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Charlotte Mackay

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Présentée et soutenue par :

Charlotte MACKAY

le 15 juin 2021

De l'Afropea à l'Afro-Atlantique

**Une étude de quatre romans de Léonora Miano et Fatou
Diome**

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Abstract

Recent research in the field of Francophone African literature has suggested that contemporary Sub-Saharan authors living and writing in Europe present in their works a fundamentally devalorising image of their continent of origin. This is said to be reflective of their inherently negative rapport with their Africanity, a degraded collective identitarian perception that finds its roots in the French colonial project South of the Sahara. Other scholars have argued that Africa no longer features, as it did in the works of previous generations of Sub-Saharan authors, as an important reference point for contemporary African authors who have turned their literary attention towards their own individual lives and to those of other African migrants in Europe. These writers are, according to some, relatively disinterested in their continent of origin and in the people who live there.

This thesis considers the textual representation of the African continent and Africanity in the novels of two contemporary Sub-Saharan authors writing in French on Africa from Europe – Léonora Miano from Cameroon and Fatou Diome from Senegal. Although these two authors are readily making names for themselves in the French and African literary scenes, they remain less studied in academia than many Francophone African male writers and other Francophone African women writers who have been writing for longer. The study seeks to determine whether Diome and Miano present in their texts a devalorising image of Sub-Saharan Africa and Africanity more broadly or, conversely, whether there is evidence in their fiction of a commitment to a project of collective Afro-identitarian revalorisation.

This study demonstrates a marked evolution across four novels by Miano and Diome through the theoretical concept of Afro-diasporic consciousness informed and developed upon by theory drawn from postcolonial, diaspora

and feminist literary studies. It comparatively analyses Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) and Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* (2005) followed by Diome's *Celles qui attendent* (2010) and Miano's *Les aubes écarlates: Sankofa cry* (2009) to reveal the authors' increasingly ardent commitment to rehabilitating and revalorising contemporary Africanity through fiction. This revalorisation is shown to be dependent on movement beyond the bounds of binary and colonially-referential Afropea and towards transnational engagement with Africa's Black Atlantic diaspora. The study ultimately suggests that Africa remains very much present in the literary and affective sensibilities of Miano and Diome.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material
used;

The thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive
of the bibliography and annex.

Charlotte Grace Mackay,

Melbourne, 2019

Publications

While this is not a PhD by publication, material from this thesis has appeared in modified form in the following papers and chapters:

Mackay, Charlotte. ‘Informal female mentorship in Fatou Diome’s *Celles qui attendent*’ in Gregoria Manzin & Véronique Duché (ed.) *Behind the Scenes. Fictional, Artistic and Scholarly Mentoring Partnerships*, Garnier, Paris, (forthcoming).

Mackay, Charlotte. “Les aubes écarlates de Léonora Miano: écologie, mémoire et conscience diasporique”, *Francosphères*, 9, 2, 2020, pp. 149-166.

Mackay, Charlotte Grace. “Les femmes womanistes de Fatou Diome: oppression, résistance et épanouissement au féminin dans *Celles qui attendent*”, *Lendemain : Études comparées sur la France*, 44, 174-175, 2019, pp. 159-171.

Do, Tess and Mackay, Charlotte. ‘Vision afropéenne sur la cuisine camerounaise dans Soulfood équatoriale de Léonora Miano : genre, mémoire et construction nationale’ in Tégua Bogni (ed.) *La cuisine camerounaise. Mots, pratiques et patrimoine*. L’Harmattan, Paris, 2019, pp. 95-130.

