) circulate. Keenly attuned to the generic classifications—"Francophone," "world music," and "African immigrant literature," among others—that package them and their authors, the works (just like this project) ultimately seek to transcend such disciplinary boundaries.

The dissertation of Katelyn Elizabeth Knox is approved.

Lia Brozgal

Alain Mabanckou

Timothy Taylor

Dominic Thomas, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

To my parents,
Jeffrey and JoAnn Knox,
with eternal love.

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INTRODUCTION

Display on Display

Léonora Miano began her lecture given at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2011 with breaking news: “La nouvelle commence à se répandre: il y a des Noirs en France, il n’est plus permis d’en douter, et même si le pays rechigne encore à dire qu’ils ne sont pas seulement *en* France mais aussi et surtout *de* France, leur présence est devenue un sujet permanent de discussions.”¹ Organizations like the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* (CDRN), the *Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire* (LUDRN), and later the *Négritude* literary movement had already made questions of black identity in France (and its empire) a political issue almost ninety years earlier; however, over time, the debates became deracialized and receded from view to a large extent.² In this statement, Miano thus captures the irony that though black individuals have been in France for centuries, and had brought forth these same issues years before, when these debates exploded back onto the political scene in the early twenty-first century, they were approached as novel. In fact, Miano’s statement points to a much larger paradoxical visibility that blacks in France experience. Racialized images have a long history in France, where stock characters in a variety of media depicted black individuals as laborers, colonized subjects, buffoons, and *tirailleurs*. Though race plays a role in daily, interpersonal interactions, France’s universalist values hold that no distinction should be made between citizens based on race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, or religion, among other

¹ Léonora Miano, *Habiter la frontière* (Paris: L’Arche, 2012), 59, italics in original.

² Lamine Senghor founded both groups; the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre* was founded in 1926. After a break, Lamine Senghor, Tiémoko Garan Kouyate and Camille Sainte-Rose created the *Ligue de défense de la race nègre* in 1927, which was “proche des trois grandes figures du panafricanisme Marcus Garvey, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois et Goerge Padmore [et] s’inscrit dans une lutte internationale bien au-delà des simples enjeux de l’empire coloniale français.” Pascal Blanchard et al., eds, *La France Noire: Trois siècles de présences des Afriques, des Caraïbes, de l’océan Indien et d’Océanie*. (Paris: Découverte, 2011), 120.

criteria.³ Events such as the 2005 riots that swept through France's *banlieues*, or the national identity debate held in 2009-2010 that asked the French public to debate "what it means to be French today" illustrate how France struggles to reconcile these universalist values with its increasingly multiethnic population, which might seek to affirm such identities.

The tension between "*en* France" and "*de* France" in Miano's citation also underscores the way in which racialized subjects in France have often been figured as foreigners: they might be "in," France, but they will never be "from" France. Behind this tension lies an imagined collective ("France") from which black individuals are excluded. The present study springs from this tension, exploring several questions that arise from Miano's citation. How was blackness made visible in France in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What elements of these ways of imagining the other are visible in later images of the immigrant and of national identity? What do these moments of display reveal in terms of who has the right or responsibility to gaze? And, above all, how do cultural works engage with and destabilize these images and gazing dynamics?

This study, "Display on Display: Migrating Identities in Contemporary Francophone Literature and Music" explores these questions by turning to twentieth and twenty-first century Francophone cultural works that grapple with constructions of sub-Saharan African immigrant identity in France. My project's cultural studies methodology responds to a current lacuna in traditional philology-based literary studies that divorces literary expression from its wider cultural context, bringing to the fore questions of corporeality, history, and identity formation. The texts this project analyzes—broadly defined to include literature, music, fashion, dance, and visual art—lay bare the ways in which articulations of alterity helped, paradoxically, to solidify

³ Article 1 of France's 1958 Constitution provides for equality before the law "sans distinction d'origine, de race, ou de religion." "Conseil constitutionnel: constitution du 4 octobre 1958," July 4, 2008, [http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/acces-par-titres.5110.html#prembule](http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/acces-par-titres.5110.html#preambule), accessed 11 May 2013.

images of Frenchness. They also expose how such notions of otherness were sufficiently equivocal to create the appearance of a homogeneous group, in essence equating racial minorities over time with a variety of “other” figures, including the immigrant and the foreigner. The critique put forth in the texts, I argue, takes two principal forms. The works examined in the first half of this project—Didier Daeninckx’s novellas *Cannibale* and *Le retour d’Ataï*; visual and musical depictions of “Nénufar,” the Central African figure associated with France’s 1931 *Exposition coloniale*; J.R. Essomba’s novel *Le paradis du nord*; the song “Nou Pas Bouger” by Salif Keïta (and a later collaboration with L’Skadrille); and the song “Je suis sans-papiers” by Meïway—all resuscitate the histories of colonization and the slave trade in conjunction with 1990s sub-Saharan African immigration to call into question the way in which political and popular discourse about immigration ignored the role these larger histories played in establishing these migratory pathways.⁴ In these texts, resituating immigration as just one point on a much larger historical trajectory also calls into question the way in which exclusive notions of French history were used to continue to posit black subjects, regardless of their immigration and citizenship status, as foreigners in France. In the second half of this study, the works analyzed—including Alain Mabanckou’s novel and *soukous* album (both entitled *Black Bazar*), Congolese *sape* fashion, Ivorian *Coupé-décalé* music, and Léonora Miano’s intermedial novel *Blues pour Élise*—both establish and question the existence of a black community in France (and its relationship to diaspora and origin), scrutinizing the criteria upon which such a community

⁴ Didier Daeninckx, *Cannibale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); Didier Daeninckx, *Le retour d’Ataï* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2001); J. R. Essomba, *Le paradis du nord* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1996); Salif Keïta, *Ko-Yan* (New York: Island Records, Ltd., 1989); Salif Keïta feat. L’Skadrille, *Nou Pas Bouger* (Paris: Universal, 2007); Meïway, *Golgotha* (Paris: BMG France, 2004).

would be based.⁵ In the end, this project contributes to the larger goals of pluralizing discussions of French, black, and African histories, memories, and identities.

Though scholars in both literature and music tend to limit their inquiries to cultural objects within their own field, the works chosen for this study all exhibit engagement across media boundaries, suggesting that taking an intermedial approach allows for a more complex understanding of the processes involved. This project therefore draws from and builds on literary and popular music scholarship that take sub-Saharan African immigrant cultural works as their focus. In the literary realm, studies such as Odile Cazenave's *Afrique sur Seine: Une nouvelle génération de romanciers africains à Paris* (2003), Benetta Jules-Rosette's *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (1998) provide a foundation for examining postcolonial sub-Saharan African immigrant literature.⁶ In taking both a transcolonial and cultural studies approach (considering fashion movements such as Congolese *sape*, among other cultural works alongside literary texts), Dominic Thomas's *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (2007) also extends these inquiries in ways that are useful to my own analyses.⁷ In the musical realm, my study's commitment to engage with how the songs' musical elements (rhythm, instrumentation, lyrics, etc.) produce meaning, as well as how other associated practices (including music videos, fashion, and dance) function as performative venues that complement—or complicate—a song's message, builds on the historical and sociological

⁵ Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazar* (Paris: Seuil, 2009); Modogo Abarambwa, Sam Tshintu, and Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazar* (Paris: Lusafrika Records, 2012); Léonora Miano, *Blues pour Élise* (Paris: Plon, 2010).

⁶ Odile M. Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine: Une nouvelle génération de romanciers africains à Paris* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003); Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁷ Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

approach to African musical production in Paris taken in James Winders's *Paris Africain: Rhythms of the African Diaspora* (2006).⁸

Ultimately, each of the primary texts selected for this study also reflects more broadly on the ways in which sub-Saharan African immigrants specifically—and black bodies, more generally—are made visible within larger cultural marketplaces. This project builds on scholarly inquiries into the representation of postcolonial literary texts and their authors including Richard Watts's *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (2005), which posits Francophone works' paratexts (including introductions, promotional materials, and texts' circulation) as important sites through which larger identitarian struggles are negotiated, or the collection *Pour une littérature-monde en français* (2007) edited by Michel Le Bris et al., which calls into question the taxonomy "Francophonie" (often accused of ghettoizing authors from outside the *métropole*).⁹ Timothy Taylor's *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997), which traces the history and politics of the category "world music," as well as how it has been deployed as a signifier of "authenticity," serves as a foundation for the analyses of the musical works I examine, which are often classified into this genre.¹⁰ These scholarly engagements with the larger marketplaces in which representations of authors and works circulate find parallels in the texts' own interrogation of rigid taxonomies.

As this project's title—"Display on Display"—announces, questions of visibility and invisibility are at the heart of this study. One of the guiding principles that orients all of the

⁸ James A. Winders, *Paris Africain: Rhythms of the African Diaspora* (New York: Basingstoke, 2006)

⁹ Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005); Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud, and Eva Almassy, eds., *Pour une littérature-monde* (Paris, France: Gallimard, 2007). This collection expanded upon the views expressed in a manifesto entitled "Pour une littérature-monde en français" signed by forty-four authors. Muriel Barbery et al., "Pour une littérature-monde en français," *Le Monde* 16 March 2007.

¹⁰ Timothy Dean Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

chapters is how sub-Saharan African immigrants negotiate their identity in France, which cannot be divorced from how sub-Saharan African peoples, cultures, and histories were previously made visible in France. Framing the study of sub-Saharan African literature and musical production in France through the lens of display raises several questions. Who or what is being displayed? By whom? For what audience? Where, when, and how do these exhibits transpire? What is included and what is omitted from such displays? Typically, when one thinks of display, images of spectacles, monuments, and publically and privately sponsored spaces where art, artifacts, and other objects are collected, categorized, and narrativized for a viewing public come to mind. In this understanding of display, the peoples, cultures, and histories gazed upon have little agency in defining the terms of their exhibition; rather, they are talked about, packaged, and labeled. In addition to considering official sites of display such as museums, monuments, official historical discourse, my project also approaches “display” through a wider perspective. First, I propose reading official venues where the “other” was exhibited as their own sites of display through which images of the self become legible. In this reading, how, when, and why peoples and cultures are put on display in France can be read as a narrative through which images of Frenchness are constructed. Second, my project considers political and media discourse such as politicians’ speeches, television images, and even legislation about sub-Saharan African immigrants (and their descendants) to be venues of exhibition that are just as important as officially sanctioned spaces. Finally, and most importantly, I read the texts depicting sub-Saharan African immigration through the lens of display (and self-exhibitionism), showing how they expose, and subsequently subvert, the terms on which sub-Saharan African bodies have historically been made visible in France. In so doing, the artists seek not only to challenge the

circulating images of black bodies in France but they also make their audience aware of the underlying dynamics that legitimize their gaze.

As is evident in the introduction thus far, questions of race and immigration are inextricably linked in France, due in large part to France's official rhetoric of colorblindness. Thus, I would first like to sketch out a brief history of sub-Saharan African immigration and tease out how this project envisions navigating such terminological issues, before then examining how the texts themselves seek to complicate such discursive entanglements.

Sub-Saharan African Immigration: Numbers and Names

France has historically been a country with one of the highest immigration rates in the world; in fact, after the United States imposed immigration quotas in the 1920s, the proportion of foreigners as a percentage of population in France exceeded the same percentage in the United States.¹¹ Immigration to France has typically been closely tied to the increased need for labor during periods of economic growth, and France actively recruited immigrants at several points during its history. Though the overall percentage of immigrants as a part of France's total population has remained relatively stable since the 1950s, the national composition of its immigrant population has seen dramatic shifts during this time. Whereas Europeans, Maghrebis, and sub-Saharan African immigrants made up 78.7%, 14.2%, 0.7% of France's immigrant population in 1962, respectively, by 1999 these figures had shifted to 45.0%, 30.2%, and 9.1%.¹²

¹¹ Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration, XIXè-XXè siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). Noiriel also offers an insightful analysis of the difficulties France has in recognizing the history of immigration in "Difficulties in French Historical Research on Immigration," in *Immigrants in Two Democracies: French and American Experiences*, ed. D.L. Horowitz and Gérard Noiriel (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

¹² Alec G. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.

Following the global economic crisis in the mid-1970s, immigration became a political tool deployed by both the right and the left in France. During this time, not only did Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* (FN)—whose slogan, “la France aux Français,” indicates its xenophobic platform—draw increasing support, but France took measures that changed it from a nation of immigration to one that favored protectionism, seen when President Valéry Giscard d'Éstaing proclaimed the borders closed to immigration in 1973. Significant changes in France's immigration legislation in the 1980s and 1990s—such as the Pasqua Laws (1986/1993), which limited foreigners' ability to enter France, facilitated the expulsion of those who were in France illegally, and removed the right of *jus soli* which, since 1889 had accorded French citizenship to any foreigner born in France when s/he reached adulthood—literally redefined who had the right to remain in France.¹³ In the political arena, the terms frequently used—including “*étranger*” and “*clandestin*” de-emphasized the labor contributions these individuals made and effectively cast suspicion of illegality on every immigrant.¹⁴ Furthermore, this linguistic shift also depicted immigrants as economic burdens: “désigner les étrangers en situation irrégulière comme ‘clandestins’ [...] c'est supposer que l'on a affaire à des personnes qui ont choisi de se placer dans une situation *dont ils tirent injustement profit*.”¹⁵ Prominent politicians also reiterated such discourse; for instance, Jacques Chirac not only decried immigrants' supposed cultural

¹³ “Loi n° 86-1025 du 9 septembre 1986 relative aux conditions d'entrée et de séjour des étrangers en France,” http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jsessionid=5F118C1E9BD8460D4F0054A46C15EB57.tpdjo05v_1?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000317301&dateTexte=20130516; “Loi n° 93-1027 du 24 août 1993 relative à la maîtrise de l'immigration et aux conditions d'entrée, d'accueil et de séjour des étrangers en France,” <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006082579&dateTexte=20090827>.

¹⁴ As Christine Barats underscores, “implicitement, tout étranger devient un suspect potentiel car sa qualité d'étranger (en termes de nationalité) se double de la nécessaire ‘légalité’ de sa présence sur le territoire français.” Christine Barats, “Immigration: carrefour de la suspicion (discours présidentiels et juridiques),” *Mots* 60 (September 1999): 53. See also Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 41-60.

¹⁵ Didier Fassin, “‘Clandestins’ ou ‘exclus’? Quand les mots font des politiques” *Politix* 9, no. 34 (1996): 83, my emphasis.

incompatibility with Frenchness, but also characterized them as a drain on France's social welfare benefits. He contrasted a hypothetical "travailleur français" earning 15,000 French francs to the immigrant family who lives next door: "une famille avec un père de famille, trois ou quatre épouses, et une vingtaine de gosses, et qui gagne 50 000 francs de prestations sociales, *sans naturellement travailler*."¹⁶ Giscard d'Éstaing similarly likened immigration to an "invasion" from the former colonies in 1991.¹⁷

This discourse of "invasion" bears little resemblance to the reality of the time, when immigrants (half of whom came from other European nations) made up only 7.4% of the total French population.¹⁸ In France, the *Haut Conseil à l'Intégration* provides the following definitions that are used in official census data: an "*immigré*" is defined as a "personne née étrangère à l'étranger et entrée en France en cette qualité en vue de s'établir sur le territoire français de façon durable," whereas an "*étranger*" is a "personne qui ne possède pas, sur le territoire français, la nationalité française, soit qu'elle possède (à titre exclusif) une autre nationalité, soit qu'elle n'en possède aucune (apatride)."¹⁹ Thus, as the *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (INSEE)—the body responsible for conducting France's official censuses—reminds us, though some "immigrés" might be "étrangers" (and vice versa), the two terms should not be confused: even if an immigrant becomes a French citizen, s/he never stops being an immigrant, whereas one can either be a "étranger" or a French citizen, but not

¹⁶ My emphasis. Chirac gave this speech during a dinner debate of the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) political party on 19 June 1991. A video of this portion of his speech can be found at: <http://www.ina.fr/video/CAB91027484/chirac-immigration-video.html>.

¹⁷ Valéry Giscard d'Éstaing, "Immigration ou Invasion?" *Le Figaro Magazine*, 21 September 1991.

¹⁸ In 1990, Europeans made up 50.4% of immigrants and 40.6% of foreigners. Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 18-19.

¹⁹ Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, "Mots de l'intégration," <http://www.hci.gouv.fr/-Mots-de-l-integration-.html>.

both at once.²⁰ Similarly, “étranger” does not necessarily imply a migration; because France no longer accords children born in France automatic citizenship (*droit du sol*), children born in France to two foreign parents are considered “étrangers” at their birth (though they have the possibility of taking legal measures to become French citizens by the age of 16).²¹ From 1975-1999, the proportion of immigrants in France held steady at 7.4%,²² and in the most recent census (2009), the level had risen just one percent to 8.45%.²³ Sub-Saharan Africans accounted for less than 5% of the total immigrant population until 1982; in 1990 they comprised 6.6%, and in 1999, they made up 9.1%.²⁴ In 2009, they made up 13% of France’s total immigrant population, which represents 1.1% of the total French population.²⁵ For a point of comparison, immigrants of Maghrebi origin (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) have consistently comprised approximately 30% of France’s immigrant population since 1982, and in 2009 they made up 28.9% of the total immigrant population—2.5% of France’s total population.²⁶

The number of foreigners, too, has decreased since the mid-1980s. As Alec Hargreaves notes, it has dropped from a high of 6.8% in 1982 to 5.6% in 1999, a decrease that he attributes

²⁰ According to the definitions the INSEE published to accompany the 2009 census, “La qualité d’immigré est permanente: un individu continue à appartenir à la population immigrée même s’il devient français par acquisition.” INSEE, “Définitions,” http://www.recensement.insee.fr/telechargement/documentation/doc_definitions_2009.pdf.

²¹ “Un immigré n’est pas nécessairement étranger et réciproquement, certains étrangers sont nés en France [essentiellement des mineurs].” Ibid.

²² Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 28.

²³ INSEE. “IMG1A—Population par sexe, âge et situation quant à l’immigration—Niveau agrégé.” *Recensement de la population générale de 2009* (2009), <http://www.recensement.insee.fr/tableauxDetaillés.action?zoneSearchField=FRANCE&codeZone=1-FE&idTheme=9&idTableauDetaillé=24&niveauDetaillé=1>.

²⁴ Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 19.

²⁵ INSEE, “IMG1B—Les immigrés par sexe, âge et pays de naissance—Niveau agrégé,” *Recensement de la population générale de 2009* (2009), <http://www.recensement.insee.fr/tableauxDetaillés.action?zoneSearchField=FRANCE&codeZone=1-FE&idTheme=9&idTableauDetaillé=25&niveauDetaillé=1>.

²⁶ Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 19.

to foreigners acquiring French citizenship.²⁷ The 2009 census reveals that foreigners made up 5.86% of the French population.²⁸ Of these foreigners, sub-Saharan Africans represented the fourth largest group with 482,157 individuals (0.75% of France's total population; 13% of the total "foreign" population).²⁹ This percentage represents a significant shift from the earlier trajectory of sub-Saharan African individuals as a part of France's total foreign population: prior to 1982, sub-Saharan Africans made up less than 5% of this population; in 1990, this percentage increased to 11.8%, and in 1999, it decreased to 8.7%.³⁰

Despite the fact that foreigners only make up 5.86% of France's total population according to the 2009 census, a poll conducted by Ipsos entitled "France 2013: les nouvelles fractures," found that 70% of French people polled believe that there "trop d'étrangers en France" and 62% believe that "on ne se sent plus chez soi comme avant."³¹ Such reactions, culled from the 2013 poll, are reminiscent of Giscard d'Éstaing's assertion that 1980s

²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ INSEE, "NAT1—Population par sexe, âge et nationalité—niveau agrégé," *Recensement de la population générale de 2009* (2009), http://www.recensement.insee.fr/tableauxDetaillies.action?zoneSearchField=France_&codeZone=1-FE&idTheme=11&idTableauDetaille=41&niveauDetail=1.

²⁹ The census classifies this population under "other African nationalities" to distinguish this region from the Maghreb. INSEE, "NAT1—Population par sexe, âge et nationalité—Niveau semi-agrégé," *Recensement de la population générale de 2009* (2009), <http://www.recensement.insee.fr/tableauxDetaillies.action?zoneSearchField=FRANCE&codeZone=1-FE&idTheme=11&idTableauDetaille=41&niveauDetail=2>.

³⁰ Hargreaves succinctly summarizes the issue thusly: "a large part of what the French call 'immigration' is commonly known as 'race relations,'" (Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 1-2). Valérie Amiraux and Patrick Simon also reflect upon how such conflation of processes (immigration and race) in scholarly writing about the French case render efforts to dissociate the two difficult. They conclude that, while not ideal, using the term "immigrants" to discuss, in part, racial and ethnic minorities in France is justified because of its presence in the literature: "We will not make an exception here, since the term 'immigrants' will return in a systematic way in our overview of the literature. In doing so, we are well aware of contributing to the confusion between the field that stems from the study of migrations, and that which is interested in ethnic and racial minorities within a context not so much of national, but rather postcolonial domination." Valérie Amiraux and Patrick Simon, "There Are No Minorities Here: Cultures of Scholarship and Public Debate on Immigrants and Integration in France," *International Journal of Comparative sociology* 47, no. 3 (2006): 193-94.

³¹ This same study also found that 74% of people surveyed believe that Islam is "incompatible avec la société française." Gérard Courtois, "Les crispations alarmantes de la société française," *Le Monde* January 25, 2013, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2013/01/24/les-crispations-alarmantes-de-la-societe-francaise_1821655_8_23448.html.

immigration constituted an “invasion” on the part of the formerly colonized. This discrepancy between perceptions and realities in 2013 substantiates scholars’ and artists’ claims that a discourse of “immigration” is often used in France as a proxy for other discussions, specifically for “race,” “ethnicity” and “post-migratory processes” more generally, to borrow Hargreaves’s term.³²

This lexical difficulty of distinguishing between immigrants—those who were born elsewhere and now reside in France—and racial and ethnic minorities stems in large part from France’s republican ideals, its associated official rhetoric of colorblindness, and its resistance to collecting “ethnic statistics.”³³ As Louis-George Tin has argued, the reticence against taking “ethnic statistics”—a term that he eschews in favor of “statistics of diversity”—is partly due to the ever-present specter of Nazi Germany in France: “taking a census of blacks would be tantamount to reverting to the Nazi period, when records of Jews facilitated the ‘Final Solution’.”³⁴ Furthermore, arguments made against taking “ethnic statistics” typically suggest that not only would such studies implicitly acknowledge that racial and ethnic categories exist, but they also propose that conducting such inquiries would effectively increase the possibility of ethno-racial factionalism in France, to the detriment of a united sense of national identity.³⁵

³² Hargreaves, *Multi-Ethnic France*, 1.

³³ See, for instance, Erik Bleich, “Anitracism Without Races: Politics and Policy in a ‘Color-Blind’ State,” *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2000); Herrick Chapman and Laura Levine Frader, Eds., *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Françoise Lionnet, “Continents and Archipelagoes: From *E Pluribus Unum* to Creolized Solidarities,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008); and Maxim Silverman, *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism, and Citizenship in Modern France* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³⁴ Louis-Georges Tin, “Who Is Afraid of Blacks in France? The Black Question: The Name Taboo, the Number Taboo,” *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 1 (2008): 37. Other seminal discussions of France’s ethnic statistics include Daniel Sabbagh and Shanny Peer, “French Color Blindness in Perspective: The Controversy over ‘Statistiques Ethniques,’” *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2008); and Cris Beauchemin et al., “Les Discriminations: Une question de minorités visibles,” *Population et sociétés* 466 (April 2010).

³⁵ See Patrick Simon, “The Choice of Ignorance: The Debate on Ethnic and Racial Statistics in France,” *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 16. For a thorough discussion of what is—and is not—

Though collecting data on the racial and ethnic composition of France's population is still looked upon with skepticism, recent efforts have, been able to make limited—but still significant—steps in this direction by framing their studies in terms of discrimination and immigrants' integration (that is, studying matters related to immigrants and their children). In 2007 the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France* (CRAN) sought to capture a more representative image of France's demographics, when it conducted a survey about discrimination against blacks in France, entitled “Les discriminations à l'encontre des populations noires.” According to their estimate, 1.8 million “noirs” over the age of 18 live in France (including Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, and French Guyana), which amounts to 3.86% of the total French population over 18 in 2007.³⁶ Of this “black French” population, 81% is French (either having single or double nationality), whereas only 19% are foreigners.³⁷ Other estimates suggest that at most, “Black France” is composed of between 5 and 5.5 million individuals (8-10% of France's total population), but that a more conservative estimate is around 5% of the population, or 3 million individuals.³⁸ Though these studies paint a more accurate picture of France's black population, it does not address what percentage of this black population is foreign, nor does it provide additional information on the individuals' national background (such as what percentage come from sub-Saharan Africa).

permitted in terms of discussing “ethnicity” in France, see Alec G. Hargreaves, “Veiled Truths: Discourses of Ethnicity in Contemporary France,” In *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity and Conflict in a Globalized World*, ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

³⁶ Included in this number are people who self-identified as “métis” and also identified their parents or grandparents as “noir.” This study also concludes that the total percentage of “visible minorities” over the age of 18 living in France (and its overseas territories) is 9.5%. CRAN (Conseil représentatif des associations noires) and TNS-Sofres. *Les discriminations à l'encontre des populations noires de France*. 31 January 2007. <http://www.le-cran.fr/document-cran-associations-noires-de-france/1-la-premiere-enquete-statistique-sur-les-noirs-de-france---une-realisation-le-cran-tns-sofres.pdf>, accessed 17 May 2013.

³⁷ CRAN and TNS-Sofres, *Les discriminations à l'encontre des populations noires de France*, 25.

³⁸ Blanchard et al., *La France Noire*, 47.

In 2008–2009, the INSEE collaborated with the *Institut national des études démographiques* (INED) to conduct a study of the population entitled “Trajectoires et Origines: Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France,” whose stated purpose was to study immigrants, their children, and these populations’ obstacles to integration.³⁹ Although two questions about race and religion were initially proposed for the survey, (“De quelle couleur de peau vous diriez-vous?” and “Avez-vous une religion? Si oui, laquelle?”), the anti-racism group SOS Racisme published a petition online entitled “Fiche pas mon pote” that ultimately led to their removal.⁴⁰ Even without these two questions, the survey provides limited clues into the composition of France’s population that are useful for the present study. Catherine Borrel and Bertrand Lhommeau’s analysis of the data revealed that in 2008, there were 3.1 million children born to at least one immigrant parent living in France, and 4% of those children (124,000 individuals) had at least one sub-Saharan African immigrant parent.⁴¹ By collecting information on immigrants and their children in France, this survey helps to paint a more nuanced picture of France’s population.

Another way in which scholars have tried to circumvent the conflation of immigration and post-migratory practices is to approach questions of “immigration” through the lens of race

³⁹ The study was announced on December 3, 2003—the twentieth anniversary of the *Marche des Beurs*—by then prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. The survey team justifies the project in the following way: “Améliorer les connaissances sur les trajectoires sociales et les conditions de vie des migrants et leurs descendants dans la société française paraît nécessaire pour éclairer les débats publics sur l’immigration dans un contexte où des politiques d’égalité et de lutte contre les discriminations liées à l’origine sont mises en œuvre et réclament des outils de diagnostic et de suivi.” Beauchemin, Cris, Christelle Hamel, and Patrick Simon, eds. *Trajectoires et origines: Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France*. (Documents de travail 168: October 2010), http://www.ined.fr/fichier/t_telechargement/45660/telechargement_fichier_en_dt168.13janvier11.pdf, accessed 15 May 2013, 5.

⁴⁰ The petition asserts that rather than helping to fight discrimination, taking ethnic statistics is, in and of itself, a form of discrimination: “Je refuse l’idée que la lutte contre les discriminations et l’effort pour l’intégration supposent la création de catégories ethnoraciales.” The petition’s website is no longer in operation. SOS Racisme, “Fiche pas mon pote,” November 2007.

⁴¹ Catherine Borrel and Bertrand Lhommeau, “Être né en France d’un parent immigré,” *INSEE Première* 1287 (March 2010).

and diaspora. In these theorizations, scholars rely on formulations such as “Black France” or the “African diaspora in France.” However, such terms also necessarily bring together a diverse range of populations and experiences. As Elizabeth Mudimbe-Boyi asks,

Who then is this France noire? They are the Blacks both *from and in* France: Black French, French Blacks, Blacks and French, Franco-Africans, the Franco-African-Americans. One could add Franco-Caribbean, a label that would be in principle tautological since Antillians are officially French. [...] The appellation seems transparent, but in reality is diverse and complex: multinational, multicultural, transcontinental, and even multicolor.⁴²

Mudimbe-Boyi’s elaboration of “Black France” here echoes Miano’s citation: blacks can be both “in” France and “from” France—regardless of how they are treated. However, Mudimbe-Boyi’s enumerations of different populations that might be regrouped under the category of “Black France,” calls into question the usefulness of such a category.

Yet, this heterogeneity of a “Black French” population (of which sub-Saharan African immigrants comprise one part) is often overlooked in contexts lacking an official vocabulary to talk about race. Consequently, as Alain Mabanckou has highlighted, black subjects in France—immigrants, foreigners, and citizens—have, over time, been associated with a variety of homogenizing images:

Nous avons traversé l’Histoire d’abord comme des ‘sauvages’ et des ‘indigènes’, puis des ‘tirailleurs’ dans les guerres européennes avant de comprendre ce que voulait dire le Blanc lorsqu’il prononçait le mot ‘Nègre’. [...]

⁴² Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, “Black France: Myth or Reality? Problems of Identity and Identification,” in *Black France/France noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*, ed. Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 21, my emphasis.

Toujours est-il que d'autres qualifications allaient suivre pour nous désigner, et finalement questionner notre présence, douter de sa légitimité et de son opportunité en nous englobant dans un terme plus générique: nous étions tout simplement des *immigrés*, même lorsque nous n'avions connu qu'un seul territoire, la France!⁴³

This citation brings to the fore the tension between racial identities as imposed categories—something that is ascribed to a population based on certain criteria—and identities that a population claims or celebrates. Additionally, it substantiates the claim that I have been developing: that in France “immigration” as a term is also entangled with notions of race and colonial history.

In studying sub-Saharan African immigrant identity as developed through a variety of media in twentieth- and twenty-first-century France, my project acknowledges that “immigration” is a specific process that involves an individual leaving his or her country of origin, arriving in a new country, and residing there for an extended period of time. However, as this overview of the problems of naming and numbering sub-Saharan African immigrants has illustrated, dissociating discussions of “immigration” from those of race and ethnicity in the French context is problematic at best. This discursive messiness, however, lends weight to an interdisciplinary, cultural studies methodology. This study therefore takes seriously the work accomplished in texts, where meanings are negotiated, subverted, and contested. Because the texts I analyze operate from within a context where “immigration” and “post-migratory practices” are conflated (though, as I will show, the texts do seek to undermine this association), this project, while focusing on sub-Saharan African immigrant identity deliberately reads works depicting pre- and post-immigration moments alongside those depicting immigration.

⁴³ Alain Mabanckou, “Préface,” in *La France Noire: Trois siècles de présences des Afriques, des Caraïbes, de l’océan Indien et d’Océanie*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Paris: Découverte, 2011), my emphasis.

In fact, the works chosen for this project deliberately complicate—rather than attempt to resolve—such terminological difficulties by probing the contours and highlighting the intersections between racial and immigrant identities. The act of bringing such diverse texts together in this study, thus, serves to mirror the work done by the texts. As I discuss in more detail in the chapter descriptions, the texts considered in this project have been chosen to reflect the trajectory of images ascribed to sub-Saharan African populations in France (that mirror closely those Mabanckou highlights above): from the childlike yet threatening savage and unassimilated but potentially assimilable colonized subject examined in the first chapter, to the clandestine immigrant explored in the second chapter, to the heterogeneous black population (composed of sub-Saharan African immigrants, Domiens,⁴⁴ métis, and French-born blacks) in the third chapter, to Afropeans⁴⁵ in the fourth chapter.

Immigration, Colonial History and the History of Display

In addition to negotiating the tenuous boundaries between immigration and race, the texts examined in this project also grapple with national and transnational histories. As Gérard Noiriel has argued, narrow visions of French national history centering around the French revolution are often deployed, making it “impossible for ‘foreigners’ to have a place in the collective memory of the nation.”⁴⁶ This “institutionalization of a common past”—to borrow Fatima El-Tayeb’s

⁴⁴ This term refers to individuals from France’s overseas territories. Formerly known as DOM-TOMs (“*Départements d’outre-mer*” and “*Territoires d’outre-mer*”), they are now known as DROMs (“*Départements et régions d’outre-mer*”). Such spaces include French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and Mayotte.

⁴⁵ As I explain in the fourth chapter, Léonora Miano writes in *Habiter la frontière* that though she did not invent the term “Afropean,” she sees it as the most appropriate way of defining peoples of African descent born in Europe. She outlines how this concept is based on her ideas of “Afropea,” which is “un lieu immatériel, intérieur, où les traditions, les mémoires, les cultures dont ils sont dépositaires, s’épousent, chacune ayant la même valeur. *Afropea*, c’est, en France, le terroir mental que se donnent ceux qui ne peuvent faire valoir *la souche française*,” (Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 86), italics in original.

⁴⁶ Gérard Noiriel, “French and Foreigners,” in Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Conflicts*

formulation—has important identitarian implications.⁴⁷ Shared histories are often put forth as a source of community identity, be it racial, diasporic, national, or even transnational (such as the European Union).⁴⁸ The works analyzed in this project raise a series of questions related to this intersection between history and community identity. To what extent does France’s reticence to examining its colonial history create a national identity that excludes formerly colonized subjects, immigrants, and their descendants? Do larger African and African diasporic histories such as colonization and the slave trade form the basis for a shared black identity? What role does the history of display of the black body in France at events such as the 1931 *Exposition coloniale* play in creating and upholding images of Frenchness and of others, and how does this legacy affect sub-Saharan African immigrants? In posing such questions, the texts not only point out lacunae regarding France’s imperial past, but they also seek to complicate discussions of French, African, immigrant, and black histories and memories.

In the late 20th century, discussions of colonization and the slave trade were conspicuously absent from official historical discourse, as well as from memorial space in France. Though France’s “memorial turn” in the early twenty-first century has sought to rectify this lacuna, discussions about how France can and should recognize these histories are far from resolved. For instance, Pierre Nora’s three-volume *Les Lieux de Mémoire* has a hexagonal bias, revealed by the fact that only one of its chapters—that on 1931 *Exposition coloniale*—deals even

and Divisions. Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 151.

⁴⁷ Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 4.

⁴⁸ On the role of history in African diasporic identity formation, see Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (April 2000); and Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990). For an examination of history and its potential role in a European citizenship see Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

remotely with questions of colonization.⁴⁹ Furthermore, few traces of colonial history, even those events—such as the *Exposition coloniale*—that transpired on French soil were visible in the French landscape.⁵⁰ The fact that many such monuments (such as the current *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*, which formerly served as the *Musée des colonies* at the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*) have been repackaged in ways that elide their colonial heritage recalls Pascal Blanchard's assessment of colonial history in France generally: “depuis les indépendances, cette culture coloniale semble particulièrement invisible et sujette à l'occultation et à la manipulation.”⁵¹

Efforts to make France's colonial history more visible, however, have been met with accusations of historical *communautarisme* and “concurrence victimaire.”⁵² One of the most outspoken critics, Pascal Bruckner, published *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc: Tiers-Monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* in 1983—a text which, as its title suggests, posits a sense of “white guilt” as one outcome of revisiting colonial history.⁵³ During the early twenty-first century, colonial history has been negotiated in part through France's legislature, visible in two “lois

⁴⁹ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

⁵⁰ See for example, Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Charles Forsdick, “Siting Postcolonial Memory: Remembering New Caledonia in the Work of Didier Daeninckx,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 12, no. 2 (2010).

⁵¹ Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, *Culture coloniale: La France conquise par son empire, 1871-1931* (Paris: Autrement, 2003), 16.

⁵² These two terms are not easily translatable. “*Communautarisme*” refers to asserting a community or minority identity and is seen as divisive in France, though it is applied to assertions of racial, ethnic, and religious identities. For more on the racially-charged dimension of this term—particularly the ways in which it is selectively applied to racial and ethnic minority groups but, significantly, not to French groups, see Tin, “Who is Afraid of Blacks in France,” 38; and Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 38. “Concurrence victimaire” has been translated as “memory competition,” but in French it implies that one's goal in asserting one's history as a victim is to be seen as more of a victim than another group. Michael Rothberg opposes classifying such memorial gestures as “memory competition,” and instead proposes the concept of “multidirectional memory,” which he argues better captures “the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and diverse times during the act of remembrance.” Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11.

⁵³ Pascal Bruckner, *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc: Tiers-Monde, culpabilité, haine de soi* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

mémorielles.” In 2001, France’s government recognized the history of the slave trade as a crime against humanity and provided for the creation of the *Comité pour la mémoire et l’histoire de l’esclavage* (CPMHE), whose role is to advise the government on how to commemorate such a history.⁵⁴ The *Loi du 23 février*, passed in 2005, mandated that French history textbooks teach “le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l’histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l’armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit.”⁵⁵ A reaction to this law published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* that both denounces the law but yet cautions against groups using such histories for their own “concurrence victimaire,” captures the difficult balance scholars (and communities) who seek to recognize “minority” histories in France must strike: “Il est nécessaire de s’interroger sur les décalages entre des représentations figées et les caractères actuels de l’exclusion. Dans nos sociétés, le passé est devenu l’enjeu d’un discours revendicatif de forces qui se posent en héritières des victimes, avec autant plus d’insistance [...] qu’elles sont animées par une logique

⁵⁴ The CPMHE was provided for in 2001 under “Décret n° 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l’esclavage en tant que crime contre l’humanité.” <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000405369&fastPos=2&fastReqId=1680676956&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>. The “Décret n° 2004-11 du 5 janvier 2004 relatif au comité institué par la loi n° 83-550 du 30 juin 1983 relative à la commémoration de l’abolition de l’esclavage” specified how the committee would be chosen <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT0000000611956&fastPos=1&fastReqId=1757791884&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>. Later, “Décret n° 2009-506 du 6 mai 2009 relatif au Comité pour la mémoire et l’histoire de l’esclavage,” further defined the committee’s official duties: “assister de ses avis et recommandations le Gouvernement sur les questions relatives à la recherche, l’enseignement, la conservation, la diffusion ou la transmission de l’histoire et des mémoires de la traite, de l’esclavage et de leur abolition.” See <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000020584544&fastPos=1&fastReqId=451018047&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>

⁵⁵ “Loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.” http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jsessionid=B1EAB37CF96F324AB9B502C3A9F68B4D.tpdjo16v_3?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000444898&dateTexte=29990101. For a comprehensive study of how the law was crafted and its effects in France, see Nicolas Bancel, “The Law of February 23, 2005: The Uses Made of the Revival of France’s ‘Colonial Grandeur,’” in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. Charles Tshimanga, Ch. Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

de concurrence victimaire.”⁵⁶ The controversy surrounding the *Loi du 23 février*’s forth article, as well as the increased attention to questions of colonial history and to that of the slave trade, however, have resulted in more publicized discussions about these histories in France.

In the scholarly realm, many studies in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries sought to rectify such historical lacunae by positing immigration and “Black France” as objects of study. In the French domain, as Louis-Georges Tin notes, the advent of the twenty-first century saw a multitude of historical studies whose titles actively invoke race—a rarity in France because of the general skepticism toward racial classifications.⁵⁷ Published works that investigate questions of immigration as well as race in France include the edited volumes *Frenchness and the African Diaspora* (2009) by Charles Tshimanga et al., *La France Noire: Trois siècles de présences des Afriques, des Caraïbes, de l’océan Indien et d’Océanie* (2011) by Blanchard, et al., and *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (2012) by Trica Keaton et al., two individually authored studies by Thomas, including *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (2007) and *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (2013), and Pap Ndiaye’s *La condition noire: essai sur une minoïté française* (2008).⁵⁸ In addition to the ways in which scholars have made sub-Saharan

⁵⁶ Raphaëlle Branche et al., “Les historiens face à l’histoire coloniale,” *Le Monde* 20 September 2005.

⁵⁷ Tin notes the prevalence of works published between 2004 and 2007 with “noir” in their title, including Patrick Lozès *Nous les noirs de France* (Paris: Danger Public, 2007); Rama Yade-Zimet, *Les Noirs de France* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2007); Stephen Smith and Géraldine Faes, *Noir et français!* (Paris: Éditions Panama, 2006); Myriam Cottias, *La Question noire: Histoire d’une construction coloniale* (Paris: Bayard, 2007); François Durpaire, *France Blanche, colère noire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006); Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, *La Force noire* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006); Raphaël Scheck, *Une saison noire: Les massacres des tirailleurs sénégalais, mai-juin 1940* (Paris: Tallandier, 2007); and Jean-Yves Le Naour, *La Honte noire: L’Allemagne et les troupes coloniales françaises, 1914-1945* (Paris: Hachette, 2003).

⁵⁸ Charles Tshimanga, Ch. Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom, eds., *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); Blanchard et al., *La France noire*; Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall, eds., *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Thomas, *Black France*; Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana

African immigrants (and blacks in France) visible as a group worthy of scholarly inquiry, novelists have also joined the conversation, publishing poignant nonfictional assessments of France's immigrant and racial populations, including Mabanckou's *Le sanglot de l'homme noir* (2012) and Miano's *Habiter la frontière* (2012).⁵⁹

Furthermore, several publications and events have sought to bring the history of France's display culture to the fore. The edited volume *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (2008)—first published in French in 2002—edited by Blanchard et al., is one of the most significant collections on this topic.⁶⁰ Discussions surrounding the opening of two museums—the *Musée du Quai Branly* in 2006 and the *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* in 2007—have productively addressed the ways in which France's "others" have both been put on display in the past, and how vestiges of these practices are still visible today.⁶¹ For instance, from November 2011 to June 2012 an exhibit entitled "Exhibitions: L'invention du sauvage" organized by Pascal Blanchard, Nanette Jacomin Snoep, and Lilian Thuram, took place at the *Musée du Quai Branly*, challenging museum visitors to critically examine the ways in

University Press, 2013); Pap Ndiaye, *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Éditions Calmann-Lévy, 2008).

⁵⁹ Alain Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l'homme Noir* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); Miano, *Habiter la frontière*.

⁶⁰ Pascal Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Nicolas Bancel et al., *Zoos humains: Au temps des exhibitions humaines* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002). These exhibits and publications also complement research coming out of a variety of groups, notably the *Association pour la connaissance de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine* (ACHAC), which has engaged with the representation of (formerly) colonized subjects in France.

⁶¹ See especially Dominic Thomas's edited collection *Museums in Postcolonial Europe* (New York, London: Routledge, 2010), particularly the chapters Mary Stevens, "Still the Family Secret? The Representation of Colonialism in the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration,"; Fassil Demissie, "Displaying Colonial Artifacts in Paris at the Musée permanent des colonies to Musée du Quai Branly,"; Robert Aldrich, "Colonial Museums in a Postcolonial Europe." See also Charles Forsdick, "Postface: Situating *Human Zoos*," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Herman Lebovics, "The Musée Du Quai Branly: Art? Artifact? Spectacle!" *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 24, no. 3 (Winter 2006); and the chapters "Museology and Globalization: The Quai Branly Museum" and "Object/Subject Migration: The National Center for the History of Immigration" in Thomas, *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism*.

which this museum constructs images of otherness—and, in turn, images of the self. Its catalog, *Exhibitions: L'invention du sauvage* (2011) edited by Blanchard, et al., brings together more than 500 illustrations and contributions from over 70 authors.⁶² Similarly, the proposition that Paris's *Jardin d'Acclimatation*—the former space where colonized populations such as the Kanak were displayed in the early twentieth century—serve as the locale for the 2011 *Jardin de l'Outre-Mer* sparked heated controversy.⁶³ These criticisms prompted France's Overseas Minister, Marie-Luce Penchard, to charge Françoise Vergès, president of the CPMHE, to investigate the history of France's human zoos and to propose ways in which the Republic could take to commemorate it more appropriately.⁶⁴ Though the *Jardin de l'Outre-Mer* transpired without mention of the *Jardin d'Acclimatation*'s past as a site for human zoos, an exhibit entitled “L'invention du sauvage: Acclimations/Exhibitions” organized by the ACHAC research group and the Thuram Foundation was held in the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* children's museum from November 21, 2012 to January 6, 2013.

By analyzing cultural works that all explicitly deal with the histories of colonization, the slave trade, and postcolonial immigration (as well as the commemoration of these histories in contemporary France), this project builds on the historical discussions outlined above. However, as I show, though the texts represent these marginalized histories, they approach notions of a unified and unifying history with caution. In so doing, the works seek to pluralize notions of history, at once showing how collective and individual histories are interdependent (such as

⁶² Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, eds., *Exhibitions: L'invention du sauvage* (Arles: Actes sud, 2011).

⁶³ I discuss this affair in more detail in chapter 1.

⁶⁴ See Penchard's April 7, 2011 letter reproduced in CPMHE (Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage). *Rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions ethnographiques et coloniales*. Ministère de l'intérieur de l'outre-mer et des collectivités territoriales, Paris, November 2011.

those of sub-Saharan Africa and France) but yet also highly individualized. Accordingly, the texts challenge the notion that shared experiences—the experience of colonization, or of being treated as black in France—form the basis for shared collective identities.

Making The Self Visible: Social and Literary Movements

The works analyzed in this project not only build on those moments outlined above when sub-Saharan African immigration (and blackness) have *been made* visible in France, but they also respond to and reimagine moments when such groups have *made themselves* visible. In addition to two concrete moments when immigrants and their descendants sought to bring wider recognition to their presence in France—the *sans-papiers* movement of the 1990s and the 2005 *banlieue* riots—the works examined in this project also engage with the increased visibility of sub-Saharan African immigration within literary and musical marketplaces.

Following the radical changes to France’s immigration policies I discussed earlier, a group calling themselves the “*sans-papiers*” used a combination of hunger strikes, occupation of public parks and churches, and politicized speeches to draw attention to their difficulties.⁶⁵ The period from April to August 1996 when the *sans-papiers* occupied the Saint-Bernard church has become the most emblematic event, primarily because the extreme force police used to evacuate the protesters on the morning of August 23, 1996 was captured and broadcast on national television.⁶⁶ Ababacar Diop, one of the principal spokespersons for the protesters, emphasized

⁶⁵ See especially Thierry Blin’s book-length sociological study devoted to the *sans-papiers* protests, *L’invention des sans-papiers: Essai sur la démocratie à l’épreuve du faible* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2010); and the autobiographical account published by the *sans-papiers*’ spokesperson Ababacar Diop, *Dans la peau d’un sans-papiers* (Paris: Seuil, 1997). See also Ababacar Diop, “Réalités et perspectives de la lutte des sans-papiers,” *Sociétés africaines et diaspora* 4 (December 1996); and Winders, *Paris Africain*.

