

**Beyond Afropolitanism: Representations of African  
Identities in Select 21<sup>st</sup> Century African Novels**

by

Hicham Gourgem

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Carleton University  
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Hicham Gourgem

## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the theoretical and ideological stakes in contemporary representations of African cultural identities through “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism.” The two concepts informed by anglophone and francophone African experience respectively—“Afropolitan” and “Afropean”—construct cultural dialogue through an over-reliance on a dualized Western-African relation. The study presents a comparative analysis of novels in French and English published at the turn of the twenty-first century by Calixthe Beyala, Sami Tchak, Chris Abani, Teju Cole, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Taiye Selasi. I examine these literary works as instantiations of a paradigm of cultural dialogue that privileges Western culture in contemporary redefinitions of African identities. The study also underlines the efforts by “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers to depart from atavistic African self-representation of the 1950s and 1960s generation of African writers to challenge myths of national identity, universality of Western culture, and stereotyping and marginalizing Africans in Western societies. Put differently, this work aims to show how a select group of African writers deploy “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” literary texts to reimagining alternative African identities and ways of belonging that challenge monolithic Western discourse on national identity. Yet, it interrogates the writers’ model of decolonizing African representations as one that perpetuates the notion of the West as the center. Theoretically, I build on Edouard Glissant’s concept of Relation and Achille Mbembe’s rendering of “Afropolitanism” as alternative accounts that diversify cultural dialogue(s) and complicate identities. The “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” texts studied here inadequately engage with the cultural histories of African people. Through a close reading of these literary texts, I delineate how the writers negotiate social identities and belonging of African subjects across race, gender, and social status, and particularly, how they attempt to resist imperial domination through hybridity.

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## Introduction

The representation of African identities has been at the center of African literary production, and approximately since the mid-twentieth century, the modern African novel has addressed cultural identity in light of the colonial realities which many African nations experienced. The older generation of African writers associated with Négritude and anti-colonialism—writers in French such as Ferdinand Oyono, Bernard Dadié, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Camara Laye, Mongo Beti and their English counterparts Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Ayi Kwei Armah, to name only a few—privilege native/national identities and racial difference, and use binarism as a mode of representing Africa and the West<sup>1</sup>. The historical, political circumstances of the first half of the twentieth century—including the development of a cultural and militant Pan-Africanism by some black and African writers and activists in the diaspora such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Sédar Senghor—significantly shaped the literary aesthetics, themes and representations of African identities by the writers of the 1950s and 1960s<sup>2</sup>. “The rhetoric of cultural and racial affirmation,” states Irele in “Dimensions of African Discourse”, “involved in (...) [national decolonization] ideologies thus served as the mental levers in the struggle against the objective structures of imperial domination and colonial dependency” (50). Although the older generation of African writers of the 1950s and 1960s may differ in

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<sup>1</sup> In *Reading Chinua Achebe* (1991), Simon Gikandi shows how Chinua Achebe deploys cultural and moral binary oppositions of Self-Other in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this, see Chielozona Eze’s *Postcolonial Imaginations and Moral Representations in African literature and Culture* (2011). Eze emphasizes the role played by nineteenth century black thinkers and early twentieth century Négritude writers in the constitution of an African identity in literature and culture based on racial, cultural and moral dichotomies with Europe.

their choices of literary aesthetic, or political and theoretical approaches, they construct cultural homogeneity and binaries of Self-Other.

By comparison, since the 1990s, the assigned role of the African writer in national politics and in adhering to the notion of a national identity and literature has considerably waned. A younger generation of African writers emerged who are interested in the themes of transnationalism, immigration to the North, diaspora, and cultural hybridity. Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier portray this new “generation” among African writers in French who “lifted the burden of engagement” (138) by developing alternative literary themes, forms, and techniques that reflect their openness to transnationalism and awareness of the global aesthetics in which culture and literature operate. This turn to transnational or global frameworks shows “the desire on the part of the authors to be identified as writers rather than as people from a specific national, cultural, or geographical origin”<sup>3</sup> (5). The efforts by the new “generation” of African writers to free African identities and literature of a national framework corresponds to the notion of world literature as analyzed by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* (1999). For Casanova, world literature is mainly a space for “competition among its members (...) to attain the same goal: literary legitimacy,” (40) beyond national or political claims to literary value.

This understanding of world literature is embraced by some African writers in French who criticize the ideological distinctions of Us-Them embedded in the idea of “francophone” literature. The notion of “francophone” literature as the Other of French

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<sup>3</sup> Similar arguments have been made by Waberi in “Les enfants de la postcolonie: esquisse d’une nouvelle génération d’écrivains francophone d’Afrique noir” (1998) and Taiye Selasi’s “African Literature Does Not Exist” (2013).

literature involves a binarism that is dismissed by many of these writers who “resist(...) their marginalization in some exotic literary periphery by living and working out of what continues to be considered the center of the French/Francophone literary and publishing world: Paris” (Migraine-George xix). Many writers in French rejected the literary, ideological and creative limitations placed by the “francophone” label and advocated for a world literature in French as a literary space that accommodates their literary and ideological interests. Alain Mabanckou is a case in point, arguing in “Immigration, Literature-Monde, and Universality: the Strange Fate of the African Writer” that African cultures and literature are transnational. He is of the idea that Africa and its cultures can be found on the African continent as well as beyond its boundaries, among its diasporas in the West. Mabanckou believes that world literature as a literary institution centred in the West plays an important role by extending African cultures and experiences beyond the continent to include Africa as imagined by writers in the diaspora (78-79). (Alain believes that world literature in French shaped African literature and identity by allowing writers in the West to articulate various transcultural experiences that challenge racial and geographical identities).

However, although the embedded literary and cultural hierarchies of the label “francophone” literature are challenged by these young contemporary African writers, the literary marketplace in France yet imposes a universal aesthetics of literature. In this global literary space, though, some African writers achieve visibility in the literary arena in France and other places. Their circulation in the West is not without the benefit of disseminating literary and cultural forms subversive of the dominant assumptions about

French literature and national identity. As they<sup>4</sup> “inscriv[er]nt leur démarche dans un nouvel espace identitaire [...] à équidistance entre l’africanité et la francité, ils puisent leur inspiration dans leur hybridité et leur décentrement qui sont devenus les éléments caractéristiques de la « world literature » à la française” (Chevrier 96). This statement applies to the “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” works selected for this study, although we will see in the textual analysis that they also challenge Eurocentric literary and cultural forms. This characteristic is typical of postcolonial<sup>5</sup> literatures, as Ashcroft et al. show in their seminal survey of postcolonial literatures in English in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Postcolonial literatures, they state, “assert (...) themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2).

For a definition of “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities, I rely, respectively, on Taiye Selasi’s essay “Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)” (2005) in which she coins the neologism “Afropolitan” (African and cosmopolitan) to refer to the multiple cultural identities and experiences of diasporic Africans, and Leonora Miano’s collection of conference lectures *Habiter la frontière* (2012) in which she introduces the concept “Afropean” (African and European). Similarly, the term “Afropean” refers to the

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<sup>4</sup> Here Chevrier refers to the French-speaking writers of the *Migritude*. He defines *Migritude* as a “néologisme [qui] renvoie à la fois à la thématique de l’immigration, qui se trouve au cœur des récits africains contemporains, mais aussi au statut d’expatriés de la plupart de leurs producteurs qui ont délaissé Dakar et Douala au profit de Paris, Caen et Pantin” (96). The use of the term “Afropean” instead of “*Migritude*” by writers like Leonora Miano suggests that this shift to “Afropeanism” is to emphasize the status of Africans in Europe as insiders in European societies.

<sup>5</sup> In this study, I distinguish between “post-colonial” and “postcolonial”. “Post-colonial” has a chronological meaning and it refers to the period after colonization; that is, post-independence. “Postcolonial” refers to the body of literary and critical texts that respond to colonialist discourse. “Postcolonial” is also used here in a general sense to refer to the impacts of the colonial experience on cultures, communities and subjects.

diasporic experiences of Africans in France, and Europe, as “personnes [qui] ont des appartenances multiples” (84). “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” identities are formed through contact with the Other—a view of African identities as relational. “Identity,” writes Chielozona Eze, “is no longer shaped exclusively by geography or blood, or culture understood in oppositional terms. On the contrary, identity is now relational” (“Rethinking African culture and identity: the Afropolitan Model” 235). Afropolitan and Afropean writers describe experiences in which African individuals identify with multiple cultures, places, and languages; and in this way, they challenge national (ist) identities. Edouard Glissant describes the complexity of cultural formations through his term “chaos-monde.” “The aesthetics of the chaos-monde,” he states, “embraces all the elements and forms of expression of this totality within us; it is totality’s act and its fluidity, totality’s reflection and agent in motion” (94). Embracing all elements involved in the formations of African identities is what “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” representations seek to do.

However, Miano’s and Selasi’s renderings of “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” identities reinforce the notion of the West as the centre. An understanding of “Afropolitanism” focused on the continent is offered by Achille Mbembe in an essay of the same title in 2005. Mbembe portrays “Afropolitanism” as an African “cultural, historical, aesthetic sensibility” underlying an “[a]wareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa” (28). What this shows is that Mbembe’s outlook is different to what Selasi wants to achieve in her essay. Mbembe uses the term “Afropolitanism” to describe how the African continent was always culturally

cosmopolitan<sup>6</sup>. His description focuses on the significant way in which African cultural, religious, racial and ethnic identities have been shaped by movements of many populations in the continent since the pre-colonial era. Based on his essays “Writing the World from an African Metropolis” (2004) and “Afropolis: from Johannesburg” (2007), it is clear that Mbembe is interested in writing the world from/in African (or Johannesburg), as opposed to Selasi who describes the “Afropolitan” as an African who is at-home in the West. Both Selasi and Mbembe aim to produce atypical representations of Africa and Africans, although their strategies are dissimilar. Mbembe seeks to reveal the diversity, mutability, and mixing of African cultures and lives in Africa, and this representation challenges the Western constructions of Africa as a homogenous and uncivilized place. Selasi also produces an enhanced image of Africans, as a successful group of young Africans based in the diaspora with the freedom to move in the world, but this positive representation implies the idea that Africa is helped by the West. It is a representation that entails a Eurocentric notion of history and culture. Besides, Selasi’s rendering of “Afropolitanism” has been criticized for being an elitist cultural and artistic trend that commoditizes African cultures.<sup>7</sup>

“Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers write about the experience of displacement, identity, citizenship, assimilation, social exclusion, and the perception of Africans by Western societies. Their transnationalism complicates the meanings of home, culture, and

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<sup>6</sup> I use cosmopolitan to mean a person or a place that comprises or experiences multiple cultures leading to diversification and hybridity.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this discussion, see Salah M. Hassan’s “Rethinking Cosmopolitanism: Is “Afropolitan” the Answer?” (2012), Brian Bwesigye’s “Is Afropolitanism Africa’s New Single Story?” (2013), Marta Tveit’s “The Afropolitan Must Go” (2013), Emma Dabiri’s “Why I’m not an Afropolitan” (2014), Stephanie Bosch Santana’s “Exorcizing Afropolitanism: Binyavanga Wainaina Explains why I am a Pan-Africanist, Not an Afropolitan” at ASUK 2012, and Amatoritsero Ede’s “The Politics of Afropolitanism” (2016).

belonging, while the idea of a national identity and literature becomes out of sync with these concepts. In *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010), Paul Jay suggests, that “in an age of accelerating globalization, (...) [literature] and literary studies ha[ve] shifted away from scholarly practices and critical paradigms rooted in the nation” (16). “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” literature reflects this shift through a focus on hybrid identities and shows that cultures are shaped by third-space and “transgress the clear lines between states and the more fuzzy ones between nations” (16).

“Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities emerged in the late twentieth century when postcolonial and cultural criticism shifted to a transnational approach of investigating cultures. Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe, Edouard Glissant, and Arjun Appadurai have pushed the conventional conceptions of identity, culture, belonging, and home beyond the boundaries of the nation. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Gilroy offers an alternative account to the predominant nationalist reading of nineteenth- and twentieth-century black writers by highlighting their transnational experiences and relations with Africa and Europe and the way transnationalism shaped their intellectual and cultural contributions to European modernity and the independence of Africa (17-19). Through this theoretical framework, Gilroy criticizes ethnic absolutism, nationality, and racialism as essentialist concepts of understanding Western modernity and its Other. Gilroy also criticizes European aesthetics that are often based on racial and national particularity. He subverts this European rationality by showing how the transnationalism of black intellectuals in the West not only shaped their black European identities but also contributed to modern European culture.

Likewise, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha suggests national communities are not fully understood when they are essentialized and homogenized. For Bhabha, postcolonial writers need to invent a new mode of writing cultures which highlights their inter-connectedness and hybridity. His understanding of cultural hybridity challenges the binary representations of Self-Other and enables representations of third-space cultures (22). This in-between of cultural space articulated in writing/discourse, in Bhabha's view, is politically empowering because it levels down the national(ist) boundaries constructed by the modern myths of originary nations and cultures. Bhabha writes, "What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (1). What is suggested is that the theory of cultural hybridity breaks new ground in representation and anti-colonial resistance through its anti-essentialist accounts of cultural formations.

The narratives of cultural rootedness and purity that originated in the enlightenment, Appadurai argues in *Modernity at Large* (1996), are now challenged by the dynamics of cultural transnationalism. We no longer can examine cultures as spaces that are segregated and authentic, for the processes of globalization require we take into account the connectedness of cultures as an essential way towards their formations (49). Together, these postcolonial cultural critics provide theories and concepts for understanding cultures transnationally and show that cultures and humans not only reach beyond national borders, but also shape each other.

The language of transnationalism and hybridity distinguishes "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" literary representations from the previous literary and cultural movements

organized around the idea of a national identity. “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” identities are subversive of the power of Western discourse because they blur the distinctions of Self-Other. In this subversive vein, Miano responds to the exclusionary and monolithic discourse of identity in Europe by asserting “l’appartenance à l’Europe [et] le nécessaire entré de la composante dans l’expérience diasporique des peuples d’ascendance subsaharienne” (86). Miano’s claim to an insider position of Africans in France whose transnational/diasporic experiences shape their Frenchness. “Afropean” identities reflect the theorizing of postcolonial cultural identities by the postcolonial and cultural critics listed above. Glissant articulates a complex portrait of relational identities that is worth mentioning. “The thought of Chaos (...),” Glissant writes, “opens onto a new phenomenon: Relation, or totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever” (133). This description reveals Glissant’s understanding that cultural identities are constituted through relations and mutations that involve unpredictable cultural formations. Glissant’s use of terms ‘chaos’ and ‘disorder’ is an indication of the unpredictable relations and movements of cultures and populations that resist prescribing patterns of cultural connections.

Selasi also understands “Afropolitan” identities along these subversive lines. In “Bye-Bye Babar” she asserts, “Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American Accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual” (528). This portrait of the interrelation of cultures, ethnicities, and languages challenges the idea of a national identity. The subversive quality of “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” representations situates the novels informed by “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” as literary accounts that “write back”

to challenge imperialist discourse, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin elaborate in their text on postcolonial criticism and literature, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989).

This was a definition of “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities as we will be using them in this project. The purpose of this study is to examine and interrogate constructions of cultural dialogue between Africa and the West in some “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” novels. The thesis shows that “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” representations in literary works such as Calixthe Beyala’s *Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992), Alain Mabanckou’s *Bleu-blanc-rouge* (1998), Sami Tchak’s *Place des fêtes* (2001), Fatou Diome’s *Le ventre de l’atlantique* (2003), Chris Abani’s *GraceLand* (2004), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011), Bulawayo NoViolet’s *We Need New Names* (2013), and Taiye Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go* (2013) involve assumptions of unequal cultural dialogue between Africa and the West, while they challenge Western binarism. In these “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” novels, the writers privilege cultural relations with the West/North more than with other African and non-Western civilizations. This form of cultural exchange is embedded in the narrative pattern of immigration to the West and the characters’ negotiations and inventions of lives and identities between African and Western cultures, spaces and geographies. This account of African cultural identities constructs the West as the center in the discussions of contemporary African identities among “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” writers and critics. This is a biased representation of relations between cultures and communities.

Discussing “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” representations in relation to the role of the novel as a literary form that can decolonize the mind will be enlightening. We will be able to explore how “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” writers conceive of decolonization of

African representations, how their understanding of decolonization differs from the one by earlier writers such as Camara Laye, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and what shortcomings involved in "Afropean" and "Afropolitan" identities as decolonized representations.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a representative postcolonial African text that seeks to decolonize the image of Africa. Achebe challenges Western representations of Africans as backward and uncivilized people. In "Dimensions of African Discourse", Irele argues that Achebe's "imaginative and intellectual efforts" to write back "represent not only a repudiation of the negative representations of the "native" in the imperialist ideology, they also articulate the claim to an alternative cultural history to the Western" (48). As suggested in Achebe's essay "An African Image," the narrative of Africa has been told by the West, from the perspective of the West. Novels such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* tell the story of Africa, but from a Western, prejudiced point of view, as Achebe argues. Such one-sided, negative representations of Africa are countered by the story we read in *Things Fall Apart* about European colonization of Africa.

Achebe writes in "The Novelist as Teacher" that he believes the African writer has a responsibility towards his/her community or culture—it is his/her "task of re-education and regeneration" (105). Hence, the decolonization of the African mind through literature is of paramount importance, as Achebe explains the role he wants his novels to play: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the one I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery (...)" (105). Achebe aims to write a literature that challenges the "single story" that the West wrote about Africans.

In a later essay “Today, the Balance of Stories,” published in *Home and Exile* (2000), Achebe raises the question of whether we have overcome the single Western story about Africa in the twenty-first century. He states, “My hope for the twenty-first century is that it will see the first fruits of the balance of stories among the world’s peoples” (79). Despite the hope, Achebe is aware of the difficulty of the task, with the tendency of some writers in the diaspora to align with the concept of a world literature that bears little or no relation to the writer’s home (105). Achebe rejects this trend of globalization of literature as a pattern of literary and cultural exchanges because it fails to achieve a balance of stories the way he sees beneficial for Africans. He states in this regard that “the people who will advance the universal conversation will be not copycats but those able to bring hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling” (83). What Achebe means by a balance of stories is the production of stories that counter the dominant story about Africa told by the West. In relation to “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” novels, the “untold stories” refer to the other patterns of cultural exchange that these stories fail to engage; that is, dialogue with a multiplicity of cultures including the West, Africa and other non-Western cultures and histories.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie builds on Achebe’s ideas in a talk, “The Danger of the Single Story,” she gave in 2009. The question of the “single story” is inseparable from the literary marketplace that shapes the image of Africa by producing and circulating a negative image about it (Ojaide 200). One can hear Adichie echo the idea of the dominance of the single Western narrative about Africa while reminding her audience that the single story always fails to tell the entire story of a community or culture. The key message that Adichie sends to her Western audience is to open their minds to

multiple, diverse accounts about Africa. Western readers should know, as Adichie persuasively argues, that because there are negative realities and positive ones of Africa; the trouble is when one reality is made the dominant one.

Wa Thiong'o is of the same view as Achebe that the African novel as a literary form can accomplish decolonization of the African mind. In *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), wa Thiong'o argues that African literature should serve to mobilize the masses in their struggle against imperialism. He writes that African literature "will find its form and character through its reconnection with the mainstream of the struggles of African people against imperialism and itself in the rich oral traditions of peasantry" (86-87). This is a clear articulation of wa Thiong'o's understanding of how African writers can decolonize Africa. For him, African writers must resist the global neo-colonial forces that perpetuate imperialist domination. Anti-imperialism for wa Thiong'o consists in privileging native languages, literatures and cultures over the homogenizing tendency of global culture.

In *Moving the Centre*, wa Thiong'o discusses how the new literature of the empire writes back to the great tradition of European literature and of which the title symbolizes the energy and determination of "the Calibans and the Fridays of the new literature [who] were telling their story" (22). His novel *A Grain of Wheat* illustrates that wa Thiong'o's goal is to place native Africans (people of Kenya) at the center of their world and history by writing a history of their struggle for independence, a history that is not represented in European literature. But "moving the centre" is not limited only to writing in literature a history of the "people's struggle to claim their own space" (21), although this practice is important for a decolonization of the African mind. Decolonization means also a return to African oral traditions, cultures, languages and an African epistemological outlook on the

world which have been destroyed during colonial rule. Wa Thiong'o raises this question in *Petals of Blood* (1977) by showing how white education fails to answer all the questions of native African pupils. Munira who teaches in a white school in a rural area of Kenya does not provide satisfactory answers to his students who leave at the end of the class with their questions unanswered (23-24).

Language is essential for a decolonization of the African mind, as wa Thiong'o argues in *Decolonizing the Mind*. He always called for the use of native African languages by African writers as an important medium of culture. It explains wa Thiong'o's efforts to move the centre from Europe to Africa by writing literary and critical works in his native African language.

Wa Thiong'o believes that cultural dialogue through literature should allow writing African stories without the imposition of a Eurocentric aesthetic or imaginative tradition. The trouble that wa Thiong'o and his contemporaries had with the Western tradition of writing is that it considers itself to be universal. "The problem arose," wa Thiong'o contends, "only when people tried to use the vision from any one centre and generalize it as the universal reality" (22). Yet, although wa Thiong'o's concept of "moving the centre" has similarities with Achebe's notion of "a balance of stories," the two writers diverge on the question of the language of African literature.

In "Globalectical Imagination: The World in the Postcolonial," an essay in his book *Globalectics* (2012), wa Thiong'o discusses postcolonial literature and its relationship to world literature. He believes that postcolonial literature, with its differentiation from the European literary canon, is "the closest to that Goethean and Marxian conception of world literature because it is a product of different streams and influences from different

points of the globe, a diversity of sources, which it reflects in turn” (66). In wa Thiong’o’s view, this notion of world literature promotes a free, equal exchange of cultures between nations, particularly because literatures get to preserve their national particularities and native languages through translation. Wa Thiong’o clarifies the idea that world literature does not “mean that any one national literature would constitute world literature. World literature would be like the sea and the ocean into which all streams from all corners of the world would flow” (72).

I examine “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” representations of African cultures along the problem of the predominance of a Western story of Africa, as raised by Achebe, wa Thiong’o and Adichie. Equal cultural exchange, as we learn from these writers, suggests that we question the predominant pattern of cultural and intellectual transactions. For these writers, the story of Africa often gets to be told from the perspective of the West—from Western spaces, with Western languages, theories and categories of knowledge or to cater to the taste of Western readers and critics. In “Today, the Balance of Stories”, Achebe sums up the trouble with cultural dialogue between Africa and the West in the literary works of African writers who write about the West: “You cannot balance one thing, you balance a diversity of things” (79). Based on this, “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” authors fail to “balance stories” because when they redefine African identities, they place the West at the center of African cultural history. It is contradictory that the subversive representations of “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” identities reiterate the idea of European culture as the center. Achebe, wa Thiong’o and Adichie aim for something different from this. They intend to shift the story of Africa to be told from a postcolonial African perspective. The ideas by these writers and critics can help assess

whether “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” tell a different story from the one that the West has already told about itself and its Other.

In their approach to decolonizing African identities, “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers use discursive strategies to undermine European discourse through representations of cultural hybridity. This approach disturbs what it means to be African and European by blurring the binaries of Self-Other. Although such discursive constructions attempt to dismantle binarism, they fail to “move the center” because they emphasize cultural dialogue with the West more than with other non-Western cultures. Edouard Glissant’s principle of “Relation” and Achille Mbembe’s portrayal of “Afropolitanism” in the African continent provide more complex accounts of cultural formations that help unpack the problematic aspects of “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” as constructed in the novels under study.

In *Poetics of Relation* (1990), Caribbean critic Edouard Glissant theorized the principle of Relation as an approach to the study of cultures with a pattern of dialogue based on multiplicity, difference and connectedness of cultures. His account of cultural formations challenges the Western ideology of universalism, unity, and rootedness of identity and belonging. Glissant believes that the imperialist ideology by which Europe places its civilization above other nations leads to a homogenized world. Europe is constructed as a superior culture—a construction legitimating its rule over “minor” cultures.

As an alternative to cultural homogenization, Glissant invites us to think of cultures and languages through the concept of Relation, which refers to a complex mix of multiple languages and cultures interacting with each other with no hierarchical assumptions

attached to them. This human condition existed before Europe's conquests of its Other. As Glissant explains, Relation declined because of the conquests that engendered divisions of communities based on race and nationalism. In response, identity politics formed based on geography and race among conquered populations to resist imperialism (17).

As Glissant suggests, the age of imperialism, European modernity, and capitalism created its values of rootedness, settlement, linearity of history, and progress. Relation, as its theorist shows, has different values such as movement, nomadism, and skepticism (11-12), which are subversive of the system of rationality and truth invented by European modernity. Glissant's Relation provides a comparative conceptual/theoretical frame for examining "Afropolitanism" and "Afropeanism" as constructed in the selected novels. Relation promotes "unforeseeable patterns" (14) of cultural dialogue that resist the pursuit of absolute truth or a universal culture. We notice that Miano and Selasi and the novels analyzed here pursue a foreseeable paradigm of the relation between Africa and the West and end up reinforcing the universality of Western culture.

Similarly, in "Afropolitanism" (2007), Cameroonian historian and critic Achille Mbembe provides a more complex account of cultural formations in the continent and suggests the existence of African modernity dating back to the pre-colonial era. Mbembe's understanding of "Afropolitanism" invokes the point of entanglement of cultures and populations of the world. This important phenomenon took place in pre-colonial Africa: "people [were] in perpetual movement throughout the continent" (27). Mbembe states, "[T]he pre-colonial history of African societies was a history of people in perpetual movement throughout the continent [...] [and that] the cultural history of the

continent can hardly be understood outside the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility and displacement” (27). Pre-colonial Africa was a place in which diverse populations and cultures came into contact through travel, trade, wars, and settlements. This account displaces the time and place of “Afropolitanism” as described by Selasi and Miano. Mbembe decolonizes African history and cultures through his rendering of “Afropolitanism”. Mbembe’s account gives a more thorough picture of African cultural history than the ones that Selasi and Miano construct. In Selasi’s and Miano’s accounts, African cosmopolitanism<sup>8</sup> begins with the immigration of Africans to the West in the second half of the twentieth century. Mbembe, instead, delves into the African past and provides a portrait of cosmopolitanism on the continent that dates back to the pre-colonial period. His account subverts Western representations of Africa as a place cut off from the rest of the world or where nothing significant ever happened.

