

FPS

Volume 2, Number 2

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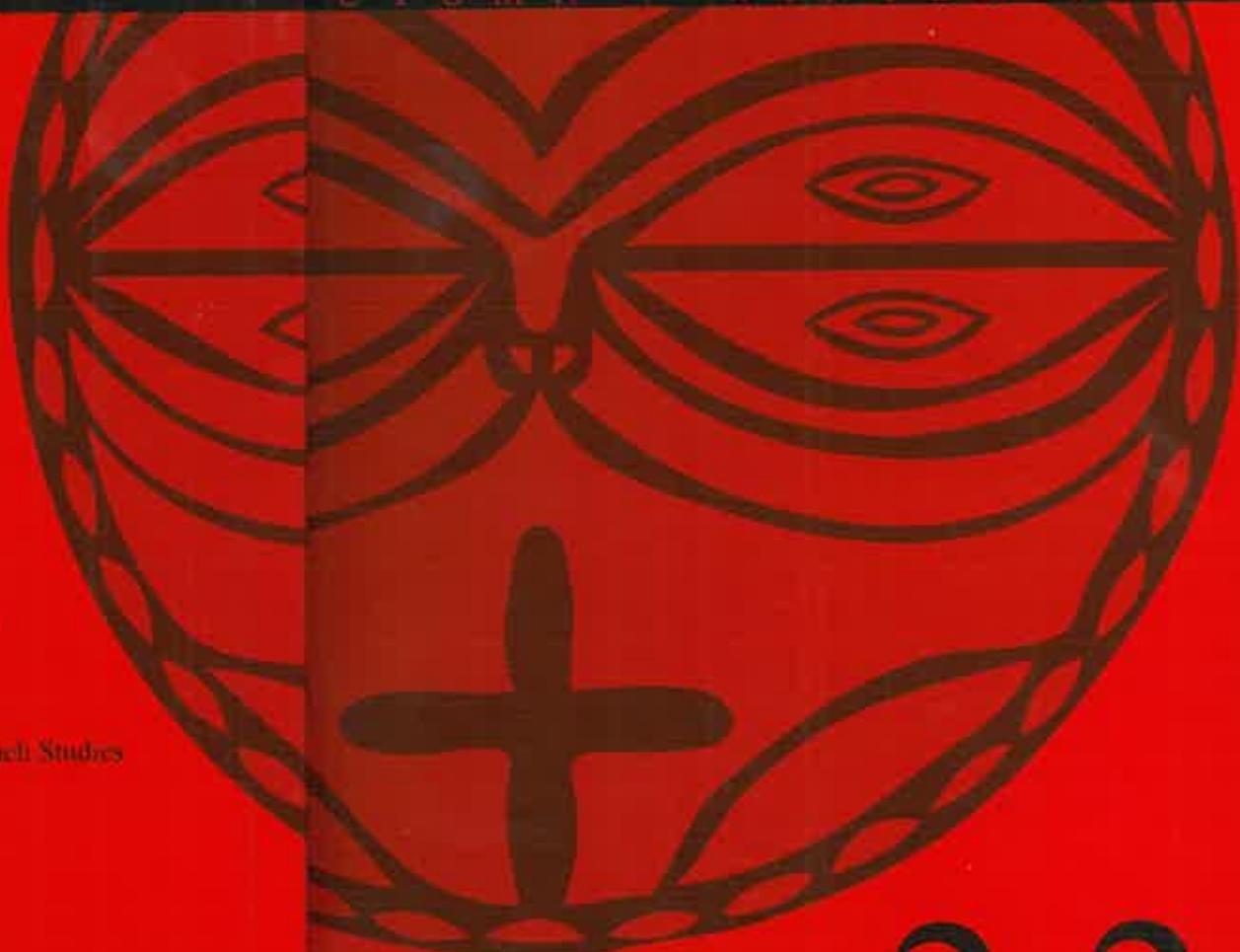
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POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

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Editorial: Why 'Francophone Postcolonial Studies'?

Despite the impact of postcolonial theory on different academic disciplines over recent decades, the insight it can provide with regard to Francophone studies has yet to be fully assessed. Equally, the contribution that French and Francophone studies can make, and indeed have made, to a postcolonial theory largely perceived as Anglophone frequently remains unexplored.

By providing a forum for postcolonial perspectives, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* aims to promote theoretically driven, analytical studies of the Francophone world, which both question and reinvigorate the more established fields of French and postcolonial studies. The privileging of the postcolonial is in no way intended to imply that Francophone cultural production will be approached according to a single theoretical framework. On the contrary, *FPS* acknowledges the different theoretical trends within this multidisciplinary field, and believes that the complexity of postcolonial theory is best served by encouraging a variety of approaches. This theoretical complexity and multidisciplinarity is, in turn, ideally suited to studying Francophone cultural production, which is frequently situated at the intersection of different historical, linguistic and social phenomena where synthesis is neither desirable nor possible.

As outlined in the first number, *FPS* envisages an approach that highlights a distinctive but reciprocal relationship between Francophone studies and postcolonial studies. We would like to invite contributions on any topic related to Francophone postcolonial studies for inclusion in future issues. Suggestions for themed issues to be co-ordinated by guest editors are also welcome. Authors should submit two copies of their article, of 6,000 words maximum, in English or in French, to a member of the editorial team (full contact details are given below). Articles should conform in presentation to the guidelines in the *MHRA*

Stylebook, providing references in footnotes, rather than the author-date system. All articles submitted to *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* will be refereed by two scholars of international reputation, drawn from our advisory and editorial boards. To facilitate the anonymity of the refereeing process, authors are asked to ensure that the manuscript (other than the title page) contains no clue as to their identity. The editorial team will endeavour to inform contributors of the decision regarding the publication of their articles within 12-15 weeks of receiving the piece. Book reviews, conference reports (700-800 words max.), calls for papers, should also be sent to the editorial team.

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Entretien avec Maryse Condé

Ecrivaine, critique et professeur, Maryse Condé a accordé un nombre important d'interviews au cours de sa carrière prolifique, entretiens dans lesquels elle s'exprime sur des thèmes divers et souvent controversés. Mais, quels rapports existe-t-il entre ces interviews et l'œuvre de Condé? Feraient-ils partie de cette œuvre finalement? Tel est le point de départ pour les réflexions qui sont menées dans cette discussion avec l'auteur. Ce recours marqué à l'entretien par Condé semble s'insérer dans un contexte social caractérisé par la médiatisation du rôle de l'intellectuel. Néanmoins, comme l'observe Christopher Johnson dans son étude récente sur l'entretien en tant que genre, jusqu'ici les critiques ont accordé très peu d'intérêt à ce phénomène.¹ L'entretien qui suit s'inscrit donc dans ce champ de réflexion embryonnaire. En plus, en me penchant sur les particularités identitaires qui forment 'Condé l'écrivaine', je cherche aussi à élargir ce champ de réflexion en proposant de nouvelles pistes d'interrogation.

Les théorisations avancées par Lejeune sur le genre de l'entretien serviront à orienter une réflexion préalable sur le rôle qu'accorde Condé à l'entretien. Si Lejeune a constaté dans *Je suis un autre* que l'interview répond à une demande de la part des lecteurs pour des faits biographiques, l'usage spécifique qu'en fait Condé laisse apparaître les limites d'une formule explicative qui privilégie la volonté du public.² Certes, Condé se montre consciente d'entrer en dialogue avec les attentes souvent

¹ Christopher Johnson, 'Introduction', *Nottingham French Studies* 'Thinking in Dialogue: the Role of the Interview in Post-war French thought', 42 (2003), 1-4.

² Dans *Je suis un autre: l'autobiographie, de la littérature aux médias* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), Lejeune souligne d'ailleurs que l'interview peut aussi servir comme un champ d'intervention pour l'intellectuel en lui fournissant les moyens de 'court-circuiter' le travail des critiques littéraires, p. 182.

différenciées de ses différents publics (d'ailleurs, dans la collection d'entretiens recueillis par Françoise Pfaff, Condé identifie trois contextes de réception pour son œuvre: la Guadeloupe, la France et les Etats-Unis).³

Néanmoins, en même temps, ses interventions font preuve d'une volonté personnelle qui se forge indépendamment des attentes de ses lectorats. En effet, cette double sensibilité qu'articule Condé au cours de ses nombreux entretiens sert à faire ressortir les rapports complexes qu'entretiennent les contextes de réception d'une œuvre avec la volonté personnelle d'un auteur, rapports qui s'inscrivent dans le champ de l'entretien et qui en même temps le dépassent.

Christopher Johnson rend compte de la complexité de ces relations d'une manière très pertinente. Ainsi, il propose une approche analytique qui relie la demande du public pour des faits 'vérificateurs' sur la vie de l'auteur à une volonté de la part de l'écrivain d'utiliser l'entretien comme un champ d'intervention. Qui plus est, il étend le champ de réflexion sur ces rapports en maintenant que cette volonté d'intervention se double d'une allure d'autoreprésentation qui fait que l'entretien puisse servir une fonction autobiographique. Du fait de caractériser d' 'autobiographique' le genre de l'entretien, l'approche de Johnson soulève des questions sur les frontières génériques de l'autobiographie et de ce fait, rend problématiques les tentatives antérieures de fixer les limites du genre, dont celles élaborées par Lejeune. Dans *Le Pacte autobiographique*, Lejeune offre cette définition maintenant canonique du genre: 'récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence lorsqu'elle

met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité'.⁴

Du fait d'attribuer une fonction autobiographique à l'entretien, Johnson met en cause trois présomptions clés sur lesquelles se repose la définition de Lejeune: premièrement, l'idée que le projet autobiographique s'articule nécessairement en prose; deuxièmement, le postulat qu'il existe 'un contrat' qui permettrait au lecteur d'identifier l'auteur; et troisièmement, la présomption corrélative que ce contrat sert à garantir la véracité des déclarations que l'écrivain fait dans l'œuvre autobiographique.

La difficulté posée par la première présomption, comme l'indique l'approche de Johnson tient à l'instabilité de la notion même de 'prose', problématique qui remet en cause la double hypothèse que cette forme structurelle constituerait un champ d'articulation privilégié, voire *naturel* pour le genre de l'autobiographie, et qu'elle servirait à définir les limites mêmes de ce genre. Car, si Johnson semble maintenir que *stricto sensu*, l'entretien en tant que 'genre parlé' ne peut pas être considéré comme de la prose, en évoquant l'importance de la transcription dans la production de l'entretien, il démontre que l'entretien revêt quand même certaines caractéristiques de la prose.

Donc, l'hybridité même de la forme de l'interview (en tant que genre partagé entre l'oral et l'écrit) sert à mettre en doute la validité de la deuxième présomption qui soutient l'approche de Lejeune: celle de l'existence d'un contrat entre lecteur et écrivain. Du fait de souligner l'importance de la transcription dans la production de l'entretien, Johnson invite une réflexion sur les implications de ce processus pour la conception de la notion de 'l'auteur' dans ce contexte. Lejeune prend en compte cette dimension dans *Je suis un autre*, soulignant l'éclatement du rôle de

³ Voir Françoise Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), pp. 149-155.

⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p. 14.

l'auteur qui résulte de la transcription.⁵ Vu cette dispersion du rôle de l'auteur, la validité même du contrat que soutient l'interview ne se trouve-t-elle pas nécessairement minée?

De cette ambiguïté concernant l'identité de 'l'auteur' d'un entretien se profile le troisième défi que l'approche de Johnson présente au pacte lejeunien. C'est-à-dire, si l'identité de l'écrivain est mise en doute, par sa référence à la nature construite de 'l'effet-spontanéité' qu'emprunte l'interview, Johnson laisse constater que 'le pacte de vérité' qui sous-tend ce genre se voit marqué par une pareille incertitude. Cette incertitude soulève inéluctablement des questions concernant *l'authenticité* de l'auteur qui se présente dans l'entretien, évoquant un décalage éventuel entre le personnage que projette l'auteur dans l'interview et l'auteur en tant qu'"individu authentique". C'est d'ailleurs sur cette problématique que se clôt cet interview avec Condé.

Bien que l'approche de Johnson diverge de celle de Lejeune sur les trois points cités, il convient de constater que l'approche de Johnson ré-inscrit l'universalité à la fois du sujet-écrivain et du projet autobiographique, deux hypothèses, d'ailleurs, qui sont présentes implicitement dans la thèse du *Pacte autobiographique*. Se pencher sur les interventions spécifiques que Condé fait sur son oeuvre nous permet de cerner l'ambiguïté de son positionnement vis-à-vis de ces deux présomptions: l'universalité du sujet-écrivain aussi bien que l'universalité du projet autobiographique.

Certes, c'est précisément dans le champ de l'entretien que l'auteur souligne l'importance de 'l'autobiographique' pour sa fiction, constat qui semblerait situer son œuvre implicitement dans le champ d'un 'projet autobiographique universel'. Qui plus est, en refusant la politisation de son rôle d'écrivain, elle se réclame du statut d'écrivain universel. Mais cela ne l'empêche pas pour autant

⁵ Dans *Je suis un autre*, Lejeune observe qu'en raison de la répartition du travail de la transcription entre plusieurs personnes, l'interview transcrit 'se trouve ainsi parfois avoir plusieurs "auteurs"', p. 187.

d'explorer les particularités de ses expériences en tant que femme, Guadeloupéenne, noire, issue de la classe bourgeoise, ce qui aurait tendance à lui accorder le statut d'écrivain marginal. De cette conception ambivalente du rôle de l'écrivain surgit tout un processus de questionnement qui facilitera un prolongement de la thèse de Johnson. En fin de compte, au constat que l'entretien peut servir une fonction autobiographique, les interventions de Condé viennent poser une question fondamentale: Comment est-ce que l'identité d'un écrivain influe sur la réalisation et la mise en scène de cette fonction autobiographique? C'est donc au carrefour de ces deux problématiques — d'une part, les rapports entre l'interview et l'autobiographie, et d'autre part, la particularité et l'universalité de l'écrivain — que se situerait cet entretien.

L'entretien comme genre et champ d'intervention

ES: Vous avez accordé de nombreux entretiens au cours de votre carrière. Lors de ces entretiens, vous parlez librement de vos expériences personnelles, de votre passé, de votre famille et de vos amis. Vu vos références récurrentes à ces expériences personnelles, peut-on donc attribuer à l'entretien une fonction autobiographique?

MC: Je pense que l'entretien, ce n'est pas tellement pour parler de soi. C'est un peu pour aider le lecteur et celui qui interviewe à corriger les erreurs que peut-être il a faites en lisant les livres. Comme ça, ça lui permet de mieux connaître l'écrivain, de voir ce qui est tiré de sa vie, fidèle à sa vie, et ce qui au contraire est absolument différent de lui. Donc, je dirais que plus qu'une valeur autobiographique, c'est une valeur de correction, de rectification.

ES: Mais, ce n'est pas au lecteur de tirer du roman le sens que lui convient?

MC: Oui, évidemment, le lecteur est libre, mais je suis un peu lasse de voir presque tous les romans que j'ai écrits interprétés différemment de ce que je voudrais. Le cas le plus étonnant, (je crois que je t'ai raconté) c'est un roman qui s'appelle *Célanaire cou-coupé* (qui n'est pas traduit encore en anglais) et dans lequel j'avais l'intention de m'amuser un peu, faire un roman fantastique pour me divertir. Les gens qui l'ont lu au contraire, l'ont considéré comme un roman grave, politique et très lourd. Donc, on a un peu essayé de dissiper les malentendus dans les interviews, on essaie, on explique.

ES: Ceci dit, est-ce que vous voyez l'entretien comme partie de votre œuvre?

MC: Oui, parce que dans l'entretien, on peut expliquer à quelqu'un qui s'y intéresse les techniques de narration, l'écriture qu'on a utilisées. Alors que le lecteur, 'le grand lecteur moyen' n'y fait pas du tout attention. Je pense que dans l'interview, on peut cibler un point et essayer de faire comprendre, apprécier, mais évidemment les entretiens servent dans l'imagination de l'écrivain à mettre au point certaines choses, mais finalement le lecteur en fait ce qu'il veut.

ES: Vu les opinions que vous avez exprimées concernant la réception de vos romans en France, en Guadeloupe et aux États-Unis pendant vos divers entretiens, serait-il valide de caractériser l'entretien comme une façon d'influer sur le champ de réception de votre œuvre?

MC: Je ne crois pas qu'on puisse influer sur le champ de réception. Quand je suis en Guadeloupe, je suis toujours étonnée de voir la lecture locale (on peut dire que c'est peut-être réductrice) qui informe leur point de vue. Je prends l'exemple de *La Belle Créo*;

tout ce qui les intéressait c'était de savoir si l'action se passe en Guadeloupe parce que le pays n'était pas nommé. Donc, ils cherchaient à trouver les clés qui leur permettraient de nommer l'île. Quand un livre est discuté en France, (ben, surprise!) on parle toujours du racisme, on parle toujours de l'anticolonialisme, alors que des fois, je n'ai pas voulu parler de ça directement. Donc, je ne crois pas qu'on puisse influer sur la réception de l'œuvre mais ce qu'on essaie de faire est de donner le point de vue ou l'état d'esprit dans lequel on était quand on écrivait.

ES: Êtes-vous d'accord avec l'argument évoqué par Lejeune selon lequel l'entretien peut servir à court-circuiter le travail des critiques littéraires, parce que l'écrivain s'adresse directement à son public?

MC: Non. Je pense que non. D'abord, je ne lis pas les critiques donc je ne sais pas du tout ce qu'on dit. Je pense que même si je les lisais, ça n'aurait pas beaucoup d'importance. Non. Les gens sont libres de critiquer et vous, l'auteur ou l'écrivain, vous êtes libre d'être content d'un livre ou pas content d'un livre en fonction de vos propres critères.

ES: Mais quand vous parlez de la réception de vos livres, est-ce que ça n'implique pas que vous lisez les critiques?

MC: [...] Par exemple, le mois prochain, je vais à un débat sur le livre au Salon des Livres d'outre-mer. Alors, c'est tellement en fonction des questions qui seront posées par un journaliste que vous voyez bien comment le livre a été perçu. Donc, ce n'est pas tellement ce qui est écrit dans les journaux ou dans les magazines. C'est plutôt la façon dont les gens avec qui des fois vous parlez de vos livres les reçoivent dans les entretiens.

ES: Est-ce que vous jouez un rôle quelconque dans la transcription de vos entretiens?

MC: Des fois, on me demande de les relire, quand c'est trop parlé, quand le français est trop 'colloquial'. A ce moment-là, oui, je joue un rôle mais enfin, on ne peut pas dire que c'est toujours. Il y a beaucoup de journalistes ou d'étudiants qui transcrivent sans me demander mon avis.

ES: Est-ce qu'il n'y a donc pas un risque qu'on détourne vos idées?

MC: Non. Une fois, une seule fois, depuis que j'écris, ça posait un problème. C'est une jeune fille qui m'a demandé des entretiens pour un livre sur le théâtre et c'est une Américaine qui comprenait assez mal le français. Elle a voulu faire l'interview en français. Elle a tenu à faire l'interview en français mais en fait, elle comprenait assez mal. Alors, tous les mots qu'elle n'a pas compris, elle a simplement mis des points de suspension ! Donc j'ai trouvé que c'était un peu de gâchis de faire l'interview et de mettre tant de points de suspensions. Mais je crois que ça s'est produit une seule fois. Dans l'ensemble, les gens sont assez fidèles, honnêtes.

L'autobiographie comme 'stratégie d'authenticité'

ES: Maintenant, j'aimerais parler des stratégies autobiographiques que vous employez dans quatre de vos romans: *Hérémakhonon*, *Moi Tituba*, *La Vie scélérate* et *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance*. Bien que ces quatre romans contiennent des faits ayant trait à votre vie, en même temps, les histoires qui en découlent sont le fruit de votre imagination?

MC: Sauf *Coeur à rire et à pleurer* qui là, est un petit peu déformé par l'imagination mais quand même, très fidèle à ce que j'ai vécu. Les autres, évidemment, il y a beaucoup plus de fiction mais je dirais que *La Vie scélérate* est proche, assez proche, le plus proche possible de la vérité.