⁶⁶ For an insightful analysis of the television images see M. Rosello, “Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From Clandestins to l’Affaire des Sans-Papiers de Saint-Bernard,” *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998)

how sub-Saharan African immigration to France was predicated upon the larger histories I outlined above:

Nous ne sommes pas ici par hasard. Nous sommes ressortissants d'anciennes colonies françaises surexploitées au profit de la métropole. Nos parents se sont rudement battus pour la France, pays des droits de l'homme, pour qu'elle soit préservée, avec des pertes en vies humaines innombrables. Mais encore après les guerres, la France en ruines va se tourner vers son empire colonial pour faire migrer des millions de personnes pour deux raisons essentiellement: revigorer l'économie exsangue et revitaliser le taux de natalité.⁶⁷

Though the *sans-papiers* quickly faded from public view, they left a lasting legacy of drawing public attention to the struggles of immigrants and their children in France.

Just as the *sans-papiers* protest marks the culminating moment of tensions surrounding immigration, the riots that swept through France's *banlieues* in 2005 during which protesters burned almost nine thousand vehicles sought to make visible *banlieue* residents' feelings of discrimination.⁶⁸ In the scholarly realm, the riots are often cited as an originary moment for opening discussions of race and ethnicity in the French public; not only does Bancel call it a "postcolonial turning point,"⁶⁹ but many studies devoted to questions of diasporic and racial identity in France—*Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (2009) or *Frenchness and the African Diaspora* (2007), to name just two—take the riots as their starting point.⁷⁰ Following the riots, several associations were created in the interest of fighting against racism including the

⁶⁷ Diop, "Réalités et perspectives de la lutte des sans-papiers," 95.

⁶⁸ For a thorough background on the riots see Hugues Lagrange and Marco Oberti, *Emeutes urbaines et protestations: Une singularité française* (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 2006).

⁶⁹ Nicolas Bancel, "France, 2005: A Postcolonial Turning Point," *French Cultural Studies* 24, no. 2 (2013).

⁷⁰ Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, eds., *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Tshimanga, Gondola, and Bloom, eds., *Frenchness and the African Diaspora*.

Indigènes de la République and the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires de France* (CRAN).

In addition to these concrete events during which immigrants (and their descendants) sought to bring attention to their plight in France, authors and artists also shed light on these same issues in the literary and musical realms, and works depicting sub-Saharan African immigration dramatically increased during the 1990s and early 2000s. The sub-Saharan African novels that this study examines—*Le paradis du nord*, *Black Bazar*, and *Blues pour Élise*—set themselves in a longer trajectory of Francophone “immigration literature.” As Thomas has shown, discussions of postcolonial immigration literature must take into consideration the ways in which colonial works such as Camara Laye’s *L’enfant noir*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’aventure ambiguë*, and Ousame Socé’s *Mirages de Paris* already grappled with the topics that would be addressed in later works, particularly distancing from one’s “home” culture and marginalization in the “host” society. This increase in works depicting migration in the 1990s and 2000s prompted scholars to propose generic classifications to distinguish these works and their authors from postcolonial “engaged” literature, set mostly on the African continent.⁷¹ Among the classifications proposed, one finds “les enfants de la postcolonie,” “migritude,” and “Parisianism,” which were often applied to authors including Daniel Biyaoula, Fatou Diome, Calixthe Beyala, J. R. Essomba, Alain Mabanckou, Abdourahman Waberi, Sami Tchak, Bessora, Simon Njami, and Yodi Karone, and their works.⁷²

⁷¹ Examples include works such as Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les soleils des indépendances* (Montréal: Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 1968), Mongo Beti’s *Remember Ruben* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1974), Emmanuel Dongala’s *Jazz et vin de palme* (Paris: Hatier, 1982) and *Les petits garçons naissent aussi des étoiles* (Paris: Serpent à plumes, 1998), and Sony Labou Tansi’s *La vie et demie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979). For an insightful problematization of African “engaged” literature, see Odile M. Cazenave and Patricia Célérier. *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

⁷² “Les enfants de la postcolonie” is a term employed by Abdourahman Waberi. Jacques Chevrier classified similar works as “migritude” literature to capture their simultaneous disengagement with the authors’ culture of origin and

Such taxonomies, however, are also largely dependent on the author's personal trajectory (most, though not all, personally immigrated from Africa to France), and thus should be read with skepticism alongside categorizations such as "African," "Francophone," "world music." The classifications "Francophone," and "world music" are of particular import to this study. Following the 2006 season when non-French authors won three of the major literary prizes, a group of forty-four authors published what would come to be known as the "Manifeste des quarante-quatre," in *Le Monde* that proposed a "littérature-monde en français" as an alternative to the ghettoizing category of "Francophonie." For the signatories of the manifesto, the 2006 prize season was an indication that the "Francophone" regions were no longer the margins, but rather an important center of cultural production.⁷³ In the realm of popular music studies, similar discussions have called into question the usefulness of the designation "world music," which regroups music as diverse as Navajo flute music, Tibetan monk chanting, African popular music, and traditional Irish music. In fact, though "world music" was legitimized by a dedicated top-40 chart on *Billboard*, and a dedicated section in most record stores, it is often described in terms of what it is *not*—*not* classical music, *not* (western) pop, *not* jazz, *not* rock—just as the designation "Francophone" implies that an author is French-speaking, but *not* French.⁷⁴

their "host" culture. Bennetta Jules-Rosette sees Parisianism as a literature in which African authors return the colonial *gaze*, a literature that troubles critics by the fact that it cannot be classified into national paradigms. Abdourahman A. Waberi, "Les enfants de la postcolonie: Esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire," *Notre librairie* 135 (1998); Jacques Chevrier, "Afrique(s)-sur-Seine: Autour de la notion de 'Migritude'." *Notre librairie*, no. 155-156 (2004); Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

⁷³ Barbery et al., "Pour une littérature-monde en français." As previously mentioned, an edited volume that presented signatories' expanded views on the debate followed this manifesto. For insightful analyses of some of the manifesto's problematic elements, see the chapter "Decolonizing France: National Literatures, *World Literature*, and *World Identities*" in Thomas, *Africa and France*; and Françoise Lionnet, "Universalisms and Francophonies," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, no. 2-3 (2009).

⁷⁴ Julien Mallet, "'World Music': Une question d'ethnomusicologie?" *Cahiers d'études africaines* 168, no. 4 (2002). See also Taylor, *Global Pop*.

For the reasons outlined above, the texts selected for this study approach such taxonomies with suspicion; in fact, they all invite their audience to reflect more generally on the impulse to classify peoples, cultures, and cultural works. Turning to sub-Saharan African immigration literature and music—understood in their broadest senses in this project—thus provides a means to examine not only questions of identity formation, but also how such identities are mediated within much larger frameworks.

Project on Display: Chapter Descriptions

Because this study investigates sub-Saharan African immigrant identity construction (understood in the broad sense associated with “immigration” in the French context) through diverse media, each chapter purposely reads works from multiple media alongside one another, for two reasons. First, each work of printed literature examined in this project contains references to musical works: *Cannibale* and *Le retour d’Ataï* both reproduce lyrics to the *Exposition coloniale*’s official march entitled “Nénfuar”; when the protagonists of *Le paradis du nord* enter the Château Rouge neighborhood, the music reminds them of Africa; in addition to the conspicuous and hidden references to popular musical works from throughout the world that *Black Bazar* contains, it was also translated into a *soukous* album in 2012; and *Blues pour Élise* not only has a musical structure (it contains a “Bonus” chapter not listed in the novel’s table of contents), but its content draws on musical works from throughout the African diaspora, particularly African American musics. The prevalence of music in the textual narratives (and, in the more recent works, the intermedial narratives) suggests the importance of looking beyond the limits of printed literature. Second, this intermedial approach that underpins each chapter in the present study—that is, looking at the musical works and printed literature within the same

chapter, rather than in separate chapters—necessarily engages with the specificities (and limits) of each medium in order to paint a more complex picture of how artists working in different media approach similar questions.

The first chapter, “Behind the Scenes: Exhibiting Display Culture at the 1931 Exposition,” considers the integral role France’s “human zoos” played in creating and upholding images of blackness and of French national identity. Focusing particularly on the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*, during which eight million visitors converged on the *Bois de Vincennes* to gaze upon “la plus grande France,” I read Didier Daeninckx’s fictional novellas, *Cannibale*, and *Le retour d’Atai*, alongside musical and visual works depicting Nénufar—the Central African figure associated with the *Exposition*. In all of the works, the black, colonized subjects find themselves outside of the *Exposition*’s official walls; however, the French individuals still interact with them through the lens of France’s display culture. In my analysis of visual and musical depictions of Nénufar, I show how the ambiguity of his representation—he is at once both a threat and a child lacking self-awareness—upholds colonial discourse, and puts forth the need for colonized subjects’ surveillance. My analysis of Daeninckx’s novellas, in turn, shows how these gazing dialectics put forth at events such as the *Exposition* have contemporary iterations, including museums, official historical discourse, and cultural works. I also turn to contemporary Parisian museums such as the *Musée du Quai Branly*, the *Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration*, as well as the recent controversies surrounding the continued sale of racist cultural works published during the time of the *Exposition coloniale* (including Hergé’s *Tintin au Congo* and the release of a CD entitled *Au temps des colonies*, which contains the march [with lyrics] “Nénufar”), to show how these sites and works continue to the discourses of alterity and of Frenchness developed at events such as the *Exposition*. This spectacularization of

the (formerly) colonized subject solidified images against which the immigrants (and French racial minorities) would later define themselves.

The musical and literary works I examine in my second chapter, “*Sans-Papiers* but not *Sans-Voix*: (Re)Writing Black Atlantic History in Francophone Immigration Literature and Music,” destabilize the gazing dialectics set up by the *Exposition* by actively drawing attention to the clandestine immigrant, putting him on display in a society where he was largely invisible. I argue that the works, including J. R. Essomba’s novel *Le paradis du nord*, Salif Keïta’s song “Nou Pas Bouger,” Meïway’s song “Je suis sans-papiers,” and Salif Keïta and L’Skadrille’s rerelease collaboration of “Nou Pas Bouger,” all put 1980s and 1990s sub-Saharan African immigration into dialogue with colonization and the slave trade in order to combat the historical myopia that underpinned France’s official rhetoric about immigration during this period. Furthermore, each work actively puts forth the site of the black body to challenge the audience to acknowledge not only stereotypes associated with blackness, but also the inherent power structure that determines who has the right to speak about those bodies. By suggesting that contemporary sub-Saharan African immigration can only be understood as part of a much longer historical trajectory, these works’ significance extends far beyond their immediate context: they pave the way for immigrants (and their descendants) to share space in France’s collective imaginary.

In the second half of my study, the attention shifts to works that grapple with notions of a “black” community in France, and what its constitutive criteria might be. In my third chapter, “Selling (out) Racial Identity in the *Black Bazar*: Negotiating Alain Mabanckou’s Black France,” I read Alain Mabanckou’s novel and *soukous* album, both entitled *Black Bazar*, alongside the Congolese fashion phenomenon known as *La sape* and Ivorian popular music movement called

Coupé-décalé. Unlike other works of “Francophone immigration literature,” which depict the marginalization of immigrant protagonists with respect to a larger white, French society, Mabanckou’s *Black Bazar* takes place almost exclusively within a black milieu. Nevertheless, the protagonists still negotiate what it means to be black, and their diverse perspectives about what constitutes a black community (including historical communities based on shared experiences of colonization and the slave trade, skin color, or experiences of being treated as “black” in France, etc.) call into question the efficacy of such communal identities. I focus particularly on the central protagonist, Fessologue, who first uses opulent fashion practices associated with the Congolese *sape* movement to spectacularize himself and to actively draw others’ gazes, before later employing what I term “literary *sape*”: peppering his novel with references to worldwide literary, musical, filmic, and television works. This practice, I argue, exposes and interrogates how authors, artists, and their works are packaged within larger global economies, notably the taxonomies into which they are categorized, including “Francophone,” “African,” “world literature,” “world music,” and “immigrant literature.”

In my final chapter, “Re-Membering Afropeanism: Intermediality in Léonora Miano’s *Blues pour Élise*,” I turn to articulations of female Afropean identity by considering Léonora Miano’s intermedial novel *Blues pour Élise* through the lens of diasporic *remembrement*. The two protagonists I investigate—Akasha and Shale—exemplify the position of the African diaspora: born of violence, they also represent the point where opposing genealogical trees meet. Born in France, they must recognize how these conflicting genealogies form a cohesive whole within them. The novel’s intermedial structure, I claim, functions as an alternative genealogy that allows each of the women to *re-member* herself to a wider cultural community. The musical references that pepper the novel are repackaged into “Ambiance Sonore” sections at the end of

each chapter; these references are both profoundly territorialized and simultaneously placeless, which serves as a metaphor for the Afropean women's identity: they are at once "at home" in France, but yet excluded from conceptions of national identity. During her process of *remembrement*, each woman negotiates her connections to larger genealogies—including the cultural genealogy established by the music—thereby acknowledging how the many fraught elements of her identity coexist within her.

Reading these diverse works of literature, music, visual art, architecture, and even museum displays together paints a more complex picture of sub-Saharan African immigrant identity. The works invite their audience to consider the complicated connotations of "immigration" in the French context, as well as the ways in which sub-Saharan African immigration is both inseparable and yet completely separate from questions of race and "Black France." By considering the works as well as the wider contexts in which they circulate, this project seeks to engage in the same efforts as the works: to expose and call into question rigid notions of identity through the position of the marginalized figure—the immigrant.

CHAPTER ONE

Behind the Scenes: Exhibiting Display Culture at the 1931 *Exposition*

The 2011 announcement that the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* had been chosen as the site for the “Jardin d’Outre-Mer,” a festival celebrating the traditional and contemporary cultures of France’s overseas territories as part of the “Année de l’Outre-mer,” sparked heated controversy. Because the *Jardin* had formerly served as the site for France’s “human zoos,” where colonized peoples and cultures were made to live in exhibits and perform exoticized, stereotypical scenes, Guyane’s deputies Chantal Berthelot and Christiane Taubira (among other public figures and politicians) decried this choice, arguing that holding the festival there was not only insensitive to the suffering of those native performers put on display in early twentieth-century France, but it would also inherently imbue the contemporary event with the same exoticizing gaze.¹ Daniel Maximin, the event’s commissioner, refused to consider its relocation, instead claiming that holding the “Jardin d’Outre-Mer” in the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* would allow *Outre-mer* cultures to symbolically reclaim the space once used to objectify them.² Yet, as historian Nicolas Bancel pointed out, this symbolic reclamation of space could only happen if the *Jardin*’s history as a site for human zoos was openly acknowledged. To this end, Bancel proposed situating the “Jardin d’Outre-Mer” within a larger context of conferences, film screenings, and discussions addressing the history of human zoos in France.³

¹ Berthelot wrote a letter to Penchard on February 28, 2011 and Taubira wrote hers on March 1, 2011. A full list of the letters can be found in the CPMHE (Comité pour la mémoire et l’histoire de l’esclavage) *Rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions ethnographiques et coloniales*. Ministère de l’intérieur de l’outre-mer et des collectivités territoriales, Paris, November 2011.

² In a speech made on March 6, 2011, Maximin proclaimed, “Il est temps pour l’Outre-mer de réinvestir ce Jardin, de répondre aux errements du passé en y affirmant la vitalité de cultures dont nous ne pouvons qu’être fiers.” CPMHE, *Rapport de mission sur la mémoire des exposition ethnographiques et coloniales*, 44.

³ On this topic, Bancel wrote, “Il est dangereux d’ignorer un tel passé. Il ne doit s’agir nullement de repentance, mais bien d’affirmer que la valorisation de la diversité culturelle issue des Outre-mer ne peut faire l’impasse sur les

Though these suggestions were largely ignored, just two days before the event was scheduled to begin, France's Overseas Minister, Marie-Luce Penchard, announced that she was charging Françoise Vergès, president of the *Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage* (CPMHE), with a special mission to conduct research on France's human zoos and to propose appropriate memorial and historical steps the Republic could take to “reconnaître ces mémoires et cette histoire, de leur donner leur juste place dans l'Histoire de la France, sans aucunement occulter le passé et instruire de procès.”⁴ Penchard's diction reveals some of the difficulties France has in recognizing its own colonial history. For instance, what is any memory or history's “juste place” in the History of France? Where does one draw the line between “instruire” and “instruire de procès,” and why would this distinction be a concern in the case of these histories in particular? Furthermore, assigning this memorial project on human zoos to the CPMHE, when it clearly falls outside this organization's purview of advising the government on matters of slavery, abolition, and their commemoration in France only further illustrates the complex entanglement of many different histories—including slavery, colonization, decolonization, and even postcolonial immigration—at an institutional level.⁵

pages sombres et ambiguës de notre histoire. Les [peuples...] ‘exhibés’ (femmes, hommes et enfants, à côté d’animaux), mesurés et étudiés par les savants, observés par les visiteurs derrière des barrières et des grillages, sont liées à une histoire complexe, souvent douloureuse.” (“Nous n’irons pas au Jardin d’Acclimatation,” *Respect Magazine* 30 March 2011, 4).

⁴ See Penchard's April 7, 2011 letter reproduced in CPMHE, *Rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions ethnographiques et coloniales*.

⁵ The CPMHE was provided for in 2001 under “Décret n° 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l'esclavage en tant que crime contre l'humanité.” <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000405369&fastPos=2&fastReqId=1680676956&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>. The “Décret n° 2004-11 du 5 janvier 2004 relatif au comité institué par la loi n° 83-550 du 30 juin 1983 relative à la commémoration de l'abolition de l'esclavage” specified how the committee would be chosen <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000611956&fastPos=1&fastReqId=1757791884&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>. Later, “Décret n° 2009-506 du 6 mai 2009 relatif au Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage,” further defined the committee's official duties: “assister de ses avis et recommandations le Gouvernement sur les questions relatives à la recherche, l'enseignement, la conservation, la diffusion ou la transmission de l'histoire et des mémoires de la traite, de l'esclavage et de leur abolition.” See

In a sense, Penchard's charge had already been taken up several decades earlier in cultural works, particularly two novellas by Didier Daeninckx—*Cannibale* (1998) and its sequel *Le retour d'Ataï* (2001). These works grapple with how France can and should recognize its colonial past and its associated display practices. *Cannibale*, which reimagines France's "human zoos" from the perspective of two Kanak performers put on display there, illustrates the way in which such events were essential tools in promoting the discourses about Europe and its colonies that both justified the colonial project and that played a central role in constructing images of French national identity. In *Le retour d'Ataï*, which takes place eighty years later in early twenty-first century France, one of the Kanak, Gocéné, returns to France to recover the head of a Kanak warrior, Ataï, which had been taken during the 1878 uprising against French colonial rule. In the process, Gocéné visits museum collections, "native" art auctions, and even the former site where he had been exhibited, only to find that all traces of France's colonial display culture (and, to a certain extent, colonial history), have been removed from public view.

In this chapter, I investigate the complex entanglement of France's colonial historical discourse and display practices by analyzing the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*; its associated visual, musical, and architectural works; and fictional representations of these spaces depicted in Didier Daeninckx's novellas *Cannibale* and *Le retour d'Ataï*. In the first section, "Masking and Dressing Ambiguities at the 'Tour du monde en un jour,'" I read the *Exposition* space itself alongside musical and visual works about colonized subjects produced in conjunction with the *Exposition*. I trace how the *Exposition coloniale* maintained rigid visual divisions between "self" and "Other" that both reinforce the European spectator's right and responsibility to gaze on the colonized other, and, by extension, justify a continued colonial project. Similarly, musical and

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000020584544&fastPos=1&fastReqId=451018047&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>.

visual works associated with the *Exposition*—especially the depiction of a Central African man named Nénufar, later referenced in Daeninckx’s novellas—use colonized subjects’ comedic (mis)appropriation of European clothing to suggest that colonized gestures toward assimilation could only ever be mimetic. Next, in the section “Nothing to See Here...,” I turn to Daeninckx’s novellas, which privilege “behind the scenes” spaces at the *Exposition* and at museums. In so doing, the novellas highlight the force of the discourses put forth at these events, while simultaneously critiquing their arbitrary and constructed nature. For this reason, Daeninckx’s novellas can be read as textual exhibitions that invert the gazing dialectic established at events such as the *Exposition* by putting France’s display practices on display for the reader. Finally, in the third section entitled “Finding a ‘juste place’,” I turn to instances of the resurgence of colonial history and culture in France in the early 2000s, focusing on the questions they have raised regarding how France can acknowledge its colonial past and critically analyze national mythologies bound up in its former display practices and cultural works.

Masking and Dressing Ambiguities at “Le Tour du Monde en un Jour”

France’s 1931 *Exposition coloniale* held in Paris’s *Bois de Vincennes* represents just one moment in a long tradition of “native villages,” indigenous performances, and human zoos found on every continent.⁶ While some performers were forced to participate in these spectacles, others—including those on display at the 1931 *Exposition*—belonged to professional troupes that were compensated for their performances.⁷ In fact, as Pascal Blanchard notes, after troupes

⁶ Though they transpired less often on the African continent, there is evidence of exhibitions in Egypt, where “des ‘nains-noirs’ provenant des contrées soudanaises” were put on display (Blanchard et al., eds., *Exhibitions*, 22). See also Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos*.

⁷ Pascal Blanchard et al., “Human Zoos: The Greatest Exotic Shows in the West: Introduction,” in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 14.

began signing contracts with European fair organizers, they often “travel[ed] from place to place playing the various roles assigned to them [...] cannibals here, native warriors there, or burlesque savages on a music-hall stage.”⁸ The popularity of such spectacles in Europe, however, meant that spectators quickly became desensitized to representations of “savagery,” thus necessitating progressively more shocking exhibits.⁹

Motivated by a desire to reinvigorate declining French interest for and pride in “la plus grande France,” the 1931 *Exposition*’s organizer, Maréchal Lyautey, sought to break with the tradition of sensationalism and exotic entertainment that had characterized earlier “native” villages. Instead, Lyautey’s objective for the Exhibition was to depict “authentic” native cultures in a framework that sought to educate, rather than entertain, the French public.¹⁰ Accordingly, Lyautey banned certain groups of performers deemed too shocking such as the “négresses à plateaux” or the Kanak, who had previously been exhibited as cannibals.¹¹ From May 6 to November 15 it is estimated that eight million spectators (totaling thirty-three million entries) visited the *Exposition coloniale*, which promised visitors “le tour du monde en un jour.”¹² The Exhibition was supplemented by the Museum of the Colonies, whose iconic bas-relief

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰ Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre, 1931, *L’exposition coloniale* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1991), 91; Blanchard et al., “Human Zoos,” 35.

¹¹ Paul Reynaud, then Minister of the Colonies, urged Lyautey to exclude the “négresses à plateaux” because he believed they cultivated an unhealthy curiosity in the French public. The practice of stretching a woman’s lower lip using stones had recently been banned by colonial law, and when these women were brought to France, efforts were made to encourage them to seek medical care to see whether their lips could be returned to “normal.” As I discuss shortly, though the Kanak were banned from the official Exhibition, they were still exhibited in Paris in 1931 at the *Jardin d’Acclimatation*.

¹² Hodeir and Pierre, 1931, *L’exposition coloniale*, 101.

constructed by Alfred Janniot commissioned especially for the *Exposition* depicted the labor and resources each colony contributed to France.¹³

Of course, as scholars note, this emphasis on education and authenticity did not preclude sensationalism or exoticism at the *Exposition*. Though native performers were compensated for their work, organizers carefully controlled what cultural elements they exhibited, and what environment they were set in; Europeanized clothing prevalent in colonized metropolises, for instance, was banned, and performers were required to don “authentic” clothing within their performance space.¹⁴ Similarly, as Patricia Morton highlights, organizers used the architecture of the pavilions—whose exteriors supposedly reflected “authentic” native architecture—to classify “colonized races into hierarchies based on stages of evolution.”¹⁵ For instance, the pavilions for Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion—populations whom the French considered examples of successful assimilation to French culture—“employed ‘metropolitan’ styles” (unlike other colonial pavilions).¹⁶ These examples aside, the overall project of erasing hybridity between colonial and colonized cultures visually maintained the distinction between colonizer and colonized, and presented the colonized other in a static state prior to the advent of the colonial project. In so doing, this architecture affirmed the continued need for France’s colonial project.¹⁷

¹³ As I discuss at the end of the chapter, this building has a long history, as do the collections that were housed there. In 1935, the museum was renamed the *Musée de la France d’Outre-Mer*; 1960, it became the *Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens* under the direction of André Malraux. Later still, in 2003, the museum closed and its holdings were relocated primarily to the newly created *Musée du Quai Branly*. The building was later chosen for France’s *Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration* (CNHI), opened in 2007.

¹⁴ Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 207. Christopher Miller also discusses how native performers’ movements out of the *Exposition* were carefully regulated in *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 72.

¹⁵ Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 111.

¹⁶ Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*, 31

¹⁷ This practice also has parallels in disciplines such as museology and anthropology. For instance James Clifford, highlights how the same types of erasures are also central to museum exhibits: “The *making* of meaning in museum

In so doing, the *Exposition* affirmed the need for France's colonial project. Furthermore, the *Exposition* as a whole can be read as an exhibit of France's enterprise of collecting, ordering, and displaying native peoples and cultures, reaffirming its place in the world, and providing justification for colonial projects.¹⁸

Though moments of colonial-colonized hybridity were expunged from the *Exposition's* visual logic, they seep through the cracks in other cultural works associated with this event. One such example can be found in representations of a fictional Central African protagonist named Nénufar. The eponymous protagonist of the *Exposition's* official march (with lyrics) played every morning at the *Exposition*, Nénufar also appeared in a serial comic published in *Les Enfants de France* in 1931. Nénufar seems a curious choice as the representative figure of an event that maintained strict boundaries between the European gazing subject and "authentic" colonized spectacle on display: though he travels to France, not only is Nénufar *not* on display at the *Exposition*, but he also does *not* represent his "authentic" culture, depicted instead as attempting to—but, significantly, falling short of—participate fully in French culture through gardening, attending soirées, preparing crêpes, participating in the Bastille day parade, and adopting European fashion practices. Analysis of his fashion practices, however, reveals that the very same ambiguous positions that seem to allow him to dissolve the *Exposition's* rigid division between "European" and "Other" (particularly his European clothing) in reality provide a vehicle through which colonial discourse can be remapped onto the colonized body.

classification and display is mystified as adequate *representation*. The time and order of the collection erase the concrete social labour of its making." James Clifford, "On Collecting Art and Culture," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993), 54. See also Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

¹⁸ Hodeir and Pierre, 1931, *L'exposition coloniale*, 96-97.

What is striking about Nénufar—given the fact that he is a central figure associated with the *Exposition*—is that in both the march (with lyrics) and the comic he is located outside of the *Exposition*'s official structure. The short article by illustrator Pol Rab introducing Nénufar to the children of France in the January 1, 1931 edition of the magazine *Les Enfants de France* associates Nénufar with the *Exposition*, but quickly relocates him outside of its official structure. Pol Rab writes, “Je vous entends déjà vous écrire: ‘Mais, c’est un nègre!’ C’est mon fils adoptif, je m’empresse de vous le dire. [...] Il est arrivé tout dernièrement à Paris *dans le colis de l’Exposition Coloniale*.”¹⁹ Though he has arrived in an *Exposition* package, Nénufar is decidedly part of Pol Rab’s family, and, as all of the subsequent cartoons depicting Nénufar show, he lives his life outside of the *Exposition*. Furthermore, Pol Rab’s assertion that Nénufar is his adopted child, coupled with descriptions of Nénufar’s naïveté (“il est un petit négrillon qui est très intelligent et possède un excellent cœur. Mais il *ignore totalement la vie civilisée des petits Français*”),²⁰ encourages the young readers to rehearse France’s civilizing mission by metaphorically adopting Nénufar.²¹

Similarly, the song’s opening lines position Nénufar as a seeing traveler, rather than a native spectacle. As Charles Forsdick, Siobhán Shilton, and Aedín Ní Loingsigh demonstrate, the act of traveling for leisure in the early twentieth-century was almost exclusively associated with Europeans,²² which makes Nénufar an exceptional protagonist for his time: “Quittant son pays, /

¹⁹ Pol Rab, “Nénufar,” *Les Enfants de France* 69 (1 January 1931), 2032.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ In fact, the magazine also ran a promotional campaign where children could obtain a Nénufar doll for renewing their subscription. The advertisement promises that “[t]out abonné qui nous enverra un abonné nouveau aura droit de prendre à nos bureaux, comme cadeau, l’irrésistible ‘Nénufar’ de Pol Rab, fétiche de l’Exposition Coloniale.” Pol Rab, “Nénufar Advertisement,” *Les Enfants de France* 75 (1 April 1931), 2215.

²² See Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu, and Siobhán Shilton, eds., *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History, Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); and Aedín Ní Loingsigh, *Postcolonial Eyes: Intercontinental Travel in Francophone African Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

Un petit négro de l’Afrique centrale / Vint jusqu’à Paris / Voir l’*Exposition* coloniale.”²³ These first lines make clear that Nénufar’s journey is to *see* the *Exposition*, not to be on display there. Nénufar’s role as seeing traveler, thus, destabilizes the *Exposition*’s gazing dialectic that affirmed the European spectator’s right and responsibility to gaze upon the colonized other. Although Nénufar is not endowed with critical thinking skills, according to Pol Rab, his journey to Paris to gaze upon the *Exposition* itself also seems to position him with the authority to denounce it as constructed.²⁴ For these reasons, “Nénufar” seems like a curious choice for the *Exposition*’s official march. In fact, another song of the time, entitled “Viens à l’Exposition,” seems like a more fitting selection because its racist and exotic imagery mirrors the *Exposition*’s exhibits. In the lyrics, a couple describes their day at the *Exposition*, including their time seeing “des Fatmas qui font la dans’ du Ventre” in the Moroccan pavilion, “Les négress’s [qui] ont la têt’ frisé’ comm’ des moutons” in the Sudanese pavilion, and women with “des ongl’s en or” in the Cambodian exhibit.²⁵

However, Nénufar’s potential position as seeing subject does not last long: as soon as he arrives in France, the song shifts from as an account of how Nénufar sees the *Exposition* to a combination of humor, racial stereotypes, and hyperbole. Though physically located outside of the *Exposition*, the song places Nénufar back within its gazing dialectic, positing him as a spectacle. The song deploys racist stereotypes to satirize Nénufar, calling him a “joyeux lascar,” and later exclaiming

²³ Roger Féral and Jacques Monteux, *Nénufar* (1931), Sound Recording.

²⁴ Parallels emerge here between Nénufar and Fara, the protagonist of Ousmane Socé’s *Mirages de Paris*, who travels to France to see the *Exposition*. Both traveling subjects, however, become caught up in the French gaze, and ultimately lack the ability to critically gaze upon the *Exposition* itself; as Aedín Ní Loingsigh concludes, “Fara becomes tragically trapped in the crossfire of two competing gazes: his own complex view of France on the one hand, and, on the other, the iconic Duboisian double perspective of ‘always looking at oneself through the eyes of others’ “ (Ní Loingsigh, *Postcolonial Eyes*, 40). See also chapter 2 of Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads*.

²⁵ Géo Koger, Vincent Scotto, and Léon Raitier, *Viens à l’Exposition* (1931), Sound Recording.

Nénufar!
T'as du r'tard!
T'as du r'tard
Mais t'es un petit rigolard.
T'es nu comme un ver,
Tu as le nez en l'air
Et les ch'veux en paill' de fer!²⁶

In addition to the conspicuous physical stereotypes that reinforce Nénufar's blackness ("les ch'veux en paill' de fer"), one also finds those that reinforce associations between colonized subjects and children who lacks self-awareness ("T'as du r'tard / Mais t'es un petit rigolard. / T'es nu comme un ver"). Later lines in the song that describe his journey throughout Paris and his encounters with French individuals reinforce these images. For instance, at the *parfumerie*, Nénufar orders thirty kilograms of lipstick for his girlfriend, "une négresse à plateaux."²⁷ That Nénufar's girlfriend is a "négresse à plateaux,"—one of the groups Maréchal Lyautey explicitly banned from the *Exposition coloniale* because of their supposed excessive savagery—further relegates Nénufar to the position of a spectacle.

In addition to portraying him as an exotic "Other," the song's lyrics also depict Nénufar equivocally, suggesting that he is at once childlike and potentially threatening. Nowhere is this ambiguous position more evident than in Nénufar's role as a "fétiche" revealed in the chorus's last three lines: "T'as fait la conquête des Parisiennes / Tu es leur fétiche / Et tu leur portes veine."²⁸ The many meanings of the term "fétiche," leads to two divergent readings of Nénufar's

²⁶ Roger Féral and Jacques Monteux, *Nénufar* (1931), Sound Recording.

²⁷ " 'Donnez-moi' qu'il dit / Du rouge en étui, / J'en veux trent' kilogs, / Car c'est un' négresse à plateaux." Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

role. The first way of reading Nénufar's position as a "fétiche," is as a "personne qu'on idolâtre" or an "objet que les joueurs superstitieux considèrent comme devant les faire gagner."²⁹ Whereas Nénufar's overall position as a "fétiche" might initially seem to give him power over the French women, the phrase "tu leur portes veine" instead reduces Nénufar's role to a talisman—a lucky object—for the French women. In this reading, his "conquest" of French women seems benevolent (he has won over the French women's hearts) and its tone presents Nénufar in a childlike role. A second way of reading Nénufar's position as "fétiche" is less benevolent; in psychoanalytic thought, a "fétiche" is an "[o]bjet provoquant et satisfaisant les désirs sexuels chez le fétichiste."³⁰ In this reading, Nénufar's "conquête" of French women carries a tone of domination, repositioning him as a potential aggressor.³¹ The idea that Nénufar might be carrying out his own conquest of French women inverts the sexual undercurrent of the colonial project, which is often discussed in terms of rape.³² Nénufar's potential to engage in the sexual conquest of white French women, thus, points to an anxiety that the colony will "come home" to colonize the *métropole*—an anxiety that is reprised in later Francophone novels such as Alain Mabanckou's *Black Bazar*.³³ Though in this reading, the term "la conquête" certainly might

²⁹ "Fétiche, I," in *Dictionnaire général de la langue française* (Paris 1896).

³⁰ "Fétiche, II," in *Dictionnaire général de la langue française* (Paris 1896).

³¹ In fact, this is how Catherine Hodeir reads Nénufar's position: "Nénufar [sic] exemplified the masculine as fetish, which seduced Parisian women spectators." Catherine Hodeir, "Decentering the Gaze at French Colonial Exhibitions," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Paul Stewart Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 238.

³² See for example, Fanon's foundational description of how the Algerian woman functions in the French mindset as a symbol inviting penetration in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967). See also Roger Little, "Blanche et noir aux années vingt," in *Regards sur les littératures coloniales, Afrique francophone: Approfondissements*, ed. Jean-François Durand (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

³³ In *Black Bazar*, as I discuss in chapter 3, one of the novel's protagonists, Yves l'Ivoirien, posits revenge for colonization in explicitly sexual terms: "Ils nous ont pris nos matières premières, nous aussi on doit leur piquer leurs richesses à eux, je veux dire leurs femmes!" (Mabanckou, *Black Bazar*, 75). Later, he also draws the connection between sexual conquest and visibility: "plus nous sortons avec les Françaises, plus nous contribuons à laisser nos traces dans ce pays afin de dire à nos anciens colons que nous sommes toujours là [...] nous allons carrément

attribute agency to Nénufar, one can also read it as objectifying him: by referencing his black masculinity, the song returns him to the stereotypical role of a hypersexualized black male—a sexualized object in the eyes of the French women.³⁴

The possibility of reading Nénufar’s position in both ways—as either a child or a sexual aggressor—illustrates Bhabha’s assertion that stereotypes about colonized subjects profit from a certain flexibility: “[t]he black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); *he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child*; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces.”³⁵ Though these two roles might outwardly seem contradictory (since the former implies complete naïveté and denies Nénufar agency, whereas the second endows him with malevolent agency), what unites them is that they both necessitate Nénufar’s surveillance: if he is childlike, then it becomes the French duty (as a part of the civilizing mission) to watch over him and guide him towards French civilization; if he is a sexual aggressor, French society must watch him closely to ensure that he does not corrupt French women. His ambiguity, therefore, justifies his spectacularization.

bâtardiser la Gaule par tous les moyens nécessaires” (102). This discourse of the (formerly) colonized subject returning to colonize the former métropole was also propagated by French politicians, notably Valéry Giscard d’Éstaing, who, in an article in *Le Figaro* magazine in 1991 famously asked whether 1990s immigration was not, really, an “invasion.”

³⁴ In fact, a parallel emerges between Nénufar and Moïse, the protagonist of Simon Njami’s *African Gigolo*. As Susan Gehrman points out, although Moïse is initially “ready to fall in love and longs for a serious relationship” he soon realizes his true position in France “white French women take him as an object of pleasure without considering him as a human being with feelings—he is turned into a sex toy.” Susanne Gehrman, “Black Masculinity, Migration and Psychological Crisis—a Reading of Simon Njami’s *African Gigolo*,” in *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, ed. Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, and Daniela Merolla (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009), 148. Later, he attempts to use white women’s attraction for him to his advantage, only to realize that this, too, cannot afford him real power; instead “he has fallen into a trap while playing the game of the black male expected of him.” (Gehrman, 151).

³⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: New York, 1994), 118, my emphasis.

In addition to Nénufar's ambiguous roles, discussions of Nénufar's attempts to adopt European fashion also reinforce three of the civilizing mission's tenets: first, that the colonized subject aspires to attain European culture, second, that it is the colonizer's responsibility to anticipate colonial subjects' needs, and third, that any attempts on the part of the colonized subject to adopt European civilization can only ever be mimetic. When discussing Nénufar's fashion the song reveals that, "Pour être élégant / c'est aux pieds qu'il mettrait ses gants."³⁶ This equation between elegance and European fashion attributes to Nénufar a desire to acquire European culture, but his inability to practice European culture correctly suggests that his gestures are only mimetic. Similar parallels can be found in other colonial visual and musical works. For instance, in the song, "Joli Chapeau," (1952) the protagonist describes (in broken French) how he traded all of his pearls "contre un joli chapeau / A gentil Monsieur blanc qui venait par bateau."³⁷ Just as the gloves symbolize elegance for Nénufar, the hat functions as a symbol of assimilation to European culture for the protagonist of "Joli Chapeau." In fact, the narrator in "Joli Chapeau" highlights how his new hat earns him prestige within his own society: "Chapeau, ça me fait distinction, / Bell' fill's ne regard'nt plus que moi, / Les Chefs me font génuflexions."³⁸ This scene recalls the figure of the colonial *évolué* (or, colonized subject who adopted European culture such as dress and language), and suggests that European civilization is revered among the Central African population.³⁹ Furthermore, in addition to being a source of

³⁶ Féral and Monteux, *Nénufar*.

³⁷ André Claveau, *Joli Chapeau* (London: Polydor, 1952), Sound Recording.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ One also thinks of the case of the elephant Babar in de Brunhoff's *Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* (1931), who, after escaping the European hunters that have killed his mother, arrives in a European-looking town and immediately envies the fashion of two European men. The Old Lady who witnesses the scene is able to recognize Babar's desire to acquire European clothing without Babar having to express this desire verbally, and, in response, the Old Lady gives Babar her purse. As a result, Babar is able to purchase new outfits and eventually return to his land, where his European clothing is revered and he is crowned king. For an insightful analysis of the connection

derision for the listener, the fact that the protagonist trades all of his pearls for a relatively worthless hat implies that colonized populations do not understand the value of their natural resources. Consequently, this logic serves to justify France’s colonial project: the fact that the “natives” are willing to do anything to gain the appearance of European civilization—including trade all their actual wealth—means that, in some sense, it is the colonizer’s responsibility to not only provide such civilization, but also to properly manage the colonized subject’s resources. What is more, the ironic colonized subject’s description of the white man as “gentil” cuts against the unequal economic relations of this particular scene, repositioning the colonized subject as the grateful recipient of colonization.

Discussions of Nénufar’s clothing in *Les Enfants de France* also reinforce the idea that it is the colonizer’s responsibility to provide the colonized subject with European civilization. Pol Rab’s introduction of Nénufar discusses the provenance of his clothing: “Son costume se réduit à peu de choses, vous le voyez: *un faux-col, un plastron et une manchette en celluloïd; ce sont des cadeaux que lui ont fait des explorateurs qui ont traversé son pays*” (Figure 1).⁴⁰ The colonial gesture of benevolent giving underscored in how Nénfar comes to acquire his clothing recalls how the civilizing mission was posited as bestowing the gift of European civilization on the colonized subjects. However, Nénufar’s inability to see how his clothing serves no practical use illustrate how the colonized subject’s adoption of European culture—which would seem to be a symbol of acculturation and supposed progress—is instead a sign of his distance from it. In most of the illustrations, Nénufar participates in activities (including celebrating Bastille day, or

between Babar’s clothing and narratives of civilization see Ariel Dorfman’s *The Empire’s Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

⁴⁰ Pol Rab, “Nénufar,” 2032. Léon Gotran Damas’s poem “Solde,” (1937) dedicated to Aimé Césaire, contains echoes to two of these garments: “J’ai l’impression d’être ridicule / [...] dans leur plastron / dans leur faux-col.” Léon Gotran Damas, *Pigments* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1962), 39.

preparing crêpes) wearing the clothing from his initial description: a shirtfront, one cuff, and gloves on his feet (though when preparing crêpes, he also dons a chef's hat). His regular clothing, which serves no practical use, is therefore at once a sign of Nénufar's attempts to assimilate, reminder of the colonial gesture of benevolent giving, and an indication of Nénufar's inability to critically gaze upon himself. His clothing, thus, a seeming indication of Nénufar's hybrid culture, instead repeats the association between colonized subjects and children.⁴¹

Most of the comics show Nénufar in this semi-naked state; however, two of the comics depict Nénufar in the process of "dressing up." In the first, Nénufar holds up a white mask in front of his face; a box containing additional white masks rests on the floor, while another discarded white mask sits underneath the mirror. The caption reads, "Je mets un masque parce qu'ils croient que je suis déguisé." In the second, Nénufar wears a red jacket over a white shirt, a black top hat, gloves on his hands, and dress shoes; his false shirtfront and cuffs are visible draped over a couch in the background. Within the frame, Nénufar defiantly proclaims, "Moi aussi, je me déguise" (Figure 2). These images conflate race and culture: putting on a white mask is just as much a process of "disguising" oneself as correctly putting on European-style clothing. In fact, Nénufar seems in these images to be gesturing toward racial and cultural "passing."⁴² However, the illustrations' emphasis on "disguising" is central: not only does it imply something that is impermanent (ie. that can be removed), but the fact that Nénufar calls himself "disguised" in both images seems to suggest that the colonized subject, too, understands that this "disguise"

⁴¹ As Alain Ruscio puts it, "Le thème du vêtement 'pour Blancs' accaparé par les 'indigènes' qui en font un effet parfois paradoxal, est l'un des moyens les plus fréquents de souligner que les Noirs restent des 'grands enfants'." Alain Ruscio, *Que la France était belle au temps des colonies: Anthologie de chansons coloniales et exotiques françaises* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), 443.

⁴² For more on racial passing in the American context, see Elaine K Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century Us Literature and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

is not real; he has not fundamentally changed. These failed attempts at acculturation, to borrow Homi Bhabha's terms, perpetuate the colonized subject "as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. [...] Almost the same but not white."⁴³ Just like the misadoption of European clothing, the images' emphasis on colonized subjects' disguise and masking assert that any gesture of acculturation on the part of the racialized subject can only ever be mimetic.

⁴³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122, 28.



Figure 1: Pol Rab's first image of Nénufar. *Les Enfants de France* 69 (1 January 1931): cover art.



Figure 2: Illustration of Nénufar by Pol Rab. *Les Enfants de France* 74 (15 March 1931): 2162.

In the end, the *Exposition*'s structure and its associated visual and musical depictions of Nénufar advance colonial discourses by rehearsing stereotypes about colonized subjects, and by reinforcing France's image of itself and its civilizing mission. As I have discussed, though these narratives are clearly present, the *Exposition* and the cultural works cover over their constructed nature. Revealing their constructed nature, however, is what propels Didier Daeninckx's novellas *Cannibale* and *Le retour d'Atai*, to which I now turn. Focusing primarily on spaces "behind the scenes," Daeninckx's novellas put the *Exposition* (and France's associated display practices) on display and, in the process, implicate historical discourse as an extension of such narrative construction.

Nothing to See Here...

Though Maréchal Lyautey banned the Kanak from appearing at the 1931 *Exposition coloniale* held at Vincennes, the *Fédération française des Anciens Coloniaux* still recruited a troupe of Kanak, and arranged for them to perform at the *Jardin d'Acclimatation* in the *Bois de Boulogne*.⁴⁴ A few months into their stay in Paris, some of the Kanak were lent to Hagenbeck's circus, and spent months traveling throughout Germany.⁴⁵ After many complaints of their treatment in France, officials sent the troupe home on November 11, 1931.⁴⁶ Daeninckx's fictional representation of this event is told as an extended flashback whose narrative present is set during the Kanak independence struggle in the 1980s. Just like in reality, in the beginning of the novella, officials recruit a troupe of Kanak performers and send them to France on a boat

⁴⁴ Joël Dauphiné, *Canaques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie à Paris en 1931: De la case au zoo* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

named the *Ville de Verdun*. Once they arrive, they are transported to Paris, where they are installed in the *Exposition* (rather than the *Jardin d'Acclimatation*). Upon discovering that crocodiles coming from the Caribbean have perished en route, *Exposition* officials “trade” half of the troupe to Hagenbeck’s circus in exchange for live crocodiles. Among those selected to be sent to Germany is Manoé, Gocéné’s fiancée. That same night, Gocéné and his friend Badimoin escape from the *Exposition* in an attempt to locate his fiancée and compatriots, and the rest of the novella traces their journey throughout Paris in this pursuit. Despite the *Exposition*’s centrality to *Cannibale*’s action, the novella privileges spaces outside of the *Exposition*’s walls; in the analysis that follows, I argue that this strategy brings to the fore the constructed nature of the *Exposition*’s displays by emphasizing how stereotypical narratives are mapped onto the colonized body, and by highlighting what the *Exposition* conceals from view.

Before Gocéné’s departure for France in *Cannibale*, he and his fellow Kanak are given a lesson by Governor Guyon to explain to them why they have been brought from their respective regions to New Caledonia’s capital city, Nouméa. The Governor’s speech reveals the contradictory positions the colonized subject must embody at the *Exposition*. He proclaims,

Ce voyage est la chance de votre vie. Grâce à la Fédération des Anciens Coloniaux [...] la Nouvelle-Calédonie tiendra toute sa place au cœur de la prochaine Exposition coloniale [...] où] vous représenterez la culture ancestrale de l’Océanie. [...] Vous montrerez par vos chants, vos danses, que coloniser ce n’est pas seulement défricher la jungle, construire des quais, des usines, tracer des routes, c’est aussi gagner à la douceur humaine les cœurs farouches de la savane, de la forêt ou du désert... (C 19)⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In this chapter, all quotations from the two novellas studied are referenced using parenthetical citation. “C” indicates that the quotation comes from *Cannibale*; “RA” indicates the quotation comes from *Le retour d’Ataï*.