Both Glissant and Mbembe offer counter-accounts to Selasi’s and Miano’s representations of “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities. Whereas, for Glissant, “each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other,” (11) we observe that Selasi and Miano consider this Other to be the West. In *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi suggest that those who challenge the dominant discourse render it even more powerful (3). This is the situation where “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers stand regarding the Western cultural domination

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<sup>8</sup> I use African cosmopolitanism in this work to refer to the way African writers represent African cultural identities as related to the other cultures and nationalities in the world. Leonora Miano uses “Afropean”, meaning African and European, by which she emphasizes African immigrants’ status in France as insiders. This framing understands African cosmopolitanism as a cultural form that subverts an essentialist notion of national identity. Yet African cosmopolitanism is a plurivocal concept that embraces different cosmopolitan experiences nuanced through aspects of geography, race, and social privilege. A helpful example is the difference between Selasi’s and Cole’s use of African cosmopolitanism associated with free mobility, success and individualistic lifestyle, and Abani’s and Bulawayo’s use which foregrounds its location in the African continent and among socially unprivileged Africans in the North.

that they set off to undermine through transnationalism. The dominant discourse ends up absorbing minor cultures as these postcolonial critics argue: “The minor *appears* always mediated by the major in both its social and its psychic means of identification” (2). Based on this theorization, “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” reinforce the idea of the West as the center.

Because Lionnet and Shi believe that the major-minor relation is a legacy of imperialism, they promote minor transnational narratives as a way of avoiding cultural relations that foreground the West. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant argues that Western civilization created and imposed a temporality in which Europe occupies the leading position (16-17). His principle of Relation works against the idea of the West as the center because it deploys a diversified multilateral pattern of cultural transactions that make universalism something impossible to attain. What Mbembe, Glissant and Lionnet and Shi suggest is that the Other is not only the West; the Other is plural and different; it includes Western and non-Western cultures, places and histories. These cultural accounts go against the major-minor cultural transnationalism constructed by “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers.

So, “Afropolitanism” uses a bilateral pattern of dialogue (or cultural syncretism) that cannot reflect the full picture of the complex cultural relationships which have shaped the formation of African identities. It privileges cultural exchange with European cultures over non-European or other African cultures. It is this relational pattern that I wish to interrogate as one that perpetuates the cultural dominance of the West. A bilateral mode of dialogue leads to historical myopia because it makes us forget the complexity of the cultural history of Africa. We realize this point as we read Mbembe’s account of

cosmopolitan Africa, which tells the story of African cultural identities from an African (or Afrocentric) perspective, unlike Selasi and Miano. This reminds of Bhabha's metaphor that a nation's or national identities "only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (*Nation and Narration* 1), which suggests that official accounts of the nation greatly shape memory and understanding of and its national identity.

The Western literary marketplace partly explains some African writers' constructions of "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" identities. As is known, the marketplace is selective about what novels get to be published and circulate in the West. African writers who want to be published in the West often have to deal with a profit-driven industry. Often a "good" novel is rewarded with one or more literary prizes, which promote its author. It is the case with authors like Calixthe Beyala, who was rewarded with one of the prestigious literary prizes in France, and also the case with NoViolet Bulawayo, Teju Cole, and Taiye Selasi, who have gained a literary reputation through the promotion and circulation of their novels in the West. However, the promotion of particular literary works by Western publishers needs to be taken with a bit of skepticism. "Often the foreign publishers," Tanure Ojaide argues in "The Politics of African Literature", "have their ideas of Africa that they want to promote in the manuscripts they choose to publish" (199). In light of this, "Afropolitan" or "Afropean" novels also promote an idea of Africa that foregrounds Western culture.

Nigerian, South Africa-based, writer Yewande Omotoso comments on the experiences and narratives that "Afropolitanism" promotes in the West:

Afropolitanism panders to something that I don't want to pander to. It is interesting that all these books are coming up now—Adichie's *Americanah*,

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and so on—because they are all about identity, the traveller, the African living in the West. But the story of the non-Southern African in South Africa would be a different narrative. (Fasselt 235)

Omotoso indicates the stories of Africa that Western publishers may be interested in promoting. She suggests that these literary works relate more to the Western readers' experiences and environment and give them a better understanding of African cultures<sup>9</sup>.

As an alternative to a Western-based "Afropolitanism", Omotoso focuses on a different account of immigrant and "Afropolitan" experiences in South Africa—experiences that relate more to Africans in the continent (Fasselt 234). In her novel *Bom Boy* (2011), Omotoso tells the story of experiences of Nigerian-South African subjects as immigrants in South Africa. Not only does she portray their "Afropolitan" identities and spaces, but she also highlights moments of conflict and alienation facing her Nigerian characters. Oscar, a first-generation Nigerian immigrant, and father of Omotoso's protagonist, Leke, "feels himself confronted by the ongoing of an imperial outlook on the African continent and the suppression of African history" (Fasselt, 2015, 128) on his visits to the Rhodes Memorial. In this way, the writer sheds light on the question of Otherness and the colonial and apartheid heritage that keeps returning in substitute configurations in the contemporary time. Yet besides this imperial structure, the novel

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<sup>9</sup> See S. Okwunodu Ogbechie's essay "Afropolitanism: Africa Without Africans" in which the author argues that artistic works produced by "Afropolitan" artists to display in museums and art galleries in the West are influenced by what art curators define as universal or global art. These artistic works are usually influenced by Western art and make it easy for Western curators and art historians to appreciate contemporary African art. Ogbechie suggests that "Afropolitan" art oversimplifies African art, while African artists in Africa are under-represented in the world art marketplace. Ogbechie, articulates very well how the "single story" of Africa is produced in "Afropolitan" art in the West, which inspires how the "single story" of Africa is produced in literature too.

captures the protagonists' familial background tying them to South Africa, which reminds us of the unhomely, this cultural history of a borderless Africa that keeps coming back as a reminder undermining Western discourse. Although Oscar himself uses Nigerian myth in a way which foregrounds a Manichean relationship between South Africa and Nigeria, we know he has a mixed Nigerian, South African parentage although he identifies more with his Nigerian roots. The familiar ties bring distant cultural, social and geographical lives closer, lives that are divided by economic and political conflicts. In this way, Omotoso offers a defamiliarized account of life in South Africa. Leke is also of mixed Nigerian and South African parentage, and Omotoso complicates Leke's background through his adoption by a white family. Leke, as a result, develops ties with his white adoptive mother, whose death impacts him deeply, and with his Nigerian father, who writes him from jail and tells him about his Nigerian origins and ancestors. Based on this interpretation, *Bom boy* is an important novel to contrast with a "Western-based" conception of "Afropolitanism", as Fasselt suggests, "The novel is, thus, not only critical of popular definitions of Afropolitanism linked to the free mobility and cultural hybridity of the postcolonial African elite but also seems to advocate a critical Afropolitanism that questions a single, universal interpretation of the term" (132).

Omotoso dismisses the label "Afropolitan" because it is associated with African writers who live in the West. Her novel concretizes Mbembe's understanding of "Afropolitanism" as an articulation of a history of the connectedness of African populations and cultures with the world. As Mbembe writes, "[A] history of the rest of the world, of which we are inevitably the actors and guardians, is present on the continent. Our way of belonging to the world (...) has always been marked by, if not

cultural mixing, then at least the interweaving of worlds” (28). In Omotoso’s novel, the Western, black South African and Nigerian worlds interweave and coexist in the continent, though without the absence of racial and autochthonous consciousness. In this way, Omotoso attempts to decolonize “Afropolitanism” by shifting its geographical focus. In her essay, “Decolonizing the Afropolitan” (2019), Fasselt tries to disentangle “Afropolitanism” and postcolonial immigration from a Western-centered geographical and ideological assumption<sup>10</sup>. In her study of Leila Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley* (2010), Alex Agyei-Agyiri’s *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* (2004) and Binyavanga Wainaina’s *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (2011), she shows how their “alternative migratory trajectories and Southern transnationalisms contribute to the recognition of the irreducibility of migration novels to a single, South-North trajectory” (78). Fasselt’s reading of these novels untangles the “Afropolitan” or the African immigrant from a unilateral Northern migratory trajectory to decolonize “Afropolitan” identities. “This invites us,” Fasselt argues, “to consider further paths across a more differentiated terrain of pluriversal migration and Afropolitanism, including other narratives and geographies

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<sup>10</sup> Fasselt’s decolonial reading of post-2000 African migrant novels resembles in its reading strategy the scholarly work of a group of African studies scholars based in African universities published by J. K. S Makokha and Jennifer Wawrzinek in *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African literature and folklore* (2011). The collected essays provide decolonial readings of “Afropolitanism” in literature, culture and folklore that reflect Mbembe’s conception of “Afropolitanism” by displacing the concept from its Western geographical predominance. They, thereby, cast fresh views on issues of language, identity and belonging in postcolonial Africa. As employed by the scholars in *Negotiating Afropolitanism*, “Afropolitanism” reflects cosmopolitanism in Africa in the diverse worlds and outlooks conveyed through literary, cultural and artistic endeavors of African writers. More importantly, the role of Makokha’s and Wawrzinek’s book to contribute an alternative point of view of Africa from an African knowledge site is worth noting. Simon Gikandi words highlight how these scholars shifted Africa from being a raw material for Western theorizing to a producer of (self)knowledge: “Why is this [book] important? For several years now I have been concerned about the domination of debates about Africa by a small privileged elite located in American and European universities. I have expressed the worry that the power and authority of this group as the authorized arbiter of knowledge about Africa has been achieved at the expense of work produced in African universities, which has increasingly been marginalized and delegitimized” (“On Afropolitanism, 11). Gikandi’s statement articulates very clearly the problem of the “single story” about Africa that we have been discussing.

that co-exist with, re-work, and challenge the South-North axis” (78). As Fasselt shows, these writers contribute alternative accounts of the African migrant which depart from the dominant narrative of “Afropolitanism” in the West and its privileges.

This being said, Mbembe’s gesture of shifting the time of “Afropolitanism” is also worth mentioning as a substantial way to decolonize “Afropolitanism”. This gesture removes the Afropolitan narrative from the linear, teleological rationality of Western modernization. In Western discourse, power is manifested in constructions of Self-Other through a temporality in which the West leads History. Mbembe subverts this Eurocentric assumption by constructing a non-linear history, with modernity and globalization on the continent predating that in Europe. By writing (back) the pre-colonial era of Africa when the continent hosted diverse cultures, travellers and communities from the world, Mbembe challenges Western constructions of Africa as an uncivilized place.

In “Bye-Bye Babar,” Selasi also argues that her “Afropolitan” subjects challenge the single Western story about Africa that focuses on the negative things like war and hunger. However, her representations of the “Afropolitan” in “Bye-Bye Babar” and *Ghana Must Go* can also be considered a “single story” of Africa. Many African commentators reject her brand of “Afropolitanism” as one that represents the African elites who are educated and live in the West. To a great extent, her portrayal of the “Afropolitan” thriving in the West fits in the Western narrative of progress and modernity. As Lionnet and Shi would probably think, Selasi’s “Afropolitanism” renders Western cultures and spaces more powerful.

Concerning the position of African writers in the West like Selasi and Teju Cole, Binyavanga Wainaina discusses the question of power and its relationship to

“Afropolitan” identities. Wainaina is skeptical about how “Afropolitan” identities will balance power relations between the West and Africa when the West remains the center. He argues, “When the power dynamics terms change, then we can have that conversation [...] We remain where we were a hundred years ago with Europeans in general, and the West [...] Nothing has changed in that relationship” (Solés). Here, Wainaina echoes the problems Achebe, Wa Thiong’O, and Adichie have articulated. They all confirm that the cultural conversation between Africa and the West rests on uneven terms of power and unequal opportunities of being heard by the world. Wainaina’s statement applies to “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” as understood by Selasi and Miano. The unequal terms of dialogue are embedded in their accounts that complicate African cultural identities in relation to the West while neglecting relations with non-Western cultures.

The discussion has shown that power relations are linked to the question of dialogue between cultures. The question that inspires this study is whether “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” as a postcolonial discourse of identity change the dominant-dominated relationship of Africa with the West. We perhaps need more than to blur the distinctions between Self-Other to change this power relationship, and “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers falling short of their efforts to undo entirely relations of unequal power bear witness to this hypothesis. It seems, as some African critics discussed so far suggest, the unequal relations of power will change once the West is no longer the cultural center; when the conversation between cultures and nations shows genuine efforts to represent the diverse ethnicities, nationalities, relationships, travels, settlements, cultural exchanges, and conflicts that shape African identities and lives on the continent and

elsewhere. It is in this way that cultural transactions will reflect closely what Achebe calls the “balance of stories”.

Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi also provide a theorization of cultural dialogue through minor transnationalism and they echo wa Thiong’o’s notion of “moving the centre”. Their reason for going in the direction of the minor-minor cultural dialogue is to avoid a Eurocentric assumption embedded in predominant major-minor transnationalism in postcolonial criticism and cultural theory. On another note, the literary marketplace and the forces it exercises in directing the image of Africa in one way or another by circulating some literary works instead of others is also important to discuss as an intellectual, cultural, and economic arrangement that fails to foster diversity.

Our discussion of “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” has laid out definitions of these concepts based on Selasi and Miano and my reading of the constructions of cultural dialogue in select “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” novels published in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century by African writers based in the West. This study shows that “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities tell a single story about African cultural identities that relies on a dualized major-minor pattern of cultural exchange. They neglect the plural and multi-direction cultural relations that formed and still form African cultural identities. Based on this description, I question the ability of “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” identities to fully decolonize African self-writing. “Afropolitan” representations produced by Selasi and Miano perhaps need to disentangle themselves from a lingering Western temporality of supremacy, linear thinking and universalism.

In chapter 1, “Negritude, Postcolonialism, and National Identities,” I explain the theoretical assumptions that underpin the cultural representations by both African

atavistic<sup>11</sup> writers and “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers. This comparison helps to explain the decolonized outlooks of each group. This chapter shows that there is not a universal perception of decolonization. Generations of African writers have adopted different ways of writing back to the imperial center in order to contest the Western representations of Africans and black people. In this chapter, I examine and question the outcome of their theorizations of decolonizing African self-representations.

In chapter 2, “Afropeanism in Calixthe Beyala’s *Le petit prince de Belleville* and Sami Tchak’s *Place des fêtes*,” my focus is on the fragmentation of the African subject caused by geographical/cultural displacement. In the first section, “Nationalism, Gender, and Immigration,” I show how the postcolonial nativist/nationalist ideals that unite the African families in the novels disintegrates under the forces of French liberal culture and society. The figure of the father in the novels, which is a symbol of cultural nationalism and anti-imperialist resistance, reaches a crisis point when his wives and son break with their native African ideals and question the power of the patriarch. This situation shows the triumph of French culture as the guardian of liberal, democratic ideology over the ways of the traditional religious culture of Africa. In the second section, “Roots and Routes,” I draw attention to the debilitated state of the father when the son is attracted to French culture, which makes his primary point of reference for his lifestyle, convictions, and identity. This section also serves to illustrate the fragmented African diasporic subject. I suggest in this chapter that major-minor cultural transnationalism reinforces the

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<sup>11</sup> “Atavistic” is used to mean that the return to the past and ancestors inspires the writers’ representations of African cultural identities. It is important to note that atavistic cultures are also constructs. Atavistic representations of African cultural identities by Négritude by no means suggest that the black culture or soul they celebrate is authentic or pure. Atavistic is used here to describe a dominant mode of representation among Négritude writers.

power of the dominant culture or discourse. I chose Calixthe Beyala's and Sami Tchak's novels because they illustrate a generational conflict of identities, which is central to "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" identities.

In chapter 3, "The Global: Home for a Stranger," I analyze how the aesthetics of world literature—the de-politicization and de-historicization of literary production—imposes an abstract approach to the question of home and identity, making these less tied to one's native geography. I will show that this globalized understanding of identities may exclude the difference and diversity of cultures. I selected Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and Teju Cole's *Open City* because they both break with the image constructed by Négritude writers of the African subject as alienated and not belonging in the Western society and depict "Afropolitan" characters that are at home in the lifestyle of the West.

In chapter 4, "Writing Self and Other As 'Unhomely'", I examine these two novels as alternative accounts to Selasi's and Cole's cosmopolitanism. I will analyze the novels using Bhabha's notion of the "unhomely" to show that the writers approach cultural identity as relational. The notion of the unhomely subverts essentialist representations of cultural identities. I show how Abani's and Bulawayo's literary accounts of Afropolitan identities differ from Selasi's and Cole's. I will illustrate how Abani depicts cosmopolitanism in Nigeria and Bulawayo represents an "Afropolitan" subject who does not feel at-home in the West.

In the next chapter, I will present a theoretical overview to compare "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" writers with the writers of the 1950s and 1960s. This comparison focuses on the theoretical assumptions that underpin "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" writers' and atavistic writers' approaches to the representation of African cultures and identities. We

see that the two “generations” have different ways of contesting Western representations of Africans through their dissimilar modes of (re)inventing African cultural identities.

## **Chapter 1: Negritude, Postcolonialism, and National(ist) Identities**

From the emergence of the Négritude movement in the 1930s in France until the early part of the twenty-first century, African self-writing in literature produced mainly two modes of representation of African identities: the one deploys cultural atavism, the other adopts hybridity. These two modes of representation are attempts by African writers to contest the negative Western constructions of Africans and especially to offer alternative representations of Africans and their cultural identities. They aim to show to the West that its negative image of Africa is wrong and seek to correct this image, although they redress the image of Africans in different ways. The older generation of writers associated with anti-colonialism and nationalism has done this by asserting the values of African culture and the “personality traits” of Africans. “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers seek to dismantle binarist oppositions of Self-Other and to define African cultural identities in relation to the Western Other, not against it.

This chapter frames the contributions of atavistic writers, on the one hand, and “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers, on the other, to the decolonization of (self-)representations of Africans. I will discuss the theoretical bases underlying the attempts by the two “generations” to contest Western representations of Africans. The comparison explains why “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers depart from Négritude and anti-Western literary accounts of the 1940s through the 1960s. For recalling, in the introduction section, I question the plan by “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers to resolve the problem of binarism and unequal power relations through a predominantly dualized version of cultural exchange between Africa and the West.

### **African Nationalist identities:**

Pan-Africanist thinker Edward Wilmot Blyden invented the notion of an “African personality” to define African identities—a definition which shaped the writings of many black and African intellectuals and writers for an extended period. “African personality” is a racial assumption that people of black African origins share physical and psychological traits that distinguish them from white European people. Abiola Irele explains in *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* that “African personality” is “a distinctive physical and moral disposition of the African, and even specifically, the foundation in an African civilization of the collective personality of black men throughout the world” (90). This reading of Blyden’s racial nationalism seems to contradict the transnational network of places, cultures and intellectual activism of black people in the New World and Africa that shaped their journeys as important black intellectual figures. Paul Gilroy foregrounds Blyden’s multilayered Caribbean, African, Jewish, and Western connections as crucial to the reading of the figure’s cosmopolitanism and significant role in the history of black people (208-210). Blyden has an ambivalent relationship with Africa and Africans on the continent. Although he considers Africa to be the place from which a great African ancient civilization emerged, he believed that modern Africa needed the help of the West to emerge out of its rudimentary form of society, and recommended English language to Africans as a language of progress and Islam a religion of black unity. All this background helps explain Blyden’s pan-Africanist vision and transnational connections.

However, as V. Y. Mudimbe illustrates in *The Invention of Africa* (1988), Blyden remains an important black intellectual in what Mudimbe describes as “a larger

epistemological shift” (80-81) to racial difference that extends to culture, history, and civilization. In other words, Blyden’s ideas of race reflect a shift in European humanist discourse from universality and sameness of the human race to differences between races. Anthropology is another essential field for the invention of Africa as the Other of Europe, which emerged in parallel with the imperialist expansions of Europe. As Mudimbe shows, the influences of Blyden’s writings on black cultural and racial differences and European anthropological scholarship about Africa in the early twentieth century were already visible. He states:

In the first quarter of this century, critical thinkers like Blyden and Frobenius seemed to be simply transferring doxological modalities from their own rationalizations of African experiences, the first hypothesizing a black personality culture on the basis of the most controversial racist recommendations, the second anxious to grant social formulations the practicality of a classification of its culturally distinct features. (81)

Such an intellectual and scholarly framework surrounded the emergence in the 1930s of the Négritude movement formed by Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, who “mostly used poetry to explore and speak about their difference as black” (81). The theory of Leo Frobenius attracted Négritude writers because it “démontais l’idée de la barbarie africaine et séduisait les Noirs de France, les encourageant à se départir de l’aliénation culturelle inculquée par l’éducation européenne, à reconsidérer le monde de fond en comble et à reconnaître l’apport de leurs propres civilisations à l’histoire de l’humanité” (Mabanckou 29). Although Leo Frobenius represented African

civilization positively, he also shaped perceiving it as the Other of European civilization. An idea that does not disentangle itself from the binarist opposition of Western discourse.

Another black figure who influenced pan-Africanism and Négritude in the twentieth century is W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois's ideological and political impact on African nationalism marked the first half of the century. During this period, he took part in the organization of several Pan-African congresses, which discussed the future of Africa as an independent continent. He expressed in the conferences that race united black people and was the basis for their shared historical destiny from slavery to modern African nationalism (Shepperson 306-307). Both Blyden and Du Bois promoted a return to African roots for black people to regain their self-esteem after slavery, racism, and colonialism. Going back to roots in Africa is a central idea in Négritude and it witnessed one of its fullest literary articulations in Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939).

I have singled out Blyden and Du Bois among the many black thinkers and writers that have contributed to pan-Africanism because their influences were more directly felt in the ideologies of race and geographical roots among the Harlem writers and Négritude and anti-colonial literature in the diaspora. To a large extent, Blyden's invention of the "African personality" shaped the binary opposition between blacks and whites. Mudimbe describes Blyden's invention of black identity as "an annunciating sign of the rupture" (81) in Western discourse with a humanist ideology of sameness. In *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991*, Esebede details some nineteenth-century racial theories in the West, which accompanied the development of pan-Africanist ideology (15). Racial ideologies made up the premise of the European legitimation of imperialism. In this

respect, Blyden's "African personality" is a notion that counters the white ideology that blacks are an inferior race. Blyden himself experienced racism in the United States when universities refused his admission because of his colour. In this context, his pan-Africanist thought was a reaction to the denigrated condition of black people in the West. It was an intellectual effort to rehabilitate the African past and culture and restore self-esteem to black people. The "belief in a distinct African personality, rehabilitation of Africa's past, pride in African culture" (Esedebe 4) were common ideas of pan-Africanism.

The Négritude movement adopted these principles during the first half of the twentieth century as a reaction to the French ideology of assimilation which imposed the notion that African cultures were backward and inferior to French civilization. Notable examples in this effort are Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) and Senghor's collection of poems *Chants d'ombre* (1945) and his essay "Négritude: Humanism of the Twentieth-century" (1966). Yet, it is important to note that the binary nature of histories, cultures and races of Africans and Europeans is a pan-Africanist idea that emerged during the nineteenth century in the West when imperialism saw its ideological, "scientific" articulations in scholarly disciplines like anthropology. Mudimbe shows that pan-Africanist thought built its knowledge of Africans upon nineteenth-century Western epistemology (80-81).

The Harlem Renaissance writers of the 1920s were an inspiring literary and ideological experience for African intellectuals in Paris during the 1930s and 1940s. Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* (1925) comprised many writers of the Harlem Renaissance such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and others who

made a “remarkable outburst of literary creativity” (Drake 78) focusing on the experiences of black people in Western societies. Senghor praised the Harlem writers as an inspiration to the literary expression of Négritude writers in Paris (85). As Chevrier suggests in *Littératures francophones d’Afrique noire*, perhaps the most important inspiration is that of the African-American Renaissance writers being “un mouvement à caractère social et littéraire qui dénonçait la situation de mendiant culturel du Noir américain, manifestait la prise de conscience de son identité et traduisait sa volonté de réhabiliter un long passé déformé par l’idéologie esclavagiste” (47). Accordingly, the idea that black people have an identity and a culture that distinguishes them from white people is passed over to African and Caribbean writers by African-American writers of the twentieth century.

Négritude was also a literary and ideological expression of the essence of black culture. It was a response to the French imposition of cultural assimilation, which is an ideology that imposes the universality of French culture and language, and a critique of the colonial rule in the continent—Négritude is also an anti-colonial movement that condemns French colonialism in Africa. A notable expression of this anti-colonial dimension is Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950). For the anti-assimilationist dimension of the Négritude, Senghor’s essay “Négritude: Humanism of the Twentieth Century” is an insightful articulation of the contribution of Africa to European art and literature in the early twentieth century (200-201). Literary articulations of a return to roots, cultural alienation in Paris, and the beauty of life in the African village are presented in Damas’s collection of poems *Pigment* (1937), Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (1939), and Senghor’s poems *Chants d’ombre* (1945). In 1947, Alioune

Diop established *Présence Africaine* journal, which played a key role in disseminating the philosophy of Négritude.

There is an idea entrenched in the Négritude movement that its writers will restore a damaged black culture which Western ideology incurred. This effort to invent the racial and cultural origins of black people as a reaction to racism against black people and their cultures is what sets the Negritude writers as different from Afropolitan writers who are interested in disturbing the Western narrative of modernity and rationality rather than constructing another master-narrative of black culture.

That was a very brief review of the ideological, political and cultural contexts that shaped pan-Africanist thought in the nineteenth century and the influence of this black internationalism, especially its definition of blackness as a race, on African writing during the 1950s and the 1960s. As we know, the emancipatory project of pan-Africanism in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which condemned white racism towards black people, was a major ideological impetus in the mobilization of anti-colonialist voices among Africans in the West. In “Dimensions of African Discourse”, Irele suggests that the early attempts of writing back to the center during the first part of the twentieth century were shaped by the polemical discussions that black thinkers and writers raised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (46). Négritude poetry reflects this dimension. Césaire’s poetry “embraces in its scope the African experience in its full ramification—historical, moral, and even metaphysical” (47) which shows a subversive dimension of Négritude poetry in its response to European colonialism. Damas’s poem *Black-label* (1956) addresses alienation in exile, praises black identity, and expresses trenchant criticism of slavery and racism.

The early expressions of Négritude thought among African writers in French in the 1930s and 1940s privileged the poetic medium. Poetic expression is somewhat akin to the African oral tradition. Irele characterizes this relationship as “a closer relation between the poetic consciousness and the structures of apprehension suggested by the traditional background, as these structures come through in cultural practices that continue to animate the indigenous sensibility” (56). Therefore, poetic expression itself reflects an African essence and a traditional form of imagining the Self. It is a medium for expressing the cultural richness of black people while the shift after WWII to the novel as a form of literary expression was suitable for articulating the realities of African people and their anti-colonial struggle (Chevrier 67).