ES: Le fait que vous avez gagné un prix pour la fiction pour *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer*, est-ce que vous trouvez ça ironique?

MC: Oui, j'ai eu un prix pour la fiction mais enfin, j'ai eu un prix qui s'appelle le prix Marguerite-Yourcenar. C'était simplement pour une oeuvre écrite en français par un écrivain résidant en Amérique. Donc, l'accent n'était pas mis sur la nature de l'ouvrage. Il ne fallait pas que ce soit un essai, il ne fallait pas que ce soit un livre de poèmes mais enfin, je pense qu'on n'avait pas exclu l'autobiographie, qu'on en a fait une sorte d'étiquette commune 'l'œuvre de fiction - l'œuvre littéraire en général'.

ES: De toute façon, l'autobiographie est un genre fort ambigu ou se mêlent le fait et la fiction et, il y a toujours un travail de reconstitution qui se produit dans une oeuvre autobiographique.

MC: Surtout, comme je pense avoir dit récemment, quand j'écrivais *Le Coeur à rire*, j'avais environ 60 ans et je parlais d'une enfant qui avait 7 ans, 8 ans, 9 ans. Donc, fondamentalement, avec le recul que l'âge m'a donné, j'ai transformé certaines séances mais dans la plupart des cas, je me suis efforcée quand même de rester fidèle à ce que l'enfant avait ressenti. C'est peut-être malgré moi que j'ai un peu exagéré dans un sens ou dans un autre mais fondamentalement, c'est un livre que je crois sincère, fidèle, assez fidèle à la réalité.

ES: Mais avec *Moi Tituba*, il y a cet artifice de sincérité qui rappelle le genre du testimonio.

MC: *Moi Tituba*, oui, oui. Le charme de *Moi Tituba* c'est que je ne possédais aucun document sur elle. Je suis allée à Salem. Je suis allée à la ville Denver, la ville qui a remplacé l'ancien Salem. Je suis allée à la Boston. Je suis allée dans toute la région et je n'ai pas trouvé de documents; très, très peu de documents sur elle. Donc cette liberté de lui recréer une enfance, une adolescence et une mort aussi, était très séduisante et évidemment, tout à fait différente du travail de l'autobiographie.

ES: Vous cherchez consciemment à brouiller les frontières entre fait et fiction dans ces œuvres?

MC: Non, pas tellement. Je pense que mon dernier livre, *L'Histoire de la femme cannibale*, là, j'ai essayé ce que vous dites, de brouiller la fiction et l'autobiographie. Le personnage principal s'appelle Rosélie et c'est une femme-peintre. Je pense que quand je parlais d'elle, de ses rapports avec la peinture, je parlais en fait de moi. C'est vrai. Mais quand je parlais de certains événements de sa vie, qui étaient arrivés dans sa vie, là, je retrouvais la fiction. Je pense que c'est le seul roman où je jouais d'une manière absolument délibérée avec la fiction et la réalité.

ES: Pourtant, la thématique de ce roman semble très différente du reste de vos romans.

MC: C'est-à-dire ce dernier roman c'est un peu en dehors de la ligne de ce que j'ai écrit. J'ai eu envie de parler d'une chose dont personne ne parle jamais: le couple mixte; la femme noire dans un couple mixte. Tout ce qu'elle reçoit, tout ce qu'elle voit et comment elle réagit. Je suis mariée maintenant plus de 20 ans. Et je pensais que c'était une sorte de lâcheté de n'avoir jamais parlé de ça, de l'avoir toujours évité comme si c'était trop intime. Donc, je me suis délibérément mise à le faire. Et ce roman, c'est

intéressant, c'est le seul de mes romans, je crois, que mon mari déteste. Il le trouve trop intime. Pourtant, il y a beaucoup de fiction, énormément de fiction dans *L'Histoire de la femme cannibale* qui change complètement ce que nous avons vécu bêtement tous les deux mais quand même la base le dérange beaucoup. Et je me suis aperçu en interrogeant les amis que c'est un roman que les a un peu déstabilisés. C'est un roman on dirait qui a gêné beaucoup de gens.

ES: Les femmes et les hommes?

MC: Ce sont surtout les femmes. À part mon mari qui est un homme et qui a été choqué pour des raisons personnelles, intimes. Mes amies l'ont trouvé pessimiste, négatif, elles ont été choquées par l'humour. Je ne dirais pas qu'elles ne l'ont pas aimé parce qu'elles ont reconnu que le roman est fait avec beaucoup de travail littéraire. Mais elles ont réagi un peu plus que devant un roman.

ES: Vous semblez faire une distinction entre l'autobiographie et l'intimité que je trouve fascinante.

MC: Oui. L'autobiographie c'est ma vie que je raconte tandis que *L'Histoire de la femme cannibale* ne raconte pas ma vie à part le fait que j'ai été en Amérique, et que je suis allée en Afrique du Sud comme l'héroïne. Ce n'est pas ma vie, ce sont plutôt mes sentiments, les choses que je ressens. Les choses que j'ai pu dire à Richard, dont j'ai pu discuter avec lui. Donc c'est plus l'intimité que l'autobiographie.

ES: Mais on a l'impression quand même dans *Moi Tituba* que vous jouez avec les deux catégories: réalité et fiction.

MC: C'est-à-dire, je jouais avec l'histoire.

ES: Et peut-être aussi avec les attentes et les idées reçues selon lesquelles par exemple les marrons étaient des héros?

MC: Mais ça, j'avais déjà dit ça depuis longtemps dans *Ségou*. J'avais démontré depuis longtemps que le nom du marron était peut-être un peu exagéré. Dans tous mes livres, j'essaie toujours un peu de me moquer de ce que les gens pensent, de les déstabiliser. Mais avec *Tituba*, je jouais surtout avec l'histoire, l'histoire qui a complètement occulté cette femme, que j'essayais, à ma manière, de réhabiliter.

ES: Vous jouez avec l'histoire coloniale aussi bien que l'histoire antillaise?

MC: Les deux parce que les deux finalement sont des fabrications. L'histoire coloniale qui vous dira que les nègres, les Antillais, n'ont rien. Ils sont des cons. On a trouvé pour eux. Bon, et l'histoire antillaise qui vous dira que non, nous sommes des héros, nous sommes des saints, des martyrs. C'est nous qui avons tout fait. Donc, je crois que la vérité est quelque part entre ces deux discours qui sont diamétralement opposés.

ES: Revenons maintenant à la question de l'autobiographie, est-ce que l'utilisation des stratégies 'autobiographiques' dans ces livres peut être considérée comme une forme d'auto-invention pour vos personnages féminins?

MC: C'est-à-dire que je me suis rendu compte depuis mon premier livre que quand on est proche de la réalité, il m'est très difficile de dire 'elle'. Quand je parle des choses que j'ai ressenties profondément, si j'essaie d'écrire un livre à la troisième personne, le livre est raté. Donc l'autobiographie, c'est un moyen pour moi de donner à mon texte une force, peut-être une sincérité, qu'autrement, il n'aurait pas eu. Par exemple, *Hérémakhonon* qui

est très proche de l'autobiographie avait d'abord été écrit à la troisième personne. Et finalement ça ne marchait pas du tout. Le livre était gauche et emprunté. Donc finalement, il a fallu que je change, que je réécrive tout à la première personne. Donc, c'est une stratégie d'authenticité.

ES: Que signifie pour vous le terme 'stratégie d'authenticité'?

MC: Oui, parce que l'authenticité si elle est brute, si elle est pure, n'est pas littéraire. Il y a beaucoup de gens qui ont beaucoup de sentiments, des idées, des intuitions. Mais pour qu'ils deviennent littéraires, il faut une stratégie. Donc pour un écrivain, afin qu'il se serve de l'authentique, il faut qu'il ait une certaine bagage d'écriture. On n'arrive pas à la sincérité sans faire un travail préalable sur elle.

ES: Mais comment définir cette idée de l'authenticité?

MC: Quand je dis 'l'authenticité', je dis simplement la vérité d'un personnage. Quand je dis authentique, je veux simplement dire 'vrai'. La vérité de chacun de nous, l'authenticité de chacun de nous n'a rien à voir avec l'authenticité collective. Ça, je ne sais pas qu'est-ce que c'est. Par exemple, l'authenticité des Guadeloupéens, des Trinidadiens, des Jamaïcains. Je crois qu'il a une image que chacun de ses peuples a bâtie pour lui et à laquelle ils voudraient qu'on se conforme. Mais quand je parle de l'authenticité de Maryse Condé, à ce moment-là, je parle de quelque chose qui est ma réalité personnelle que j'essaie d'exprimer avec des mots qui sont des mots à moi, une technique de narration; c'est une technique que j'essaie de mettre au point. Donc c'est un élément absolument individuel.

Discours identitaires et le rôle de l'écrivain

ES: Il y a quand même une certaine idée d'authenticité qui soutient les divers discours d'identité qui ont été élaborés aux Antilles.

MC: Oui. Je trouve ça très dangereux parce que je pense que comme je vous ai dit, ce sont des constructions. Certains écrivains, certains auteurs consciemment, ont construit un discours sur le peuple. Ils ont demandé au peuple de se conformer à ce discours. Ils appellent ça 'l'authenticité'. Moi, Maryse Condé, je suis authentique dans ce sens que par rapport à ces discours, j'ai une entière liberté. Je me construis en tant qu'être humain, en tant qu'individu, absolument indépendamment de ces discours. Donc vous voyez, je pense même qu'il y a une sorte de conflit entre l'authenticité individuelle et l'authenticité collective que ces mouvements littéraires, que ces mouvements identitaires ont définie.

ES: Et il n'y a aucune possibilité que ces deux formes d'authenticité s'entrecroisent?

MC: Moi, je crois qu'elles ne peuvent pas. Je pense que si on veut être soi-même, si on essaie d'être soi-même, il faut justement se refuser à cette image collective qui a été bâtie, construite par l'écriture.

ES: Dans ce cas-là, comment construire une communauté?

MC: Je crois qu'une communauté est faite d'individus séparés et qu'ils sont unis un peu et surtout par le regard des autres. Je crois que les Guadeloupéens qui sont à l'étranger, en France par exemple, si vous regardez chacun d'entre eux, ils sont divers. C'est le charme. Ils sont divers. Mais quand les Français, on peut dire les Blancs, les regardent, ils sont tous pareils les uns aux autres et ils

deviennent une collectivité. Mais une collectivité n'est faite que de différences et d'individualités.

ES: Alors, l'idée même de 'blackness' ou d'une identité noire est le fait d'un regard?

MC: Oui. Alors, quand nous sommes pris dans ce regard, évidemment, nous réagissons en fonction de ce regard, nous répondons à ce regard, nous nous rebellons contre ce regard. Nous répondons aussi à cette attente. Mais quand nous sommes laissés à nous-mêmes, individuellement, chacun reprend sa liberté.

ES: Mais il y aura sans doute des gens qui ne partagent pas votre vision.

MC: Oui, parce que si on veut faire de la politique, il faut croire que la collectivité est unie et hétérogène. Si on veut faire un discours messianique, il faut croire. Mais quand on veut parler des discours, refuser les discours comme des constructions dangereuses à la limite, évidemment on s'oppose à toute cette notion d'authenticité, de collectivité et tout. Mais c'est un luxe.

ES: Celui d'une femme qui a une certaine éducation et un certain statut social?

MC: Oui, on est un peu indépendant. On mène sa vie. On va et on vient. On s'enferme derrière sa porte et on fait ce qu'on veut. On n'a pas besoin à tout instant de lutter contre ce regard de l'Autre qui vous globalise.

ES: Mais ceux qui mènent ces luttes, les adressez-vous dans vos romans?

MC: Non. Pas trop. Je les laisse. Je les comprends. Je pense que si on n'est pas prêt pour ce que je dis, si on vit dans le Bronx ou à Brooklyn à côté des Américains profondément racistes qui vous insultent tout le temps, on a besoin du discours identitaire. Je considère les discours identitaires comme une défense que certains doivent avoir à tout prix.

ES: Et en Guadeloupe, peut-on se passer de ce genre de discours maintenant?

MC: C'est-à-dire les Guadeloupéens me reprochent beaucoup de me passer du discours identitaire. Parce qu'eux, étant donné la situation du pays, les problèmes du pays — l'absence de liberté, l'absence d'autonomie, la position de la France, l'invasion des touristes — (on peut énumérer à l'infini), eux, ils ont besoin de cette collectivité. Tandis que moi qui suis à l'étranger qui reviens chez eux tous les ans comme une personne en vacances, je peux m'appliquer le luxe de ne pas avoir une identité définie et ils me le reprochent et peut-être qu'ils ont raison. Peut-être. Peut-être.

ES: Vraiment?

MC: Je pense que de leur point de vue à eux, les gens ont raison. Une fois, par exemple, une sportive Marie-José Pérec avait gagné au Championnat du monde de 400m. Toute la Guadeloupe était en liesse. On disait que c'était une victoire de la femme antillaise. On m'a demandé mon avis et j'ai eu le malheur de dire: 'Moi, je ne crois pas. C'est la victoire de Marie-José Pérec et moi, je n'en ai rien à foutre.' Ça a été un scandale. Ça a été un scandale. Les gens étaient terriblement choqués et blessés. Donc vous voyez, moi je pouvais dire ça parce que ça m'est égal mais peut-être qu'eux, ils avaient raison de vouloir considérer ça comme une victoire collective. Ils avaient besoin de ça.

ES: Il y a quand même les écrivains qui varient ou assouplissent leur discours en fonction de leur public.

MC: Oui, mais je pense qu'il faut avoir un peu le courage de ses opinions. C'est un effort de ne jamais céder à la démagogie, de ne jamais essayer de faire plaisir aux gens en disant en fait ce qu'ils ont envie que je dise. C'est très dur. C'est très, très dur. Ça vous condamne à un peu de solitude, à un peu de marginalité. [...] c'est un choix personnel.

ES: Vous vous décrivez parfois comme 'un écrivain noir'. Que signifie pour vous le mot 'noir'?

MC: Qui, là, pour moi, le mot 'noir' est un mot très vaste. Ce qu'il englobe de commun c'est une certaine expérience, une certaine histoire, une certaine dispersion à travers les îles et les continents. Mais je ne pense pas par exemple qu'il implique quelque chose comme une âme noire ou une psyché noire. Non. Moi, je pense que quand je dis que je suis un écrivain noir, ça veut dire que je suis d'origine africaine avec des ancêtres qui ont connu un certain dépaysement et que finalement, tout ça s'inscrit, que je le veuille ou non, dans la façon dont j'aborde la réalité aujourd'hui.

ES: Et cette expérience commune ne peut pas servir de base pour une identité noire?

MC: Je ne pense pas. Je pense qu'elle sert simplement à situer le lieu d'où on vient. On vient de là. Et à partir de ça, on est différents. Chacun va dans sa direction.

Contextes de réception: le leurre de l'authenticité

ES: On a parlé de la façon dont vous jouez avec la fiction et la réalité dans votre roman le plus récent. Est-ce cette pratique peut être perçue comme une façon de résister aux pressions que subit l'écrivain antillais?

MC: C'est-à-dire, je crois que je ne suis pas tellement sensible aux pressions. On parlait hier soir avec des amis et par exemple, je remarque qu'après tant de livres et tant d'efforts, je n'ai jamais eu un grand prix en France. En France, non. Ce qui veut dire que je ne conforme pas à l'image que les Français attendent d'un écrivain antillais. Donc, je crois que je ne suis pas sensible aux pressions. Je suis très indépendante. Je fais ce que j'ai envie de faire comme je peux le faire. Et je pense que tant pis! Qu'on m'accepte. Qu'on ne m'accepte pas. C'est assez frappant de remarquer que tous les prix importants que j'ai eus ont été à l'étranger: Au Canada, aux États-Unis, en Italie. Mais en France, j'ai beau chercher un grand prix important en France, jamais. Je vois d'autres écrivains, dès qu'ils disent un mot, ils sont acclamés par la critique française. Je pense que ce refus de prendre en compte ce que je dis comme j'aimerais que ce soit, c'est une façon quand même de me moquer parce que je ne conforme pas.

ES: Quand même, aux États-Unis, vous avez l'air très prisée.

MC: Oui, aux États-Unis, quand j'ai des choses à dire, tout le monde s'accourt. Une étrangère, elle parle avec un accent francophone, on ne comprend pas tellement ce qu'elle dit ('d'où vient-elle? Oui, de la Guadeloupe'). C'est-à-dire, la marginalité que vous avez ici aux États-Unis vous permet d'être vous-même. Tandis qu'en France vous n'êtes pas marginal sauf si vous tenez un discours que personne ne veut entendre. D'un côté, marginalité égale la liberté. De l'autre côté, la marginalité entraîne l'exclusion.

ES: Mais les Noirs, en général, ne sont pas marginaux en France?

MC: Oui, mais il y a des écrivains noirs qui ne sont pas du tout marginaux. Au contraire, dès qu'ils arrivent, dès qu'ils apparaissent, dès qu'ils parlent, tout le monde se jette dessus.

ES: Mais il y aussi des avantages qui peuvent découler de votre statut d'"écrivain marginal". Par exemple, le critique post-colonial Graham Huggan dit que certains écrivains peuvent tirer profit de leur marginalité. Êtes-vous d'accord?⁶

MC: Oui. Certainement. Je pense qu'au niveau des lecteurs, surtout les lecteurs noirs, même blancs des fois. Ils ont envie d'entendre autre chose que ce qu'on leur raconte d'une manière officielle.

ES: Est-ce que ça ne veut pas dire que les écrivains jouent la marginalité?

MC: Oui. Tout le monde joue un peu parce que finalement si vous êtes exclu, vous vous complaisez dans l'exclusion. Vous jouez le rôle de l'écrivain exclu. Donc, je pense que jouer un rôle pour un écrivain est inévitable.

ES: En dépit de vos réticences envers l'idée de l'authenticité antillaise, il me semble qu'il y ait quand même une idée de l'authenticité qui influe sur la réception de vos livres en France. Est-ce que vous avez constaté des différences dans le fonctionnement du concept de l'authenticité entre les trois contextes de réception de vos romans?

⁶ Voir Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 83-104.

MC: Moi, je crois l'endroit où on est le plus libre, c'est quand même les États-Unis parce que d'abord, ils ne connaissent pas votre pays. Ils ne s'y intéressent pas. Un écrivain guadeloupéen qui arrive chez eux en traduction qui n'avait pas écrit son texte originellement en anglais. Ils savent que c'est une traduction. C'est écrit dessus: 'traduction de Richard Philcox'. Pour eux, c'est l'ailleurs. Ils permettent à l'ailleurs d'être différent.

ES: Même les Noirs?

MC: Peut-être pas. Peut-être pas. Parce que la plupart de mes lecteurs sont des Américains ou des Caraïbes de langue anglaise. Je ne sais pas comment les Africains-Américains reçoivent vraiment les textes. Dans les cours que j'ai eus, c'est surtout les jeunes Trinidadiens, Jamaïcains, Haïtiens qui sont ici et qui me considèrent un peu comme une grande sœur, une mère même. Tandis que j'ai rarement eu des étudiants Africains-Américains parce que finalement, leurs problèmes à eux, ce ne sont pas les miens. Ce sont des problèmes que leurs écrivains à eux traitent avec beaucoup de talent. Ils n'ont pas besoin de moi qui parle d'autre chose. En Guadeloupe, on voudrait un écrivain plus militant et plus local à la fois qui parle des problèmes du pays et d'une perspective plus locale. Le grand écrivain celui qui est connu maintenant en Guadeloupe s'appelle Max Rippon; il n'y a peut-être pas beaucoup de gens qui le connaissent en dehors du pays. Il est d'une petite île qu'on appelle Marie-Galante. Il parle de la vie en Guadeloupe comme elle était il y a 50 ans, avant que tous les changements aient eu lieu. Les gens adorent ça. C'est la Guadeloupe. En France, on veut que tout le monde écrive comme Chamoiseau avec introduction du créole, avec un discours strident en philosophie créole. Alors que moi, je ne le partage pas tout. Alors, la France est beaucoup plus fermée à une certaine ouverture des écrivains antillais, à la diversité des écrivains antillais. Pour

eux, il n'y a que Chamoiseau et Glissant. En dehors de ça, les autres ne sont pas intéressants.