This excerpt illustrates several of the *Exposition*'s ideas not only about colonized subjects, but also about the colonial enterprise and the European place in the world. First, Guyon's slippage between archipelago ("Nouvelle-Calédonie") and region ("Océanie") elides the specificity of Kanak culture by assuming regional homogeneity. Second, the vocabulary of benevolence that peppers Governor Guyon's announcement ("la chance de votre vie" and "grâce à") posits this journey as a gift bestowed upon the native New Caledonian population. Behind this idea of colonial benevolence, however, lies the presupposition that the Kanak aspire to gain recognition in France. Framing the importance of the troupe's *Exposition* performance in this way reinforces the *métropole*'s power as the arbiter of civilization because the Kanak must travel to France in order to be recognized. Moreover, the emphasis in Guyon's speech about the benefit of colonization such as its emphasis on creating infrastructure ("défricher la jungle, construire des quais, des usines, tracer des routes") and civilizing the natives, glosses over the violence committed in such a project.⁴⁸ This speech recalls the way in which Nénufar's clothing reinforced colonial narratives of benevolence, and simultaneously reaffirmed the European subject's right to gaze.

Furthermore, Guyon's speech highlights the temporal contradiction that the Kanak body will be asked to represent. Guyon's first declaration that the Kanak will perform "ancestral," rather than contemporary, culture presents this culture as an "authentic" entity, frozen in time prior to colonization.⁴⁹ However, Guyon's later assertion that these same dances and songs will

⁴⁸ As I discuss later, in 1931, the Surrealists organized a counter-Exposition, entitled "La vérité sur les colonies," which sought to draw public attention to the colonial project's violence, and call into question the exotification of colonized cultures. A tract published alongside it, entitled "Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale" (1931) outlined many of their principles. For an insightful analysis of the discourses put forth in this exhibition, see Panivong Norindr's third chapter "The 'Surrealist' Counter-Exposition: La Verité sur les Colonies" in *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁴⁹ Critics of museography have raised similar concerns about how removing artifacts also seems to fix the culture which they represent in the past. In fact, these ideological debates—how to present cultural artifacts, the role

also illustrate the success of France's *mission civilisatrice* ("Vous montrerez par vos chants, vos danses, que colonizer [...] c'est aussi gagner à la douceur humaine les cœurs farouches de la savane, de la forêt ou du désert...") implies that the Kanak songs and dances must also fall temporally after the arrival of French colonizers—a contradiction with their "authentic" culture. Governor Guyon's speech, thus, points to the contradictory role the colonized subject must embody: the unassimilated but potentially assimilable other.

These internal contradictions in Guyon's speech lend evidence to the idea that the Kanak participation in the *Exposition* serves to uphold not only narratives of the colonized subject's place in the world, but also those about France's own place. As Homi Bhabha concludes in *The Location of Culture*, the stereotype does not only have consequences for the colonized, but rather is "the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized."⁵⁰ This formulation also recalls both Albert Memmi's foundational work *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* where he develops the ways in which the colonized is often defined negatively against a positive colonizing identity, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* in which he asserts that the Orient, constructed through Occidental cultural works, becomes the identity against which the Occident defines itself.⁵¹

A second space—the ship named the *Ville de Verdun* that transports the Kanak to France—demonstrates how the colonized subject's body is made to conform to colonial narratives well before the *Exposition*. Gocéné remembers that his maritime journey was divided into two main spaces: the main deck, where the Kanak are forced to practice the "fausses danses

contextualization should play—stem from ethnography's and anthropology's development as a field in the early twentieth century. See Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 55-59; Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

⁵⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 107.

⁵¹ Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

tribales” (RA 11) in the view the other passengers, and the “third deck,” where their daily suffering due to extreme temperatures and substandard living conditions remains out of sight (C 19). Another event—the death of a Kanak named Bazit—also illustrates how colonial tragedies are glossed over. When Bazit dies of malaria, *Exposition* officials express their intent to throw his corpse overboard. His compatriots implore officials to allow them to bury his corpse in New Hebrides, but rather than acquiesce to the Kanak pleas, the officials jettison his body overnight (RA 11).⁵² Throwing the body into the ocean, rather than burying it (or allowing it to be buried) on land both ensures that the contributions Bazit was willing to make to France and the colonial violence he suffered will remain invisible forever.⁵³

After they arrive safely in France, Gocéné and his compatriots are briefly housed in the *Exposition coloniale* before half of the troupe is removed from their enclosure to be sent to Germany. Another crack in the *Exposition*’s carefully crafted narrative comes when, in the process of defending his fiancée, Gocéné, who has been labeled a “homme anthropophage,” attempts to intimidate the guards, recalling

⁵² This event, too, is based on an actual event aboard the *Ville de Verdun* in 1931: two Kanak perished. The first, Pia, was buried at sea, while the other, Bazit, was placed in a lead casket to be buried later in New Caledonia (Dauphiné 35). However, this burial came at a significant cost to the Kanak: even though the F.F.A.C. was legally responsible for the burial expenses of the Kanak, the representatives, profiting from the absence of jurisprudence, required that each Kanak in the contingent promise 36 francs of their salary to pay for the casket (Dauphiné 35-36).

⁵³ In fact, this lack of recognition is underscored in boat’s name itself, which references one of the most important battles for France during World War I: the battle of Verdun. Although the name “*Ville de Verdun*” historically accurate—it was the ship that transported the Kanak to France in 1931—Daeninckx later draws a connection between the colonized body’s disposability on the boat and during WWI through the recollections of a Senegalese *tirailleur*, Fofana, who served in the battle of Verdun. Fofana remembers that during the battle “Les soldats blancs ne voulaient pas monter à l’assaut, et c’est à nous, les tirailleurs des troupes coloniales, que le général a demandé de sauver la France. On s’est dégagés de la boue [...] sans masques, poussés par la police militaire et les gendarmes qui étaient protégés, eux, et qui abattaient les frères qui essayaient de fuir le nuage de mort...” (C 80-81) Here, actively pushing the colonized troops ahead of the French ones even though they lacked the gas masks to survive the attack suggests that the colonized troops are expendable. That Fofana later serves as a metro sweeper speaks to France’s unwillingness to recognize the contributions colonial troops made to the French army, a subject that is also taken up in Rachid Bouchareb’s 2006 film *Indigènes*. Furthermore, this lack of recognition extends into historical reality—Dauphiné found evidence that the Kanak passengers aboard the *Ville de Verdun* worked forced to work as deckhands and dockers and were never remunerated. (Dauphiné, 35).

Je me suis précipité sur les uniformes, les poings dressés. [...] J'ai réussi à m'agripper à l'un des surveillants, à m'en servir comme d'un bouclier. J'avais en le tenant par la gorge. Je montrais les dents, *comme ils nous avaient appris à le faire pour impressionner les visiteurs*. Ils avaient formé le cercle et riaient.

Mais c'est qu'il mordait, le cannibale! (C 32-33, my emphasis)

The guards' laughter at Gocéné's performance reveals their understanding that what presented to the European public as an "authentic" display is, in reality, a performance.

After this episode, Gocéné and Badimoin escape from the *Exposition coloniale*; however, their interactions with Parisians illustrate how, just like Nénufar, through they are physically outside of the *Exposition*'s structure, they are still approached through the lens of French display culture. Two discrete interactions exemplify this impulse. The first comes when Gocéné and Badimoin stop to dine in a Parisian restaurant and the waiter approaches them with the same type of curiosity as the visitors to the *Exposition* (albeit framed more respectfully here than at the *Exposition*): "Je ne veux pas être indiscret, mais je n'arrive pas à deviner de quel pays vous êtes... Je n'ai pas encore pris le temps d'aller à l'*Exposition*, ça m'aurait aidé... Le patron dit que vous êtes sûrement de Guyane" (C 45). The server's comment, particularly his insistence that seeing the exhibits at the *Exposition* would have helped him classify other people in real life, recalls the way in which the *Exposition* was posited as both an authentic reflection of reality, and as an educational experience. Furthermore, asking Gocéné and Badimoin to self-identify brings to the fore the underlying impulse to define and categorize the unconfined colonized subject.

In his response to the waiter, Gocéné lies, allowing the restaurant owner to believe he has correctly pinpointed the Kanaks' identity: "Vous pouvez lui dire qu'il a raison. C'est de là qu'on est... De Guyane" (C 45). In so doing, Gocéné not only perpetuates the image of colonized

subjects' malleable identities (demonstrated by the way in which troupes performed a variety of different identities, depending on the demand), but he also satisfies the colonizer's "demand for narrative."⁵⁴ Though this lie might initially seem to afford him some agency, since he refuses to confess his "true" identity, Gocéné is ultimately unable to escape the larger context wherein racial and ethnic minorities are not only always "from elsewhere"—despite the fact that blacks had been in France since the seventeenth century—but also the one that posits them as the object of knowledge.⁵⁵

Similarly, the way Parisian metro passengers approach Gocéné and Badimoin as they all wait in a metro station for a storm to pass suggests that display culture becomes the frame of reference for understanding racial and ethnic minorities. Gocéné recalls that "Les gens nous regardaient comme des bêtes curieuses, mais il suffisait que je leur souris pour qu'en retour leur visage s'éclaire" (C 51-52). A linguistic ambiguity in the first clause leads to two contrasting ways of reading Gocéné's observation that highlight and subvert the *Exposition's* gazing dialectic. The first way of interpreting the clause "Les gens nous regardaient comme des bêtes curieuses" is to posit the Kanak as "les bêtes curieuses" ("Les gens nous regardaient comme [si nous étions] des bêtes curieuses"). This reading adds weight to the idea that even though the Kanak have "escaped" from the *Exposition coloniale*, they are still approached as if they were inside their exhibit. The second possible way of interpreting this passage, however, is to read the phrase "comme des bêtes curieuses" as describing the way in which the French metro passengers look at Gocéné and Badimoin ("ils nous regardaient comme des bêtes curieuses [regardent quelque chose]"). This second interpretation not only highlights a type of relativism absent at the

⁵⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 140.

⁵⁵ For discussions of the history of "Black France," see Blanchard et al., *La France noire*; Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*; and Miano, *Habiter la frontière*.

Exposition, but it also inverts the *Exposition*'s gazing dialectic. In fact, the French people's reaction to Gocéné's smile seems to indicate that they—if only briefly—recognize themselves as the object of the Kanak gaze.

Yet even while Daeninckx's prose illustrates the limitations of the *Exposition*'s narratives, the very next scene highlights their force and ubiquity. Just after Gocéné and Badimoin's nonverbal exchange with the passers-by discussed above, an old French man sits next to the Kanak, and begins speaking to them about the many exotic displays he has seen presented by the Trocadéro Ethnographic Museum: “des Indiens Peaux-Rouges [...], des Araucans mapuches, des Esquimaux, des Nubiens, des Gauchos argentins, des Pygmées, des Jivaros” (C 52). Just like in the restaurant scene, the only way in which the French man can relate to Gocéné and Badimoin is through French display culture. Though fictional, these extra-*Exposition* interactions point to how the *Exposition*'s carefully crafted ideologies about France as a colonial power and about its colonized subjects extend beyond the *Exposition*'s walls. As I discuss shortly, Daeninckx similarly illustrates in *Le retour d'Atai* how these ideologies not only transcend the limits of official display spaces, but they also continue in the present day as well.

The final scene in *Cannibale* that takes place at the *Exposition* functions as a metaphor for how the *Exposition* erases signs of how these ideologies are constructed. After days evading the police in Paris, Gocéné and Badimoin return to the *Exposition*'s head office, where their pleas to be exhibited respectfully and for the return of the Kanak sent to Germany are met with police pursuit. Just as Gocéné and Badimoin arrive at the *Exposition*'s front gate, officers open fire, killing Badimoin. Gocéné falls, and police pistols settle on him. He remembers, “[q]uand j'ai relevé le visage, mon front a cogné sur le canon du pistolet d'un policier. [...] J'ai vu le doigt blanchir sur la détente” (C 102). The commotion immediately begins to attract a crowd: “[l]es

curieux se massaient autour de la pelouse, à distance respectable” (C 103). The use of the word “curieux” harkens back to Gocéné’s earlier description of how the Parisians approached him in the metro station, highlighting how this unplanned incident has become a spectacle just like the other exhibits on display only a few feet away. Unlike in the other *Exposition* exhibits, however, the colonized body is not the only spectacle here; rather, the violent interaction between the French forces of order and the colonized subject becomes the focal point. It is precisely at this moment—when the violence needed to craft the *Exposition* displays themselves begin to become visible for the *Exposition* visitors—that the forces of order intervene and turn spectators’ attention away, proclaiming, “Allez, dégagez, dégagez, il n’y a rien à voir...” (C 103). The irony is clear: though the entire scene transpires within a few feet of the *Exposition*—a space whose very existence invites the spectator’s gaze—the underlying violence necessary to create and maintain the *Exposition* (and, by extension, the colonial project) is hidden from view. Both in reality and in the novella, *Exposition* protesters (primarily Surrealists) had accused the *Exposition* of silencing the violence committed in the name of the empire: “cette foire [...] a été organisée pour étouffer l’écho des fusillades lointaines...” (C 92).⁵⁶ Bringing one such “fusillade” within feet of the *Exposition*’s front gate, only to have it subsequently removed from public view, *Cannibale* lays bare the *Exposition*’s mechanisms for creating and maintaining its ideologies. Turning the public’s gaze away from Badimoin’s assassination is also a metaphor for the blind spots found in France’s historical discourse—a topic that Daeninckx explores more in-depth in *Cannibale*’s sequel, *Le retour d’Ataï*.

⁵⁶ This Surrealist protester’s tract in the novella very closely resembles the Surrealists tract “Ne visitez pas l’*Exposition* coloniale,” which claimed that the *Exposition* was constructed to “donner aux citoyens de la métropole la conscience de propriétaire qu’il leur faudra pour entendre sans broncher l’écho des fusillades lointaines.”

On its surface, *Le retour d'Ataï* examines processes of historical revisionism and amnesia through the lens of how colonized subjects' remains such as Ataï's head, or Saartjie Baartman (the "Hottentot Venus"⁵⁷) were brought to France and fit within existing colonial narratives. Set eighty years after the *Exposition*, *Le retour d'Ataï* traces Gocéné's second journey to France. His mission during this trip is to recover the head of a Kanak warrior named Ataï, who was violently beheaded during the repression of the 1878 rebellion he led against French colonial rule.⁵⁸ Just like *Cannibale* privileges spaces outside the *Exposition*, *Le retour d'Ataï* similarly explores museums' back rooms and hidden *cabinets de curiosité*; however, much more than *Cannibale*, *Le retour d'Ataï* reads as a historical detective novella. In the analysis that follows, I trace how *Le retour d'Ataï* puts official colonial historical discourse on display and highlights contemporary iterations of historical revisionism and amnesia about colonization. Furthermore, by taking the reader behind the scenes at museums, libraries, and *cabinets de curiosité*, Daeninckx shows how sites of knowledge production are also implicated in these processes.

Le retour d'Ataï posits that both official historical discourse as well as the spaces in which this discourse is produced and disseminated function as contemporary iterations of French display culture. In fact, Gocéné initially avoids New Caledonian history for this very reason:

⁵⁷ As I discuss shortly, Baartman was both an object of scientific and public curiosity, and was often displayed in circuses or human zoos. She resided in Britain from 1810 until her transfer to Paris in 1814, where she would remain until her death on December 29, 1815. After her death, Georges Cuvier performed her autopsy, preserving many of her organs (including her sexual organs) in jars, and made a cast of her body. Both the jars and cast were on display at several of Paris's museums until 1976, when they were removed from the public view, and later in 2002, when they were returned to South Africa. See Gilles Boëtsch and Yann Aurdagna, "Human Zoos: The 'Savage' and the Anthropologist," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Gilles Boëtsch and Pascal Blanchard, "The Hottentot Venus: Birth of a 'Freak' (1815)," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard, et al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ The 1878 insurrection—particularly Ataï's legacy—still figures prominently in New Caledonian nationalist memories. For more on the timeline of and reasons for the 1878 insurrection, as well as the ways journalists covered it as it developed see Matt K. Matsuda, *Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129-35. After the insurrection, Ataï's head as well as that of his "sorcier" were retrieved and sent to France (Dauphiné, 46-47).

“[p]endant une grande partie de ma vie, je me ne suis pas intéressé à l’histoire de mon île, certainement parce qu’elle ne parlait que de défaites et d’humiliations” (RA 62). Just as he and his compatriots’ bodies were on display for the French and European spectators to lend credence to prevailing cultural and scientific narratives of race and culture, so too does official historical discourse about New Caledonia become a site promoting French imperial success. Furthermore, details contained within the novel about the history of the Bernheim library in Nouméa (where Gocéne conducts his historical research on Ataï’s head) also carry traces of this othering gaze. Commissioned by Lucien Bernheim, a French cobalt and chrome miner who operated in New Caledonia from 1884 to 1901, the building originally served as a complement to the colonial pavilion at the 1900 *Exposition universelle* in Paris. Designed by Gustave Eiffel, the structure housed books on its first floor and “curiosités indigènes” upstairs, both of which invited the European visitor to study New Caledonian culture and art in the same way the later 1931 exhibition at the *Jardin d’Acclimatation* encouraged the spectator to gaze upon the Kanak body. In 1901, the building was disassembled and shipped to New Caledonia along with its contents, where it was reassembled and opened in 1906.⁵⁹ The exterior structure and the general internal organization remained unchanged from the way it was at the *Exposition universelle*; it was not until 1971 that the “curiosités indigènes” were moved to a separate museum building.⁶⁰

Displacing the library while keeping its structure and organization intact invites the colonized subject to gaze upon his or her own culture in the same way as the French visitors did

⁵⁹ See Bernheim’s letter regarding the library’s creation reproduced in Henri Stein, “Chronique des bibliothèques (France et étranger),” *Le Bibliographe moderne: Courrier international des archives et des bibliothèques* 25 (January-February 1901): 352-53. The letter and a more complete history of the library is available on the library’s website: http://www.bernheim.nc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=10, accessed 18 May 2013.

⁶⁰ See the *Musée de Nouvelle Calédonie*’s website: <http://www.museenouvellecaledonie.nc/portal/page/portal/smp/musee/historique>, accessed 15 May 2013.

at the *Exposition universelle*. In essence, Gocéné and other Kanak must align their gaze with that of the (former) colonizer in order to learn about their own culture and history (written from the European perspective). This act—viewing their own culture through a European perspective—resonates closely with Frantz Fanon’s description of coming to discover his place in the world is that of an “object among other objects.”⁶¹ Though the instance that provokes Fanon’s reflection is both quite literal and personal—a young child points to him and proclaims “Look, a Negro!”—Fanon highlights how this othering gaze can be consolidated into other, more figurative forms, including official historical discourse.⁶² He writes, “It is already clear that we would like nothing better than to create magazines and songs specially designed for black children, and, to go to an extreme, *special history books*, at least up to the end of elementary school, because, until there’s proof to the contrary, we believe that if there is a traumatism it occurs here.”⁶³ Though Gocéné is well past elementary school, he nevertheless still suffers the traumatism of coming to know his history and culture through a European perspective.

It is within the space of the Bernheim library that Gocéné discovers evidence of how Ataï’s head—a symbol of Kanak resistance to French colonization—has become conscripted into service of French narratives. Gocéné’s first clue about the whereabouts of Ataï’s head comes when he discovers a letter in which the writer (a French collector) describes Kanak “artifacts” he is sending to his brother in France. Written immediately following the 1878 insurrection, the letter serves as both an account of the historical event and of the status of indigenous art and artifacts. After initially describing the rebellion and the heavy losses the French suffer, the writer quickly turns to a first person account of his own relationship to the rebellion: “je n’ai pu assister

⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press 2008), 89.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 127, my emphasis.

qu'à la fin de la razzia, aux incendies de paillotes, aux égorgements. Pas une fois il ne m'a été possible de sauver les flèches faîtières, les bas-reliefs de chambranles [...et] les couteaux à lame de nacre dont l'Europe raffole" (RA 30). Although the beginning of this testimony describes horrific events—setting fire to indigenous residences and slitting Kanaks' throats—what is most objectionable for the writer is that he was unable to “save” (read: steal) indigenous art and artifacts that would have made him a profit in Europe. He then proceeds to describe how along with the objects of art, his brother will find four “crânes travaillés en masques,” and suggests that the most ornamental of the four—Ataï's head—should be sold to Edouard Bonie, founder of a new Oceanic museum in Aquitania (RA 31). In effect, the most important symbol of the anti-colonial resistance, Ataï's head, is collected and incorporated into the *métropole*, where it will stand not as an anti-colonial monument, but rather as one that confirms France's colonial supremacy and the ultimate demise of the anti-colonial insurrection. As Charles Forsdick underscores, Ataï's head “initially represent[s] a colonial desire to replace the uncontrollable specter of mass revolt with the image of a violent, but ultimately dominated, individual.”⁶⁴ The symbolism is clear: the literal and figurative head of the anti-colonial resistance has been removed, and the colony has been pacified. Furthermore, the way in which the letter blurs the lines between art, artifacts, and human remains foreshadows Gocéné's visit to the back rooms at the *Musée de l'Homme*, where remains such as those of Saartjie Baartman cause museum officials to reflect on this very distinction.

Despite a few dead-ends, a series of fortuitous contacts and leads during his short stay in France allows Gocéné to trace the history of the different narratives ascribed to Ataï's head (and inscribed literally on the stand on which it stood) since its departure from New Caledonia. For

⁶⁴ Forsdick, “Siting Postcolonial Memory,” 185.

instance, a curator reveals that after Atai's head was brought to France, he was first known as "Thakombau, le roi cannibale des îles Fidji... Ça venait d'une bande dessinée" (RA 79). Though Atai's head bears the scars of French colonialism, this violence (like the "fusillades lointaines") is conspicuously absent from the written narrative. Later, Gocéné discovers that when French researchers conducted more sophisticated tests and concluded that Atai was from New Caledonia his stand was once again updated to read: "Offert par le général Servant" (RA 79). Neither inscription testifies to Atai's importance in New Caledonia; rather, the first perpetuates stereotypical discourses of the time, sensationalizing Atai as a cannibal. The second, too, fails to provide concrete information on Atai's importance, instead serving to confirm the "legal provenance" of Atai's head as an object of cultural patrimony.

Evidence of how the rationale of France's colonial display culture has been removed from public view comes to the fore when Gocéné and a museum curator attempt to locate Atai's head in a back room of the *Musée de l'Homme* that the curator has ironically termed the "piste de repentir" (RA 51). Though they do not find Atai's head there, the two do discover the reason why the curator has named the room thusly: it contains formerly displayed human remains, including those of Saartjie Baartman.⁶⁵ Of course, continuing to display such remains objectifies those individuals; however, relegating the colonized bodies to the back rooms of the museum not only obscures their presence in France, but also it conceals the history of their display in France. By moving Baartman's remains out of sight, French museum officials forestall any critical

⁶⁵ Baartman's remains were removed from display in 1976, but were still housed at the *Musée de l'Homme* until they were given special juridical status in 2002. They were subsequently returned to South Africa where they were interred on August 9, 2002. Boëtsch and Blanchard, "The Hottentot Venus: Birth of a 'Freak' (1815)," 69. Baartman has also become a prominent symbol in French and Francophone literature; for instance the title to Bessora's novel *53 cm* (1999) evokes Baartman's hindquarters' reported circumference and uses her as one of the novel's central figures. For a poignant analysis of the novel, see L. Moudileno, "Returning Remains: Saartjie Baartman, or the 'Hottentot Venus' as Transnational Postcolonial Icon," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45, no. 2 (2008).

dialogue about its own display practices and the way it has mapped its own narratives onto the colonized body.

This “piste de repentir” also revisits the question of cultural patrimony and the distinction between art, artifact, and human remains that would later come to the fore in the French museum world. In 1992, the museum *Te Papa Tongarewa* in New Zealand called for the return of all Maori remains that were housed in museums throughout the world, and in 2007, Rouen’s mayor Pierre Albertini and an advisory board for the Natural History Museum in Rouen voted to repatriate the Maori head that had been housed there. Even though the heads were not on display, the French minister of culture, Christine Albanel, blocked its return, citing the 2002 law that classified works housed in national French museums as inalienable cultural objects.⁶⁶ Though French lawmakers had passed a law allowing Saartjie Baartman’s remains to be returned to South Africa,⁶⁷ French cultural officials later hesitated to do the same for all the Maori heads, arguing that doing so would set a dangerous precedent, and call into question the division between art and human remains. In order to discuss the stakes of this decision, Albanel called for an in-depth study, leading to the creation of an international conference held at the *Musée du Quai Branly* in February 2008, entitled “Des collections anatomiques aux objets de culte: Conservation et exposition des restes humaines dans les musées.”⁶⁸ Following the conference, in

⁶⁶ Article 11 of the “Loi n° 2002-5 du 4 janvier 2002 relative aux musées de France,” (<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000769536&fastPos=3&fastReqId=1002698152&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>) states that unless museum collections undergo a process of “déclassement,” they are inalienable.

⁶⁷ Because the committee to approve an object’s “déclassement” was not created until April 2002, the return of Baartman’s remains had to be ordered by a special law: “Loi n° 2002-323 du 6 mars 2002 relative à la restitution par la France de la dépouille mortelle de Saartjie Baartman à l’Afrique du Sud” (<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000776900&fastPos=3&fastReqId=644737141&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>).

⁶⁸ See the French proceedings available on the *Musée du Quai Branly*’s website: http://www.quaibrantly.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Version_Francaise_Symposium_Restes_Humains.pdf.

June 2009 a law was passed exempting the Maori heads from the 2002 law, and from 2011 to 2012, twenty-one Maori heads were returned to New Zealand.⁶⁹

In the end of the novella, Gocéné is able to locate Atai's head in a collector's hidden basement *cabinet de curiosités* and return it to the chief of Atai's descendants. In reality, July 2011, Atai's head was rediscovered in a collection housed in Paris's *Jardin des Plantes*.⁷⁰ Like the behind the scenes spaces that Daeninckx makes visible in his novellas, the "Affaire des têtes Maories" is just one example of how vestiges of these complex histories—and the mythologies they advanced—are beginning to resurface in France today. What comes to the fore in these novellas is the complex intersection between the colonial project, France's history of display practices (including the "human zoos," as well as museum practices) and how these events are commemorated.

Finding a "juste place"

Though over seventy years had passed since the *Exposition coloniale*, as Daeninckx's novellas suggest, its central iconography and display practices still have lasting museological, cultural, historical, and political legacies in France. In the cultural realm, the continued sale of racist colonial musical and visual works are now drawing increased controversy. For instance, in 2006, Milan Music released a compilation CD in France entitled *Le beau temps des colonies*.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Loi n° 2010-501 du 18 mai 2010 visant à autoriser la restitution par la France des têtes maories à la Nouvelle-Zélande et relative à la gestion des collections," http://legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid=55378B98EB59F2E3EC35FDBD8441E059.tpdjo02v_2?cidTexte=JORFTEXT00002227321.

⁷⁰ "Didier Daeninckx: 'La Tête a toujours été là'," *Les Nouvelles calédoniennes* 7 July 2011, <http://www.lnc.nc/article/pays/didier-daeninckx-«%C2%A0la-tete-a-toujours-ete-la%C2%A0»>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁷¹ Although the CD is listed on the FNAC website under the title *Au temps des colonies*, its official title is *Le beau temps des colonies*. The title might be intended to be ironic; however, an interview with Xavier Ternisien, who, as I discuss shortly, defends the choice of racist cover art, suggests that the title should be taken seriously. Marcelle Bordas, Félix Mayol, and Nadia Dauty, *Le beau temps des colonies* (Paris: Éd. Milan; distrib. Universal music, 2006).

Among the twelve tracks, for instance, one finds the colonial *Exposition*'s official march "Nénufar," analyzed earlier in this chapter. One of the famous Banania posters, depicting image of the smiling, docile *tirailleur* and his imagined lexicon ("y'a bon," supposedly mimicking colonized subjects' lack of proper French grammar) that famously prompted Léopold Senghor to express his desire to "déchirer les rires Banania sur tous les murs de France,"⁷² serves as the CD's cover art, encoding visually the stereotypical discourse put forth in the songs before one even listens to the album. Following widespread negative attention both in the media and on the website of French media store FNAC, where people called the album "shameful" and called for its censure,⁷³ President of Milan Music, Emmanuel Chamboredon, released a statement defending the music and the cover art: "Les chansons les plus excessives ont été écartées [...]. Notre but est de *restituer l'ambiance de l'époque*. Quant à la couverture, elle est bien choisie car elle reflète à la fois la mythologie des années 1930 et l'héroïsme des troupes coloniales."⁷⁴

Another colonial work depicting racist stereotypes has also come under fire in France and across Europe: in 2007, British human rights worker David Enright campaigned to have *Tintin in the Congo* removed from the children's section of Borders stores in the Anglophone world.⁷⁵ Later that same year Bienvenu Mbutu Mondondo, a Belgian student, sought legal action to have the comic book banned in Belgium, but it was not until 2012 that Mondondo would receive his

⁷² Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Hosties Noires," in *Oeuvre Poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 55.

⁷³ See "La FNAC et le beau temps des colonies," *Pressafrique* 12 October 2006, <http://www.pressafrique.com/m640.html>, accessed 15 May 2013; and Xavier Ternisien, "'Le beau temps des colonies' en disque," *Le Monde* 11 October 2006,

⁷⁴ Ternisien, "'Le beau temps des colonies' en disque."

⁷⁵ David Enright, "Tintin in the Congo Should Not Be Sold to Children," *The Guardian Online* 4 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/nov/04/tintin-in-the-congo>, accessed 15 May 2013.

answer: Tintin would remain on bookshelves.⁷⁶ In France, members of the *Conseil représentatif des associations noires* (CRAN) would similarly ask France’s Minister of Culture, Frédéric Mitterrand to require publishers to add a prefacing notice to the comic book, just as Britain’s Commission for Racial Equality had added to the English version in 2007.⁷⁷ As Alain Mabanckou has argued, the comic book “doit rester une trace de l’esprit belge de ces années trente. Elle est une des preuves historiques d’une certaine pensée occidentale—mais pas de toute la pensée occidentale! [...] Ce n’est pas à partir de ‘Tintin au Congo’ que la pensée du Blanc sur le Nègre s’est formée. Lorsque Tintin est ‘arrivé au Congo’, l’idéologie raciste et coloniale sur le Noir était déjà bien établie.”⁷⁸ Censoring colonial iconography would allow France to sidestep the process of reflecting on how the image of itself as a colonizer, and its larger colonial mission were mediated. As Mabanckou and other critics highlight, the problem with such works is not only the stereotypes they perpetuate, but also that the context into which these cultural works are (re)circulating has not adequately yet addressed the history of colonization and its mythologies:

Le lecteur adulte peut lire ‘Tintin au Congo’ avec un peu plus de recul. Parce qu’il sait—en principe—que la question coloniale est au cœur de ce livre. Mais quid des enfants, de tous ces jeunes qui n’ont appris l’histoire coloniale que sous un angle positif? [...] Prenez n’importe quel livre d’histoire en France, un livre au programme scolaire, et remarquez

⁷⁶ Louise Bastard de Crisnay, “Racisme: Tintin Acquitté,” *BibliObs* 13 February 2012, <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20120213.OBS1234/racisme-tintin-acquitte-en-belgique.html>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁷⁷ The Forward’s last paragraph now advises the reader that “In his portrayal of the Belgian Congo, the young Hergé reflects the colonial attitudes of the time. He himself admitted that he depicted the African people according to the bourgeois, paternalistic stereotypes of the period—an interpretation that some of today’s readers may find offensive.” Leslie Lonsdale-Cooper and Michael R. Turner, “Forward,” in *Tintin in the Congo* (London: Egmont, 2012). On the CRAN case see “‘Tintin Au Congo’: Le Cran demande à Frédéric Mitterrand de se prononcer,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* 9 September 2009, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/culture/20090909.OBS0540/tintin-au-congo-le-cran-demande-a-frederic-mitterrand-de-se-prononcer.html>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁷⁸ Alain Mabanckou and David Caviglioli, “Tintin doit rester une trace de l’esprit colonial des années 30,” *BibliObs* 10 September 2009, <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/bd/20090910.BIB3965/tintin-doit-rester-une-trace-de-l-039-esprit-colonial-des-annees-30.html>, accessed 1 May 2013.

ce qu'on dit de la colonisation! Une glorification, une revendication de la grandeur de la puissance coloniale, celle qui est allée dispenser les lumières loin là-bas, dans les territoires reculés, au cœur des ténèbres!⁷⁹

Absent wider discussions that seek to critically interrogate the types of ideologies they put forth, cultural works such as “Nénufar,” the Banania poster that adorns it, or *Tintin au Congo*, represent no more than what Mark McKinney has termed “uncritical nostalgia”—works that unquestioningly glorify the past.⁸⁰

In fact, a cursory glance at the historical, political, and even architectural environments into which these works are now circulating, substantiates Mabanckou’s claim. Politically, the late 1990s and early 2000s were characterized by racist and xenophobic discussions of France’s increasingly multiethnic population, illustrated when Jacques Chirac discussed immigrants’ “noise and smells” in 1991,⁸¹ or when Claude Guéant (Minister of the Interior) asserted in 2012 that “[t]outes les civilisations, toutes les pratiques, toutes les cultures, au regard de nos principes républicains, ne se valent pas.”⁸² As scholars note, France’s landscape is relatively devoid of monuments that make colonial history visible, even those moments such as the *Expositions* that transpired on French soil.⁸³ Even as recently as the late 1980s and early 1990s, France’s colonies

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mark McKinney, *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

⁸¹ Chirac gave this speech at a dinner-debate for RPR in Orléans on June 19, 1991, while he was mayor of Paris. In the speech, he argues that though the number of immigrants in France might not have elevated after the war, their origins—“Muslims and Blacks” instead of “Spanish, Polish, and Portuguese”—creates more problems for the nation. In this speech, Chirac characterizes these new immigrants (ie. “Muslims and Blacks”) as dependent on welfare, unlike their “French” working neighbors.

⁸² “Guéant persiste et signe: ‘Toutes les civilisations ne se valent pas.’” *Le Point*, 5 February 2012. http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/hierarchie-des-civilisations-claude-gueant-persiste-et-signe-05-02-2012-1427704_20.php, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁸³ See Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France*; Forsdick, “Siting Postcolonial Memory: Remembering New Caledonia in the Work of Didier Daeninckx.”

represented an historical blind spot, particularly palpable in its relative absence from Pierre Nora's memorial project *Les Lieux de mémoire*.⁸⁴ Since the early 2000s, France has begun to wrestle with those its colonial history and the history of its display culture; for instance, in 2001, France recognized the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity,⁸⁵ and in 2006, another law was passed, setting May 10 as the “date de la commémoration annuelle de l’abolition de l’esclavage.”⁸⁶ Yet other legislation such as the *Loi du 23 février*, whose fourth provision, now repealed, mandated French history textbooks teach “le rôle positif de la présence française outre-mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord, et accordent à l’histoire et aux sacrifices des combattants de l’armée française issus de ces territoires la place éminente à laquelle ils ont droit,”⁸⁷ highlights the complexities surrounding colonial history and memory in France. As Mabanckou highlights above, despite the polemic that surrounded this law, and the fact that its most controversial article was repealed, the French history curriculum still fails to adequately address the complexities of France’s colonial project.

⁸⁴ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*. For a detailed critique of the relative absence of colonial spaces in Nora’s project and for Pierre Nora’s response see Perry Anderson and Pierre Nora, *La pensée tiède: Un regard critique sur la culture française, suivi de La pensée réchauffée: Réponse de Pierre Nora* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

⁸⁵ “Décret n° 2001-434 du 21 mai 2001 tendant à la reconnaissance de la traite et de l’esclavage en tant que crime contre l’humanité.” <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000405369&fastPos=2&fastReqId=1680676956&categorieLien=id&oldAction=rechTexte>.

⁸⁶ “Décret n° 2006-388 du 31 mars 2006 fixant la date en France métropolitaine de la commémoration annuelle de l’abolition de l’esclavage.” <http://admi.net/jo/20060401/PRMX0609202D.html> A later circular cites this first law, stating that it made May 10th the day of “mémoires de la traite, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions,” though this language is not in the original decree. <http://admi.net/jo/20080502/PRMX0811026C.html> The CPMHE created by the 2001 law, terms May 10 the “journée nationale des mémoires de la traite, de l’esclavage et de leur abolition.” See <http://www.cpmhe.fr/spip.php?rubrique45>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁸⁷ “Loi n° 2005-158 du 23 février 2005 portant reconnaissance de la Nation et contribution nationale en faveur des Français rapatriés.” http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?jsessionid=B1EAB37CF96F324AB9B502C3A9F68B4D.tpdjo16v_3?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000444898&dateTexte=29990101. The law was passed in 2005, but Jacques Chirac repealed the polemic Provision 4—the specific provision that required colonization to be painted in a positive light in French history textbooks—just a few months later. For a comprehensive study of how the law was crafted and its effects in France, see Nicolas Bancel, “The Law of February 23, 2005: The Uses Made of the Revival of France’s ‘Colonial Grandeur’.”

Similarly, though large-scale exhibitions of the imperial project—such as the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*—are no longer held in France, vestiges of its display culture are still visible in Paris’s museum landscape—particularly those dedicated to “Other” cultures and to France’s national mythologies. In 2006, the *Musée du Quai Branly* was inaugurated, housing art and artifacts from four distinct regions: Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Its structure and organization, however, are consistent with the same types of exoticism found at the *Exposition*. For instance, the permanent collections for all four regions are housed on the same floor, which contains few indications of where one region ends and another begins.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the museum’s series of dimly lit, narrow enclaves, found primarily in the Asian (7) and African (17) sections, is reminiscent of *cabinets de curiosité* that exoticize the foreign objects and cultures.⁸⁹ Another recent museum—the *Cité National de l’histoire de l’immigration* (CNHI), inaugurated in 2007—fuses discourses of colonialism and immigration in its very architecture: it is housed in the building that served as the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*’s *Musée des colonies*. Alfred Janniot’s iconic bas-reliefs intended to highlight the colonies’ contributions of wealth and human labor still adorn the museum’s façade, inscribing black, stylized, colonized bodies into a discourse of utility and objectification. As Dominic Thomas asserts, despite the CNHI’s laudable goals of humanizing the immigrant experience, it nonetheless fails to engage critically with “the longer history of displaying and representing the other,”⁹⁰ effectively objectifying the very same people

⁸⁸ In his first-person account of his first visit inside the museum, Herman Lebovics confirms this sentiment: “The exhibition area, one great hall, was divided into four zones; Asian, Pacific, African, and American. But these areas were not clearly demarcated, and I was never sure where I was or how to get to some other culture zone.” Herman Lebovics, “The Musée Du Quai Branly: Art? Artifact? Spectacle!” 97.

⁸⁹ For more analyses of the *Musée du Quai Branly*’s history and structure, see Dominic Thomas, “The Quai Branly Museum: Political Transition, Memory and Globalisation in Contemporary France,” *French Cultural Studies* 19, no. 2 (2008); and Herman Lebovics, “Will the Musée Du Quai Branly Show France the Way to Postcoloniality?”

⁹⁰ Dominic Thomas, *Africa and France*, 51. For another analysis of the CNHI, see Mary Stevens, “Still the Family Secret?”

they purport to present as migrating subjects who have made important contributions to the republic.

Yet, if France's public sphere still lacks the tools to adequately move from a context where cultural works and colonial mythologies are evoked as "uncritical nostalgia" to one in which their core ideologies are productively unpacked, recent events and research are beginning to draw public attention to France's display practices and their role in processes of national identity formation. For instance, from November 2011 to June 2012 the *Musée du Quai Branly* held an exhibit entitled "Exhibitions: L'invention du sauvage" organized by Pascal Blanchard, Nanette Jacomin Snoep, and Lilian Thuram, whose goal was to draw attention to how images of the Other were fundamental in shaping European—particularly French—identities from the fifteenth century to the present day. Arranged around four acts—"La découverte de l'autre: rapporter, collectionner, montrer," "Monstres & Exotiques: Observer, classer, hiérarchiser," "Le spectacle de la différence: Recruter, exhiber, diffuser," and "Mise en scène: Exposer, mesurer, scénariser"—some of the exhibit's more prominent features, such as a reconstructed native village, actively draw the visitor's gaze onto the machinations that produced meanings of the exotic Other, not only at France's colonial *Exhibitions*, but in cultural works, and even contemporary immigration discussions as well.⁹¹ Furthermore, the site of the exhibit is also significant: holding such an event at the *Musée du Quai Branly*, whose entire focus is on exhibiting extra-European cultures, encourages visitors to begin analyzing such spaces with critical perspectives. Just as Daeninckx's novellas take the reader behind the scenes, so too does

⁹¹ A description of these acts can be found on the exhibition's page at the *Musée du Quai Branly*'s website: <http://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/programmation/Expositions/Expositions-passees/exhibitions.html>, accessed 18 May 2013. The exhibition's catalog, which contains 500 illustrations and contributions from 70 authors, also marks the most comprehensive step to this date in chronological and in national scope towards understanding how the images of the Other developed in a variety of media. Blanchard, et al., eds. *Exhibitions*.

“Exhibitions: L’invention du sauvage” lay bare the processes that crafted the “Other,” and the self.

In the end, taking the reader or spectator behind the scenes of France’s displays (either in the fictional realm such as Daeninckx’s novellas, or in the scholarly realm) to unpack how these ways imagining the “Other” also played integral roles in constructing French national mythologies has significance beyond addressing the lacunae in France’s historical record. In this chapter’s opening, I discussed how, following the polemic surrounding the decision to hold the Jardin d’Outre-Mer at the *Jardin d’Acclimatation*—the very space in which the Kanak were exhibited (in reality) in 1931—Marie-Luce Penchard called on the CPMHE to make recommendations about how France could commemorate its history of “human zoos.” In its report, the CPMHE concluded that just as these minoritized histories (of the “human zoos” specifically, but also of colonization and the slave trade, more generally) lack a “juste place” in French history and in the Parisian landscape, many individuals in France who are born of these histories find that they, too, are “en quête de leur ‘juste place’ dans la conscience collective de la France, dans un récit partagé de son histoire.”⁹² As the report highlights, such discussions are of critical import for France’s increasingly multiethnic society.

In the following chapters, I turn my attention to one such group: contemporary sub-Saharan African immigrants to France and their descendants. In my analysis of literary and musical works that engage with post-1980s sub-Saharan African immigration and “Black French” culture and identities, I continue the lines of inquiry developed in this chapter,

⁹² CPMHE, *Rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions ethnographiques et coloniales* 20. See also Vergès’s speech that accompanied the mission report Françoise Vergès. “Remise du rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions coloniales ‘êtres humains en France’.” Paris, 15 November 2011. One such commemorative event did take place when, from November 21, 2012 to January 6, 2013, an exhibit entitled “L’invention du sauvage: Acclimations/Exhibitions” was held in the children’s museum at the *Jardin d’Acclimatation* in Paris’s *Bois de Boulogne*, organized by the ACHAC research group and the Thuram Foundation.

illustrating how the works actively draw on—but also subvert—the role the black body has historically played in French display culture. Furthermore, I trace how the works resuscitate the historical “liens complexes, ambigus et multiples,”⁹³ drawn between France and its former colonies to affirm their centrality not just for racial and ethnic minority populations in France, but rather for all of contemporary French society.

⁹³ CPMHE, *Rapport de la mission sur la mémoire des expositions ethnographiques et coloniales*, 21.

CHAPTER TWO

Sans-Papiers but not *Sans-Voix*: (Re)Writing Black Atlantic History in Francophone Immigration Literature and Music

On the morning of August 23, 1996, the French viewing public witnessed the conclusion of that summer's media event: following France's Prime Minister Alain Juppé's orders, approximately one thousand CNRS agents entered Paris's St. Bernard church using tear gas and serious force to disband a peaceful protest of three hundred men, women, and children of predominantly sub-Saharan African origin.¹ The church occupation, which had begun almost five months earlier, was the culmination of a much longer struggle conducted by immigrants who openly acknowledged their illegal immigration status by calling themselves the "*sans-papiers*." Though most had entered the country legally, many changes to France's immigration legislation in the 1980s and 1990s—such as the Bonnet (1980) and Pasqua (1986/1993) laws—had caused some to lose their residency permits, and had even created paradoxical political categories, such as the *inexpulables-irrégularisables*, a group which per French law could neither be deported from France nor ever receive permanent residency papers or citizenship.²

¹ As Thierry Blin highlights in his thorough study of the *sans-papiers* movement, the group was not exclusively sub-Saharan Africans. Though the protesters were predominantly Malians (247 individuals), Mauritians (29), Senegalese (21), Syrians (2), Central Africans (2), Guineans (2), an Algerian, a Zambian, and four individuals of "other nationalities" made up the group of protesters (Blin, *L'invention des sans-papiers*, 221).

² These laws represent some of the most major changes regarding immigration and regularization policy in France during the 1980s and 1990s. The *Loi Bonnet* severely restricted the conditions under which immigrants could legally enter France, and also allowed for illegal immigrants to be detained and deported. Following several hunger strikes, the expulsion clause of the *Loi Bonnet* was repealed on October 29, 1981. The *Loi Pasqua* of 1986 again limited foreigners' ability to enter France and facilitated the expulsion of those who were in France illegally—in fact, 101 Malians were deported. The second *Loi Pasqua*, passed in 1993, prohibited polygamous individuals from obtaining a 10-year residency permit. More importantly, it also removed the right of *jus soli* that, since 1889, accorded French citizenship to any foreigner born in France when s/he reached adulthood. Under the Pasqua law, foreigners had to not only satisfy a number of requirements, but they also had to submit a "manifestation de volonté" to become a French citizen. In other words, obtaining French citizenship at the age of 18 was no longer automatic. Finally, in 1998 the *Loi Guigou* reinstated automatic citizenship at the age of 18 for children born in France to immigrant parents; they can receive it earlier if they apply and satisfy the necessary criteria.

Prior to the *sans-papiers* protest, however, French media and political discourse tended to gloss over immigrants' highly individual experiences and instead depicted them as a homogeneous group defined by blackness, clandestinity, and delinquency. For instance, in the political arena, the discursive shift from "travailleurs immigrés," popular during the *trente glorieuses* to "étranger," qualified with a phrase commenting on the individual's legality ("en situation régulière" or "en situation irrégulière"), which gained currency in the 1990s, effectively cast suspicion of illegality on every immigrant.³ Furthermore, this shift not only de-emphasized the labor immigrants contributed to the French economy but it also depicted immigrants as economic burdens: "désigner les étrangers en situation irrégulière comme 'clandestins' [...] c'est supposer que l'on a affaire à des personnes qui ont choisi de se placer dans une situation *dont ils tirent injustement profit*."⁴ French news media, too, portrayed sub-Saharan African immigrants to France in the 1980s and 1990s as a homogeneous collective. Frequently, images of immigrants often depicted confrontations between racial minorities and the police, which not only reinforced the association between criminal activities and racialized immigrants, but also served to align the French viewer with the white force of order: "the national subject watching TV is almost implicitly cast in the role of the immigration officer, whose role is to control and expel."⁵ By affirming their rights to speak on their own behalf and by bringing to the fore their diverse experiences (both in Africa and in France), the *sans-papiers* called into question the assumptions on which France's immigration legislation and political discourse about immigrants rested.

³ As Christine Barats underscores, "implicitement, tout étranger devient un suspect potentiel car sa qualité d'étranger (en termes de nationalité) se double de la nécessaire 'légalité' de sa présence sur le territoire français." (Barats, "Immigration," 53).

⁴ Fassin, "'Clandestins' ou 'exclus'?" 83, my emphasis.