Négritude is a discourse that contests Western representations of Africans and black people and criticizes slavery and colonialism. To produce a counter-account to Western constructions of Africa, Parisian African writers reversed the values of African and Western cultures as portrayed by the West. They did not go beyond binarism; instead, they asserted African traditions and values to restore black people’s self-esteem. Their constructions of an essentialist African identity are based on the assumption that there is a pure African identity or personality out there, and that it is possible to deploy literature to present this past African culture without actually re-producing and re-telling the past<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon raises this problem in “Pitfalls of National Consciousness” published in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) when he warns that rehabilitating native African cultures risks homogenizing African cultures and populations. Native African subjects and intellectuals when they want to assert a national culture to fight colonial oppression, they end up affirming/producing a black culture (170-171). This is an argument that applies to pan-Africanism and Négritude. Stuart Hall addresses this question in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1996) regarding black and African diasporas’ self-identification as a homogenous community organized around race, color or geography. He writes, “Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (225). The split of the subject through representation

The role of literature to reflect reality underpins the literary creations of many African writers, especially in the novel. Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953) and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) more clearly illustrate this mode of representation. Achebe's essay "The Novelist as Teacher" articulates his role of making his people aware that Western representations of Africa are only a Western version of Africa and that his early novels contest the image of Africa in colonialist discourse. Therefore, Achebe's representation of African culture through Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* contests Western literary accounts of Africa such as *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. This effort to decolonize the African mind through literature situates Achebe's novel in postcolonial literature as a practice of writing back to, or in Achebe's words fighting back<sup>13</sup> against, Western discourse.

However, *Things Fall Apart* deploys binaries of Self-Other. In *Reading Chinua Achebe*, Simon Gikandi shows this binary structure underpins Achebe's moral and cultural imagination in the novel (82). He points out a dualist paradigm organizing Achebe's definition of traditional Igbo culture against European civilization. Irele and Gikandi mention that Achebe's novel inaugurates how African culture is represented in African literature in the 1950s and 1960s and sets a literary model for African novels written after *Things Fall Apart* (Irele, 115; Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the invention of African Culture", 6).

In his reading of *Things Fall Apart*, Irele refers to an imaginative articulation of the communal existence of the Igbo people as a contestation of Western representations and

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into a Self and its Other, as described by Hall, suggest that it is impossible to have a representation that does justice to its subject.

<sup>13</sup> See Chinua Achebe's essay "The Empire Fights Back" in *Home and Exile* (2000: 37-72).

the language expression as different from imperial English. According to Irele, Achebe's novel belongs to a black tradition of writing that dates back to the eighteenth century. He refers to this as the "African imagination", which he describes as "a coherent field of self-expression by Black writers in relation not only to a collective experience but also to certain cultural determinants that have given a special dimension to that experience and therefore to have imparted to black expression a particular tonality" (4).

Olaudah Equiano is an eighteenth-century black writer who helped shape African self-representation in modern African literature. Irele points out the importance of Equiano's autobiographical narrative *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), stating that "it serves to identify the point of departure of both the written self-representation they [African letters] offer and the process of self-reflection they delineate" (46). Chielozone Eze remarks that there are similarities between the autobiographical narrative written by Equiano and Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*. An important parallel between the two is the way they depict "Africa as a home, not as a jungle [...] [as] a community that has its own culture [...] and his people as cultural agents" (19). Such resemblance shows the efforts made by the two writers to convey an image of Africa that subverts the Western stereotype, while it is noticeable that the writers avail themselves of an idea of literary work as a faithful expression of reality, which helps the writers represent African experiences and cultures as distinctly different from Western life. This realist approach to representation is essential for the construction of binary oppositions in Achebe's novel. The question of the nation as a narrative construct, as elaborated by Bhabha, is of absolute relevance to Achebe's representation of the Igbo society as the Other of Europe. The choice by the author to represent a pristine

African past interrupted by colonial intervention suggests how the African past is important for Achebe to explain Africa to the West.

Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (1953) is an important novel in French that conveys an essentialist culture and life left in the continent through the protagonist's memory. The novel is an autobiographical account of a child growing up in a village in what is now Guinea. One day, the child moves to Paris for school. The account is told from the narrator's place of exile, Paris. First, like Achebe's and Equiano's narratives, Laye's novel contests the Western representations of Africa. All these literary accounts show an ideologically and historically informed engagement with Africa reflected by their representations of Africa as a place inhabited by humans. *L'Enfant noir* contains detailed descriptions of customs, rites of passage, religious beliefs, caste system among the Malinkés. Despite the criticism of its exotic account of African customs<sup>14</sup>, the novel is one of the first in modern African literature to engage existential themes in the African context—an idea which challenges Western constructions of Africa as a place of savages. As an autobiographical account, it establishes the human existential experience of the protagonist which serves as a subversive account of Africa. Also, as a novel of formation, it challenges the Western conventional form by transgressing the movement to social and cultural assimilation. The protagonist is nostalgic about his roots and remembers his village. From this perspective, *L'Enfant noir* offers a representation of African identity that privileges roots and native customs. This said, a major difference between *Things Fall Apart* and *L'Enfant noir* is that Achebe expresses anti-colonialist ideology and is critical of Igbo culture, while Laye engages a romantic account of native culture and life.

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<sup>14</sup> Mongo Beti critiques Laye's novel, making a connection between its literary recognition in France and its exotic representation of Africa (qtd. in Moudileno 130).

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the proliferation of novels in French that privileged native African cultures. Many African writers produced novels that emphasize cultural binarism such as Olympe Bhely-Quenum in *Un piège sans fin* (1960) and Mongo Beti in *Mission terminée* (1957). These novels construct African cultures as things that exist and are fully constituted outside their representations in literary works.

Many African writers of the 1950s and 1960s who write back to the West show an underlying assumption that there is a “true” Africa that Western writing distorted. This idea applies to the early novels of Ngugi wa Thiong’o that depict the African liberation struggle. As he suggests in *Decolonizing the Mind* and *Moving the Centre*, wa Thiong’o writes to decolonize the mind of Africans so used to the colonial ideology. His novels *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965) represent the agency of Africans to free themselves from colonial rule. Western writers, such as Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling, did not tell about African resistance. Wa Thiong’o’s novels document the history of anti-colonial resistance that the West silenced, in which way he tells the story of Africans from the point of view of Africans. The representation of anti-colonialism is crucial for wa Thiong’o to show the agency of Africans in the struggle for self-rule.

Anti-colonial literature involves an essentialist construction of African identities. This applies to wa Thiong’o’s novels, too. *Weep Not Child* depicts the British occupation of Kenya and the struggle of the Gikuyu people in the 1950s to liberate the country. The writer describes his people’s agency to overthrow colonialism. We also see in the novel the creation of the myths of the black race and autochthony, which mobilize anti-colonial resistance. Wa Thiong’o’s representation of African identity in these novels echoes the racial and geographical identities that black African and Caribbean thinkers and writers

produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The novel depicts the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya and the mobilization of the masses through race and nationalism.

Similarly, in *The River Between*, the central theme is resistance and unification of the tribes to fight colonial rule. Here, too, the question of cultural identity is fundamental. Waiyaki, the protagonist, aims to save his tribe from colonialism. His father tells him about the secret of the tribe and sends him to the mission school to learn the way of the white man to save his tribe. The question of culture emerges as an important one first when Waiyaki's father warns his son against embracing the religion and culture of the white man. This problematic moment points to the anxiety surrounding Africans' contact with European culture. Yet, Western education shapes Waiyaki's strategy of unifying the entire population against colonialism. It made him realize that the best way to resist colonial rule is by unifying the entire nation. This concept of nationalism transcends narrow tribal or ethnic identities. The cultural and ideological constructions that underpin wa Thiong'o's portrayal of resistance in this novel is informed by pan-Africanism. For instance, racial and geographical identities are crucial in mobilizing an oppositional identity for the anti-colonial struggle in *The River Between*.

So far, I have described the atavistic and binary mode of self-representation adopted by some important writers in English and French during the 1950s and 1960s. Now, I will briefly discuss the critique of African atavistic identities. Mudimbe raises a serious problem concerning the forms of knowledge by which African scholars and writers of pan-Africanism and Négritude understand the African self. In *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe (1988) shows that the Western forms of knowledge used for understanding and

inventing Africa have influenced African scholars in their criticism of Western discourse. He states, “The fact of the matter is that, until now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order” (x). Mudimbe’s archeological tracing of the meaning of Africa is an important procedure that interrogates the Western structures, methodologies, and discourses that mediate Africa’s understanding of itself.

A similar view is expressed by Anthony Appiah, who rejects African racial identities. In *In My Father’s House*, Appiah argues that African-American writers’ racial constructions of African identities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are shaped by Euro-American inventions of Africa (74). Like Mudimbe, Appiah believes that black writers have adopted the concept of race from the West to define Africa. In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Appiah highlights the ethical value of cultural cosmopolitanism in promoting dialogue across cultures and nations. He subverts racial and nationalist identities through his concept of cultural contamination (15-26).

Before Appiah and Mudimbe, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon elaborates on the invention of African/black nationalism and the racialization of African cultures. He writes, “The Negro, never so much a Negro as since he has been dominated by the whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realize that history points out a well-defined path to him: he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists” (170). Fanon questions the black and African writers’ reaction to Western discourse by inventing a culture that is the opposite of the Western one. As he states, “The unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture” (171). Here, Fanon

suggests that there is a relationship between Western identity and African writers' assertion/invention of African culture. That is, the invention of a homogenous national identity is a reaction to colonialism, which means it is a discursive construct intended to serve a timely purpose. As we know, Fanon does not associate his thought in *The Wretched of the Earth* with the Négritude. His focus in the book is to show that African culture is national and that it serves to mobilize the anti-colonial struggle.

After the independence, many African critics and intellectuals began to question Négritude as an ideology that essentializes and homogenizes African identities. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the popularity of the Négritude movement declined in the academic, intellectual field with the publication of *Léopold Sédar Senghor, négritude ou servitude* (1971) by Marcien Towa and *Négritude et Négrologues* (1970) by Stanislas Adotevi. Wole Soyinka is also one critic who disagreed with the tenets of the Négritude movement in the 1960s.

Along similar lines, Mbembe believes that the meaning of being an African should go beyond the narratives of Afro-radicalism and nativism. Mbembe, in "African Modes of Self-Writing" acclaims Mudimbe's and Appiah's thinking beyond Afrocentrism. He suggests that Afrocentric narratives conceal the diverse realities and cultures of Africans by imagining African identities in the form of race and geography (255-256). Writing about the post-independence condition, writers in French such as Yambo Ouologuem in *Le devoir de violence* (1968) and Ahmadou Kourouma in *Les soleils des independences* (1970) question narratives of origins. In *Sortir de la grande nuit* (2010), Mbembe refers to these novels as marking the beginning of "Afropolitanism". Mbembe argues:

Ouologuem, par exemple, ne se contente pas de remettre en question la notion même des origines, de la naissance et de la généalogie si centrale au discours de la Négritude. Il cherche purement et simplement à les brouiller, voire à les abolir dans le but de faire place à une nouvelle problématique, celle de l'autocréation et de l'*auto-engendrement*. (222)

Mbembe shows the efforts by Ouologuem and Koukouma to question Négritude writers' representations of an African identity based on race and geography. Mbembe explains that these writers prepare for African self-inventing beyond the legacies of colonialist discourse. He views Ouologuem and Koukouma as examples of how African writing can decolonize representations of Self. Likewise, Appiah refers to Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* as one that makes a "space-clearing gesture" (149). It "reject[s] the nationalist project of the post-colonial national bourgeoisie," (152) which is to produce a national culture by returning to the past.

As we have discussed, Négritude and anti-colonialist literature produced essentialist and homogenized African identities. They sought to rehabilitate the African Self and decolonize their land and culture. I have drawn attention to the influence of black intellectuals on modern African writers. As we have noted, Négritude and anti-colonialist writers focused their efforts on recovering an African culture destroyed by colonialism. They attempted to show that Africans have a culture and contested the representations of Africa by the West through representations of the past, cultures and values, which were portrayed as antithetical to Europe. The notion that there is a pure African identity held by atavistic writers marks their difference from Afropolitan writers who challenge Western discourse by unsettling the binaries of Self-Other.

### **(Self-)representation and Women's Writing:**

I shall speak about African women's writing since its effort to emancipate women disturbs the nationalist narrative of emancipation. African literature and criticism in the 1950s and 1960s were concerned with decolonization and nation-building. The fight against neo-colonialism in literature had priority over the discussion of Women's emancipation. Few African women had access to education and travel compared to men, which explains the late coming of females to writing and publishing. During this time, male writers mostly did the representation of African women in literature. In "Women and Creative Writing in Africa", Flora Nwapa contends that male writers such as Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi, and others "in many instances portrayed women negatively or in their subordination to men" (528). Nwapa's novel *Efuru* (1966) describes the world of women in Igbo society. Efuru is a woman who has positive qualities such as generosity, care, intelligence, and success. As Florence Stratton describes the novel, "Nwapa's focus [in the novel is] quite different from Achebe's. It is in "the women's world" (...) [that] Nwapa writes into Efuru what Achebe left out of *Things Fall Apart*" (87). But Nwapa does not criticize the values of Efuru's native community. In *Une si longue lettre* (1979), we see a different perspective. Mariama Bâ depicts women's subordination in male-dominated Senegalese society. Through the letter exchange between Ramatoulaye and her friend, Aissatou, Bâ criticizes gender inequality as a norm entrenched in the Senegalese cultural values.

Before Mariama Bâ, some African women writers in English like Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo wrote their first novels. Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) feature self-empowered women protagonists who have

access to the privileges reserved for men, such as education and travel. Emecheta and Aidoo do not disentangle women's struggle from the pan-Africanist nationalist struggle. Nationalism incorporates their voices, and the struggle against a male-dominated mindset and institutions seems to be secondary in their novels. In contrast, Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* focuses on the subordinate position and role of women in an urban middle-class society in Senegal. She does not deal with racial problems and Western hegemony, as Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emecheta do. For instance, Aidoo frames her protagonist's journey to Europe as an inversion of the colonial travel narrative. Sissie, a Ghanaian student, receives a scholarship to travel to Europe. When in Europe, Sissie perceives the white man/woman as her Other and resists Western domination. Yet we can read the story as an unprecedented representation of African women in African literature of the 1960s. Aidoo portrays an educated Ghanaian girl who challenges European discourse.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta provides a representation that empowers African women through her main character Adah. The protagonist is a little girl who challenges her society and has an education. Adah attends school without her parents' permission and knowledge. Adah moves to London to join her husband. Emecheta shows how Adah faces subordination by her community in Nigeria and by her husband in London. Yet, the part set in London remains dominated by the backdrop of black racism in the 1960s and the writers' critical perspective on the failure of the African diaspora, with their mediocre efforts to change their subordinate position overseas. Emecheta's representation of African women's struggle against subordination through her character, Adah, shows their predicaments of sexism and racism. Unlike Aidoo and Emecheta, Mariama Bâ treats the

question of women in Senegal as a separate subject, without addressing issues of national importance in parallel with it.

The purpose of this brief review of African women's writing was to present the responses of some African women writers to their male-dominated communities. Although these women writers approach the question of women's emancipation differently, they present a challenge to the postcolonial nationalist narrative of emancipation by promoting women's liberation. In the next part, we will discuss "Afropean/Afropolitan" writers' constructions of hybrid African identities to challenge nationalist identity. Some of these writers such as Beyala and Tchak raise the question of women. The intersection of Afropeanism and gender is clear in Beyala's novel. Gender is one way of negotiating cultural and social identities in her novel. Tchak and Beyala challenge African nationalist identities through transgressive gender identities.

### **Immigration and "Afropolitanism" and "Afropeanism"**

The post-independence period did not turn out to be promising for many African nations, due to wars, poverty, economic hardships and precarious social conditions. These problems made many Africans think of immigration to escape the unstable condition of post-colonial nations. A massive wave of Africans immigrated to Europe and the United States in the late 1980s and 1990s, looking for better opportunities. Many African writers like Daniel Biyaoula, Fatou Diome, Bulawayo NoViolet, Chika Unigwe and other writers ended up settling in Western countries and imparted their perspectives on the theme of African immigration. These writers focus on the condition of African

subjects in Western societies. A condition shaped by the discourse of national identity and policies of immigration that exclude coloured populations, particularly blacks.

It is helpful to mention Edward Said's analysis of orientalist representations. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that Western discourse helped to conquer the non-Western cultures. It represented non-Europeans as the inferior, backward Other of Europe (5-6). As Said shows, orientalism defined European identity and civilization against the non-European ones. Western representations created binary structures of Self-Other and established hierarchies between cultures and value systems.

Miano and Selasi try to resolve binarism in nationalist identities. Miano and Selasi coined the terms "Afropolitan" (Selasi) and "Afropean" (Miano) for this purpose. While African nationalism seeks to revive native cultures to confront imperialism, "Afropolitanism" aims to challenge Western domination through cultural hybridity. According to Homi Bhabha's theorizing of hybridity, third space cultures escape Western stereotypes and dismantle the Western value system.

In *Habiter la frontière*, Miano refers to how French media poorly portray African people in France. Describing how a documentary on M6 channel titled *L'étonnante vie des africains de Paris* represents Africans in France, Miano writes, "Simplement, le regard porté sur elles [Africans represented in the documentary] était dégradant, le commentaire stupide et racoleur [...] ce qui donnait l'impression qu'il s'agissait d'une population composée d'êtres anormaux, farfelus et malfaisants par essence" (71). Besides these stereotypical representations, Miano points out another important issue, that Africans in France do not have access to the media to represent themselves (71). Commenting on how the French media receives her literary work about Africans in

France, Miano states, “Mes livres consacrés a la vie des Noirs de France reçoivent un accueil des plus tièdes, de la part des médias [...] Bref, on ne me reconnaît pas le droit, après vingt ans de résidence dans l’Hexagone, de m’exprimer sur ces questions” (73). In French literature written by white writers, Africans are absent, portrayed negatively, or as outsiders. Literature and the media are influential in imagining national identity. Miano’s collection of short stories *Afropean Souls et autres nouvelles* (2008) is an attempt to express the voices of marginalized subjects in France, particularly Africans. Vulnerability and despair color the stories of her African immigrant characters in France. Through these accounts in *Habiter la frontière*, Miano depicts “le terroir mental que se donnent ceux qui ne peuvent faire valoir la souche française” (86). Accounts of marginalized ethnicities challenge the ideals of the democracy and equality associated with the French Republic.

“Afropeanism” challenges French nationalist identity by blurring the distinctions between Self and Other, French and African. To contest the homogenizing discourse of identity in France, Miano uses hybridity. She portrays Africans in France with a dual identity belonging to both France and Africa. “Aujourd’hui,” Miano contends, “les Européens noirs refusent d’avoir à choisir entre leur part subsaharienne ou caribéenne, et leur part européenne. Ils souhaitent abriter en eux les deux, les chérir, voguer de l’une à l’autre, les mélanger sans les hiérarchiser. C’est dans cet entre-deux qu’ils sont à l’aise, complets, épanouis” (84). This form of relational identities interrupts French nationalism and re-invents national identity beyond color and geography. Through constructions of Africans in France as cultural hybrids, Miano shifts their position from outsiders to insiders vis-à-vis French society and culture. In *Habiter la frontière*, Miano criticizes the

structures and institutions that bar Africans in France from self-expression. She views that Africans in France “ne maitris[ent] [pas leur] proper image, puisqu’elle est fabriquee par d’autres” (71). When Miano writes “[ê]tre Noir en France aujourd’hui, c’est avant tout être dans une situation d’impouvoir,” (71) she means that that they are not in a position to define themselves as belonging to France.

Likewise, Selasi’s representation of “Afropolitans” in her essay “Bye-bye Babar” (2005) challenges Western stereotypes about African people. She states, “For us, being African must *mean* something, the media’s portrayals (war, hunger) won’t do. Neither will the New World trope of bungling, blue-black doctor [...] [T]he modern adolescent African is tasked to forge a sense of self from wildly disparate sources” (529). Like Miano, Selasi understands African identities as transnational and uses the term “Afropolitan” to assert Afrodiaspora’s experience of striding multiple cultures and homes. Selasi describes “Afropolitans” as Afrodiasporic subjects who “belong to no single geography but feel at home in many [...] Some of us are ethnic mixes [...] others merely cultural mutts [...] Most of us are multilingual” (528). Selasi’s answer to the question of what is an “Afropolitan” is not categorical. It challenges defining Afropolitans based on colour only. As portrayed by Selasi, Afropolitans are transcultural, transnational, transethnic and multilingual. Their cultural identities only make sense in relation to their diverse and mixed backgrounds. In Selasi’s novel, *Ghana Must Go*, “Afropolitan” identities take shape through mobility and relations with places, cultures and people. This transnational approach to African identities contests representations of Africans as the Other of the West. Besides, the writer portrays the Sai children in the novel as well-educated, artists, surgeons, and dancers, which challenges representations

of Africans in Western literature and media. Above all, Selasi describes Afropolitans as subjects who feel at home in the West. This representation subverts binary definitions of identities and belonging, although it focuses on the experiences and lives of a privileged class of Afrodiaspora.

“Afropean” and “Afropolitan” writers discuss racial and geographical identities as problematic. In *L’impasse* (1996), Daniel Biyaoula calls Afrocentric identity into question by showing how the protagonist does not identify with his fellow Africans in France. The author illustrates that African identity transcends ethnicity, race, and geography. In the airport, the protagonist, Joseph, criticizes the way his fellow Africans dress to impress their relatives and friends at home. He views Africans as his Other. Biyaoula’s protagonist reminds us of Glissant saying in *The Poetics of Relation* that “the Other is within us and affects how we evolve as well as the bulk of our conceptions and the development of our sensibility” (27). Joseph’s diasporic experience has shaped his perception of identity, and his relation to the Western Other makes him rethink his belonging and identity. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) explores the question of race in the United States. She shows through many examples that race is a construct in a predominantly white society such as the United States. The protagonist, Ifemelu, goes through a learning curve in the United States. As the protagonist shows, in Africa people are unaware of their distinct race. Race becomes a problem only when they move to the West. I have used these two writers as examples to show how some African writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries questioned identity. As we have already noted, “Afropolitan” “Afropean” writers deal with identities not as transparent or “real,” as atavistic African writers do, but as discursive representations.

Approaching identity as a discursive production enables “Afropolitan/Afropean” writers to invent alternative identities to the national and racial ones.

Bhabha’s theorization of hybridity helps explain how “Afropolitan/Afropean” identities are subversive of nationalism. For Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, political action is not restricted to protest and opposition but involves hybridity as a mode of writing identities, cultures and histories (22). As Bhabha emphasizes, antagonistic reactions to Western imperialism reiterated instead of resolving Western binary oppositions. He explains “political action” in relation to writing, “The ‘true’ is always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process of emergence itself [...] It is in this sense that the historical moment of political action must be thought of as part of the history of the form of its writing” (22-23). By constructing third space cultures, “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers use the same concept of “political action” developed by Bhabha. Biyaoula interrogates Afrocentric identity through his protagonist, Joseph, who distances himself from his fellow Africans at the airport. Through Joseph, Biyaoula shows the mind-set of some Africans in France who dress to impress their families and friends in Africa. Joseph does not sympathize with his fellows’ practice. Through this example, Biyaoula shows how some Africans take part in perpetuating stereotypes about France. Africans in the West who impress their people in Africa with fashion reinforce an ideal notion of France. Biyaoula challenges such essentialist perceptions through Joseph.

In *We Need New Names*, NoViolet Bulawayo questions binary identities. Darling, the protagonist, and her friends meet a white woman in a neighbourhood called Budapest. Godknows asks the lady where she is from, and she tells them that she is from London

and that she is visiting her Dad's country, Zimbabwe. Bulawayo's investigation of identity reminds us of Mbembe's question of what it means to be African in his essay "Afropolitanism". "For many," he contends, "to be 'African' is to be 'black' and therefore not 'white', with the degree of authenticity being measured on the scale of raw racial difference" (26). Here Mbembe tries to destabilize the meaning of African identity by going beyond colour or race. Likewise, Bulawayo questions Afrocentric identity by showing how Darling sympathizes with the white couple when attacked by the freedom fighters. Through this scene, Bulawayo demonstrates how race-based identity embodies violence.

Another effort by the author to blur binaries of Self-Other is through Darling's Othering of the white woman. Darling imagines the white woman as if "a caged animal" (10). Darling and her friends have a certain expectation of what an "English" woman should look like, and the white woman does not live up to their expectations. Darling's description of the woman illustrates the disappointment: "With her hair all wild like that, and standing on the other side of the gate with its lock and bars, the woman looks like a caged animal. I begin thinking what I would do if she actually jumped out and came after us" (10). What is interesting about this portrayal is that Darling indulges herself in imagining the white woman as animalistic and barbarian. This returned look/imagination of the colonizer by Darling undoes the structure of meanings (white-black, African-Western) and hierarchies embedded in Western discourse.

The readings of these novels show how some "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" writers question African and Western identities. Their approach to decolonization differs from that followed by atavistic writers. Atavistic writers depend on binaries of Self-Other, and

“Afropolitan/Afropean” writers seek to undermine binarism through hybridity. In “African Modes of Self Writing”, Mbembe writes concerning the attempts to transcend the rhetoric of emancipation and atavism in the twentieth century: “[T]here are the efforts to deconstruct tradition (and thereby Africa itself) by showing the latter to have been invented. From this point of view, Africa as such exists only on the basis of the text that constructs it as the Other’s fiction” (257). This mode of self-writing is adopted by “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” writers who seek to challenge the notion of Africa as the Other of the West through literary accounts of African cosmopolitanism and hybridity.

Discussions of the efficiency of hybridity to decolonize representations were generated by postcolonial critics such as Aijaz Ahmad (2016) and Benita Parry (2004). Ahmad dismisses Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and considers it to be inefficient as a theory of resistance. In “The Politics of Literary Post-Coloniality”, Ahmad also raises another important problem with Bhabha’s theory related to its homogenization of hybridity. Ahmad believes that Bhabha fails to address the social and political circumstances that may divide postcolonial subjects regardless of their hybrid identities. He states, “In Bhabha’s writing, the post-colonial who has access to such monumental and global pleasures is remarkably free of gender, class, identifiable political location” (13). Ahmad’s critique goes beyond culture to other areas of material and economic (dis)empowerment for the cosmopolitan postcolonial subject. Benita Parry provides a more nuanced reading of Bhabha’s understanding. In “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse”, Parry acknowledges the productivity of such reading/textual strategies in recuperating postcolonial subaltern voices when she states, “For Bhabha, the subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonialist text recover a native voice” (24).

Yet, Parry comments on the limits of theories of colonial discourse analysis by postcolonial critics. Like Ahmed, she believes that discursive practices of postcolonial writers and critics exclude the economic and social aspects, the things external to them. The limits of discourse analysis, she argues, are caused by “an exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis” (26).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter describes how “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers differ from atavistic writers regarding criticism of Western discourse. The comparison shows that the two “generations” of writers approach decolonization of African representations in different ways. We have seen that “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers break with pan-Africanism and Négritude and deploy hybridity and transnationalism as modes of representing African cultural identities. “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” identities undermine the binary oppositions invented by nationalist discourses.