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General Introduction¹

Pour l'Europe, pour nous-mêmes et pour l'humanité, camarades, il faut faire peau neuve, développer une pensée neuve, tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf.²

Pourquoi toujours attendre tout de l'Autre et rien de soi-même ? Incapables de planifier notre devenir, nous confessons un désir de servitude éternel. Inconsciemment, nous octroyons à l'Autre la responsabilité de notre destin, signant ainsi notre arrêt de mort.³

On the 8th of July 2017, current French President Emmanuel Macron gave a press conference at the G20 summit in Hamburg. He was asked by Ivorian journalist Philippe Kouhon how much Europe was willing to invest to “save Africa” in reference to growing calls for the implementation of an African Marshal Plan based on that which enabled Europe to rebuild her economies following the devastation of World War II.⁴ Macron responded that such a plan would not work in Africa for the continent’s problems were of a different nature to those of Europe. Africa’s challenge is, according to Macron, fundamentally “civilisational”.⁵ The president’s remarks stirred controversy among social and political figures, African and non-African alike. In a piece written for *Le Monde* a few days later, Franco-Djiboutian novelist, essayist and academic Abdourahman Waberi asserted that if Macron’s comments concerning difficult democratic transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa are generally accepted, others made were inherently problematic in terms of both “form and content”.⁶ The president’s use of the word ‘civilisational’ was particularly damaging as it “revived an old colonial

¹ All translations from French to English in this thesis are those of its author unless explicitly indicated.

² Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1968), p. 233.

³ Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*. (Paris: Éditions du Cygne 2010), p. 86.

⁴ Anonymous, 'Macron France "le défi de l'Afrique est civilisationnel (..) 7 à 8 enfants par femme..."', (Ndoh-chi BUZZ, 2017).

⁵ Abdourahman Waberi, 'En lâchant le gros mot de “civilisationnel”, M. Macron a ravivé une vieille blessure', *Le Monde*, 14/07/2017.

⁶ Ibid.

wound” through its suggestion that Southern humanity and its predicaments are essentially different to those of Northern societies.¹

Many observers were quick to draw parallels between Macron’s comments and those made by another French president a decade earlier on the African continent. On the 26th of July 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy stood in front of students, teachers and political personalities at Senegal’s Cheikh Anta Diop University to deliver his now infamous “Dakar speech” in which he articulated his vision of Africa and Franco-African relations of the past, present and future. Sarkozy touched on various dark chapters of France and Africa’s joint history, including the Transatlantic slave trade and colonisation of much of the Western, Central and Northern regions of the continent. Overall, the tone of Sarkozy’s speech was judged to be troublingly condescending and demonstrative of an extreme ignorance on behalf of the president (and plausibly his speech maker Henri Guaino) of the African continent, her rich history, societies and cultures. In perhaps the most infamous extract of the speech, Sarkozy implied that Africa’s history was limited, that Africans were static, passive, incapable of progress and situated, fundamentally, outside of modernity. He suggested, furthermore, that African peoples should aspire to the ‘universal’ and ‘inherently positive’ values of reason and progress embodied, in his opinion, by Western societies.²

Such Eurocentric rhetoric pronounced, what is more, by “a friend of Africa” points to the persistence of a hierarchised model of value distribution in which Europe (and the West more broadly) continues to self-valorise at the expense of a devalorised Africa. Western media outlets, in the same

¹ Ibid.

² For a comprehensive account of the reactions of African intellectuals to Sarkozy’s speech, consult the following: *L’Afrique répond à Sarkozy. Contre le discours de Dakar*, ed. Makhily Gassama (Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey, 2008).; *L’Afrique de Sarkozy. Un déni d’histoire*, ed. Jean-Pierre Chrétien (Paris: Karthala, 2008).