⁵ Rosello, "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France," 144.

Similar challenges to France's discourse about immigration and immigrants were also articulated in the musical and literary realms, both of which enjoyed an increase in production during this period.⁶ In the literary domain, postcolonial literature of engagement gave way to a new literary movement that Jacques Chevrier termed "*migritude*"—a neologism that at once captures the thematic of immigration at the heart of many of the works and the way in which they carve out "un nouvel espace identitaire dont les frontières font éclater les cadres ordinaires."⁷ In the musical realm, the number of Francophone African musicians living in France producing "world music," also dramatically increased. Often set in opposition to presumed normative Western musical and literary productions, both "world music" artists and *migritude* authors (which one could classify under the larger rubric of "world literature") encountered similar forms of structural marginalization, particularly evident in the processes governing their production and reception.⁸ The very fact of categorizing these musics and literatures thusly is symptomatic of the larger assumptions about belonging undergirding France's immigration discussions.

⁶ Winders, *Paris Africain*, 57.

⁷ Chevrier, "Afrique(s)-sur-Seine," 99. Many of the *migritude* works, such as Simon Njami's *African Gigolo* (1989), Calixthe Beyala's *Loukoum: Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (1992), J. R. Essomba's *Le paradis du nord* (1996), Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse* (1996) and Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (1998), use first-person perspective to depict immigrants' journeys to France, and the subsequent marginalization they suffer from both their "native" African and "host" French communities. The fact that many of the artists themselves were themselves migrants—or, at least lived part-time and published in France—has also served as criteria to delimit *migritude* writing, and though the works clearly inhabit the fictional realm, this aspect has also accorded the works more autobiographical or sociological reception.

⁸ As Timothy Taylor unpacks in *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*, world music, an official musical genre which has its own top-100 chart in Billboard Music and its own section in music stores, is deeply problematic for its association with particular world regions to the exclusion of others, (just as the term "world literature" has been accused of ghettoizing authors from outside of a presumed "world" that is often characterized as white and Western). Beyond effectively marginalizing certain artists or albums, Taylor points out that categorizing works as "world music" also has implications for their reception. For instance, listeners often seek "authenticity" in world musicians, and "if world musicians depart from their assumed origins they run the risk of being labeled as a sellout and/or perhaps losing their world music audience, which for many nonwestern musicians, is the only audience they have outside their immediate locale and circles." (Taylor, *Global Pop*, 23). See also Simha Arom, and Denis-Constant Martin, "Combiner les sons pour réinventer le monde." *L'Homme* 1 (2006): 155-178; Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

In this chapter, I therefore examine how three such works, including one novel—J. R. Essomba’s *Le paradis du nord* (1996)—and two songs—Malian *griot* musician Salif Keita’s “Nou Pas Bouger” (1989) and Ivorian *zoblazo* artist Meiway’s “Je suis sans-papiers,” (2004)—intervene in the discussion about France’s immigration policies and representations of immigrants. Despite their obvious differences in media, I suggest that all three interrogate the historical myopia upon which France’s immigration legislation was contingent. The works, I claim, challenge the way in which political discourse depicted sub-Saharan African immigration as a “contemporary” problem originating in the postcolonial era and ignored the longer historical intersections between France and Africa that laid the foundation for these migratory flows. Furthermore, each work actively puts forth the site of the black body to challenge the audience to acknowledge not only stereotypes associated with blackness, but also the inherent power structure that determines who has the right to speak about those bodies. By resuscitating these moments of marginalized history in conjunction with France’s 1980s and 1990s immigration discourse, these works’ significance extends far beyond their immediate context: they pave the way for immigrants (and their descendants) to share space in France’s collective imaginary.

In France, as historian Gérard Noiriel suggests, “the myth of origin that was built upon the events of the Revolution made it impossible for ‘foreigners’ to have a place in the collective memory of the nation.”⁹ Worse still, as Fatima El-Tayeb points out, this “institutionalization of a common past” affects not only migrants, but also “*their descendants* [who] are routinely denied access.”¹⁰ The nomenclature whereby children and grandchildren of immigrants are commonly referred to as second- or third-generation immigrants, too, “ascribes ‘the migrant’ (including

⁹ Noiriel, “French and Foreigners,” 151. In fact, as I discussed in chapter 1, both France’s landscape and its historical discourse overlook colonial history and colonized contributions to France, a blind spot that is only beginning to be addressed.

¹⁰ El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 4.

succeeding generations to the nth level) a flat, one-dimensional existence in which she or he has just arrived, thus existing only in the present.”¹¹ For the artists I examine in this chapter, bringing to the fore these tangled moments of transnational history dealing with forced migrations and unwelcome settling—particularly slavery and colonization—allow them to highlight the irony implicit in France’s 1980s and 1990s immigration discourse. In so doing, the works lay the foundation for France to imagine itself as a multiethnic nation that openly recognizes minorities’ long presence and contributions. Furthermore, these works also dispute automatic assumptions of foreignness associated with racial minorities—a notion France is still wrestling with today.

Immigrant, Cargo, or Commodity?

J. R. Essomba’s 1996 novel, *Le paradis du nord*, which tells the story of two Cameroonian protagonists’ journey to France, is often cited as one of the early *migrITUDE* works, but has received relatively little critical attention. One of its most productive analyses comes from Siobhán Shilton, who uses *Le paradis du nord* to articulate her theories of postcolonial travel literature. For Shilton, Essomba’s novel reverses the parameters of traditional European travel literature wherein the European traveler has both the right and responsibility of traveling to and subsequently gazing upon the “native” population.¹² Unlike earlier African travel literature such as Ousmane Socé’s *Mirages de Paris* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* (1961), however, *Le paradis du nord* “demonstrates the impossibility of the African traveller’s resistance to assimilation by metropolitan culture. Through its critique of French and African myths of otherness, Essomba’s 1996 novel counters narratives both of neo-colonialism and of

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Siobhán Shilton, “Postcolonial Approaches to Travel Literature in French,” in *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History, Theory*, ed. Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu, and Siobhán Shilton (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 69.

nationalism.”¹³ It is the protagonists’ doubly-marginalized position—both outside their native national structures, and those of France—that affords them the distance necessary to put forth alternative models of belonging.

Two of the work’s elements that mark the protagonists’ journey to France—the specific means of transportation and the water topos—have not been addressed in criticism, yet they define how Essomba calls into question rigid notions of French identity put forth in the 1990s. Focusing my analysis of the novel on these methods of transportation, I argue that the text erects a parallel between immigrant labor and slave labor, which challenges France to recognize how late twentieth-century immigration is predicated upon its longer history including colonization and slavery. Furthermore, the way in which the text stages the black body reveals the complex framework (including stereotypes stemming from colonial mentalities) through which racialized bodies are understood and, more importantly, spoken for in 1980s and 1990s France. Essomba is certainly not the first Francophone sub-Saharan African author to draw parallels between the contemporary immigrant experience and forced labor; in fact, similar claims have been made about colonial texts such as Ousmane Sembène’s *Le docker noir* (1956) and *La noire de...* (1965) as well as postcolonial texts such as Fatou Diome’s *Le ventre de l’Atlantique*.¹⁴ However, as I suggest in this chapter, resuscitating this history in the context of immigration discourse in

¹³ Ibid., 114.

¹⁴ In *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*, Miller argues that Sembène’s *Le docker noir* “works mostly by comparison: modern immigrant labor is like slave labor (the simile that will be developed in *La Noire de...*)” (369). Similarly, as Dominic Thomas points out in *Black France*, in Sembène’s short story, “La noire de...” (“The Promised Land”), which was later translated into the cinematic form *La noire de... (Black Girl)*, Diouana’s journey to France “is not entirely ‘voluntary,’ given economic imperatives and the power of the lure toward France that has resulted from colonial indoctrination and that is recuperated and embraced by colonial subjects. Furthermore, Diouana’s capacity to arrive at a carefully formulated decision is voided by the illusionary nature of her representation of France.” (128). Miller and Thomas also highlight how other works such as Daniel Boukman’s play *Les Négriers* (1971) (based on Jean-Pierre N’diyae’s *Négriers modernes: Les Travailleurs noirs en France*), Henriette Akofa’s *Une esclave moderne* (2000), and Fatou Diome’s *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* (2003) make similar comparisons in the postcolonial period.

late twentieth-century France anticipates two important elements that characterize early twenty-first century France: history and memory legislation such as the *Loi Taubira*¹⁵ or the *Loi du 23 février*,¹⁶ and debates about how recognizing racial and ethnic identities complement—or complicate—French Republican ideals.

Like many of the *migritude* texts, *Le paradis du nord* begins in Africa, developing not only the local context that drives migration, but also the ways in which Paris is imagined from Africa. Charlie, one of the novel's protagonists, often cites the splendor contained in his compatriots' letters about life in Paris: "Il paraît que là-bas, il y a tellement d'argent qu'il suffit de se baisser pour le ramasser" (17).¹⁷ For his friend Jojo, this image of life in France contrasts greatly with what he has known in Cameroon, where he was forced to work selling peanuts at age five, became a street child at age six, and only finally found menial jobs working in a cinder block factory, as a houseboy for a French couple, and in a hotel catering to European travelers (18-20). This opposition between Jojo's own experiences in Cameroon and the image of what life in France is like explains why traveling to France becomes a form of escapism bordering on religious devotion for him: "dans sa chambre, sur le mur en face du lit, il avait collé une gigantesque carte de France [...]. Et chaque matin au réveil et chaque nuit avant de s'endormir,

¹⁵ The *Loi Taubira*, named after Christiane Taubira (former Deputy of French Guiana and current Minister of Justice), was passed on May 21, 2001. The declaration that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity comes in its fourth article, which also provides for the establishment of the Comité pour la mémoire et l'histoire de l'esclavage (CPMHE, <http://www.cpmhe.fr/>). The law's second article also underscores the need for the history of slavery to be recognized in French school curricula: "Les programmes scolaires et les programmes de recherche en histoire et en sciences humaines accorderont à la traite négrière et à l'esclavage la place conséquente qu'ils méritent." See Françoise Vergès, "Les troubles de la mémoire: Traite négrière, esclavage et écriture de l'histoire," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 179-180, no. 3 (2005): 1160; Patrick Weil, "Politique de la mémoire: l'interdit et la commémoration," *Esprit* 2 (2007).

¹⁶ Passed in 2005, this law drew much critical attention, primarily because of its fourth article, which mandated that French history curriculum teach students colonization's "rôle positif." This article was repealed on January 25, 2006 following vehement criticism from historians, scholars, and citizens. See Bancel, "The Law of February 23, 2005"; Branche, Liauzu, Meynier, et al., "Les historiens face à l'histoire coloniale."

¹⁷ Note: all parenthetical references in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, refer to Essomba's *Le paradis du nord*.

comme d'autres se jettent sur leur bible ou leur chapelet pour faire une prière, lui, il plongeait dans sa carte de France" (13). Charlie convinces Jojo to help him realize their dream of travel to France, and together the two steal money from a local business, but their theft culminates in Charlie killing a guard, making their journey to France more exigent to escape murder charges. After debating between two possible routes north—the first, a combination of overland and sea journeys through the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea, and the other (exclusively marine) leaving from Douala, Cameroon, passing through Dakar before arriving off the coast of Spain—they opt for the second and reserve a place as illegal immigrants on a cargo ship.

In *Le paradis du nord*, every segment of the protagonists' journey north reminds the reader of the previous Atlantic and Mediterranean crossings that laid the foundation for 1980s and 1990s immigration. The cargo ship in which the Cameroonians find passage during their departure from Africa recalls the trans-Atlantic slave trade, placing contemporary relationships between France and Africa in their larger historical trajectory of exploitation. The ship's ecosystem carries echoes of a slave economy that depends on the objectification of workers, whose labor remains invisible from the shore. For the captain, Charlie and Jojo are no different from the other commodities the ship carries; for instance, he sternly warns them "Si d'une façon ou d'une autre vous représentez un danger pour moi, je n'hésiterai pas un seul instant à vous balancer à la mer" (41-42). Using the colloquial verb "balancer," often associated with worthless objects or trash, underscores how the captain sees the Cameroonians as objects that can easily be discarded. What is more, though Charlie and Jojo paid for their journey, the captain requires that they earn their board through labor, arguing "j'ai été payé pour vous transporter [...] mais je n'ai pas été payé pour vous nourrir" (41). Though the ship cannot make its voyage without this work, the fact that the Cameroonians must hide in a container weighed down with rocks when the ship

is in port means that their role in the successful journey is hidden from view. Furthermore, their position as undocumented laborers—whose contributions will never appear in any official records—also recalls the slave and colonial labor whose part in France’s prosperity is rarely acknowledged.

After the ship passes through the Strait of Gibraltar, the Cameroonians must swim to the Spanish coast; two of this scene’s elements—a lantern that guides them to shore and the marine setting—interrogate the seemingly stable territorial claims of national identity by resuscitating the historical depths of contemporary immigration. Just before the Cameroonians begin their swim under the cover of nightfall, the captain cautions them to “Suivez toujours cette lumière-là, la petite à gauche qui bouge. Ne la quittez jamais des yeux” (44). This light serves literally as a lifeline for the clandestine immigrants, but metaphorically, it stands as a larger symbol for the images of economic success in France first oriented the Cameroonians’ dreams northward, similar to Odile Cazenave’s formulation of the “miroir aux alouettes,” or the image of “la France comme terre de réussite facile.”¹⁸ Of course, as Cazenave underscores (and as Charlie demonstrated earlier in the text), African immigrants play an integral role in perpetuating this image of opulence associated with life in France; however, this image is also based on earlier colonial teachings. In *Le paradis du nord*, the lantern is extinguished at the very moment that the immigrants arrive on *terra firma*, leaving them isolated in the dark: “Je ne comprends rien, lorsque je suis sorti de l’eau, la petite lumière qui nous guidait a disparu” (45). This sudden blackness signals that the Cameroonians have passed from the world of dreams into that of harsh realities of life as a clandestine immigrant.

¹⁸ Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine*, 123. Cazenave initially formulates the concept of the “miroir aux alouettes” when discussing Alain Mabanckou’s *Bleu-blanc-rouge*—a text that she argues denounces this false image of France.

In addition to foreshadowing the immigrants' marginalization in France, the sudden darkness also has fatal consequences that recall the circulation of black bodies in the slave trade. Although Charlie and Jojo arrive on shore safely, only one of the three Senegalese men who also made the journey with them reaches shore alive before the smugglers signal that it is time to depart. The Senegalese immigrants' presumed deaths both adds weight to Charlie and Jojo's sacrifice because they were willing to risk everything—even their lives—to arrive in Europe, and it also inscribes historical depth into the Mediterranean. As Iain Chambers argues in *Mediterranean Crossings*, the marine environment, which contains “the traces and intertwining of different lives and histories, held in a suspension through which we ply our present-day routes”¹⁹ offers an alternative to the rigid nationally-based historiographical perspectives that silence or appropriate narratives such as the Senegalese immigrants'. The Mediterranean, therefore, not only becomes a site of passage, connecting Africa with Europe, but also a repository of “historical memories [...] the very opposite of those systematically catalogued in a national museum.”²⁰ Essomba's allusion to the Senegalese immigrants' bodies suspended within the Mediterranean evokes larger histories of ocean floors littered with other bodies, such as those of slaves cast overboard during the trans-Atlantic trade, ultimately calling into question the territorialized, national histories precisely at a time when France's immigration policies sought to reinforce them.

The middle segment of the immigrants' journey inside a small compartment underneath an orange cargo truck serves as the Cameroonians' own Middle Passage and further concretizes the metaphor between slavery and contemporary immigration. The compartment's initial

¹⁹ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 142.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

description—“la profondeur [...] ne dépassait pas quarante centimètres [... Charlie et Jojo] n’avaient que le choix de deux positions: soit couché à plat ventre, soit couché sur le dos” (50)—emphasizes the inhumanely restrictive space that carries echoes of the slave ship’s hold, where “each captive typically had a space below decks approximately six feet long by sixteen inches wide by two feet seven inches high.”²¹ Furthermore, not only does the compartment they will occupy for twelve hours restrict their movement, but it also constrains their bodily functions such as eating and drinking. For instance, once they see the compartment for the first time Charlie and Jojo naïvely ask the smuggler how they will eat, drink, and relieve themselves; he responds by giving them a meager snack, and by telling them that “vous n’avez qu’à faire dans vos frocs” (50). Imagining the immigrants relieving themselves thusly unquestionably calls to mind descriptions of the slave hold, where slaves, chained to each other and to the ship, had no option but to do the same. In fact, this similarity is rendered even more concrete when “deux heures après le départ, Jojo vomit tout ce qu’il y avait dans le ventre. Charlie l’imita une trentaine de minutes plus tard” (50). Beyond the literal connection it establishes between the Cameroonians and slaves, the act of vomiting can be read metaphorically as a figurative regurgitation of history, uniting the processes that led to the dispersal of Africans throughout the past and present. If for Paul Gilroy the ship “refer[s] us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation”²² the image of the orange truck, carrying the clandestine Cameroonians between Spain and France becomes the quintessential symbol for new orientations of European modernity that rely on immigrant labor.

²¹ Miller, *The French-Atlantic Triangle*, 51.

²² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 17.

Once the Cameroonians reach Paris, their lives are characterized by geographical and social exclusion, suggesting that though they can cross the literal borders that demarcate Europe, internal borders separating French and immigrant populations (even within the immigrant community) remain impassable. Charlie and Jojo are liberated from the false compartment only to be drugged, robbed, and left in a Parisian underground parking garage in the stolen Mercedes the smugglers used to transport them from Toulouse to Paris. Their subsequent interactions with Parisians—both white and black—reveal racist stereotypical assumptions about sub-Saharan African immigrants promoted by the highly anti-immigrant discourse that prevailed in the early 1990s. For instance, when Jojo begins to ask a French woman for directions to exit the garage, no sooner does he state, “N’avez pas...” (61) than she immediately calls out, “Au secours! au secours! ils veulent me violer! ils veulent me violer!” (61). The French woman’s immediate assumption that Jojo is a criminal and a rapist harkens back to the associations Rosello pinpoints between blackness and criminality advanced in 1990s French political discourse and news media.²³ Ironically, this interaction pushes the Cameroonians into a life of crime: in order to flee the impending police investigation, the two hide in the back seat of a car and force the female owner to drive them to a metro station.

Ultimately rejected by both French society and their Cameroonian compatriots, Charlie and Jojo have no choice but to sleep in a park for the night. The night they spend in the park is characterized by the quintessential interaction between immigrants and police that for Rosello visually defines immigration in 1990s France; significantly this is also the last moment when the trope of water resurfaces in the text. When the police arrive, Charlie and Jojo flee, fearing deportation and knowing that they will likely face murder charges in Cameroon. Whereas

²³ Rosello, “Representing Illegal Immigrants in France,” 144.

Charlie is caught, Jojo is able to escape by “plonge[r] dans les eaux noires de la Seine” (85). Because the police officers cannot spot him in the river, the Seine is initially responsible for saving Jojo’s life; however, its high walls, freezing temperature, and swift current quickly render him suicidal:

Il n’avait plus envie de lutter. Il n’était pas un lutteur. Et pourquoi lutter? Ce serait tellement simple si tout s’arrêtait... Ne plus vivre, ne plus courir, ne plus souffrir, mourir. Oui, c’était la solution: mourir!

Il s’arrêta de nager, ferma les yeux, bloqua sa respiration et se laissa couler” (86-87). Just like the Cameroonians’ brief plunge into the Mediterranean, the trope of water here imbues this commonplace interaction between police and immigrant with a much larger historical significance, suggesting that what had previously been considered “tributary histories”²⁴—that is, colonization and the slave trade—are, in fact, central: they flow directly into the heart of Paris. The phrase “se laissa couler,” which first and foremost signals Jojo’s resignation to his immediate fate of drowning in the Seine also calls attention to the passivity inherent in his entire migratory experience; from his nightly dreams of living in France, to being recruited in Charlie’s theft, to being stowed away in various modes of transportation, Jojo, in reality, has been swept along well-established migration networks progressively losing his agency at each stage. Additionally, though Jojo ultimately manages to escape from the Seine, the image of Jojo’s nearly lifeless body floating downstream calls to mind both the Senegalese bodies that remain suspended within the Mediterranean and those who perished at sea during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.²⁵ By associating the Seine—a river existing entirely within France, and which holds

²⁴ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 2.

²⁵ This moment also calls to mind the bodies floating in the Seine on the night of October 17, 1961 when Parisian police forces violently repressed peaceful Algerians protesting a racist curfew enacted against them just twelve days prior. Although no definitive conclusion has been reached regarding the number of victims, approximately two

a prominent place in French national, literary, and artistic history—with transnational histories, Essomba’s novel contests the very national identity at the heart of France’s 1980s and 1990s immigration reforms.²⁶

In addition to the way the water topos in *Le paradis du nord* implicitly situates contemporary sub-Saharan African immigration on a much larger historical trajectory, the novel’s final scene in which Jojo stands accused of rape, murder and drug trafficking (though he is innocent of the first, committed the second to save a woman who would have been killed, and was naïvely unaware of his involvement in the third) makes this connection explicit. Jojo’s case outwardly seems straightforward: a young African man clandestinely enters France, becomes involved in illegal activities, is arrested, and faces expulsion. However, in his closing argument Jojo’s lawyer demands that the jury read Jojo’s case through a much longer historical lens, and even goes so far as to suggest that each jury member is also just as guilty as Jojo:

Nous sommes allés, et parfois très brutalement, imposer la France chez lui. Pourquoi lui reprocher aujourd’hui d’aimer et de vouloir un peu plus de France? [...] En cette période *riche en commémorations*, il ne me paraît pas déplacé de vous rappeler que l’histoire de ce jeune homme n’est que *la fin tragique de votre histoire d’hier*. Alors avant de prononcer une sentence, dites-vous bien que vous ne pouvez pas le juger sans vous juger.

hundred were reported to have been killed; many of their bodies were found in the Seine. See Jim House and Neil MacMaster *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jean-Luc Einaudi, *La bataille de Paris: 17 octobre 1961* (Paris: Seuil, 1991); Jean-Paul Brunet, *Police contre FLN: Le drame d’octobre 1961* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

²⁶ In recent years scholars have begun turning to water spaces as alternatives to nationally-bounded histories and identities; however, often the object of study is a large body of water that can serve as a challenge to national histories because they connect multiple countries, such as the Mediterranean Sea or the Atlantic Ocean. See for example Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* and Chambers’s *Mediterranean Crossings*. Applying this same paradigm to national bodies of water such as the Seine, which flows entirely within France, could be a fruitful point of departure for subverting the territorially-defined histories (and the resulting ideas of national identity) from within, and is a subject that could complement emerging interdisciplinary water-based area studies’ perspectives.

Mais puisque vous devez le juger, faites votre devoir: jugez-le! jugez-vous! (167, my emphasis)

Despite its heavy-handedness, this speech with which the work concludes calls into question the myopia that dominated discussions of 1980s and 1990s clandestine immigration by arguing that it only represents “la fin tragique” of a much larger history of exploitation. Furthermore, the French lawyer’s reference to “cette période riche en commémorations” strikes an ironic tone particularly taken in light of the relative absence of events commemorating the sesquicentennial of slavery’s abolition in France in 1998 (just two years after *Le paradis du nord* was published). As Françoise Vergès notes, though the *Loi Taubira* officially designating the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity was passed in 2001, it would not be until 2005 “qu’un débat public s’est développé, relayé par les médias, l’Internet, des intellectuels et des politiques.”²⁷ Achille Mbembe has also pointed out the serious resistance to a plurality of memory in France: “Relatively belated efforts have been made to symbolically assume responsibility for slavery and abolition. As for the ‘colonial fracture,’ it is still gaping wide.”²⁸ Though in the end Jojo is still found guilty, Jojo’s lawyer’s speech transforms the way in which one reads personal immigration narratives by opening up the discursive space in which the larger history of colonization and the slave trade must be resuscitated.

At the same time, however, the courtroom dynamics point out the limitations of rereading sub-Saharan African immigration in this light. Jojo, who fears implicating his sister, chooses to remain silent during his trial, leaving both the prosecutor and Jojo’s defense lawyer the responsibility of interpreting his body for the jury. The defense that Jojo’s lawyer offers brings to

²⁷ Vergès, “Les troubles de la mémoire,” 1144.

²⁸ Achille Mbembe, “The Republic and Its Beast: On the Riots in the French *Banlieues*.” In *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, edited by Charles Tshimanga, Ch. Didier Gondola and Peter J. Bloom, 47-54 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 50.

the fore questions of authority inherent in immigrants' self-representation. Before beginning his speech I dissected above, Jojo's lawyer displays a preemptive impulse to explain Jojo's mutism and assures the jury that this choice is not because Jojo lacks a command of French: "si l'accusé avait bien voulu parler, vous auriez constaté qu'il parle le français aussi bien que vous et moi" (167). This need to justify Jojo's choice reveals two underlying assumptions: first, the lawyer believes that in the jury's eyes Jojo's blackness is synonymous with an inability to speak proper French; second, that the French lawyer is in a position to attest to Africans' linguistic abilities. These stereotypes carry echoes of Ousmane Sembène's *Le docker noir* (1956), a text that highlights assumptions regarding African immigrants' authorial capacities and, more generally, their ability to speak and write French. In *Le docker noir*, Diaw Falla stands trial, accused of plagiarizing a white, French woman's novel entitled *Le dernier voyage du négrier Sirius* and subsequently murdering her to cover up the plagiarism. Though in reality, the French woman plagiarized Diaw's manuscript, as Thomas points out, the jury's foregone conclusion of Diaw's guilt is predicated upon stereotypical roles attributed to Africans: "Diaw could not have written a prize-winning book [...] since such an accomplishment would clearly fall outside the traditional expectations of African performance."²⁹ What is more, to find Diaw innocent, the French jury must accept not only that he possesses the authorial capabilities to write *Le dernier voyage du négrier Sirius*, but also that the French woman, whose name appears as the text's author, would have plagiarized an African author's novel.

While Jojo's lawyer's explanation—like Diaw's insistence of his authorship—attempts to prove that prevalent stereotypes about African immigrants (namely, that they did not possess French linguistic abilities) do not apply to Jojo, doing so necessarily serves to reinforce this

²⁹ Thomas, *Black France*, 100.

stereotype's force. Mireille Rosello discusses this paradox in her book *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures*, arguing that "the desire to oppose stereotypes as meaningful statements is a self-defeating attempt. To declare them wrong, false, to attack them as untruths that, presumably, we could hope to replace by a better or more accurate description of the stereotyped community, will never work" because "every time someone opposes them, they gain in strength and consolidate their cultural positions as pseudo-truths."³⁰ By affirming Jojo's ability to speak French, the French lawyer reinforces the association between blackness and improper French, and he also strengthens his own position as someone who has the right and responsibility to judge Jojo's linguistic capacities.

This dynamic whereby a member of the majority must endorse the migrant's narrative can be read as a larger indictment of minority authors' positions in literary marketplaces both within and beyond the Francophone context. For instance, to be published, early works produced by African-Americans not only had to conform to certain expectations in terms of their content—often autobiographical slave narratives—but this content often had to be authenticated in the form of an introduction by white editors (or sponsors) testifying to the work's veracity.³¹ This practice raises serious questions regarding both the work's and the author's commodification in a larger literary market:

Slave narrators thus discovered that the autobiographical act, far from freeing them from commodification, tended to reinforce their status as commodities. In writing their lives, [...a]nd, in agreeing to sell their life experiences on the market place, they further *exposed themselves to the gaze of an alien audience*, whether well-intentioned

³⁰ Mireille Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 13, 18.

³¹ Carla L. Peterson, "Capitalism and the 1850s African-American Novel," *American Literary History* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 565-66.

abolitionists, prurient readers seeking titillation in the accounts of slave nudity or whippings, or simply those eager to consume private lives.³²

Though these writers sought to author their own stories, they still found themselves bound up in a literary machine that—by the very nature of what types of works were published and how they were marketed—reinforced images of blackness in the United States. A similar practice has also emerged in the Italian context in the 1990s, where a new group of Italian migrant authors such as Pap Kouma produced semi-autobiographical texts “co-authored with native Italian speakers, a practice called *scrittura a quattro mani* or ‘writing with four hands.’”³³ The fact that covers for these works of Italian migrant literature such as Kouma’s *Io, venditore di elefanti* display the name of the Italian co-author alongside that of the migrant author implicitly calls into question both the migrants’ linguistic abilities and serves as a legitimizing presence.

As Richard Watts demonstrates in *Packaging Post/coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World*, Francophone authors, too, were (and continue to be) “packaged” by paratextual images, promotional materials, and, of course writings. For Watts, analysis of Francophone paratexts reveals the underlying “struggle over who has the right to mediate and who maintains the authority to present and interpret this literature is fought.”³⁴ Yet this struggle is conspicuously absent in *Le paradis du nord*; in fact, although Jojo literally authors his own narrative by writing a journal documenting his experiences in France when he gives this journal to his defense lawyer (163), Jojo makes him promise to keep it confidential.

³² Ibid., 562, my emphasis.

³³ Allison Deventer and Dominic Thomas, “Afro-European Studies: Emerging Fields and New Directions,” in *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, ed. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 345. For more on early Italian migrant literature see Alessandra Di Maio, “Black Italia. Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa,” in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Graziella Parati, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Migration Literature in Italy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999).

³⁴ Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality*, 3-4.

While Jojo's defense lawyer does keep this promise and does not share the contents of Jojo's journal with the jury, the way in which the lawyer implicitly assumes the responsibility of interpreting Jojo's body for the jury returns him to a legitimizing and authorial role with respect to Jojo's narrative. Through the courtroom scene, *Le paradis du nord* lays bare the existence of this mediation and, in so doing, perhaps opens up space from which it can be challenged; however Jojo's silence also signals the futility of escaping the larger system in which black bodies—and the texts they produce—are subjected to a legitimizing presence.

As I discussed in the chapter's opening, it is this very framework that became the target of the *sans-papiers* protesters, who, unlike Jojo, sought to speak on their own behalf and make themselves visible in a context where others (such as journalists and politicians) spoke about and for them. Similarly, the musical works to which I would now like to turn my attention actively affirm the position of the clandestine migrant to challenge the homogenizing discourse about late-twentieth and early twenty-first century immigration in France. In the next section, I consider two songs: Salif Keïta's "Nou Pas Bouger" (1989) and Meïway's "Je suis sans-papiers" (2004). My central argument that J. R. Essomba's *Le paradis du nord* resituates sub-Saharan African immigration as just one point on a much larger trajectory of historical exploitation to counter discriminatory immigration policies also holds true for the musical works; however, as one might expect, the songs' strategies for evoking this history differ from the textual ones. Whereas *Le paradis du nord*'s repeated water topos and modes of transportation erect a parallel between modern immigration and slave labor, "Nou Pas Bouger" visually, lyrically, and musically highlights the colonized contributions to France, and Meïway's "Je suis sans-papiers" establishes a metaphorical connection between colonization—which robbed colonized subjects of their territory—and homelessness to underscore the paradoxes of immigration policies.

Voicing Black Atlantic History

As James Winders discusses in *Paris Africain: Rhythms of the African diaspora*, Salif Keïta not only had ideological reasons for speaking out against France's immigration legislation, but he was also personally affected by it, having experienced "the kinds of administrative humiliations to which African immigrants could be subjected."³⁵ Speaking out against these types of injustices is one of the many roles (including acting as a *porte-parole* for his community, a mediator between populations during disputes, and a guardian of his population's oral history) that a traditional Malian *griot*³⁶ such as Keïta would be expected to fulfill for his community.³⁷ His song, "Nou Pas Bouger," which as its title announces, defiantly asserts immigrants' rights to remain in France, prefigures the *sans-papiers* protest by seven years, demonstrating the lengthy period during which discussions of immigrants (and their rights) remained at the fore in France.

³⁵ In fact, over the years these legislative hurdles wore on Keïta to the point that he decided to permanently relocate himself and his family to Bamako in 1997. Winders, *Paris Africain*, 59, 107.

³⁶ Interestingly, Keïta is descended from the royal lineage of Sundiata Keïta, which normally would exclude him from occupying the role of *griot*—a separate inherited cast that serves the ruler in traditional Malian society. However, Keïta's albinism caused him to be disowned by his family, which in turn allowed him to pursue his passion for music and to study *griot* singing.

³⁷ Of course, many scholars, journalists, and artists note that the *griot's* role has significantly changed in recent years in many African regions. For instance, Dani Kouyaté's film *Keïta! ou l'héritage du griot* (1994) presents contrasting views of *griots*: in the main narrative, a traditional *griot* instructs a young boy on the meaning of his name, thereby recounting the oral history of the Mali Empire, but at other moments of the film, the viewer is introduced to more modern *griots* who sing the praises of notable attendees at events in exchange for money. This latter image of the *griot* is now more pervasive in West African society, and, as Dorothea Schulz discusses, these types of *griots* have been criticized for being only interested in money. Schulz, Dorothea. "Praise without Enchantment: Griots, Broadcast Media, and the Politics of Tradition in Mali." *Africa Today* 44, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1997): 449. This mistrust of modern *griots'* intentions, however, is not exclusive to the postcolonial moment; as Christopher Miller shows, a similar skepticism towards *griots* is already present in earlier works such as Laye Camara's *L'enfant noir* (1953): "The *griot* can enter your home and demand what he wants; you refuse at your peril, for his powers of speech, usually used to praise, can be turned from *chant* to *chantage*, from praisesong to bribery. Uninvited, a *griot* may begin singing your genealogy; if a sufficient gift is not forthcoming, he may begin weaving in sly references to skeletons in your closet such as ancestors who were slaves." (Miller, *Theories of Africans*, 83).

In terms of musical composition, the 1989 version of “Nou Pas Bouger” deftly weaves together traditional African musical rhythm and instrumentation with global 1980s sounds, creating a musical genealogy attesting to the intertwined nature of French and African history and culture. Though Keïta’s traditional *griot*-style singing in Bamana will later announce the song’s West African roots, the instrumentation of the song’s opening situates it squarely within 1980s rock music: a synthesized keyboard sound plays before drums from a drum kit join in, followed closely by an electric bass, two guitars and a horn section (a keyboard will join later). Next, the two more traditionally African elements—Keïta’s vocal track and a balafon—enter. The song’s triplet rhythm accentuates its upbeat and optimistic, but forceful tone and its two-against-three polyrhythm highlights its west African roots, but also places it within a more global 1980s soundscape, which relied heavily on polyrhythms. Musically, thus, the song both asserts an African perspective, but yet is very much anchored in global 1980s sounds, underscoring the ways in which European and African cultures can productively come together.

Just as the music itself suggests how African and European cultures are inextricably linked, the song’s lyrics evoke two types of historical interconnectedness—Africans’ service to France and the continued postcolonial European presence in Africa—to question France’s exclusionary immigration policies. The song’s opening lines insist upon the physical labor that the African body provided, without which European imperial expansion would not have been possible: “From the time of slavery / The black man have [sic] toiled / The black men have suffered / The black men have sweated blood.”³⁸ In these lyrics, the reference to blood not only reminds the listener of the harsh realities slaves and colonized subjects faced, but it also calls into question rigid racially-, historically-, and even biologically-based conceptions of national

³⁸ Salif Keïta, *Ko-Yan* (New York: Island Records, Ltd., 1989).

identity. Keïta's role as a *griot*, whose other primary responsibility is to recount the genealogy of his people, is significant: the slaves' blood to which Keïta alludes reinforces the genealogical connection between the African diaspora and Africa—a product of the forced circulation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, because it is shed in service of the French empire, this blood also asserts a genealogical link between France and Africa; in other words, Africans, who were forced to work in service of the colonial empire, form an integral branch of its genealogical tree. These lyrics, then, offer an alternative genealogy of France that calls into question the distinction between French and foreigner that will form the basis for 1980s and 1990s immigration reforms.

Additionally, the lyrics also target the association between African and foreigner by pointing out that though it excludes immigrants, France maintains a postcolonial presence as “foreigners” in Africa. Keïta sings, “Independence has arrived / There are white men everywhere / There are white men in Africa.”³⁹ Yet, despite the fact that non-African populations continue to persist in Africa after independence, African immigrants who have been living in France for years are violently expelled:

The CRS are everywhere
They only use violence and nothing else
To move us on [...]
Every day they call the police
Every day there are arrests
Every day people are taken back home by ‘plane.’⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

By insisting upon the historical intersections of France and Africa, and by underscoring the irony between Europeans' continued presence in Africa, and Africans' exclusion in Europe, Keïta's lyrics strike at the underlying assumptions whose roots extend back to the height of the colonial empire: that only Europeans have the right to travel freely (Africans, even in the postcolonial context, are always forcibly moved) and that the reason formerly colonized subjects do not belong in France is because they have no claim to French history.

Similarly, the song's music video uses close-ups to visually reference how the black body was conscripted into forced service for France and juxtaposes imagery of historical events such as slavery and colonization with that of immigration to bring the two historical moments into dialogue. Though these devices are present throughout the video, the opening scene illustrates them particularly well. Unlike the "Nou Pas Bouger" CD track, the music video begins with the chorus, and the video's first shot, which corresponds to the chorus's first four beats, begins with a close-up of black feet walking rhythmically from the right of the screen to the center of the shot, taking a step on each down beat (Figure 3).



Figure 3: African dancer in opening shot of Salif Keïta’s 1989 “Nou Pas Bouger.”

Once the feet reach the center of the shot, they remain there, but continue to march in place on each down beat. The dancer’s clothing—a dark grass skirt—is partially visible around the dancer’s legs, and both his feet and clothing stand in stark contrast to the white background. Furthermore, hand-drawn white lines emphasize the contrast between black and white, and also obscure a clear view of the dancer’s feet. The second shot begins with a jump cut to a close up of the dancer’s top half; his wooden, elongated mask surrounded by dark strands similar to those from the dancer’s skirt looks quickly from screen left to screen right, before this image fades out to that of a bright object in the center of the screen. Finally, in the third shot, the image of the bright object fades out to a medium close-up of a person’s torso, dressed in green, with his or her hands handcuffed in front of him or her. As s/he moves from the right to the left of the screen, four more handcuffed bodies follow—each one wears dark clothing, making their handcuffed arms the prominent focus of the shot (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Handcuffed arms in Keïta’s 1989 version of “Nou Pas Bouger.”

Using close-ups to frame the music video’s opening reduces the black body to symbolic constitutive parts and serves two complementary purposes: first, it suggests that these individuals—particularly those who are handcuffed—are not understood as human beings, but rather as a faceless collectivity; second, it evokes the way the African body was historically seen as an ensemble of parts that could serve the colonial empire. In *Littératures africaines francophones des 1980 et 1990*, Lydie Moudileno notes that several body parts, including skin, feet, the male torso, blood, and the womb play prominent symbolic roles in sub-Saharan African literary productions before 1980.⁴¹ For her, each of these body parts functions metonymically; references to feet, for instance, “signal[e]nt tantôt l’acculturation (pied entravé dans la chaussure, pied botté du tirailleur, pied sur l’asphalte de la ville), tantôt la reculturation (pied nu en contact

⁴¹ Lydie Moudileno, *Littératures africaines francophones des années 1980 et 1990*, 2 ed. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2003).

avec la terre natale, pied nu de la dance ancestrale).”⁴² In the music video, the feet’s performance of a traditional dance evoke African culture, yet in light of the larger context of the song’s lyrics—which asserts immigrants’ rights to be in France given the longer history of exploitation—they can also be read as affirming belonging, claiming their “droit du sol” that would be revoked just four years later when the *Loi Pasqua* was passed.⁴³ Yet the fact that the background is ambiguous—that is, no referent definitively places it in either France or Africa—also suggests a doubly-marginalized space, outside of both France and Africa, where the immigrant resides physically and psychologically. Just as Jojo finds himself excluded from both African and French communities in France, and eventually inhabits a squat in *Le paradis du nord*, so too do sub-Saharan African immigrants inhabit a space outside of presumed French national identity, marginalized both legally and discursively.

Similarly, the handcuffed arms and torsos closely following each other in a line across the screen visually reference the many clandestine immigrants who were deported from France, but they also evoke earlier moments of colonization and slavery when these body parts were forced into service for France. In fact, a later shot from the music video makes this history of servitude explicit: approximately one minute into the video, a shackled line of feet marches slowly from left to right across the screen (Figure 5). Juxtaposing these two types of restraints from different historical periods within the same video produces a parallel underscoring the song’s critique of French immigration policy: even though Africans were formerly forcibly brought into service for the French empire, they are now being excluded from citizenship within the former colony.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴³ The second *Loi Pasqua* revoked automatic citizenship for children born in France to immigrant parents. Instead, these children had to file a formal “manifestation de volonté” to become a French citizen between the ages of 16 and 21. This “manifestation de volonté” requirement would later be repealed with the *Loi Guigou* of 1998.



Figure 5: Shackled feet in Keïta's 1989 version of "Nou Pas Bouger."



Figure 6: Multiethnic chorus in Keïta's 1989 version of "Nou Pas Bouger."

Finally, unlike *Le paradis du nord*'s courtroom scene discussed earlier, which suggested the impossibility of transcending the framework by which a French mediator must always interpret the black body, the multiethnic chorus (Figure 6) and images of fluid borders in “Nou Pas Bouger” suggest the possibility that a plurality of voices can be expressed—and heard—in France.⁴⁴ On the surface, this scene's chromatic binary between black and white seems to mirror the way in which France's immigration discussions were figured in implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) racial terms: the chorus's all-black attire stands out sharply against the white background and fabric, as do the shadows cast back onto the fabric. The bright lighting, however, reduces the overall contrast, and can be read as a critique of the larger discourse surrounding the immigration “crisis”: whereas it had been framed in very clear, oppositional terms—that is, it is depicted as a question of “black” and “white”—in reality, the video suggests that discussion must be much more nuanced. In this way, the “Nou Pas Bouger” video anticipates the *sans-papiers* protest, which Rosello describes as a “new authoring principle, a group of individuals who managed to impose a new grid of intelligibility, and to suggest that a much more nuanced response to their fate was both desirable and possible.”⁴⁵ In addition to targeting the specifically racial binarisms that pervade the discussion of immigration in France, the multicultural chorus scenes also call into question the impulse to divide populations in the first place. In these scenes, the chorus is divided into three rows, each of which stands on a different level of a riser. At several moments during the video, a wide strip of sheer, white fabric is raised between the rows, symbolically gesturing toward separating the chorus's members. Though the sheer white fabric does obscure certain features the chorus's members, it never

⁴⁴ The chorus's composition recalls other social equality movements from the same time, most notably the group SOS-Racisme, which was founded in 1984, for whom “Nou Pas Bouger” would serve as the unofficial anthem. Winders, *Paris Africain*, 59.

⁴⁵ Rosello, “Representing Illegal Immigrants in France,” 139.

completely hides them from the camera's view, and, in fact, the shadows that the rows behind it cast back onto the fabric make their partial absence visible. Beyond symbolizing the arbitrary divisions between people that is at the heart of the immigration discourse, the shadows add depth, suggesting that there are more narratives to be heard.

If Keïta's "Nou Pas Bouger" stands as an affirmation of belonging that anticipates the way the *sans-papiers* would claim their right to self-representation in 1996, Meiway's "Je suis sans-papiers," as its title suggests, reclaims the *sans-papiers* identity in 2004 to highlight the continued struggles of sub-Saharan African immigrants in France. Though most of Meiway's songs are upbeat dance-style *zoblazo* songs, the slower tempo, atmospheric percussion, and plaintive melodies make "Je suis sans-papiers" a doleful ballad. Despite its striking difference from "Nou Pas Bouger" in terms of musical composition, "Je suis sans-papiers," like "Nou Pas Bouger," anchors its critique of France's immigration policies in French history.

Lyrically, Meiway's "Je suis sans-papiers," establishes a metaphor of homelessness to describe not only the clandestine immigrant's life in France, but the postcolonial African condition more generally.⁴⁶ For instance, Meiway proclaims, "J'étais bien chez moi / sous mon petit toit / Tu es venu chez moi / Tu m'as imposé ta loi."⁴⁷ Later, he reinforces how immigrants' legal and cultural marginalization is an outgrowth of this history: "Immigré chez toi / Je suis exclu par ta loi / Sans-papiers—je suis sans-papiers."⁴⁸ The anaphora of the terms "chez moi" and "chez toi"—phrases with which half of the song's French lines end—underscores the theme of belonging and emphasizes the paradoxical state of the postcolonial subject, who no longer has a home to call "chez moi," but yet is rejected from the *métropole*. Moreover, this link between

⁴⁶ Meiway, *Golgotha* (Paris: BMG France, 2004).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

colonization, homelessness, and immigration also orients the music video, encouraging the viewer to read the protagonist's homelessness (indicated in scenes where Meiwai is depicted sleeping on the ground or begging in front of the metro) historically. The song therefore not only suggests that the immigrant's economic situation is caused by imbalances of power originating in colonial exploitation, but also that the immigrant's literal homelessness can be seen as a metaphor for the postcolonial condition—Europe metaphorically stole his home through its colonial project.

Both the repeated informal second person pronoun “tu” and Meiwai's chilling gaze directly into the camera also serve to implicate the listener directly in this history. The first four lines cited above, in particular, lend an accusatory tone to this discussion of French colonial history that recalls other works of Francophone immigration literature set during the same period, such as Jojo's lawyer's closing argument that I discussed earlier in this chapter or Abdou Traoré's epigraphs in Calixthe Beyala's *Loukoum: The 'Little Prince' of Belleville*.⁴⁹ This accusatory tone, however, raises much larger questions at the forefront of the history and memory debates that France continues to address in the present day. As Pascal Blanchard underscores, the increased pressure in early twenty-first century France to accord public space to colonial history sparked violent reactions across France's political spectrum: “d'une part, la droite nationaliste (concept émergent du ‘*racisme antiblanc*’ et défense de l’‘*identité française*’) et, de l'autre, les ultrarépublicains qui vont prendre comme cheval de bataille la lutte contre la ‘repentance’ (de Max Gallo à Pascal Bruckner).”⁵⁰ Despite the potential pitfalls of such a tone,

⁴⁹ For instance, in one of his epigraphs, Abdou Traoré announces, “*My country, your forebears know it well. They ripped out its flowers, cut down its forests, ploughed its land to strip it of the red gold of its life. I'm not resentful of them, for I have no body left, no rancour. I am lost. Withered. For once, just leave me alone—renounce your spirit of conquest, of domination, of pleasure. Just for once.*” (Beyala, *Loukoum*, 29, italics in original)

⁵⁰ Pascal Blanchard, “Histoire coloniale: La nouvelle guerre des mémoires,” *Cultures sud* 165 (June 2007): 37.

Meiway's lyrics nevertheless encourage viewers to recognize their own—albeit historical—role in contributing to the conditions leading to 1980s and 1990s sub-Saharan African immigration to France.