The following chapters are textual analyses of a selection of “Afropean” and “Afropolitan” novels to explore the efforts of the authors to redefine African identities. We will see through the analysis that the novels privilege dialogue between African and Western cultures. The next chapter is a textual analysis of Calixthe Beyala’s *Le petit prince de Belleville* and Sami Tchak’s *Place des fêtes*. The focus will be on the impact of displacement on African nationalist identities embodied by the figure of the father. I will show that the fragmentation of the African subject occurs through dialogue with French culture, lifestyle, and laws.

## **Chapter 2: “Afropeanism” in Calixthe Beyala’s *Le petit prince de Belleville* and Sami Tchak’s *Place des fetes*.**

In the previous chapter, I clarified that “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” writers have a different approach to African decolonization from Négritude or anti-colonial writers. This chapter explores how Calixthe Beyala and Sami Tchak as “Afropean” writers represent African identities by blurring the distinctions between French and African. The writers problematize African nationalist identity through the African diaspora in France as a community that challenges essentialism. They show that while the fathers presented in each novel develop a victim mentality and an atavistic identity, the wives and the children forge more flexible social identities in order to integrate into French society. The wives and children challenge not only cultural homogeneity imposed by the figure of the father but also the notion of a monolithic French identity. As postcolonial texts, Tchak’s and Beyala’s novels reinvent social/cultural identities for African subjects that contest national identity. They *write back* to “francophonie” as a French ideology and institution that legitimates “assimilat[ion] [of] the “francophone” [Other] into a single homogenized totality” (Corcoran 11).

*Le petit prince de Belleville* (1992), written by Cameroonian writer Calixthe Beyala, is her first novel set in Paris. Beyala is a controversial writer and figure in France; she won many literary awards but also faced allegations of plagiarism in some of her literary works (Hitchcott 212). *Le petit prince de Belleville* is about seven-year-old Loukoum, the narrator of the daily life of his African community in Paris. As Loukoum grows up, he learns about the adult world of his community in Belleville and also learns about racism and marginalization toward his people. As the main character grows up and goes to

school in Paris, his relationship with his father becomes troubled, and the gap between them widens.

*Place des fêtes* (2001) is by Togolese writer Sami Tchak. The novel features an angry narrator and protagonist. We do not know the name of the narrator, but we know his gender. His parents were born in an African country and moved to France. He was born in France. He is an angry youth, angry at his father, angry at his mother whom he loves, angry about racism, discrimination, and social exclusion. To express his anger, the narrator uses swear words and inappropriate sexual language. The narrator has conflicts with his father, who has a traditional mindset and wants to return to his native village to die there, eventually. The son, in contrast, believes he belongs in France despite the racism and exclusion.

These novels serve the purpose of showing how “Afropean” identities construct French culture/France as the center. Besides, the writers discuss cultural identities across the generations of parents and children, which to some extent echo the comparison of cultural constructions by writers of the 1950s and 1960s on the one hand, and “Afropean” writers in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, on the other.

### **Nationalism, Gender and Immigration**

An examination of social/cultural identities across gender highlights how *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes* complicate the struggles of African women through their encounter with their subordination by African men and exclusion by the French society. The women in both novels resist patriarchy within their African communities in France and develop ideas of emancipation and equality. I will show how

the writers challenge the narrative of an African national struggle against Western domination through representations of subversive African women who reject being subordinated by men. This interpretation shows an ambivalent position of these writers regarding French culture and language. The writers use French language and foreground French culture as a culture of women's rights and liberation, yet they assert their difference from the French center by using literary and cultural/social and language forms that challenge assimilation to French cultural and literary institutions.

Difference is important for the relationship of French culture with its formerly colonized subjects because it maintains French supremacy and legitimates control of francophone cultures. Patrick Corcoran gives a good description of this ambivalent situation: "The homogenising discourse of official *francophonie* appears to co-exist alongside a conception of the 'francophone' individual as irreducibly Other" (10). This tension between French culture and francophone cultures is evident in the writers' efforts to assert their difference by articulating in-between identities and using the novel as a literary form to challenge the official definition of French identity and literature.

Ayo Coly (2010) expresses a somewhat dissonant view of the representation of women's relationships with the African nation in African migrant women's literature in French. Through her reading of literary works by Calixthe Beyala, Ken Bugul, and Fatou Diome, Coly "tells a feminist counterstory to the postnationalist interpretive narrative in Francophone African literary criticism by bringing gender to bear on the theorizations of Francophone African migrant texts" (xiii). She shows that women subjects have a more complex relationship to the native home than some African literary criticism in French has suggested. She states that "the geographies of home that Francophone African

migrant women construct with their works are in constant negotiation with nationalist discourse of home, [and] my book contends that home remains an emotionally, politically, and ideologically loaded matter for postcolonial subjects” (xiv). The story told by Coly about African migrant women counters the interpretations made by some critics through their analysis of a “male-dominated Francophone African migrant corpus” (xiv) that focus on post-nationalist identities and their disconnectedness from their African homes.

However, in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes*, the women dismiss the postcolonial homes as oppressive places. For instance, Soumana in *Le petit prince de Belleville* tells stories about her mother who is ill-treated by her father in Mali. Also, the narrator’s mother in *Place des fêtes* tells him about under-age sexual promiscuity and social precariousness in Africa. In contrast, the fathers cherish their native homelands as a place to which they want to return eventually. This suggests that the postcolonial home has different meanings for men and women. It may be an emancipatory notion for these men but not for the women. The women are uncertain about the postcolonial nation being an emancipatory option where they could be free from the power of their male compatriots. For them, the postcolonial home is embedded in an ideology that legitimizes their subordination by men. This is clear with Soumana who rejects the way men use religion to control women.

In *Le petit prince de Belleville*, Soumana is one of the outspoken women's voices that rejects gender inequality and criticizes Malian traditions for legitimizing such practices. Soumana is Abdou’s second wife, and she lives with her children and Abdou’s first wife, M’am, in the same apartment. She is an illegal immigrant in France and her children are

officially registered as M'am's children, who is a citizen of France. When Soumana learns about Abdou's affair with a young French girl, she gets angry and asks M'am, "Pourquoi qu'il permet les choses comme ça, le bon Dieu?" (66). Soumana asks why the Muslim God allows such things to happen to women.

Also, Soumana criticizes M'am for keeping calm as Abdou disrespects her. For Soumana, M'am has the traditional mindset of the women in Mali who are submissive to their husbands. She says to her, "Ben j' vai te dire, tu me fais penser à ma mère. Toujours a la botte de mon père. Inch Allah a tout c'qu'il dit. Et elle lui répond jamais. Elle se défend jamais" (54). In this description, Soumana speaks from her position in France, which shapes her cultural identity. Through Glissant's principles of "errantry" and "Relation", we understand better Soumana as an African migrant subject and how this situation helps to transform her ideas. The notion of errantry—"the thought of what is relative" (18)—"emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities" (18). Movement into a new society or culture "when (...) experienced as a search of the Other" (18) challenges absolute identities. Soumana's dispute with gender inequality in her African community is enabled by the view that cultural identities are relational. This way of thinking allows Soumana to move between cultures and gives her a unique perspective on her identity. Cultural forms expressed through Glissant's "Relation" are subversive of national identities that privilege roots.

These representations evoke Beyala's position as a Cameroonian writer based in France and who represents in her literary work African women voices that challenge African nationalist narratives. In *Imperial Leather* (1995), Anne McClintock suggests that nationalist narratives depend so much on constructions of gender identities and roles.

She states, “Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation” (354). Beyala represents African women in France as uncertain about their symbolic role to protect African traditional values. As a representation, it fits into the French ideology of assimilation. This interpretation is in line with Beyala’s relationship to French culture and identity, who asserts her “French” identity through her strong relationship with French cultural institutions<sup>15</sup>.

To show how the postcolonial nation/home is pulled apart by dissenting women's voices, we need to focus on the relationship between the nation and the family as described by McClintock. McClintock writes, “[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space” (357). Accordingly, the family is an important metaphor that gives nationalism a model of unity, hierarchy and homogeneity (357). Beyala enables the voices of Soumana, M’am, and Aminata, the main character’s actual mother, who works as a dancer at a nightclub. And through these voices, Beyala disrupts the unity and homogeneity embedded in African nationalist discourse.

However, Beyala portrays the Malian traditional family as a form that challenges the mainstream monogamous type of French family. Abdou is polygamous. He has two wives, and the entire family lives in the same place. The women help each other raise the children. M’am, the elder wife, helps raise Soumana’s children and Loukoum, Aminata’s and Abdou’s son out of wedlock. Also, Abdou and Esther, a French girl, expect a newborn out of wedlock. During her pregnancy, Esther comes to live with Abdou’s family and M’am takes care of her. In representing an alternative to the mainstream

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this topic, see Calixthe Beyala’s *Lettre d’une Afro-française à ses compatriotes* (2000), an essay in which she reacts against racism in France. It is important to underline that in “Beyala’s chosen identity tag (...) ‘Afro-française’ (...) Afro-French appears to foreground French rather than African identity” (Hitchcott 89).

family form, Beyala portrays diverse social and cultural experiences that counter the monolithic discourse of French identity that excludes ethnic diversity. Yet, she also shows how some women characters negotiate polygamy within their African community and across cultures through Western feminism and French legislation. The articulation of the ambivalence of these women characters about polygamy counters the notion of a monolithic French society.

In *Le petit prince de Belleville*, Beyala shows that religion (Islam) and nationalism play an important role in legitimizing polygamy, and we see how this traditional arrangement of gender relations serves resistance to French cultural domination. But Beyala also portrays ambivalent performances of polygamy by Abdou's wives. For instance, M'am accepts Abdou's marriage with Soumana although it hurts her emotions, which suggests M'am's in-between position vis-à-vis polygamy. M'am is in a similar position in relation to polygamy as Ramatoulaye, the main character in *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Bâ. According to Obioma Nnaemeka, "Ramatoulaye remains ambivalent about polygamy. She does not walk away from it (...) even as she accepts to remain in it, she is aware of and deeply concerned about its subversion (conjugal responsibility, respect for hierarchy among wives, etc.)" (180). M'am is also sometimes concerned about the subversion of polygamy and seems to endorse it, although it upsets her that Abdou goes after other women. Similarly, Soumana takes for granted polygamy as an institution, only she is upset that Abdou engages in casual sexual affairs with women. To draw his attention to her, Soumana wears make-up and pants like a young French woman. Beyala's ambivalent approach to the practice of polygamy is subversive.

It challenges the French social forms. And in renegotiating normative gender roles, Beyala destabilizes Abdou's authority as a patriarch.

Beyala also portrays the influence of Western feminism on African women's negotiation of gender identities and women's rights. Madame Saddock, a white French feminist woman, who meets Soumana and M'am. Saddock shapes their ideas regarding the struggle for equality with men, as shown in the following conversation:

- C'est inadmissible, qu'elle fait. Intolérable! Il faut vous battre! Moi je vais pas le faire à votre place.
- C'est vrai ça, dit la Soumana. J'en ai marre!
- Alors, qu'est-ce que t'attends? Que ta vie soit par terre? ...
- J'en peux plus, elle dit. Cet homme, c'est la mauvaise graine. Il pourrait tout. (Beyala 84)

This dialogue exemplifies the domination of third-world women by Western feminist theory, "a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty 333). Mohanty warns that the universalist claims of Western feminist theory risk homogenizing third-world women, in which case Western theory advances "the assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions" (337). Beyala challenges this imperialist assumption embedded in Western feminist theory. French feminism essentializes the struggle of women. It presents the struggle of French women as a universal model for third-world women.

The critical lens of Western feminism does not allow us to analyze properly Beyala's women characters. While they are subordinated by their patriarchal partners, they are also ethnic minorities in France, and their different social situations shape the ways they cope

with their subaltern conditions. In this respect, Beyala asserts the differences that mark the third-world women's struggle for gender equality by underlining "other distinctive features to leave an impression markedly different from that of feminist works" (Ogunyemi 65). The French authorities deport Soumana to her native country at the end of the story. The effort by the writer to highlight the social vulnerability of ethnic minorities in France is essential to contesting the homogenizing knowledge by which Western theory dominates postcolonial subjects. Glissant lucidly describes the Western imperial tendency to dominate the Other through assimilating it into the Western experience and knowledge. Criticizing Western myths, Glissant writes, "[N]o matter how opaque the other is for oneself (no myth ever provides for the legitimacy of the other), it will always be a question of reducing this other to the transparency experienced by oneself" (49). But Beyala provides a counter-account to the Western myth of universality by emphasizing the difference of the Western African subaltern woman. Beyala illustrates that the situation of African women is not transparent to Western women activists but challenges their understanding of the complicated struggle of third-world women for equality with men. Mathilda is an enlightening example in this respect. She sleeps with a police officer in return for releasing members of her community from the police station. It disappoints Mathilda that her husband, Kouam, does not protest when the community agrees that she goes to the police officer. Mathilda leaves her husband because she rejects being mistreated by him. She says to M'am, "Depuis qu'on est maries, il n'a qu'une chose dans la tête, c'est de me forcer à lui obéir" (Beyala 136). Through Mathilda's situation, Beyala offers a nuanced account of the situation of an African woman who meets the expectations of her African community and demands to be

free of male domination, a complicated situation that resists the transparency with which Western theory approaches African feminism.

Mathilda, Soumana, and M'am subvert Malian gender identities through their aspirations for emancipation from men's domination. As a result, they destabilize Abdou's power. When Loukoum says, "il n'est vraiment plus le même," (245) he means that Abdou behaves in an atypical manner. "il aide M'am à cuisine le dimanche. Ensuite, il l'emmène promener au jardin (...) il a même ramené des fleurs à M'am," says Loukoum (245). By contrast, Loukoum says, "M'am, ça [Abdou] l'intéresse pas. On dirait que c'est elle qui le voit plus (...) Elle met des pantalons (...) avec des sandales assorties (...) elle aimerait bien apprendre à nager ou aller danser. Alors, mon papa s'inquiète" (245). To blur social identities undermines construction of traditional gender roles in nationalist discourse. Through performance of social identities by these women, we realize that what we believe to be normative identities are cultural constructions that can be challenged through performance of different cultural forms. Beyala exposes the constructedness of cultural identities by showing that their performance in the context of immigration reveals inconsistency, heterogeneity, and hybridity. As Bhabha writes, "The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside" (147-148). Abdou's reconsideration of traditional Malian gender roles illustrates how the "performative" challenges the homogeneity of nationalist discourse.

The new cultural and social identities performed by these women disturb the idea of nations as "imagined communities". Abdou's letters to his white French friend show that

the influence of French culture on his family challenge Abdou's cultural nationalism. He writes to his friend, "La femme a changé. Je vois des théories descendre l'escalier de la raison, apporter du vent pour convertir la passe en monuments d'échos. Qui donc habite ces théories? La femme est l'égale de l'homme" (150). This "tragic" event in Abdou's life stems from dialogue with Western culture, which threatens the consistency and perpetuity of traditional forms of culture. Abdou expresses this idea by saying, "L'époque a choisi ma fin" (231). Glissant makes a relevant statement to Abdou's predicament when he writes, "[e]ngendering tragedy, it is illegitimacy that threatens the community by leading toward its dissolution. Tragic action, the art of opacity and disclosure, resolves this dissolution in the quest for legitimacy and its reestablishment" (52). "Opacity" and "disclosure" describe Abdou's situation accurately, for he is alienated by his wives' subversive actions and realizes how being culturally in-between threatens the legitimacy of his nationalist narrative.

Beyala combines a variety of literary forms in her novel, such as poetic prose form, intertextuality, and epistolary genre. Abdou's letters make up the inter-text of Negritude ideology that Beyala challenges through cultural hybridity. Beyala uses poetic prose for Abdou's letters, reflecting the genre's popularity among the Négritude poets. The mixing of multiple forms and genres is a strategy that challenges the novel as a Western canonical literary form. A key feature of postcolonial texts, Ashcroft et al. argue, is their involvement in contesting European "cultural hegemony [that] has been maintained through canonical assumptions about literary activity" (7). Challenging the Western literary canon is part and parcel of postcolonial writers' effort to interrogate essentialist cultural and literary forms. The process suggests that postcolonial writers dismiss

oppositional notions of “us” and “them” in labels like “French” as opposed to “francophone” literatures. In “Stratégies rhétoriques du discours décentré”, Michel Laronde uses the term “discours décentré” to refer to literary texts such as Beyala’s *Le petit prince de Belleville*, that mimic the French literary canon. He writes, “Le discours ‘décentré’ a pour support tout Texte qui, par rapport à une Langue commune et une Culture centripète, maintient des décalages idéologiques et linguistiques”(Limag.com). “Le discours décentré” refers to a (literary) text by a migrant writer that resists canonical concepts and forms. One way of understanding “décalages idéologiques” is to look at how writers like Beyala construct “Afropean” identities as in-between cultural identities that subvert the notion of a homogenous French identity.

Yet, in writing about “Afropean” identities in *Le petit prince de Belleville*, Beyala shows how she perceives her relationship to French literary and cultural institutions. On the one hand, Beyala’s literary works, particularly this one, are popular in France, and the *Académie française*, which is an important literary and cultural institution in France, has awarded her a prestigious prize. What these facts suggest about Beyala is that the dominant literary standards of France categorize her as an insider to the literary world of Paris, which is an ideologically problematic relationship for a postcolonial writer who now appears allied with a literary institution that culturally controls non-white French writers. In “Calixthe Beyala and the Post-colonial Woman”, Nicki Hitchcott recalls the French colonial mission and its reliance on cultural assimilation, describing the relationship between postcolonial literature and the literary center of Paris as neo-colonial. Hitchcott writes, “[I]terary incorporation denies cultural difference and suggests a neo-colonization of post-colonial writing” (214). Yet Beyala’s novel shows the

writer's attempts to challenge the French literary canon and to negotiate subversive cultural identities. These procedures contest the constructions of a national literature and identity that exclude the Other.

How *Le petit prince de Belleville* ends shows Beyala's stance regarding cultural assimilation in France. The denouement of the novel shows Abdou as dominated and defeated by the culture and laws that regulate French society. The court sentences Abdou to prison for misappropriating social assistance benefits. When released, he compromises his authority as a family patriarch. M'am and Loukoum recruit him in their small business. To be precise, he is assimilated into the French social regime. As we know, assimilation extends French colonial ideology. It promotes the postcolonial subjects' internalization of French cultural standards as a crucial criterion for being regarded and treated as a citizen with equal rights. Although Beyala challenges French national identity as defined by race, she foregrounds French culture through the characters' adjustments to and negotiations of French social values—a situation that shows their assimilation of some French cultural norms.

Likewise, Sami Tchak's *Place des fêtes* shows the impact of African women's emancipation on the narrative of an African national struggle against the West. Tchak represents the waning influence of the father as an authority in the household and uses this figure as a metaphor for African cultural nationalism. In the novel, the narrator's mother redefines her social identity beyond the traditional gender identity that the narrator's father imposes on her. The father wants his wife to be submissive and to maintain the native cultural values. But Tchak challenges the identity that cultural nationalism shapes for women by representing the narrator's mother performing a

subversive social identity. The narrator says, “Il [father] a peur de ton autonomie financière. Mais, tout fut vain, tu eus cette autonomie” (85). This statement suggests that the protagonist’s mother struggles to free herself from subordination by her patriarchal husband, not from Western culture. While the woman reinvents herself in a Western cultural and social context to integrate into the social and economic life, the man tries to resist French cultural domination by curbing his wife’s freedom. The narrator says, “Enfermée par papa qui ne voulait pas que tu eusses des amies, mauvaises langues qui te conduiraient vers la mauvaise émancipation. Enfermée, battue, exploitée (...)” (85). This situation evokes Gayatri Spivak’s question “can the subaltern woman speak?” while being dominated by the colonizer and the native traditions. Spivak asks how “to give the subaltern [woman] a voice in history” (92). By comparison, Beyala and Tchak adopt different novel forms that we can link to Spivak’s question. Tchak’s *Place des fêtes* uses a monologic novel form in which the authorial voice dominates in interpreting the themes and ideas in the novel. Consequently, we see one dimension of the women’s struggle for emancipation represented by the protagonist’s mother. Beyala’s novel follows a dialogic form<sup>16</sup>, which engages multiple voices and social worlds that discuss the social realities and problems from different positions. In Beyala’s novel, there are nuances to the issues of women’s struggle that correspond to the social positions from which the women characters negotiate their struggles.

Tchak’s depiction of a rebellious African woman subverts a homogenous national identity. To illustrate this concept, he describes a household divided over the question of

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<sup>16</sup> Monologic and dialogic forms of the novel are discussed by M. M. Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (90).

identity and belonging. He shows that the renegotiation of social identities in the context of migration has a visible impact on homogenous constructions of national culture. Its impact is clear on the narrator's father. The new arrangements and meanings of gender and sexuality disturb the father's masculinity. The narrator says, "Maman, tu as vaincu papa, tu l'as humilié sur le ring des sexes" (85). This quote suggests that sexual identities/roles can also be reversed. While the father is impotent, the wife is insatiable and promiscuous. We come to understand that the trouble with the father's sexual impotence is his displacement to a social space that disturbs his normative performance of gender identity. As Judith Butler argues in "Critically Queer", gender and sexuality are cultural representations and social performances. The binary gender and sexual identities forged in the protagonist's parents' culture are interrupted by the construction of social identities in France. What this suggests is that social constructions can do things to individuals; they can shape them to think and behave in specific manners. Hence, the impact of different gender and sexual constructions on Tchak's patriarchal character is a loss of sexual vigour. As the mother disrupts normative gender roles, the narrator's father loses his sense of masculinity. Through the representation of gender as performance, Tchak challenges essentialist cultural and social identities.

The narrator's mother tells him negative stories about Africa, subversive versions of the stories told by his father. Her story challenges the father's moral account of his native village. We know how important the binaries of good-evil, African-Western are for anti-imperialism. Yet these cultural and moral dualisms are undermined by the woman's story of Africa. The narrator/protagonist mentions to his father, "Tu sais, maman m'as tout raconté. Le village, ce n'est pas le bastion des valeurs que les gents appellent

traditionnelles. Les femmes, même au village, elles ont le derrière assez chaud, elles ont des amants, elles commencent à brûler des fesses avant d'avoir perdu leurs dents de lait” (63). Regarding multiple stories, Derrida argues that “[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum” (231). Narratives of postcolonial home are suspended and Africa as a signification is de-centred, multiplied, and interrogated through the story told by the narrator’s mother.

It is essential to recall that “Afropean” writers reject nationalist identities by blurring cultural borders between Africa and the West. “Afropean” writers do not seek to construct reversed nationalist identities to oppose Western domination. By telling counter-stories about home, women undermine the homogenizing patriarchal narrative of the nation. Women’s stories of home in *Le petit prince de Belleville* show how biased Abdou’s glorified memories of his native village are. Soumana describes her mother being ill-treated by her father, which counters Abdou’s narrative of home. Such stories suggest that while Mali is a place of relief for Abdou, it is not for Soumana and other women. Also, identity as performance challenges nationalist identities. The novels show that in the context of migration, African women perform new cultural forms that enable hybridity and diversity of the nation.

In this section, I showed that Beyala and Tchak represent a fragmented African subject in their novels. This representation challenges African nationalist identity through women’s agency to resist dominant male nationalists. This approach allows the authors to contest homogenous concepts of African identities. Using pan-Africanism and Négritude as an inter-text serves to interrogate essentialist national identities. In the following part, I will continue to explore the theme of fragmentation of the African subject by focusing on

the cultural and ideological gap between the parents (the father) and their children. The following section will stress the writers' transnational approach to African identities to undermine nationalist identities.

### **Roots and Routes**

In *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes*, the fathers look to their cultural roots in Africa while their children have turned their backs on their African cultural ties and want to integrate into French society. This divergence in outlooks between parent and descendant shows that African children in France are unlikely to identify with one culture. In this part, I further discuss how a homogenous African subject disintegrates through the performances of alternative cultural forms carried out by youth. By articulating their cultural identities through a third-space, the sons challenge the atavistic nationalist identities held by the fathers.

We can distinguish between two conflicting types of identities that mark this generational difference. One of them privileges reproducing identical cultural identities and it imagines the African diaspora members as a homogenous community—through notions of lineage, nationality, ethnicity, and traditions. The fathers in the novels adopt this concept of identity through their return to ancestral cultures. The other kind follows relationships between cultures as essential to identity formations. This model reflects the principle of the rhizome<sup>17</sup> which counters the notion of roots and genealogy held by the fathers. Loukoum in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and the protagonist of *Place des fêtes*

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<sup>17</sup> The rhizome, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, involves the “principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order [...] The rhizome is an anti-genealogy” (7-11).

articulate this rhizomatic line of identities. The protagonists reject a monolithic national identity and instead reinvent relational identities that straddle Africa and France.

The positions of Abdou in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and the protagonist's father in *Place des fêtes* are what Glissant (1989) describes as "The obsession with a single origin," which is an atavistic form of identity that "consecrate[s] permanence and neglect[s] contact" (16). From the perspective of the fathers, the exclusion of ethnic minorities in France leads them to blame the French state for their suffering and to resist French cultural norms. In *Le petit prince de Belleville*, Abdou is resentful because France does not value his sacrifice for it in World War II. But Abdou is proud of his war medals, which he wears every weekend, as Loukoum writes in a letter to President Mitterrand. Beyala shows that although Abdou and other Africans have defended France in the war, they remain outsiders and France does not integrate their diversity into French societal norms. Through this situation, Beyala raises criticism of "Frenchness" as a racial or geographical identity instead of an identity gained through hard work as the ideology of assimilation claims. Leonora Miano also comments on how the national identity is imagined in France as a community of white citizens that excludes non-whites people. She writes "La nation [France] ne fonctionne que rarement sur le mode inclusif. Sa position naturelle est de dire : il y a nous, et il y a les autres" (84).

Tchak's protagonist, in contrast, criticizes his father for blaming France. He dismisses the attitude of some blacks who find excuses to explain their marginalized situation. "Je te dis, papa," says the protagonist, "que je sais que ma couleur est un problème, c'est clair et net, même sur le Net. Mais, je refuse de tout ramener, comme tu le fais, toi, au problème du racisme" (34). It is interesting how the marginalization of Africans in France

is perceived differently across the generations of parents and their children. The differences suggest that while the fathers look to their roots in the past, their children look to their future in France. The future of Africans in France is important to “Afropean” writers for re-defining French national identity. Miano argues that what Africans and Caribbeans want is “la reconnaissance d’une appartenance à l’Europe, mais surtout a celle du demain, celle dont l’histoire s’écrit en ce moment. C’est le refus d’une identité nationale réductrice et crispante. C’est l’unité dans la diversité” (86). This transnational approach to re-inventing French identity subverts the divisions of Self-Other/black-white that shape national identity in France.