manner as some political figures, tend to depict Africa in a certain manner with an emphasis on preconceived ideas, frighteningly overwhelming in their negativity, that converge to form the representation of a backward continent engulfed in a “ravaging process of auto-destruction”.¹ For Franco-Cameroonian intellectual and author Nathalie Etoke, “Africa exists exclusively through the pornography of violence and poverty”,² an interpretation that is seconded by political scientist Achille Mbembe who stresses that “this great soft and fantastic body” is routinely depicted through connotations of tragedy, monstrosity and, above all, death.³ Anne-Cécile Robert, journalist at *Le Monde diplomatique*, similarly highlights the role played by media outlets who present events occurring in Africa in a manner which deforms the image of the continent, both that projected outwards as well as that relayed inwards to her own inhabitants. The most alarming aspect of this, according to Robert, is the fact that the pathological image of Africa has penetrated, even contaminated, the minds of local populations. She notes with regret that it has come to be reflected in the incalculable number of novels written by African authors who “offer up with disgust the continent’s humiliations without tracing any future perspectives”.⁴

In recent scholarship focusing on the specific notion of self-hatred in Francophone African fiction, scholar Bourahima Ouattara argues that the youngest literary generation of Sub-Saharan writers living in the diaspora – Waberi’s “children of the postcolony”⁵ – demonstrate markers of a distinct

¹ Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala 2000), p. 19.

² Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 71.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Anne-Cécile Robert, *L'Afrique au secours de l'Occident* (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Atelier/Les Éditions Ouvrières, 2006), p. 91.

⁵ A term referring to a sub-set of contemporary writers born after the wave of Sub-Saharan independences in the 1960s who supposedly experience their dual identity (namely African and French) harmoniously and who aspire to a certain universalism marking as such a distinct divergence from their Sub-Saharan predecessors. See: Abdourahman Waberi, 'Les enfants de la postcolonie. Esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique Noire', *Notre Librairie* /135 (1998), 8-15.

self-hatred towards their African selves and origins. Ouattara asserts that the cultural hybridity apparent in the texts of contemporary Sub-Saharan writers and reflective of their migrant statuses, is in fact revealing of their inherently negative rapport with their Africanity.¹ He states that:

Il est aisé de trouver dans ces écrits les multiples manifestations de leur africanité ; une esthétique de l’oralité, une langue française aux particularités du français en Afrique noire d’une part et de l’autre, une appropriation fictionnelle – un imaginaire romanesque – des cultures négro-africaines. Cet amour-répulsion est une des caractéristiques majeures de la haine de soi. Il y affleure un désir de thématization de sa propre culture tout en s’en éloignant, en l’exécant et en la dévalorisant. L’exécution et la dévalorisation des civilisations *ab initio* sont la nervure centrale de l’ethnologie coloniale et des littératures coloniales.²

[It is easy to find in these writings multiple manifestations of their Africanity: an oral aesthetic, a French language with characteristics of Black African French on the one hand and on the other a fictional appropriation – a novelistic imagination – of Black African cultures. This love-repulsion is one of the major characteristics of self-hatred. It shows a thematic desire for one’s own culture while distancing oneself from it by abhorring and devalorising it. Execration and devalorisation of civilisations *ab initio* are the main framework of colonial ethnology and colonial literatures.]

Ouattara suggests that the devalorising representation of Sub-Saharan cultures (made evident through recourse to the tropes and themes of violence/non-respect for life, Black sexuality, the apologia of colonialism and/or slavery and Sub-Saharan immigration) in the works of some Francophone African postcolonial writers is reflective of an underlining self-hatred and inherent unease with African identity.³ Yet he also suggests that this “auto-denigration” (“auto-dénègrement”) operating literarily through a taking up of the themes and motives of colonial literature is influenced by

¹ Africanity, a term and a notion, is becoming increasingly popular in cultural, literary and cinematic scholarship on African and Afrodescendant writers, artists and thinkers. In this work, the term will be used interchangeably with African/Black identity and will refer to a self-representation based on the “trans-geographical similarity of the historical and everyday life experiences of blacks around the world”. Boulou Ebanda de B’béri, ‘Africanity in Black cinema. A conjunctural ground for new expressions of identity’, *Cultural Studies*, 22/2 (2008), 187-208, p. 193. See also: Boulou Ebanda de B’béri, ‘The Semeiotic of Africanity in Gaston Kaboré’s film *Buud Yam*’, *Tydskrif vir letterkunde*, 44/1 (2007), 98-109.