In terms of visual composition, several of the music video's scenes are filmed through vertical bars (Figures 7 and 8), reminding the viewer of a prison cell, and clandestine immigrants' imprisonment and deportation. This composition also recalls moments when the colonized subject's body was put on display at "human zoos,"⁵¹ such as the *Exposition coloniale* discussed in chapter 1. In this way, the camera's gaze in "Je suis sans-papiers" is a concrete example of how "ethnic cultures accustom themselves to a bifocality reflective of both the ways that they view themselves and the ways they are viewed by others."⁵² Beyond simply conjuring these stereotypical images of black bodies, however, this scene's bifocality—akin to Fanon's notion of "knowing oneself in the third person"⁵³—is strengthened through Meiway's chilling gaze directly at the spectator through the red, metal bars (Figure 7). By staring into the camera at the presumed spectator, Meiway acknowledges, but also simultaneously questions, his position as a spectacle. Furthermore, his stare at the viewer makes him or her aware of his or her own impulse to gaze, pushing the viewer to interrogate the underlying power dynamic behind his or her authority to do so. This perspective harkens back to Jojo's lawyer in *Le paradis du nord*, who, though he explains how Jojo differs from the stereotypes about African immigrants, nevertheless does not critically analyze the framework whereby he is authorized—and, in fact, feels compelled—to explain the black, mute body.

⁵¹ See Blanchard, Bancel, Boëtsch, eds., *Human Zoos*.

⁵² George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 135.

⁵³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

In the end, both Keïta's 1989 version of "Nou Pas Bouger" and Meïway's "Je suis sans-papiers" affirm former colonial subjects' rights to belonging in France by reading postcolonial immigration on the same historical trajectory as slavery and colonization. In so doing, the songs begin to reconceptualize French national history through a transnational lens, interrogating rigid notions of national identity. What is more, these musical productions allow sub-Saharan African artists a means to define the terms through which they are understood in a time when—particularly prior to the *sans-papiers* movement—"immigrants" were often spoken for and represented in an abstract, homogeneous way.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to another musical production that voices immigrants' and their descendants' claims to belonging in France: the rerelease of Keïta's "Nou Pas Bouger," a collaboration Keïta produced with French rap duo L'Skadrille. Released seventeen years after the original, but just two years after riots swept through France's *banlieues*, the song—like the original—deplores racial discrimination and highlights moments of historical intersection between France and Africa. Though both the original and the rerelease resuscitate moments of history and question notions of national identity, the 2007 version of "Nou Pas Bouger" opens the discussion of immigration to a related question: France's multiethnic population. In so doing, the 2007 collaboration concretely asserts that recognizing these histories and grappling with the ways in which they have shaped contemporary French society are not just questions for immigrants and their descendants; rather, they are the most urgent issues affecting twenty-first century France.



Figure 7: Meiway staring through vertical bars in video for “Je suis sans-papiers.”



Figure 8: Meiway begging seen through vertical bars in video for “Je suis sans-papiers.”

We will move (forward)

In terms of its musical composition, whereas the 1989 version's overall sound is that of global 1980s rock, the 2007 remake combines musical elements from traditional Malian *griot* music (such as a kora and Keïta's traditional singing) and hip-hop music⁵⁴ (including a drum machine, half-time, and L'Skadrille's rapping) to musically evoke the connections forged across the Black Atlantic. As Paul Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double-consciousness*, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was not just a circulation of peoples and raw materials; rather, it also established connections between Africa and its diaspora that would later serve as a foundation for larger transnational intellectual and cultural exchanges.⁵⁵ In fact, musical circulation serves as a prime example of Gilroy's assertion: not only were West and Central African musical elements (such as rhythms, instruments, lyrics, etc.) transported across the Atlantic with the slaves, but in the twentieth century, Latin American and Caribbean musics profoundly influenced African music. For instance, in his book *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the two Congos*, Gary Stewart shows how Latin American music, made widely available when the GV label began to distribute in the Congos, led to the creation of several Congolese styles including *rumba*, *soukous*, and *ndombolo*, which I will examine more closely in chapters 3 and 4.⁵⁶ Just as Congolese musical styles contain a complex rhythmic genealogy bearing witness to the history that binds different sides of the Black Atlantic together, so too does one of the major musical elements in the 2007 version of "Nou Pas Bouger": hip-hop.

⁵⁴ Here, I adopt Krims's distinction between rap and hip-hop that asserts that rap is one facet of the larger hip-hop culture. Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12.

⁵⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16-17.

⁵⁶ Gary Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos* (London: Verso, 2000).

The hip-hop elements contribute two seemingly antithetical narratives to the “Nou Pas Bouger” remake: they both testify to the history of dispersal that permanently separated the African diaspora from Africa, and they also reaffirm the commonalities facing black communities worldwide, of which the *sans-papiers* is just one part. In this way, the song’s rap elements forge a connection across the Black Atlantic, reminiscent of earlier African-American forms of musical expression such as jazz.⁵⁷ However, hip-hop’s circulation throughout the Black Atlantic⁵⁸ and across national boundaries⁵⁹ make it for Lipsitz “the most important recent manifestation of post-colonial culture on a global scale.”⁶⁰ Of course, as a globally-marketed commodity largely produced in metropolitan centers, one might question hip-hop’s power to articulate these connections; however, as Lipsitz goes on to suggest, its role as a commodity does not negate its role as “a conduit for ideas and images articulating subaltern sensitivities. [...] It brings a community into being through performance, and it maps out real and imagined relations between people that speak to the realities of displacement, disillusion, and despair created by the austerity economy of post-industrial capitalism.”⁶¹ In a similar way, then, Salif Keïta’s collaboration with L’Skadrille musically triangulates the three major points on the Black Atlantic triangle—Africa, the Americas, and Europe—not only to affirm trans-Atlantic identitarian

⁵⁷ For instance, Nick Nesbitt affirms that “this black Atlantic vernacular [of] modernism arose from and protests against society while steadfastly maintaining the concrete musical image of a utopian intersubjective social experience.” Nick Nesbitt, “African Music, Ideology and Utopia,” *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 184.

⁵⁸ See for example George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994); Tony Mitchell, ed. *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); S. Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Spady, Meghelli, and Alim, *The Global Capha*.

⁵⁹ See for example El-Tayeb *European Others*; Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*; and Durand, ed. *Black, Blanc, Beur*.

⁶⁰ Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

struggles, but also to remind the audience that this circulation (in which Europeans are also implicated) bears directly on questions of belonging in contemporary France.

Though they differ slightly from the 1989 version, Keïta's lyrics in the remake still affirm the larger historical trajectory of slavery and colonization and underscore the labor—both forced and compensated—that black bodies contributed to France. For instance, after opening the song with a discussion of African suffering during slavery and colonization, Salif Keïta turns to the sacrifice many colonized subjects made for France by fighting as *tirailleurs* in the French army: “Lorsque la guerre contre les Allemands est arrivé, nombreux sont les Noirs qui ont combattu et sont morts. Ce n’était pas la guerre de leurs mères, ce n’était pas la guerre de leurs pères, mais ils sont nombreux les Noirs qui sont morts pour cette guerre. Après tout ça, ils veulent qu’on parte d’ici.”⁶² Evoking the irony between the exclusionary policies of the 1990s and the *tirailleurs*' service recalls other works, particularly Rachid Bouchareb's film *Indigènes* (2006) that highlighted the disparities colonized troops suffered both during and after their service to France.⁶³ Most importantly, though, juxtaposing references to slavery and colonization with those to the *tirailleurs*' service underscores how colonial subjects' labor (both forced and compensated) allowed France to prosper as a nation. Though this idea is clearly at the heart of colonial imagery (such as Janniot's famous bas-reliefs on the exterior of the former Porte Dorée Museum for the 1931 *Exposition coloniale*, which depict the colonized contributions of goods and labor to France's Empire),⁶⁴ it is rarely openly acknowledged in France. Beyond reminding the audience of the historical labor contributions (formerly) colonized subjects made to the

⁶² Salif feat. L'Skadrille Keïta, *Nou Pas Bouger* (Paris:Universal, 2007).

⁶³ Rachid Bouchareb, *Indigènes*.

⁶⁴ This space now serves as the site of France's *Cité de l'histoire nationale de l'immigration* (CNHI), opened in 2007.

French Republic, presenting contemporary immigration in this light reframes it as a question of labor, a fact that had been elided with the discursive shift from “travailleurs immigrés” in the 1970s to “étrangers” and later “clandestins.”⁶⁵

In addition to the lyrics’ references to colonized contributions to France, the music video—like that of the original “Nou Pas Bouger”—juxtaposes of archival footage of colonizers being welcomed in Africa with immigrants being expelled from France to underscore the irony of its exclusionary immigration legislation. One of the video’s most striking features is its set design: a large panel of hanging strips stands in the center of a black floor, and bright black lights shine out from what would otherwise be a completely black background. This set, however, is not immediately revealed to the viewer; rather, in the video’s first three shots, the panel of hanging strips, onto which images including the song’s title (“Nou Pas Bouger”), a black man wearing a traditional hat, and a group of Africans saluting and later welcoming colonial authorities are projected takes up the entire screen. After approximately ten seconds, the camera slowly zooms out, as three shadowed figures move toward the central panel. At this point, the bright rear lights come up, revealing the three artists standing in front of the panel. The camera then returns to featuring the hanging strips, which alternates between archival footage of Africans welcoming colonial representatives (Figure 9) and videos of police in riot gear clashing with, detaining (Figure 10), and ultimately deporting black men. By alternating rapidly between these two different historical contexts, the artists suggest that the “welcome” African immigrants receive in France is radically different from the one colonial officials received in Africa. Furthermore, the police’s riot gear—particularly the helmets—parallel the colonial attire, notably

⁶⁵ In 2010 a group proposed a boycott during which immigrants would not work or participate in France’s economy, called the “Journée sans immigrés: 24 heures sans nous.” Though this event had limited success with only a few hundred participants, the group still exists, maintains a website (<http://www.la-journee-sans-immigres.org/>) where it encourages immigrants to make their voices heard. They also continue to organize a “journée sans immigrés” each year, despite low turnout.

the *casque colonial*. By juxtaposing these images, the artists highlight the irony that they point out in their lyrics: though Europeans occupied Africa for centuries and forced African bodies into service of European empires, in the present day, African immigrants are being forcibly removed from Europe.



Figure 9: Archival colonial footage seen on hanging strips in “Nou Pas Bouger” (2007).



Figure 10: Police with handcuffed immigrant in “Nou Pas Bouger” (2007)

Like the 1989 music video, the remake also features a central dancing figure, which draws attention to the site of the black body, playing with prevailing stereotypes to challenge French immigration policy. Unlike the dancer in the 1989 video who was clad in a traditional mask and grass skirt, the 2007 video’s dancer wears modern dance apparel: his torso remains bare, and he wears white athletic style pants. The contrast between his black skin and white pants inverts the uniform the two members of L’Skadrille wear during the majority of the video—white tops and black pants. Furthermore, the fact that his torso remains bare throughout the video serves a similar purpose to the fractured body featured in the 1989 video. As Lydie Moudileno argues, the black torso at once recalls moments when the black body was dominated and used for labor (such as slavery and colonization), and also moments of resistance:

Le torse nu renvoie alors à l’homme laborieux, la force prolétarienne, en particulier chez des auteurs comme Mongo Beti ou Ousmane Sembène. Symbole duel de l’esclavage et

de la violence coloniale mais aussi de la combativité, le torse musclé transpirant, flagellé, puissant, sert à désigner dans nombre de romans réalistes et poèmes à la fois l'exploitation de la force africaine et sa capacité de résistance.⁶⁶

In a song that uses history to question the underpinnings of contemporary immigration and national identity policy, the dancer's bare torso and the way he manipulates it stand as yet another reminder of the labor and historical suffering Africans endured at the hands of Europe. Many of the dancer's moves effortlessly blend a combination of slower, fluid motions and faster, explosive ones, demonstrating his precise body control (Figure 11). Coupled with his bare torso, which highlights his muscles, these movements recall how the black body was studied, classified, and put on display during the many colonial exhibitions and Negro villages, such as the *Exposition coloniale* discussed in chapter 1. In fact, as Pascal Blanchard notes, at human exhibitions "the 'savage' body was staged in such a way that it was eroticized, displayed naked or semi-naked, and made to move in 'ritual dances' in a way which escaped an the canons of Western movement."⁶⁷ The dancer's body and movements, thus, remind the video's viewers of preconceived notions of the black body's strength, flexibility, and its "exotic" movements, and challenge them to acknowledge how these same stereotypes have shaped national identity and immigration discourse in contemporary France.

⁶⁶ Moudileno, *Littératures africaines francophones des années 1980 et 1990*, 56.

⁶⁷ Blanchard et al., "Human Zoos," 20.



Figure 11: Dancing figure’s shadow in front of hanging strips in “Nou Pas Bouger” (2007).

Finally, in addition to calling attention to how French and African history are interconnected, the song—unlike Essomba’s novel or the other two songs I examined earlier in the chapter—point out new identitarian complexities stemming from postcolonial immigration. L’Skadrille’s lyrics, for instance, do not emphasize colonized contributions to France; rather, they posit immigration and occupation as retribution for historical wrongs. For example, they defiantly proclaim: “On ne va pas bouger, comme vous dans mon pays avant 60,”⁶⁸ playing in to French anxieties that formerly colonized subjects would return to “colonize” the *métropole*.⁶⁹ L’Skadrille later evokes another fear regarding immigrant presence in France: that immigrants will not assimilate to French culture. In fact, though they were born in France—the rapper known as 13or (Trésor, alias “La Massue”) was born in Yvelines and his partner, who goes by

⁶⁸ Keïta, *Nou Pas Bouger*.

⁶⁹ This fear was reiterated by prominent politicians, including Valéry Giscard d’Éstaing, who, in an article in 1991 in *Le Figaro*, asked whether the migratory flows were “immigration ou invasion.”

16ar (César, alias “La Lame”) was born in Paris—they assert, “J’suis du Mali, j’suis en France.”⁷⁰ This statement flies in the face of French Republican values, which hold that all citizens be treated equally under the law, and that just as the nation should not recognize distinctions between its citizens, French citizens themselves should not keep allegiances that compete with their French identity.⁷¹ Seen through this lens of assimilation and identitarian history in France, L’Skadrille’s proclamation that they are “en France” but “du Mali” constitutes an affront to French national identity, asserting subversive alternative ways of belonging.

Yet, as the music video’s final scene suggests, these alternative in-between identities need not necessarily be subversive, and, in fact, can be productive in multiethnic France. When the final sequence begins, the camera rests at the side of the panel of hanging strips, and captures Salif Keïta and L’Skadrille, who part the strips and step through them. As the camera pans to the right to follow the artists through the panel, the spectator sees a city wall adorned with brightly painted graffiti instead of the completely black set. Followed by a multicultural group, the artists walk slowly but steadily down the street (Figure 12). In the final shot, the camera pans around in front of the group, but when it reaches the point where it is filming the group head-on, the image begins to fracture and the hanging strips reappear. The camera continues to pan to the right, revealing a bright light projecting the images onto the hanging strips (Figure 13) before the shot

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Of course, questions regarding how France should deal with citizens having multiple allegiances go as far back as the French Revolution, when one potential constituency in particular—the Jews—posed a specific problem to French national identity. Though they were first accorded the rights of citizens following Adrien-Jean-François Duport’s speech made to the newly-formed French National Assembly on September 27, 1791, the law was later amended to clarify that by taking the civic oath, Jews as individuals were renouncing their participation in an autonomous political community within France. This same question of competing allegiances and the potential for assimilation has remained at the heart of how France deals with its immigrant populations. For instance, French housing authorities have often sought to disperse immigrant groups among many different buildings in order to prevent ethnic or national enclaves from forming. If and how individuals can recognize minority ethnic or national origins within the larger French context was also a fundamental question in the polemic surrounding the *Beur* movement in the 1980s.

abruptly goes black. The fact that the artists move through the strips in this final scene stands in stark contrast to earlier moments in the video when the camera engaged in sweeping pan shots, circling around behind the panel of hanging strips and returning to the front, revealing an image of the three musicians standing defiantly (Figure 14). The artists' relative stasis throughout the song—but particularly at these moments after the camera's pan—reinforces the title's defiant declaration (“We Will not Move”); however, ending the song with the artists' even-paced forward march suggests that France is moving towards progress. Furthermore, projecting the image of the music video itself onto the hanging strips signifies the possibility of one day moving beyond the turbulent present moment when, as Keïta notes “people are being deported on a daily basis and [...] immigrants [are] accused of being responsible for everything that's going wrong in society.”⁷² In other words, by acknowledging France's larger historical involvement in Africa and the ways in which it contributed not only to 1980s and 1990s immigration, Keïta's video suggests that one day the reductive binaries that permeated immigration discourse can themselves become part of France's history.

⁷² Patrick Labesse, “Salif Keita, a True Independent,” *RFI Musique* 27 March 2007, http://www.rfimusique.com/musiqueen/articles/087/article_7874.asp, accessed 15 May 2013.



Figure 12: Salif Keita and L'Skadrille walking at end of "Nou Pas Bouger" (2007).



Figure 13: Camera moves to reveal scene from Figure 12 is projected onto hanging strips.



Figure 14: Salif Keita (center) and L'Skadrille (right and left) standing defiantly in front of the panel of hanging strips.

As I have investigated in this chapter, 1980s and 1990s France was characterized by turbulent changes to immigration and national identity legislation whose effect was to reinforce binary divisions in France's population between a presumed autochthonous population and a "foreign" one. Drawn along implicitly racial lines, this division both rested upon and reinforced assumptions of national belonging that were firmly anchored in history, and that excluded migrants (and, as I have suggested, their children and grandchildren) from any possibility of affirming their belonging. Moreover, political discourse increasingly moved away from acknowledging the immigrant's labor contributions to France ("travailleur immigré") to one centered on his or her juridical status, creating a culture in which racial minorities were equated with clandestinity.

The literary and musical works I have examined all question these discriminatory immigration and national identity laws by interrogating the historical myopia without which they

could not exist. Specifically, each work—whether through its water topos such as *Le paradis du nord*, its musical language such as “Nou Pas Bouger,” or its imagery of the black body under surveillance such as “Je suis sans-papiers”—affirms that France’s immigration crisis of the 1980s and 1990s is only one point on a much longer trajectory of exploitation. By evoking the histories of colonization and of the slave trade, the artists I have studied reframe the terms of the immigration debate, asserting their own power “to define what is and what is not a serious object of research and, therefore, of mention.”⁷³ In so doing, they challenge France to recognize its own role in forging the connections that contributed to immigrants’ travel to France. Though these connections may seem obvious⁷⁴ they are also often overlooked, and are therefore essential components to resuscitate when discussing contemporary migratory flows.

Evoking these histories in the context of immigration, however, has a much larger significance that reaches beyond the immediate historical context of 1980s and 1990s France. By resuscitating histories of colonization and the slave trade in conjunction with immigration and national identity discussions, the works I analyze in this chapter anticipate France’s memorial turn in the mid-2000s (illustrated by the inauguration of the CNHI, the *Musée du Quai Branly*, and the passing of the *Loi du 23 février*, among other events). As Pascal Blanchard asserts, recognizing these histories—though difficult—is essential in France’s increasingly multicultural society: “L’enjeu est de taille: soit le *fait colonial* trouvera sa place dans le présent, soit les frustrations deviendront *mythologies* et accentueront les césures de la société française.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 99.

⁷⁴ Achille Mbembe, for instance, reminds us that “before colonization, there was the slave trade [...]. The acceleration in migratory movements toward France is also the direct product of that long history.” (Mbembe, “The Republic and Its Beast: On the Riots in the French *Banlieues*,” 50).

⁷⁵ Blanchard, “Histoire coloniale: La nouvelle guerre des mémoires,” 40.

Ultimately, these works of sub-Saharan African literature and music pluralize notions of national history and memory, put forth the black body, and give voice to those who were legally and discursively marginalized.

More importantly still, by laying the groundwork for this memorial project, works such as *Le paradis du nord*, “Nou Pas Bouger,” and “Je suis sans-papiers,” have now opened up new discussions in which these histories—and their identitarian implications—can be challenged. In fact, more recent Francophone works point out that establishing a teleological relationship between sub-Saharan African immigration, the slave trade, and colonization risks suggesting that these shared historical experiences form the basis for a homogeneous “black identity” in France. Works such as Alain Mabanckou’s *Black Bazar* (2009) and Léonora Miano’s *Blues pour Élise* (2010), which feature protagonists from a range of ethnic and national backgrounds, ages, sexual orientations, and immigration statuses, explore the contours of such a “black identity,” before then questioning not only its existence, but also its constitutive criteria. Though Mabanckou’s and Miano’s works—to which I now turn in chapters 3 and 4, respectively—underscore the highly personal nature of these identitarian questions, they nevertheless show how the central themes developed in this chapter, particularly the role of history and the site of the black body, remain means through which sub-Saharan African immigrant protagonists (and their descendants) negotiate their multiple belongings.

CHAPTER THREE

Selling (out) Racial Identity in the *Black Bazar*: Negotiating Alain Mabanckou's Black France

“But where are you really from?” A seemingly innocuous question, its underlying message is clear for those artists and authors such as Léonora Miano, Alain Mabanckou, Faïza Guène, and rapper Médine, who have all spoken publicly about its implications: that racial and ethnic minorities in France are always from somewhere else, even if they are born in France.¹ Guène, for instance, describes how France’s 2009 national identity debate served as another example “to remind us French Muslims that our national identity is not a given and that for those unable to ask us to ‘go back to our own countries’ (too bad, but that would be France!), the next best step is simply to erase little by little all that distances us from the true Frenchman, beginning with Islam and its distinctive features.”² In his 2012 essay *Le sanglot de l’homme noir*, Alain Mabanckou describes his own experience with these types of interactions: “D’habitude, c’est automatique: quand deux Français—un Blanc et un Noir—se rencontrent, le premier demande inévitablement par les voies détournées les ‘vraies origines’ du second.”³ What these brief vignettes underscore is how discussions of race and ethnicity permeate daily interpersonal interactions, and how this topic is often couched in other terms such as “own countries” and “true origins.”

¹ In a reaction to the banlieue riots, Médine discusses how racial minorities are often positioned as foreigners asking, “but I was born and raised in France. I’ve been a citizen since birth. How much more French can I be?” Médine, “How Much More French Can I Be?” *Time Magazine Online* November 6 2005. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1126720,00.html>, accessed 15 May 2013.

² Faïza Guène, “In Search of Frenchness,” trans. Dominic Thomas, *The Guardian* 28 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/28/france-national-identity-muslim>, accessed 15 May 2013.

³ Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l’homme noir*, 53.

Though these anecdotes highlight how race certainly plays a role in quotidian interactions, France's universalist ideals, holding that no distinction should be made between citizens based on race, ethnicity, or national origin precludes discussions of race at an institutional level, visible in policies such as the fact that collecting ethnic statistics violates French law. For French historian Pap Ndiaye, this discrepancy between France's official rhetoric of colorblindness and racial minorities' visibility creates a paradox: "les minorités visibles ont longtemps été invisibles dans l'espace public français."⁴ Even if discussions of race are not permissible at an institutional level in France, this does not mean that they do not transpire; rather, they are framed in other terms such as "culture" (one thinks, for instance, of Chirac's famous "Discours d'Orléans,"⁵ in which he implied that blacks' and Muslims' culture—unlike that of other European immigrants—precluded their full integration into French society), "immigration," (evident in the way the French expression "population issue de l'immigration" is used to discuss racial and ethnic minorities in France today) and "*communautarisme*."⁶

Since the 1980s and 1990s, political discussions of immigration have invariably sparked others regarding the changing face of France's culture and national identity. Often, these discussions have also implicitly opposed racial and ethnic minorities to supposed homogeneous

⁴ Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 68.

⁵ Chirac gave this speech at a dinner-debate for RPR in Orléans on June 19, 1991, while he was mayor of Paris. In the speech, he argues that though the number of immigrants in France might not have elevated after the war, their origins—"Muslims and Blacks" instead of "Spanish, Polish, and Portuguese"—creates more problems for the nation. In this speech, Chirac characterizes these new immigrants (ie. "Muslims and Blacks") as dependent on welfare, unlike their "French" working neighbors. A video of this portion of his speech can be found at: http://www.ina.fr/video/CAB_91027484/chirac-immigration-video.html. In 1995, the Toulousian rock group Zebda released an album entitled *Le bruit et l'odeur* commenting on France's sociopolitical landscape, and bringing up issues of multiculturalism. Zebda, *Le bruit et l'odeur* (France: Barclay, 1995).

⁶ This term, which would roughly translate to "community identity" or "communitarianism," carries a decidedly negative connotation in French, because it is seen as a threat to national identity's supremacy. Because of the differences in overtone between the original French and possible English translations, I prefer to keep this term in French.

notions of French identity. In fact, in 2009 Éric Besson, minister of France's Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development⁷ launched a national identity debate that asked French citizens to submit (online or in-person) their reflection on "what it means to be French today."⁸ That this debate was meant to be exclusionary—that is, that it sought to delimit France's internal others—is evident the way a document the Ministry published to supplement the debate, entitled "Pour aller plus loin dans le débat," addresses French regional identities and *communautarisme* differently. Though one could argue that affirming French regional identities (such as a Breton identity, or an Alsatian identity) could be considered a type of *communautarisme*, particularly in light of several regions' moves to valorize local culture and languages in ways that might pit them against French national identity's supremacy,⁹ the document separates *communautarisme* from regional identities, asking different questions about each. Whereas it asks "Quels sont les différents types de communautarisme: ethnique, racial, religieux, culturel, social?" and "Les valeurs de l'identité nationale sont-elles compatibles avec le communautarisme?"—lines of questioning that suggest *communautarisme*'s (and, by extension,

⁷ Though the ministry was dissolved in 2011, it was already problematic for the ways it pitted these concepts against each other.

⁸ The website (www.debatidentitenationale.fr) where individuals could submit their contributions is no longer operational. In addition to allowing participants to contribute their own views on national identity, the website also contained many supplementary materials, including video interviews, and a suggested "bibliothèque" for consultation. For an insightful analysis of these supplementary materials—particularly the "bibliothèque" portion, see the chapter entitled "Decolonizing France: National Literatures, *World Literature*, and *World Identities*" in Thomas's *Africa and France*. As I alluded to in this chapter's opening, the announcement of a national identity debate in France sparked heated controversy. For more reactions to this event, see Towards a Real Debate Collective, "France Needs a Real Debate on Identity," trans. Dominic Thomas, *The Guardian*, 14 January 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/14/french-identity-eric-besson>, accessed 15 May 2013; or the longer, original ACHAC response published on its website: Collectif 'Pour un véritable débat,' "Identité nationale et passé colonial. Pour un véritable débat," <http://www.achac.com/?O=204>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁹ The *Académie française*, in fact, used this logic to argue against a 2008 amendment to France's constitution that would protect French regional languages, and even make them share space with standard French on regional street signs and menus. See Peter Allen, "France's L'Académie française Upset by Rule to Recognize Regional Tongues," *The Telegraph* 16 August 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/2569651/Frances-LAcademie-Francaise-upset-by-rule-to-recognise-regional-tongues.html>, accessed 15 May 2013; and Angelique Chrisafis, "Local Language Recognition Angers French Academy," *The Guardian* 16 June 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/17/france>, accessed 15 May 2013.

affirmations of racial, ethnic, or religious identities) incompatibility with French national identity—the questions the document asks about regional identities illustrate how they are seen as a subset of national identities: “L’identité nationale est-elle la somme des identités locales? Qu’est-ce qui différencie l’identité nationale des identités locales?” Both the act of separating *communautarisme* from regional identities, and the types of questions the document asks about each confirm assertions such as those made by Léonora Miano that the term *communautarisme*, posited as a threat to national unity, is selectively applied to racially-, ethnically-, or religiously-affiliated groups.¹⁰

Beyond these discussions about racial and ethnic identities in France that have transpired in the political sphere—albeit in couched terms—racial and ethnic minorities themselves have also sought to negotiate how to affirm such minority identities within a larger system that lacks the vocabulary for addressing such processes. One pertinent example transpired during the 1980s when children born in France to North African immigrants sought to celebrate their unique experiences that differed from both those of their parents and those of their peers not born to immigrant parents by calling themselves the *beurs*. Following the *banlieue* riots in 2005, several associations representing black communities, including CRAN (Conseil représentatif des associations noires) sought to give public space to debates and concerns about black identities, histories, and struggles in France today.¹¹ Although both the *beur* movement and CRAN represent initiatives to define such minority communities from within the communities themselves and to promote their larger visibility in “l’espace public français” (to reprise to

¹⁰ “C’est en grande partie pour eux qu’on a inventé le mot de *communautarisme*, qui ne s’applique ni aux solidarités des Bretons ou des Aveyronnais entre eux, ni aux efforts que mettent les parlementaires français à préserver un entre soi monocolore à l’Assemblée nationale.” (Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 59).

¹¹ On its website (<http://www.le-cran.fr/index.html>), the committee states that its mission is to “bousculer les habitudes et les routines, en posant à la France des questions nouvelles concernant les Noirs de France, les statistiques ethniques, le vote obligatoire, les réparations liées à l’esclavage, etc.”

Ndiaye's terminology), such actions have also opened up serious discussions—both within the communities and beyond—regarding the criteria upon which such communities would be based.

Discussions of blackness and black communities in France in particular have gained increasing social and scholarly currency, evidenced not only by CRAN's creation, but also by the many studies that take "Black France" as their focus.¹² Yet as many scholars have pointed out, the broadest definitions of a black French community necessarily elides significant internal differences that might preclude such a community identity. For instance, as Alain Mabanckou highlights in his essay *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, significant differences including immigration status, education, and regional background might serve to divide a black community more than a supposed black identity unites it: "Qu'a-t-il de commun, en dehors de la couleur de peau, entre un Noir en situation régulière qui étudie à Sciences Po, un sans-papiers d'Afrique de l'Ouest, un réfugié haïtien ou un Antillais de couleur issu d'un département intégré au territoire français? Rien."¹³ Furthermore, as many scholars point out, France has historically served as host to several black communities (including African Americans during the interwar period, colonized soldiers, and students, among others), not all of which sought French citizenship, further complicating notions of black French communities.¹⁴ Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi succinctly discusses this problem of nomenclature:

Who then is this France noire? They are the Blacks both from and in France: Black French, French Blacks, Blacks and French, Franco-Africans, the Franco-African-Americans. One could add Franco-Caribbean, a label that would be in principle

¹² See Blanchard, et al., *La France noire*; Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris*; Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall, eds., *Black France/France noire*; Ndiaye, *La condition noire*; Thomas, *Black France*; and Thomas, *Africa and France*.

¹³ Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, 47.

¹⁴ Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

tautological since Antillians are officially French. [...] The appellation seems transparent, but in reality is diverse and complex: multinational, multicultural, transcontinental, and even multicolor.¹⁵

To reconcile these complicated processes of individual and collective positionality and identities, other scholars have proposed instead that those individuals who have the experience of being treated as black in France (and of developing responses to this fact) constitute “Black France.”¹⁶ What is at the heart of these discussions of potential pitfalls of defining a black community in France—that is, the risk of being so globalizing as to be applied to a group whose members are so diverse that they have little common ground or, conversely, the risk of being so proscriptive as to divide groups who share common concerns—is that this community (however defined) might share common obstacles and benefit from representation within larger French society.

Such complex questions (Who is “Black France”? How can one assert a racial identity in a nation that ascribes to colorblind universalist values? What histories shape “Black France”? What identities and positionalities both unite and divide such community identifications?) are at the heart of Alain Mabanckou’s *Black Bazar*. Set primarily in Jip’s, an Afrocuban bar in Paris’s 1st *arrondissement*, the novel tells the story of a Congolese immigrant known among his friends as Fessologue. At the start of the novel Fessologue’s girlfriend known as Couleur d’Origine has just left him to travel to the Republic of the Congo with another man (L’Hybride), taking her daughter (Henriette)—who might also be Fessologue’s daughter—with her. In order to process

¹⁵ Mudimbe-Boyi, “Black France,” 21.

¹⁶ For instance, though Pap Ndiaye prefers the term “condition,” to “community,” or “identity” he nevertheless describes how this social position of being treated as black serves as a common experience uniting individuals: “il désigne une *situation* sociale [...] d’une minorité, c’est-à-dire d’un groupe de personnes ayant en partage, *nolens volens*, l’expérience sociale d’être généralement considérées comme noires. La condition noire est donc la description dans la durée de cette expérience sociale minoritaire.” (Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 29). Mabanckou, similarly, describes how a black community identity—if one exists—should stem from “l’expérience vécue sur le sol français, avec les Français.” (Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l’homme noir*, 19).

this trauma, Fessologue begins writing a novel, also entitled *Black Bazar*, based on the journals in which he has recorded his interactions with his friends at Jip's. Unlike earlier *migritude* works, which tended to depict the protagonist's (or a small immigrant population's) physical, psychological, and economic marginalization with respect to both the larger French society within which they were living, and their "home" culture¹⁷ *Black Bazar* transpires almost exclusively within a black community in Paris, staging very few interactions between the protagonists and larger "white" French society. Furthermore, the prominent symbols of immigrants' and minorities' surveillance such as French forces of order—particularly police officers—prevalent in earlier works such as Mabanckou's *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (1998) or J. R. Essomba's *Le paradis du nord* (1996) are conspicuously absent in *Black Bazar*.

However, despite the predominance of black-black (as opposed to black-white) interactions in *Black Bazar*, many of the novel's interpersonal exchanges still center around questions of racial identity formation. Not only do the protagonists discuss what it means to be black in France, but they also critique other protagonists' perspectives and performances of blackness. Beyond these individual perspectives, protagonists' discussions often turn to the wider cultural and political contexts (literature, music, films, political discourse, etc.) in which racial identity formation transpires. In my analysis of the novel, I focus on the intersection between the individual expressions of racial identities and the larger marketplaces in which they are negotiated. I show how the novel erects parallels between the potential pitfalls to individual protagonists' strategies of performing blackness (including essentialism, commodification, and racial authenticity) and those that permeate larger cultural marketplaces in which black cultural

¹⁷ In fact, this is precisely how Chevrier defines *migritude* literature—as works that highlight the protagonist's distanciation both from his/her "home" culture, and his/her marginalization within the "host" culture. Chevrier, "Afrique(s)-sur-Seine," 99.

works circulate. In addition to highlighting these parallels, however, *Black Bazar*'s structure and references to worldwide cultural works also destabilize the ways in which larger cultural marketplaces reproduce these discourses.

My analysis of *Black Bazar* is divided into three main sections, and, because the novel itself calls attention to the larger cultural context in which such a work is produced, I also draw on African fashion practices and popular music—both diegetic and extra-diegetic to the novel. In my first section, entitled “Making Blackness (In)Visible,” I contrast the strategies put forth by two of the novel’s protagonists: Yves L’Ivoirien and Hippocrate. Both protagonists’ strategies are caricatural: whereas Yves L’Ivoirien proposes *sexual métissage* with white, French women as a means to force France to recognize colonial and postcolonial wrongs, Hippocrate (Fessologue’s Martinican neighbor) articulates a desire to no longer be considered black, and acts in racist and xenophobic ways towards other black protagonists. Despite their significant differences, each strategy is ultimately flawed in its inability to move beyond the oppositional dialectic that frames it. Next, in my second section, entitled “Self-Spectacularization: *La sape* and Ivorian *Coupé-décalé*,” I turn to the main protagonist, Fessologue, who is an avid practitioner of the Congolese sartorial phenomenon known as *La sape* (an acronym for *La Société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes*). Like other black dandy movements, *La sape* allows Fessologue not only to use opulent fashion to challenge prevailing roles black bodies in worldwide economies, but also to spectacularize himself in an act that recalls—but simultaneously reverses—how (formerly) colonized subjects were displayed at events such as “human zoos” discussed in chapter 1. As I show in putting *sape* into dialogue with Ivorian *Coupé-décalé* popular music, however, this strategy, too, has two potential pitfalls: first, the these movements’ success depends on culturally competent audiences, and second, they risk

participating in the commodification of identities, thereby perpetuating practitioners' dependence on larger marketplaces in which these identities circulate. In my final section, entitled "Refashioning Literary Blackness," I trace how these same concerns examined in the first two sections—oppositonality, essentialism, commodification, and authenticity—also bear upon how blackness is fashioned in larger cultural marketplaces. Other protagonists' reactions to Fessologue's transition from *sapeur* to author raise questions that parallel those asked about Francophone and African literary production such as who can write, about what, and how. In addition to highlighting how the same discourses about race that permeate interpersonal interactions are reproduced within larger structures, however, the novel's structure, which I term "literary *sape*" also subverts these processes.

Making Blackness (In)Visible

Most of *Black Bazar*'s protagonists experience Ndiaye's "condition noire," that is, the condition of being treated as black in France; however each protagonist reacts differently to his "Lived Experience of the Black Man" (to reference Fanon's chapter from *Black Skin, White Masks*), calling into question whether this criterion forms the basis for a collective identity. Reading how two protagonists in particular—an Ivorian known as Yves l'Ivoirien and a Martinican named Hippocrate—negotiate their black identities reveals the potential limitations of seeking recognition as black individuals (or a black community) in France. Both Yves and Hippocrate have an acute awareness of being seen as black; however, their reactions to this positionality diametrically oppose each other: whereas Yves promotes actively drawing the white gaze and returning the violence of colonization through sexual *métissage*, Hippocrate attempts to deny the stereotypes applied to him by strategically distancing himself from black African

populations and by aligning himself with conservative French cultural and historical views. Both perspectives, however, point to several potential limits inherent in seeking recognition, including essentialism and oppositionality.

For Yves, black individuals' invisibility as economic agents in France is symptomatic of colonial history's lack of recognition in France:

Puisqu'on ne veut pas savoir qu'on existe dans ce pays, puisqu'on fait semblant de ne pas nous voir, puisqu'on nous emploie pour vider les poubelles, eh bien [...] plus nous sortons avec les Françaises, plus nous contribuons à laisser nos traces dans ce pays afin de dire à nos anciens colons que nous sommes toujours là, qu'ils sont contraints de composer avec nous, que le monde de demain sera bourré de nègres à chaque carrefour, des nègres qui seront des Français comme eux qu'ils le veuillent ou non, que s'ils ne nous remboursent pas dare-dare les dommages et intérêts que nous réclamons, eh bien nous allons carrément bâtardiser la Gaule par tous les moyens nécessaires.¹⁸ (102-103, my emphasis)

Yves's reference to racial minorities' role as trash collectors recalls Chéri Samba's 1998 painting *Paris est propre*, which depicts a nighttime scene of Paris. In the foreground three black sanitation workers pick up after the dogs of two white individuals, who seem oblivious to the men's work, while the Eiffel Tower looms in the background.¹⁹ The painting's caption "Paris est propre / Grâce à nous les immigrés qui n'aimons pas voir les urines et les crottes des chiens / Sans nous, cette ville serait peut-être la scorie de crottes," emphasizes how these economic (and

¹⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all parenthetical references in this chapter come from Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazar* (Paris: Seuil, 2009).

¹⁹ Produced in 1998, the painting now hangs in France's *Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration* (<http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/musee/collections/paris-est-propre-de-cheri-samba>).

sanitary) contributions, so central to France's image of itself as a civilization, receive no recognition.

Yves's notion of a racial community at the heart of this recognition, however, is defined by a shared African diasporic history that goes beyond the "condition noire" (or the shared experience of being treated as black in France). Defining France's black community in this way recalls how the 1980s and 1990s authors and artists I discussed in chapter 2 put the *sans-papiers*' struggles into dialogue with larger historical moments of colonization and the slave trade. However, equating such disparate moments of African diasporic histories carries significant risks; for instance, Michelle Wright notes that "while an Afro-German will no doubt find the Middle Passage a significant event, it is not what brought him or her into Germany."²⁰ In *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, Mabanckou, too, cautions against evoking such globalizing visions of history doing so has the potential to create a "passé mythique" that glosses over differences affecting black populations in France.²¹ Furthermore, Yves's reference to reparations in the above citation echoes calls by groups such as CRAN to seek reparations for these events. Yves's strategy of tying black individuals' visibility in France to that of colonial and African diasporic history also risks permanently associating the black body in France with the role of the historical victim.

At the same time as Yves promotes sexual *métissage* as a means of gaining recognition in France, this strategy also stands to perpetuate many of the dialectics that Yves seeks to subvert

²⁰ Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

²¹ Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, 17. Mabanckou's articulation of the black community's "sanglot" not only plays on Pascal Bruckner's *Le sanglot de l'homme blanc* (1983), but it also recalls the "dolorisme" that Albert Memmi suggests stalling African-Americans' progress: "Le dolorisme est une tendance naturelle à exagérer ses douleurs et à les imputer à autrui. [...] Comme les décolonisés, tant que les Noirs ne se seront pas débarrassés de ce dolorisme, de ces pseudo-explications, qui sont des alibis, ils ne pourront pas analyser correctement leur condition et agir en conséquence." Memmi, Albert, *Portrait du décolonisé arabo-musulman et de quelques autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 34-35.

because it presumes that the resulting *métis* individuals will actively affirm their blackness in prescribed ways. Yves's schema initially seems positioned to challenge latent associations between race and nation—for him, the preexisting dialectic posits the white individual as a French citizen, and the black individual as a foreigner. The resulting *métis*, thus, which represents the synthesis, would be both a French citizen, and not (completely) white. Over time, this way in which the *métis* challenges associations between Frenchness and whiteness would also dissolve the inverse association between blackness and foreignness. However, Yves's logic depends on mixed-race individuals performing their blackness in precise ways, a role that another of the novel's protagonists, known as Roger le Franco-Ivoirien, (who, as his name implies, is *métis*) refuses to embody. Roger's unwillingness to conform to Yves's narrow understanding of a black identity exasperates Yves:

Ce Nègro-Blanc commence à m'énerver! [...] Pendant qu'on revendique nos droits, les Nègro-Blancs nous vendent aux enchères comme à l'époque de l'esclavage. Ce type ne comprendra jamais notre lutte parce que lui c'est un vendu comme tous les autres métis. Quand le système est contre les Noirs il se dit blanc, et quand les Blancs lui rappellent qu'un métis n'est qu'un nègre comme un autre il revient au milieu des nègres! [...] Moi je veux qu'il soit ivoirien vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre, sept jours sur sept [...]! Vendu! Complice des esclavagistes! (104-105)

The logic that undergirds Yves's complaints about Roger has two consequences: first, his preference that Roger "be Ivorian" all the time denies the fact that identities are profoundly contextual. In fact, Yves seems to recognize this fact when he accuses Roger of only returning to the black identity when white groups remind him that in comparison to them, he is black. Furthermore, Yves's phrasing that he would like Roger to "be Ivorian" all of the time not only

reveals a latent association between nationality (Ivorian) and race (black), but it also highlights how for Yves, belonging to a particular identity—in this case, racial—requires performing legitimized forms of blackness.

Additionally, Yves's repeated use of the word "vendu"—or, "sellout"—in reference to Roger's performance of his black identity reinforces how Yves's vision for mixed-race individuals is essentializing. As Randall Kennedy posits in his book *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal*, the racial sellout represents the enemy from within: "He is worse than an enemy. An enemy is socially distant. [...] The sellout is a person who is trusted because of his perceived membership in a given group—trusted until he shows his 'true colors,' by which time he has often done harm to those who viewed him as a kinsman or fellow citizen."²² Yves's accusations that Roger is selling out his community, however, reveals his underlying assumptions that by not actively advancing the black community's cause in France (without, of course, interrogating further what would constitute this community), Roger—and, by extension, all racially-mixed individuals—are actively detracting from a supposed black cause. Not only does this logic that mixed race individuals must perform their "minority" identity all the time come dangerously close to the logic of the American one-drop rule, which held that any individual having even the tiniest fraction of African ancestry could not be considered white (of course, here the logic is reversed: any individual with even one drop of black blood must advance the cause of black individuals in France), but it also uncritically reproduces the same dialectic between "black" and "white" that Yves hopes to ultimately subvert.

²² Randall Kennedy, *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 5.

In fact, Yves's focus on how only individuals of mixed races can destabilize notions of French national identity is problematic for two additional reasons, revealed when Yves sees Fessologue's daughter, Henriette, for the first time. He lectures Fessologue, proclaiming,

C'est un métis qu'il fallait avoir! Tu n'as rien compris à ce pays alors que je me crève à répéter urbi et orbi que le problème le plus urgent pour nous autres de la négrerie c'est d'arracher ici et maintenant l'indemnisation pour ce qu'on nous a fait subir pendant la colonisation. [...] Ce bébé il ne compte pas à mes yeux, il nous fait régresser de cent ans. Quel destin il aura *dans une Gaule qui va le traiter d'immigré* [...]? (102-103).

First, by maintaining that only racially mixed individuals can challenge latently racialized notions of French national identity, Yves overlooks the fact that Henriette—whose mother is French (and black), and father is African²³—while not of mixed race, is a French citizen by the law of double *jus soli*, and can therefore challenge the latent association between French national identity and whiteness.²⁴ Yves's rejection of Henriette, thus, calls into question his larger project. Whereas he seemed to be in favor of *métissage* because it has the potential to challenge the latent opposition between “blackness” and “Frenchness,” he ultimately reproduces the same mentality whereby blackness is equated with non-Frenchness with respect to Henriette.

For Fessologue, Yves's reaction to Henriette functions as a violence that reproduces the same essentializing discourses associated with Europe's colonial project. After experiencing

²³ In the novel, Henriette's paternity is uncertain. Couleur d'Origine (Henriette's mother) tells Fessologue that he is the father, and Fessologue fulfills paternal duties such as buying clothing and diapers for the infant and even sending child support to Couleur d'Origine in the Congo after she decides to travel there with Lucien Mitori (aka. l'Hybride), taking Henriette with them. The close relationship between Couleur d'Origine and l'Hybride, as well as later revelations that l'Hybride previously served a prison sentence for sleeping with Couleur d'Origine while she was still a minor, cast doubt on Fessologue's paternity and suggest that l'Hybride might instead be the father.

²⁴ In the 1990s, France adopted a series of legislative changes affecting immigration and citizenship. Whereas children born in France no longer receive automatic citizenship regardless of their parents' origins (*jus soli*), children born in France to at least one parent who was also born in France, as Couleur d'Origine was, do receive automatic citizenship based on the law of double *jus soli*.

Yves's reaction to Henriette, Fessologue decides to protect his child from such views in the future: "Je ne suis plus revenu au Jip's avec Henriette. Quand on me demandait de la ramener, je répondais que mon bébé n'était pas un spécimen pour une exposition coloniale..." (106). Fessologue's reference to the *Exposition coloniale* here recalls the way in which exhibitions, worlds' fairs, and even museums erected literal boundaries between the colonized performer on display and the French gazing public, thereby affirming the right and responsibility of the latter to gaze on the former. Yet, in this interaction between Yves and Henriette, the European gazing public is conspicuously absent. This new paradigm whereby the black subject (Henriette) is subjected to a black gaze reveals how expectations from within the supposed black community that black individuals assert their blackness in particular ways are just as dangerous as stereotypes stemming from colonial ideologies.

In the end, Yves's strategies for gaining recognition in France remain reactionary gestures that are ultimately unable to escape the very logic that he seeks to combat. Perhaps worse still, they also effectively rest upon notions that there exist acceptable ways to perform blackness. Finally, Yves's means of gaining recognition in France is predicated upon rigid racially- and historically-determined notions of what constitutes a black community in France—that is, those having black skin and whose ancestors suffered colonization and the slave trade, regardless the individuals' personal history (ie. whether they themselves experienced colonization) or their own feelings of the pertinence of racial identities in their own lives. Hippocrate, to whom I now turn, opposes most of Yves's perspectives: though he has an acute awareness of being seen as black, he attempts to oppose this framework by aligning himself with French political discourse, by racializing others, and by distancing from totalizing expressions of history that would put him into a community with black Africa.