Beyala raises a related discussion about French identity in her essay, *Lettre d’une Afro-française a ses compatriotes* (2000). In this essay, Beyala criticizes France for excluding ethnic minorities. She rejects policies that marginalize people of color and expresses her in-between hyphenated identity. Beyala re-defines African and French identities beyond color, which challenges dominant discourses on national identity. She contends, “Je suis plus française que vous. Je connais une plus grande partie de la culture française que 90% de mes compatriotes. Donc je suis immigrée ? Je ne pense pas [...] Je suis chez moi. C’est ma terre. Je l’aime” (20). Hyphenated identities “emphasize the incommensurable elements—the stubborn chunks—as the basis of cultural identifications,” Bhabha writes concerning the challenge hybridity poses for national identity (219). Likewise, Beyala challenges national identity as imagined through colour and autochthony by focusing on French as a shared culture. Beyala’s view, however, is problematic because while she criticizes domination based on colour, she does not question cultural domination.

In the novels, binary oppositions shape the fathers' perspectives. During conversations between father and son in *Place des fêtes*, they adopt different moral positions, which reveal what Africa and France mean to each of them. The father criticizes Europeans for exploiting Africans as he and his son watch a film documentary about the slave trade. He says to his son, “[R]egarde comment ces gens sont devenues les premiers du monde. En buvant notre sang, le sang de toute une race” (253). This statement highlights the different understandings of identity across the two generations. The father dwells in his self-victimization, returning often to Africa's history of slavery and colonialism as an explanation to Africans' wretched condition.

In *Le petit prince de Belleville*, exile leads Abdou to madness. “Je crois que je deviens fou,” he says (207). His mental disorder reveals itself as an external disturbance caused by estrangement and an inability to cope with exile. About exile and madness, Bennetta Jules-Rosette writes, “From Fanon through the writers of Parisianism, madness has been used as a metaphor for failed African assimilation” (189). His failed integration into French culture causes Abdou's predicament. “J'ai juste cherché la survie dans mes signes à moi,” Abdou says to his white friend (205). About the imagining of communities in Western myth, Glissant points to the latter's tendency to eliminate Otherness in society. “Either the other is assimilated, or else it is annihilated,” states Glissant in *The Poetics of Relation* (49). Abdou's faith is no different to this Other who cannot forge for themselves a relational identity to survive cultural domination. Glissant writes concerning this situation that “(the absolute exclusion of the other) cannot be faced head on nor all at once” (52). For this reason, Glissant promotes “Relation” as a principle that subverts domination by a major culture. Abdou supposes that he can resist cultural assimilation

and impose traditional culture on his wives and son. But the republican culture and legislation do not accommodate his differences.

Abdou's view is that cultures are separate and have an equivalent value in themselves. This proves to be an untenable idea in the novel since Abdou's wives and son challenge this concept of culture and reinvent themselves to adapt to life in France. That cultures are different and separate is an essentialist version of cultural pluralism that excludes "Relation" and "does not prevent the formation of hierarchies among civilizations" (Glissant 135). Glissant's idea that no culture escapes "Relation" applies to Abdou's denial of cultural contact. African intellectuals associated with Négritude and anti-colonialism construct African identity as essentialist, like Abdou. But as Glissant explains, they "ha[ve] colored even the concepts that contributed to challenging the domination of conquering cultures" (135). Glissant criticizes Négritude as an ideology that draws on the Western tradition of representing the West and its Other. Glissant also suggests that contact between cultures is unavoidable. He writes, "[W]hatever, defending a tradition, justifies Relation" (93), which echoes Abdou's defending of his cultural traditions. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall argues that identities are a production "always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). About Abdou's defending of his Malian roots, it is helpful to remember that his "[p]ractices of [self-]representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the positions of *enunciation*" (222). The historical and political background in which the Négritude thought emerged shows that Abdou's ideas about cultural identity are shaped by the same history. This idea problematizes Abdou's seeking of his African roots.

Beyala and Tchack challenge Négritude by complicating cultural identities. They present subjectivities that articulate identities through hybridity. The realities of Loukoum in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and the protagonist in *Place des fêtes* vary from those of their parents. Unlike their parents, Tchak's protagonist is born in France, and Loukoum moves with his parents at a very early age. For the young protagonists, France is home where they see their future. Tchak's protagonist describes this "Afropean" reality by saying, "Mais, est-ce que je vous ai dit que mes parents sont nés là-bas et que moi je suis né ici" (9). The writers challenge filiation—a term used by Glissant to refer to paternal connections—by disrupting its "fixed linearity of time (...) toward a projection, a project" (47). The fathers' intents to preserve community identity through lineage and race are challenged by the performances of hybrid identities by their sons. Pius Adesanmi describes the resentment of the father by his son in *Place des fêtes* as an emotion that stems from the son's rejection of his African roots. Adesanmi writes, "The quasi-Oedipal of the hero to the person of his father is also another indication of the abdication of the root motif. For his father represents Africa, a constant reminder of why his Frenchness will never be complete" (971). We can use Glissant to interpret the hostility to the figure of the father by the son as something "tragic" for the homogeneity and unity of community "when [the latter] feels that the chain of filiation has been broken" (52). The break of the chain of filiation in Beyala's novel leads to Abdou's madness. It is interesting the strategy through which the writers criticize nationalist identities. They mimic a Western notion of sacred, lineage-based community and portray how contact with the Other distorts the nation as an imagined community. It is also interesting how in Beyala's novel Abdou's madness coincides with the ultimate unfolding of Otherness in

the community through women and children. The bildungsroman is used by Beyala to convey this “chaos” of cultural diversity, contact, and mutation.

The return to the ancestral home is not an option for Tchak’s protagonist, who is a French-born African. Instead, he criticizes his father for entertaining the return of the entire family to Africa. He says, “[e]t maintenant, papa, tu me demandes, à moi, d’aller vivre là-bas? Mais, je rêve ou quoi? [...] Mai, je suis français, papa. Je suis français, même si je ne suis pas vraiment français, parce que ma peau ne colle pas avec mes papiers. Mais je sais que je ne suis pas de là-bas non plus, parce que je n’ai rien à voir vraiment avec là-bas” (22). Here, the protagonist asserts his belonging in France despite his colour, which is a subversive way of thinking beyond skin colour as a trait tied to national identity. Not only does this way of thinking disturb the father’s understanding of African identities, which for him are associated with blood and colour, but it redefines Frenchness as also black. In Bhabha’s terms, the family, which stands for the African “nation” in France, loses “its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside,” (148) for the issue is not that the Self and the Other are different, but that the African Self is hybrid and heterogeneous. It is this logic which undermines any absolute nationalist discourses by Africans or Europeans, as Tchak’s protagonist himself shows. The protagonist differentiates himself from his parents by using a language that refers to their location as the Other of France, such as “là-bas,” “chez lui”, and “chez eux,” to assert difference from, not similarity to his parents’ culture.

However, Tchak’s protagonist knows well that he is othered by the dominant white discourse in France. When he says that he is French, he knows that white French people see his colour and think he is an immigrant. This situation does not cause as much

anxiety for the protagonist as it does for his father. The son comes to terms with his being neither French nor African. He distinguishes between “patrie” and “nationality” to argue that his national identity is his choice. He says, “[j]e veux dire que la France, c’est mon pays natal, mais ce n’est pas ma patrie. Je veux dire que je n’ai pas vraiment de patrie [...] Une patrie, c’est autre chose que la nationalité, une patrie c’est dans le sang” (22). The protagonist shifts identity and belonging from ideologies of autochthony and race to freedom of choice and self-determination. He defines national identity as something that you can choose, rather than an ancestral inheritance or a question of birth, which is the difference between him and his father. The father identifies with his homeland in Africa—the land of his ancestors where he was born and grew up—and the son identifies with France as a nationality he chooses over an African one. He believes that “puisque je peux vivre ici aux yeux de la loi, je préfère faire comme si j’avais une patrie” (290). The son deploys an alternative concept of national identity that challenges his father’s notion that his identity is rooted in Africa.

Similarly, for Loukoum, living between two different worlds made it necessary for him to choose between them. To be sure, school is a crucial factor because it helps Loukoum’s assimilation into society. As Abdou complains, “[l]a culture c’est pour tous. De gré ou de force. Éducation obligatoire,” and he adds, “[d]’autre mots se forment contre les miens. L’argot des générations de ceux qui détiennent le savoir, la science” (7). We need to see this situation from the perspectives of both Loukoum and Abdou because the experience of school widens the gap between them. Loukoum’s school participates in his assimilation process. Modern education replaces the traditional teachings of the father. For the first time, he learns in school that unlike him, other children in France

have only one mother and that model of his family differs from the mainstream family and not the “right” thing. Likewise, in his learning process in school, Loukoum’s Malian culture and knowledge are questioned by French education.

For instance, Loukoum’s teacher is surprised to know that he cannot read or write French. “Qu’un garçon qui sait pas lire autre chose que le Coran, c’est honteux et contraire au mode de vie français,” his teacher rebukes him (8). Importantly, the teacher’s remark involves the construction of cultural difference and the making of ethnocentric judgments. The school simultaneously teaches Loukoum French culture and inculcates in his mind the inferiority of his traditional culture. Through school, Loukoum learns that they rank races and nationalities in contrast to what Abdou teaches him. We know that Abdou teaches Loukoum that African traditional culture is moral and, therefore, superior to the French culture. The school challenges Abdou’s moral imagination; Loukoum’s teacher describes the first world as developed and generous, and the third world as underdeveloped and helped by Europe. She says as she engages her white French students in a volunteering event to help students with learning difficulties, “[m]es enfants, nous allons faire quelque chose de special. Le monde est divisé en pays développés et en pays en voie de développement. Les pays industrialisés doivent aider les pays les plus pauvres [...] Je fais appel a votre générosité, à votre courage, à votre sens de la solidarité” (53). Through assimilation, Beyala reveals the trans-colonial relationships of France with Africans. The relationship of a civilized nation that helps uncivilized people. She shows that France tells its version of history with Africa. For a young child born in the post-independence era and growing up in France, this history starts not with

colonialism but with “[j]e fais appel a votre générosité, à votre courage, à votre sens de la solidarité” (53). It is an interpretation of French history from a single perspective.

Loukoum’s assimilation challenges the stability of Abdou’s culture since the French school replaces the father’s traditional teaching. Through school, Loukoum learns about himself and his African people. The school contradicts his father’s teaching about Africa and France. It also interrupts the continuum of Malian culture. Abdou complains, “Il impose d’autres conformismes. Il importe des goûts, des préoccupations. Il passe sans s’inquiéter d’un univers à l’autre. Le notre, il le juge, il le méprise” (206). The writer describes how Abdou’s family experiences division and diversity through contact with French culture.

Tchak also displays the divergent destinies of the father and the son by underlining their different histories. Their discrepant transnational or diasporic experiences are essential to take into account as we think about their identity formations, their (dis)engagement with and perception of the “host nation”, and their sense of belonging. The protagonist believes that he and his father have “sans doute pas la même histoire” (18), which refers to the father’s attachment to his original home in Africa and the son’s choice of France as home. The father calls his son “vendu,” meaning he sold himself to the French. He considers his son to be corrupt and immoral for turning his back to his ancestors and origins. The historical dissimilarities experienced by these two generations shape their different views of identity and belonging. Colonial and neo-colonial history is clear in the father’s resistance to French culture. The protagonist, in contrast, cannot see things from the perspective of the father, because the life that relates more to him is that of the rights, liberty, and success that he endeavours to get in France. What concerns him

most is the condition of civil rights in France and how to improve his social situation. Referring to the differences between the father and his son in discussing the African diaspora in France suggests that ties of blood and kinship are challenged by alternative self-adjusting forms of identity.

In this chapter, the goal was to show that in *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes*, the unity of African families is disrupted by the transnational/diasporic experiences. Although the family was our focal point in this chapter, it is a figure for the nation, as McClintock suggests in *Imperial Leather*, and there are many affinities between their structures. Beyala and Tchak offer an alternative representation of the African diasporic members and communities by highlighting hybridity and diversity as a pattern of identity formation. They criticize and break with the essentialist African self-writing that reduces African identities to race and geography. Yet, the writers foreground French identity as a central component in the discussion of contemporary African cultural identities.

Having examined “Afropeanism” through select novels in French in this chapter, I shall focus on textual analysis of representative African novels in English in the next chapter. I will investigate “Afropolitan” identities in *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi and *Open City* by Teju Cole.

### **Chapter 3: The Global: Home for a Stranger in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and Teju Cole's *Open City***

In the previous chapter, I analyzed *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fetes* to show the impact of Western culture and values on migrant Africans. I showed the writers' views that French cultural values shape the experiences of postcolonial African diasporas. African migrant subjects experience divisions and shifts in their identities and struggles for individual freedom. In this chapter, I continue to explore the question of cultural dialogue to show its construction in *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi and *Open City* by Teju Cole as an unbalanced relationship. I illustrate that the authors use a generalized, universal framework to describe home(lessness) that inadequately represents the realities of marginality among people of the African diaspora. For instance, the constructions of home(lessness) as a general condition of movement and fluid identities, symptomatic of (post)modernity, withhold the political, cultural, and social particularities of Afrodiasporic subjects. As constructions of home(lessness) transcend geographical locations, and the stranger is a metaphorical figure representing impossible closures of meanings and identities, it is likely to disregard postcolonial subjects who are made strangers by imperialism in the Global North.

The rootedness of home and culture in a geographical place is important for writers and artists who want to engage with the identity of their populations (Ojaide 3). Tanure Ojaide disagrees with some African writers who believe that literature should not be rooted in the culture of their communities. In *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed shows how postmodern discourse on home and belonging produces a universal, figurative perception of identities. Ahmed also suggests that a postmodern frame is incommensurate

with the discussion of racialized subaltern subjects. In contrast, Abiola Irele views that the use by African writers and artists of Western culture and theory enables African agency, instead of enabling a sense of cultural alienation. He argues, “We need [...] a new state of mind that will enable us to come to terms with our state of alienation and to transform it from a passive condition we confusedly endure into an active collective existential project” (601). Irele’s suggestion is in line with “Afropolitan” writers’ insight to re-invent African identities beyond the 1950s and 1960s African discourse of atavism and political emancipation. The ideas of these cultural and literary critics are opposite angles for approaching the literary representations of “Afropolitan” identities in *Ghana Must Go* and *Open City*. These critics provide theoretical frames to situate appropriately the novels between the effort of the writers to challenge stereotypical representations of Africans in the West, and the tendency to homogenize/globalize culture and literature. The writers generalize the experience of postcolonial African immigrants in the West as an experience of cultural cosmopolitanism. They focus on how their main characters interrogate fixed identities and meanings while playing down the historical and political realities shaping these same experiences.

Ahmed’s critique of the postmodernist approach to the concept of the stranger focuses on how postmodernism constructs a universal figure of the stranger as cut off from social and historical specificities. According to Ahmed, representations of the stranger by some Western postmodern critics such as Zygmunt Bauman and Bulent Diken celebrate the stranger as a figure that reminds us of our differences (4). But the trouble with such formulations, as Ahmed argues, is that they “take for granted the stranger’s status as a figure that contains or has meaning” (3). In other words, Ahmed’s concern is that

postmodern theory essentializes the stranger. The stranger as a subject with the privilege of mobility and competence to challenge essentialist identities is itself a narrow concept that overlooks the role of class, gender and race in shaping the stranger as a subaltern subject. Ahmed argues this concept of the stranger “functions to elide the substantive differences between ways of being displaced from ‘home’” (5). In Cole’s and Selasi’s novels, constructions of the postcolonial stranger, as an “Afropolitan” subject, focuses on fluidity of his/her thoughts and identities and plays down their status as ethnic/racial minorities in the West and what this situation entails. In “The Perils of a Culture-less African Literature”, Ojaide makes a similar point about contemporary African literature, in particular “African writers who write works that are not identifiably African in content and form” (12-13). Globalization (of literature), Ojaide argues, “is an effort to promote homogeneity that is Western and absorbs the once “Other” into the hegemonic West” (5). This critique applies to Cole’s and Selasi’s representations of “Afropolitan” subjects through a Western postmodern figure/concept of the stranger because as constructions they render characters less identifiably African.

Selasi’s and Cole’s descriptions of “stranger-to-oneself” as a universal experience bring about the question of world literature. These representations spell out world literature as an expression of universal human reality. In “What Is a World? On World Literature as a World-making activity,” Pheng Cheah raises a similar point regarding the dominant rendering of world literature as a process of book circulation and globalization of aesthetics. Cheah suggests that the literary marketplace globalizes world literature. He proposes a notion of world literature as an equal cultural exchange between national literatures to express their particular realities and cultures (28). The circulation and

marketing of literature help to explain why Selasi and Cole construct “home” and “identity” as general concepts. The writers’ global framework of free mobility and metropolitan lifestyle invites the question about the “single story”. Reinventing African identities in this way privileges the experiences and perspectives of Westernized middle-class Africans.

*Ghana Must Go* (2013) is Taiye Selasi’s debut novel. It tells the story of the Sai family, coming to terms with their father’s death. Kweku, the father, moves back to Ghana to live the rest of his life there. Kweku is a renowned surgeon in the U.S. After botching an operation, the hospital fires him. The family members meet in Ghana for their father’s funeral. In Ghana, tensions among family members come to a climax and lead to family reconciliation. The author uses a third-person narrator. Several Western reviewers praised the novel, and in 2013 it was nominated for the NAACP Image Award. This being said, many African commentators describe Selasi’s rendering of “Afropolitanism” as commodity-driven.

Accordingly, the return home to Ghana for Selasi is a journey to the new home in which reflection on self, one’s reality, and memories are of great significance for both Kweku, the father, and Fola, the mother. The entire family is scattered around the world—in London, the United States and Ghana. When the novel opens, both Kweku and Fola are in Ghana but live separately since their relationship has ended. They return for different reasons, as we come to know. Fola tries to come to terms with her broken relationship with Kweku. Kweku escapes from the shame of being fired from his position as a surgeon in Boston. But, as Stuart Hall states in “Minimal Selves”, “[m]igration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back to” (44). It is especially so for Fola because

she returns to Ghana, not to her native Nigeria. While in Ghana, she brings back her past memories, and she evokes her Scottish-Yoruba origins and the death of her father in the Nigerian civil war. Memories that only increase uncertainty about her life and origins. As Iain Chambers states, “The belief in the transparency of truth and the power of origins to define the finality of our passage is dispersed by this perpetual movement of transmutation and transformation” (3). Perpetual mobility and change are, for Chambers, an ontological human condition distinguishing our (post)modern times that resists fixity and transparency of selfhood and identity. It is the same philosophical premise that informs Fola’s ruminations about her memories. The narrator captures one of these crucial moments saying, “Whether this house or that one, this passport or that, whether Baltimore or Lagos or Boston or Accra, whether expensive clothes or hand-me-downs or florist or lawyer or life or death—didn’t much matter in the end. If one could die identityless, estranged from all context, then one could live estranged from all context as well” (Selasi 107). The impossibility of returning home is described by Hall as “the universal story of life” (3)—a universal feeling and condition of displacement that pervades humanity in the contemporary time.

Similarly, Fola is the stranger in Ghana who breaks the conventional fixed idea of what an African woman should or should not do. I mean here a concept of home as an embodiment of a set of values and a code of conduct within a specific culture that defines who belongs and who does not. When Fola returns to Ghana to the house she inherited from her father, she brings her American style of life with her, which places her as an outsider vis-à-vis the values and codes of the Ghanaian society. The omniscient narrator describes how the house workers perceive Fola as a stranger: “Worse [...] That she

wanders around the garden in these shorts and a sun hat with cigarettes and clippers, snipping this, snipping that, hauling her catch into the kitchen, where she stands at the counter, not pounding yams, not shelling beans, but arranging *flowers*” (Selasi 101). She is the stranger whose transnational journey to and from the U.S. renders her coming home to Ghana incomplete. Instead, her “homecoming” becomes subversive to the fixed woman identity in Ghana by introducing a new concept of the African woman who is more independent and liberal. Thus, the movement North, as we learn from critics like Hall and Gilroy, is a subversive journey, and Selasi shows us how postcolonial transnational subjectivities challenge the narratives of fixity of identities.

Following Chambers’ notion of the impossibility of homecoming, it is enlightening to examine Kweku’s changing perception of home after his homecoming. For Kweku is perplexed when he contemplates the smile of a little boy in the village, as the narrator states:

The boy was smiling brightly, possessed of that brand of indomitable cheerfulness Kweku had only seen in children living in poverty near the equator: an instinct to laugh at the world as they found it, to find things to laugh at. To know where to look. Excitement at nothing and at everything, inextinguishable. Inexplicable under the circumstances. Amusement with the circumstances. He had seen it in the village, in his siblings. (25)

The experience of displacement seems to shape Kweku’s way of thinking; as Kweku remembers his younger sister who dies of tuberculosis and who has the same smile as the boy, we understand Kweku’s impossible homecoming. The boy’s smile reveals Kweku’s estrangement from what previously is an ordinary and familiar childish smile. Kweku

encounters the other of himself through re-reading and reinterpreting the reality that as a child used to be so familiar to him. The Other, as we come to realize, lies within the self, not outside it. It is not the different Other that one makes up through binary concepts, but the Other “that shadows every discourse, [it] is the disturbing interrogation, the estrangement, that potentially exists within us all” (Chambers 6). Kweku exemplifies the concept of the stranger as described by Chambers. Kweku’s homecoming is prevented by his self-difference—the child is a reminder to Kweku that his return to “home” is incomplete. What Kweku’s estrangement means in contemporary cultural theory is that cultural categorizations such as Self-Other become untenable because of movement and mutation.

However, understood differently, the stranger has another quality other than the abstract, interrogative one that Selasi articulates above. The postcolonial stranger, as described by Selasi, is not only one who subverts fixed identities as Kweku and Fola do. As Ahmed argues, “What is at stake [in the postmodern fetishizing of the stranger] is the ‘cutting off’ of figures from the social and material relations which over-determine their existence” (5). But the stranger is also one who is first and foremost a marginal subject in Western society because of their racial and cultural differences. We need to examine this sense of the stranger as a subject who is seen as an outsider by a white-dominant society. For instance, Kweku is fired from the hospital because of an unsuccessful surgery he performs—although it is not entirely his mistake as surgery is too late. Although the decision to fire Kweku was a racist one, this incident is understated. Instead, Selasi focuses on Kweku’s feeling of shame and his decision to leave his family behind and return to Ghana.

Selasi portrays Kweku as a strange person with incomprehensible behaviour. She describes Kweku's behaviour with his wife Ama as something strange: "Or if she passes by his study door and coughs, he looks up; no matter what he's doing, what he's reading, Ama coughs, he stops. His children used to do the same, intentionally, just to test him, to weigh his devotion to his profession against his devotion to them" (Selasi 47). This is an example of how the author constructs Kweku as a stranger to his family who knows him. Accordingly, the author focuses on Kweku's return to Ghana and the way this movement changes his habits and preferences. His marriage with Ama makes him contemplate the differences between her and all the women he knows, including Fola, his daughters, his mother, and his sister. Only then he realizes that all these women he has never known—they have been strangers to him all the time—he never realizes that "They were dreamer-women. Very dangerous women" (Selasi 48). What is shown through such characterization is the tendency by the author to "ontologiz[e] the stranger" (Ahmed 5), that is to portray the stranger only as a subject that moves and with his/her movement he/she resists closure of meanings.

While this type of human estrangement from self serves to disrupt the categorization of subjectivities according to racial, and national(ist) essentialisms, dominant use of this model of estrangement can downplay or hide other forms of the stranger as one who is made a stranger because of social and political reasons. There are, as Ahmed argues, "substantive differences between ways of being displaced from 'home'" (5). Yet, Selasi disconnects her characters from the social and political realities that may determine their being treated as not-at-home in Western societies. Consequently, the actions of the characters are likely to be perceived as a universal condition of life and even arbitrary,

that “[o]ne is where one is to try and get away from somewhere else” (Hall 44). Based on this, we are likely to read that Kweku is in Ghana because he escapes shame, as the narrator tells us, “He does not think what he thought he would think. That he never said bye or that it goes so fast or that he should have chased Olu down the stairs when he came or seen Sadie grow up or not driven away. He thinks that he was wrong. About the whole thing being forgettable” (Selasi 90). Likewise, Fola has moved to Ghana, because Kweku breaks her heart. There is an emphasis on arbitrary actions and decisions, while the questions of politics and race are de-emphasized.

It should be noted that Selasi’s interest in the stranger as a figure that defies fixity of identities is part and parcel of her project to change the Western perception of Africans. The “Afropolitan”—the cosmopolitan African subject—re-invents cultural identities by situating himself/herself at the crossroads of cultures, places, and languages. As Selasi states in “Bye-bye Babar,” “[s]ome of us are ethnic mixes, e.g., Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss, others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic language or two, we understand some indigenous language(s) and speak a few urban vernaculars” (528). The cosmopolitan migrant, for Selasi, lives in multiple languages, cultures and places that are in constant mutation. The “Afropolitan” is, by definition, a hybrid subject that resists being reduced to a single national identity, whether it is a culture, place, or language. He/she inhabits the entire world as Selasi describes him—the “African of the world.” Yet, the “Afropolitan” cannot have a home by living in-between many cultures and places. The “Afropolitan” is a subversive identity. It challenges Afrodiasporic identities when they are interpreted racially and nationally, because, as

Gilroy argues, “the processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity [...] exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents” (2). The discourse of race is challenged by the representations of the culturally and ethnically hybrid Afrodiasporic subjects.

The “Afropolitan” characters in the novel are Kweku and Fola’s children Olu, Kehinde, Taiwo, and Sadie. They fit into Selasi’s definition of cosmopolitan Africans who, besides being tied to multiple places and cultures, are subjects who have academic, professional, and artistic competencies that lead them to social mobility<sup>18</sup>. Olu is a reputable surgeon like his father, Kehinde is an artist whose paintings sell for high prices, Taiwo is in law school and is a talented writer, and Sadie studies diligently to live up to her siblings’ achievements.

Besides social mobility, Selasi shows that “Afropolitans” enjoy free mobility between places. Kehinde, for instance, carries his art with him wherever he goes in the world—Mali, London, or Brooklyn. People like Kehinde, “Wherever they go,” states Ulf Hannerz, “they find others who will interact with them in the terms of specialized but collectively held understandings” (107). Such transnational experiences enable the individuals to be involved with the cultures, people, and places as they “make quick forays from a home base to many other places—for a few hours or days in a week, for a few weeks here and there in a year—and as they shift bases for longer periods within their lives” (106-107). There is practically no home base that privileges one local culture over another, but instead, the transnational culture of art becomes the shared home.