ES: Est-ce que c'est parce que le discours de ces écrivains se conforme à une certaine vision exotique?

MC: Oui. Je crois qu'en fait le discours de ces écrivains, tout en prétendant être un discours authentique, est un discours exotique. Il satisfait l'attente d'un public français. Les gens s'imaginent que c'est un créole authentique. Les gens s'imaginent que c'est l'aventure des djebours. Ils adorent ça. Ils s'imaginent: 'Ah ! Oui, c'est ça, on fait comme ça.' Le beau magnifique conteur, le héros égorgé de la parole.

ES: Ça leur permet de croire qu'ils connaissent les Antilles?

MC: Ils croient qu'ils connaissent. Ils y sont allés deux semaines. Ils ont vu et ils n'y reviennent pas beaucoup. Bon, ça leur apporte une sorte de clé. Tandis que si vous êtes en train de parler d'autre chose, vous les dérangez.

ES: Alors, c'est que les romans écrits par Chamoiseau par exemple, rendent votre univers plus compréhensible pour les lecteurs français?

MC: Oui. Oui. Mais je ne pense pas que le public français ait envie de comprendre les Antilles. Il a une image des Antilles et il veut simplement que tous y conforment. Il veut que les écrivains, les musiciens, les chanteurs fassent des œuvres qui correspondent à leur attente et à leur image des Antilles. Ils n'ont pas envie qu'on vienne les déranger. Non. Ils n'ont pas de temps d'ailleurs. Ils ont

simplement besoin du petit goût du soleil (comme on dit), des parfums, des saveurs de sa terre. Ils sont contents avec ça.

ES: Le contexte de réception en Guadeloupe et en France a-t-il évolué?

MC: Quand je repars en Guadeloupe, les gens commencent à m'écouter. Pendant le semestre dernier, j'ai fait beaucoup de rencontres dans beaucoup de clubs de lecture, avec des gens qui arrivaient et qui n'avaient pas du tout compris le livre. Ils posaient des questions et ils étaient vivement choqués, embarrassés à ne pas les comprendre. Mais quand je parlais avec eux, ils écoutaient, au moins ils m'écoutaient sans s'énerver. Ils acceptaient. Donc je pense que peut-être en Guadeloupe, avec la jeunesse et avec l'influence des femmes, petit à petit, ça commence à changer. Mais en France, je ne crois pas.

ES: Sont-ils très communs, les clubs de lecture?

MC: Il y en a beaucoup. Toutes les communes ont un club de lecture. Je suis allée à Baie Mahault, une petite commune de 2000 habitants où il y avait un club de lecture. On a parlé avec les gens. J'ai parlé après qu'ils m'ont fait une petite répétition: ils ont joué le livre en danse. C'était intéressant. Je suis allée à Basse-Terre, partout. Il y avait de petites communes avec de petits clubs de 50 ou 60 personnes. On a lu les livres et des jeunes me posaient des questions. C'est par le biais de ces clubs qu'on arrive d'abord à se faire lire et ensuite à se faire comprendre.

ES: Alors, le public guadeloupéen lit beaucoup plus qu'auparavant?

MC: Les gens lisent, seulement ils lisent sans comprendre. Des fois, ils lisent mal. Donc, il faut essayer après de débattre avec eux.

Ils sont choqués des fois par des plaisanteries qu'ils n'ont pas comprises. Donc, il faut leur dire que c'est une plaisanterie, c'est pour faire réagir. Moi, l'écrivain, je voulais que vous soyez un peu énervé par ce que je dis pour faire une discussion. Donc, je crois qu'il y a un important travail à faire en Guadeloupe au niveau de la lecture.

ES: C'est en contraste avec la Trinité, par exemple, où il est encore assez rare de trouver dans les librairies des romans trinidadiens ou antillais. En fait, ceux-ci sont plus disponibles ailleurs.

MC: Nous, une grande partie de la littérature offerte est écrite par les Guadeloupéens, les Martiniquais, les Haïtiens. Partout où vous irez, vous trouverez. Je vous dirais qu'un bon tiers des romans est fait par les gens de la région.

ES: C'est très positif parce que les gens ont accès à la littérature de la région.

MC: La littérature de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique, de l'Haïti est extrêmement florissante. Je pense que dans les Caraïbes, la littérature, c'est peut-être l'art le plus florissant. Donc, il serait difficile à des libraires de faire l'impasse. Par exemple, quand je suis arrivée à Orléans (en Guadeloupe), il y a plus de 15 ans en 1985, il y avait peut-être deux ou trois romans antillais. On était si rares dans les librairies que les gens venaient vous regarder comme des bêtes curieuses. Mais ça a énormément changé. On vous appelle dans les écoles, on vous appelle dans les clubs de lectures. On vous appelle dans les débats de télévision. Je pense que depuis 1985 ça a énormément changé.

ES: Quelle est l'importance de cette date?

MC: Je pense que les écrivains ont commencé vraiment à écrire à partir de ce moment-là. Avant il y avait Césaire et Glissant mais c'étaient des écrivains isolés. Mais à partir de 1985, il y a une espèce de vague de littérature. Mais regardez, *L'Éloge de la créolité* est sorti en 1989. Donc, ça veut dire qu'un peu avant, on avait commencé à produire des tas de choses.

ES: Pensez-vous que le fait d'être femme influe sur la réception de votre oeuvre dans les trois contextes?

MC: Ce n'est pas tellement en Amérique, ni tellement en Guadeloupe mais sûrement en France qui est une société fondamentalement raciste et où la femme noire est absolument un non-être. Il est sûrement certain que le fait qu'une femme noire écrit, ça provoque une surprise, qui peut être positive. Certains journalistes ont peut-être envie de vous lire. Ça peut être aussi négatif. Certains écrivains ou journalistes diront: 'Non, je ne la lirai jamais' [...]. C'est que la femme noire depuis le temps de l'esclavage, on lui a enlevé toute possibilité de création autonome. Donc c'est très gênant, ces femmes noires qui, quand même, écrivent. Encore chanter mais écrire à la limite, ça peut irriter.

Tradition littéraire antillaise, le mode ‘féminin’ et l’authenticité de l’individu

ES: Dans ‘Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer’ vous avez dressé un portrait ironique d'une tradition littéraire antillaise masculine qui crée ‘des représentations stéréotypiques’ de la femme antillaise.⁷ Existe-t-il une tradition littéraire antillaise féminine?

⁷ Maryse Condé, ‘Order, Disorder, Freedom and the West Indian Writer’, *Yale French Studies*, 97 (2000), 151-165.

MC: En Guadeloupe oui, il y a une tradition qui remonte à Suzanne Lacascade. Il faut lire un livre que j'ai écrit dessus qui s'appelle *La Parole des femmes*.

ES: Quelles écrivaines y contribuent?

MC: Par exemple Simone Schwarz-Bart. Je pense qu'elle a beaucoup contribué. Avant il y avait Suzanne Lacascade. Maintenant, il y a Gisèle Pineau qui fait un peu de choses de femme. Ce n'est pas une tradition très développée. Mais enfin, il y a une tradition littéraire féminine.

ES: Comment est-ce que vous vous situez par rapport à cette tradition?

MC: Je m'efforce de ne pas être ‘une écrivaine-femme’. Je suis une femme mais qui écrit. Je ne suis pas une écrivaine-femme. C'est-à-dire que j'écris sur tous les sujets mais évidemment, je ne veux pas contrôler la subjectivité qui fait que je suis une femme. Mon rapport à la réalité, mon rapport aux choses, mon rapport à la politique est un rapport d'une femme avec le monde. Mais quand j'écris, j'écris en tant qu'écrivain, un écrivain qui se trouve être une femme.

ES: Étant donné ce rapport de ‘femme avec le monde’, est-ce que vos romans peuvent être interprétés comme une façon de résister aux représentations peu nuancées des femmes antillaises qui sont créées par les écrivains antillais ‘masculins’?

MC: Mais un roman, ce n'est pas un lieu de résistance. Un roman, c'est pour faire un lieu d'abandon. On écrit un roman parce qu'on a des choses à dire et d'une certaine manière, on se trouve dans un périmètre absolument libre, fécond dans lequel on dit ce qu'on a

envie de dire. Si après, une fois que l'œuvre est terminée, elle paraît comme une réaction de résistance aux discours masculins, peut-être, mais enfin le but, ce n'est pas ça. C'est un but de s'exprimer librement comme on a envie de faire.

ES: Ceci dit, vous avez souvent évoqué les discours de Fanon et de Césaire dans vos livres.

MC: Mais ça c'est dans les écrits plutôt théoriques. Ce n'est pas tellement dans les romans.

ES: Mais dans le cas d'*Hérémakhonon*?

MC: Des fois pour se moquer, on peut émailler son texte de références. Il ne faut pas oublier quand même que je suis une enseignante universitaire. Donc, il y a dans ma tête toute une intertextualité sur ces écrivains que vous connaissez. On ne fait pas ça consciemment. C'est une chose inconsciente qui vous dépasse un peu. Donc la plupart du temps, c'est ça.

ES Finalement, pour moi, ce qui semble caractériser votre positionnement en tant qu'écrivain, c'est ce refus catégorique de la notion d'une authenticité collective. Néanmoins, en vous décrivant comme 'l'enfant de la bourgeoisie de couleur', n'évoquez-vous pas, malgré tout, une position authentique que vous occuperiez comme représentante de votre classe?

MC: Je crois que quand je dis par exemple, en Guadeloupe, que j'étais un enfant de la bourgeoisie noire, je m'aligne aux trois quarts du pays. La bourgeoisie chez nous, comme partout d'ailleurs, est absolument détestable. Surtout dans un pays qui est colonisé où ils avaient envie d'essayer de singer les valeurs de l'Occident. C'est m'aligner à mes gens. Je pense que là aussi, ce n'est pas l'authenticité que je cherche. C'est une authenticité

personnelle. Je suis moi, Maryse Condé. Il faut me prendre comme ça. Il faut lire comme ça ou alors me laisser tomber. Donc, finalement, je m'affirme pour ce que je suis et pas pour autre chose.

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Continents Apart: Intertextual Subversion in Justine Mintsa's *Histoire d'Awu*

'Continents Noirs', with its connotations of an ineffable, even sinister, Conradian 'Heart of Darkness', is the rather surprising title chosen for Gallimard's new series of African literature in French, launched in 2000. Whilst the publishing giant's rather belated recognition of the literary worth of so-called 'minority' African Francophone writers is certainly a positive step, the nature of its classification and packaging of such works is somewhat problematic. The plural form, 'Continents', whilst no doubt intended to designate the multiplicity of Africa and its diaspora, is both geographically and psychologically unquantifiable, implying an all-encompassing, ever-proliferating presence or even threat. The epithet 'noirs', as in the French term 'Afrique Noire', conflates people and place, implicitly associating skin-colour with what JanMohamed, in his studies of colonialist discourse, has called 'a magical essence of the continent'.¹ In creating a literary classification based on skin-colour, 'Continents Noirs' not only reductively occludes the existence of non-black African writers, but also overlooks the many areas of difference — geographic, cultural, social, ethnic, gender, and so forth — between its published authors.² Despite the great diversity of literary

production from Africa and its diaspora, the title 'Continents Noirs' signals a clear distinction between the works grouped under its banner, and those published either in Gallimard's mainstream, unproblematically 'French' collections or in its existing 'Du Monde Entier' series. The linguistic connotations of the title 'Continents Noirs' and the implicit racial classifications on which the series is based are, arguably, more readily characteristic of nineteenth-century imperialist ideology than of a twenty-first-century publishing house.

The problematic nature of Gallimard's classification has, not surprisingly, raised a few eyebrows in the French publishing and media worlds. In June 2000, an article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* criticised Gallimard for opportunism, for its somewhat arbitrary selection criteria and for 'ghettoisation'.³ Also under attack were the anachronistic racial clichés expressed by the series' editor, Jean-Noël Schifano, in the postface, itself headed 'Continents Noirs', appended to each of the works in the series. Instead, as one might expect, of setting out the selection criteria of the series or of offering a reading of the novel in question, the postface discusses the long-standing influence of African sculpture on western art, and the recent shift in African culture from sculptural and oral to written forms of expression. As the *Nouvel Observateur* article highlights, this discussion is replete with disturbing racial stereotypes which 'en ont choqué plus d'un'.⁴ For instance, in his postface, Schifano describes African art forms as being 'chargées de la primitive puissance créatrice'. According to Schifano, they combine what, he claims, the Congolese writer Henri Lopes

¹ Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: the Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1 (Autumn 1985), pp.59-87 (p. 68).

² Aly Diallo (*La Révolte du Kòmò*, 2000) is Malian, though born in Guinea. Gaston-Paul Effa (*Le Cri que tu pousses ne réveillera personne*, 2000) was born in Cameroon but has lived in France since the age of sixteen. Sylvie Kandé (*Lagon, Lagunes*, 2000) was born in Paris, the daughter of a French mother and a Senegalese father, and now lives in the United States. Justine Mintsa (*Histoire d'Awu*, 2000) is Gabonese. Amos Tutuola, who died in 1997, was Nigerian. *L'Ivrogne dans la brousse* (republished in 2000) is Raymond Queneau's 1953 translation of Tutuola's English-language original, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

³ Bernard Loupias, 'Vent d'Afrique', *Le Nouvel Observateur* (15-21 June 2000), 128-29.
⁴ *Ibid.*, p.128

referred to as ‘la langue de la Sévigné avec des couilles de nègre’, with the result that traditional wooden fetishes are being replaced by ‘les fétiches en papier’. Whatever the possible benevolent motives behind Schifano’s enthusiastic promotion of African literature, it would be mild criticism indeed to describe his stereotypical depiction of Africans as primitive, sexualised beings with magical, totemic rituals as naive and anachronistic. What is more, Schifano’s appeal to African Francophone literary expression to rejuvenate (*dégeler*) frigid metropolitan French, offers no self-reflexive consideration of the role played by French colonisation in the destruction of indigenous oral traditions, or of the reasons why these so-called ‘primitive’ peoples are speaking or writing French at all.

In his 1950 essay, ‘L’Ethnographe devant le colonialisme’,⁵ Michel Leiris warned against three prevalent tendencies in ethnographic studies of African cultures, tendencies that one can readily identify, fifty years later, in Schifano’s postface. Leiris argues first against attributing too much significance to the influence of African on western art, since other aspects of western culture have remained totally unchanged by such influence. Secondly, he rejects the tendency to favour so-called ‘primitive’ over ‘evolved’ aspects of a society. Linked to this, thirdly, Leiris refutes ethnography’s emphasis on ‘culturally pure’ folklore, myths and rituals, since, in his view, it is neither possible nor desirable to dissociate a postcolonial society from the historical context of colonialism.

Given this overt criticism of the kind of racial stereotyping evident in Schifano’s postface, it is perhaps ironic that a quotation from Leiris (*‘L’Afrique — qui fit — refit — et qui fera’*) is used as an epigraph to the ‘Continents Noirs’ series. The non-attributed

source of this quotation is Leiris’s ‘Bagatelles végétales’:⁶ a series of playful linguistic pseudo-definitions of Leiris’s favourite words and phrases, all based on sound patterns rather than on received meaning. In most cases, however, the ludic phonic shifts and associations reveal paradoxical new dimensions to common words. Hence, the anagram ‘Afrique – qui fera’, whilst playing with sounds and linguistic structure, also comments on the enduring nature of the continent.

Whatever Leiris’s individual ideological position in relation to cultural and racial alterity, and whatever his personal engagement with the African continent, it is telling that Gallimard should choose the words of a canonical French male writer, rather than of an African writer, to act as the series’ epigraph. As Gérard Genette points out, in his study of epigraphs in *Seulls*,⁷ the purpose of an epigraph is to create connections between citing and cited writers and texts. The ‘Continents Noirs’ epigraph immediately sets up a relationship of exteriority, of an outsider looking on, between its cited French writer and text and the African author and novel that it precedes. If read in parallel with the editorial postface, back-cover blurb and overall series classification, Leiris’s quotation invites the reader to adopt a position of distanced spectatorship in relation to the Otherness of the African novel.

The decision to write in the language of the former coloniser and to have that work published in France is one that has evident ethical consequences for Francophone African writers, under any circumstances. For the writers included in the ‘Continents Noirs’ series, however, such general ethical problems are compounded by the problematic nature of Gallimard’s paratextual framing of their works. So how might a Francophone African writer respond to such ethical and creative dilemmas, whilst continuing to reap the

⁵ Included in Michel Leiris, *Cinq Études d’ethnologie* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1969).

Michel Leiris, ‘Bagatelles végétales’ (1956), reproduced in *Mots sans émoires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

Gérard Genette, ‘Les Épigraphes’, *Seulls* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), pp.134–49.

benefits of association with a prestigious French publishing house? How can editorial attempts to classify and colonise the works be resisted from within their own structures? In this article, I shall examine the ways in which one of the authors in the series, Justine Mintsa, subverts Gallimard's and Schifano's paratextual attempts to appropriate her novel, *Histoire d'Awu* (2000). I shall focus, in particular, on the interrelation between Mintsa's text and the Leiris epigraph, and examine how this illustrates or subverts Genette's four functions of epigraph.⁸ What is the nature of the intertextual relationship established between citing and cited text when, as in the case of Mintsa's novel, the epigraph is imposed upon the work by the publishing house, rather than, as Genette's definitions presuppose, being chosen by the author herself?

The first function of epigraph, according to Genette, is to clarify and justify the text's title. The title of Mintsa's novel, *Histoire d'Awu*, presents the reader with the puzzle of who, what, or where Awu is. On reading the novel, we soon learn that Awu (or Awudabiran') is the main, female protagonist. The epigraph, therefore, invites us to draw an implicit connection between the story of the eponymous heroine and the history of Africa. Mintsa's novel can, indeed, be read as an allegory, as implicit parallels are made between what happens to the main character, Awu, and the past, present and future of Africa. Whilst the clarifying function of the imposed series epigraph is, in this sense, similar to that of an epigraph chosen by the author herself, the reader's automatic assumption of the novel's straightforwardly allegorical role nonetheless glosses over its many complexities and ambiguities. Such a pre-emptive conditioning of our reading of the novel

⁸ I must acknowledge here my debt to Michelle Hartman, whose fascinating research on Francophone Lebanese writers demonstrates the many productive possibilities of applying intertextual theory to the study of postcolonial texts. See, in particular, her use of Genette's four functions of epigraph in: Michelle Hartman, 'Multiple Identities, Multiple Voices: reading Andrée Chedid's *La Maison sans racines*', *French Studies*, 64 (January 2000), 54-66.

those voiced in the above-mentioned *Nouvel Observateur* article, of conventionality and didacticism.⁹

Linked to clarification of the title is Genette's second and main function of epigraph, that of providing a commentary on the text and a key to its meaning. On an explicit level, Mintsa's novel tells the story of Awu's life — from the particular circumstances of her marriage to Obame Afane (his first wife was infertile and so custom required him, reluctantly, to take a second, fertile wife), through the birth of her children, the development of her relationship with her husband, the various problems and compromises faced by the couple and their extended family, to Obame's death, and the hardships of Awu's widowhood. The epigraph invites the reader to identify the implicit significance of this narrative as an allegory of the challenges facing modern-day Africa. What the implied western, male gaze of the epigraph cannot illuminate, however, is the essentially African and female way in which this allegory is developed, or the many instances in which the narrative frustrates a simplistic allegorical reading.