Hippocrate, like Yves, forcefully articulates his views on how racialized subjects should seek recognition in France; however, the novel does not reveal that he is black for ninety-four pages, calling into question the usefulness of racial communities. Hippocrate's xenophobic and racist outbursts accusing other black characters such as Fessologue of relying on government aid, participating in illicit activities, and only seeking retribution for past wrongs such as colonization and the slave trade recall famous speeches such as Jacques Chirac's "Discours d'Orléans." In fact, it is not until the moment when Fessologue thinks, "Espèce de Martinicais! Retourne chez toi!" (41), that the reader discovers that Hippocrate is Martinican, and not until over fifty pages later that Fessologue's soon-to-be ex-girlfriend confirms that Hippocrate is black, proclaiming that he belongs to a category of blacks "qui ne savent pas qu'ils sont noirs. C'est leur droit..." (94). This assessment of Hippocrate's perspective on his own identity is certainly in line with French universalist principles, whereby racial identities are not officially recognized by the state.

Though examples of Hippocrate's racist and xenophobic attitudes abound throughout the entirety of *Black Bazar* one ten-page conversation between Hippocrate and Fessologue in a café near the end of the novel lays bare how Hippocrate struggles to reconcile his own positionality with his racial identity.²⁵ Despite *Couleur d'Origine's* assertion above that Hippocrate does not know that he is black, Hippocrate acknowledges an acute awareness of being seen as black, a positionality that in his eyes stands to threaten his French cultural identity. In fact, despite his many attempts to affirm his Frenchness in terms of geographical, cultural, and historical experiences, Hippocrate laments that he is still always still considered black: "je ne veux plus être taxé de Noir, moi" (226). For him, this violent gaze carries assumptions about other areas of

²⁵ Much of this conversation was originally published as a short story entitled "Propos coupé-décalés d'un nègre presque ordinaire." Although the short story's title announces a single, unified narrator, the citations that were incorporated into the novel become divided among three voices: those of Roger le Franco-Ivoirien, Fessologue, and Hippocrate. See Alain Mabanckou, "Propos coupés-décalés d'un nègre presque ordinaire," *Télérama* 2958 (23-29 September 2006).

his life: “Je ne veux plus qu’on raconte des trucs du genre les Noirs ils sont naturellement forts, beaux, sportifs, endurants, qu’ils vieillissent mieux que les Blancs, etc.” (226).

Yet despite Hippocrate’s wish to be treated as French, his actions towards other characters could be described as perpetuating the same gaze that he seeks to avoid. For instance, during this conversation with Fessologue, Hippocrate sharply criticizes the server who has brought Hippocrate his typical drink: a cognac without ice. Immediately, Hippocrate demands to know why there was no ice in his drink, and when the server responds that that is how Hippocrate normally orders his drink, Hippocrate retorts, “Eh, bien aujourd’hui je veux des glaçons,” before then remarking to Fessologue, “Vous avez vu ce serveur? Lui je vais le virer, je vous jure. Il a des cheveux un peu frisés, ça ne m’étonnerait pas qu’il ait du sang nègre quelque part! Regardez-le bien, est-ce que c’est normal qu’on embauche des gens pareils, hein?” (223). This act is just one instance that illustrates Brezault’s assertion that Hippocrate “racialise l’Autre pour se conforter dans sa place de citoyen français, en discréditant celui qui est plus noir que lui.”²⁶ Racializing others allows Hippocrate align himself with the powerful gazing position of the former colonizer, and affords him the agency he feels denied by his black positionality.

And yet, even though he attempts to derive his subjectivity from his own ability to gaze upon others, Hippocrate still remains paradoxically dependent on the racializing gaze that he would ultimately like to combat. This position recalls Fanon’s discussion of Jean Veneuse—the protagonist of René Maran’s *Un homme pareil aux autres* (1947) who seeks out recognition in the eyes of the white woman: “What a struggle to free himself of a purely subjective conflict. I am a white man, I was born in Europe, all my friends are white. [...] I think in French, France is my religion. I am a European, do you understand? I am not a Negro, and in order to prove it to

²⁶ Éloïse Brezault, “Du malaise de la ‘condition noire’ dans la société française: Une identité composite en mal d’intégration dans quelques romans africains contemporains,” *Nouvelles études francophones* 26, no. 2 (2011): 150.

you, I as a public employee am going to show the genuine Negroes the differences that separate me from them.”²⁷ Unlike Jean Veneuse, though, Hippocrate does not seek legitimization in the eyes of white women; rather, he seeks such recognition from Fessologue, downplaying—without quite denying—his own blackness to align himself with cultural, historical, and geographical notions of Frenchness. Not only does he often remind Fessologue that he was born in France (Martinique), but he actively proclaims his love for what he sees as French culture: “Moi j’aime la France, j’adore les femmes blanches et les pieds de cochon,” (222). For Hippocrate, thus, his cultural affirmation of his Frenchness, serves to give primacy to his national and cultural identities over his racial positionality.

Looking more closely at Hippocrate’s insistence on his cultural assimilation also reveals the role historical recognition of black communities plays for him; whereas Yves sees making historical events such as colonization and the slave trade visible (through reparations as well as sexual *métissage*) as a way to gain rights for blacks in France, Hippocrate sees such movements as a threat to the affirmation of his French culture. In fact, aligning himself with French colonial history is an integral part of Hippocrate’s identity formation because, in his opinion, the slave trade and colonization were the means through which Hippocrate became French. Accordingly, his perspective on such historical moments repeats *mission civilisatrice* propaganda, depicting colonization in sub-Saharan Africa in a positive light: “Je trouve que les petits esprits exagèrent trop l’injustice que l’on fait aux Africains alors que l’homme en Afrique noire vit dans un état de barbarie et de sauvagerie qui l’empêche encore de faire partie intégrante de la civilisation” (222). This discourse aligns Hippocrate’s views with those that justified Europe’s colonial project, particularly the way in which it located Africa and Africans outside of both history and

²⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 70.

civilization. For Hippocrate, thus, not only do gestures from within the black community to seek reparations for these historical events risk creating the impression of a homogeneous black community in France (with which Hippocrate would also be associated), but it also risks deconstructing Hippocrate's vision of the French civilization to which he belongs.

Hippocrate's views on colonial history, while caricatural, also echo larger debates regarding how to commemorate France's colonial past that continue to make headlines in France. In the novel, he alludes positively to political acts such as the controversial *Loi du 23 février* that mandated how colonial history must be taught: "Heureusement qu'on a voté une loi géniale qui valorise la colonisation. Il ne fallait pas attendre un tel constat venant des Nègres, ces ingrats! Ils sont tellement noirs qu'ils noircissent tout [...] Y a eu des groupuscules de nègres qui demandaient même réparation partout jusqu'au souiller la place de la Bastille là où notre peuple s'est battu pour garder sa dignité," (225-226). Hippocrate's reference to "groupuscules" demanding reparations reflects accusations that seeking to make black history in France more visible amounts to historical *communautarisme*. Furthermore, Hippocrate's reference to the Bastille, and his association between that monument and the French Revolution also glosses larger paradoxes such as how the same "dignité" born of the Revolution and codified in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was not extended to France's colonized peoples.

In the end, Yves's and Hippocrate's divergent perspectives regarding how blackness can and should be recognized in France highlight some of the potential limits of both racial identities and community identities in France. What emerges from these two proposed strategies for making blackness visible—or invisible—in France is that racial identities are negotiated within a variety of dialectics. Whereas Yves's strategy is undoubtedly more community-oriented than Hippocrate's, the latter still has the impression that his positionality as black means that he must

constantly affirm his distinction from other black individuals. In each situation, blackness becomes an identity that requires constant negotiation between the individual and the collective. Furthermore, each strategy's limitations—particularly essentialisms—call into question the possibility of developing subjectivities within a purely oppositional framework. Yves's strategy—sexual *métissage*—might increase the black French population and ultimately make blackness visible in France, but it is also predicated upon essentialist expectations that individuals perform their blackness in fixed ways. Similarly, Hippocrate alternatively racializes others, highlights the internal divisions that would preclude a true black community identity, and aligns himself with French history and culture—strategies that, in the end, give strength to the very categorizations to which he does not want to be subjected.

In the third section, “Fashioning literary blackness,” I continue these lines of inquiry, turning my attention to how these same dialectics permeate larger discussions of African literary and musical works. In fact, these types of questions are evident in the prominent discussions regarding taxonomies applied to black artists who produce work in French: “Francophone” authors, “immigrant” authors, “postcolonial” authors, “sellouts,” or “engaged” authors, categories that are highly dependent on biographical information about the authors. Before investigating these parallels, however, I would first like to turn to an alternative way of negotiating blackness found within the text: Fessologue, the narrator's Congolese *sape* fashion practices. Though Fessologue's sartorial choices are highly individual and performative, (rather than Yves's and Hippocrate's strategies, which they seek to impose on others), they are also dependent on larger marketplaces that perpetuate images of blackness. Comparing *la sape* to a recent Ivorian popular music movement known as *Coupé-décalé* that, unlike other African popular music movements, originated within the diaspora before being exported to Africa, both

raises larger questions regarding commodification of racial identities, and also highlights how French and African history as well as images of the black body circulate within a diasporic space.

Self-Spectacularization: *La sape* and *Ivorian Coupé-décalé*

At the beginning of the novel, fashion, opulence, and participating in the cult of luxury define Fessologue's self-image and the way he interacts with others. Fessologue's name—which he earned thanks to his ability to read women's personalities through their hindquarters, or their "Face B" in the novel—testifies to the primacy of the site of the body for him. The suffix "–ologist" recalls western disciplines of study, particularly those developed in conjunction with Europe's colonial projects such as ethnography, anthropology, and even phrenology. In the novel, however, rather than being the object of study, Fessologue is the quasi-ethnographer. By repositioning himself as a decoder of others' bodies, Fessologue subverts the gazing dialectic established at nineteenth- and twentieth-century Exhibitions (and their associated human zoos) and cultural works, which put the colonized subject on display for a European audience.

Reading others' bodies not only affirms his ability—unlike Nénufar, whom I discussed in chapter 1—to critically gaze on himself, but it also allows him to impose his own analytical framework on others. For instance, Fessologue boldly proclaims, "dis-moi comment tu noues ta cravate, je te dirai qui tu es, voire qui tu hantes" (44) boasting that he can read TV debate participants' personalities based solely on their necktie. He then proceeds to enumerate his analyses, including how "j'ai constaté que les timides ont des nœuds bien serrés et dans notre milieu nous les appelons les suicidés" (44) or "les égoïstes, [...], autrement dit les fourmis, eux ils ne changent pas de nœud jusqu'à l'usure de la cravate." (45) In providing translations such as

how “les timides” become “les suicidés” and “les égoïstes” are known as “fourmis,” Fessologue rereads these bodies in terms of his own cultural milieu. This gesture recalls how colonial exhibitions or museums organized colonized subjects and artifacts into frameworks reinforcing emergent scientific narratives about human civilization’s progression from savage to civilized states by, for instance, labeling certain ethnicities as the missing link between primates and human beings.²⁸

In addition to affirming his role as gazer, however, Fessologue also uses his own fashion practices to actively draw the gaze, and to subvert associations between the black body and work. Throughout the novel, he criticizes stereotypical depictions of Africans promoted through how European cultural works such as Hergé’s famous comic book *Tintin au Congo*; for instance, he asks Couleur d’Origine, “est-ce que moi je ressemble aux nègres qu’on voit dans les aventures de *Tintin au Congo*? Ces grosses lèvres roses qu’on nous collait dans ces aventures-là c’étaient pas les vraies lèvres des Congolais même si à l’époque certains livres d’histoire rapportaient qu’on n’avait pas tout à fait achevé notre mutation du singe vers l’homme” (53). To combat these stereotypes advanced in European cultural works, he participates in a Congolese fashion movement known as *La sape*, which reached its height among urban, Congolese youth in the 1970s, but has roots extending back into fashion practices of the 1930s.²⁹

For Fessologue—as for other *sapeurs*—not only are the clothes’ type, color, pattern, and fit important, but also their authenticity; in the Congo, *sapeurs* could only truly find success if

²⁸ For several examples, see the essays in Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos*.

²⁹ Martin addresses how colonized servants, for instance, often untucked their shirts as an action. See Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Thomas, too, has shown how Congolese men used sartorial choices to assert their own agency both under colonial rule and during Mobutu’s dictatorship in the 1970s. Thomas, *Black France*, 64, 161.

they were able to travel to France to acquire a wardrobe, known as a *gamme*.³⁰ Furthermore, their *gamme* had to be composed of recognizable *griffes*, or labels, that one showed off conspicuously on one's return to the Congo.³¹ Yet *la sape* should not be understood solely as a means to cover up reality, but rather, as self-spectacularization that undermines traditional ways in which clothes reflect one's societal standing. For Fessologue, one of the primary goals of his opulent fashion is to make himself seen; in fact, one day when he is traveling to an acquaintance's apartment, he decides to walk instead of taking a taxi: "j'aurais pu prendre un taxi, mais pourquoi me priver des regards des passants?" (47). Here, Fessologue's self-spectacularization allows him to challenge the image of how Africans are viewed in France, and, as Johnathan Friedman points out regarding *la sape* more generally, it also allows him to challenge some of the dominant narratives about the intersection between work, class, and appearance: "The dangerous success of [the *sapeurs*'] project consists in the demonstration that one can reach the 'top' without passing through the accepted channels of education and 'work'. This is the great crime against the identity of prestige and power."³² In fact, in France, the *sapeur* population constantly affirmed its distinction from those they termed the "paysans," or economic migrants willing to occupy any menial job.³³

³⁰ Justin-Daniel Gandoulou, *Au cœur de la sape: Mœurs et aventures des Congolais à Paris* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 63; Jonathan Friedman, "The Political Economy of Elegance: An African Cult of Beauty," in *Consumption and Identity*, ed. Jonathan Friedman (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 179.

³¹ In the *sape* milieu, the return trip is known as a "*descente*." Mabanckou's 1999 novel *Bleu-blanc-rouge* centers around the life of a hopeful *sapeur* known as Massala-Massala. The novel begins with his life in the Congo, where he witnesses the *descente* of a successful *sapeur*, Moki. Once Massala-Massala manages to travel to France, he spends his time preparing for his own *descente*. For more on preparations for *descentes*, see Friedman, "The Political Economy of Elegance," 180; Gandoulou, *Au cœur de la sape*, 63.

³² Friedman, "The Political Economy of Elegance," 184.

³³ "*La sape* allows the *sapeur* to define the boundaries that separate him from the Other, but also serves as a defined social territory which distinguishes the *sapeurs* from the rest of society." Ch. Didier Gondola, "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth," *African Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (1999): 23. In this way *sape* can be placed in dialogue with a larger history of transnational black dandy movements, which sought to dissociate black bodies from images of labor. For instance, the 16th and 17th century Cuban *negros curros* used Andalusian-

La sape quickly spread to the musical realm, where its association with Congolese *soukous* music and later Ivorian *Coupé-décalé* music have led critics to call into question how the music (and its associated videos) perpetuate Francocentric imagery. *La sape* is often associated with *soukous*, a Congolese popular musical genre, because many of its main musicians including Papa Wemba (and his band Viva la Musica), Stervos Niarcos, and Koffi Olomide not only adopted such practices themselves, but also promoted them in their songs' lyrics and musical performances.³⁴ More recently, however, this same cult of opulence formed the basis for an Ivorian music movement that, unlike most African popular music genres, did not begin in Africa, nor were its artists musically trained. Instead, as the artists and producer David Monsoh affirm, it began as a group of friends known as the "Jet Set," who met every Sunday in Parisian clubs of the African milieu such as the Atlantis.³⁵ Because the future musicians'

style dress to distinguish themselves from the increasing slave population brought to the island (to the surprise and sometimes ridicule of white Cubans). Very few studies have been conducted on the *negros curros* population; the most complete is Fernando Ortiz, *Los Negros Curros* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1995). While this study sheds significant light on a population that played a significant role in Afrocuban society, certain descriptions, such as how "Aun los vestidos que podían recordar el África, se referían marcadamente a pueblos de la costa, ya de viejo en contacto con los europeos" (51) ["Even the clothing items that could have recalled Africa were drawn markedly from the coastal peoples, who had already been in contact with Europe for a long time"] reveal Ortiz's expectation that black individuals assert their connection to Africa. Though the *curros* had disappeared by the twentieth century, as Ned Sublette notes, elements of their style were reprised in theatre and music: "A common stock character in zarzuelas and sainetes was the negra curra, or, in the commonly applied phrase, a *mujer de rumba* (woman of the street), ergo: a *rumba del manglar* (from the mangrove, where the *negros curros* lived), or a *rumbera*. This negra curra character was often a principal [feature] in the spectacle's finale, which might be a guaracha or a rumba." Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004), 238-39. As Monica Miller shows in her book *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, nineteenth- and twentieth-century slaves in the United States used processes of mending and maintaining their clothes as opportunities to add their own flourishes, such as adding color through dyes, buttons, or ribbons. Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 91.

³⁴ For insightful analyses of *soukous*, see Bob White, "Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms." *Cahiers d'études africaines* 168, no. 4 (2002): 663-86; Bob White, "Soukouss or Sell-Out? Congolese Popular Dance Music as Cultural Commodity," in *Commodities and Globalization: Anthropological Perspectives*, Angelique Haugerud, Margaret Priscilla Stone, and Peter D. Little, eds., (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); and Winders, *Paris Africain*, 55.

³⁵ Dominic Kohlhagen, "Frime, escroquerie et cosmopolitisme: Le succès du 'Coupé-décalé' en Afrique et ailleurs," *Politique africaine*, no. 100 (2005): 93.

ostentatious lifestyle had garnered them significant attention within the African diasporic population in Paris, DJs who worked the clubs often called them out to the dance floor to sing their praises, a practice known as an *atalaku*.³⁶ Much like the Congolese *sapeurs*, the Jet Setteurs performed modified *dances des griffes*,³⁷ incorporating moves that allowed them to show off their opulent fashion—including accessories such as designer socks, belts, and watches. In order to prove the DJ's *atalaku* true, the Jet Setteur being praised would shower the DJ with bills (which would later become a practice known in the *Coupé-décalé* milieu as “travailler”). As the artists recall, these spectacles escalated quickly and each artist tried to outdo the others.³⁸ When a violent civil war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002, David Monsoh asserts that he believed such a cultural movement could reaffirm the connection between the Ivorian diaspora and the Ivorian population affected by the daily violence; thus, he approached the *Jet Setteurs* asking them to come to his studio and to record some tracks. At the time, all but one of the artists—Douk Saga—declined; however, soon after Saga entered the studio the rest of the Jet Set joined him.³⁹ Monsoh explains that he believed that creating a movement around such a lifestyle would provide the people of war-torn Côte d'Ivoire with a means of escaping their immediate realities of political turbulence.

³⁶ This term is borrowed from the Congolese language *lingala*. In the context of Congolese *soukous* music, the *atalaku* is the person who animates the crowd by shouting phrases and important attendees' names. See Bob W. White, “Modernity's Trickster: ‘Dipping’ and ‘Throwing’ in Congolese Popular Dance Music,” *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 4 (2005): 156. This role finds parallels in the West African *griot* (discussed in chapter 2 with respect to Salif Keïta), who traditionally served as a guardian of the society's lineage; however, recently *griots* have been criticized for only singing the lineage of people during celebrations such as weddings or circumcisions. See Schulz, “Praise without Enchantment”; and Butler, “Clio and the Griot.”

³⁷ Gandoulou, *Au cœur de la sape*, 209; Elie Goldschmidt, “Migrants congolais en route vers l'Europe,” *Les temps modernes* 620-621 (August-November 2002): 222; Justin-Daniel Gandoulou, *Dandies à Bacongo: Le culte de l'élégance dans la société congolaise contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 106, 22.

³⁸ Lino Versace, Interview with Author, Paris, 2006; Boro Sanguy, Interview with Author, Paris, 2006.

³⁹ David Monsoh, Interview with Author, Paris, 2006.

In addition to how the artists' opulent dress (just like Congolese *sape* fashion) challenge the framework whereby economic success is predicated on work, so too do two other elements of the *Coupé-décalé* music movement. First, creating a movement whose principal artists have no formal training as musicians suggests that an opulent lifestyle is their sole criterion for success in the musical realm. Second, the lyrics' use of many short phrases and words that come from an Ivorian street slang known as *nouchi* conceals a double-valenced narrative of diasporic revenge for colonization.⁴⁰ Many of the phrases—particularly those that make up the movement's title—discuss economic considerations in couched terms: for instance, the term “coupé” (“cut” in French) means “to steal” in *nouchi*, and the term “décalé” (“to shift” in French) means “to return to one's country,” presumably with the stolen money, in *nouchi*. A third term, “travailler” (“to work” in French), which means “to shower one's audience with money,” is of particular import because it literally redefines the concept of “work” the black body performs—rather than complete labor or produce goods, in the *Coupé-décalé* context, working is the means through which one draws attention to oneself and establishes one's social position. This coded language of the *Coupé-décalé animations* recalls Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s discussions of the African-American linguistic practice of signifyin(g), or, using of African-American vernacular words that, while homonyms of their standard English counterparts, “have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing.”⁴¹ Seen in this light, *Coupé-décalé's* lyrics offer a double-valenced narrative of economic revenge for colonization that complements the fashion

⁴⁰ *Nouchi* has also played a significant role in other Ivorian popular music movements, particularly *zouglou*—originally a type of protest music born in the student milieu of the 1990s. For more analysis on the linguistic composition of *nouchi* and its use in the popular sphere and in music see Soro Solo, “Zouglou et nouchi, les deux fleurons pervertis de la culture urbaine,” *Africultures* 56 (2003); Sasha Newell, “Enregistering Modernity, Bluffing Criminality: How Nouchi Speech Reinvented (and Fractured) the Nation,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2009); and Noël Kouassi Ayewa, “Mots et contextes en FPI et en nouchi” (Université de Cocody-Abidjan).

⁴¹ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 44-45.

strategies allowing the artists to critique how the black body has been traditionally associated with work.

Coupé-décalé's reception among artists and journalists is a useful lens through which to return to Fessologue's sartorial practices in *Black Bazar*, particularly the questions of cultural literacy and commodification. Although some journalists have likened the *Coupé-décalé* artists to "modern-day Robin Hoods," who seek revenge for colonial and neocolonial wrongs,⁴² others critique the movement because of how success in the music videos is equated with travel to France.⁴³ In fact, while A'salfo (Salif Traoré), lead singer of the popular Ivorian *zouglou*⁴⁴ group Magic System, supports the *Coupé-décalé* genre insofar as it represents an Ivorian musical form, he has publicly criticized the practice of "travaillement"—the ostentatious displays of wealth whereby one showers another person with bank notes.⁴⁵ In response to these critiques, however, Monsoh affirms that *Coupé-décalé*'s lifestyle is not meant to be taken literally; rather the musical genre represents the "vente d'un rêve."⁴⁶ Similar claims were made about the narrative promoted

⁴² Honoré Essoh, "Le 'Couper-décaler': Phénomène musical ou danse d'escrocs?," 1 September 2009, <http://www.africahit.com/news/article/Ivorycoast/22/>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁴³ This critique of *Coupé-décalé* music also finds parallels in the literary realm, recalling Odile Cazenave's formulation of the *miroir aux alouettes* (lark mirror). For Cazenave, many of the early *migritude* works—including Mabanckou's *Bleu-blanc-rouge*—depict sub-Saharan African immigrants' lives in France in a way that denounces the *miroir aux alouettes* (or the prevalent narrative equating travel to France with immediate success) repeated by immigrants in order to maintain their reputation (Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine*, 123). Wandiya Njoya reprises this metaphor in her analysis of Mabanckou's *Bleu-blanc-rouge*. Wandiya Njoya, "Lark Mirror: African Culture, Masculinity, and Migration to France in Alain Mabanckou's *Bleu Blanc Rouge*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 2 (2009).

⁴⁴ The name *zouglou* originally comes from a *Baoulé* expression describing students' conditions: "Bé ti lé Zouglou" or "they are crowded in there like rubbish." *Zouglou*, (Bleu Caraïbes, 1993). For more on the creation of *zouglou*, see Yacouba Konate, "Génération Zouglou," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 168 (2002); Anne Schumann, "Popular Music and Political Change in Côte d'Ivoire: The Divergent Dynamics of *Zouglou* and Reggae," *Journal of African Media Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009); and Raoul Germain Blé, "Zouglou et réalités sociales des jeunes en Côte d'Ivoire," *Afrique et développement* 31, no. 1 (2006).

⁴⁵ Schadé Adédé, "A'salfo (Lead Vocal De Magic System) – 'Douk Saga est parti avec une bibliothèque'," *Notre Voie*, 25 October 2006, <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200610250808.html>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁴⁶ Monsoh, Interview with Author.

by *sapeurs* and as sociological studies such as Gandoulou's *Au coeur de la Sape* highlight, many sub-Saharan African immigrants did experience psychological and social marginalization, but yet still felt pressured to repeat the narrative equating travel to Paris with economic success, for fear of being labeled a "paysan." Yet, only considering these narratives of immigration in this negative light—as something that needs to be denounced—forestalls discussions of how they might also be useful on a personal and international scale. For instance, as Adrien Ngudi asserts in an interview with Gondola, "Le mythe Afrique-misère, nous ne le voulons plus. Nous sommes en train de forger d'autres mythes. *La sape* c'est une idéologie; c'est contredire les forces de la misère."⁴⁷ These practices, then, seek to subvert stereotypical images of black bodies and of Africa more generally. Furthermore, by crafting—and selling—such dreams through images of opulence, the artists ultimately confirm Freidman's assertion "[t]here is no 'real me' under the surface and no roles are being played that might contrast with an underlying true subject."⁴⁸ And yet, at the same time, this commodification of black and diasporic identities also calls into question what the stakes of such gestures are.

Black Bazar addresses the role commodification plays in Fessologue's *sape*, showing how it causes him to become paradoxically dependent on global marketplaces. For instance, when describing his wardrobe, Fessologue confuses his labels: Cerruti 1881—not Cerruti 1884—is the name of the couturier.⁴⁹ This subtle, but essential, mistake reveals how Fessologue has become bound up in iconography fashion more generally, but his knowledge does not go beyond the level of the image, a point that is also illustrated in Fessologue's choice of ties

⁴⁷ Gondola, "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth," 23.

⁴⁸ Friedman, "The Political Economy of Elegance," 181.

⁴⁹ Fessologue makes this same mistake once earlier in the text, when he remembers, "Comme je n'ai pas bronché, avant de sortir du local [Hippocrate] a détaillé un moment mes pompes et mon costard Cerruti 1884" (28).

featuring Parisian monuments of the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe. As De Souza points out, “[t]his garment can be seen as a symbol of success but also as the epitome of the colonial yoke, a potential weapon to throttle any dissenting voice.”⁵⁰ Despite these mistakes, Fessologue is well-known and well-respected within his group of friends to the extent that he even becomes bound up in such commodification of identity when he sells some of the clothes he buys to his friends. In so doing, Fessologue assumes the role of perpetuating his friends’ dependence on these commodities whose markets they do not fully understand.

Furthermore, the novel also points out how such gestures to refashion the black body also risk making the practitioners dependent on culturally competent audiences. To return to the scene I discussed earlier, just after proclaiming that he wanted to actively draw others’ gazes, and thus he decides to walk instead of taking a taxi to the train station, Fessologue gets his wish. He remarks that on the quai in the *gare du nord* “Les gens n’arrêtaient pas de me regarder. Je me disais que c’était l’effet de mon costard, de mes chaussures et de mon parfum. [...] J’ai ouvert les trois boutons de la veste, une technique pour mettre en valeur ma ceinture Christiane Dior” (48). This choreographed movement—a *danse des griffes* in the absence of music—allows Fessologue to show off the full power of his outfit; yet, his audience misses the cultural significance of his performance. In fact, just after this attempt at exhibitionism, a man approaches Fessologue, asking, “Monsieur, pourquoi vous êtes en grève, hein?” which quickly incites insults from others, including “Ah oui, il faut tous les virer, ces connards!” and “Bande de fainéants!” (49). Fessologue admits initially not understanding these reactions; however, while leaving the train station, he catches sight of an RATP agent and notices that his own carefully crafted suit was of the same color as the agent’s uniform (50). The French man’s mistake, thus,

⁵⁰ Pascale De Souza, “Trickster Strategies in Alain Mabanckou’s *Black Bazar*,” *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 190.

points to the dominant way of decoding the black uniformed body: as a source of labor, the same role Fessologue sought to subvert. In the end, thus, strategies such as Fessologue's use of *sape* are able to fashion alternative images of Africans and the African diaspora; however, they ultimately fail to engage with the larger machinery that perpetuates such images. Fessologue's transformation from *sapeur* to author, to which I now turn, rectifies these shortcomings because they allow him to not only show the role larger cultural and literary marketplaces play in creating and upholding national and racial identities, but also to subvert these processes.

Refashioning Literary Blackness

Focusing on how Yves l'Ivoirien, Hippocrate, and Fessologue propose strategies for making blackness (in)visible in France, as well as how these strategies seek to delimit cultural, racial or national identities (and their outsiders) in the previous two sections has allowed me to tease out some of the potential risks of such articulations of racial identities, including oppositionality, essentialism, and commodification. Other protagonists' reactions to Fessologue's transformation from avid *sapeur* to author reveal how these same discourses about race, authority, and authenticity that permeate individual negotiations of racial identity also define larger cultural marketplaces (including publication houses, promotional materials, television programs, and even academic and literary criticism).

The novel's opening conversation between Fessologue and Roger le Franco-Ivoirien positions authorship as a white, western endeavor. Roger vehemently asserts that Fessologue should abandon his literary aspirations and instead leave this task to those who are more qualified: "y a des gens plus calés pour ça, et ces gens-là, on les voit à la télé, ils parlent bien, et quand ils parlent y a un sujet, y a un verbe et y a un complément. Ils sont nés pour ça, ils ont été

élevés dans ça, alors que nous autres les nègres, c'est pas notre dada, l'écriture. Nous, c'est l'oralité des ancêtres" (13-14). In Roger's descriptions of authorship, the television functions as a modern-day iteration of the colonial gaze: just as I showed in chapter 2 how 1980s and 1990s French television media perpetuated associations between blackness and illegality, or in chapter 1 how putting colonized subjects on display and asserting their radical cultural alterity reinforced images of the colonized subject as spectacle, here the prevalence of white authors and journalists seen on the many shows dedicated to French literary discussions reinforces the association between French authorship and whiteness. Despite the fact that he has no literary training, this association causes Roger le Franco-Ivoirien to assert that his lighter skin means that he would make a better author than Fessologue (14). Moreover, Roger's later comical account of colonial history, which contains unsignaled references to Michel Leiris's autobiographical and ethnographic book *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), written during Leiris's participation during the Mission Dakar-Djibouti; Hergé's comic strip *Tintin au Congo* (1931); and Albert Londres's *Terre d'ébène* (1928), a travel narrative that denounces the effects of colonial rule, suggests that Africa and African history are made visible in western literary works: "Y avait les moustiques, les diables, les sorciers, les cannibales, les mambas verts, la maladie du sommeil, la fièvre jaune, la fièvre bleue, la fièvre orange, la fièvre arc-en-ciel et que sais-je encore. Y avait tous ces maux sur nos terres d'ébène, notre Afrique fantôme au point que même Tintin était contraint de faire le déplacement en personne pour notre bien!" (16, my emphasis). Though Roger's impulse to read these cultural works as truthful historical documents adds humor to the scene, it also testifies to the power works such as these have in perpetuating stereotypes about colonized populations (or even in structuring the way in which formerly colonized populations come to know themselves in the eyes of the west).

In addition to reflecting upon how images of Africa have been mediated through European cultural works, the novel also considers how French literary structures perpetuate neocolonial relationships with Francophone African authors. For Hippocrate, literary works produced by (formerly) colonized subjects must be understood as proof of the authors' assimilation to French culture, and simultaneously their contempt for the supposed benefits this assimilation has afforded them:

Une vérité éclatante: c'est grâce à la colonisation que le Camerounais Ferdinand Oyono a écrit *Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille* et *Une vie de boy*; c'est grâce à la colonisation qu'un autre Camerounais, Mongo Beti, a écrit *Ville cruelle* et *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*; c'est grâce à la colonisation que le Guyanais René Maran a écrit *Batouala*, et qu'un Noir a eu pour la première fois le prix Goncourt qui n'est réservé, en principe, qu'aux Blancs, c'est ça! [...] Les Colons étaient donc élégants, c'est ça le fair-play, ils acceptaient les critiques alors que vos dictateurs ne tolèrent pas le dialogue. (228)

The undercurrent of gifting, evident in the repeated phrase “grâce à” and the symbolism of the literary prize that underpins Hippocrate's discussion of African authorship recalls the discourse of the gift associated with the *mission civilisatrice* (and the discourse of gifting found in descriptions of colonial clothing I discussed in chapter 1). Furthermore, the discussion of the literary prizes evokes the position of the French literary establishment as the legitimizing presence for authors from former colonies, and returns the African author to the position of gracious recipient evoked in the images I discussed earlier.⁵¹ In fact, Cameroonian author Léonora Miano (whom I discuss in more detail in chapter 4) has publicly spoken about the her

⁵¹ See also my discussion of this in relation to Francophone literary production as it is represented in J. R. Essomba's novel *Le paradis du nord*, as well as how it relates to African-American and Italian migrant literature in chapter 2.

sense of occupying this very role, which has, in her estimation, limited the types of narratives she can publish in France: “En dépit de ma visibilité, de ma notoriété, je suis avant tout une femme du tiers-monde à qui on accorde une faveur, et je suis donc sommée, par divers moyens, de rester à ma place.”⁵² Similarly, after she was awarded the Goncourt Prize in 2009, Marie NDiaye, a black French author (born in France to a French mother and a Senegalese father) drew public criticism from politicians—notably Éric Raoult (UMP mayor of Raincy)—for denouncing President Nicolas Sarkozy’s policies. Raoult’s criticism reveals a discourse of gifting and of expected gratitude and complacency on the part of the racial minority, completely ignoring the fact that NDiaye considers herself French: “*We* awarded her the Goncourt Prize because she has talent... Now that she has received this prize, she can think as she likes, but as it happens she now has to be a kind of ambassador for our culture... France has given her the Goncourt Prize.”⁵³ Furthermore, as Nicki Hitchcott shows regarding Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala, certain African authors, once “legitimized” by French outlets, themselves become capable—and perhaps even responsible—for authenticating fellow African voices.⁵⁴

Black Bazar’s own back cover, which reproduces a citation from the text in which Fessologue describes his entry into the world of authorship—“Je suis allé acheter une machine à écrire à la porte de Vincennes parce que je voulais faire comme les écrivains...”—set off from the rest of the cover text in a green box directly next to a small photo of Mabanckou. Though the

⁵² Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 73.

⁵³ Éric Raoult quoted in Thomas, *Africa and France*, 149.

⁵⁴ Nicki Hitchcott, *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 17. As Hitchcott shows in her book and article, Beyala’s case is more complicated than the schematic way I have presented it here, since she is accused of having plagiarized in several of her works, and convicted of doing so in *Loukoum: Le Petit Prince de Belleville*. See also Nicki Hitchcott, “Calixthe Beyala: Prizes, Plagiarism, and ‘Authenticity’,” *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2006).

citation does come from the novel,⁵⁵ placing this particular quote next to the photo of Mabanckou, who has become one of the most prolific Francophone African writers and whose works have received the highest levels of international acclaim—such as the *Grand Prix de littérature Henri Gal* from the *Académie française* in 2012—suggests that Mabanckou’s own accomplishments might be due to literary imitation, rather than talent or skill.

Furthermore, Hippocrate’s ideas about colonial Francophone literary production delimits a space from within which Francophone authors must produce politically engaged, oppositional literature, a paradigm that finds parallels in critical approaches to Francophone African texts. The works Hippocrate cites in this passage I quote above, as well as those he cites at other points in the novel, including Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950) can be classified as politically engaged literature depicting the harsh realities of colonial rule. By citing these works, Hippocrate thus repositions African literary works in a reactionary paradigm with respect to metropolitan literature and culture. This vertical and oppositional framework that Hippocrate develops here finds parallels in the field of Francophone and postcolonial literary criticism as well. One thinks, for instance, of the edited volume *The Empire Writes Back*, and the way it sets up the dialectic within which postcolonial literary production can only ever be reactionary.⁵⁶ More recently, scholars have begun to interrogate the expectation that Francophone African authors produce politically “engaged” literature, as well as the history of this literary classification;⁵⁷ however, certain African authors and scholars maintain that addressing the social

⁵⁵ The cover fails to indicate several omissions from the original: “Le lendemain je suis allé acheter une machine à écrire à la porte de Vincennes parce que *moi j’aime pas les ordinateurs, parce que je voulais faire comme les vrais écrivains qui déchirent les pages, les raturaient, s’interrompaient pour changer le ruban de leur machine...*” (167, my emphasis).

⁵⁶ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁵⁷ See especially Cazenave and Célérier’s *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of*

and political realities of their nation of origin should be African authors' imperative. For instance, as Hitchcott shows, Cameroonian author Mongo Beti has criticized his compatriot Calixthe Beyala for turning her back on Cameroonian political struggles and of pandering to French audiences in her work.⁵⁸ Boubacar Boris Diop makes similar accusations against exiled Francophone African authors: "Ces auteurs qui parlent d'une Afrique dont ils ne savent plus rien sont malheureusement les seuls à pouvoir se faire entendre du reste du monde et donc à être écoutés... en Afrique. [...] Ils continuent pourtant à écrire mais leurs œuvres ne correspondent pas à l'idée que l'institution littéraire occidentale, toute-puissante, souhaite donner de nos jours de l'univers africain."⁵⁹ Beyond the underlying assumption that African authors must discuss African sociopolitical realities, the distinction Diop makes between "insider" and "outsider" presumes that only authors that come from a particular cultural milieu can faithfully represent its "realities," despite the fact that this perspective has been extensively debated and rebuked in anthropological, sociological, and literary realms.

What is more, both Diop's and Sene's critiques also hinge upon the destination of literary works produced by African authors. For them, the Francophone African author who chooses to reside in the West necessarily becomes bound up in cultural markets designed to exotify African cultural production. A similar anxiety is also at the heart of Paulin Hountondji's discussions of the production of scientific knowledge (both hard sciences and social sciences) in Africa and by African researchers living in exile, outlined in his introduction to *Endogenous Knowledge:*

Commitment.

⁵⁸ See Hitchcott, *Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration*, 18-19; and Mongo Beti, "L'affaire Calixthe Beyala ou comment sortir du néocolonialisme en littérature," *Palabres: Revue Culturelle Africaine* 1, no. 3-4 (1997).

⁵⁹ Boubacar Boris Diop, *L'Afrique au-delà du miroir* (Paris: Editions Philippe Rey, 2007). As Mabanckou discusses in *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, journalists such as Nabo Sene have made similar accusations (42-43). Ironically, Raoul Nkouatchet has recently presented *Le sanglot de l'homme noir* itself in such a light: Raoul Nkouatchet, "Alain Mabanckou écrit-il pour les blancs?" *Slate Afrique* 4 April 2012.

Research Trails. For Hountondji, funding networks and the high level of consumption of scholarly works in the West means that researchers must exoticize their own cultures in order to succeed in the scholarly community. If, he argues, African researchers begin to examine their society with “African” eyes, they would no longer feel the need to “exalt their own cultural particularities” that are different from the West.⁶⁰ These critiques, however, presume that the audience for one’s scientific or cultural production must be members of one’s own community, and that to produce knowledge or cultural works for a different national, racial, or ethnic community automatically makes one a sellout.

In *Black Bazar*, however, Fessologue’s authorial strategies call into question these critiques of insiderism and the figure of the author-as-sellout, subvert impulses to read works sociologically (and autobiographically), and destabilize notions of a homogeneous target audience. As I previously mentioned, Fessologue’s practice of keeping meticulous journals about his interactions with his friends at Jip’s—journals that will later become the basis for his novel—recalls the image of the ethnographic observer conducting fieldwork.⁶¹ This autoethnographic position resonates with critiques of other Francophone African authors, most notably Camara Laye’s *L’enfant noir*, often accused of revealing initiation secrets to a western audience.⁶² Mabanckou further plays with scholars’ impulses to read Francophone literary production through autobiographical and sociological lenses. In many of his works—*Black Bazar* included—Mabanckou’s characters claim a biological relationship to Pauline Kengué,

⁶⁰ Paulin J. Hountondji, *Endogenous Knowledge: Research Trails* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 1997), 68.

⁶¹ The author/protagonist-as-ethnographer is also a trope used in Mabanckou’s earlier novel, *Verre cassé* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), where the eponymous narrator records the goings-on of a bar called “Le crédit a voyagé.”

⁶² Laye Camara, *L’enfant noir* (Paris: Plon, 1976).

Mabanckou's mother.⁶³ In *Black Bazar*, for instance, Fessologue, explains he decided to name Henriette after his grandmother, Henriette Nsoko: "une femme qui a compté dans mon enfance [... J]'étais son petit-fils, le fils de sa fille Pauline Kengué," (100-101). In so doing, Mabanckou actively embraces and simultaneously subverts autobiographical readings of his text, calling into question expectations for African authors' authenticity and privileged insiderism.

The reactions to Fessologue's many transformations that accompany his development into an author—particularly his decisions to begin straightening his hair, to trade in *la sape* for what his friends term "hippy" clothes, and to begin dating a white woman—echo the critiques about Francophone African authors' of racial and cultural engagement, and reopens discussions of "passing" and "selling out" in literary marketplaces. For instance, one day while he is waiting for Roger Le Franco-Ivoirien in the *gare de l'est*, a Gabonese man approaches Fessologue and begins to critique his physical appearance: "Le Gabonais a rajouté que je n'étais qu'un pauvre Noir qui n'aimait pas le manioc et que je me défrisais les cheveux pour ressembler aux Blancs" (245). This interaction harkens back to Yves's expectations that black—and *métis*—individuals perform their blackness in certain prescribed ways, and his belief that individuals who fail to do so are "selling out." What is more, the unsigned allusion to Gaston Kelman's novel *Je suis noir et je n'aime pas le manioc* (2003)—an work that has been termed a "non-threatening, apologist narrative"⁶⁴—suggests how these types of identities are also produced at the literary level, and simultaneously links Fessologue's individual, corporeal choice with those that he will face as an author, whose writings are taken as representative of a community.

⁶³ In many of his novels, including *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1998), *Les petits-fils nègres de Vercingétorix* (Paris: Le serpent à plumes, 2002), *Verre cassé* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), *Mémoires de porc-épic* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), and *Demain j'aurai vingt ans* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), Mabanckou highlights this biographical information, dedicating the works "à ma mère, Pauline Kengué."

⁶⁴ Thomas, *Africa and France*, 78-79. Kelman also served in the controversial Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Co-Development.

The underlying reason why this exchange transpires—Fessologue is waiting for Roger le Franco-Ivoirien to borrow his copy of Koffi Olomide’s famous *soukous* album, *Droit de véto* (1998)—also comments upon intersection between identity, authenticity and commodification. Beyond the fact that the album (just like Kelman’s novel) is a commodity that circulates within cultural and economic marketplaces, Bob White has suggested that *soukous* artists commodified Congolese culture by produced their music with the tastes of non-Congolese audiences in mind.⁶⁵ Though for White, this commodification should not be understood as Congolese artists “selling out” their culture, it, like Kelman’s novel, is predicated upon western expectations of African and racial authenticity: a particular sound in the case of the former, and a particular set of cultural practices in the case of the latter.

In addition to calling into question essentialist expectations placed on the Francophone African author, *Black Bazar* also pluralizes notions of audiences through linguistic signifying and a practice I would like to term “literary *sape*.” Linguistically, as De Souza notes, part of Fessologue (and Mabanckou’s, since the two voices are not easily separated in this novel within a novel) literary prowess is his ability to signify—to borrow Gates Jr.’s term—French cultural expressions.⁶⁶ In so doing, Fessologue appropriates the French language for his own uses, subverts established expressions, asserts his own agency as a speaking subject, and calls into question the assumed division between linguistic insider and outsider. Beyond this signifying practice, Fessologue also uses “literary *sape*”—a practice where he peppers his novel (sometimes covertly) with references to worldwide cultural works—to both delimit communities of understanding and to call into question the way readers approach Francophone African literary

⁶⁵ White, “Soukouss or Sell-Out?” 48.

⁶⁶ See De Souza, “Trickster Strategies in Alain Mabanckou’s *Black Bazar*,” 114-16.

texts.⁶⁷ Just as the goal in vestimentary *sape* is to conspicuously display a variety of recognizable *griffes* (labels), the goal in literary *sape* is to conspicuously display a different set of labels: references to recognizable titles and artists. Furthermore, just as the force of a *sapeur*'s performance is determined when he reveals hidden elements of his outfit during a *danse des griffes*, so too does Fessologue's literary power come from the fact that some of *Black Bazar*'s references are hidden, only visible to the reader who has the requisite cultural background to spot them. Yet, I contend that Fessologue's authorial strategies constitute a modified *danse des griffes* that has three complementary effects: first, they position the reader to actively seek out these references; second, they allow Fessologue to place the responsibility on the decoder—rather than the encoder—to understand the references (thereby allowing him to have his revenge for his misunderstood *danse des griffes* in the *gare du nord*); and third, they destabilize notions of the novel's readership.

The novel's opening conversation between Roger le Franco-Ivoirien and Fessologue about his recently completed novel establishes the literary *danse des griffes* that will permeate the novel. Before criticizing Fessologue's authorial aspirations and suggesting Fessologue's inability to produce literature based on his race, Roger poses a series of questions about the contents of Fessologue's completed novel, such as whether the novel has “une mer et un vieil homme qui va à la pêche avec un petit garçon” (15), “un ivrogne qui va dans les pays des morts pour retrouver son tireur de vin de palme décédé accidentellement au pied d'un palmier” (18), or even “un grand amour au temps du choléra entre un pauvre télégraphiste et une jeune écolière

⁶⁷ Mabanckou has used this strategy in his earlier novels, most notably in *Verre cassé*. John Walsh takes this act as a Mabanckou's “metacommentary on the power relations at work between cultures and canons.” John Walsh, “Sarkozy, Mabanckou, and Notes from the Bar: Alain Mabanckou's *Verre Cassé*.” *The French Review* 84, no. 1 (2010): 133.

qui finira plutôt par épouser un médecin plus tard,” (18). In these questions, the reader recognizes the plots of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952), and Gabriel García Márquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), and, in the other questions he poses during this exchange, Roger also cites the plots, but not the names or authors of four other works: Luis Sepúlveda’s *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* (1989), Yukio Mishima’s *La Musique* (1965), Ernesto Sábato’s *The Tunnel* (1988) and Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1959). By opening the work with a list of plots that might seem familiar to the reader without mentioning the titles or authors of the works themselves, the novel positions the reader to uncover whether all the summaries Roger provides are, in fact, published works and, if so, their titles and authors. Similarly, another protagonist known as *L’Arabe du coin* also asks Fessologue on five separate occasions if he knows of the “poète noir” who wrote the lines “L’Occident nous a trop longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences...” (24, 112, 114, 147, 246).⁶⁸ Just like Fessologue’s earlier conversation with Roger, this interrogative format wherein neither party reveals the author’s name encourages the uncertain reader to pursue the reference. Furthermore, *L’Arabe du coin*’s continued reference to Césaire as a “poète noir”—an allusion to André Breton’s preface to the *Cahier* wherein he calls Césaire “un grand poète noir”—constitutes another clue that speaks to the packaging of black authors within larger literary marketplaces.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ “L’Occident nous a trop longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences...” Est-ce que tu sais quel poète noir a eu le courage de dire ça, hein?” (24), “L’Occident nous a trop longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences, mon frère africain! Tu sais quel poète noir a dit ces paroles courageuses, hein?” (112), “Mais tout le monde sait maintenant qu’elle nous a longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences...” (114), “L’Europe nous a trop longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences! Est-ce que tu sais quel poète noir a dit ces paroles courageuses, hein?” (147), and “L’Europe nous a trop longtemps gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences! Est-ce que tu sais quel poète noir a dit des choses courageuses, mon frère africain?” (246). In reality, *L’Arabe du coin* slightly misremembers Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*—the lines he tries to cite read “l’Europe nous a pendant des siècles gavés de mensonges et gonflés de pestilences.” Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, ed. Irele Abiola, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 29.