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<sup>18</sup> These Afropolitan characters show the contributions by African professionals in the West to the economic, intellectual and cultural spheres of Western countries. For more on this, see Nduka Otiono’s essay “Tracking Skilled Diasporas” in which he argues that African immigrants, especially the highly skilled professionals, add to the “brain gain” of the Western metropolises from Africa.

The return of the “Afropolitan” siblings to Ghana or Nigeria subverts the return to a homeland as understood in pan-Africanism and Négritude. The siblings are not mindful of the homeland and origins of their parents; it does not occur to them to want to visit Ghana or Nigeria. They associate their parents’ countries of origin with psychological trauma, bad memories or an unknown, unvisited place, like with Sadie. The twins, Taiwo and Kehinde, still struggle to get over their traumatic experience caused by their uncle in Nigeria, who forced them to sleep with each other. They blame their mother for sending them to Nigeria. Olu, the last time he visits Ghana to persuade his father to go back with him to the family, he finds that his father starts a new life with another woman. There were fewer connections and communication between the siblings, until their reunion in Ghana due to their father’s death, and it is their mother who asked them to attend the funeral.

Paradoxically, their journey to Ghana turns out to be replete with self-reflection and reconciliation. It helps them understand and forgive each other. The entire process of movement, remembering, confessing, and self-mutating takes us back to the universal concept of home(lessness) that I have been discussing. For instance, Olu’s marriage with Ling—an Asian intern like him—has been on standby because Olu is anxious that he will be like his irresponsible father. This fixation on fear of being like his father is mystically removed when Olu visits his grandfather’s house and knows more about the family of his father. Only then does Olu understand his father’s advice to him when he misses his Yale graduation day to convince his father to go back home with him to Boston. The narrator recounts: “‘You can’t do that ...’ his father said, weakly now, faltering. ‘Give up when you’re hurt. Please. You get that from me. That’s what I do, what I’ve done. But you’re

different. You're *different* from me, son—" (Selasi 253). What Kweku suggests is that he is different from his son because his home is in Ghana, where he is born, grows up, and has memories. The conversation between father and son later discloses this reality: "he [Olu] now shouted, 'It's you who is better, goddammit, not me, I'm no different. It's you. You are better than this.' To which Kweku, very softly, 'This? This is what I come from.'" (Selasi 253). Moving in space and with one's memory back and forth to when Olu meets his father in Ghana and now when Olu is standing in his grandfather's house is a process that changes his way of thinking about what he can be. It somewhat draws a line between his father, who has his world and philosophy of life, and Olu, who also has his own.

The notion of home as one's roots hurts every member of the family, and not least Taiwo and Kehinde, whom Fola sends to Nigeria because she cannot afford to keep them with her in the United States. However, the two siblings challenge Kweku's "homecoming" by suggesting that it is an impossible thing. Interestingly, Kehinde fancies designing coffins. Not regular coffins, but "Coffins in shapes, like kids' birthday cakes, celebratory, colourful, laughing at death,' and he thinks, '*A home [...] for the homeless*'" (Selasi 295). Although Kehinde gets to know his father more on his trip with his siblings to Ghana and to discover that his father is an artist like him, the two have different philosophies. While Kweku designs himself a home in Ghana in which to spend the rest of his life, a place he considers home and has always wanted to realize, Kehinde instead is interested in homelessness and thinks it is an innovative idea to design coffins—homes for the dead—that do not look like the regular coffins. We have here a "rhizomatic

thought”<sup>19</sup> (Glissant 11) that resists absolutist ideologies versus Kweku’s interest in roots and origins, although homecoming for Kweku himself is not a completed event—Kweku is estranged from the home to which he returns.

As if through telepathy, Kehinde’s twin sister, who is also profoundly philosophizing about home(lessness), is a non-believer in the concept of home as rooted in a place. Pitying her father’s endeavour to establish a home, Taiwo thinks, “Poor little boy, who had walked on this beach, who had dreamed of grand homes and new homelands [...] with his feet cracking open, his soles turning black, never guessing his error (she’d have told him if he’d asked): that he’d never find a home, or a home that would last” (Selasi 273). This notion of home that is constantly mutating challenges Kweku’s belief in rootedness of home and identities, showing his mistake, as Taiwo puts it, that home is not fixed to a place or concept, but it is subject to change. Comparatively, the siblings and their father have different notions of home, and Kweku’s pursuit of absolute truth and origin is challenged by the mutation and deferral of a home that the children suggest. Contrasting the two ways of thinking through Glissant’s theory of “Relation” helps explain the subversive potential of nomadic thinking. Glissant states that the thought of nomadism “supposedly liberates Being, in contrast, perhaps, to a settled way of life, with its law based upon the intolerant root” (11). The comparison made by Glissant is echoed by the divergent concepts of home that Kweku and his children follow.

So far, I have shown that in *Ghana Must Go* Selasi focuses on movement, and the flexibility of thought, which opens up her characters to newness and change. In what follows, I will discuss that the author draws on a universal, modern condition of mobility,

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<sup>19</sup> Glissant adopts Deleuze and Guattari’s terms “rhizome” and “rhizomatic” to theorize the principle of “Relation”.

self-estrangement, and ambivalence as the new home while concealing other forms of otherness or strangeness determined by the social and political realities. To clarify this point, I will quote Ahmed on the postmodern understanding of (home)lessness and estrangement as a universal human condition:

Here, strangeness is not simply ontologised, *but it is universalised as that which 'we' have in common*, in the presumed universality of homelessness. The effects of stranger fetishism are clear: the figure of the stranger assumes a life of its own only insofar as it is cut from the histories of its determination, and hence only insofar *as it erases the very forms of difference that render impossible the formation of an inclusive community*. (6)

The author of *Ghana Must Go* engages a universal condition, as described by Ahmed, of homeless selves driven by the global conditions of increased uprootedness and cultural flow. Yet, the concept of the stranger constructed by Selasi as an agent that subverts essentialist cultures obscures the experience of marginalized postcolonial immigrants. Selasi's understanding of a stranger does not raise the social and political relationships that shape the situation of a non-white immigrant as an outsider to a Western society. What is involved in this kind of stranger's constitution, according to Ahmed, are the "broader relationships of power and antagonism" (8). It is this relationship of domination that is downplayed by Selasi in her representation of "Afropolitan" subjects. In Selasi's novel, the postcolonial stranger who is identified as an outsider by the dominant community is either unidentifiable or converted to the generalized and universalized concept of a stranger produced by the processes of globalization.

It is crucial to situate Selasi's universal aesthetic choice in *Ghana Must Go* in her perception of ("African") literature. Often when Selasi makes statements about literature, she describes literature as a universal home that reveals our belonging to the human race. That is, it invites what all human beings have in common—humanity. For instance, in her controversial talk "African Literature doesn't exist," she quotes F. Scott Fitzgerald, "That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong" (qtd. in Selasi 14). Then Selasi adds that it would be ideal to have "a world without African literature, or need of it, [but] a world with human literature" (15). We can understand that Selasi is trying to argue against the essentialization of African literature. She argues that the title "African literature" does not reflect the complexity of cultures, languages, and realities in African nations.

However, Selasi's understanding of literature as a universal experience, that a literary work may appeal to anyone regardless of their nationality, is a notion that renders national boundaries irrelevant to the circulation and appreciation of literature. The backdrop for this model is Pascale Casanova's notion of literature as shaped by the market, and by the centers of the literary market in world metropolitan cities such as Paris, New York, and London that define literary value. Casanova argues that for writers to make it to the center of the world literary space, they have to compete for recognition of their literariness, which is only measured by style and form, not the content of the literary work. As she states in *The World Republic of Letters*, "The literary economy is therefore based on a 'market,' [...] which is to say a space in which the sole value recognized by all participants—literary value—circulates and is traded" (13). When

literature is subjected to the logic of the economy, it is cut off from the world. Postcolonial literature, which is problematically considered by theorists of world literature as a latecomer to world literary space and lacking literary value, is expected by these theorists to dispense with political, national, and historical realities and seek literary recognition in form.

This overview of world literature from the perspective of Casanova serves as an explanation of what extra-literary forces may stand behind Selasi's promotion of the universality of ("African") literature. It is obvious that behind Selasi's understanding of the universality of literature is a notion of world literature similar to Casanova's and Franco Moretti's theories of world literature. Literature must circulate beyond the nation to achieve its universality. Franco Moretti promotes "distant reading" as an appropriate approach to studying world literature. Defining "distant reading" in "Conjectures on World Literature", Moretti writes, "[I]t allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" (57). Moretti's model of literary criticism does not differ from Casanova's model described in "Literature As a World" (2005). Casanova wants the focus of literary criticism to be on the connections between the evolution of forms or aesthetics of the novel and the political, economic and social reality (72). She suggests that literary criticism will get a historical account of literature by studying the world literary market which mediates aesthetics and the world. First, this literary outlook is a Eurocentric one, based on a literary system that developed in the West. Ideologically, the Western centre of literary aesthetics gets to test the universality of non-Western literature. Secondly, as a model of understanding world literature, it goes against the grain of literature as developed

nationally. As Frassinelli and Watson comment on Casanova's theory of world literature, "[t]his history of literature is an account of the literary aesthetic overcoming history, the nation, and the political, and generating its own autonomous space" (197). According to Frassinelli and Watson, Casanova's concept of world literature creates a hierarchy between center and periphery. The West, which is the center of the world literary space, prescribes aesthetic value for postcolonial authors. Selasi's novel seems to be shaped by this hierarchical model of world literature in which the political and social struggles are "refracted, diluted, deformed, or transformed according to a literary logic" (qtd. in Frassinelli and Watson 202). The question of the literary market is relevant too since the marketplace determines what stories will circulate. And African literature that provides universal and accessible stories to the Western reader is better suited for circulation from the viewpoint of publishers in the West.

### **Open City**

*Open City* was written by Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole in 2011. It tells the story of Julius, a psychiatric fellow at a hospital in New York City. Julius has Nigerian and German origins. He travels to Belgium to search for his German grandmother. The protagonist narrates the story. He describes his long walks in the streets of New York and expresses his opinions about music, art, and philosophy. During his trip, Julius meets and has conversations with many people about racism, immigration, and identity. *Open City* received positive reviews by Western reviewers and was praised for its prose style and descriptions of New York. The novel was awarded the Pen/Hemingway Award in 2012.

Movement is a pattern that reveals Julius's (non-)identity and life. As he walks in the streets of New York, visits public places, or travels abroad, he meets acquaintances, friends, or people he does not know, invites memories and reflections, and engages in conversations. This pattern is the mode of self-writing that the author introduces in *Open City*—movement and writing become one thing; they both involve a journey of the self into questioning. Iain Chambers describes this intimate relationship of writing and moving in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* more clearly: “Although allegorical, always speaking of another, of an elsewhere, and therefore condemned to be dissonant, writing opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey. It involves putting a certain distance between ourselves and the contexts that define our identity” (10). As Julius walks through Central Park in New York, memories of his grandmother's last visit to Nigeria return to him. The memories reveal the identity of Julius as mixed-raced raised in a multicultural family—a grandmother and a mother who are German, a grandmother who lives in Belgium, and a father who is Yoruba. These are memories that establish the hybridity of cultures and races rather than their fixity. What is lost in this context, Chambers states, “is the security of the starting point, of the subject of departure” (11). Here, Julius paints his family genealogy and connects German, Belgian, and Nigerian cultures while he connects with his multicultural origins through memories. Julius's “departure,” accordingly, is not a singular one, but one that stems from multiplicity. It produces cultural hybridity and multilingualism—Julius's first language is German, the language of childhood, then the local African language and English. Now, located in New York looking back to his childhood in Nigeria, Julius maybe thinks that he does not move from roots to routes but from routes to routes. Of this relational form of identity, the root

is “an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air,” an “idea of rootedness [which] challenges that of a totalitarian root” (Glissant 11).

These rhizomic identities are subversive representations through which Cole’s text mimics writing as “an imperialist gesture” (Chambers 10). Chambers does not address Cole’s novel in his book. His book is one of the theoretical books that inspire my interpretation of *Open City*. Cole subverts the Western binary structure of Self-Other, as Julius appropriates the imperialist “I” to undermine its centredness and authority. The postcolonial “I” of the narrator and protagonist does not pursue fixed identities. In Chambers’s terms, “[t]he provisional character of writing this structure [the authorial voice] oscillates, is put in doubt, disrupted and weakened” (10). Relation as a mode of writing Julius’s cultural identity demonstrates that the point of arrival of Julius in the North and his point of departure in Nigeria are the same; decentered, plural and hybrid. “Errant,” Glissant states in *The Poetics of Relation*, “he challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny.” (20). Through the dispersed “I” of Julius, Cole undermines the authority of imperialist discourse by decentering and deferring signification. The tendency towards subversion is an essential characteristic of postcolonial writing, as Bill Ashcroft et al. emphasize. It aims to interrogate “the bases of European [...] metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize center and periphery in the first place” (32). This subversive strategy is common among “Afropolitan” writers as a way of re-defining African cultural identities as relational. As Selasi does, which I discussed earlier in the chapter, so does Cole here as he portrays characters that are tied to more than one place, culture, or language, and some

who are mixed-race. Here, “Afropolitan” authors move away from the binary structure of Self-Other to an open-ended pattern of Otherness within the self.

Besides the cosmopolitan background that Julius comes from, he demonstrates openness to other cultures and ethnicities that he is eager to discuss and understand. At the same time, Julius shows disengagement with individuals that have narrow views about identity and belonging, especially people who claim his brotherhood as black or Christian. For instance, once with a taxi driver who gets upset because Julius does not say hello in recognition of African brotherhood. Another time it was with a Caribbean man named Kenneth who enquires about Julius’s African origins when Julius disconnects from the conversation. He describes the situation: “Are you Yoruba? Kenneth was, by now, starting to wear on me, and I began to wish he would go away. I thought of the cab driver who had driven me home from the Folk Art Museum—hey, I’m African just like you. Kenneth was making a similar claim” (Cole 53). We are reminded of Taiye Selasi’s portrayal of the “Afropolitan” in “Bye-Bye Babar”. She writes, “Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question—“where are you from?”—you’d get no single answer from a single smiling dancer” (528). The complexity of cultural identities indicates the cosmopolitan position from which Julius reacts to the black or the African individuals he meets above.

These situations, in which Julius finds himself with the taxi driver or the Caribbean man, demonstrate cultural confusion. Through such cases, Cole shows how some African people understand identity and belonging. They imagine themselves as a community defined by race, geographical origins, and shared history/destiny. Cole highlights that this is the kind of mentality that informs the claims of the taxi driver and Kenneth to a shared

identity with Julius. As Julius, later on, recalls his conversation with the taxi driver; “Blacks, ‘we blacks’, had known rougher ports of entry: this [...] was what the cab driver had meant. This was the acknowledgment he wanted [...] from every ‘brother’ he met” (55). In a slightly different context, Mbembe states that such accounts fail to transcend the narrative of a clash of cultures, and self-victimization as the defining experience of African people. For instance, Julius meets a poet named Terry, who works at a post office. Terry calls Julius “brother” and recites some of his protest poems to Julius. Again, the poet engages Julius in a conversation on the grounds of a collective African struggle against white domination. He said to Julius, “[b]rother Julius [...] you’re a visionary, keep hope alive. I think we should see some poetry together. I can see that you instinctively get it. We must be a light for this generation.” (187). In reaction, Julius keeps a distance in these conversations. He goes beyond the category of race as a confining concept of identity.

Julius is suitable for David Chariandy’s characterization of the postcolonial diaspora as “figurative.” It is the way scholars such as “Paul Gilroy, Rey Chow, and Stuart Hall have each decided to understand diaspora not as a ‘reality’ to be empirically analyzed, but as something self-consciously ‘figurative’ or ‘metaphorical’ and thus a special agent for social change” (9). This “metaphorical” understanding of diaspora is subversive, as Chariandy explains, “[i]ts very status as figurative enables these critics to make inventive demands on existing political, institutional, and epistemological constraints” (9). Julius carries on this figurative role of a postcolonial diaspora member through his openness to cultures and conversations with other ethnicities as a way of understanding cultures. Through representations of cultural and ethnic pluralism and hybridity, Cole challenges

the calcified notions of black/African diaspora and the idea of a nationalist European identity.

Cole mentions Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* and suggests the book shapes Julius's outlook on identity. In this book, Appiah is concerned with the question of how different people or cultures can co-exist under universal values and shared humanity. One of the founding principles of Appiah's cosmopolitan vision is a universal concern for humanity. "We have obligations to others," he states, "obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kin" (17). The other important thing for Appiah's vision is respect for individual differences and freedom. That is, to "take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives" (17). The obligation towards individuals is mainly embodied in Julius when he deals with the taxi driver, Kenneth, and Terry. All these characters speak from the premise that black people must promote solidarity with each other. Yet Julius fails to sympathize with this mind-set and often takes distance when he meets black people. What this suggests is that Julius has a deep awareness of the value of individual freedom and cultural differences that he privileges over the interests and contexts which tie him to his kith and kin. Subversively, Julius opens up the sign of what it means to be black to choices and opportunities other than the race-based oppositions and struggles. This is what Chambers considers to be "[t]he move [...] into a sense of language that does not merely reflect culture, history and differences but also produces them," (12) and Julius freely produces his identity as out of sync with nationalism or ethnic absolutism. We are back here to the earlier notion of the "I" of the protagonist that de-centers the Self.

In this sense, both Selasi and Cole erase the notion of home associated with nostalgia for the homeland, the “comfortable place of familiar faces,” and cultures (Hannerz 110). Julius is not at home in the same way that the real, local people can be, yet with respect to his kith and kin, he can be described as “one of us and yet not quite one of us” (110). Instead, he sets off to invent his own home(s) that is commensurate with the condition of migrancy, movement, and strangeness. This type of home is revealed to us as Julius speaks about moments of sighting bird migrations. “Not long before this aimless wandering began,” Julius recounts, “I had fallen into the habit of watching bird migrations from my apartment, and I wonder now if the two are connected” (3). He finds a home in movement—walks and travels—and encounters with people.

The places where Julius goes or that he visits are not qualified as home in the conventional sense. They are mostly restaurants, shopping malls, banks, museums, art galleries, hotels, or events. French anthropologist Marc Augé calls these spaces “non-places.” Arguing how globalization produced non-places, Augé states, “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (77-78). Place, for Augé, is “in the established and symbolized sense, anthropological place” (81). This sense of place, for Julius, is superseded by places that invoke strangeness and loneliness despite the crowd. As Julius recounts, “walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people, hundreds more, thousands even, than I was accustomed to seeing in the course of a day, but the impress of these faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation” (Cole 6). In subway stations, Julius’s feeling of strangeness emerges as described here: “Above-ground I was with thousands of others in their solitude, but in the subway, standing close to strangers,

jostling them and being jostled by them for space and breathing room, all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified” (7). Other spaces seem to provide Julius with a sense of a temporal or ephemeral home, such as in the art gallery. Julius says “I lost all track of time before these images, fell deep into their world, as if all the time between them and me had somehow vanished [...] when I eventually walked down the stairs and out of the museum, it was with the feeling of someone who had returned to earth from a great distance” (39-40). Julius mostly frequents places that leave no lasting identity in people, and it is enlightening to contrast this with the moments in which he disengages from encounters with people that claim a permanent collective identification.

Yet Julius’s cosmopolitanism becomes somewhat problematic in the face of positions of ethnic marginality. He seems incapable of engaging with issues of marginality and exclusion that the postcolonial diaspora encounter. This problem arises when Julius meets with Farouq, a Moroccan immigrant in Belgium. Julius is impressed by Farouq’s intellectual competencies, although their opinions diverge at many points—yet, Julius listens and shows curiosity to know and understand Farouq’s points of view about literature and critical theory. They both discuss Edward Said, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Mohamed Choukri, and other writers. However, there is one thing that they discuss and that reflects their crucial differences in approaching matters of marginality. Farouq prefers Malcolm X to Martin Luther King when in a class, his professor asks them to choose between the two. “Malcolm X,” Farouq argues, “recognized that difference contains its own value, and that the struggle must be to advance that value. Martin Luther King is admired by everyone, he wants everyone to join together, but this idea that you should let them hit you on the other side of your face, this makes no sense to me” (105).

Julius, though, understands Farouq's condition in Belgium with the anti-immigration views and the increased Islamophobia. He even thinks of himself in connection with Farouq's situation since he is a racialized minority. Yet, Julius distances himself from what he describes as Farouq being "in the grip of rage and rhetoric" (107). This response shows the difference between the two men in dealing with marginalization and exclusion. While Farouq guards a somewhat antagonistic attitude to the West, Julius negotiates cultures.

When Julius goes back to the US, he sends Farouq a copy of Appiah's book *Cosmopolitanism* to read. Nevertheless, it seems pointless that he sends a copy to Farouq but not to the white Belgian lady that he meets on his flight to Belgium. When Julius tells the Belgian lady about Farouq's story of having his thesis rejected by the committee at university because they were uncomfortable with the subject, the lady replies in a somewhat judgmental fashion. "I know this type, she said, these young men who go around as if the world is an offense to them. It is dangerous. For people to feel that they alone have suffered [...] Having such a degree of resentment is a recipe for trouble. Our society has made itself open for such people, but when they come in, all you hear is complaints" (143). It is impossible not to wonder what message Julius tries to convey by sending the book to Farouq and not to the lady since Appiah's book sets a challenge for all humanity to live by the universal values of understanding and tolerating each other. Here, the trouble is not Appiah's book, but Julius's use of it. For Julius, the problem is not the lady's white autochthonous discourse, but Farouq's complaints about white Europe's marginalization of and discrimination against ethnic minorities.

The concern with a universal condition (a typical situation of strangeness) and human values somewhat interferes with the handling of the issues of social marginalization of ethnicities in the diaspora. Although the author tends to subvert Western metaphysics of Self-Other, he seems to subordinate the problems of racialized communities and visible minorities to the human condition of increased mobility of subjects and cultures, and how these global forces bear on identity and belonging. It is appropriate to conclude this point with Bill Ashcroft et al.'s comment on the stakes of incorporating postcolonial texts in theories of postmodernism. The postcolonial text will reconfirm the master-narrative of modernism and the cultural hierarchies that come with it. "The label of 'postmodern,'" as Ashcroft, et al. argue, "is increasingly being applied hegemonically to cultures and texts outside Europe, assimilating post-colonial works whose political orientations and experimental formations have been deliberately designed to counteract such European assimilation" (170).

In this chapter, we have seen how the authors construct home(lessness) as a phenomenon that transcends geographical space—the home that we tie our identities with—in order to construct the stranger as a figure that resists essentialist thoughts and identities. I also discussed how this postmodern construction of the universality of home(lessness) or stranger(ness) as a universal condition might conceal how white discourse can make postcolonial Afrodiaspora members strangers in Western societies. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* offer counter-accounts to Selasi's and Cole's narratives of African cosmopolitanism. Also, I will discuss how the authors'

representations of “Afropolitanism” in the continent and among abject postcolonial African subjects are subversive of Eurocentric discourse.

#### **Chapter 4: Writing Self and Other As “Unhomely” in Chris Abani’s *GraceLand* and NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names***

In this chapter, I will analyze *GraceLand* (2004) by Chris Abani, and *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo as alternative accounts to Selasi’s and Cole’s representations of “Afropolitanism”. We will see that the two authors subvert anti-colonial atavistic identities and Western nationalism through representations of ambivalent, in-between cultural identities. I propose reading Abani and Bulawayo through the concept of the “unhomely”. The “unhomely” is a concept adopted by Homi Bhabha to refer to an alienating situation. I will use the concept of the “unhomely” to reveal the writers’s efforts to resist nationalist and imperialist domination. We will see how the novels can be read as alternative accounts to the narrative of “Afropolitanism” by Selasi and Cole that places cultural contact and transnationalism in the West. The authors displace “Western” “Afropolitanism” by situating cultural cosmopolitanism in the continent among lower-class citizens and in the Global North among unprivileged Afrodiaspora members.

Abani and Bulawayo portray the post-colonial nation emerging from colonialism as it collapses under corruption and dictatorship, while a new era of cultural and economic domination is unfolding under the aegis of the United States. But their Afropessimism is controversial. Helon Habila raises the problem of excessive portrayal of war, rape and poverty in his 2013 critical review of Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. Habila criticizes the part of the novel Bulawayo sets in Paradise, a low-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Harare, for being an unfair representation of Africa. In his view, the intervention of the Caine-Prize aesthetic shaped the choice of style and topic of Afro-

pessimism. (Habla, *theguardian.com*). In contrast to Habla's concern about the dynamics of circulating African literature in the West, Bulawayo states in an interview, "I wrote the novel at a specific time of my country's history. Recent history, I should say, when the country was coming undone, due to failure of leadership" (Paschel, *DW.com*). Abani is of a similar opinion. He announces in an interview that "[T]he slums, the societies, the poverty, the war, and the questions they examine are not fabricated. They are there on the ground" (Goyal 235). This discussion situates postcolonial writers like Abani and Bulawayo between the effort to write about the problems of their native countries and their dependency on the Western literary marketplace for publication and circulation of their literary works.

Despite the Afropessimism, the novels shed light on an important dimension of the "unhomely" which foregrounds the postcolonial perspective as subversive of Western discourse. The "unhomely" is a complex concept which Homi Bhabha uses to analyze various colonial and postcolonial contexts. Here, it is the social and cultural context in which the postcolonial subject feels that his/her life is positioned between home and the world, the familiar and the unfamiliar. In "The Home and the World", Bhabha explains that the unhomely renders "the border between home and the world [...] confused [...]" The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (141). As Bhabha's definition suggests, unhomeliness also involves the repetition of the social and cultural in ways that question the "heimisch, home-like, familiar" (147). According to Bhabha, the statement or the enunciation as a space of displacement, translation and deferred meaning must be defined in terms of its differential repetition. He says in *The Location of Culture*, "Repeatability [...] is always the repetition in the

very act of enunciation, something other, a difference that is a little bit uncanny” (131). The uncanniness of culture, as Bhabha further elaborates, involves its split or double identity. He argues:

Culture is Heimlich, with its disciplinary generalizations, its mimetic narratives, its homogenous, empty time, its seriality, its progress, its customs, and coherence. But cultural authority is also unheimlich, for to be distinctive, signficatory, influential and identifiable, it has to be translated, disseminated, differentiated, interdisciplinary, intertextual, international, inter-racial. (136-137)

In line with Bhabha’s theorization, in *GraceLand*, the main character, Elvis, experiences profound unfamiliarity (or unhomeliness) with the new setting of the city of Lagos, which is a notable example of the coexistence of the homely and the unhomely, that which is recognizable, native and ordinary and that which is profoundly estranging. His alienation is revealed at the beginning of the novel. The narrator suggestively depicts Elvis’s estrangement by the life of the city, the slum, the crowd, violence, poverty, and the somewhat liberal lifestyle, which challenges the image he has about Lagos from postcards or from city dwellers who return to his hometown, Afikpo, for holidays. The narrator says, “He [Elvis] hadn’t known about the poverty and violence of Lagos until he arrived. It was as if people conspired with the city to weave a web of silence around its unsavoury parts” (Abani 7). Elvis’s feeling about the city of Lagos is like how Bhabha uses the notion of the uncanny to characterize the double identity of (postcolonial) modernity. It has one identity that is recognizable and another that is (meant to be) hidden. This hidden unpleasant side often goes out of control through articulation and repetition and thus it comes back to haunt the city as an ambivalent notion of place.