Mintsa's novel begins with an anthropomorphic description of Awu sewing, with the defamiliarising perspective shifted from the embroiderer to the process of embroidery itself. The motif of embroidery runs through the entire novel, taking on material, narrative and metaphorical significance, both in relation to Awu's story and, by extension, to the history of Africa. Not only does Awu's sewing provide the family with an income in difficult times, but it also becomes Awu's means of expression: she tells her story by sewing scenes and objects from her everyday life into her work. In contrast to her husband's recourse to the medium of writing — illustrated by the repeated motif of his red school ink —

⁹ Loupias claims, in 'Vent d'Afrique', that 'avec les livres de la Gabonaise Justine Mintsa ou du Malien Aly Diallo, on ne sort guère des limites d'une littérature très conventionnelle (tradition contre modernité, etc.), voire résamment didactique' (p.128).

her work. In contrast to her husband's recourse to the medium of writing — illustrated by the repeated motif of his red school ink — Awu's embroidery represents a traditional, female, non-written means of expression, embedded within the essentially western novel form.¹⁰ The inherently non-verbal nature of the embroidery which, because it is unseen, can only be rendered approximately and allusively in narrative form, leaves an essential, significant gap at the heart of the novel, so denying the reader the decisively allegorical interpretation that Gallimard's epigraph seeks to dictate.

The very nature and process of embroidery become, for Awu, a metaphor for her life, encompassing its dreams, aspirations and often harsh realities. Thus, early in the novel, Awu's hopes for life are described in terms of sewing:

Depuis toujours, Awu avait rêvé de coudre sa vie au point de chaînette: faire un nœud d'attache au départ avec les enfants et le mariage, et exceller sur tout le parcours à travers les rapports harmonieux tant sur le plan matrimonial que sur les plans social et professionnel. (*Histoire d'Awu*, p.13)

At this point in the novel, the optimistic metaphorical possibilities are exploited of embroidery's need for an initial, anchoring knot and of the existence of distinct but complementary threads within one harmonious work.

Later on, however, as many of Awu's dreams are thwarted, the embroidery metaphor is extended to encompass both positive and negative aspects of her life:

¹⁰ Interesting inter-cultural parallels could be made with literary representations of other female crafts, as used for similar narrative or self-expressive purposes, such as samplers, quilts, tapestries or kilims.

Pour Awudabiran', le point de chaînette était plus que jamais le point de l'amour, le point de sa vie. Elle était secrètement fière de toutes ces bouclettes qu'elle avait soigneusement confectionnées sur le parcours de sa vie. [...] Pourtant, belle et brillante elle était, ce qui, en revanche, lui valait le mauvais œil, voire même la jalousie de certains. Mais elle feignait de ne se rendre compte de rien. Le point de chaînette ne requérait-il pas qu'on fit d'abord un point arrière, et qu'avant de tirer l'aiguille, on glissât le fil sous la pointe de cette dernière? N'était-ce pas la condition pour qu'en tirant l'aiguille il restât sur le tissu une jolie petite boucle? Le fil apparemment si docile ne finissait-il pas par imposer sa beauté resplendissante qui incitait au respect et à l'admiration? (*Histoire d'Awu*, pp.77-78)

Despite the difficulties that Awu faces, the embroidery metaphor, like the process of the craft itself, is adaptable enough to continue to offer solace and assurance: as in life, the doublings-back of chain stitch are an inextricable part of a general forward momentum and constitute the components of a multi-faceted but potentially beautiful whole.

At the end of the novel, the embroidery metaphor undergoes yet another modification as, using the same imagery as she had previously applied to her own life, Awu transfers her hopes and aspirations to her children: 'elle espérait que la vie [de ses enfants] serait cousue au point de chaînette, avec un solide nœud au bout' (*Histoire d'Awu* p.110). Whereas the threads of her own life have metaphorically come undone, Awu attempts to overcome her own hardship and unhappiness by safeguarding the fabric of her children's future. Read against Leiris's quotation, the metaphor of Awu's embroidery — composed of many threads and requiring

both a secure foundation and constant doublings-back, creating a harmonious whole — offers a message of hope, albeit a compromised form of hope, for the future of Africa ('qui fera'). At the same time, the essentially female, traditional and non-verbal form that this message takes does much to undermine the male, European, literary emphasis of both epigraph and postface.

On a broader level, the coexistence, in modern-day Africa, of indigenous and western cultures and traditions is symbolised, in *Histoire d'Awu*, by the topography of the village in which Awu and Obame live: 'Le village, en effet, se situait entre deux collines' (*Histoire d'Awu* p.24). The geographical configuration of the village is matched by religious and cultural divisions associated with these two opposing locations, since the indigenous 'Culte des Ancêtres' worships on the top of one hill and the French Evangelical Mission is built on the top of the other:

L'une [des collines était] coiffée d'une petite église aux portes et fenêtres perpétuellement ouvertes, et au-dessus de laquelle se déployait une croix svelte; et l'autre, couronnée d'arbres gigantesques dont les troncs étaient murés par des arbustes et des buissons.

C'étaient là les deux temples d'Egomane. (*Histoire d'Awu*, p.24)

Associated with Egomane's geographical and religious divisions is a cultural and educational opposition between the village's mission school and secular school. The latter is described by the villagers as 'une vraie école' since there 'on n'allait pas tenter de dénigrer le culte des Ancêtres, comme c'était le cas au collège évangélique!' (*Ibid*). The passive acceptance of the mission and its school by the villagers is shown as being dependent on their belief that the two religious and cultural systems could co-exist whilst remaining entirely distinct from each other: 'Le culte des Ancêtres n'était pas

menacé. C'était là l'essentiel' (*Ibid*). Read against Leiris's epigraph, such a statement has evident ironic resonance for West Africa's long tolerance of French colonial rule. Hence, rather than the epigraph functioning to illuminate the implicit meaning of the text, Mintsa's novel can here be seen to highlight and undermine the complacency and distance implied in the French editorial paratext, of which the epigraph forms a crucial part.

In *Histoire d'Awu*, western and African traditions do not exist in discrete and harmonious proximity. There are constant clashes and tensions between the two cultural systems, between indigenous customs and the 'choses des Blancs'. These tensions come into play, in particular, when individuals are confronted with such legacies of French colonialism as education, health and bureaucracy. Although Obame has dedicated his life to being an exemplary teacher, the novel plots his vain attempts, in the face of corrupt and unwieldy bureaucracy, to receive his state pension. Faced with the failure of the administrative system inherited from the French, 'les Anciens pensaient que la confiance trop aveugle du village en les choses des Blancs avait dû blesser les dieux et les ancêtres qu'on avait un peu trop ignorés dans cette affaire' (*Histoire d'Awu* p.73). Obame thus seeks help from an ancestral priest, or 'nganga', but 'il s'en retourna au village, plus déçu que jamais, et décidé, entre autres à ne plus jamais entendre parler de nganga' (*Histoire d'Awu* p.74).

When Obame dies in a road accident, his funeral presents another occasion for the meeting of French and African cultures. The two sides are united in their grief at the loss of Obame, although each continues to express this in opposing ways. The iconography and symbolism of the two religions are seen to dictate and even distort their respective approaches to their loss. Hence:

Le pasteur Gambier salua la loyauté d'Obame Afane qui, bien que n'étant pas baptisé, s'était, toute sa vie durant, conduit comme un véritable chrétien.

C'était le bon Samaritain rené à Ebomane. Le pasteur Gambier déclara qu'au moment précis où il parlait, le frère Obame Afane était assis au Paradis à la droite du Père Dieu Tout-Puissant. (*Histoire d'Awu*, pp.101-02)

Obame's father, the head of the Ancestral Cult, envisages paradise and Obame's position in it in contrasting terms: 'En ce moment même, il siégeait au centre de la Colline Couronnée parmi ses valeureux Ancêtres' (*Histoire d'Awu* p.102). Although the sentiments underlying both men's words may be similar, the funeral becomes another occasion for the expression of difference and division. Indeed, an explicit link is made between Obame's death and the French presence in the village, since: 'Le père d'Obame, quant à lui, affirma qu'il avait toujours su que le progrès de l'école des Blancs, tôt ou tard, finirait par exiger le sacrifice d'un fils du terroir' (*Ibid.*). As son of the head of the Ancestral Cult and as a schoolteacher within the post-colonial education system, Obame in many ways embodies the challenges entailed in the meeting of two, often contradictory, cultures.

Throughout *Histoire d'Awu*, opposing solutions, based on western or indigenous cultural systems, are offered to problems which result precisely from the historical incompatibility of these two systems: that is, from colonial attempts to calque European values and infrastructures on to indigenous African civilisations. The only approaches which offer a chance of resolution are those based on compromise between, and subversion of, both opposing cultures. Read in intertextual association with Leiris's quotation, then, the story of Awu and Obame serves as an allegory for the various conflicts within, and solutions open to, modern-day Africa and, running contrary to Gallimard's paratextual distancing, fully implicates France within such conflicts. The content of the novel turns the European gaze of the epigraph on itself, so implicitly

subverting and critiquing the imposition of Gallimard's western framework on Mintsa's African text.

In addition to the functions of clarifying the text's title and of revealing the implicit significance of the text's content, an epigraph is said to fulfil two further, more oblique functions. According to Genette, the third function of epigraph is to draw attention to the name of the cited author, rather than just to the content of the quotation. The citation thus establishes advantageous associative links between the citing author and the name of the cited author. Closely linked to this is the fourth function of epigraph, the 'effet épigraphe', which links the citing writer and work to the literary, cultural or intellectual traditions with which the cited author's name is associated. The assumption underlying Genette's formulation of both of these oblique functions of epigraph is that, by choosing to name a prestigious precursor, citing authors can choose their own peers, and so vicariously assert their own place in the Pantheon. In Mintsa's case, however, the fact that the Leiris epigraph is imposed on her text by the publishing house confuses Genette's model of voluntary, emulative citation. It is not the author herself, but Gallimard and the series editor who position Mintsa's text in relation to Leiris. So what kinds of oblique associative links does this positioning seek to establish, and how does Mintsa's text either exploit or subvert these?

As well as being an influential poet and novelist, Michel Leiris was an important ethnographer of African cultures. His *Afrique fantôme* is the journal of the French Dakar-Djibouti ethnographic mission of 1931-33,¹¹ but it also plots a journey of personal discovery, from stereotypical conceptions of an exotic racial Other to a greater understanding of the author's own position in relation to the reality of contemporary Africa. *L'Afrique fantôme* is credited with being the first account consciously to insist on the

¹¹ Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934).

subjectivity and personal implication entailed in ethnographic study and, in this respect, Leiris is regarded by many as being the father of modern ethnography. He was also, as we saw earlier, intensely aware of the uncomfortable but unavoidable links between ethnography and colonialism.

The association set up, via the series epigraph, between Mintsa and Leiris has both positive and negative implications for our reading of *Histoire d'Awu*. Leiris's interwoven roles, as poet, novelist, African ethnographer and critic of colonialism, serve to signal to the readers the multiple implications of Mintsa's novel and its engagement with literary, cultural, social and political traditions. The association of Mintsa with a canonical French writer could also be seen as disrupting, from within, distinctions between French and Francophone texts, and between mainstream and minority literatures: distinctions that, as we have seen, underlie the creation of the 'Continents Noirs' series as a whole. Yet the very fact that the Leiris epigraph is imposed upon the text, rather than being chosen by the author, nonetheless positions the novel as the object of a male, European, ethnographer's gaze. By preceding Mintsa's novel, this distancing gaze, implicit in the playfulness of 'Afrique — qui fit — refit — et qui fera', seeks to colour our reading of the text, signalling that it is accessible to, if not predominantly aimed at, a French readership.

Throughout *Histoire d'Awu*, Mintsa makes quite explicit her awareness of the essentially French gaze — of both readership and publishing paratext — on her African novel. This is evident in her frequent translations of Fang words, and her explanation or even justification of African customs. For instance, during the 'Conseil de famille', the hierarchies and corresponding etiquette between family members are explained to the implied French reader, as in the following passage:

La belle-famille étant sacrée, Afane Obame n'eut pas le choix. En outre, les descendants des conjoints,

les Mbebeñ, se devaient d'entretenir des rapports particulièrement courtois. Aussi se rassit-il et se mit-il à l'écoute de son homologue, son Mui.
(*Histoire d'Awu*, p.34)

Here and elsewhere, Fang terms of address are accompanied by their French translation and nearest equivalent: 'Minkî, beau-père' (p.35), 'Nnom ngon, gendre' (*Ibid.*), 'belle-fille ou belle-sœur, M'bôm ou M'mieñ' (p.40). Yet such tactics are not simply concessions to Mintsa's French readership: throughout the novel, its linguistic and cultural hybridity is closely linked to its post-colonial and anti-colonial content. Rather than gloss over the clash between languages and customs provoked by writing in French and publishing in France whilst treating essentially African subject-matter, and rather than turn her African novel into a picturesque object of European curiosity, Mintsa makes this clash the focus of both the form and the content of her novel. Read against, rather than with, the Leiris epigraph, Mintsa's hybrid novel refuses French linguistic and cultural hegemony, with its African, female-centred form disrupting the race and gender distinctions imposed upon it by Gallimard's paratextual framing.

Whilst outlining what he sees to be the four main functions of epigraph, Genette concedes that 'épigrapher est toujours un geste muet dont l'interprétation reste à la charge du lecteur'.¹² As we have seen, the imposition of the series epigraph on Mintsa's novel implies a very different intertextual relationship between citing and cited author and text than that presupposed by Genette. Whereas some of the functions identified by Genette may to an extent still hold true for an imposed, rather than a chosen, epigraph — clarification of the title, illumination of the text's implicit meanings, association with certain intellectual traditions — in other ways, Mintsa's text refuses to be appropriated and explained

¹² Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p.145.

by the epigraph, and so resists being contained and classified by Gallimard's paratextual framing. The interaction of Mintsa's novel with the Leiris quotation is far more subversive and critical than Genette's limited and emulative theoretical model allows. It has thus also been necessary to interpret the relationship between epigraph and text in the opposite sense, and to explore the ways in which the text not only subverts the functions of the epigraph but also reveals the complacent, distant, Eurocentric nature of the gaze implied by Gallimard's choice of citation. Rather than construct comforting, reconciliatory links between different literatures and cultures, the intertextual relationship that Mintsa's novel creates with Leiris's quotation highlights the tensions and conflicts inherent in the encounter between Europe and Africa.

As the case of *Histoire d'Awu* illustrates, epigraphs can be used to throw into question rather than condone the traditions and belief systems with which they engage. By exploiting the intertextual possibilities of the encounter between Leiris's quotation, 'L'Afrique — qui fit — refit — et qui fera', and her novel, Mintsa challenges the distant, spectatorial positioning of the French reader in relation to the African Other, that the epigraph appears to set up. Her novel ironically replies to Leiris's word-play, writing back with an insider's view and a personally engaged assertion of the nature of Africa. The western Other's gaze is returned and deflected onto its own imperialist history and onto the present-day colonial legacy (religion, education, health system, administration) left to the African continent. The gaze is turned on those French writers and ethnographers of Africa who, as Leiris himself recognised, were collusive, consciously or not, with French colonial ideology. The gaze is turned upon the kind of pernicious, essentialist stereotypes deployed by Schifano in his postface to Mintsa's novel, so subverting from within the publisher's facile racial classifications. The interplay between Mintsa's novel and its epigraph reveals meanings, and permits readings, which go way

beyond, and even overturn, the expectations and limitations of the 'Continents Noirs' series.

In an interview, Mintsa claimed that:

Les Africaines devraient s'abstenir de calquer le modèle occidental et de le transposer chez nous, car les réalités ne sont pas les mêmes. J'estime qu'être Africaine et intellectuelle, ne signifie pas rejeter systématiquement sa culture.¹³

In Mintsa's novel, Awu can be seen to embody just such an approach. Though educated according to western norms, she does not rebel against her traditional roles of wife, mother or widow. She does not, for instance, refuse to become her brother-in-law's property, as custom dictates, when her husband dies, but instead subverts such customs from within. Exploiting once again the metaphorical parallels between embroidery and her life, Awu spells out to Nguema her compromise solution to the apparent incompatibility between the dictates of tradition and personal happiness, in the following passage:

Toi et moi, on va coudre le point du jour où chaque groupe de fils est nettement séparé l'un de l'autre, bien que tous appartiennent au même ouvrage. Mon groupe de fils ne peut pas se joindre au tien, ça risquerait de froisser le tissu. Gardons nos distances pour parvenir à une certaine harmonie. (*Histoire d'Awu*, p.105)

Since neither traditional African customs nor western models are able to resolve the contemporary realities with which she is faced,

¹³ Interview with Oumdouba Ouédraogo, 'Un seul tournant Makôsu', *Amina*, 334 (December 1998), p.84.

Awu chooses to find her own solutions, based on compromise, experience and personal priorities. Read both with and against the Leiris quotation, Awu's story represents both a subversive rebuke to French representations of Africa as a 'continent noir', and an exhortation to Africa to look to itself to find its own solutions and forms of expression.

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***Batouala*, the First 'Roman Nègre' and Dialogism: Writing 'Difference' or Writing 'Differently'**

René Maran's novel *Batouala*, which won the Prix Goncourt in 1921, has provoked considerable scandal since then. This scandal — or indeed these scandals — are linked to the claim, inscribed within the book's own subtitle, that it is the first 'véritable roman nègre'. Certainly, it is one of the first works of literature written in French by a French colonial of a 'native' race. But the novel's authenticity was grounded, as the subtitle implies, on the racial identity of its author. Even much later, Marie-Magdelaine Carbet recounts that a visitor to the prestigious Hôtel de la Monnaie might see, among the bronzes 'à l'effigie des artisans de la gloire nationale', a face that is unexpected in such a place:

Il est nègre. Crêpue, la toison encadrant le haut front bombé. Large, la base du nez d'où partent, en lourdes virgules, des plis d'amertume à peine atténusés par l'ironie légère de la bouche et l'acuité du regard. [...] Le menton comme les arcades sourcilières semblent se rebiffer...¹

The markers of authenticity are, it is clear, situated outside the book, in the author himself, and most specifically in the traits that characterise him racially. But what does it mean to call *Batouala* a 'roman nègre'?

At its publication, *Batouala* shocked — and impressed — its first (French and metropolitan) readership because it was seen as presenting a critical vision of the realities of colonialism in Africa. This initial scandal was to give way to another: in later generations the novel was to shock its new readership among African

¹ Marie-Magdelaine Carbet, 'René Maran (1887-1960)', in *Hommes et Destins* (Paris: Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1977) tome 2, volume 2, p.503.

nationalists and independence fighters for precisely the opposite reason. It was accused of racism, of interiorising a French, white viewpoint and of portraying Africans, through its protagonist Batouala, as lazy, incompetent, and incapable of resistance.

The question of authenticity: René Maran the Frenchman?

Despite Maran's 'authentic' physical traits as romanticised in the quotation above, he was accused of being 'French' and 'inauthentic'. He was in fact born not in Africa but into a family of colonial civil servants in Fort-de-France, Martinique (1887), and as his father was transferred to various French colonies, his schooling was largely in a French boarding-school in Bordeaux. He was not to live in Africa until he took up a post in the French colonial administration in Central Africa in 1910 (at the age of 23). The novel's intended audience was also seen as grounds for accusations of 'inauthenticity': published in France by Albin Michel, it is clearly addressed to a metropolitan readership. Indeed, in his preface Maran claims that he has *translated* what he heard 'là-bas' (*Batouala*, p.9),² using the term 'traduire' for the process of transformation from what he 'heard over there' to what he wrote 'over here' in a transfer that is linguistic, geographical and cultural at the same time.

So whom was Maran speaking for, and from where? Chidi Ikonne, along with many other post-colonial readers, sees him as a 'white' black man, who wore the 'masque blanc' that Fanon was to denounce and who was politically in favour of French

colonialism because it was the system to which he belonged.³ Yet it is not so simple to dismiss Maran as a defender of French imperialism. Though he did condone the *theory* of an intervention of some kind, an idealistic vision of imperialism that was shared by many liberal thinkers of the time, he was deeply critical of the injustices of French colonial *practice*. Maran was in fact a figure who should seem very contemporary to us: a displaced person caught between at least two cultures, the product of racial and cultural ambivalence.