⁶⁹ See Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality*.

In addition to these half-hidden references, Fessologue's literary *sape* weaves its web of *griffes* in two additional ways. First, at certain points in the novel Fessologue explicitly references other works, citing the author and title, as well as sometimes reproducing excerpts. For instance, he reproduces the lyrics to Franco Luambo Makiadi's *Liberté* (1976) (154) as well as those from Claude Nourago's *Armstrong* (1967) (182). These intertextual references confirm the reader's detective work, encouraging him or her to continue to pursue more elsewhere. Second, as I have shown in various excerpts, Fessologue sometimes hides references to other works, often by playing on the original titles' such as when Hippocrate proclaims "la ville n'était pas si *cruelle* que ça" (a reference to Mongo Beti's novel *Ville Cruelle*), or when Fessologue proclaims, "C'est aussi avec le tam-tam que les Africains ont accueilli *les soleils des indépendances* alors qu'ils ne savaient pas qu'ils allaient de Charybde en Scylla" (123). The novel also references other works such as Voltaire's *Candide* at several points in the work by referencing the work's concluding phrase "il faut cultiver notre jardin,"⁷⁰ subtly altering this recognizable phrase to "cultiver son jardin."⁷¹ These many ways of hiding and simultaneously drawing attention to the transnational references in his text delimits multiple communities of understanding that go beyond rigid binaries erected between western and non-western audiences.

The delicate balance Fessologue strikes in his literary *sape* between exhibitionism and careful concealment of his references allows him to put his own cultural capital on display. Citing literary, musical, and filmic works from a variety of periods and geographic regions, as well as those considered theoretical (Marx's *Das Kapital*), classical (Homer's *Odyssey* evoked

⁷⁰ Voltaire, *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (London: J. Nourse, 1759), 294.

⁷¹ Two of the references are with respect to Hippocrate: "S'il s'était contenté de cultiver son jardin, rien ne lui serait arrivé" (29), and "Monsieur Hippocrate aime cultiver son petit jardin à mes dépens" (35); the other comes when Fessologue discusses colonization with the Breton in Jip's bar "Chacun doit rester dans sa parcelle et cultiver son jardin dedans" (235).

by the reference to Charybdis and Scylla above), canonical (Voltaire's *Candide*, Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendances*) and even popular (*Jaws*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Columbo*) establishes both his breadth and his depth of knowledge. Just like *sape* fashion allows its practitioners to call into question prevailing stereotypes about the role of black bodies in worldwide economies, so too does Fessologue's literary *sape* allow him to interrogate images of Africans' access to worldwide culture.

And yet, it is impossible to not also read the practice of literary *sape*, and the title of the work itself, as part of a larger discussion on how these works circulate as cultural commodities within larger global economies. The *bazaar* is a place of meeting and of exchange, a polyvocal space where merchants call out to shoppers, a site where a variety of commodities are assembled in one place, all displayed for the consumer to see, and a place of negotiation. In this way, the novel's use of a polyvocal structure and its literary *sape* reveal how meanings of blackness and black identities are negotiated not only individually—as Yves's and Hippocrate's drastically different views on their own racial identity show—but also within larger marketplaces. Furthermore, it also suggests, as I have traced in my discussion of Fessologue's development into an author, how different conceptions of black identities are also commodified in larger cultural markets. In the end, through its polyvocal structure, literary *sape*, and heterogeneous characters, Mabanckou's *Black Bazar* reveals how black identities in France (and worldwide) are constantly negotiated, and bound up in larger worldwide economies.

Conclusions

Just as larger cultural contexts such as music, film, dance and fashion play an integral role in the novel *Black Bazar*, the novel itself has also become part of a much larger intermedial

project. In 2010, actor Modeste Nzapassara transformed the novel into a one-man play, which he performed in several different cities. In 2012, Mabanckou also collaborated with Congolese artists Modogo Abarambwa and Sam Tshintu to produce the *soukous* album *Black Bazar*.⁷² Filmic and comic book versions of the novel are expected to be released in the near future, as is a second musical album, *Black Bazar: Round 2*. In addition to the ways in which the polyvocal and intertextual novel call into question textual authorship and rigid notions of communities, this larger intermedial project also meditates upon the role cultural marketplaces play in fashioning larger racial and cultural communities. Several of the *soukous* album's features, including its transnational musical collaborations, its rhythmic borrowings, its music videos that destabilize notions of unidirectional cultural flows, and its songs' lyrics illustrate the productive connections that transcend national, ethnic, racial, and even linguistic communities.

Though the principal artists are from the Republic of the Congo, most tracks feature collaborations between Abarambwa and Tshintu and other artists from diverse musical and national backgrounds, including Cameroon, Cuba, Senegal, and Columbia. The tracks' musical composition—particularly the *clave* rhythm, heard on many of the tracks—testifies to the productive circulation of cultural forms throughout the African diaspora. For instance, the Cuban *son* *clave* rhythm heard in the album's second track (“Kinshasa-Havana”) was born of West and Central African rhythms brought to Cuba during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and was later re-exported back to the Congo in the 1930s, where it became the basis for Congolese *soukous* music heard in *Black Bazar*'s other tracks.⁷³ *Soukous*'s popularity beyond the two Congos has meant

⁷² Modogo Abarambwa, Sam Tshintu, and Alain Mabanckou, *Black Bazar* (Paris: Lusafrica Records, 2012).

⁷³ Stewart, *Rumba on the River*, 13.

that variations of this same rhythm can also be found in later African popular music movements, such as Ivorian *Coupé-décalé* and *zouglou*, Cameroonian *makossa*, and even Ghanaian *highlife*.

Though this album's musical composition testifies to the circulation of culture throughout Gilroy's Black Atlantic, the lyrics and music video for the album's first track, entitled "Black Bazar Face A" disrupt notions that these cultural forms are limited to black communities. Lyrically, the song complements the novel's discussion regarding how racial identities are negotiated within larger cultural marketplaces, while simultaneously complicating such notions of identity. On this track, Souleymane Diamanka, a Senegalese-born French rapper, musician, and slam poet known for his intricate word play, joins Modogo Abarambwa and Sam Tshintu. Diamanka's first set of lyrics meditate upon latent negative associations with the concept "black" and positive ones with "white" in western society:

Justice blanche, misère noire

La bête noire, c'est toi

C'est écrit noir sur blanc

Blanc sera ton chemin de croix

Et ta peau restera noire malgré ton masque blanc.⁷⁴

Later, he engages in a type of free association, citing compound nouns and phrases containing the English word "black," such as the "Black Mafia," "blacklist," "blackout," "blackjack," "Blackberry," the "black cowboy," and even references the Rolling Stones's song "Paint it Black." The anaphora of the English term "black" emphasizes its prevalence in everyday discussions, and also meditates upon its association with negativity, which parallels larger discussions in the novel about how black identities are negotiated within larger global

⁷⁴ Abarambwa, Tshintu, and Mabanckou, *Black Bazar*.

frameworks. The music video, too, complements the novel's investigation of identity formation and cultural circulation within and beyond "Black France." The video juxtaposes shots of Soulemayne Diamanka, clad in a red *sapeur*-style suit, singing into a microphone set against a completely black background (aside from two visible spotlights), close-ups of Abarambwa and Tshintu, clad in black t-shirts whose white writing reads "Black Bazar," and those following a *sapeur* as he visits the clothing store Connivences, purchases an ensemble, and joins a group of white *sapeurs* at a bar, where they each perform a *danse des griffes* for the camera (Figure 14). No studies to date have investigated how widespread *la sape* is outside of African (and African diasporic) populations; however, the instance in the music video bears upon on intercultural borrowings and appropriation, imitative chains, and identity performance. As I previously highlighted, *la sape* developed within a Congolese milieu, and its practitioners adopted European clothing, while subverting fashion norms. Not only did *la sape* call into question the role of the black body in worldwide economies, but it also critiqued how, as I discussed in chapter 1, colonial discourse often cited instances when colonized subjects' failed to correctly reproduce European fashion norms as a sign of their inability to completely assimilate.



Figure 14: White *sapeur* doing a *danse des griffes* to show off his socks in “Black Bazar Face A.”

The white individuals’ performance of *sape* fashion, thus, functions as a means to raise the novel’s central questions that I have explored above, including: What does it mean for one culture (or race) to adopt practices developed within another cultural (or racial) milieu? Does race matter, and how might one articulate it? What can one draw the line between imitation, appropriation, and ironic subversion? and How are (racial) identities shaped, performed, and packaged both within France’s universalist context, and in larger marketplaces? Rather than offer concrete answers to these complicated questions, by showing how *la sape* has now been adopted in other circles, the music video—like the novel—suggests the productive ways in which culture can transcend communities, rather than articulating rigid communitarian divisions.

In the end, Mabanckou's *Black Bazar*—both the novel and the larger intermedial project—celebrate and problematize the intersection between French, black, and African history, memory, and identities. The protagonists' diversity in terms of national origin and their divergent perspectives on the pertinence of their racial identity highlight France's increasingly multiethnic landscape while simultaneously underscoring the heterogeneity of "Black France." The sometimes caricatural beliefs the protagonists espouse caution against the dangers of defining one's identity in purely oppositional terms, which ultimately fail to engage with the larger structures in which these negotiations transpire. *Black Bazar's* literary *sape*, as well as the novel's transformation into a *soukous* album both draw from wider cultural contexts and also highlight how what are often posited as authentic forms of cultural expression are, in reality, outcomes of productive entanglements and borrowings. In this way, Mabanckou's *Black Bazar* reframes the term of the debate behind the question with which I opened the chapter: "but where are you really from?" The novel and larger project both provide a polyvocal answer to this question, simultaneously showing how posing this same question of France (whose culture and histories are themselves born of fractured, contradictory, and always already hybridized), can reveal equally complicated entanglements.

Despite the many ways *Black Bazar* seeks to pluralize discussions of culture, identity, and belonging, this project remains, like many works of sub-Saharan African immigration literature that came before it, set in a predominantly male space. In my next chapter, I therefore turn to Léonora Miano's novel *Blues pour Élise*, analyzing not only the racial but also the gendered dimensions of "Black France."

CHAPTER FOUR

Re-Membering Afropeanism: Intermediality in Léonora Miano's *Blues pour Élise*

As a point of departure, I would like to return to Alain Mabanckou's assertion that "[d]'habitude, c'est automatique: quand deux Français—un Blanc et un Noir—se rencontrent, le premier demande inévitablement par les voies détournées les 'vraies origines' du second."¹ As I explained in the previous chapter, this coded language hides an assertion that racial minorities—even if they are born in France—are always from “elsewhere”; however, this concept of “origins,” specifically its relationship to ideas of the nation, is worth teasing out more closely here. In addition to carrying obvious racial implications since, as Mabanckou notes, it is only asked of visible minorities, this concept of “vraies origines” also signals geographical and genealogical dimensions that are not easily separated. The implication is that even if a black individual was born in France, his or her genealogical tree is rooted in other geographical places. Conversely, the expression often used to denote “true Frenchness”, “Français de souche” (those of pure French stock) not only carries racial overtones, but also evokes the image of a family tree, suggesting the complex entanglement between geography, genealogy, and national identity. This type of discourse posits the French nation (and those who do not belong to it) as a “domestic genealogy,”²—to borrow Anne McClintock's formulation—one from which the immigrant (and his or her descendants) is often excluded. In fact, the intersection between genealogy and national identity has never been stronger at a time when French politicians

¹ Mabanckou, *Le sanglot de l'homme noir*, 53.

² Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family,” *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993): 63, emphasis in original.

proposed making DNA testing mandatory for family members of immigrants seeking reunification.³

The relative lack of history about the interactions between sub-Saharan Africa and France, is coupled with a metaphorical “whitening” of black French history including, as Léonora Miano underscores, when Gérard Dépardieu was cast to play Alexandre Dumas, in Safy Nebbou’s film *L’Autre Dumas* (2010). In so doing, the film elided Dumas’s complex racial heritage, since he was born to a white, French mother, and a *métis* father—the son of a French nobleman and an Afro-Cuban slave.⁴ This instance serves as just one example of how few black French icons are readily accessible to the French public, and how race has been edited out of French history. To continue the family tree metaphor, the many French-born blacks today have few icons to claim as their black French family tree.⁵ Coupled with the lack of vocabulary to address blackness in a nation that declares itself blind to race, these individuals are still seeking out ways to delineate their own identities.⁶

In this chapter, I focus on literary depictions of one such population—Afropeans⁷—by turning to Miano’s novel *Blues pour Élise*. Miano had examined this population in three of her

³ For a succinct background on this proposed legislation see the chapter “Sarkozy’s Law: National Identity and the Institutionalization of Xenophobia” in Thomas, *Africa and France*. See also Éric Fassin, “Entre famille et nation: La filiation naturalisée,” *Droit et société* 72, no. 2 (2009).

⁴ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 72.

⁵ Lilian Thuram, former soccer player and current director of the “Thuram Foundation” (whose mission is “éduquer contre le racisme”), has addressed this topic in part in his recent book *Mes étoiles noires: De Lucy à Barack Obama*. This work examines forty-three figures of African descent that Thuram considers to have had a significant impact in the world, or on his own life. While focusing on people of African descent throughout the world—not just in France—the book nonetheless begins to rectify this lacuna in the French space. Lilian Thuram and Bernard Fillaire, *Mes étoiles noires: De Lucy à Barack Obama* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2010).

⁶ On the entanglement between race and nation, see Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*; Sarah Daynes and Orville Lee, *Desire for Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For an insightful investigation of how race plays out at the transnational European level, see Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?*.

⁷ This term has gained wider currency in the scholarly realm since Miano began using it in her fictional works in the early 2000s; however, as she explains in *Habiter la frontière*, the term “Afropean” originally came out of the

fictional works; in fact, in her 2008 collection of stories, *Afropean soul et autres nouvelles* (2008), the central protagonist of the title chapter is described as “un *Afropéen*, un Européen d’ascendance africain.”⁸ Miano also explored similar identitarian questions in *Tels des astres éteints* (2008); however, two of the work’s three main protagonists—Amok and Shrapnel—immigrated to France, and Amandla (the other main protagonist) comes from the Caribbean, meaning that this novel is not wholly devoted to Afropean identities.⁹ Unlike Miano’s earlier works, which focused on marginalized blacks in France and Afropeans (*Afropean soul*) or those immigrants and *Afrodéscendants* who explore more radical forms of asserting their blackness in a sociopolitical context that denies its existence (*Tels des astres éteints*), *Blues pour Élise* centers around the lives of four bourgeois *Afropéennes*: Akasha, Shale, Malaïka, and Amahoro. Forming a sisterhood known as the “*Bigger than life*,” the women, as the novel’s back cover announces, are “*loin des clichés misérabilistes*”¹⁰ in fact, they “adpote[nt] le mode de vie bobo, se nourri[ssent] de graines germées, se déplace[nt] en Vélib’, recour[en]t au *speed dating* pour rompre la solitude.”¹¹ This description lays bare the prevalence of stereotypes about black individuals in France: these black women are so “normal” that, in fact, their normalcy must be pointed out (and, in some sense, this “normalcy” also makes them exceptional). One cannot talk

musical realm, fueled in part by the success of Zap Mama’s album *Adventures in Afropea 1*. Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 83; Zap Mama, *Adventures in Afropea 1* (New York: Luaka Bop Records, 1993), CD.

⁸ Léonora Miano, *Afropean soul et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), 53.

⁹ Though Miano does not specify in the text, certain critics have suggested Amandla’s birthplace is French Guiana. See Éloïse Brezault, “Tels des astres éteints de Léonora Miano,” *Africultures* 2008, <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=8029>, accessed 15 May 2013. Rhetorical problematics emerge in the context of *Outremer* territories (which are, of course, part of France) with respect to both “immigration” and Afropeanism. Scholarly inquiries into *Outremer* individuals traveling to France, often prefer “emigration” and “installation” to “immigration.” See Ndiaye, *La condition noire*.

¹⁰ Léonora Miano, *Blues pour Élise* (Paris: Plon, 2010), back cover, emphasis mine. Note: all parenthetical citations in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, come from *Blues pour Élise*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, back cover, italics in original.

about these women without repeating the circulating images of black women in France that are supposedly irrelevant in their case.¹²

The Afropean women's exceptional unexceptionalism announced in the work's paratext also speaks to their national, racial, and cultural identities. Born in France, the women are French, and do not necessarily feel any attachment to their parents' geographical origins. Unlike other works that are set within black communities in France such as Alain Mabanckou's *Black Bazar*, where the protagonists' conversations primarily center around questions of individual and collective black identities in France, *Blues pour Élise* primarily focuses on women and their romantic relationships in Paris. Yet, even if discussions of racial identities are not at the forefront of the women's daily interactions, each woman still meditates upon her own belonging in France and with respect to other communities. As the narrator suggests just after a scene that transpires in a hair salon during which the diverse protagonists discuss the politics of black hair styles and the ways in which genealogy also inscribes itself on the women's bodies (through their "heritage capillaire"): "La douleur [des femmes noires du troisième millénaire] est celle *des déchirures intérieures, d'écartèlements, de difficiles remembrements*. [...Elles] cherchent leur place, dans un espace aux limites mal définies, entre aliénation et quête de la pureté identitaire" (49, my emphasis).

In this chapter, I trace the process of Afropean *remembrement*—proposed in the above citation—for two of the novel's protagonists: Akasha and Shale. Three connotations of the word "*membre*" make the term "*remembrements*" particularly apt to discuss the women's journey. First, "*membre*" refers to a "member" of a larger community, evoking the tension that arises between each woman's individual sense of identities and that of the collectivities to which she

¹² This paradox whereby in order to combat stereotypes one is forced to repeat them is also explored deftfully in Rosello *Declining the Stereotype*.

might belong. Second, “*membre*” can also mean “a limb,” which foregrounds the corporeal dimension of the female protagonists’ identitarian struggles. Finally, though this definition is no longer prevalent in modern French, the term “*revenir*” formerly signified “to remember,” which points to the often problematic role that history plays in developing the women’s sense of Afropean identity.¹³

Tracing the process of *remembrement* places emphasis on the connectivities forged across different spaces and times, and, above all, brings to the fore the intersection of nation, race, diaspora, culture, and family. Diaspora has often been figured as a paradoxical point of “articulation” that is expressed in bodily metaphors: just as a joint represents the point of intersection and of disjuncture without which limbs could not move, “it is exactly such a haunting gap or discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to ‘step’ and ‘move’ in various articulations.”¹⁴ In addition to the corporeal metaphors to express diaspora, one also finds familial ones, such as Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s assertion that “[d]iaspora is invoked—sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically—as a form of racial kinship consisting of Black folks across time *and* space.”¹⁵ From within these two representative ways of figuring the African diaspora emerge not only its paradoxical role as both a point of intersection and a point of disjuncture that I highlighted above, but also several questions germane to my exploration of

¹³ “Remembrer,” in *Dictionnaire général de la langue française* (Paris, 1896). In fact, Homi K. Bhabha makes a similar observation about postcolonial history: “Remembering is never a quite act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present,” (*The Location of Culture*, 90).

¹⁴ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 14. Edwards bases his theorization of diaspora on Stuart Hall’s formulation developed in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).

¹⁵ Jacqueline Nassy Brown, “Black Europe and the African Diaspora: A Discourse on Location,” in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 205, emphasis in original.

remembrement. What characterizes the African diaspora: Race? Culture? Genealogy? What geographies anchor the African diaspora? How do articulations of the African diaspora relate to different national (or transnational) contexts such as France or the European union? What is the relationship between the African diaspora and Afropeanism?

In this chapter, I argue that the women in the novel work through genealogical (or familial), cultural, and geographical dimensions of African diasporic identity to interrogate how such articulations are apt in reference to Afropeans, who are both diasporic but yet decidedly rooted in national contexts. Born in France, both women are disconnected from their parents' (and ancestors') geographical homes. From a genealogical perspective, both women come from problematic family trees: Akasha's ancestors had opposed her parents' union, and, as the reader discovers at the end of the novel, Shale might be the product of a rape. The violence of which they are both born disconnects them from their genealogy, which can be read as a metaphor for the Afropean and larger African diasporic position. And yet, though both women's fraught genealogies might seem to function as a source of disjuncture, the novel also puts forth an alternative cultural genealogy that allows them to forge horizontal connections: references to musical works from within and beyond the African diaspora that are later listed at the end of each chapter in a section entitled "Ambiance Sonore." Two elements of the "Ambiance Sonore" sections bear on my discussion of Afropean *remembrement*. First, many of the artists found in these genealogies (such as Millie Jackson or Francis Bebey) are associated with specific geographical contexts (the United States and Cameroon, respectively in these examples). Others, however, such as Baloji—born in the Congo, but who has lived in France since the age of three—resist such national or regional affiliations. Second, many of the musical works are both placed and placeless; musical analysis of the works reveals connections and borrowings that

testify to the history of circulation within and beyond African diasporic spaces. In the end, I contend that the novel's intermedial structure, thus, provides the space in which the women undergo the process of *remembrement* and negotiate their Afropean identities.

In the first section, entitled "Black Mothers and Afropean Daughters," I focus on Akasha's relationship to her parents and to her own complicated genealogy; I argue that she tries to reconcile the many diasporic *décalages* present in her own ancestry by seeking out validation in the eyes of men. As she discovers, however, the *remembrement* process cannot transpire in the eyes of others; rather, she must come to terms with the violent histories and conflicts of which she was born. In the second section, entitled "Genealogical Trauma," I turn my attention to Shale, whose family covers over the rape during which she might have been conceived. I read this rape and its subsequent silencing as a metaphor for the distancing Afropeans suffer from their genealogies. In addition to these literal genealogies, the novel contains abundant references to musical works from a variety of European, African, African-American, and Caribbean artists, which I examine in the third section, entitled "Afropean Soundscapes." I argue that these references, which are both made in each chapter's body and listed in each chapter's "Ambiance Sonore" function as a cultural genealogy that complements the women's complicated family trees. Ultimately, by drawing on the works of a variety of artists whose identities and musical works defy national and generic classification, *Blues pour Élise*'s intermedial structure gives shape to the complex genealogies tying together French and black spaces.

Black Mothers and Afropean Daughters

Though several protagonists in *Blues pour Élise* encounter obstacles in their self-image, romantic relationships, and sense of Afropean womanhood, Akasha struggles the most in these

respects. The novel opens with Akasha's continuing battle to recover from the breakup with her most recent boyfriend (known only as "l'ultime frangin") that transpired two years previously. To begin her new life, Akasha turns to music: "Akasha s'était levée du bon pied: le plus résolu. Elle avait allumé son ordinateur, ouvert la liste de lecture compilant les plus belles chansons de Millie Jackson. C'était sa *soul therapy*. Une musique chaude. Sensuelle. Tout allait changer. [...] Aujourd'hui, c'était le premier jour de sa nouvelle vie. Fini de passer pour une amazone, une icône" (13, emphasis in original). Millie Jackson, an R&B and disco artist known for her "celebration of adult sexual pleasure"¹⁶ and for exploring and subverting the larger gendered dynamics of the African American community,¹⁷ sparks in Akasha a sense of women's empowerment. However, Akasha discovers that her own disconnection from her family tree's conflicting branches also has implications for her sense of self as an Afropean woman.

This music with which the novel begins prompts Akasha to reflect on a myriad of possible subject positions open to women depicted in cultural productions from around the world. Among them, Akasha thinks of "la jumelle bronzée de Xéna la guerrière, le double féminin d'Atlas s'interdisant de gémir sous le poids de la terre" (13), "la femme *poteau mitan*" (13), "la femme increvable, taillable et corvéable, la déesse vivante pour laquelle il n'y eut jamais de septième jour, celle qu'on célébra autant qu'on la craignait, qu'on idolâtra pour mieux s'en détourner" (13-14), and "fée du logis, infirmière, mère nourricière, compte bancaire, souffre-douleur" (14). This list of roles traditionally associated with women draws from a variety of cultures: as a footnote offered in the text explains, the "*poteau mitan*" is Martinican creole for the central pillar in the house that keeps it standing (13), whereas Xéna references an American

¹⁶ Simon Frith, *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 17.

¹⁷ See Mary Ellison, *Lyrical Protest: Black Music's Struggle against Discrimination* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 114-15.

popular television series. Akasha's sense of exasperation before these readily accessible images echoes Iman Marshal's assertion that diasporic artists suffer not from a loss of identity, but rather from a surplus, which is imposed on them.¹⁸ Exploring—and ultimately refusing to occupy—these packaged images of femininity causes Akasha to turn to a concrete embodiment of a female diasporic subject: her mother. This memory is filtered through the lens of another cultural work: Joby Bernabé's poem "Fanm," which he performed to music.¹⁹

Despite its laudatory tone towards women, the poem, which explores the contradictory and complementary roles women occupy, raises questions regarding women's agency and subjectivity within a larger Martinican and African diasporic community. For instance, in the first stanza, women are "**Femmes-fleurs**; hommes-colibris à vos corolles. **Femmes-flèches** au beau milieu du cœur des hommes. **Femmes-fils**; mâles amarrés entre vos cils. **Femmes-fiels** et coups de langue pourfendeurs d'hommes. **Femmes folles** et cœurs pendus à vos délires."²⁰ This imagery underscores a duality that is often associated with women: as "fleurs" and "fils," they act as seductive forces, yet once men get close, women can turn threatening—expressed in physical ("flèches," "fiels,") and psychological ("folles") terms. Later, the poem examines

¹⁸ Iman Mersal, "Eliminating Diasporic Identities," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1582.

¹⁹ Joby Bernabé, *3 Mo 7 Pawòl* (Fort-de-France: GD Productions; distrib. Sonodisc, 1986), 33⅓ rpm.

²⁰ Joby Bernabé, *Dabò Pou Yonn...* (Offset G. Absalon: Schoelcher, Martinique, 1984): 9. The bolding is preserved from the original author's translation to French. The corresponding creole lines are: "Fanm flè ka tounen nonm an kolibri / Fanm flèch ka pitché nonm an mitan tchè / Fanm fil ka voplé nonm an pwèlzyé yo / Fanm fyèl ka fann fwa nonm èk an kout lang / Fanm fol ka pann tchè nonm an bout branch yo," (9). Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, professor of letters and of creole studies at the Université de Provence published a more literal translation of Bernabé's poem, available online. She translates these lines as: "Femmes-fleurs qui rendent les hommes colibris / Femmes-flèches qui piquent l'homme au milieu du cœur / Femmes-fils qui enveloppent les hommes dans leurs cils / Femmes-fiel qui fendent le foie des hommes d'un coup de langue / Femmes-folles qui pendent le cœur des hommes à leurs branches." Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, "Fanm Traduction," <http://creoles.free.fr/Cours/mchmtrad.htm>, accessed 15 May 13.

women's suffering at the hands of men, which emerges as a punishment for her previous dual nature: "**Femmes (en) laisse**; sueurs sangs et eaux sous trique mâle."²¹

In the final stanzas, the poem shifts dramatically from a sexualized and subjugated image of women to that of a maternal figure. The biblical myth of Eve serves as the point of reference: "le serpent de vie prit possession de ton corps puis répandit en toi le venin de connaissance, tandis qu'il s'abreuvait du lait de ta candeur. Neuf lunes ont grossi sur ton ventre et tu connus le poids de la charge primordiale. La clarté d'un midi s'ouvrit sur tes genoux. Tu livras à la vie l'homme en sa livrée d'homme."²² In this retelling of the Eve story, however, the image of the snake entering the woman's body reads as a rape for which the woman will have to bear the consequences. This connection is even more apparent in Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux's translation, which offers the following lines: "Le serpent de vie entra dans ton corps / Et avec lui le venin de la connaissance / T'enlevant ainsi ton innocence."²³ Furthermore, Hazaël-Massieux's translation also makes explicit a connection between this pregnancy and nation: "Tu as mis l'homme au monde / Nourissant un pays."²⁴ This articulation of motherhood recalls Michelle Wright's proposal of the traditional way of imagining motherhood within national frameworks:

²¹ In the original creole, the line is: "Fanm lanm ka nenyen nonm an dlo zyé yo," (Bernabé, *Dabò Pou Yonn...*, 10). Hazaël-Massieux's translation is: "Femmes-bœuf qui peinent fort sous le joug des hommes." (Hazaël-Massieux, "Fanm Translation").

²² The corresponding lines in the original creole are: "Sèpan lavi rantré an kò-w / Simen vènen lakonésans / Ek i tété-w pa andidan-w./ Nèf lalin plenn anlè bouden-w. / Ou poté chay avan chay fèt. / Gran jou kléré dé bòl jounou-w. / Ou mété nonm asou latè" (Bernabé, *Dabò Pou Yonn...*, 10). Hazaël-Massieux translates this section as: "Le serpent de vie entra dans ton corps/ Et avec lui le venin de la connaissance / T'enlevant ainsi ton innocence. / Neuf pleines lunes passèrent sur ton ventre. / Tu connus le fardeau avant que le fardeau ne fût. / La lumière éclaira tes genoux. / Tu mis l'homme au monde / Nourissant un pays" (Hazaël-Massieux, "Fanm Translation").

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

“as a heterosexual, passive conduit for active male seed that will (re)produce other heterosexual male subjects.”²⁵

Beyond the ways in which the poem highlights the contradictory roles ascribed to women—temptress, subjugated object, mother—the poem’s language locks the woman into a dialectic with men. In the lines I just cited, for instance, the woman not only gives birth to the nation, but this nation is figured as a masculine subject. The repetition of the creole word for man (“nonm”) in the poem’s first lines cited above, too, provides further evidence of this dialectic. In fact, Bernabé’s translation of the poem’s concluding line—“Tu es la nef du grand navire et la mamelle de nos futurs”²⁶—glosses over the fact that in the creole original, the poem’s last word is “man.” Hazaël-Massieux’s translation captures this aspect of the original creole: “Charpente du navire de la vie / Source où s’abreuve l’avenir de l’homme.”²⁷

The figure of the mother as bearer of male nation in Bernabé’s poems finds parallels in the woman the poem evokes for Akasha: her mother, Marianne. Born in Martinique before traveling to France under BUMIDOM regulations,²⁸ her name conjures the image of France’s national allegorical figure.²⁹ Unlike the unnamed women in the poem, however, Marianne defies her Martinican community’s expectation that she enter a convent and (at least initially) finds a

²⁵ Wright, *Becoming Black*, 12.

²⁶ The original creole lines are: “Ou sé rèdlo kannòt lavi Ou sé mammèl divini nonm.” (Bernabé, *Dabò Pou Yonn...*, 11).

²⁷ Hazaël-Massieux, “Fanm Translation.”

²⁸ This acronym stands for the “Bureau pour le développement des migrations intéressant les départements d’outre-mer,” which was created in October 1961. It would be replaced by the “Association nationale pour l’insertion et la promotion des travailleurs d’outre-mer” (ANT) in 1981. For more on the BUMIDOM and Outre-mer migration, see Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 188-97.

²⁹ In fact, Miano explicitly discusses the figure of Marianne (not the protagonist from *Blues pour Élise*) in *Habiter la frontière*, saying “Marianne est le symbole de la France. Elle est perçue, avec ma sensibilité de romancière, comme une mère qui peinerait parfois à se souvenir de tous ses enfants. La manière dont Marianne se raconte à elle-même et se présente au monde, efface une partie des couleurs elle ne serait pas” (Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 91).

loving, stable relationship. In the novel, Marianne is a woman who is rejected by her Martinican society because of her dark skin: “elle était trop noire pour que les siens lui prédissent un avenir lumineux” (15). Having rejected her family’s expectations that she will enter a convent, Marianne instead voyages to France, where she works as a housekeeper and meets Georges, a Cameroonian man “venu de la Terre Mère” (15). Despite the couple’s devotion to one another, each of their families raise objections to their upcoming union that hinge upon historical and cultural articulations of alterity. Georges’s family, for instance, considers Marianne “une femme sans généalogie” (19) because she is descended from slaves. Though the history responsible for Marianne’s loss of her genealogy, namely, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, forever binds the two families together, it is nevertheless figured here as a point of separation—or, *décalage*³⁰—from which there is no recovery. This history, however, is never named; in fact, as the text reveals later, “On ne disait pas l’Histoire qui avait enchaîné, vendu, charrié la généalogie et les totems de Marianne dans l’entrepont d’un navire négrier, avant de les noyer dans l’océan. Cette histoire-là, les flots l’avaient recouverte comme un suaire. On n’y pensait plus” (20). Though this history has the potential to remind the two populations of the link that forever binds Africa and its diaspora together, they prefer instead to articulate their relationship as an irreversible separation.

Marianne’s family, too, voices opposition to her marriage to Georges, mostly because of racial and cultural stereotypes about black Africans. For instance, they call Georges a “singe” and a “sorcier vaudou qui n’a jamais vu l’ombre d’une savonnette dans sa brousse” (17-18). Marianne’s family’s assertion that Georges is a savage echoes French colonial discourse that fixes African civilization in the past.³¹ This geographical and temporal distancing inscribed

³⁰ See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*.

³¹ See, for example, Fabian, *Time and the Other*.

between Africa and its diaspora recalls Brent Hayes Edwards's conceptualization of diaspora (that he bases on Léopold Senghor's formulation) that what separates Africa and its diaspora is a "décalage—dans le temps et dans l'espace."³² Furthermore, her family puts these seemingly insurmountable spatial and temporal disjunctures into dialogue with Marianne's potential role as mother, calling into question what space her children will inhabit: "penses-tu à vos enfants. De quel monde seront-ils, et surtout, oui, et surtout, de quelle couleur?" (18). Marianne's family's insinuation that George's cultural backwardness will tarnish the children, in both metaphorical and literal terms, points out that race is not seen as a factor uniting Africa and its diaspora.

Despite their families' objections, Georges and Marianne marry, preferring to see their marriage as a uniting force. In fact, the symbolism they use to describe their union—a tree—underscores how genealogical and geographical conceptions of identity are inextricably linked: "Ils étaient un miracle. Ils avaient survécu. À la violence. [...] Ils étaient ce grand arbre multimillénaire, dont les racines plongeaient dans la Terre Mère, dont le feuillage colorait maintenant l'Europe, les Amériques. Ils étaient immortels" (31). This tree, unlike the histories that are not named, unites African, diasporic, and Afropean populations across generations. Furthermore, the temporal vocabulary projects the tree millennia into the past, while also suggesting its immortality.

Despite their initial optimism, the couple's marriage does not last, owing in large part to Georges's family's continued denigration of Marianne. After the couple's subsequent divorce, Georges abandons the family, while Marianne stays to raise the children. As Akasha comes of age in France, this failed marriage not only leads her to question how her complex genealogy,

³² Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Problématique de la négritude," in *Liberté III: Négritude et civilisation de l'universel* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 274. Edwards reads "against the grain" of Senghor's proposition, focusing instead on the effects of how "race" has been used to gloss over "disarticulation—the points of misunderstanding, bad faith, unhappy translation" (Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 13-14).

filled with ancestors unwilling to recognize each others' legitimacy, can possibly create a cohesive whole within her, but also what the possibilities are for Afropean female subjectivity. This instability within Akasha's family structure finds parallels in Black women's writing where, as Carol Boyce Davies suggests, the problems with "home" mirror "the problematizing of community/ nation/ identity that one finds in Black women's writing from a variety of communities."³³ Though Akasha is born in France and her mother embodies the French national allegorical figure, her fractured genealogy leaves her feeling disconnected from the many communities to which she might belong.

Akasha initially seeks genealogical and geographical *remembrement* in the eyes of Afropean men; however, this mission brings up her own self-doubts about her unbelonging. She notes, for instance, that the men she meets

Qu'ils soient fils d'immigrés subsahariens ou descendants de déportés du trafic transatlantique, *elle avait su les voir tels qu'ils s'ignoraient eux-mêmes*: pharaons noirs désormais sans *sceptre ni territoire*, *driveurs** réfractaires à l'ordre et à la loi, princes du Mandé *perdus* dans les couloirs du métro, rois du *marronnage* dont les tours du HLM étaient devenues les *mornes** protecteurs, fiers guerriers de l'Oubangui ne traversant plus que la Seine en RER, *tambouyés** rythmant les sound systems d'une parole plus ancienne que la leur propre, empereurs mossis *sans titre de séjour*. *À ses yeux*, ces hommes étaient bijoux de bronze noir, des étoiles à l'éclat ambré, des feux sombres* que le sort avait voulu éteindre. *Et elle s'était investie d'une mission: raviver leur éclat.*

³³ Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15.

La jeune femme ne s'était jamais vue comme une guerrière. Ce qu'elle savait d'elle-même, c'étaient ses doutes, ses complexes, ses craintes, ses fragilités. (21-22, my emphasis)³⁴

The prevalence of references to specific ethnicities—"Mandé," "Oubangui," and "mossis"—associate some of the men with particular African regions (West Africa, Central Africa, and Burkina Faso, respectively), and the creole terms and references to slavery ("driveurs," "rois du maronnage," "tambouyés") associate others with Caribbean roots. However, these geographical determiners are undercut by the predominance of references to wandering and uprootedness: "sans sceptre ni territoire," "driveurs," "perdus," "sans titre de séjour." The histories of African territories and of the Caribbean have been mapped onto Paris's urban geography (HLM, metro, RER), yet the men still inhabit the precarious position of being at once anchored in Paris's urban space, and at the same time, profoundly deterritorialized.

As Akasha mentions, her driving force becomes to reveal to them what they "truly are," to metaphorically give them new life, and to reconnect them with their lost genealogy, a motherly role. The striking lack of romantic descriptions in the passage further supports this maternal reading of Akasha: she has become the mother saddled with metaphorically producing the Afropean nation. However, this motherhood only brings up her own troubled genealogy, her "doutes," "complexes," "craintes," and "fragilités." And yet, the fact that she does not literally become a mother is significant here. In fact, this metaphorical motherhood—particularly the way in which giving new life to these men brings up her own past—causes Akasha to seek out validation through a series of relationships with men, including "le nègre bleu qui l'aimait pour

³⁴ The novel provides the following explanations (in footnotes) for the words marked with asterisks in the passage above: "Le terme créole *drive* n'a pas de véritable équivalent français. On le comprendra, ici, dans le sens d'*errance, de vagabondage*" (21, emphasis in original); "Comprendre ce terme dans son sens créole: colline" (21); "Percussionnistes des Antilles" (21); and "L'expression *feu sombre* est tirée d'un poème que Césaire dédie à Léon-Gontran Damas (in *Moi, laminaire*)" (21).

son teint” (23), “le lascar qui n’en voulait qu’à l’argent” (23), “le presque quinquagénaire qui bandait mou” (24), and finally “cette mauvaise imitation de Black Panther qui piquait une crise si elle ne décrochait pas dès la première sonnerie, [et] qui lançait invariablement: T’étais avec un bابتou, hein” (24). These relationships are clearly predicated on corporeality—specifically, race—and though Akasha originally believes that these relationships will give her a sense of belonging, in reality, they leave her still questioning who she is. Like the women in Bernabé’s poem, Akasha has become bound up in a dialectic where femininity is dependent on masculinity.

This dependence is broken when Akasha’s final boyfriend, “l’ultime frangin,” rejects her femininity, catalyzing Akasha’s *remembrement* process. Although the two seem to be soul mates, after a few months, Akasha opens her computer to find an email from him announcing he is gay and ending their relationship:

le courrier électronique ne lui disait rien, non plus, qu’elle veuille vraiment savoir. *Qui était-elle. Le seul mouvement que faisait son corps était involontaire. Le soulèvement anarchique de sa poitrine sous l’effet d’un sanglot longtemps refoulé. [...] Elle avait peur. [...] De se dénuder. Ce n’était pas une question de couleur, ni de volume à perdre. C’était elle, seulement elle, qui n’était pas encore guérie. Elle, qui n’était plus si sure d’être une femme.* (36-37, my emphasis)

Though during their relationship Akasha felt that acceptance in the eyes of “l’ultime frangin” could fill the void left by her previous rejections, it is once “l’ultime frangin” terminates the relationship that Akasha begins to realize that the process of *remembrement* must come from self-acceptance.

Akasha’s “soulèvement anarchique de sa poitrine sous l’effet d’un sanglot longtemps refoulé” (36) reveals how *remembering* personal and collective history is essential to the

remembrement process. Let us remember that the objections Akasha's extended families raise to her parents' union—and, by extension, Akasha's existence as eternal proof of this union—are articulated in corporeal and genealogical terms. Whereas Marianne's family suggests that Georges's blackness will tarnish their children, Georges's family argues that the relationship cannot last because Marianne lacks a genealogy. As I have discussed, both families, however, refuse to mention the very reason for which these two communities are both linked and irrevocably separated: the trans-Atlantic slave trade. From her birth, thus, Akasha, not only represents the *décalage* between Africa and African diasporic communities (since both come together in the very blood that runs through her veins), but she also embodies the almost deafening silence that perpetuates this separation. Though Akasha's "sanglot" here is most directly related to her own personal trauma—that is, her breakup with "l'ultime frangin"—at the same time it also carries an undercurrent stemming from the complex history that contributes to Akasha's contemporary sense of *dismemberment*. Even if she does not consciously realize it, Akasha's body reveals that a first gesture towards *remembrement* must be recognizing this history that continues to bind Africa and the African diaspora together.

Genealogical Trauma

Like Akasha, Shale is born of an unspoken violence that haunts her genealogy, and of a union not legitimated by her parents' families. Though Shale's strategy of seeking *remembrement* through writing differs from Akasha's attempts at finding recognition in the eyes of black men, the similarities between the two women's cases suggest that the women must first come to recognize how their fractured family trees can coexist within them.

Though both of Shale's parents are from Cameroon, Shale's mother, Elise remembers that her husband Raymond's family was nevertheless opposed to their marriage for two principal reasons. First, Élise is an educated woman whom they argue will not have "respect ni pour son mari, ni pour sa belle-femme" (179). The second reason is genealogical: Élise is descended from a former slave. As the story was told to Élise, a man was passing through her grandfather's village, crying out "femme à vendre," (180) leading a naked woman by a leash. Upon seeing the woman, Élise's grandfather immediately fell in love with her, and paid the man for her freedom, telling the woman that she could marry him if she so chose, or she could leave. She chose to stay, but to live in the honored guest's house until she could make her decision about marriage; after a short period, she chose to marry him: "Cela avait été un tollé. [...] Non seulement il l'avait épousée, mais il ne s'était pas intéressé à aucune autre, jusqu'à la fin de ses jours" (181). As the novel intimates, Raymond's family uses this history as a pretext to oppose the couple's marriage. The birth of Raymond and Élise's first child, Estelle, "avait clairement mis le feu aux poudres. La naissance d'un enfant légitimait l'épouse, renforçait l'union" (182). No less dissuaded in their efforts to bring an end to the marriage, the family "avait fait courir le bruit qu'Élise avait des amants" (182), to which Raymond responds that he trusts her and that "tous les enfants portés par Élise serait les siens" (183).

It is at this point that the family deals one final blow to the couple, one that complicates even further Shale's genealogy, and calls into question her membership in her family. One evening, Élise arrives home from work one hour before Raymond, when suddenly one of Raymond's "cousins," whom she did not recognize, appears at the house unannounced. As she heads to the kitchen to offer him a beverage, he follows her; "[e]lle ne l'avait pas entendu

marcher derrière elle” (184). When Raymond returns home to find two-year-old Estelle playing alone, he immediately senses something is wrong and rushes to the bedroom to locate his wife.

C’était là qu’il les avait trouvés. L’homme appliquait une main ferme sur la bouche d’Élise qui pleurait. Son agresseur s’était levé avec le sourire, avait accusé Élise de l’avoir attiré là. C’était à sa demande qu’il avait posé sa main sur les lèvres [...] le cousin avait quitté les lieux en chancelant, disant que Raymond méconnaissait les traditions. Rien de ce qu’il pensait posséder n’était à lui. Pas même sa femme. Tout appartenait à la famille. Non seulement il avait le droit de prendre cette femme, mais il ne pouvait accepter que sa parole soit mise en doute. (184)

Later, during a meeting between Raymond and his family called to discuss the incident, Raymond—much to his family’s dismay—reaffirms his commitment to his wife, stating “C’est ma femme. Les enfants qu’elle met au monde sont les miens” (185). Despite his outward affirmation of support, this incident permanently shrouds Shale—born nine months after the incident—in a sense of uncertainty (“[a]ucun des deux n’avait pu s’empêcher, en regardant Shale, de se demander à qui elle ressemblait” [185]), a doubt that her father cannot overcome: “Raymond n’avait plus eu la force d’étreindre la fillette. Son cœur le faisait continuellement, mais son corps n’y arrivait pas” (185).

Like the unspoken violence of the slave trade that haunts Akasha’s genealogy, this sexual violence of which Shale might be born also remains silenced, and produces geographical and corporeal consequences. Whether or not she is truly a product of her mother’s rape, this violence separates Shale and her family from Cameroon. The family moves to France just after the incident, causing Shale to be “la seule [de sa famille] à n’avoir aucune mémoire subsaharienne, même sensorielle, à l’inverse de sa sœur qui gardait quelques impressions de sa toute petite

enfance” (158). Furthermore, just as Shale’s father cannot bring himself to hug Shale, neither can Shale physically connect with her sister: Estelle (Shale’s sister) admits to her boyfriend, Ernest, that the fact that her sister never held her hand still—even as both are now adults—remains “sa plus ancienne blessure” (109). Just as a limb is cut off from the rest of a larger body, the violence of which Shale is born manifests itself through a corporeal distancing from her family. In the family’s body, she is the *membre* (member, and limb) that does not belong.

As a means of going through the process of *remembrement*, Shale writes a multi-episode series of autobiographical short stories entitled “*La Vraie Vie de Sambo*.” Naming her fictional double “Sambo” carries racial and gendered connotations related to American imagery. As Jan Pieterse discusses, Sambo, a term originally “derived from a Hispano-American term meaning half-caste” came to be a prevalent stock character in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture, including product advertising and minstrel shows.³⁵ Often set in opposition to Nat, the stock character that embodied the threatening stereotypes mapped onto black individuals (and whose very name recalls Nat Turner and the threat of rebellion), Sambo represents the “the prototype of the contented slave, the carefree black.”³⁶ Naming her main character—a young woman who is uncertain of her place in her own family—Sambo can be read as an interrogation not only of racial stereotypes, but also of their gendered dimensions.