Bhabha derives this meaning of the unhomely from Sigmund Freud as “the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in Bhabha 10). The notion of the “unhomely” serves to subvert the imperialist assumptions of progress, civility, and rationality promoted as modernization's ultimate goal by describing a chaotic and alienating post-colonial nation.

Likewise, Elvis's perplexity is caused by the incomplete, half-(de-)formed life of the post-colonial city. “Name it,” the narrator says, “and Lagos had a copy of it, earning it the nickname “One Copy”” (Abani 8). What this means is that Lagos has its share of the modern lifestyle: the “skyscrapers, sweeping flyovers, beaches and hotels” (7) and the opposite of this: corruption, poverty, and precariousness. There is a split in the social meaning which renders the political sign—the modern city—to be experienced as an ambivalent articulation of the familiar and the unfamiliar. In Bhabha's terms, the enunciation of the sign lends itself to resistance through the notion of mimicry (or unslavish repetition), that the post-colonial city involves a grotesque reproduction of the modern Western city. As a postcolonial bildungsroman, the novel subverts the traditional form of the genre in which we expect “the eventual assimilation of the novel's protagonist into the social order” (Mullaney 32). Elvis cannot fully integrate the social life of Lagos because of his estrangement, while this social and psychological condition is used by the author to show the disappointments of the nation as “fractured, damaged and derailed by the legacies of colonialism” (Abani 32) and civil war. Capturing the incompleteness of modernity in Lagos is how the author challenges the colonialist coercive structure of the nation in a postcolonial location. This version of the city mimics the European “original” one.

In his famous essay “Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” Bhabha expands on a similar notion to the unhomely through a discussion of cosmopolitanism. His understanding of cosmopolitanism resists “universal” cosmopolitanism; it is very similar to the notion of mimicry—repetition with a difference. He argues that rather than focusing on a cosmopolitanism that tends, in a Eurocentric manner, to abstract human commonality and therefore leads to the equation of such universal commonality with a corresponding set of shared values, what the contemporary discussion of cosmopolitanism should focus on is the difference of cultures, histories, and identities. He means that cosmopolitanism should not pull non-Western cultures in a centripetal fashion toward a process of homogenization but should reflect domestic aspects in the repetition of the global. “[T]o vernacularize,” Bhabha insists, “is to ‘dialectize’ as a process; it is not simply to be in a dialogic relation with the native or the domestic, but it is to be on the border, in between, introducing the global-cosmopolitan ‘action at a distance’ into the very grounds—now displaced—of the domestic” (202). Glissant makes a similar point about cultural difference/particularity. He believes that the connectedness of cultures must not lead to the domination of one culture by another; otherwise, the cultural dialogue will turn into an attempt to homogenize and universalize. “Relation exists,” he states, “especially as the particulars that are its interdependent constituent have first freed themselves from any approximation of dependency” (142). Together these postcolonial critics have essential ideas for understanding how cultural syncretism can challenge the concepts of rootedness, authenticity, and homogeneity.

A situation which exemplifies cultural repetition with difference plays out in *GraceLand*. Abani describes the experience of a lower-class audience watching

American movies as “magical”. In a deserted local car park where badly subtitled American and Indian movies are played for free, these people derive pleasure watching an American movie even though they are mostly illiterate. They are “unable to read subtitles, but Elvis knew they did not let that ruin their fun. They simply invented their own stories, resulting in as many versions as there were people. Still, for him, it was magical” (148). The situation echoes Bhabha’s notion of the English book, which he discusses in *The Location of Culture*, as a metaphor of authority and presence of meaning, being challenged by its reiteration. In this sense, the American movie which is a medium of American cultural/ideological dissemination is resisted by the audience who come up with their versions of the story. Thus, as a signifier of cultural domination and homogeneity, the American movie “is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation [by the poor audience] as repetition and difference” (Bhabha 107). Elvis synthesizes American movies starring “John Wayne and Actor” to the morality of good and evil, and so, any actor who represents the good is Wayne, and any actor who stands for evil is Actor: “John Wayne acting as the villain in a film was Actor,” says the narrator, “and Clint Eastwood as sheriff was John Wayne” (149). Whether in the invention of the stories, the plot lines of good and evil, or the confusion of John Wayne and Actor, we see this native audience that actively interacts with a foreign culture by translating it in different ways to make it meaningful to them. Glissant mentions that this kind of cultural translation involves “distancing,” a process intrinsic to “identity as a system of relation [as] a form of violence that challenges the generalizing universal and necessitates [...] stringent demands for specificities” (142).

Here, the postcolonial perspective of the poor audiences and Elvis is what carries out resistance to cultural domination.

Another excellent example of cultural resistance is Elvis's vernacularization of the figure of Elvis, the American singer and dancer. At the Hilton Hotel, Elvis stops to do his dance for tips from foreign tourists. The performance interprets Elvis Presley from the preparation (dressing like Elvis) to the actual performance. We should recall Bhabha's notion of mimicry, which he defines as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite [...] mimicry is constructed around ambivalence [...] to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). Mimicry is a subversive articulation of a dominant culture. As Bhabha shows, Mimicry undermines the totality of imperial power through in-compliant repetitions of Western culture. Through Elvis, the writer challenges the cultural and artistic sign/icon Elvis Presley as an American authority in music. Mimicry, as we will see below, highlights a moment in which tourists in a hotel are unable to control Elvis's agency to per(de)form Elvis Presley. The narrator comments, "[H]e turned to the small tin of talcum powder stuck in one of the pockets of his bag. He shook out a handful and applied a thick layer, peering into the mirror. He was dissatisfied; this was not how white people looked" (Abani 11). This description reveals a gap and anxiety of not being able to look as white as Elvis Presley. In the middle of Elvis's performance, some guests on the hotel beach who are all foreigners become annoyed by Elvis's intrusion and irked by his pathetic impersonation of Elvis Presley. "I think he's doing an Elvis impersonation," one American woman says. "He doesn't look like any Elvis I know. Besides, ain't that wig on back to front?" (12) says another man lying on the sand.

This moment in the novel shows how Elvis leaves the guests confused by the familiarity of the music he plays on his radio and his imitation of the real Elvis. As the man's statement show above, it is not only the issue of skin colour but also the way he reproduces the real Elvis, the way he wears the wig, and he applies powder on his face to look white, that render the whole impersonation a burlesque. All this annoys the American tourist who threatens to call the hotel guards to deal with Elvis if he does not leave. According to Bhabha's theory of hybridity, which he describes in "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism", Elvis's performance becomes a space of agency that resists abstraction and homogenization of culture and performance. As a performative act, Elvis's show involves an unforeseen reproduction of the real Elvis, what Bhabha refers to as "unexpected transformation" which is due to "the movement or relocation or revision of the "universal" or the general" (202). As far as the foreign audience, this procedure is an indication of their inability to control the cultural sign. In this manner, the performance of the real Elvis by the pretend one becomes a manifestation of agency, of appropriating the Western sign and of transforming it.

Elvis's mother is herself a fan of Elvis Presley. She listens to Elvis Presley's music and has named her son after the singer. Elvis's mother is responsible for shaping her son's enjoyment of Presley's music and dance. Often, Elvis and his mother play Presley's music on the record player and dance to it. This shows the influence of American culture on some Nigerian people. But, as Bhabha insists, this global culture should be accounted for from a postcolonial perspective to show that culture's reiteration involves relocation, translation, and transformation. Anthony Appiah offers a related understanding of this notion of cultural resistance as he mentions, "[c]ultural consumers are not dupes. They

can resist” (110). This idea recalls Bhabha’s mimicry. Elvis does not merely consume American culture and art but resists it through duplication and distortion of Elvis Presley’s singing and dance.

Elvis does not imitate Elvis Presley but appropriates him for his purpose. He adopts (what he thinks to be) Elvis Presley’s look to satisfy his interest in queer identity. The look, which resembles that of a drag queen<sup>20</sup>, on the one hand, pleases Elvis, who regrets not being able to show up in public with that look, and on the other, it challenges the heterosexual culture of the Igbo people. As he listens to “Heartbreak Hotel” by Presley, he applies a mix of makeup to his face. “Finishing, he ran his fingertips along his cheek. Smooth, like the silk of Aunt Felicia’s stockings [...] Admiring himself from many angles, he thought it was a shame he couldn’t wear makeup in public [...] He could, like the transvestites that haunted the car parks of hotels [...] But like them, he would be a target of some insult, or worse, physical beatings” (Abani 77). Seen from that perspective, Elvis uses the figure of Presley to give expression to his identity.

Elvis’s impersonation challenges an Igbo society that imposes a strict division of male and female genders. It is helpful to invoke Sunday’s, Elvis’s father, extreme reaction to Elvis’s appearance wearing makeup, a girl’s dress and cornrowed hair. “No son of mine is going to grow up as a homosexual!” Sunday shouts after he gives Elvis a violent beating. Elvis’s interest in a queer look, whether when he dresses like a girl with the help of his Aunt Felicia or when he dresses like Elvis Presley, challenges the cultural and social norms that define binary gender identities. Judith Butler theorizes gender identities/roles as cultural/social constructs. Through cultural construction, gender

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<sup>20</sup> I am using “drag queen” as the preferred term instead of Abani’s use of the term “transvestite” in the novel.

meanings become pre-given, generalized, and determined. According to Butler, discursive representations produce, rather than say, gender identities, and the performance of gender identities in society binds individuals to act in such a way that conforms to social norms. Gender identities (as performative statements) gain authority through repetition when individuals perform those cultural norms as taken-as-given gender identities (17-19). Abani's subversive representations of gender recall Tchak and Beyala. They too engage with the question of gender and the tension between the patriarch and the son.

Abani's work shows the tension between destabilizing gender identities and national culture through Sunday's harsh reaction to Elvis's drag queen look. Elvis's performances of his queer identity challenge the traditional conception and performance of gender identities in Igbo culture by blurring male and female distinctions. We can use Bhabha's notion of the unhomely as discussed in "The Home and the World", to account for this situation. The unspoken or unrepresented thoughts which the discourses of nationalism strive to repress come back to haunt the imagined nation. This description echoes Bhabha's characterization of the postcolonial nation, and culture in general, in *The Location of Culture* as split between the pedagogical and the performative (145); the unspoken distinct realities of individuals take over the official narrative of the nation. Again, Abani's novel subverts national identity by playing out the postcolonial bildungsroman as a genre that disrupts progression to social assimilation. The classical bildungsroman "[s]tress[es] the ideological awakening, reformation and assimilation of their protagonists, the genre is inseparable from notions of 'good' citizenship and nationality" (Mullaney 30). Through Elvis, Abani shows that the postcolonial

bildungsroman challenges the notion of progress toward the ideals of citizenship and nationality through articulations of alternative social and cultural identities incompatible with the values of the Igbo community as embodied by Sunday. The manly, rigid personality of Sunday is not inherited by Elvis, who demonstrates a distance from Igbo culture. Here, we see Abani's disruptive use of bildungsroman to express an interrupted lineage and a heterogeneous nation. The postcolonial bildungsroman reverses the principles of progress, formation and assimilation into the social regime through its institutions. Abani's reworking of classical bildungsroman shows a disjuncture between the protagonist's maturity and social integration. Elvis matures during a period of social and political chaos that prevents his coming to terms with his society, which culminates in his decision to immigrate to the United States.

Abani shows that Elvis's friends understand homosexuality to be something evil and associated with Western morality. Elvis discusses sex with his friends, and Obed and Titus tell the rest of the friends about a pornographic movie they have seen. As Obed suggests that the friends experiment sex with each other, the rest react strongly to this, except Elvis—Obed's suggestion appeals to him. The following is the friends' conversation: "‘Dat is evil, Obed!’ Titus shouted. ‘Yes, we will surely go to hell for dat,’ Hezekiah agreed. ‘Dat is homo. It is taboo, forbidden,’ Elvis interjected weekly. ‘But I saw it in de movies,’ Obed insisted” (Abani 196). The conversation is revealing, as Obed tells his friends he watches gay sex in foreign movies, and this suggests that homosexuality is an idea external to Nigerian cultures, something identified as Western. This shows how some local subjects in Nigeria imagine culture as homogenous and based on binaries of Self-Other. Abani challenges the binary imagination by portraying Elvis's

performance of his queer identity. Elvis articulates a third space identity through his interest in feminine physical appearance and homosexual activities.

Bhabha's insight on cultural difference is that it is inherent in all cultures and that the unhomely is a feeling of this diversity which the nation may forget, not speak of or repress. In "Articulating the Archaic," Bhabha shows that culture, like colonial discourse, has a double or split identity; that it is at once coherent and incoherent, stable and unsettling, inspiring confidence and anxiety. Elvis is an excellent example of this dual cultural identity. His father views Elvis's appearance as unfamiliar and abnormal conduct. In line with Bhabha's theorization, Elvis articulates the unhomely, an identity repressed by the native culture. His father's brutal reaction to Elvis's feminine appearance reveals the tendency by some local subjects to repress diversity of identities within Igbo culture.

### **"Afropolitanism" on the continent**

*GraceLand* illustrates the connectedness of the African continent with the world. The spiritual parallels between Igbo culture and Catholicism are striking as Abani describes them below:

The Eucharistic qualities of the kola-nut ritual are clear. There are close parallels to Catholicism, as there seems to be some kind of transubstantiation involved in the kola nut ceremony, similar to the communion wafer in the Catholic ritual mass. There is the invocation of a supreme deity, the reference to the kola nut as representative of life and by association, the implication that the consumption of one was equal to that of the other. (17)

Here, Abani blurs the origins of the two religions and disrupts these myths as authentic and different. Glissant's theorizing of Relation offers accounts for these cultural parallels. He writes, "Échos-monde [...] allow us to sense and cite the cultures of peoples in the turbulent confluence whose globality organizes our chaos-monde" (94) In what Abani describes as a parallel between Igbo rituals and Catholicism, the "échos-monde" refers to how cultural formations involve contact with the Other. That cultures and civilizations are related to one another is key in Glissant's philosophy of Relation, and so it is in Abani's portrayal of African cultural identities. This way of thinking defies approaching cultures from a binary perspective and understands them in relation to other cultures. More importantly, Abani displaces the center of cultural cosmopolitanism to the African continent. Not only does it challenge essentialist perceptions of African cultures, but also counters the imperial assumption of the West as the center. The association of the West with the center of the world is a notion embedded in some "Afropolitan" stories. By contrasting Abani with Cole, we see that Abani describes "Afropolitanism" in Africa, while Cole privileges North American and European spaces as the locus of cosmopolitan activity.

The pluralism of cultures in *GraceLand*—Arabian, Indian, Nigerian, and American—is reminiscent of Glissant's concept of Relation, which refers to "the rhizome of a multiple relationships with the Other" (16). A spectacular example of the mixing of multiple cultures as a system of Relation unfolds in *GraceLand*:

[A] line of pedestrians dressed in bright red and yellow clothes Elvis had only seen in Indian movies. Unlike the Hare Krishnas who were now a common sight in Lagos, or the Hindus and Sikhs who owned businesses in Nigeria, these Indian-

influenced Nigerians wore outfits that mixed ideas right out of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and costumes from a Bollywood production, complete with turbans (Abani 244).

Here, Abani creates a miniature of how world cultures are involved in a “tout-monde” relation constituting diverse and interrelated identities in Nigeria. This rhizomic form of identities challenges the linear progress of cultures imposed by the West while it redefines cultural identities as relational and unpredictable. Glissant describes the identity Relation as “the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other [...] basing every community’s reasons for existence on [...] a Poetics of Relation” (16). As a way of reproducing Africa through connection, movement, and transformation, *GraceLand* subverts the colonialist/imperialist notion that Africa is a homogenous continent, different, and separate from the world.

Additionally, the fact that Nigeria is made the place in which this cultural cosmopolitanism occurs is subversive of the Western tradition of representing Africa as a place in which nothing significant occurs. “[T]he African human experience,” Mbembe suggestively remarks in *On the Postcolony*, “constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a *negative interpretation*” (1). As we know, the negative image of Africa is the familiar image around which Western discourse builds its confidence; it is also this image against which the West defines itself. In an innovative representation of African cultural identities, Mbembe makes a point similar to Glissant’s concept of Relation. His understanding of “Afropolitanism” refers to the movement, entanglement, and mutation of cultures in the African continent since the pre-colonial period. The pre-colonial history of Africa, Mbembe argues in

“Afropolitanism”, is a “history of colliding cultures, caught in the maelstrom of war, invasion, migration, intermarriage, a history of various religions we make our own, of techniques we exchange, and of goods we trade. The cultural history of the continent can hardly be understood outside the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility and displacement” (27). *GraceLand* reflects African modernity, the center of which is the African continent and which Western discourse represses. This uncanny or unfamiliar side of Africa disturbs Western discourse because it reveals that it is an inconsistent discourse. In Bhabha’s “The World and the Home”, it is this unhomeliness which returns (in postcolonial writing) to haunt Western discourse. The dual identity of Western discourse consists of the homely which is its coherence, rationality, continuity; and the unhomely, which is the opposite of all this, and which is the unrepresented pasts “that haunt the historical present” (147).

*GraceLand* is subversive of atavistic identities. So is Cole’s novel *Open City*. His protagonist Julius rejects Afrocentric identities and keeps a distance from identification privileging race and common history. In Tchak’s novel *Place des fêtes*, the protagonist criticizes his father’s cultural atavism and endeavours to integrate into French society as a black person. In *Le petit prince de Belleville*, Loukoum “threatens [his father] by leading towards his dissolution” (Glissant 52). All these characters articulate alternative cultural identities to Afrocentrism. In Abani’s *GraceLand*, Elvis expressly dismisses Afrocentric identities. As he is listening to the King of the Beggar’s sermon on native culture. In this sermon, the King praises his indigenous culture and expresses his regret that the Western lifestyle is influencing many natives. The narrator tells us how “The king called for everyone to return to the traditional values and ways of being” (156). Elvis does not agree

with the King because he profoundly appreciates the complexity of cultures in Nigeria. As the narrator reveals to us, Elvis “knew there was no way of going back to the ‘good old days,’ and wondered why the King didn’t speak about how to cope with these new and confusing times” (155). Elvis echoes the problem of nationalism which Fanon discusses in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon believes that nationalist consciousness regresses to tribal or ethnic nationalism (119). Through Elvis, Abani problematizes nationalism as a discourse that essentializes a nation’s diverse cultures. Elvis thinks the King’s idea is “essentialist, maybe even prejudiced, because the culture he spoke of was that of the Igbo, only one of nearly three hundred indigenous people in this populous country” (Abani 155). Abani illustrates the procedure through which nationalism’s oppositional decolonization legitimizes domination over the heterogeneous populations in the nation to struggle against Western invasion, just like the King’s speech in which he homogenizes Nigerian cultures. Elvis and the King split ways on the question of national culture(s). Through the representation of Elvis, Abani echoes Glissant in *The Poetics of Relation* on the question of decolonizing cultures. Glissant argues, “[w]hereas the Western nation is first of all an “opposite,” for colonized peoples identity will be primarily “opposed to”—that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit” (17). In other words, decolonization of cultures and their representations will not be achieved through binarist oppositions but by going beyond the discourse of cultural and racial binarism to a discourse that enables relations and co-existence of various cultures and populations in the same land.

Abani reveals how the nation is formed through violence, homogenization, exclusion and marginalization of one culture, tribe, or ethnicity by another. Elvis challenges national identity through his eclectic lifestyle. Because Elvis grew up in an Igbo environment, he holds values of dignity, charity, sharing, and honesty, which may come from the conservative, rural background of his early upbringing. Yet, his ethnic and social background does not keep him from exploring other cultures, religions, literatures, movies, and arts, which shape his hybrid identity.

### ***We Need New Names: Relational Identities***

NoViolet Bulawayo illustrates how national identities nurture violence as she depicts the conflict between blacks and whites in Zimbabwe. In Bulawayo's novel, a scene of violence takes place when Darling and her friends are in Budapest, a neighbouring community to Paradise, taking guavas from the trees that belong to a white couple. The children hear a group of black fighters chanting, "Kill the Boer, the farmer, the khiwa! Strike fear in the heart of the white man! White man, you have no place here, go back, go home! Africa for Africans, Africa for Africans!" (113). The fighters beat the white couple, break their property, and take them away. Bulawayo describes how black Zimbabweans regain control of Zimbabwe under the threat of retaliation and brutality. The binary imagination is an ideology that divides society and excludes the Other. *We Need New Names* describes black people's hatred toward Europeans as an emotion mobilized by nationalist, autochthonous discourses.

In contrast, Bulawayo engages alternative forms of cultural identities by imagining the global from the local and inventing transnational lives and homes. This is where

Bulawayo shows the significance of dreams, emotions and imagination as avenues for crossing national/racial boundaries to reach Glissant's principle of "totalité-monde". This "thought of errantry and of totality" (144). Imagination leads Darling and her friends to think of Self in relation to Other. Like Abani, Bulawayo's "Afropolitanism" is in Africa. Darling's connectedness with the world through her aunt who lives in the United States and the white people who live in the Budapest neighbourhood are global networks that shape her relational identity. In Abani's novel, Elvis's grandmother keeps contact with her pen-friends in many places in the world. Her "thought of errantry," which is clear in her being open to the Other and redefining her world beyond the borders of Nigeria, is an expression of Glissant's "totalité-monde". The "unhomely" caused by such transnational and relational imagination resists fixed binary identities. As compared to Abani and Bulawayo, Selasi's and Cole's novels imagine "Afropolitan" characters in Europe and the United States; although Julius in *Open City* and the Sai children in *Ghana Must Go* exemplify African identities that transcend nationality, Western culture and spaces remain central to their "Afropolitan" experiences. Julius, for instance, has an impressive knowledge of Western art, literature, music, and history. It is interesting that Julius only remembers Nigeria on very few occasions, and they are negative memories. He is a student in New York and never entertains returning to Nigeria. Selasi's "Afropolitan" characters are born and raised in the United States, and their "Afropolitan" identities bear the mark of the Western culture and the places where they live. Selasi and Cole construct "Afropolitanism" as transnational experiences of African subjects in the Global North.

Bulawayo complicates the nationalist and autochthonous rhetoric of the black fighters as having no vision of the future. The question "What is exactly an African?" that

Godknows, Darling's friend, asks "is an important moral and existential interjection in the narrative; it challenges the nationalist's narrow definition of identity and its moral implications" (Eze 3). Godknows's question shows his perplexity when the white man responds to the black fighters' insurgence, "I am an African, he says. This is my fucking country too, my father was born here, I was born here, just like you!" (Bulawayo 121). By showing this, Bulawayo blurs the distinctions between white and black "Africans" and subverts nationalist discourse that produces binary opposition.

In "Modes of African Self-Writing", Mbembe discusses African identity in relation to how African writing in the twentieth century continues to define Africa through race, colour, autochthony, the past, and self-victimization (255-256). Bulawayo shows that racial and geographical identities legitimize the violent actions of the black fighters, and she challenges essentialist identities from the perspective of innocent children who question how their black community in Zimbabwe defines itself against the white community. While the question of "what is exactly an African?" by Godknows interrogates essentialist African identities, the white man's claim of Africa as his home country complicates identities and belonging.

Bulawayo illustrates that identities are relational through a situation in which Sbho, one of Darling's friends, is sympathetic with a white couple that the freedom fighters chase from their house in Paradise. Sbho cries when she sees the fighters beat and threaten to kill the white couple. Bastard rebukes her for crying about the white couple, saying "[w]hat, are you crying for the white people? Are they you relatives?" and Sbho replies, "They are people, you asshole" (Bulawayo 122). Bastard's statement reveals his understanding of family as restricted to the black family. But Sbho's reply breaks "the

psychic boundaries erected by nativism, autochthony, heritage and other mythologies of authenticity” (Eze 4). Here, Bulawayo’s conception of African identities echoes Glissant’s concept of “Relation” and Mbembe’s understanding of “Afropolitanism,” which highlight the contact of cultures, identities and histories. Sbho’s sympathetic reaction to the situation of the white couple transcends cultural and racial borders to land on universal human values.

Bhabha’s notion of the unhomely is relevant to the question of African identities as debated between Sbho and Bastard. Bastard’s reaction to Sbho is an indication of the alienation that she provokes by crossing the boundaries of identities erected by the familiar rhetoric of authenticity and autochthony. This estrangement is the unhomely described by Bhabha in “The World and the Home” as the “displacement [of] the border between home and world becomes confused,” (141). It is the experience of being disoriented by the articulation of transnational/hybrid identities that Bastard goes through. As a reflection of the dual identity of culture, Bastard and Sbho support two different dimensions of culture, a familiar side of identity as coherent and pure on the one hand, and on the other, an uncanny side of it as hybrid and relational. Therefore, Bastard’s question “Are they your relatives?” indicates how African nationalism constructs identities according to absolute racial and geographical meanings, referring to the common, black brotherhood as familial, while Sbho’s articulation of human kinship causes racial and cultural differences to collapse. It is that side of identities which the gang fails to acknowledge, but it keeps returning in the children’s queries.

Besides contesting the African ideologies of autochthony and race, Bulawayo challenges the power of the white man by recalling the power relations underlying his

claim to African citizenship. The white man is trapped in the contradictions of colonialist discourse; being a descendant of British colonizers, he is reminded by the black fighters that he took their land by force. The white man represses this colonial history, but his attitude of superiority and domination betrays it as he orders the leader of the gang to listen. His colonial past returns to disturb his narrative of belonging in Africa when the gang reminds him of this reality. And the fighters invoke this haunting colonial relation when their leader says, “[j]ust like a white man! He has the testicles to tell a black man to listen in his own country. Somebody please tell this white man here that this is not fucking Rhodesia! [...] Know this, you bloody colonist, from now on the black man is done listening, you hear?” (Bulawayo 120). While *We Need New Names* challenges absolute African identities, it also contests the continuing colonialist attitude of domination and rule by the white settler. Bulawayo undermines the legitimization narratives of black and white nationalisms, which lead to exclusion and antagonism toward the Other, and she articulates this subversive stance through the voices of Darling and her friends. They are innocent children making sense of their society and the political conflicts that inflict its white and black populations.