The novel itself has been judged to be artistically second-rate, politically hypocritical, or downright racist. Certainly, the protagonist is far from heroic, and Maran was accused of making Africans look ridiculous. The preface states his intention to criticise the colonial regime, but the novel only does so indirectly, and the plot itself is almost entirely dissociated from the topic of colonialism, centring on a story of adultery ending with an accidental death. But the plot is a mere pretext: I will attempt to show here that *Batouala* the novel, even standing alone and without the more polemical preface, is subversive. Rather than attacking colonialism (or colonial practice) head-on, Maran adopted a variety of voices speaking *against* or *around* imperialism. Unable to find a position radically outside all colonial ideology, he used the novel as a means to give space to other voices.

Thus, to my mind, the harshest judgements of *Batouala* as failing to offer a real critique of French colonialism are misleading. Certainly, what Maran produced is not a *roman à thèse*. But the accusation of in-authenticity is to be turned on its head: the novel as a form is authentically inauthentic, a space

² References to *Batouala* and its preface will be given within the text. Page numbers refer to the 1921 edition (Paris: Albin Michel).

³ Chidi Ikonne, 'What is *Batouala*?', *Journal of African Studies*, 3 (Fall 1976), 373-91. See also Anne-Marie Hampton 'Gide, Maran, Céline et l'Afrique: exotisme, colonialisme et humanisme', Unpublished doctoral thesis (University of California, 1995): 'he encouraged colonialism and even adopted a racist attitude towards Blacks, despising their "primitive" traditions'.

where different voices can speak through and over the dominant authorial voice. And the polemical preface is perhaps less subversive than the novel itself.

Multiple voices

Maran was, in his youth, very attracted to the idea of writing as an expression of the self: one of his projects was an autobiographical novel and he had already published poetry in a subjective, introspective style.⁴ But the project of *Batouala* was radically different. In this novel Maran did not aim to speak in his own voice, nor did he seek to deal with his own personal experience. In the preface he promises to do so, but later:

[...] plus tard, lorsqu'on aura nettoyé les subrures coloniales, je vous peindrai quelques-uns de ces types que j'ai déjà croqués, mais que je conserve, un temps encore, en mes cahiers. [...] Mais, alors, je parlerai en mon nom et non pas au nom d'un autre; ce seront mes idées que j'exposerai et non pas celles d'un autre. (*Batouala*, p.13)

Here, one understands, he is *not* going to speak to us in his own voice or in his own name. Nothing in this novel, he claims in the preface, comes from him: 'au cours de ces six années [d'écriture], pas un moment, je n'ai cédé à la tentation de dire mon mot' (*Batouala*, p.9).

What he does instead is speak in others' words. *Batouala* is characterised by the permeability of frontiers dividing the authorial voice from other voices. This is close to what Bakhtin has called

⁴ René Maran, *La Maison du bonheur* (Paris: Éditions du Beffroi, 1909); *La Vie intérieure* (Paris: Éditions du Beffroi, 1912).

'pictorial' style or 'double-voiced discourse',⁵ although here the discourse that is objectified is not a sociolect but a foreign language. Bearing this important difference in mind, a transferral of Bakhtinian terminology can nevertheless help us to understand the narrative strategies of *Batouala*.

In his preface Maran makes a rather heavy use of parody. There is nothing new about this device, but we can already see that in these examples the authorial voice weakens the peripheries of the quoted utterance with its own intonation. Thus the voice of colonialist discourse is adopted, in sentences such as 'Les nègres d'Afrique Equatoriale sont en effet irréfléchis. Dépourvues d'esprit critique, ils n'ont jamais eu et n'auront jamais aucune espèce d'intelligence' only to be immediately undermined by the comment 'Du moins, on le prétend' (*Batouala*, p.9). Or again, after a horrific portrait of famine resulting from colonial domination, Maran uses this double-voiced discourse with heavy irony: 'Ne disparaissent que ceux qui ne s'adaptent pas à la civilisation' (*Batouala*, p.11). This is the kind of polemical writing that would have made Maran a straightforwardly anti-colonialist writer, using the discourse of colonialism with overtly hostile intent.

Another traditional instance of the permeability of the authorial voice is in the use of parallels, close to allegory; in such cases the authorial voice reappears in a passage stylistically dominated by the voice of a character. And yet this particular use of allegory seems a backhanded critique; to say the least. Thus the dog, Djouma, stands for his master, Batouala himself. Djouma shares

⁵ The idea of 'double-voiced discourse' appears in much of Bakhtin's work, but for a clear discussion of 'pictorial' style and different styles of speech reporting see *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, published under the name of V.N. Volosinov, 1929 (English translation by L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik, Harvard University Press, 1973). For coherence of references, quotations here are taken from the invaluable *Bakhtin Reader*, edited by Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 1994).

his master's opinions about the importance of sleep, we are told — giving us a clue that the two have much in common — and then:

Un chien! Ça s'assomme, ça se mange ou ça se châtre! On vous lui coupe les oreilles. Qu'est-ce que cela peut bien lui faire? N'est-il pas moins que rien? On se sert de lui, un peu, à la saison des feux de brousse! C'est qu'il excelle à poursuivre le gibier débusqué. À part cela, comme il est inutile, on ne s'en occupe pas. (*Batouala*, pp.26-27)

Just as Batouala the chief uses the dog as long as he is useful and then discards him, so he himself is disposed of by the white man. We have already been told that this subordinate role in life did not come naturally to the dog Djouma, who had to learn it: 'N'empêche! Au début, la vie lui avait paru pénible. Il ignorait son métier de chien jusqu'à oublier d'aboyer à tout venant' (*Batouala*, p.26). Life under colonial domination means learning about the 'métier de chien'.

Maran uses parody and irony against colonialism, but this use of double-voiced discourse remains a two-edged sword: although the chief is clearly guilty of unjust domination and casual cruelty towards the dog, neither dog nor man are presented as worthy of admiration or even pity. Even in the preface, Maran's ironic critique of eurocentricity was remarkably back-handed: the European and the African, he said, are more similar than different, 'car si l'inintelligence caractérisait le nègre, il n'y aurait que fort peu d'Européens' (*Batouala*, pp.9-10). It is this essentially negative vision of both Africans and colonisers that has led some recent critics to consider Maran to be racist.

Dominance of other voices

These forms correspond to what Bakhtin described as the first pictorial style, in which the authorial voice speaks over the utterance and permeates it. The opposite occurs in the second pictorial style, which is characteristic of modern poetics. In this case 'the verbal dominant' shifts to reported speech, which becomes 'more forceful and more active than the authorial context framing it'.⁶ Here a series of voices thus express criticism of the 'whites' without the authorial voice endorsing or condemning this criticism — a technique that allows Maran to avoid the laborious *roman à thèse* and to provide a space for subversion without situating it in his own identity (an identity that was, we have already said, far from straightforward).

The novel is predominantly narrated in the third person, though interspersed with narratives by Batouala or others in the first person. Yet even where the narration is in the third person, it slips from narratorial anonymity to indirect speech and back again. Thus the third person narrative is most often double-voiced, influenced by the language of the focus character. We look through Batouala's eyes when he sees his wives dressing and the language of the third-person narrator is infused with that of Batouala or of someone close to him in the observation that 'La pudeur n'est qu'une de ces hypocrisies exportées par les blancs' (*Batouala*, p.35). Or:

Les blancs, ah, les blancs!
Ils pestent contre la piqûre des moustiques. Celle des fourous les irrite. Le bourdonnement des mouches les rend nerveux. [...] Tout les inquiète. Un homme digne de ce nom doit-il se soucier de ce qui s'agit et vit autour de lui? Ah, les blancs, les blancs!

⁶ *The Bakhtin Reader*, p.66.

Leurs pieds! Une infection. Pourquoi aussi les emboîter en des peaux noires, jaunes ou blanches?

Et s'il n'y avait que leurs pieds qui puaient! Hélas! de leurs corps entier émane une odeur de cadavre.

(*Batouala*, p.37)

This ‘vision from elsewhere’ is of course used to comic effect in many passages, somewhat at Batouala’s expense — but also, it must be said, at the expense of the ‘whites’.

When the third person narrative adopts the language and perspective of Batouala, it is remarkably close in style to the long passages when he speaks to us directly. In chapter four, for example, there are explicit criticisms of the ‘whites’, their unjust domination and their hypocrisy. There is nothing ambiguous about these criticisms, but they are expressed by Batouala and not by an anonymous omniscient narrator, and they are always double-sided: the criticism bites both ways. Batouala lists the hypocrisies of the whites, who condemn drinking and gambling, but indulge in both themselves; so although Batouala is shown the worse for drinking, he is not the only one, and he sums up the situation with damning honesty and clarity: ‘Après le lit et la chaise-longue, le pernod est la seule importante invention des boundjous’ (*Batouala*, p.79). Both whites and blacks lie, according to Batouala; both are divided among themselves and hate or kill each other (*Batouala*, pp.75-76); why, he asks, should we be better than them? His critique includes a precise and damning description of the exploitative rubber-harvesting and the empty promises of development with which the whites recompense those they oblige to work for them (*Batouala*, pp.76-77). This is all too clear:

Nous ne sommes que des chairs à impôt. Nous ne sommes que des bêtes de portage. Des bêtes? Même pas. Un chien? Ils le nourrissent, et

soignent leur cheval. Nous? Nous sommes moins que ces animaux, nous sommes plus bas que les plus bas. Ils nous tuent lentement. (*Batouala*, p.77)

Batouala’s voice (during the feast) gives way to the voice of an unspecified ‘on’, the people, who react to his words and agree with them:

Jadis, avant la venue des blancs, on vivait heureux. Travailler peu, et pour soi, manger, boire et dormir, de loin en loin avoir des palabres sanglantes où l’on arrachait le foie des morts pour manger leur courage, et se l’incorporer — tels étaient les jours heureux que l’on vivait, jadis, avant la venue des blancs. (*Batouala*, pp.77-78)

Thus the novel shifts back and forth between the double-voiced discourse of passages in which a vague ‘tribal’ or ‘African’ identity speaks indirectly in an almost songlike chanting voice (with repetition of the refrain), and the passages in which characters speak directly.

The objectification of discourse — that is, its reproduction with the ‘colour’ or ‘texture’ of its original speaker’s sociolect — is used to good effect in other ways as well.⁷ Thus, the Africans’ incomprehension of the French commander’s orders and way of speaking is shown to be perfectly legitimate. The commander speaks in an incomprehensible gibberish comprised of insulting slang and equally insulting *petit nègre*, with jokes only he can understand and elliptical phrases thrown aside to his subordinates who naturally catch only fragments of what he is saying (*Batouala*,

⁷ The objectification of discourse is discussed in Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. by C. Emerson (1963; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); see *The Bakhtin Reader*, p.110.

pp.96-97). Between the French commander and the African peoples under his domination the incomprehension is mutual.

Alone among the African voices of the novel, that of the militiamen, agents of French domination, is reproduced in bad French, to comic effect: thus military terms are ‘borrowed’ by sergeant Sillatigui Konaté without some consonants: ‘A doite!’, ‘Ixé’, ‘Po’ for ‘Fixe’, ‘Repos’, etc. (*Batouala*, p.95). The dialogue between the commander and his native soldiers is pure Ubuesque farce: both are ridiculous, and neither understands the other; the commander is also corrupt, using obscene language and dealing out arbitrary punishments.

Apart from these brief passages of gibberish, the voice of the ‘whites’ is largely absent. The commander has left for a short period, leaving only the empty architecture of the ‘poste’ as a sign of colonial domination, to be subverted by the illicit, carnivalesque festivities that the village people hold there. In the absence of the master, ‘pour garder tout cela, le seul milicien, le seul «tourougou», Boula, était demeuré, lui dont nul n’avait cure’ (*Batouala*, p.64). In contrast to the administrative language — ‘résidence administrative et dépendances, camp de la milice et prison’ (*Batouala*, pp.63-4) — the feast is described in terms of fertility, abundance and rich, joyous life. The women, singing, mock the lone militiaman who has ‘gone over’ to the whites through the traditional form of songs used to give rhythm to the crushing of corn, millet or manioc (*Batouala*, pp.66-70).

There is a marked contrast between the clumsy *petit nègre* of the militiamen and the sophistication of the traditional means of distance communication through percussion, the tam-tam and its complex dialogues (*Batouala*, pp.40-44; also p.122). It is also made clear that the skills of the tracker and the walker (*Batouala*, pp.45, 133-4) are far beyond the whites. But more striking even than this valorisation of African skills is the fact that Maran gives voice to traditional creative linguistic forms that, to some extent, come to dominate the novel itself.

Traditional oral forms

The narrative ploys discussed above — irony, allegory, and direct criticism expressed through the mouth of a character — all amount to an indirect critique of French colonialism. Yet *Batouala* is perhaps most innovative in another respect altogether: the use of the African oral tradition to counterpoint the traditional novelistic form. As the prose novel evolved from the novel of ‘letters’, so here the ‘colonial’ novel moves towards the assemblage of ‘oral’ strands. It is through its development of this technique that *Batouala* really takes its place as a precursor of the post-colonial novel.

Ikonne, who is once again critical of *Batouala*, sees the use of ‘other’ forms and oral tradition as a stylistic defect since they do not serve what he calls the ‘aim’ of the novel. As we have already suggested, the novel does not have a single monological ‘aim’ as would a *roman à thèse*, but seeks rather to speak from different places *around* the issue of colonialism. Ikonne also suggests that a collection of African folklore such as that found in the novel would be better in an ethnographic study; indeed, René Maran was to publish just such a study, dealing with some of the same material, in 1933.⁸ But the oral material serves a different purpose in the novel.

In many passages (via double-voiced utterances corresponding to Bakhtin’s third type) folkloric forms and language coexist with French literary language. Thus in chapter seven the point of view taken is that of the inhabitant of an African village, and the language is steeped in local colour; the sun is described as ‘un bon vieillard’ called ‘Lolo’, who fears only ‘Ipeu, la lune’ since he flees her every evening: these are references to an oral tradition

⁸ René Maran, ‘Légendes de l’Ougangui-Chari’, *Les Œuvres libres*, 147, (1933), 325-81.

that gives substance to Maran's portrayal of African life. And yet the very sentences infused with this view 'from within' and with the names and sometimes vocabulary of the local oral lore are in classic, balanced French (*Batouala*, pp.112-13).

Elsewhere a long passage with no clearly individualised point of view expresses the feeling of the hunt through description but also through the use of an unspecified voice that appears to belong to 'the hunters' in general:

La belle journée! 'Goussou', la brousse, toute la brousse va brûler! Iéhé, les m'balas, il n'est plus temps de barrir! [...] A nous, les antilopes! A nous, cibisis et 'to'ndorrotos'! (*Batouala*, pp.153-54).

A certain aesthetic pleasure in the music of the words is evident, and this 'colour' or 'texture' of language is sometimes developed at the expense of clear comprehension for the (French) reader. Yet the exultant, expectant mood of the moments before the hunt is captured through the rhythmic, incantatory evocation of the animals.

More easily accessible to the French reader is the use of proverbs and pithy, colourful expressions that are perfectly clear in the context:

Absent le bouc, les chèvres jouent. (*Batouala*, p.63)
Ils [les blancs] s'amusent de nous comme un 'niaou' d'une souris. Le niaou finit toujours par dévorer la souris dont il jouait.[...] Tel n'évite des bœufs sauvages que pour tomber sur une panthère à l'affût. (p.71)

Ils nous traitent de menteurs! Nos mensonges ne trompent personne. Si, parfois, nous embellissons le vrai, c'est parce qu'il n'était pas assez bien, c'est

parce que le manioc sans sel n'a pas de saveur.
(p.75)

Lorsque le 'bamara' a rugi, pas une antilope n'ose bramer aux environs. Vous n'êtes pas les plus forts. Taisez-vous. (p.79)

La vengeance n'est pas aliment qui se mange chaud.
(p.104)

L'eau va toujours vers l'eau. (p.121)

Après la saison sèche, la saison des pluies [= the time for tears]. (p.180)

There are also songs whose repeated refrains mark and rhythm certain chapters of the novel, sometimes elliptically, sometimes eerily. And most of all there are the stories. Batouala tells his young rival, Bissibingui, a story at the moment when his plot to poison the latter has been frustrated, and Bissibingui replies with another, shorter story, giving an alternative explanation for the discovery of fire. The stories exist in their own right (as they would in an anthology) but they also have a narrative function. Thus the exchange of stories between the two enemies takes the form of a narrative duel in which Batouala's attempt at intimidation must be deflected by Bissibingui. Batouala has the upper hand, since as an older man and village chief he is able to wield the weapons of traditional knowledge to more effect. Bissibingui's ignorance of the stories reflects a certain weakness, due to both his youth and the fact that he comes from a generation that has lost its close links with tradition. At first containing only a veiled sense of menace, the stories evolve into threats in the form of prophecies and warnings (*Batouala*, pp.145-46), so that the conflict between the two men is played out through their narrative acts. The final story that Batouala uses to attack his rival in this

exchange is a mythical explanation for sunstroke with all its dangers and likeness to sudden death (*Batouala*, pp.146-50); Bissibingui can only defuse this threat by laughing at it. Later, before the hunt, Batouala tells him the story of a white man disembowelled by an elephant who dies in agony, his belly rotting (*Batouala*, pp.162-66); yet, rather than bringing bad luck to its intended victim, the story turns against its teller, as he himself is disembowelled by a panther and dies in the same way. Thus the stories are used to further the action indirectly, and language clearly has a power and significance beyond its mere denotative role. It is useful to be reminded of Abiola Irele's observation that in African societies language is consciously relished and 'literature exists (especially poetry) as elaborate constructions of words which have more of a connotative than a denotative character and function'.⁹

What we have just seen of the use of parable, song, and traditional story-forms falls into the category of what Bakhtin calls 'Objectified discourse': the other's discourse is treated as an object in its own right and rendered with its own texture and determining characteristics (translated here, evidently, but with a conscious attempt at producing certain effects of rhythm, vocabulary and indirect strategies that reflect the 'original' discourse). Yet the narrative voice proper is also strongly influenced by these forms and by the 'other' language, so that there is no separate, dissociated voice; when the third-person narrator takes over from Batouala or other characters' speech, it is what Bakhtin has called 'double-voiced discourse'.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the scene of Batouala's death that Maran uses the different voices of his novel to attack and simultaneously defuse his own attack. Batouala, his belly rotting from the panther's claws, is delirious, and as always, he does not

stop talking: 'Une fois de plus, dans son délire, il dit tout ce qu'il avait à reprocher aux blancs — mensonge, cruauté, manque de logique, hypocrisie' (*Batouala*, p.186). He survives long enough to witness his best friend and his favourite wife making love, and to rise like a spectre and frighten them before falling dead 'comme un grand arbre tombe'. But any grandeur in this gesture is undermined by the chorus of ducks and chickens that greets it, and theirs is the final voice and the final epitaph for Batouala, whose discourse never ceases to undermine even as it is undermined.

Conclusion

In this novel it is not the voice of a particular hero that appears alongside the authorial voice, but the voice of another tradition, speaking most often through Batouala. Song, parable, story: these different genres speak within that most open of genres, the novel. Abiola Irele underlines the importance of oral tradition to African literature: 'the oral literature represents our classical tradition — i.e. that body of texts which lies behind us as a complete and enduring literature, though constantly being renewed, and which most profoundly informs the world views of our peoples, and is thus at the same time the foundation and expressive channel of a fundamental African mental universe'.¹⁰ Maran was able to use these stylistic traits, and in his novel the French language captures something of the texture and tone of the African oral tradition.

This proximity of the novel to ethnography does suggest a degree of distance between the author and the object of his study. Maran writes about tradition and also about its loss, but this tradition is not really his own; like any ethnographer, he describes the dances and the ceremonies, and writes down the songs. Once again it must be stressed that Maran's position is not simply that of an African writing about his own culture from within it, but that of

⁹ Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (1981; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.17.