³⁵ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 152. Sambo is also a character mentioned in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly* ed. Hammatt Billings, and David S. Reynolds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Another work that evokes him in name, but not in context, is Helen Bannerman’s *Little Black Sambo*, a story originally published in 1899 about a young boy in India. Helen Bannerman, *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1951).

³⁶ Pieterse, *White on Black*, 152. For more on Sambo’s representation in American popular culture, see Sylvia Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979). While in Paris, Leora Auslander and Thomas Holt also stumble upon many American objects (statues, advertisements, etc.) depicting Sambo, and study this figure’s ubiquity in France as a means to meditate on differences between American and French concepts of race and race relations.

In “*La Vraie Vie de Sambo*,” Sambo wakes up each day in a new household, surrounded by a group of people who call herself her family, but of whom she has no recollection. One commonality unites these families: Sambo can never see the father’s face:

L’enfant était une représentation d’elle-même, telle qu’elle se voyait encore à présent. Sambo se réveillait tous les matins dans une nouvelle maison. Ceux qui vivaient là connaissaient son nom, se souvenaient du jour de sa naissance, de la danse que sa sœur aînée avait esquissée dans les couloirs de la maternité, quand on l’avait emmenée voir sa cadette. La mère remplissait son bol de lait, y ajoutait les céréales au chocolat que Sambo aimait bien. Quand elle avait fini, elle lui pinçait doucement la joue, lui faisait le récit de sa naissance. Assis à l’autre bout de la table, faisant face à Sambo, le père lisait son journal. On ne voyait jamais son visage. Dans les autres scènes du livre, il était de dos, ou caché dans la pénombre. (144-45)

The impersonal language used to describe the family (“ceux qui vivaient là,” “la mère,” and “le père”) emphasizes the silent distance Sambo feels between herself and her family. The only possessive adjectives used that would indicate relationships between family members, describe the relationship between sisters: “sa sœur aînée” and “sa cadette,” suggesting the sisterly bond is stronger than the other relationships. Furthermore, the two references to Sambo’s birth in this scene replay the originary violence; however, its descriptions connect her to her mother and sister, not her father. The father’s hidden face—a symbol of his unknown identity—reinforces the genealogical break that haunts Sambo’s (and Shale’s) existence: he is present only as a specter. Furthermore, as Shale explains, each day Sambo wakes up in a new familial environment. Inscribing her protagonist into a different family, and a different house in each of

the stories again points to the association between genealogy and geography, where Sambo feels out of place in both respects.

As the novel explains later, this type of incomprehension plagued Shale's childhood. Élise recalls that "[q]uand elle était petite, il arrivait parfois que Shale se réveille le matin avec, dans le regard, une lueur d'incompréhension. Elle semblait se demander quel était cet entourage qui se disait sa famille, comment elle était arrivé parmi eux" (168-69). Furthermore, this distanciation also affects how Shale relates to her own identity; growing up, as Élise remembers, "Shale ne parlait d'elle-même qu'en énonçant son propre prénom" (166)—she sees herself in the third person, recalling Fanon's formulation according to which the black individual sees himself as an "image in the third person."³⁷ This dismemberment that Shale feels can be read as a form of diasporic *décalage*, and the whole story of which she is born carries echoes of the unspeakable violences that separate other members of the African diaspora from their genealogies.

Through writing, Shale explores alternative familial communities in order to grapple with her process of *remembrement*; however, each of these works only has limited success: turning around the story of her birth, Shale can only feel connected in limited ways to her mother and her sister. This disjuncture manifests itself in a different way in Shale's real life: when her father passes away and the body is sent back to Cameroon to be buried, Shale, to the dismay of her family members, chooses not to attend the funeral. The reproach she receives for this decision, however, comes in the form of silent stares: "Les regards l'avaient baignée de ce reproche silencieux qu'elle y avait toujours lu, depuis sa venue au monde, lui semblait-il" (141). The silent condemnation she receives here echoes the silence surrounding her personal history—and that of her genealogy.

³⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

In the novel, this silence is eventually broken when Élise finally decides to tell her daughter about the history of her conception. Prior to this meeting, as Élise prepares herself to see her daughter, whom she has not seen in the five years that have passed since she traveled to Cameroon for Raymond's funeral, Élise catches a glimpse of her own body in the mirror. What she sees underscores the intimate connection between body and history:

Élise regarda son reflet dans le grand miroir de la salle de bains, toutes ces choses qu'on ne pouvait deviner en la voyant passer dans la rue [...] Ce relâchement cutané lui rappelait combien la joie avait été entachée. Elle avait su donner change, mais *au fond, tout ce qu'elle était résidait dans cet écroulement. C'était sa cicatrice intime qui se voyait là.* [...] Il avait fallu révéler l'affaissement, sous la lumière crue d'une lampe halogène. Elle ignorait ce qu'elle avait le plus craint. Qu[e Frédéric] voie l'effondrement ou qu'il en palpe la matière fripée, dépourvue de chair. Il avait fait les deux. (163-164, my emphasis)

Though this passage literally describes how her new boyfriend (Frédéric) examines her body, it can also be metaphorically read as an examination of her troubled past. The “cicatrice intime” stands in for the history that she guarded close to her heart, now examined under unflattering halogen light. Yet this act also precipitates Élise's own process of *remembrement*—in examining the scars on her body, she also acknowledges the scars that have haunted her. By remembering the history, she also re-members herself; the corporeal and historical processes of *remembrement* come together.

Following this event, Élise resolves herself to *re-member* her family by revealing this silenced history to Shale. When Élise arrives at her daughter's apartment, she is invited in; their initial conversation is forced and full of uncomfortable silences, captured in the prose:

Élise dit sa surprise en croisant Baptiste à l'entrée de la résidence. Shale répondit qu'elle l'hébergeait depuis quelques jours. *Silence*. Élise ne savait pas qu'ils étaient si proches. Shale rétorqua que ce n'était pas le cas, mais qu'il n'avait nulle part où aller. *Silence. Ouverture du pot à thé*. Tout de même, n'était-il pas surprenant que Baptiste soit venu ici plutôt que chez Estelle qu'il connaissait mieux? Estelle était en plein déménagement. C'était elle qui avait donné l'adresse à Baptiste. *Silence. Dépôt de tasses sur un plateau. Ajout de deux petites cuillères. Pas de sucre. Pas d'édulcorant. Début de l'infusion des feuilles dans la théière transparente*. Enfin, rien dans cette situation ne lui posait problème, pas le moins du monde, non, non, puisqu'ils étaient majeurs et n'avaient plus de comptes à rendre, mais comment se faisait-il que Baptiste...

Si tu me disais pourquoi tu es là, maman. [...]

Élise dit simplement qu'elle était venue répondre à la question que Shale se posait depuis longtemps. (176-177, my emphasis)

This intrusion of silence into the conversation is a metaphor for how refusing to speak the violence of Shale's origin has come to unite the two women. The scene when Élise reveals this history to Shale, however, can be understood as an inverse Lacanian mirror stage. Despite her "needy" childhood, Shale has already moved out of her mother's house and has been living independently of her mother since her father's death. She therefore already sees herself as independent from the mother, and the way in which the silence intrudes into the scene only serves to reinforce the gap that separates them. In fact, as Michelle Wright argues, this dialogic subjectivity is attached to other iterations of black mothers; in order to undergo subjectification, daughters must "recogniz[e] [the mother] as both Other and conflated with oneself."³⁸ Revealing

³⁸ Wright, *Becoming Black*, 179.

this story, thus, brings the women back together, highlighting for Shale how their subjectivities are forever linked: she is (potential) proof of the violence that transpired. However, this conversation also provides Élise the opportunity to explain to Shale that her father was the one who named her: “Il lui avait donné un nom dont lui seul connaissait le sens véritable. Quand Élise l’avait interrogé à ce propos, il avait seulement répondu: *Pour qu’elle transforme la boue*. En se creusant les méninges, [Élise] avait compris, un peu plus tard, qu’il faisait allusion à l’histoire qui avait engendré la fillette. C’était cela, la boue que l’enfant devait transformer” (178, italics in original). In this sense, then, Shale’s history was always given a voice and a name, and, though Shale is still uncertain of her biological connection to the man who acted as her father, this process of naming brought her into being, a symbolic act that reconnects her to her family genealogy and allows her to undergo *remembrement*. In fact, as Élise tells Frédéric at the end of the novel, Shale has also decided to travel to Cameroon to reestablish her geographical connection to her parents’ homeland: “Elle m’a appris que son petit ami et elle iraient sur le Continent cet été. Elle veut se recueillir sur la tombe de son père” (186). The term “se recueillir,” which connotes private prayer or reflection also functions in a double sense: Shale is returning to Cameroon to metaphorically collect herself—to pick up the pieces of her broken genealogy, and to transform them into a coherent whole.

As I have been tracing in this section, though they come from different backgrounds, both Akasha’s and Shale’s complex genealogies, filled with ancestors unwilling to recognize each other, speaks to their Afropean position. Both are born of violence and embody the painful position of diasporic *décalage*, even though they are both comfortable being geographically “at home” in France. Their position of both rootedness and in-betweenness recalls Miano’s

formulation elsewhere of “border identities” (“identités frontalières”) that she argues characterizes not only Afropean identity, but also African diasporic identity more generally:

Il me semble parvenir parfois, à créer comme ils le font, *de la beauté avec de la boue*. Car ces identités frontalières sont *nées de la douleur*. Elles sont *nées de l’arrachement, du viol, de la détestation de soi-même*. Elles ont dû traverser ces ombres pour inventer un ancrage sur des sables mouvants, et *s’imposer, non pas contre, mais parmi les autres*. Elles habitent, au fond, *un espace cicatriciel*. La cicatrice n’est pas la plaie. *Elle est la nouvelle ligne de vie qui s’est créée par-dessus*. Elle est le champ des possibles le plus insoupçonnés.³⁹

One cannot read Miano’s formulation of “identités frontalières” without hearing the echo of Akasha’s and Shale’s histories: Shale must make “de la beauté avec de la boue,” both women are “nées de la douleur” (Akasha “de l’arrachement,” Shale “du viol”), and Élise’s “cicatrice” testifies to the violence that engenders Shale. This formulation that “la cicatrice [...] est la nouvelle ligne de vie qui s’est créée par-dessus” returns to the concept of genealogy that I have been tracing throughout this chapter, and puts the women’s position into dialogue with larger formulations of diasporic and Afropean identity.⁴⁰ As Akasha and Shale discover, they are both living proof of the unspeakable violence that forever separates different members of their family, yet at the same time, their life proves that these elements were able to come together. As a “nouvelle ligne de vie”—each woman keeps her family’s genealogy alive, much as it might be fraught within her.

³⁹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 30, my emphasis.

⁴⁰ See especially Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; and Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Jr. Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

What is more, this “nouvelle ligne de vie” serves as a point of connection between Africa and Europe, capturing Afropean identity in *Blues pour Élise*. Just as each of the women must establish themselves “non pas contre, mais parmi les autres” (to quote from the citation above), they also realize that in order to inhabit their Afropean identity, they must acknowledge the complexities and internal contradictions that nevertheless form one cohesive whole within themselves. For Miano, Afropeanism has geographical, genealogical, and cultural dimensions:

C'est cette maturation progressive de leur parcours identitaire que j'appelle Afropea, un lieu immatériel, intérieur, où les traditions, les mémoires, les cultures dont ils sont dépositaires, s'épousent, chacune ayant la même valeur. Afropea, c'est, en France, le terroir mental que se donnent ceux qui ne peuvent faire valoir *la souche française*. [...] C'est l'attachement aux racines parentales parce qu'on se sent le devoir de valoriser ce qui a été méprisé, et parce qu'elles charrient, elles aussi, de la grandeur, de la beauté. [...] C'est le refus d'une identité nationale réductrice et crispante. C'est l'unité dans la diversité. C'est un écho au modèle africain américain qui a fourni les figures valorisantes que la France ne donnait pas. C'est la nécessaire entrée de la composante européenne dans l'expérience diasporique des peuples d'ascendance subsaharienne.⁴¹

As I have traced in my study of Akasha's and Shale's cases in the novel, their *re-membering* allows them to *remember* the violences that generate them; in so doing, they acknowledge how the fraught limbs of their families' genealogical tree unite within them. In addition to this literal genealogy, the novel's intermedial structure also privileges musical circulation between a variety of spaces. The novel's “Ambiance Sonore” sections (to which I now turn), can be productively read as cultural genealogies that also facilitate Afropean *remembrement*. Like the Afropea

⁴¹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 86, my emphasis.

described in Miano's citation above, these musical works, (and their artists) challenge "reductive and exasperating" generic taxonomies (national in the case of the artists), to echo Miano. Instead, the works contained in the "Ambiance Sonore" sections valorize "unity in diversity," privilege musical connections that testify to the connectivities forged across a variety of spaces, and speak to the women's simultaneously placed and placeless Afropean identity.

Border Soundscapes

Miano has stated that during her adolescence, African American culture (primarily television series such as *The Cosby Show*, literature such as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, music such as jazz and blues, and even magazines such as *Ebony*) functioned as a means for her to connect with negotiations of black identity worldwide. She writes, for instance,

Mes années d'adolescence furent aussi celles de la découverte pour moi de 'l'être noir'. [...] C'est à la lecture des auteurs caraïbéens et américains noirs, que j'ai compris que je faisais, moi aussi, partie de ces peuples auxquels une place au monde avait été assigné en fonction de leur complexion. [...] Je trouvais un intérêt tout particulier à lire les écrivains noirs américains. L'esthétique qu'ils produisaient, les ambiances qu'ils décrivaient, m'étaient familières, parce que proches de ces musiques que j'avais toujours écoutées.⁴²

This connection to African American culture is particularly evident in the way it informs (in both structure and content) many of her novels as well. Her earlier novels taking place in Cameroon that form what has come to be known as her "triptyque africain," (composed of *L'intérieur de la nuit* [2005], *Contours du jour qui vient* [2006], and *Les aubes éclairées: Sankofa cry* [2009]) for instance, draw from musical structures and metaphors. As Miano has described, "*L'intérieur de*

⁴² Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 12-15.

la nuit suivait une structure AABA classique, pour l'interprétation de thèmes de jazz," while "Le cheminement de Musango, personnage principal de *Contours du jour qui vient*, m'a été inspiré par le contenu vieux spirituals et de thèmes récents de jazz vocal."⁴³ Her two earlier works dealing with questions of racial identity, immigration, and Afropeanism in France—*Afropean soul et autres nouvelles* (2008) and *Tels des astres éteints* (2008)—contain allusions to a variety of musical works (including those belonging to African American genres). In addition to the title, *Afropean soul*, which establishes a transnational musical connection between Afropean and African American culture through soul music, three of the novellas also contain references to musical works from a variety of traditions. One finds, for instance, a reference to the album *Million Dollar Boy Tour*, by Kamaro (an Canadian singer of Lebanese origin, as the novella explains),⁴⁴ and young Afropean women in the story "Filles du bord de ligne" imagine themselves as American R&B stars Mary J. Blige and Beyonce Knowles. In *Tels des astres éteints* music serves as the novel's organizing principle. The novel begins with an "Intro" and concludes with an "Outro," both titled "Come Sunday"—a reference to Duke Ellington's famous jazz song.⁴⁵ Five "themes," also titled after jazz songs ("Afro Blue," "Straight Ahead," "Angel Eyes," "Round Midnight," and "Left Alone"), serve as the heart of the novel, and a "Bande-son" in which the novel's protagonists comment upon the major musical references, follows the "Outro."⁴⁶

⁴³ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 29.

⁴⁴ Miano, *Afropean soul et autres nouvelles*, 37.

⁴⁵ As Miano explains in the "Bande-son" section at the end of the novel, Duke Ellington named the song "Spiritual," but it is more commonly referred to as "Come Sunday." (Miano, *Tels des astres éteints*, 373).

⁴⁶ In the "Bande-son" section, the novel's characters propose specific versions of these jazz themes: Oscar Brown Jr. and Mongo Santamaria's version of "Afro Blue," Abbey Lincoln and Mal Waldron's recording of "Straight Ahead," Earl Brentt and Matt Dennis's "Round Midnight," Bernei Hanighen and Thelonius Monk's version of "Round Midnight," and Billie Holiday and Mal Waldron's "Left Alone." This section also includes a "liste des chansons mentionnées ou évoquées dans la narration," (374-377) complete with page numbers of the references and details

Blues pour Élise continues Miano’s intermedial aesthetic on multiple levels. First, its title, *Blues pour Élise*, juxtaposes two different musical references: blues—a genre created in the African American milieu—and classical European music, through the reference to Beethoven’s “Für Elise.” Juxtaposing these references suggests the convergence of two worlds into one productive hybrid form; just as they coexist beside each other, so too can heterogeneous populations coexist in France.⁴⁷ Second, *Blues pour Élise*’s structure parallels that of a music album. Composed of eleven chapters, including two unnumbered “Interlude” chapters (coming between chapters 3 and 4 and 6 and 7), *Blues pour Élise* also contains an unnumbered “Bonus” chapter, which is not listed in the novel’s table of contents just like a “Bonus” track is often not listed in a CD’s track list. References to song titles, lyrics, and artists pepper the chapters; these references are later reiterated in an “Ambiance Sonore” section with which each chapter (except for the Interludes) concludes. These works are vast and, as Catherine Mazuric points out, often obscure: the reader is unlikely to be able to conjure an aural image of each song contained in the text.⁴⁸ However, as I argue in this section, the musical works (whether or not they conjure an

about the song’s album and availability. For an analysis of the effect of this musical intertextuality in *Tels des astres éteints*, see Catherine Mazauric, “Débords musicaux du texte: Vers des pratiques transartistiques de la désappartenance (Léonora Miano, Dieudonné Niangouna),” *Nouvelles Études Francopohones* 27, no. 1 (2012): 105-07.

⁴⁷ Additionally, Miano might also be referencing a recent jazz adaptation of Beethoven’s original: Erik Morales’s arrangement entitled “Blues Für Elise.” Erik Morales, “Blues Für Elise,” (Fort Lauderdale, FL: FJH Music, 2004).

⁴⁸ Miano also hosted a collection of videos available on her website for the audience to consult in conjunction with her novels, expanding her literary creations beyond the realm of any one medium; however, the website, leonoramiano.com, is not currently in operation. For Mazuric, offering centralized access to the musical works mentioned in Miano’s fiction constitutes a weakness in her intermedial project: “On aperçoit cependant les limites de cette tentative de mixage de la littérature avec la musique: à moins de tenir prête, pour la lecture, une *playlist* encodée dans un ordinateur (à l’instar d’un personnage de *Tels des astres éteints*), le lecteur n’a guère de possibilité d’accès direct, à travers la seule mention du titre du morceau—à moins d’être doté et d’une culture musicale similaire à celle de l’auteure, et d’une remarquable mémoire auditive!” (Mazauric, “Débords musicaux du texte, 108). However, whereas Mazauric sees this gesture as evidence of the inherent limits of intermediality in literature—“[l]e *medium* de l’imprimé s’avère ainsi borné, la transmédialité appauvrie, quand, sur son site personnel, Miano peut, à sa guise, offrir des liens vers des vidéos des artistes qui font le ‘son’ des personnages du roman” (108)—I see it as a productive space for opening up textual constraints, thus better achieving her intermedial project.

aural image for the reader)—particularly their packaging into “Ambiance Sonore” sections, function as an alternative cultural genealogy that privileges the connections forged across many types of boundaries, and that testify to the circulation of peoples and cultures. In so doing, these “Ambiance Sonore” sections *re-member* the Afropean women to the African diasporic and European communities to which they belong. Furthermore, by drawing from a variety of hybrid works that, though they might create friction (either within or among the works), as well as works that are both placed and placeless in their musical language, the “Ambiance Sonore” sections mirror the Afropean women’s positions in France.

In the novel, songs permeate protagonists’ immediate environments as well as their memories; however, far from constituting “background noise,” the novel’s soundscape⁴⁹ plays an integral part in its meaning. In fact, music is present from the novel’s first paragraph, when, as I mentioned previously, to begin her new life, Akasha opens her computer and brings up a playlist containing works by Millie Jackson. Similarly, music also structures the novel’s final scene (included in the regular chapters), when, just after revealing the violence of her conception to Shale, Élise joins her boyfriend Frédéric at his apartment, where the jazz of Keyko Nimsay’s song, “Around midnight Ka (lé minuit soné silouèt ka dansé a dan zalizé...),”⁵⁰ catalyzes her own *remembrement* process: “Élise ne comprenait pas la langue, interprétait à sa manière les paroles qui lui parvenait, un peu hachés. [...] Elle posa la tête sur l’épaule de Frédéric. C’était la première fois qu’elle donnait tous les détails de l’histoire” (185-186). As is clear from these two

She also gestures toward accusing Miano of commercializing her literature, “lorsqu’elle [Miano] promet dans sa “discothèque” l’album de la chanteuse Cae, citée dans *Blues pour Élise* et qui, de son côté, a précisément dédié un morceau à son œuvre” (108).

⁴⁹ Here, I borrow Schafer’s term, developed in R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994). For a succinct overview of how the term is currently employed in cultural anthropology, see David W. Samuels et al., “Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010).

⁵⁰ Keyko Nimsay, *Jazz’airya Project* (Portland, OR: CD Baby, 2008), CD.

examples, at certain points in the novel music plays an affective, emotional role that allows the protagonists to process trauma. At other points, the lyrics resonate with the situation at hand. For instance, immediately after telling her friend Amahoro how “[t]out serait parfait si Gaétan n’était pas tellement obsédé par l’idée de l’emmener *vivre dans des pays sauvages*,” Shale adds “*Comme dans cette chanson, tu sais...*” (150), referencing to Arthur H.’s “Est-ce que tu aimes (vivre dans des pays sauvages).”⁵¹

Following my analysis of Akasha’s and Shale’s familial backgrounds, what interests me most in *Blues pour Élise*’s intermediality are the “Ambiance Sonore” sections at the end of each chapter. Listing the musical allusions in these “Ambiance Sonore” sections accords these references more weight than the reader might otherwise give them, and constructs a new, musical narrative that complements the literary one. A cursory glance at the nine “Ambiance Sonore” sections reveals a diverse range of artists and musical works that often defy classification. Some artists are easily identified with certain national or regional paradigms, such as African American artists Marvin Gaye and Millie Jackson; Caribbean artists Soft and Annick⁵² and Janklod; European popular musicians Léopold Nord et Vous and Arthur H.; or Cameroonian musicians such as Francis Bebey and Bill Loko. Other artists, whose personal trajectories situate them between multiple spaces, simultaneously call attention to and subvert such classifications. Baloji, a Congolese-born Belgian artist, for instance, has spoken publicly about his (and his music’s) resistance to rigid categories: “J’aime bien le terme Afropéen. Mais j’ai une carte d’identité belge, j’ai eu la nationalité. Je ne dirais pas que je suis un mutant, c’est un peu fort, mais je vis

⁵¹ Arthur H., *Adieu Tristesse* (Paris: Polydor, 2005), CD.

⁵² In the “Ambiance Sonore,” “Annick” is spelled “Anick.” (49)

entre deux mondes.”⁵³ Rapper Bams, too, often finds herself explaining her national and ethnic heritage to journalists. Born in France to two Cameroonian parents, Bams chose her stage name—short for Bamiléké, one of the dominant ethnic groups in Western Cameroon—because it “me permet de toujours avoir à parler de ce que certains aimeraient que l’on gomme mais qui m’est cher. Mon autre Pays, mon autre moi. Titi Parisienne de naissance, Camerounaise de sang et Extra Terrienne de cœur et de Tête!”⁵⁴ That the black French artists are often asked to explain their relationship to Africa also parallels the Afropean women’s struggle of being at once “at home” in France, yet not perceived as such.

Just as the artists’ diverse trajectories call into question the impulse to classify them according to national paradigms, so too do the works’ musical compositions subvert rigid generic classifications. For instance, born in East Algeria, Keyko Nimsay produces music that fuses larger, transnational forms of musical expression such as jazz⁵⁵ with elements from her local musical context. Another artist mentioned in the novel, Valéry Boston (who grew up in Paris but overtly claims her Antillean heritage), actively encourages her audience to read musical works as a signifier of her complex heritage. Her website situates both her and her music between multiple spaces and genres, tracing a complex musical genealogy that parallels her own national and ethnic heritage: “enveloppée[s] d’un patchwork d’influences riches et contrastées, ayant pour fil

⁵³ Olivier Cachin, “Baloji: Rappeur Entre Deux Mondes,” *RFI.com* 5 February 2008, http://www.rfimusique.com/musiquefr/articles/098/article_17149.asp, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁵⁴ “A la rencontre de Bams, artiste rap, jazz et soul camerounaise,” *Bonaberi.com* 2 June 2010, http://www.bonaberi.com/ar_a_la_rencontre_de_bams_artiste_rap_jazz_et_soul_camerounaise.7810.html, accessed 15 May 2013. Though she publicly identifies herself with her ethnicity, Bamiléke, over any nationality (French, Cameroonian, or a mixture of the two), her birth in France, as well as her Cameroonian heritage is always evoked in articles about her: “Bams est une chanteuse de hip-hop originaire du Cameroun et née en France en 1973.” Yasmine Chouaki, “Bams,” *RFI.com* 13 April 2010, <http://www.rfi.fr/contenu/20100325-1-bams>, accessed 15 May 2013.

⁵⁵ As Timothy Taylor, among others, suggests, African-American music such as jazz has often been taken as a marker of modernity or of a type of reactionary musical discourse, rather than necessarily evoking the geographical location of the United States. See Timothy Dean Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 155.

conducteur une voix aux accents jazzy, et un groove irrésistible. Du jazz à la musette, en passant par le funk et le reggae, *sa musique est à l'image de qui elle est: colorée, riche, festive et positive.*"⁵⁶ These artists and their works are marketed in ways that both claim and defy territorialization, and that recall Miano's description of the Afropean women in *Blues pour Élise*: "Ces personnes vivent sereinement leur hybridité culturelle, elle-même ancrée sur un socle principalement européen, avec une forte influence africaine américaine, due à la longue absence de modèles dans l'espace français."⁵⁷

The abundant references to geographical locations pepper discussions about them and the types of musics they produce, at the same time, many of these descriptions also situate these works between multiple territories and genres. As case studies, I would now like to turn to the "Ambiance Sonore" sections for Akasha and Shale, analyzing the intersection between musical narrative, globalization, identity, and placed-ness that emerges from each.

The "Ambiance Sonore" section for Akasha's chapter ("Sable sister") contains works dealing predominantly with questions of love, femininity, women's empowerment, and belonging. As I previously mentioned, these works, including Joby Bernabé's "Fanm,"⁵⁸ any *biguine* by Polo⁵⁹ Rosine, Millie Jackson's "A moment's pleasure," "Never change lovers in the

⁵⁶ This is how her biography presents her on her MySpace page (<http://www.myspace.com/valeryboston>); my emphasis.

⁵⁷ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 138. One can also wonder if claiming such diverse musical styles is also a way of redeploying discourses of "authenticity," as Taylor proposes in his study of hybridity in "world" music. See Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 141-160.

⁵⁸ Bernabé, *3 Mo 7 Pawòl*.

⁵⁹ This spelling is how his name appears in the "Ambiance Sonore"; however, most scholarly sources on Martinican music prefer the spelling "Paulo Rosine," stage name for Paul Rosine. In the rest of the chapter, I prefer the more popular spelling.

middle of the night,” and “Put something down on it”⁶⁰ precipitate Akasha’s reflections on her own femininity and that of her mother. Unlike some of the other artists mentioned in *Blues pour Élise*, these artists are fairly easily classified in terms of their nationality (Bernabé and Paulo Rosine are Martinican, and Millie Jackson is American); however, closer analysis of the songs reveals musical connections that transcend regional and generic paradigms. In “Fanm,” Bernabé recites his poetry over musical accompaniment whose instrumentation and rhythm testifies to the intersection of Caribbean, Latin American, and African influences. The song’s rhythm carries echoes of other musical genres found throughout West and Central Africa (such as Congolese *soukous*, and Ivorian *zouglou* and *Coupé-décalé*), the Caribbean (such as Cuban *son*) and Latin America. Furthermore, the song’s instrumentation, which prominently features a harmonica and a nylon string guitar, musically connects “Fanm” with a larger Latin American sound. Similarly, Paulo Rosine became the lead of the Martinican group Malavoi, whose *biguine* style drew from European orchestral music, Latin American genres, and Caribbean influences.⁶¹ The prominent string section, rhythmic piano, and chimes found in “Jou ouve,” one of Malavoi’s most popular songs, for instance, reminds the listener of chamber symphonic style, and testifies to the continued cultural (and political) intersection between Europe and the Antilles. Millie Jackson’s works exemplify the soul, funk, and disco aesthetics, indicated by the prominent symbols and strings, bass line, and their rhythm. Though each work “places” itself in identifiable ways (among them rhythm, instrumentation, and language), listening to them together also highlights the connections between them.

⁶⁰ Both “A moment’s pleasure” and “Never change lovers in the middle of the night” are from Jackson’s album *A moment’s pleasure* (New York: Spring Records, 1979), 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm. “Put something down on it” is from her album *Live & Uncensored* (New York: Spring Records, 1979), 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm.

⁶¹ Brenda F Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 17.

The “Ambiance Sonore” for Shale’s chapter (entitled “C’est l’amour”) also contains music from a variety of genres, including European popular music (Léopold Nord et Vous’s “C’est l’amour,”⁶² Jean-Louis Murat’s “Jim,”⁶³ and Arthur H.’s “Est-ce que tu aimes [vivre dans des pays sauvages],”) neo-soul (Meshell Ndegeocello’s “Leviticus: Faggot [his mother would pray]”)⁶⁴ and Guadeloupean folk music that draws on jazz and gwo ka⁶⁵ (Soft’s “Gadé yo”).⁶⁶ Just as the songs’ lyrics in Akasha’s “Ambiance Sonore,” address her identitarian struggles, so too do the songs in Shale’s chapter complement the action in both their lyrics and their musical composition. Despite their overt differences, many of the songs draw on elements of African American popular music such as jazz and soul. For instance, the heavy reliance of “C’est l’amour” on synthesized instruments and trite lyrics (“qu’est-ce qu’on trouve en cherchant sous ta blouse? / C’est l’amour. Je prends l’entrée et puis le plat du jour / C’est l’amour”)⁶⁷ are characteristic of 1980s popular music, and in fact, its immense popularity in Europe (and France) during the fall of 1987 makes it an icon of late 1980s European popular music.⁶⁸ Set in the context of the larger “Ambiance Sonore,” its funk-inspired bassline stands out, an element which

⁶² Léopold Nord et Vous, *C’est L’amour / C’est L’amour (Instrumental)* (Paris: BMG France, 1987), 45 rpm.

⁶³ Jean-Louis Murat, *Mustango* (Paris: Virgin France, 1999), CD.

⁶⁴ Me’Shell NdegéOcello, *Peace Beyond Passion* (Los Angeles, CA: Maverick, 1996), CD. At different points in her career, Ndegeocello has preferred alternative spellings of her name. She legally changed her name at age 17 from Michelle Lynn Johnson to Meshell Ndegeocello, but has also preferred the alternative spelling Me’Shell NdegéOcello. Recently, she has also been credited on albums as Meshell Suhaila Bashir-Shakur.

⁶⁵ Berrian, *Awakening Spaces*, 214.

⁶⁶ Soft, *Kadans a Péyi-La* (Kryph, 2005), CD.

⁶⁷ Léopold Nord et Vous.

⁶⁸ Though the group is Belgian, the song enjoyed more success in France, where it appeared on France’s SNEP (Syndicat national de l’édition phonographique) singles chart for twenty-four weeks beginning on September 19, 1987. It peaked at number two, earning this position twice: once on November 21 and once on December 12. In Belgium, it peaked at number twenty-four, and only remained on the top-50 chart for five weeks. Because of its popularity, the single earned gold status, selling over 100,000 copies in France. <http://lescharts.com/showitem.asp?interpret=L%26+Nord+%26+Vous&titel=C%27est+l%27amour&cat=s>.

puts it into dialogue with the next song, “Leviticus: Faggot” a characteristic example of Meshell Ndegeocello’s neo-soul sound. Many of the elements in Ndegeocello’s song—including its prominent vocals, disco bass line, and synthesized horn section—obviously draw on earlier African American genres such as funk and soul. “Gadé yo,” in contrast, has a plaintive feel: musically, its instrumentation, which features piano, drums, bass, guitar, and a shaker has an ambient jazz feel. Such an ambiance—though Latin-inspired, rather than ambient jazz—is also prominent in the musical elements for the final song in the “Ambiance Sonore,” Arthur H.’s “Est-ce que tu aimes.” This final song, however, also incorporates electronic sounds, situating itself between Europe and Latin America.

Assembling the songs into “Ambiance Sonore” sections highlights both the connections that can be drawn between the works, as well as the particularities that are characteristic of specific aesthetics. In this way, the “Ambiance Sonore” sections testify to the larger cultural flows both within and beyond the African diaspora and illustrate Geogre Lipsitz’s claim that these flows are multidirectional and uneven: “The flow of information and ideas among diasporic people has not been solely from Africa outward to Europe and the Americas, but rather has been a reciprocal self-renewing dialogue in communities characterized by upheaval and change. The story of the African diaspora is more than an aftershock of the slave trade, it is an ongoing dynamic creation.”⁶⁹ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s concept of “minor transnationalism”—rhizomatic, horizontal connections between spaces that circumvent the normal vertical hierarchical relationships between cultural centers and their peripheries—is also a useful way of understanding these musical genealogies.⁷⁰ In fact, as a variety of music and

⁶⁹ Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*, 39.

⁷⁰ Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

cultural studies scholars have suggested, African American musical forms such as rap and jazz have been used in a variety of geographical contexts (including in France) for social and political purposes.⁷¹

Furthermore, these musical works also give voice to the silenced histories of which each woman is born. Many of the American musical styles contain elements brought to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slave trade—a fact to which the works’ musical compositions testify.⁷² Similarly, traces of European popular dance music found in the Caribbean *biguine* (as just one example), for instance, testifies to the continued intersection between European and colonized cultures. The prevalence of African American inspired musical elements in the European popular music referenced in *Blues pour Élise* can also be read as a lasting legacy of the strong African American presence in France during the interwar period.⁷³

⁷¹ Many studies have reflected on the transnational flows of African American genres. See, for example, Sarah Daynes, “The Musical Construction of the Diaspora: The Case of Reggae and Rastafari,” in *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); and Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Reebee Garofolo, “The Emergence of *Rap Cubano*: An Historical Perspective,” in *Music, Space, and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Spady, Meghelli, and Alim, *The Global Cypa*. For those focusing on the French case, see Charles Tshimanga, “Let the Music Play: The African Diaspora, Popular Culture, and National Identity in Contemporary France,” in *Frenchness and the African Diaspora: Identity and Uprising in Contemporary France*, ed. Charles Tshimanga, Ch. Didier Gondola, and Peter J. Bloom (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); and André J. M. Prévos, “Two Decades of Rap in France: Emergence, Developments, Prospects,” in *Black, Blanc, Beur: Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World*, ed. Alain-Philippe Durand (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002). It is important to note that scholars have meditated upon the usefulness of music as a political tool, particularly given its status as a commodity in worldwide markets. Reebee Garofolo (among others) argues against this purely commoditized understanding of such musics, writing “[o]ne would be hard pressed to argue, for example, that *reggae* - itself a product of US rhythm and blues, commercialization, and western technology - is a music that has been stripped of its political power and reduced to a mere commodity.” Reebee Garofolo, “Whose World, What Beat: The transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism,” *The world of music* 32, no. 2 (1993): 24.

⁷² See for example Gage Averill, “Haitian Dance Bands, 1915-1970: Class, Race, and Authenticity,” *Latin American Music Review* 10, no. 2 (1989); Thomas Turino and James Lea, eds., *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2004); Stewart, *Rumba on the River*; and Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 16. Another example of tracing musical continuities and disjunctures across diasporic spaces, though it focuses less on the slave trade is John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁷³ See Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris*; Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*; Tyler Stovall, “No Green Pastures: The African Americanization of France,” in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Brett A.

These musical works—which both promote and resist geographical classification—not only allow the women to connect to a variety of cultural communities, but they also function as a metaphor for the spatial and genealogical dimensions of the women’s identitarian struggles. As Arjun Appadurai suggests, deterritorialized populations have become prime markets for new mediascapes that reconnect diasporic populations with their “homeland.”⁷⁴ In the novel, rather than connecting the women to one geographical “homeland,” these soundscapes connect the women with the variety of spaces to which and in which they belong. And yet, it is important to note that these soundscapes, as I have shown, are both placed and placeless. The cultural flows of which the works testify do not solely transpire unidirectionally: traces of European musical traditions are found in Caribbean music and vice versa. Drawing on cultural discourses that are at once profoundly territorialized and at the same time deterritorialized mirrors the women’s profound sense of “home” in France, as well as their connections to other, diverse spaces.

Conclusions

As a means of concluding, I would like to reflect upon the significance of the text’s intermedial structure as a whole. The lens of blues music itself can also serve as a metaphor for the novel’s meditation upon Afropean identities. One element that is often cited as characteristic of blues music is its chord progression (especially the twelve-bar blues), which is composed of the following structure (all seventh chords): I-I-I-I | IV-IV-I-I | V-IV-I-V. In this chord structure, conflicting harmonies coexist. For example, in the key of C the I7 chord contains the notes C E

Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Heike Raphael-Hernandez, *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, culture and society* 7, no. 2-3 (1990): 306.

G and B \flat , and the note E \natural creates major tonality. In the same progression, the F7 chord (IV7) contains the notes F A C E \flat . Still in the key of C, the note E \flat creates minor tonality. Therefore, the progression produces struggles between major and minor tonalities. Though these tonal frictions are never resolved within the chord structure, in the end, they do produce one cohesive unit. This musical analysis underscores how music is a system; it is only in relation to the other chords that one can hear the ways in which the notes conflict and move toward resolution (even if they never arrive). Playing any one chord alone certainly allows one to describe the qualities of that chord, but ultimately what produces meaning is its relationship to the other chords in the chord structure.

A similar relationality is the central message of *Blues pour Élise*. As I have teased out above, the “Ambiance Sonore” sections establish connections between disparate spaces and genres, and provide a larger histories of “Black France,” and of the African diaspora. *Blues pour Élise*’s soundscape illustrates the cultural intersection between Africa, its diaspora, and Europe. In so doing, the novel adds branches to France’s family tree (to return to the metaphor with which I began), thereby calling into question the ways in which racial minorities are often imagined as having their “vraies origines” elsewhere. And yet, the novel’s message is as Afropean as it is universal. In his discussion of global cultural flows, Appadurai expands on Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities,”⁷⁵ to propose the idea of “imagined worlds”: “that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.”⁷⁶ Such a concept captures the relationality between France, its minority populations, and larger, globalized structures of

⁷⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁷⁶ Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” 296-97.

contemporary cultural circulation. By constructing a soundscape whose elements defy easy classification, the novel suggests that though its primary protagonists are female and Afropean, the musical language contained in the works transcends rigid boundaries. Just as the women ultimately recognize that, born of violence, their diverse and sometimes conflictual constituent elements form a cohesive whole, so too must countries such as France also acknowledge that their constituent parts cannot always be homogenized. In the end, the novel's intermedial structure provides the alternative genealogy that allows the Afropean women to *re-member* themselves in both France and the African diaspora. Like the chord structure, the novel's musical composition remains coherent but not resolved.

As I have traced in this chapter, what results from this *remembrement* is the women's feeling of connection to a variety of spaces and cultures: in other words, their Afropeanism. However, the women's Afropeanism does not negate their Frenchness. Rather, the novel suggests quite the opposite. Returning to the metaphor of the nation as family tree, this *remembrement* process that Akasha and Shale (both French women) undergo connects them to larger spaces within and beyond the African diaspora. In so doing, they become the branch of the tree that connects France with its larger histories and cultural connections. By establishing themselves "non pas contre mais parmi les autres,"⁷⁷ the women do not need to define themselves against a perceived homogeneous (and pure) French national identity. Instead, they add valuable dimensions to the French family tree, rather than diluting its genealogy. In a sense, then, though the novel traces the process of Afropean *remembrement*, their *remembrement* is also that of the French nation, which must acknowledge how its own fraught genealogies, histories, and cultural connections produce a heterogeneous collective.

⁷⁷ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 30.

OUTRO

Beyond Borders

To try to conclude neatly a project that springs from complex entanglements and misunderstandings would be a disservice to those authors and artists studied in the preceding pages, and go directly against the work I see their texts accomplishing. Just as the moment of “arrival” is a new beginning for the immigrants, so too is this conclusion—an “arrival” in its own way—just the beginning of a larger sustained dialog on those topics I have examined here.

As I have demonstrated, the texts bring to the fore the frameworks by which immigrants and racial minorities have been classified in French history. From the legacies of “human zoos,” to depictions of *tirailleurs*, the colonial and postcolonial *évolué*, the dandy, and the marginalized immigrant, the works have both exposed and sought to destabilize particular ways of gazing. The attention to these sites of display—particularly those that package black body—brings up much larger discussions about how identities are mediated and circulate as narratives within transnational spaces.

Considering immigration means contemplating those individuals straddling two worlds—those who, as Lénora Miano puts it, “habite[nt] la frontière.”¹ The works, in turn, transform our understanding of boundaries in their largest sense. Borders—taking a multitude of forms—are omnipresent in the texts. In Daeninckx’s novellas, just as in the real-life events they reimagine, the *Exposition coloniale*’s walls demarcate the space where the Kanak are housed, and the *Musée de l’Homme*’s door separates that which should remain out of sight—colonized remains—from that which is actively displayed. The pre- and post-immigration spaces of *Le paradis du nord* are replete with boundaries: once the Cameroonians decide to immigrate, their lives are controlled,

¹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, 25-32.

and their bodies physically constrained by the immigrant smugglers; the Parisian landscape into which they arrive is rendered claustrophobic by the constant presence of state surveillance defined by police presence, prison, and courtrooms. In *Black Bazar*, this state surveillance is conspicuously absent, yet borders—now internal—are no less present. Protagonists search to delimit who “belongs” to what communities (with or without these individuals’ consent), and accuse others of selling out: those who betray their community by transgressing its boundaries. Boundaries inhabit the very fabric of *Blues pour Élise*, whose blending of literary and musical narratives posits borders as limits to be approached, interrogated, and ultimately transcended. As I have shown in my analyses of the African musical works, the musical structure of each work (its rhythm, instrumentation, etc.) functions as evidence of the connections that have been made both because of and in spite of the boundary crossings that produced them. Whereas the visual works depicting Nénufar graphically enclose him within visual borders, the music videos—particularly Meïway’s “Je suis sans-papiers” and Salif Keïta’s and L’Skadrille’s collaboration of “Nou Pas Bouger”—use cinematic techniques to break the “fourth wall,” the invisible boundary that legitimizes the spectator’s gaze and allows him or her to remain comfortably detached from what transpires before him or her.

In many ways, this question of (dis)comfort underpins every interpersonal and intercultural exchange, and is thus central to the projects the texts undertake. And yet, the texts suggest that without discomfort, there is no progress, no way to move beyond the status quo; in essence, comfort is a state of complacency that only serves to reinforce the preexisting borders. In the interest of seeking out this productive discomfort, the texts expose their audience to such boundaries, before then reaching out and through them, suggesting that they can—and should—be traversed. In so doing, the texts expose the ever-shifting limits that separate an “us” from a

“them,” all too often used to spectacularize and silence those defined as “others.” As I have been tracing, unique complexities exist in France, where some criteria perceived as borders—notably race and ethnicity, inextricable yet separate from questions of immigration—are blindingly visible, but officially nameless. How, then, might one navigate such borders?

In his introduction to *Respect Magazine*’s issue entitled *100% Noirs de France*, executive editor Marc Cheb Sun reframes the question in a different way. Capturing the tension between “us” and “them” often mapped onto both immigration and racial minorities in France, he ultimately invites his reader to acknowledge how these borders are antithetical to notions of French identity. He concludes that the very accusations of *communautarisme* that made this issue the most “complicated” the magazine has ever completed represent the wrong way of approaching the problem because they obscure how “la ‘France noire’—sa mémoire, ses errances, sa créativité, ses perspectives—nous permet de cerner toute la France. En entrant par une porte, certes spécifique, mais au cœur des grandes mutations de notre histoire commune.”² The metaphor of the door captures the way in which the texts perceive borders: as a point of porous division that fosters movement and connections through it.

In addition to exposing how the borders the immigrant figure crosses are just as often psychological (and sometimes semantic) as they are geographical, the texts also underscore how specters of these borders are also mapped onto the same landscape in which they themselves circulate. As I have highlighted, the works are keenly attuned to the generic classifications—“Francophone,” “world music,” and “African immigrant literature,” among others—that package them and their authors. In much the same way, this project transcends disciplinary boundaries, and has sought to privilege the connections one can draw between Francophone literary studies

² Marc Cheb Sun, “Edito: 100% Noirs de France,” *Respect Mag*, October 3, 2011, <http://www.respectmag.com/2011/10/03/edito-100-noirs-de-france-5511>, accessed 5 May 2013.

and music studies. I would like to conclude with a discussion of the future directions I see this work taking.

As I have mapped out here, the more recent works—especially *Black Bazar* and *Blues pour Élise*—demonstrate an engagement with wider cultural works that resist easy classification into national, regional, linguistic, or even medial paradigms. Since *Black Bazar*'s publication in 2009, the novel has become just one facet of a larger intermedial project composed of a one-man play (2010) and a first *soukous* album (2012); a film, comic book, and second album are anticipated in the near future. Miano's text is most obviously a work of printed literature, yet its structure also bears traces of a television series³ and of a musical album (which is also reinforced by the musical references within the text). Her website, which contains links to those musical works mentioned in her novels and short stories, blurs the boundaries between her printed texts and their much wider cultural world.

This shift in textual production in turn opens up new ways of reading that are informed by, but that transcend, disciplinary-specific analyses, thereby offering productive points of departure for reexamining disciplinary boundaries. These intermedial projects also offer fertile new avenues for further theorizing intercultural borrowing and new modes of authorship. Authors and artists' increasing collaborations across all types of boundaries (generational, racial, geographical, medial, etc.) provide points of entry into reexamining those questions at the very heart of the humanistic studies: who we are, how we engage with our history, how we define our communities, how we negotiate our own subjectivities, what constitutes a text, who can be an author, and how s/he can speak.

³ This structure is confirmed by an interview in which Miano explained that she hoped one day it could be shown on French television. "Léonora Miano: 'Il faut formuler le concept d'afropéanisme'," *Le Magazine Littéraire*, 22 December 2010, <http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/actualite/leonora-miano-il-faut-formuler-concept-afropeanisme-22-12-2010-33069>, accessed 5 May 2013.

Beyond these thematic and structural shifts mentioned above, the national, racial, ethnic, and immigrant identities that these texts examine will only continue to grow more and more entangled in the coming years. It is my hope that these changes will continue to open up fruitful avenues of discussion on questions of belonging, and to provoke reflection on how, when, and where boundaries can be useful—and where they might be harmful. Ultimately the works urge us to think more critically about those borders we inherited so that we may interrogate those we continue to draw.

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