As Bulawayo zooms in on the realities of Darling and her friends, she uncovers alternative imaginary forms of identification that challenge the binary opposition of Self-Other. The children’s imagined worlds invent relational identities in their games. The country-game is their made-up space of dreams and ambitions and transnational loyalties to the “important” countries as defined in the game. “[F]irst we have to fight over the names,” says Darling, “because everybody wants to be certain countries, like everybody wants to be the U. S. A and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France

and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and them. These are the country-countries” (Bulawayo 51). In line with Appadurai’s theorizing of globalization, the country-game suggests the tendency of individuals in the globalized world to shift their imaginations to their everyday realities, as the time is over when modernity was mostly experienced “through the propaganda apparatuses of the newly independent nation-states and their great leaders” (Appadurai 10). Globalization not only led populations and media technologies to cross national boundaries but also caused barriers of national imagination to collapse, and the decline of what Eze calls the “psychological boundaries” once built by nationalisms. As Bulawayo shows, the children imagined worlds and cultural forms that redefine belonging, home, loyalties, and dreams beyond nationality.

Darling and her friends show that imagination resists the presumed fixity of identities. For example, they form personal ideas of life in the Global North and dream about the things that they can do there. Darling dreams about her America, and everyone else picks their countries. Appadurai illustrates how lives imagined by children play an essential role in stimulating the individual’s actions to move, construct other cultures, and open oneself to change. “For migrants,” Appadurai states, “both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (Appadurai 6). As the children talk about what they want to be when they grow up, Darling brags that “I’ll be living in America with Aunt Fostalina, eating real food and doing better things than stealing” (Bulawayo 15).

Imagination stands as an alternative to the actual lives of Darling and her friends in the post-colonial nation-state as a precarious home. *We Need New Names* reflects a disjuncture between the real and the imagined life of the characters. Bulawayo does this by challenging the classical bildungsroman as a genre that articulates progression. As a postcolonial bildungsroman, *We Need New Names* resists progress and rationality associated with modern post-colonial nation and provides an alternative account about assimilation of the subject in society. Instead, we see the disruption of this teleology in the nation's inability to integrate the citizen into the social order. For instance, Darling and her friends are unruly school dropouts, but school is important in forming social subjects assimilated to the state or the colonial regime. Another important example is the natives' estrangement from the post-colonial nation. It shows how the narrative of national emancipation fails. As the state uses power to rule the country, the people express their disillusionment and alienation, "They shouldn't have done this to us, no, they shouldn't [...] we fought to liberate this country [...] Do you remember how the whites drove us from our land [...] those were evil white people who came to steal our land and make us paupers in our own country [...] but aren't you a pauper now?" (Bulawayo 77). This situation recalls something similar to Bhabha's notion of the unhomely as familiar and unfamiliar/alienating. The nation-state is unhomely. It turns out to be just another form of colonialism. The post-colonial nation alienates the natives who think that by fighting the colonizer, they will gain emancipation. It is in this manner that the post-colonial home reveals an unhomely, alienating side to its population.

### **Abject Cosmopolitan**

Bulawayo's novel offers an alternative account of "Afropolitanism" to the African middle-class and elite cosmopolitanism, which challenges the notion of a redemptive upward movement to the Global North. It challenges the idea that by moving to the North, African subjects will turn the page to a prosperous and dignified life. This account interrogates the unquestioned notion embodied in Selasi's understanding of "Afropolitanism", that the African diaspora in the West is at home in the cultures, places, and lifestyles of big cities. The author counters the assumption that movement to the North means social mobility, economic success, and being at-home in the Western world. Instead, Bulawayo focuses on the not-at-homeness of unprivileged postcolonial African subjects in the West, which is under-represented in Selasi's definition of African cosmopolitanism.

For this purpose, I will focus more on using the literal meaning of the "abject" as a subject, feeling, or state of wretchedness, baseness, or misery. This meaning of the "abject" subject helps to illustrate the variant "Afropolitan" narrative presented by Bulawayo. I will also include Julia Kristeva's understanding of the "abject". Kristeva's theorizing of the "abject" subject underlines his/her tendency to subvert essentialist identities and imperialist domination. Kristeva writes:

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (2)

According to this description, the abject has a subversive quality; it is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 4). At the same time, the abject is miserable and wretched because he/she unsettles meanings and identities, as suggested by Kristeva.

Abjection is a crucial aspect of the cosmopolitanism of many postcolonial subjects disillusioned by the post-colonial nation-state. This aspect of Bulawayo’s novel emphasizes the association of abjection with baseness and uncleanness, which is why on many occasions Darling and her friends refer to their country as ‘kaka’, another word for excrement. The evocation of dirt, baseness, and wretchedness is, in fact, a reflection of dystopia in the post-colonial nation. It is also an indication of desperation about the future of the generation growing up after independence. In a revealing situation in which Darling and her friends in Paradise wait for the NGO people to bring food, clothing, and toys to them, it is impossible to miss the wretchedness as the NGO representatives leave in the truck and Darling and her friends run after them and scream, “Take me with you!” (Bulawayo 58). This description should cast light on the wretched conditions at home that fuel Darling’s imagination about life in America. This miserable state of the “Afropolitan” subject both at home and in the host country is an alternative story of Selasi’s and Cole’s middle-class “Afropolitans”.

In a chapter called “How They Left” in the novel, a third-person voice describes the reasons that lead Africans to leave their home in Africa and go to the North. “When things fall apart,” the voice says, “the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky. They flee their own wretched land so their hunger may be

pacified in foreign lands, their tears wiped away in strange lands” (Bulawayo 147-148). Of itself, this account counters the middle-class immigration narrative of free-willed mobility and success in the West because the population of African immigrants that Bulawayo describes is forced to leave their home countries because of their economic and political instability.

Bulawayo shows this when she describes Darling feeling homesick, and she wishes to go to her home country for a visit. At that time, Darling experiences her miserable condition as she misses home considerably while her unregulated immigrant status does not allow her to visit home. Darling’s aunt explains to her that if she goes back to Paradise, Darling will not dream of returning to the United States again because her student visa would expire. When Darling receives a box of guava fruits from home, she feels nostalgic about the days when she and her friends would pick guava from trees and feed on them. These examples show the fact that Darling turns out to have an ambivalent feeling about home in Paradise. Home keeps coming to haunt her. When she speaks on the phone to her friends back home, it triggers the memories of Paradise and her friends. “I get goosebumps just from hearing them talk,” Darling says, “[t]ime dissolves like we are in a movie scene and I have maybe entered the telephone and traveled through the lines to go home. I’ve never left, and I’m ten again and we are playing country-game and Find bin Laden and Andy-over” (Bulawayo 207-208). As she continues to speak to her friends, her feeling of homesickness is overwhelming, and Darling sheds tears. “I am remembering the taste of all these things,” she says, “but remembering is not tasting, and it is painful. I feel tears start to come to my eyes and I don’t wipe them off” (211). This situation shows the importance of Darling’s home in Paradise as a place to which she ties

her memories. In her experience of dislocation, the memories of her first home play a crucial role in forming her feeling of ambivalence, uncertainty, and homelessness. The abject feeling associated with loss triggers Darling's sadness and misery. Bulawayo relates the feeling of abjection to the transnational experience, which challenges the accounts of "Afropolitanism" that Selasi and Cole offer. Compared to Selasi's and Cole's novels, *We Need New Names* foregrounds a different kind of loss—the loss of home as a place of comfort and self-confidence—although the novel also resists the imperialist assumptions of binarism and fixed meanings. This concept of home does not pose a problem for the "Afropolitan" characters of Selasi's and Cole's novels.

Cultural barriers or gaps are an important cause of abjection. Despite her enthusiasm for America, Darling is shaken out of her excitement once she moves there. She is alienated by the language. Her English pronunciation hinders communication and meaning, and she needs to learn American expressions that are culturally proper. This situation becomes a discouraging experience for her by virtue of the effort she needs to put into learning native English expressions. Darling says:

The problem with English is this:" Darling sadly explains, "You usually can't open your mouth and it comes out just like that—first you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to think what you want to say. Then you have to find the words. Then you have to carefully arrange those words in your head. Then you have to say the words quietly to yourself [...] And finally, [...] say the words out loud and have them sound just right." (195)

Darling's aunt, who has lived in the US for a long time, still struggles with her pronunciation. Darling describes her aunt's frustration as she orders a product by phone because the American lady on the phone cannot understand Aunt Fostalina's English.

For Fostalina, using English daily triggers the feeling of not being at home as it becomes a marker of her Otherness. On the other hand, language can be a means to resist cultural and linguistic domination and a lack of effort to assimilate into the mainstream culture and language. "Ah-ngeh-l, Aunt Fostalina adds helpfully, dragging out the word like she is raking gravel. I silently mouth—enjel. Enjel. I hear the girl make a small sigh," (195) the narrator describes a situation which illustrates the abject also as someone who disturbs the dominant identities or language. So, the abject, as Bulawayo shows, is both the one that subverts the social and cultural norms, and someone who is wretched, low-spirited, and unconfident because of those very social norms. In comparison, Selasi's and Cole's "Afropolitan" characters do not face alienation by culture or language. They are at home in the West.

*We Need New Names* also subverts the preconceived image that Darling has about America before she lives there. As a coming of age character, she comes to this realization with time as she learns about her marginality as an African immigrant. Darling learns that her aunt works multiple shifts to secure a living. Darling herself takes on low-paying jobs, which cannot pay her school fees. She says, "When I'm not cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries, I'm bent over a big cart like this, sorting out bottles and cans" (253). While Bulawayo levels criticism at marginalization, she helps herself by (ab)using the bildungsroman as a Western genre that involves an instructive, assimilative journey of the character. Bulawayo challenges this classical definition through her

fictional immigrant narrative that does not end up with the protagonist coming to terms with her life in the United States. Bulawayo also uses a third-person voice that is more mature than Darling. This voice explores Darling's disillusioned reality in America. "And when we got to America," the voice says, "we took our dreams, looked at them tenderly as if they were newly born children, and put them away; we would not pursue them. We would never be the things we had wanted to be: doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers. No school for us, even though our visas were school visas" (243). The voice contests the normative account of immigration associated with assimilation and success offered by Selasi and Cole, as we saw in the previous chapter. Madelaine Hron makes a relevant point in her survey of American literary accounts of immigration. Hron discovers that these accounts neglect immigrant suffering. In the literary narratives of "Afropolitanism" offered by Selasi and Cole, we notice their focus on immigrant hybridity, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism, while neglecting immigrant suffering. "Our cultural understanding of the pain of migration", Hron states, "is largely shaped by definitions, stereotypes, popular assumptions, and generic narrative structures that demarcate and describe the immigrant" (5). Darling's friend, Bastard, shows a preconceived idea about immigration to the West. Bastard says to Darling, "You know you are lucky, Darling" (Bulawayo 210). Through Darling's experience in the United States, Bulawayo challenges such assumptions about immigration.

### **The Abject in Western Eyes**

The African Other is constructed in mass media as the abject. Although *We Need New Names* itself involves a negative representation of the continent, we find that Bulawayo

critiques how the media's constructions of immigrants shape Westerners' ideas about Africa. Darling has a revealing experience of being abjected and othered by a white woman. The lady tells Darling about the war and rape in the Congo, which is covered by CNN. "But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo?" the lady says, "Just awful [...] Jesus, the rapes, and all those killings! How can such things even be happening?" (Bulawayo 177). Binyavanga Wainaina provides a critique of such a tradition of representing Africa in Western visual and print media that (re)produces clichés. He illustrates in his essay "How to Write About Africa" that the West constructs Africans as the abject Other of Self, someone who is miserable and base. The white lady uses the same register by which is maintained the binary opposition of superior Self and inferior Other. It is revealing that the white lady does not try to know things about Darling beyond the stereotypical and exotic assumptions such as, "[a]re you African, too?" "What language is that?" "isn't that beautiful?" (176-177) by which she fixes Darling as an abject Other from Africa. This practice of constructing the Other echoes Edward Said's point that the West constructed the Other through a tradition of writing that legitimates its domination (3).

An obvious example to apply Said's theory to Bulawayo's novel is Darling's boss's unsympathetic reaction to her when she fears a cockroach. He says, "You're just acting up, I know you've seen all sorts of crazy shit over there" (Bulawayo 255). The boss's response suggests that Darling has seen worse things in Africa and that she cannot complain about the uncleanliness of the warehouse. Darling is fixed to the image of the abject by her boss who taps into this Western stereotype about Africans to justify exploitation. The relationship of power and the stereotype, Said argues, is instrumental.

*We Need New Names* contests Western representation of Africans by showing how it legitimates their domination.

As a coming of age character, Darling subverts the ossified stereotypes that construct Africans as the inferior Other of Westerners. Through her portrayal of Darling's ambivalent experience in the U. S., Bulawayo also challenges the form of the classical bildungsroman. Darling does not fit in this classical form because she defies the transparency with which Westerners see her. She says, "I didn't come all the way to America to do meaningless stuff and be nothing" (275). This statement by Darling is relevant to discuss the postcolonial bildungsroman as a subversive literary form. As a racialized subject, Darling faces obstacles to achieve her dreams and so her statement shows frustration at not being able to integrate into American culture. About this, Darling says, "When I'm not cleaning the toilets or bagging groceries, I'm bent over a big cart like this, sorting out bottles and cans" (253). While this statement shows that Darling's disappointment that her experience in the U. S. has not turned out so pleasant, we see a demystified image of "America" as Darling matures. Read against Cole's and Selasi's accounts of African immigration in the Global North, Bulawayo's novel casts light on the dismal side of the lives of African diaspora members who are racialized and marginalized by white culture. From this perspective of stranded African subjects in the North Bulawayo tells a story of "Afropolitan" identities.

In this chapter, I have shown how Abani and Bulawayo "move the centre" of "Afropolitan" identities portrayed by Selasi, Cole. Abani and Bulawayo displace postcolonial cosmopolitanism geographically and socially. They challenge "uniform discourses of transnationality" (Fasselt 87) found in the dominant understanding of

“Afropolitanism”. Also, we have seen how *We Need New Names* and *Graceland* subvert Afrocentric identities and Western imperialist assumptions by blurring the binaries of Self-Other. Yet Abani’s and Bulawayo’s novels follow the pattern that I identified in the introduction section: “Afropolitan” writers foreground Western culture through the construction of a dialogue between African and Western cultures.

## Conclusion

The novels by Calixthe Beyala, Sami Tchak, Chris Abani, NoViolet Bulawayo, Taiye Selasi, and Teju Cole analyzed in this study engage dialogue across cultures as an essential process to form African identities in contexts of immigration and globalization. My analysis of the selected texts written by these writers suggests that cultural dialogue must take a more pluralistic form than their predominant bilateral pattern of relation between African and Western cultures. In their novels, the writers use a dualized paradigm of cultural dialogue. I have sought to emphasize that this pattern of cultural exchange perpetuates the idea of the West as the centre.

This problem shows how these writers reduce cultural exchange to a relationship of Africa and the West that does not describe the complexity of African cultural history. Their literary representations of African cultural identities perpetuate the narrative of Western supremacy. I have discussed how Glissant's Relation and Mbembe's "worlds in movement" provide alternatives to this "Afropolitan" and "Afropean" literary accounts. Glissant's and Mbembe's concepts—including Mikhail Bakhtin's "heteroglossia"<sup>21</sup>—provide a multilateral framework to account for cultural identities. Their frameworks present a serious challenge to binaries of Self-Other. In "Penser pour un nouveau siècle", Mbembe and Felwine Sarr describe how Glissant's principle of "Relation" can "décentrer la pensée" by "revenir à une certaine idée du *Tout*. Ou, pour le dire dans les termes d'Édouard Glissant, du 'tout-monde'" (10).

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<sup>21</sup> In his essay "Discourse of the Novel", Bakhtin defines heteroglossia in language or speech as the intersection of "specific points of view on the world, forms of conceptualizing the world in words, specific worldviews, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values." (291-92). The principle of heteroglossia highlights and explains the plurality of voices in one's speech or language as a hybrid utterance as opposed to a monologic voice or language that does not accommodate diversity of voices.

Cultural dialogue is inseparable from the question of decolonization. African writers' handling of cultural dialogue with the West shows different approaches to resisting Western cultural domination. In the historical and political context of the 1950s and 1960s, novels like *L'Aventure ambiguë* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane and *Un nègre à Paris* by Bernard Dadié articulate the protagonists' experience of anxiety over hybridity with Western culture. Samba, Kane's protagonist, quits school in France and returns to his village to avoid being corrupted by Western culture. Dadié's protagonist, Tanhoé, uses precaution and purchases a return ticket to ensure his return to his village. These novels depict African protagonists' resistance to French culture.

It was that time when Obi Wali, Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'O raised the debate on resistance and language<sup>22</sup>. Wali and Wa Thiong'O believe that African writers should abandon European language and use local languages for literary expression. Achebe had a different approach to resisting the power of English language by shaping the language to convey an African world-view.

At the turn of the twentieth century, young African writers in the West do not see contact with the West the same way that Dadié and Kane saw it, as a nervous experience ending with the return to the native culture. Waberi shows that “[I]es enfants de la postcolonie sont (...) les premiers à user sans complexe du double passeport (...) à se considérer comme africains et à vouloir en même temps dépasser cette appartenance” (11). “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers break with the cultural representations made by writers in the 1950s and 1960s. They understand cultural identity as a discursive

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<sup>22</sup> See Obi Wali's “The Dead End of African Literature” (1963), Achebe's “English and the African Writer” (1965), and Wa Thiong'o's “The Language of African Literature” (1986) for a discussion of decolonization, African literature, and language.

production: “Not an essence but a positioning,” as Stuart Hall argues in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (226). We have noted in a previous chapter the political context and cultural ideologies that shaped an African homogenous identity in the 1950s and 1960s. The latter served in the struggle against colonial occupation in African nations. Dissimilarly, “Afropean/Afropolitan” writers adopt hybridity, as a form of identity, to (re)define Africans in the West. This post-structuralist approach to identity aims to challenge the domination of Western concepts, culture and languages by blurring the binarism of Self-Other. Mudimbe, Mbembe, and Appiah have attacked African nativism for shaping the notion of a pure African identity and have situated this notion in Western nationalist discourses. These African critics emphasize Africa’s contact with the Other and the role of contact with the Other in shaping African cultural identities. In line with this view, “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” writers construct African identities as relational. They highlight transnationalism, diversity, mutation and hybridity as opposed to nationalism and essentialism.

My focus has been to question the pattern of cultural dialogue constructed by “Afropean/Afropolitan” writers. Instead of abandoning the notion of the West as the centre, “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” foreground this cultural centre to redefine contemporary African cultural identities. These writers do not fully subvert Western hegemony through their pattern of cultural dialogue because it focuses on major (Western)-to-minor (African) dialogue. “Afropolitan/Afropean” writers assert Western domination by suggesting that in the entire cultural history of Africa, Western culture now predominates contemporary African history and cultures. So, the pattern of cultural and power relations remains the same—center-periphery. We need to interrogate

“Afropolitan” writers’ approaches to decolonizing cultural identity because it rooted in Western discourse. As Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih argue in *Minor Transnationalism*, decentering the West requires shifting the pattern of transnational relations to minor-to-minor transnationalism (5). Lionnet and Shih’s theorization of transnationalism inspires an alternative way of decentering the West. I have drawn on their concept of “minor transnationalism” to question cultural dialogue in “Afropolitan” and “Afropean” novels. I have mentioned that Glissant and Mbembe provide decolonizing accounts of culture by diversifying the patterns of contact between cultures. The “Afropolitan/Afropean” writers under study attempt decolonize African identities through representations of African hybridity. They complicate cultural identity, gender, and belonging through transnationalism and diaspora. Yet, they do not completely disentangle their discursive representations of African cultures from Western discourse.

I have shown that the “Afropolitan” novels written in French and English selected for this study contest postcolonial nationalist/nativist narratives of identities and Western discourse. *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes* illustrate an example of this subversive practice. The authors undermine masculinist, nationalist discourse by playing out the impact of transcultural contact on the division of postcolonial identity. The writers reveal the emerging diverse voices in the protagonists’ families, which undermine the power of the patriarch. Besides, these novels are about immigration in France. They show how France treats Africans as foreigners and depict the nation’s concern about French identity. France sees Africans and other ethnic minorities as a threat to national identity. Reading Beyala’s and Tchak’s novels as a reaction to state policies of homogenizing national identity explains their constructions of in-between identities that challenge the

state in France. Beyala and Tchak describe Africans in France as insiders to French society through their Afropean representations. “Afropean” is a more popular term in francophone literary studies and refers to “Européens d’ascendance africaine” (Miano 53). It emphasizes the insider position of the African diaspora in France. The writers’ claims to French identity through the novel as a literary form show how their works challenge the notion of a French national identity. We have seen in this research that “Afropolitan” “Afropean” are concepts that refer to the experience of African transnationalism and cultural hybridity. African writers and critics use these terms to assert Africans belonging in Europe and criticize practices of marginalization based on ethnicity or race.

The study has shown that *GraceLand* and *We Need New Names* reveal a disruptive quality of the postcolonial local. Local subjects reiterate and translate Western culture and concepts in-between the global and the local, the same and the different. Abani and Bulawayo offer alternative accounts to national/native identity by focusing on the protagonists’ creative capabilities to imagine and perform new worlds and cultural forms. Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go*, and Cole’s *Open City* likewise subvert the fixity of truth, identities, and meaning by displacing the binaries of Self-Other through performances of the Other in Self—the Other as inside instead of outside the Self. These attempts at interrogating cultural identities show that these postcolonial writers engage in “an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European [...] discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling” (Tiffin 95).

The issue with the novels by these writers is in their attempt to subvert European discourse through a dualized concept of transnationalism and hybridity. The Europe that

they challenge returns in their cultural constructions as the center. This suggests that the concepts of hybridity and transnationalism, as used by some of these “Afropolitan/Afropean” writers, fail to break fully with the binaries of center-periphery. While these novels try to subvert Western forms of literature and culture, they return to reinforce the assumption of the West as the center which they do by privileging cultural dialogue with the West over dialogue with and between non-Western cultures.

I have put the writers in conversation to show how “Afropolitanism/Afropeanism” develops in contemporary African novels in French and English. The focus has been on the writers’ common preoccupation—their attempts to challenge nationalism through Afropolitan and Afropean identities. Through my analysis of these novels, I have examined “Afropolitanism” and “Afropeanism” across a spectrum of themes: gender, ethnicity, generation gap, social class and geographical locations. We have seen how Beyala and Tchak focus on issues of gender and generation gap among African diaspora as essential areas to question national identity. The writers criticize primeval/ancestral forms of African identity and contest French national identity. Through their protagonists, they assert the embedded lives of African subjects in France. Beyala’s and Tchak’s protagonists struggle for the place of insider through their willingness to integrate the social and economic regime despite the difficulties visible minorities must face in France.

As postcolonial texts, *Le petit prince de Belleville* and *Place des fêtes* challenge “francophonie” as an ideology of cultural assimilation. They subvert the form, language, genre and ethnic representations of canonical French literature. The novels debate the question of belonging of African subjects born and/or raised in France and subvert

French language and literary canon through African orality (Beyala), derogatory language (Tchak), a combination of poetic and prosaic genres (Beyala), and separate narrative extracts that defy linearity (Tchak). These aesthetic and discursive practices characterize postcolonial literatures as defined by Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* as involving “the tension with the imperial power, and by [...] their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2). Based on this definition, Beyala and Tchak undermine the universality of French language and literature. By blurring the boundaries of French and African cultures and languages, the writers show how these languages and cultures shape each other. Here, the writers challenge francophonie as a neocolonial concept meant to “offer access to [...] universality” (Parker 97) by marking their differences from the French literary form and language. There is this colonial history that is part of the authors’ experience with French culture and writing, and it keeps returning in the concept of francophonie as a relationship of dependence, hierarchy, and assimilation. Beyala and Tchak challenge French domination through their deployment of different subversive aesthetic practices and Afrodiasporic representations of the monolithic French and France. In contrast, Bulawayo, Abani, Selasi, and Cole do not have this binding colonial relationship with the US, although they contest cultural homogenization and assumptions of imperial power.

My study has further illustrated how the “Afropolitan” authors in English speak to each other. While *Open City* and *Ghana Must Go* illustrate how cosmopolitan identities seek to undo essentialism and binarism, yet they emphasize an elitist postmodern version of “Afropolitanism” that underrepresents ethnic marginality in Western societies. As I have noted, some contemporary African writers and commentators such as Emma Dabiri,

Binyavanga Wainaina, Marta Tveit, and Yewande Omotoso take a distance from this version of “Afropolitanism”. I read *We Need New Names* and *GraceLand* as alternative accounts of “Afropolitan” identities to the ones that Selasi and Cole present. Bulawayo and Abani focus on “Afropolitanism” in the continent and among unprivileged African immigrants in the West.

In engaging these literary accounts of “Afropolitanism” “Afropeanism” in conversation with each other, I have sought to bring to light the diverse stories of “Afropolitan” subjects as a way of avoiding homogenization. In *The Creolization of Theory*, Lionnet uses the term “creolization” to describe “the polycentricity of theory” (31), which is a relevant point to the comparison that I drew here between the authors of English expression. Selasi’s and Cole’s use “theory” to address a postmodern human condition on the one hand. Bulawayo and Abani deploy “theory” to discuss ethnic particularities and differences and experiences of racialization and marginalization in a predominantly white society. While Selasi’s and Cole’s novels minimize the problems of social marginalization of ethnic minorities through a Western universal theoretical frame, Bulawayo and Abani “creolize” Western theory by addressing contextualized subaltern realities (24-25). Lionnet’s concept of “creolization of theory” prevents generalizing theory about heterogeneous subjects and dissimilar situations.

Through this comparative study of “Afropolitan/Afropean” novels, we see how this new generation of “Afropolitan/Afropean” writers tackles the question of African cultural identities. While they complicate identities by engaging transnationalism, migration, and diaspora, they also make us reflect on the extent and limit of their postcolonial texts to go beyond the center-periphery structure.

As this study focuses on how these “Afropolitan” “Afropean” novels present accounts of African cosmopolitanism that privilege the West, it would be interesting to investigate how readers, reviewers and critics in African countries receive these “Afropolitan” novels. Particularly, I would be interested in finding out if the representations of Africans and Africa in these novels relate to Africans in the continent and whether they see them as positive accounts of Africans, as Selasi and Miano claim. Also, since these “Afropolitan/Afropean” novels focus on immigrant experiences in the West, it would be helpful to examine another version(s) of “Afropolitanism” on the continent and see how they deal with cultural diversity and agency in Africa and how such “Afropolitan” stories may decolonize the image of Africa. This might involve investigating how these “Afropolitan” stories written by Africans on the continent circulate in the West.

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