¹⁰ Irele, p.12; see also p.131.

a *passeur* guiding his boat between frontiers, allowing the expression of voices within a form and a culture to which they are foreign.

Iheanachor Egonu, in a discussion of Maran's use of folk elements in other works, suggests that by thus writing within two traditions Maran succeeds in operating 'au niveau de l'art la rencontre harmonieuse des deux cultures en présence'.¹¹ Yet I have already mentioned the criticisms of another critic, Ikonne, for whom the oral forms within *Batouala* are not integrated into the 'aim' of the novel — or indeed into the novel as form. In some ways *Batouala* is interesting precisely because of this lack of integration, which results in a form of dissonance. The presence of various African oral traditions, in song, parable and story, appears to overshadow the flimsy plot and near-absent narratorial voice, so that the novel itself appears to be in a process of disintegration or metamorphosis.

Paradoxically Maran, the Frenchman, succeeded in writing a subversive novel not because he was writing from any 'authentic' position, but on the contrary because he wrote from several positions, destabilising the form of the novel itself and setting up an interplay of 'voices' and forms, thus foreshadowing the post-colonial novel. Though it is perhaps an artistically flawed novel, it has the merit of remaining disturbing to us even now because it lacks a single, monological point of view, each voice being undermined even as it speaks. Maran's position as indeterminate, marginal or between states is thus reflected in the ambivalence of the text itself.

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¹¹ Iheanachor Egonu, 'Les "romans de la jungle" de René Maran', *Neophilologus*, 71 (1987), 523-30 (p.529).

Edward Said and Francophone Postcolonial Studies

Edward Said's Legacy for French and Francophone Studies¹

The major impetus for this modest contribution on the importance of Edward Said's work for postcolonial theory was a panel I organized and moderated on Said's legacies for French and Francophone Studies, that took place at the 20th-21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium, held last April under the auspices of the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies at Florida State University. Said's untimely death in September 2003 was the catalyst for this panel and prompted me to bring together a number of scholars (some of whose contributions appear in this volume) to dialogue across disciplines twenty-five years after the original publication of perhaps Said's most polemical book, *Orientalism* (1978),² and bear witness to their own trajectory as scholars. I envisioned the panel as a type of intellectual tribute or homage that would not simply celebrate his work — he warned us against this type of unreflective celebration — but also address Said's own critical blindness, as well as reflect on the future of French studies since the immediate context was an annual conference on French studies. In a gesture of provocation, I characterized the field as suffering from 'essoufflement', quickly depleting itself of its most original energies — which I dubbed 'the exhaustion of the field of postcolonial studies', and which I attributed in large part to its very institutionalization as a discipline and also to the ceaseless

¹ I want to thank: Alec G. Hargreaves, one of the conference organizers and the Director of the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies at FSU, for supporting with enthusiasm my request to organize the Said panel; Peter Bloom, David Murphy, and Jane Winston, my co-panelists; and all of the members of the audience who participated in the discussion.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

repetitions and unimaginative recycling of the same corpus of texts drawn from newly canonized authors, hence promoting a new kind of orthodoxy rather than critical and inventive thought. At the same time, I readily admitted that Francophone studies also reenergized French departments in the United States, rekindling students' interest in studying the vexed relation between metropolitan France and its former colonies in Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, the Maghreb, and Southeast Asia, which seemed to contradict my earlier assertion. Such a paradoxical statement certainly deserved to be unpacked and scrutinized carefully, and indeed it elicited a number of thoughtful and dissenting responses from audience members. Underlying such a provocative utterance was my continued unease with the idea of 'Francophonie', a linguistic formation whose neo-colonial roots should still be called into question.³

In my original prefatory remarks, I included an apology for speaking in a tone that could be construed as combative (read, unacademic) and too subjective and personal. Edward Said would have appreciated the irony of trying to tone down oppositional criticism and strong beliefs. Following his example, I will now put decorum to one side and begin my own reflection on his work. I mentioned *Orientalism* earlier not simply because it marked for me and those of my generation trained in the early to mid-1980s at Princeton University (for some, an institution synonymous with the *belle-lettiste* literary tradition) a radical shift in the ways we read and analyzed literary texts. Said's books and essays opened up new, original and imaginative lines of scholarly investigation. We learned that 19th and 20th-century literary practices could not be so easily contained within fixed national boundaries, mere typologies or genre classification. The self-sufficient text could

now be seen as emerging from a dense historical and political matrix. The force of deconstructive strategies of reading could now also be more fully assessed for their radical insights on contemporary political affairs. In addition to his brilliant and original reading of canonical texts, the questions of colonialism and its legacies in shaping Western literary and political culture constitute some of his most acute and lasting contribution to postcolonial theory. If today, these questions seem almost banal and have been thoroughly assimilated by postcolonial critics, Said's penetrating insights were not only contested then but often dismissed as being 'unscholarly', and relegated to the lowly realm of ideological analysis. One of the most respected professors at Princeton even wrote a review of Said's book, entitling it 'The "Scandals" of scholarship'. What made *Orientalism* so intensely scandalous? *Orientalism* not only ventured into the realm of critical political analysis, it also reflected on the formation of intellectual traditions such as the emergence and consolidation of certain academic fields like Middle Eastern Studies, which marshaled knowledge not only for some higher disinterested, detached scholarly/humanist endeavor, but in support of insidious policies whose principal and immediate (if unacknowledged) political aim, according to Said, was to discredit the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people who demanded autonomy and self-rule. Tracing such an intellectual genealogy and linking objective scholarly research with crass political objectives created quite a stir in the ivy-covered walls of elite institutions. Only an extraordinarily talented literary critic and public intellectual could connect the aesthetic with the political in such a compelling fashion. Said certainly earned his reputation as a maverick and a public intellectual whose lifelong devotion to the Palestinian cause⁴ — see, for example, his book, *The Question of Palestine* (1979)⁴

³ Perhaps my unconscious use of the English language as the dominant language for these exchanges can be attributed to my timid attempt to find a more neutral language from which to conduct these proceedings.

— did not prevent him from voicing his strong opposition to P.L.O. chairman Yasser Arafat.

There are many other points of entry into Said's work besides his more politically inflected work: 'traveling theory', 'worldliness', 'beginnings', 'secularity', 'exile', 'homelessness', are some of the key terms that still resonate with us because they have been further elaborated by subsequent generations of postcolonial critics. One could also trace Said's own intellectual trajectory or genealogy, to use one of his favorite Foucauldian terms. The importance of Vico, Gramsci, Fanon, and Césaire for his own scholarly work should not be overlooked. But of particular interest to those in French studies is his take on 'French theory' and his use of Foucault's *Archéologie du Savoir* and *Surveiller et Punir* for his own elaboration on the concepts of discourse, knowledge and power. *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)⁵ are perhaps Said's most obviously Foucauldian texts, but they do not reveal a blind allegiance to Foucault's thought. In fact, Said was also extremely critical of both Foucault and Derrida, whom he criticized for their 'quietism' in the early 1970s, their lack of 'direct engagement with historical or political processes'.⁶ He also accused them of being Eurocentric, and even 'Franco-centric': 'They became prisoners of their own language [...]. They were maintaining the integrity of their work [...]. Even those theorists like Derrida who appear to be breaking away from all the structures and orthodoxies, the logocentrism, phallocentrism, etc., etc., in time became prisoners of their own — I would not call it "system", but I would certainly call it their own "manner"'.⁷ Other French intellectuals like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir also did not fare very well in Said's personal account of his late encounter

with these public figures. They simply did not measure up to his own vision of what the public intellectual should be: 'The intellectual is not really a neutral figure; he or she is not really somebody who is standing about it all and just pontificating, but somebody who is really somehow involved in it'.⁸ How Said established himself as one of the founding figures of what would be later known as postcolonial criticism is indeed a remarkable story that remains to be written. For now, I would simply assert that the story of his critical and political commitment can be better gleaned in his critical essays and political books than in his memoir, *Out of Place* (1999).⁹

I want to end these very brief remarks on Said's important legacy for postcolonial theory by pondering over one last key concept that he deployed in all of his work, perhaps because of his location as a nomadic subject, that is 'the sense of belonging', and more specifically here, his deep-rooted sense of belonging within the particular field of comparative literature:

[...] both my training and my interests are in what could be called comparative work. I'm much more interested in traveling across boundaries—in other words, traveling horizontally rather than hierarchically inside one's culture. And the thing that interests me about comparative literature, for example, are precisely those kinds of cross-over, as well as anti-specialization and anti-territoriality [...]. I've always been interested in writers and intellectuals who cross cultural and territorial boundaries and make a career in that sort of traffic.¹⁰

⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

⁶ Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), p.56.

⁷ Ibid., p.166.

⁸ Ibid., p.185.

⁹ Edward Said, *Out of Place* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

These words sum up rather well the intellectual location from which Edward Said has intervened in the more than twenty books that he has penned in the thirty years of a productive and distinguished career. They should also serve as a cautionary tale against a type of oppositional criticism that seems overtly parochial and nationalistic, which can only serve the interest of those in power. Said invites us to travel with him on a journey across disciplinary boundaries and cultural divides, where one finds scholarly sustenance in the most unexpected places, contact zones from which one is spurred to write ethically, with erudition, and a deep and personal sense of political commitment.

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Material Traces of Edward W. Said's Legacy¹

On a recent trip to New York I briefly visited the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in search of physical traces of Edward W. Said's legacy. On 20 August, 2004, I went to look around the building known as Philosophy Hall where Said maintained his primary office. The solid oak fixtures, the wide-paned scholastic nineteenth-century windows, the decaying low-pile grayish carpet, and the gently sloping central staircase all give this building a sense of grandeur. The dark-grained oak doors were not only locked but sealed to outside intrusion whereas a backlit clerk-like door on the sixth floor framed a rectangular opaque glass pane with the department name painted on it establishing a sense of Anglican formality.

On a somewhat humid Friday afternoon in the depths of August the building was mostly unoccupied. There were a few departmental administrators, student workers on their way out, and a painter working in an office suite on the fifth floor. I found my way to the English and Comparative Literature Department office and began speaking with the Departmental Administrator, Joy Hayton, who had known Said since 1980. She explained that it was a shock when he died, just because Edward had recovered from his hospital treatments for leukemia several times before, and she assumed that he would be back in his office once again. In fact, he was diagnosed with leukemia as early as 1991, and managed to

¹ I would like to thank Panivong Norindr for inviting me to participate in the Roundtable on Edward Said's Legacy at the Twentieth Century French and Francophone Studies Conference in Tallahassee, Florida in April 2004. I would also like to thank Joy Hayton (Columbia University, Department of English and Comparative Literature) and Professor Zaineb Istrabadi (Indiana University, Bloomington) for talking with me so freely about their memories of Edward Said.

¹⁰ Viswanathan, *Power, Politics and Culture*, p.55.

live with the illness for some time, still remaining concentrated, engaged, and astoundingly productive.

Joy recounted that as early as last summer, just a few months before Edward died, he taught a three-week summer course on Jonathan Swift when he saw a long list of courses that were being offered for the year displayed on the departmental bulletin board. After concluding that he could teach most of the courses offered that covered a vast range of authors, periods, and topics, he exclaimed that he wanted to teach a course in spite of his failing health. It was just over a year ago that he taught this course on Swift, which was the subject of his dissertation work more than forty years ago. In the departmental time capsule, a sense of his presence, gesture, voice, and vibrancy was still in evidence.

Joy also recalled that whenever fellow faculty, particularly Jewish faculty, were under attack for taking positions that were critical of Israel, they would often call on Edward for support. As Said has written, he was called a Nazi by the Jewish Defense League in 1985, his office at the university was set fire to, he received death threats and became caught in a swarm of media coverage after Anwar Sadat and Yasser Arafat appointed him the Palestinian Representative to Peace talks without even consulting him.² A reinforced steel door replaced the oak door on his office, his mail was always checked before he could open it, and he wasn't allowed to drive because it was feared that the car could be targeted. Sadly, the polarization of Edward Said's persona as Palestinian activist in American political culture undermined a broader understanding of his deeply secular commitment to justice. In the numerous articles that he published for the Arabic reading public, Said urged Arab intellectuals to look more closely at the devastating experience of the Holocaust and take a more

sympathetic approach to understanding the roots and nature of insecurity expressed by the international Jewish community.³

Joy then told me where his most recent office was located. It was a suite of three small offices that were sectioned off in the southwest corner of the fifth floor. The department wanted to turn the office into a small library and reading room for students, but instead it is being reverted back to three separate offices. The painter that I noticed earlier was now applying spackle to the ceiling in Said's former office suite. A few worn faux Georgian-style Spoon-back chairs among other desk furniture of the same general Ivy League repro genre were covered in undulating cellophane. Several of the lightly stained wooden bookshelf planks were removed from the metal hinges on the wall. There were few traces left other than a sense of calm associated with a view looking south towards the Upper West Side. I also learned that Said had a second office on campus that he seemed to rarely use, located in a somewhat 1960-ish institutional-style building known as the Heyman Center for Cultural and Historical Studies. It was located amidst a seemingly uncoordinated configuration of dormitory housing complexes punctuated by a check-in desk. At the center Edward Said's name still appears as the occupant of office HL-1. After briefly surveying his office, I finally retreated to the large reception entry hall where I began to wonder whether this was an ill-conceived method of searching for a material trace of Edward Said.

These spaces were now empty, and many of the physical traces of his presence were in the process of being effaced. There was, however, an inscrutable density to the immediate and extended environment where Said lived and worked. The proximity to the

² Edward Said, 'Between Worlds', in *Reflections on Exile and other essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.564.

³ Thanks to Profesor Zaineb Istrabadi for pointing this out to me in my conversation with her over the telephone on 29 August 2004. Istrabadi worked as Said's assistant from October 1986 to April 2001. She mentioned that several of his articles in the Arab press have yet to be translated into English, such as those which appeared in *Al-Majalla* and *Al-Hayat*.

stained glass wonder of St. John the Divine, the apple strudel at the Hungarian Pastry Shop on Amsterdam Avenue, the myriad of serious titles at Labyrinth Books, and the continual reinvention of restaurants and commerce on Broadway, presently in a mostly unappealing French bistro phase. Nonetheless, the extended boundaries of the university partake in a sense of openness nurtured by the classroom experience at its best.

Said's particular set of commitments in fostering debate, defiance, and taking positions begins, as he has written, with his students and the crucial importance of imparting the rigor of his own field of study as a member of the academy.⁴ 'To move from the academy into the larger world', he writes, 'it is important to remember that we are not simply trying to impart a reverence for authority, or simply what one says as a teacher, but a sense of critical awareness, and cultivate a sense of skepticism for what authorities say.'⁵ It is from this perspective that Said's intellectual work was grounded in a profound engagement with secularism, where, paraphrasing Vico as he does, 'human beings make their own history'.⁶

Although Edward Said was perhaps best known as a Palestinian public intellectual, it was his location in New York City that still speaks most clearly to me. New York City served as Said's home for forty years, and it was within its ethnic boundaries that his work managed to project beyond the urban cold war geography of containment that served as an unspoken point of reference in his work. As someone who grew up in one of the Jewish ethnic enclaves of Brooklyn, New York, Said's work managed to communicate to me across the peculiar confrontational geography of New York City and its neighboring areas. Said's location in

New York City, in the residential remove of Riverside Drive and at Columbia University where he lived and worked from 1963 until his death in 2003, was more than simply provisional.

A week after visiting Columbia, I contacted Professor Zaineb Istrabadi, Said's assistant for fourteen years who is now Associate Director of the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program at Indiana University, and I asked her whether she thought Said considered himself a New Yorker above and beyond some of the more politicized ways in which he has written about exile and the experience of dislocation. She said that he did consider New York his home and that it suited him well precisely because he was last person who could be compartmentalized in any way. He was always looking elsewhere, she explained, and embraced the cosmopolitan sensibility of New York where being out of place in the greater world is nearly the norm. She also expressed dismay that several obituaries tried to neutralize his legacy as merely an advocate of Palestinian rights.

My own encounter with Edward Said has always been as a student of his texts. I was first introduced to Said's work upon reading *The Question of Palestine* when I was a high school student. This book was part of a group of texts that I was reading at the time as I became acutely interested in the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian divide in the aftermath of the Camp David Peace Accords. Although I didn't come to recognize Said's distinctive perspective at the time, his work was part of a process in which I began to challenge so many elements that were taken for granted in my own location. In the predominantly Jewish area of Brooklyn where I grew up, known as Midwood, there lurked a nearly absolutist Zionist attitude as the only way to safeguard Jewish identity from the possibility of yet another Holocaust, which remained part of an active living collective memory.

At my former high school I studied with a teacher who had recently completed a PhD thesis addressing the history of the

⁴ Edward Said, 'On Defiance and Taking Positions', in *Reflections on Exile and other essays*, p.501.

⁵ Ibid., p.502.

⁶ Ibid.,

British Mandate in Palestine.⁷ He urged me to pursue my interest concerning the competing perspectives of Jewish and Palestinian claims. In the era immediately following Anwar Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, it seemed as though the Cold War politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was starting to shift. As part of the project I interviewed a representative at the Arab-American Chamber of Commerce in Manhattan. When I began asking him questions about the significance of the 'historic' Camp David Peace Accords, he referred me to the writings of David Hirst, Mohammed Heikal, and Edward Said, which subsequently transformed my understanding of these events.

I discovered Edward Said's *Orientalism* some time later and it had a decisive impact on inspiring my developing interest in French colonial discourse. In fact, Said's writing introduced me to the significance of how colonial culture was structured as a discourse that was grounded in a set of aesthetic, political, and intellectual imperatives. By challenging these imperatives as part of an Orientalist ordering of knowledge, he was able to pinpoint how this discourse functioned as a form of psychological paranoia. It was Said's intellectual engagement with the epistemological project of the West through the historical and literary imagination that led me to think critically about the relationship between pure and political knowledge. It also led me to challenge how categories of prestige and success were constructed, particularly in the context of a European hegemony of taste and judgment that seemed so pervasive in the aspiring world of New York assimilationist affluence. France, in particular, was part of a culture and complex of refinement, and remained a site of one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe after the Second World War. This was in spite of the complicity of Vichy with Nazi

Germany during the Second World War, and continuing periodic episodes of anti-Semitism.

As a figure who made New York his home, Said was a diasporic intellectual whose work engaged, in part, with a Jewish textual tradition, and continued to demonstrate a will to challenge authority and stage a culture of intelligent debate as part of an ongoing process. In a passage from Theodor Adorno that Said was fond of quoting he writes, 'In his text, the writer sets up house... For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.'⁸ This quotation continues with Adorno's caustic observation that, in the final analysis, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing because of a fundamental contradiction that results from the hardening of the exiled self against self-pity and the flattening effect that this often engenders.⁹ Nonetheless, there is still a provisional satisfaction to creating this fleeting sense of home. Said's writing continues to provide more than a provisional sense of shelter that will not be forgotten.

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⁸ As initially noted by Anton Shammas, "Looking For Somplace to Call Home," *The New York Times Magazine*, 28 December 2003, pp.25-26.

⁹ Edward Said, 'Between Worlds', in *Reflections on Exile and other essays*, p.568.

⁷ Wilfred Keith Pattison, *The International Law of Recognition in Contemporary British Foreign Policy*, PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1981.

'Other languages and other histories': Edward Said and French Studies

There can be no true humanism whose scope is limited to extolling patriotically the virtues of our culture, our language, our monuments. Humanism is the exertion of one's faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret, and grapple with the products of language in history, other languages and other histories.¹

When interviewed by Roger Célestin for the journal *Sites*, Gayatri Spivak described her relationship to French and Francophone studies as that of an outsider who 'come[s] into French through comparative literature'.² Although the affiliations between Spivak and Edward Said — beyond their alliance in a 'Holy Trinity' of postcolonial thinkers, from which the latter increasingly attempted to distance himself as his career progressed — are far from concrete, had the author of *Orientalism* been asked the same question, his answer would perhaps have been similar. As an eloquent advocate and committed practitioner of interdisciplinary studies, as a prominent public intellectual who contested any attempt to form a school or orthodoxy around his own work, as an advocate of Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and the transcendence of national literatures it implies, Said would undoubtedly have viewed with suspicion any field that traditionally defines its object of study according to fixed national or linguistic boundaries: his own experience as a student in Modern Languages departments ('constricted', he claims, 'by an approach that might be described

as a combination of connoisseurship and cultural appreciation') led him to seek a way out in Comparative Literature.³ Said's often tangential relationship to the field of French Studies remains, however, undeniable: an undergraduate at Princeton between 1953 and 1957, he recalls taking 'almost an equal number of courses in English as in French', and it was a series of French critics then relatively unknown in North America — such as Poulet, Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty — who triggered new directions ('European and aggressively non-English') in his postgraduate work on Conrad at the end of that decade;⁴ Said himself went on to play a decisive role in the dissemination of 'French theory' in the 1960s US academy and in the challenge to 'disciplinary celibacy' this allowed;⁵ and henceforth, references to literature and thought in French would characterize the complete range of his critical output, from the corpora of *Beginnings* and *Orientalism* (in which an eclectic range of French theorists, authors and travellers play key roles) to the final reflections in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (that contain, for instance, a discussion of Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres*) and on 'late style' (in which Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé* serves as one of the critical exempla).⁶

³ Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue: A Late-Twentieth-Century Reassessment', in Ieme van der Poel and Sophie Bertho, eds, *Traveling Theory: France and the United States* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp.134-56 (p.138).

⁴ Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue', p.135, p.138. Two of Said's earliest essays, published in *The Kenyon Review* and *Partisan Review* in 1967, were devoted to Merleau-Ponty and Poulet. See 'Labyrinths of the Incarnations: the essays of Maurice Merleau-Ponty', and 'Sense and Sensibility', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp.1-14, 15-23.

⁵ Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue', p.149.

⁶ See Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, pp.128-29, and 'Thoughts on late style', *London Review of Books*, 26.15 (2004), 3-7 (p.5).

¹ Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p.28.

² Roger Célestin, 'An interview with Gayatri Spivak', *Sites*, 6.2 (2002), 259-66 (p.259).

As French Studies reflects with ever more urgency on its own disciplinary boundaries — and on the meanings of the adjective or denotative noun (i.e. that part of speech whose field of reference is notoriously arbitrary or unpredictable) by which it defines itself⁷ — the potential contribution of Said's work to these processes is becoming increasingly apparent. I would venture, therefore, that his contribution to knowledge is essential to any methodological or theoretical reflection regarding the scholarly activity currently known as Francophone (Postcolonial) Studies, but will also remain equally relevant when such a strategic, provisional project — such a ‘performative statement that,’ in Mireille Rosello’s terms, ‘may or may not be useful ten years from now’ — has obliged French Studies itself to renegotiate and widen its object and field of study.⁸ In relation to these ongoing shifts, Spivak herself comments on the ambiguous relationship between French Studies and the ‘literatures in the local languages of what used to be the former colonies’,⁹ and it is particularly in those efforts to create a connection between the ‘French’ and the ‘Francophone’ — and, perhaps more importantly and more concretely, between the

multilingual and multicultural products emerging from a complex network of (historically or actually) Francophone regions, countries and communities — that Said’s writings and example may play a decisive role. It is important to note, however, that any engagement of Francophone Postcolonial Studies — and of French Studies more generally — with Saidian criticism takes place alongside a markedly less enthusiastic French response to his work that ranges from relative indifference to open hostility. Two of Said’s critical texts have been translated,¹⁰ but these have attracted little attention beyond the attacks of figures such as Michel Le Bris who, in a series of interviews entitled *Fragments du royaume*, describes *Orientalism* as ‘l’hystérisation de toute pensée, le refus de toute complexité, de toute nuance’, parodying the work’s thesis as a monolithic response to the homogeneous reality of intercultural contact.¹¹

Nevertheless, shortly after Edward Said’s death, Christopher Hitchens spoke of a ‘vast periphery of readers who one might almost term his diaspora’.¹² The image is a striking one, for it underlines not only the geographical and disciplinary reach of Said’s work, but also the way in which a variety of responses to his criticism have led to its active translation — and even instrumentalisation — in a range of different contexts. Scholars active in geography, history, disability studies and a series of other

⁷ See Christophe Campos, ‘The Scope and Methodology of French’, in Jennifer Birkett and Michael Kelly, eds, *French in the 90s: A Transbinary Conference July 1991* (Birmingham: Birmingham Modern Languages Publications, 1992), pp.33-38 (pp.33-34).

See Mireille Rosello, ‘Unhoming Francophone Studies: A House in the Middle of the Current’, *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 123-32 (p.124). As Naomi Schor makes clear, the ‘postcolonial turn’ in French Studies is itself part of an ongoing process of transformation, epistemological and otherwise, continuing and further developing in many ways the impact of feminism in the 1970s: ‘Francophone literatures did not arrive alone and did not arrive first. The dismantling of the Enlightenment universal handed down, and nowhere more so than in and by France, was well underway by the time Francophone literatures emerged. Indeed their emergence may be viewed less as a cause than an effect.’ See ‘Feminism and Francophone Literature: From One Revolution to Another’, *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 163-65 (p.164-65).

⁹ Roger Célestin, ‘An interview with Gayatri Spivak’, p.260.

¹⁰ See *L’Orientalisme: l’Orient créé par l’Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), and *Culture et impérialisme* (Paris: Fayard/Le Monde diplomatique, 2000).

¹¹ Michel Le Bris, *Fragments du Royaume* (Vénissieux: Paroles d’Aube, 1995), p.197. A similar point is made by Alain Quella-Villéger in the first issue of *Carnets de l’Exotisme*, in which he links *Orientalism* to ‘une arrière-goût de culpabilité’. See Quella-Villéger, ‘Exit exote? (en guise d’éditorial)’, *Carnets de l’Exotisme*, 1 (1990), 7-10 (p.10). On French reactions to Said, see also David Murphy, ‘De-centring French studies: towards a postcolonial theory of Francophone cultures’, *French Cultural Studies*, 13.2 (2002), 165-85 (pp.179-81).

¹² Christopher Hitchens, ‘My friend Edward’, *The Observer*, 28 September 2003, p.29.

disciplines and fields of enquiry have all attempted to gauge the impact of Said's criticism on their respective fields, and it is timely to reflect on its legacy to a rapidly changing French Studies. My own engagement with Said's work links me to that loose 'diaspora', and my initial encounter and engagement with his criticism was, I suspect, similar to that of many in our field — having followed an undergraduate programme dictated by a Hexagonal and predominantly canonical understanding of the subject area, reading *Orientalism* coincided with my initial contact with the breadth and richness of a wider Francophone field. Operating between the French and the Francophone, without creating the potentially disabling dichotomy that often seems to open between the two, Said's comparatism — at a time when comparative modes of scholarship appeared to be in decline — was a profoundly enabling model. In my work on Victor Segalen, *Orientalism*'s initially dismissive critique of the author led me to reflect on a model of colonial counterdiscourse that revealed a more anxious, less categorical exoticism that, in Eddie Hughes's terms, has the capacity to 'articulate important ambiguities that both define colonialism's culture and hold the capacity to dismantle it'.¹³ Segalen's recurrence in *Culture and Imperialism* pushed this enquiry further, and the model of contrapuntal reading encouraged me to present Segalen in relation to his subsequent postcolonial readers, such as Khatibi and Glissant, creating unexpected connections and revealing dimensions of metropolitan

literature that Tom Conley, in a discussion of the work of Naomi Schor, dubs its 'fabulous alterities'.¹⁴

Counterpoint — that postcolonial comparatist ideal that moves beyond the value judgements of centre-periphery models of literary and cultural production — also permits a more general approach to Francophone space that has clear implications for the means by which we conceive of our object of study and understand the ways in which we approach it. We are all aware of the turf battles: the dismissal of Francophone Studies as 'Francophobic enquiry', the tokenism inherent in some departments' response to a widening of the francophone space by the appointment of a single 'Francophone hire', the fears that diversification of our field will lead to its eventual fragmentation.¹⁵ In Said's work, we find an exemplary model for the bases of an alternative version of French Studies, one in which we move beyond the dichotomising divisions implicit in the label 'French and Francophone' in order 'to construct fields of coexistence rather than fields of battle as the outcome of intellectual labor'.¹⁶ Said asks: 'Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities; and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon these two imperial cities?';¹⁷ and

¹⁴ See Tom Conley, 'From' Detail to Periphery: All French Literature is Francophone', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 166-76. I have outlined a contrapuntal response to Segalen and his postcolonial readers in 'L'exôte mangé par les hommes: from the French Kipling to *Segalen le partagé*', in Charles Forsdick and Susan Marson, eds, *Reading Diversity* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 2000), pp.1-22.

¹⁵ For a discussion of these issues, see Farid Laroussi and Christopher L. Miller, eds, *French and Francophone: The Challenge of Expanding Horizons*, *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003).

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p.141.

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.19.

¹³ Edward J. Hughes, *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature: from Loti to Genet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.170. For a discussion of Said's critique of Segalen, see my 'Edward Said, Victor Segalen and the implications of post-colonial theory', *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies*, 5 (1997), 323-39, and 'Said After Theory: The Limits of Counterpoint', in Martin McQuillan, ed., *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.188-99.

it is precisely such an awareness of the interconnections and interdependencies between French-speaking regions, countries and communities that allows us to explore what has been called the ‘interval between what we mean by “France” and what we mean by “French”’,¹⁸ to negotiate in more complex ways the relationship between the two.¹⁹

An approach that has been identified as ‘postcolonial’ — an appellation from which, as I have suggested above, Said progressively distanced himself — is clearly central to such study of convergences and divergences.²⁰ In as much as Said contributed to postcolonial studies, the field as he understood it was never implicitly Anglophone: not only, in his repeated references to Césaire, Fanon and Foucault, was the French-language dimension of its emergence always apparent, but also, in his comparative critical practice, the risks of eliding and generalizing differences in imperial practice were made clear. The contribution of French Studies to such a field is clearly related to the prising open of a set of critical practices that often seem to have ‘ears only for

¹⁸ See Mary Gallagher, ‘Revisiting the “Others’ Others”, or the Bankruptcy of Otherness as a Value in Literature in French’, *Women’s Studies Review*, 6 (1999), 51-59 (p.51). Cited by Roger Little, ‘World literature in French; or Is Francophonie frankly phoney?’, *European Review*, 9.4 (2001), pp.421-36 (p.425).

¹⁹ In his essay on exile, these questions are developed and opened out into a more concrete statement on France’s status as (what James Clifford might call) a ‘travelling culture’: ‘Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness: Vietnamese, Algerians, Cambodians, Lebanese, Senegalese, Peruvians’. Edward W. Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, pp.173-86 (p.176).

²⁰ On the relationship between Said and postcolonialism, see Patrick Williams, ‘Nothing in the Post? — Said and the Problem of Post-Colonial Intellectuals’, in Patrick Williams, ed., *Edward Said*, 4 vols (London: Sage, 2001), I, pp.314-34.

English’;²¹ at the same time, however, its practitioners would seem to have a privileged role to play in the analysis of origins, the elaboration of genealogies, the constructive autocritique represented by the recent work of Graham Huggan and Robert Young.²² For postcolonialism is a clear instance of what Said dubs ‘travelling theory’, an example of the displacement of anti-colonial and poststructuralist texts in French and their transformation in the Anglophone academy. Such an understanding invites us, on the one hand, to consider the implication of such translations of travels — dissipation or reignition? — and, on the other, to direct the reinterpretation of those texts back to France itself, where (as I have commented above) many scholars are notably hostile both to postcolonial criticism and to the work of Said. In all of these more general reflections and reorientations, Said’s remarks on an ideal for postcolonial education, in his essay ‘The Traveler and the Potentate’, would seem to be of great relevance. He uses the traveller as a model for academic freedom and openness, what he calls ‘venturing beyond’.²³ The concept remains problematic, and may be seen to lend itself to an understanding of travel that both ignores the practice’s ambiguous ‘worldliness’ and obscures its grounding in the material conditions of displacement.²⁴ The traveller-potentate divide is related, however, to the statement on humanism which this article takes as its epigraph, and to the sense that ‘understand[ing], reinterpret[ing], and grapp[ing] with the

²¹ See Harish Trivedi, ‘The Postcolonial or the Transcolonial? Location and Language’, *Interventions* 1.2 (1999), 269-72 (p.272).

²² See Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), and Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

²³ See Edward W. Said, ‘Identity, Authority, and Freedom: the Potentate and the Traveler’, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, pp.386-404 (p.404).

²⁴ I have discussed the ambiguous status of Said’s use of ‘travel’ in ‘Travelling Theories, Exiled Theorists’, *Travel and Exile: Postcolonial Perspectives*, ASCALF Critical Studies in Postcolonial Literature and Culture, 1 (ASCALF, 2001), pp.1-13.

products of language in history, other languages and other histories' depends on the willingness to cross boundaries — disciplinary, chronological, cultural — and to create connections where these may not be immediately apparent. It is to such processes that, as Michael Cronin makes clear in his *Across the Lines*, those active in Modern Languages research are particularly well-suited: approaching other cultures from outside, with an implicitly ethnographic agenda, but at the same time applying, self-reflexively, this knowledge to an understanding of the point of departure.²⁵ Reflecting on the decontextualised curriculum of a World Literature module, Said's comments may initially seem to echo those reactive responses of colleagues in Modern Languages for whom the teaching of 'literature in translation' sounds our field's death knell:

I criticized the course for having our students encounter Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French and Spanish texts in sometimes undistinguished or non-descript translations. I made the point that the practice of reading these wonderful books out of their historical contexts and at several removes from their original forms needed some critical looking into and that misty-eyed pieties about what a great experience it is to read Dante [or Flaubert, or Camus, or Césaire...] allied to the uncritical assumptions about 'great books' disseminated by the course, which had somehow become an integral part of it, were open to justified suspicion.²⁶

Said's reservations here underline more actively, however, what French Studies — as well as Modern Languages more generally — continues to offer in the Anglophone academy: a counterpoint to

²⁵ See Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, and Translation* (Cork: University of Cork Press, 2000), pp.125-26.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p.3.

any predominantly monocultural attention to national culture and literature; a challenge to the risks of monolingualism in scholarship and teaching; a reminder of the permeability of cultural boundaries; an illustration of the complex networks that emerge once languages and cultures travel as a result of colonization or other transnational forces. In his excellent study of translation and globalisation, Michael Cronin states: '[T]he general decline in foreign-language learning in the English-speaking world in recent years can be attributed in part to the ready identification of English as the sole language of globalisation but also to the desire to maintain the benefits of connectedness without the pain of connection'.²⁷ Said's writings and thought are a constant reminder of this inevitable interplay between the 'benefits of connectedness' and the 'pain of connection', an interplay that underpins French Studies when we understand the field in the light of his work.

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²⁷ Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.49.

Edward Said and Comparative Postcolonial Studies

My first exposure to the work of Edward Said came as an undergraduate at university in Ireland, in the early 1990s. Studying for a degree in English and French, I was introduced to both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* in an English department course on literary theory. After three years of studying two great world literatures, here at last was a critic attempting to bridge the gap between them in a way that was particularly meaningful for me. Reading Said allowed me to make connections, to bring knowledge of one literature to bear on the other. One might counter that any comparative critic worth their salt would have done the same; however, the centrality of Empire to Said's comparatism, the analysis of Camus's *L'Etranger* in particular, was of special interest to me. I had studied *L'Etranger* as a first-year student and had been left perplexed by the accepted interpretation of the novel as a classic of existentialist angst. Reading Said a few years later, I came to realise that as a student from a postcolonial Irish background, it was what Said called the 'imperial actuality' of *L'Etranger* that was a given for me, while the philosophical interpretation seemed tangential. And, of course, the significance of Said's interpretation relying heavily on the work of an Irish critic, Conor Cruise O'Brien, was not lost on me (although, unfortunately, by the mid-1990s, O'Brien had in fact become deeply reactionary in his attitudes towards Empire).¹

Then, as a postgraduate student, I became more aware of the French distrust of both Said and Postcolonial Studies more generally. For instance, a 1996 review of *Culture and Imperialism* for the *Revue des Lettres Modernes*'s *Albert Camus* series begins by agreeing with Said's basic thesis that culture bears traces of the

¹ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Camus* (London: Fontana, 1970).

imperial process, but then proceeds to reject Said's reading out of hand, claiming that: 'ce qui me gêne dans l'interprétation de Said est qu'il présente sa lecture comme *la lecture, la seule bonne*'.² For this French critic, Camus deals with the philosophical questions facing Man; while for Said (following in the footsteps of Césaire and Fanon), this 'universal' Man is, in fact, European Man. This episode taught me that if Said — or even someone as inconsequential as myself — were 'biased' in looking at texts through the prism of Empire, then so too were the allegedly 'universal' French critics of the type I have just mentioned. But Said was not attempting to create a relativist system; rather, he sought through the notion of counterpoint to salvage a reformed and refashioned humanism from the wreckage of Empire, one that would break down the hierarchies between the West and the formerly colonised world. Such a grand objective was of course beyond the scope of a single scholar, however, there is no doubting that Said's work has been central to a process that has led to a thorough questioning of the Western-centred humanist principles of the 'English' literary canon. (As for Said's equally influential political work I will turn briefly to this below.)

What then will be Said's legacy for French Studies? If Said's critical trajectory can be (somewhat reductively) summarised as a movement from the analysis of European writing on Empire and the 'exotic' to the contrapuntal analysis of such writing alongside the work of post-colonial authors from the colonial 'margins', then I believe that it can be safely argued that his work has inspired similar criticism of French-language material. However, I think it equally safe to argue that we have not witnessed a shaking up of the canon in French literary studies to rival that which has taken place in English. The study of 'metropolitan' French work on

² Maurice Weyembergh, 'Recensement et recension des travaux sélectionnés', *Albert Camus*, 17, textes réunis par Raymond Gay-Crosier (Paris: Revue des Lettres Modernes, 1996), 139-49 (p.142; emphasis in original).

Empire and that of post-colonial French-language writing have, until recently, occupied separate academic categories, those of French and Francophone literature respectively.³ The recent decision of the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) to change its name to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS) is to my mind a shift towards a Saidian conception of the postcolonial. And personally, Said's writing has been a major inspiration for my own work, especially the collection of essays I recently co-edited with Charles Forsdick, entitled *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*,⁴ a work that explicitly seeks to combine analysis of the colonial and post-colonial periods as Said had done for English literature, and which he also does at many points in his work in relation to French-language material. I believe that Said's work offers a brilliant model for those of us hoping to explore the Francophone dimensions of postcoloniality, not as a separate category designed to exist in parallel with Anglophone Postcolonial Studies. Rather a Francophone Postcolonial Studies might bring about the comparatist Postcolonial Studies that has long been promised but has never been delivered. The vitality and wisdom of Said's comparatist project highlights precisely how much French Studies might bring to postcolonial debates; it is not a question of French Studies playing catch up with a predominantly Anglophone Postcolonial Studies or carving out its own specialist niche alongside Anglophone criticism; rather it is a matter of engaging with and challenging the conventions and received wisdom of Anglophone postcolonial criticism. A consistent French Studies engagement with Said's writing would also serve to reveal the gaps and omissions in Said's own work on French-language texts;

³ For a more detailed analysis of these issues, see my article, 'De-Centring French Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Theory of Francophone Cultures', *French Cultural Studies*, 13.2 (June 2002), 165-85.

⁴ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003).

see, for example, the work of Nicholas Harrison on the schematic elements of Said's critique of Camus or Charles Forsdick's reassessment of Said's arguments about Segalen.⁵ Essentially, Said offers a model — imperfect though it may be (and it has received necessary, 'correcting' analyses from feminist, queer studies and various other critical perspectives) — both for questioning the English-language bias of Postcolonial Studies, and for breaking down the Hexagonal focus of French Studies (what Charles Forsdick has called a process of 'challenging the monolingual, subverting the monocultural').⁶

Thus far, I have discussed Said's work solely in literary terms but it must not be forgotten that Said's humanist interests went well beyond the literary, and his key works of literary analysis range widely across the fields of philosophy, history and religion; moreover, he also wrote important works on non-literary matters: political works on the Palestinian question, as well as writings on the European classical music tradition that he loved so much. It is curious that this 'interdisciplinary' dimension of his work has received relatively little critical comment. I do not have room here to discuss this matter in greater depth but I think it is worth noting that the almost predominantly literary focus of Postcolonial Studies is in many ways a departure from the 'interdisciplinary' work of one of postcolonialism's 'founding fathers'. In an important recent article, Graham Huggan argues that this 'interdisciplinarity' in Said's work might more accurately be described as a fundamental 'anti-disciplinarity', which is a result of Said's antagonism towards 'the hegemonic, historically self-

⁵ Nicholas Harrison, 'Camus, *Écriture Blanche* and the Reader, Between Said and Barthes', *Nottingham French Studies*, 38.1 (Spring 1999), 55-66; Charles Forsdick, 'Travelling Concepts: Postcolonial Approaches to Exoticism', *Paragraph*, 24.3 (November 2001), 12-29.

⁶ Charles Forsdick, 'Challenging the monolingual, subverting the monocultural: the strategic purposes of Francophone Postcolonial Studies', *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 1.1 (2003), 33-41.

perpetuating tendencies of disciplinary regimes'.⁷ For Huggan, Said's 'transgressive' approach to disciplinary boundaries is extremely fruitful and has been very influential within postcolonial thought; however, ironically, the systematic questioning of disciplinary boundaries by postcolonial *literary* scholars has in itself become something of a 'disciplinary trait' of Postcolonial Studies as a field. Huggan concludes that in order to move forward Postcolonial Studies needs to develop interdisciplinary approaches, which he views as teamwork-based projects, involving academics from various disciplines, addressing common sets of issues and problems. This interdisciplinary approach he distinguishes from interdiscursive approaches, which, he argues, involve the borrowing of language and ideas from different disciplines in a theoretical, 'synoptic' fashion. For Huggan, this latter approach has been dominant within Postcolonial Studies, and it has contributed to the oft-criticised theoretical pretensions of the field. An interdisciplinary, teamwork-based approach would provide much-needed empirical analyses with which to reassess certain theoretical paradigms. And Said's eclectic writings may prove to be an interesting model for elaborating such genuinely interdisciplinary work.

Now, in his later years, Said of course grew increasingly dismissive of the tag of postcolonial critic, as he increasingly came to see Postcolonial Studies as a received theoretical orthodoxy; so I fully understand that I might here be accused of 'getting Said wrong', of claiming his work for Francophone Postcolonial Studies when he himself might (or, more likely, would) have opposed such a move. However, in my defence, I would like to lay claim to a key Saidian concept, that of 'travelling theory', which highlights the capacity of ideas to migrate and take on new

meanings in different contexts.⁸ Although Said disliked the way in which Postcolonial Studies came to be what he saw as a received doctrine for the analysis of texts, I would argue that his ideas have nonetheless 'travelled' to new contexts and been used in many exciting and fruitful ways by postcolonial critics (although I am sure there will undoubtedly also be a legacy of schematic postcolonialist readings of classic French texts; you cannot impose quality control on all scholars). Travelling theory should not be viewed as a universally applicable 'get out' clause, designed to cover the backs of intellectually lazy arts scholars. Rather, it is an acceptance of the fundamentally speculative nature of many of the ideas that preoccupy us: it is not solely a matter of whether people get ideas 'right' — which is of course vital — but of how ideas come to mean certain things and gain currency in specific contexts. Said himself comes under attack for misinterpreting other scholars. In his monumental study of postcolonialism, Robert Young claims that Said 'gets Foucault wrong' but I would agree entirely with John McLeod who defends Said against this charge.⁹ Speaking of those who criticise Anglophone postcolonialism for the ways in which it has interpreted Francophone theories, McLeod writes: 'it seems inappropriate to rule out all such encounters on the grounds that French and British colonial contexts are incommensurable and thus that one is being ahistorical or disrespecting context when using Francophone thought in Anglophone postcolonialism; although contexts are, not to be simply ignored.'¹⁰ McLeod

⁸ Edward W. Said, 'Traveling Theory', in *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1983; London: Vintage, 1991), pp.226-47; 'Travelling Theory Reconsidered', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000), pp.436-52.

Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

¹⁰ John McLeod, 'Contesting Contexts: Francophone thought and Anglophone postcolonialism', in Forsdick and Murphy, eds, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, p.201.

⁷ Graham Huggan, 'Postcolonial Studies and the Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity', *Postcolonial Studies*, 5.3 (2002), 245-75 (p.264).

concludes by quoting from Said himself: '[l]ike people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another'.¹¹ And it is this spirit of dialogue across linguistic, cultural and academic boundaries — tracing the ways in which ideas travel and migrate — that I regard as Said's chief legacy for French Studies.

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Anales Del Caribe, ed. by el Centro de Estudios del Caribe, Casa de las Americas, 19-20 (La Habana: Casa de Las Americas, 1999-2000.) ISBN 959260376.

Anales des Caribe, volume 19-20 is a collection of selected scholarly papers that were presented at the IV and V International Interdisciplinary Congresses of the Society of Caribbean Studies in Berlin (1993) and Bonn (1996). The articles in this volume are loosely thematically linked through their focus on the Caribbean archipelago and through the conference themes, in accordance with which the book is structured. The first twelve papers are critical readings of Caribbean History and histories, and the second part of the volume is an investigation of 'moments and *momentum*' in the characteristically changing societies of the Caribbean. *Anales del Caribe* offers an insight into analyses of Caribbean history, society and culture from an array of different disciplines, notably sociology, ethnography, social anthropology and literature. By covering various regions of the archipelago that are linguistically separated and by including essays in the three main official languages of this area, namely Spanish, French and English, this volume is well positioned to point out discrepancies and connections between the different (is)lands. These interrelations could, however, have been made more explicit if the editors had divided the book more clearly into individual thematic sections and provided 'an introduction to each part. Additionally, by contextualising the articles within contemporary theoretical and critical debates in the respective discourses and disciplines, the editors could have underlined differences and links between different scholarly approaches towards issues that are relevant in current debates on Caribbean ethnography, anthropology, sociology and literature. Such a structural framework could have highlighted the benefits of interdisciplinary interpretations of critical discussions in Caribbean studies.

¹¹ Said, 'Traveling Theory', p.226.

As a collection of conference articles, *Anales del Caribe* does not elaborate on specific arguments in the field of Caribbean studies in great detail. Its scholarly significance rests on its interdisciplinary and multilingual critical contributions to major current debates in the field. The (is)lands and cultures focused on in this volume range from the Caribbean countries on the South American continent and the Leeward and Windward islands to the large islands of Haiti / the Dominican Republic and Cuba, which have become strongly influenced by the US-American economy, politics and culture. The contributors analyse certain social, cultural and religious phenomena in communities such as the French Guyanese Kaliña, French Guyanese and Surinamese Maroon societies, 'female-headed households in Curaçao' as well as local representations of global history in Rastafari communities. The individual articles focus neatly on island-specific social, cultural and historical characteristics and thus highlight the need for scholars clearly to relate their arguments to particular phenomena and developments in sharply defined fields of investigation.

While avoiding generalisations about 'the Caribbean', this volume nevertheless underlines connections between the different cultural and linguistic areas. Some contributors explicitly scrutinise discrepancies and links between different Caribbean societies within their essays. This holds true primarily for discussions that were presented at the V Congress of the Society of Caribbean Studies and that critically examine changes in Caribbean societies. The first twelve essays in the volume address particular historical phenomena in specific Caribbean communities, whereas the contributions in the second part analyse developments such as postmodern trends in Hispanophone writing, as well as theoretical literary concepts like Glissant's idea of 'tout-monde' or debates about orality vs. writing. Interesting connections between different cultures are established in Rainer Epp's article that scrutinises the

representations of some Caribbean islands by the German-Jewish critic and writer Hubert Fichte as well as in Barbara Bush's analysis of historical developments in Cuba seen from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon travel writers. Many papers from the V Congress testify to the recent tendency in Caribbean studies to shift towards not only cross-cultural and cross-linguistic but also interdisciplinary research. They illustrate the extent to which current debates in the fields of history, sociology, ethnography, anthropology and literature can jointly contribute to a greater understanding of Caribbean cultures. Good examples of this trend are Rex Nettleford's interdisciplinary approach towards 'paradoxes of Caribbean culture in the nineties' as well as Wolf-Dietrich Sahr's examination of 'concepts of postmodernity in the Caribbean'. Cultural and ethnographic forms of Creolisation are discussed in Angelina Pollak-Elzt's article on the 'worship of historic personalities in the cult of Maria Lionza in Venezuela', and the interrelation of 'Western' and Caribbean critical discourses is addressed in Kathleen Gyssel's discussion of the relationship between Caribbean literature and 'World Literature' as well as in Helmtrud Rumpf's interpretation of the mutual influence between tradition and modern trends in Francophone Caribbean societies as represented in literary texts.

Anales del Caribe is a collection of sharp scholarly investigations of various aspects of Caribbean history, societies and cultures and an excellent contribution to present-day criticism that takes into account developments in different disciplines and language areas within Caribbean studies.

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AGOTEM, Revue de littérature publiée aux éditions Obsidiane [11 rue André-Gateau, F 89100 Sens], no 1: *Une certaine idée de la France et du français*. ISBN: 2-911914-62-7. €14.

In the absence of a title page, the above information is gleaned from the cover of this new periodical, which also bears the question (without the question mark): ‘Pourquoi ne sommes-nous plus *francophones*’. The journal is still defining itself in the *achevé d'imprimer*: ‘éloge d'une nouvelle perception de la francophonie!’ A healthy scepticism, primarily about *la francophonie* as ‘un forum politico-économique’ but also covering *francophone* as a multicultural and multinational linguistic grouping which does not of itself guarantee writing quality according to origins, pervades the editorial. ‘La conquête française de l'Amérique au XIX^e siècle et le dogme du modèle centralisateur font que les Français ne peuvent s'empêcher de regarder les francophones comme des sujets ethnologiques.’ The opportunity is not taken to make the more radical point that the French also speak French and are therefore *francophones*, a term arbitrarily reserved in practice for non-French French speakers.

This is a literary rather than an academic periodical, but academics will find items of interest to them. There are poems by the Tunisian Tahar Bekri and the Ecuadorian Margarita Guarderas Gandara (following her eminent compatriot Alfredo Gangotena who also wrote in French); aphorisms by the Moroccan Abdelmajid Benjelloun; brief studies on Senghor, Robert Marteau and Monchoachi, whose acceptance speech for the Prix Max Jacob is also included. The intermediate status of cultural *métis*, seen as a challenge and an enrichment rather than as a threat of falling between two stools, is several times revisited as a live issue for foreigners writing in French, and subtle points are made by Petr Král (Czech), Salah Stié (Lebanese) and Nimrod (from Chad). The prime mover of the journal, François Boddaert, contributes a

piece linking two ‘retours’: Senghor’s ‘Le retour de l'enfant prodigue’ and Césaire’s *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. An extract from France Ariel’s 1920 *Canadiens et Américains chez eux: journal, lettres, impressions* makes amateur linguistic observations while Nimrod suggests that ‘Il est temps de considérer le français comme une langue africaine’. The Cameroonian Emile Moselly Batamack aspires to African film beyond the ethnology of ‘le cinéma calebasse’. Graphics by Colette Grandgérard (not obviously related to the theme of the volume) enhance the elegant effect of the publication while drawing attention to the disparity of its contents.

The editorial pulls few punches in its comments on *La Francophonie* which includes: ‘des pays non-francophones ou “défrancophonisés”: ses efforts sont aujourd’hui portés prioritairement vers l’assistance économique, le monde de l’image et de l’Internet – ce qui n’est en aucun cas la garantie d’un avenir réel du français...’ and ‘La Francophonie, telle qu’elle s’exprime aujourd’hui, n'est qu'un vaste réservoir d'hommes qui, le cas échéant, seront jetés dans la guerre linguistique pour y servir de chair à canons.’

A far more positive note is sounded by the bicultural writers. So Petr Král observes: ‘Je trouvais naturel d’essayer, en échange de ce que j’avais appris grâce à elle, d’enrichir un peu la langue [française] à mon tour, dans l’esprit de réprocitité propre à tout vrai dialogue.’ And Salah Stetie: ‘Je reproduisais en moi sans le savoir le lieu héracliteen du devenir, ce déséquilibre fondateur sans lequel il ne saurait y avoir de véritable équilibre’; or again, magnificently: ‘Les langues ne doivent de compte qu'à elles-mêmes et à la constellation de valeurs qu'elles ont élaborées au fil de leur patience.’

The critical pieces avoid the laboriousness of some scholarly work but, in the process, are sometimes inaccurate and, more surprisingly in such a publication, linguistically so: the copy-editing leaves

several errors. And for me at least the mystery of the title remains complete: nowhere is ‘AGOTEM’ explained. Is it an acronym, an anagram, a foreign term? The editors might have come clean and saved some gratuitous head scratching. But a discriminating journal open to writing in French from both inside and outside France, and shifting the emphasis of *la francophonie* from the political to the linguistic and literary, in other words to *la francographie*, is much to be welcomed. Colleagues will want to keep an eye on its development.

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Patrick Corcoran, *Oyono: Une vie de boy and Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille* (London: Grant and Cutler Critical Guides to French Texts, 2003). ISBN 072930437X. £7.95.

Patrick Corcoran, in this slim volume, has accomplished perhaps the rarest feat in the field of literary criticism: he has written an introductory text to two canonical works which is both lucid and (surprisingly?) suggestive and should engage both those new to the works as well as old-hands in the field. Part of Grant and Cutler’s Critical Guides to French Texts series, Corcoran’s work is comprised of two chapters – ‘Colonial relations’ and ‘Rhetorical strategies’ – framed by a brief but significant Introduction and a rather sparse Conclusion. The volume also includes an abbreviated and not very useful bibliography though no index, which, considering the scope and length of the study, seems a wholly appropriate omission.

Corcoran opens his Introduction with an observation that calls into question the entire project of writing, when he points to 1960, the year Oyono published his last fiction, *Chemin d’Europe*, as

marking the point at which [Oyono] abandoned the strategy of writing fictions about colonial oppression in order to align himself with the political class which was assuming power in post-colonial Cameroon.
(p.11)

This is familiar territory, for both writers and critics. Questions of engagement and relevance underlie both Oyono’s decision to turn away from writing and our own consideration of works that are over 40 years old and wherein ‘the “social setting” in which [the] texts are produced are so disconnected from the “social setting” in which they are “consumed”’ (p.15).

It seems to me that in this we learn something of Oyono’s own appraisal of the place of novel writing in the grander scheme of

things. There is no doubt about the importance and centrality of Oyono the novelist and these two works, in particular in the history of contemporary African literature, but there are some issues that need to be addressed.

This fact, presented first, presented to us so starkly, casts a long shadow over the rest of Corcoran's work, though in no way detracts from the job he does reading and presenting these two canonical works. It does, however, severely hamstring the closing, almost obligatory nod to postcolonialism that Corcoran presents in his brief Conclusion. There is, in Corcoran's two-paragraph excursion into the rarefied 'discourse' of Foucault and Said, a hint of desperation. If these two works are going to be something other than 'meritorious portraits of a society which has long since disappeared' (p.85) – which Corcoran clearly feels is less than acceptable – they need to be tied into a 'far more complex story which is only now coming into full visibility' (p.85); a story Corcoran finds emerging out of the theoretical constructions of postcolonialism.

I would not quibble with the general terms of Corcoran's assertions here, but the quality of the presentation is *pro forma* at best. And it is telling that Corcoran's language, so lucid and easy in his discussion of Oyono's works, turns heavy and obtuse at the close. It is an unfortunate ending to an engaging presentation, wherein he truly introduces the two works without explaining away the nuance of the works, or even touching upon all the more obvious and frequently addressed 'key' issues.

Corcoran's is a model of 'close reading' and mirrors how Oyono himself (in Corcoran's reading) structures *Une vie de boy* and *Le Vieux Nègre et la médaille*: 'the critique constantly deploys a lighter comedy of social manners in order to illustrate and emphasise far more serious issues. The case Oyono builds in order to attack colonialism does not rest on any appeal to moral, ethical or philosophical abstractions such as justice or equality. Instead he favours an inductive method which draws on a detailed observation

of the empirical data provided by the behaviour of the Whites in order to demonstrate the general principles which actually operate in the colonial setting' (pp.25-6).

First presenting a broad overview of the social milieu of colonial Cameroon, Corcoran approaches both works – with compelling reason – as more social than political critiques of the colonial enterprise; and collaboration (or, more aptly, 'collusion') rather than the now familiar trope of force and/or resistance as a mediator of the Cameroonian characters' actions.

By closely reading and presenting selected narrative and rhetorical elements of Oyono's works, Corcoran buttresses his own arguments that these works chronicle the complexity of the historical moment and ways in which colonized Africans operated within this radically unbalanced system. He is not interested in disproving any particular approach or interpretation – and is refreshingly honest in his appraisal of his own work (as only a partial reading of one particular critical perspective) and Oyono's (numerous times pointing to elements which might be making rhetorical points or might just be 'evidence of Oyono's less than complete mastery' (p.56) of a particular device). Rather, Corcoran attempts to provide a more nuanced yet far from all-inclusive framework for approaching these two works in particular. And, one might imagine, a framework useful in considering similar works of the period or beyond – historical context and the discursive dictates of postcolonialism aside.

While Corcoran does not suggest this explicitly, elements of his argument in the Introduction do point to the fact that between the glance back to an idealised Africa and a focus on the political and administrative realities of the moment (Oyono's choice of vocation), there lies a very narrow sliver of literature. Patrick Corcoran has presented us with a work that not only well illustrates how writers can flower in that narrow, often harsh space, but also how, by

looking again at these flowers, our own critical perspective can be renewed and reinvigorated.

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'Republic and Empire'

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Alice Conklin (Ohio)
Gilles Manceron (Paris-I)

According to Bancel, Blanchard and Vergès (2003), the conjunction of the French Republic with colonies around the world was nothing more than a 'utopia': a 'democratic imperialism' would always be a contradiction in terms. And such are the paradoxes at the heart of 'Republic' and of 'Empire' that there has been, in recent years and is still now, a veritable deluge of research and publications on France's colonial and imperial era, and of which it is perhaps now time to take stock. Of course, this newer research has focused centrally on the historical and political dimensions of the interface between Republic and Empire, but scholars have also examined the legacy of the Republican Empire in the area of culture: from Edward Said's assessment of Camus to Bernard Mouralis's work on African literature. The aim of this conference is thus to draw together scholars from a range of disciplines – politics, history, anthropology, cultural studies, literature, sports studies –, to assess the paradoxes and complexities of France's Republican Empire, not only in relation to France itself but also its former colonies.

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ASCALF Publications Back Catalogue Only £60

In November 2002, the Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French (ASCALF) officially changed its name to the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies (SFPS). As part of this realignment of our activities, SFPS decided to rationalise its publications policy, with the *ASCALF Yearbook* and *ASCALF Bulletin* making way for a new, twice-yearly journal, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*.

However, as we move towards a new future, we are also keen to make our back catalogue of work available to both individual scholars and university libraries: 25 issues of the *ASCALF Bulletin* (the first 3 issues are no longer available), and 5 issues of the *ASCALF Yearbook* (issues 1 and 2 are no longer available) were published. These publications include articles by prominent scholars in the field as well as interviews with writers such as Tanella Boni, Azouz Begag and Ahmadou Kourouma.

Individual issues of both *Bulletin* and *Yearbook* can be purchased and their prices are listed below. However, we are also proposing a **special offer of £60 (inc. p&p)** for individuals and libraries purchasing the entire back catalogue (21 *Bulletins* and 3 *Yearbooks*). Cheques, made payable to 'Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', should be sent to: **Dr David Murphy, School of Modern Languages, French Section, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland.**

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