² Bourahima Ouattara, *La haine de soi dans le roman africain francophone*, ed. Bernard Mouralis (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2017), p. 217-18.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

the financial and professional need for these authors to align their representations of Africa with their Western (namely French) reading public's preconceived ideas concerning the 'dark' continent.¹

Though not distinctly concerned with the issue of self-hatred, literary scholar Odile Cazenave has similarly investigated the writings of contemporary Francophone African authors living in France and namely the rapport of these authors with their continent of origin. In *Afrique sur Seine. A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*, she posits that African writers of the contemporary generation exhibit in their fiction a pronounced detachment from Africa. Cazenave states that these writers are, in fact, "only slightly preoccupied with Africa itself" and that they, in stark opposition to the poets of Négritude who assumed the task of revalorising a collective African identity systematically abased in the face of European imperialism, "do not constitute a movement" their "voices remain[ing] the expression of their individuality rather than that of a collective agenda".²

The present study was inspired by the above findings and proposes to investigate the literary portrayal of the African continent, her peoples and identities in the works of two contemporary Afro-diasporic women writers, Léonora Miano and Fatou Diome. My study seeks to provide answers to the following broad questions: do Diome and Miano present in their fiction the same devalorising tendencies vis-à-vis Sub-Saharan Africa identified by Ouattara? Do they exhibit the same detachment from Africa that Cazenave attributes to the contemporary generation of Europe-based African writers through a focus on individualised movement "from Africa to France and to the community of Africans implanted in France"?³ Or, conversely, is there

¹ Ibid., p. 54.

² Odile Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine. A New Generation of African Writers in Paris* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 1, 161.

³ Ibid., p. 43.

evidence in Diome's and Miano's fiction of a commitment to a project of collective Afro-identitarian revalorisation and how does this differ from that promulgated by Négritude's mostly male voices? Is this project restricted to continental Africa or does it extend into the African diaspora and, if yes, how far into diasporic territories?

Léonora Miano was born in 1973 in Douala on Cameroon's Atlantic coast. She moved to France in 1991 where she has lived ever since in order to pursue her tertiary studies in Anglophone literature. Miano published her first text, a novel entitled *L'intérieur de la nuit*, in 2005.¹ Her literary corpus has since grown to boast collections of short stories (*Afropean Soul et autres nouvelles* and *Soulfood équatoriale*), poetry (*Ce qu'il faut dire*), theatre pieces (*Écrits pour la parole* and *Red in blue trilogie*) and critical essays (*Habiter la frontière* and *L'impératif transgressif*) yet remains most densely comprised of novels: *Contours du jour qui vient*, *Tels des astres éteints*, *Les aubes écarlates*, *Blues pour Élise*, *Ces âmes chagrines*, *La Saison de l'ombre*, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 1: Melancholy*, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 2: Héritage* and *Rouge impératrice*.² In recent years, Miano has also coordinated two collective volumes of short stories: *Première nuit. Une anthologie du désir* and *Volcaniques: Une anthologie du plaisir*.³ In 2017 she brought several Afrod descendant voices together in light of recent

¹ Léonora Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit* (Paris: Plon, 2005a).

² Léonora Miano, *Soulfood équatoriale* (Paris: NIL, 2009).; Léonora Miano, *Ce qu'il faut dire*, (Paris: L'Arche, 2019), Léonora Miano, *Écrits pour la parole* (Paris: L'Arche, 2012).; Léonora Miano, *Red in blue trilogie* (Paris: L'Arche, 2015).; Léonora Miano, *Habiter la frontière* (Paris: L'Arche 2012).; Léonora Miano, *L'Impératif transgressif* (Paris: L'Arche 2016).; Léonora Miano, *Contours du jour qui vient* (Paris: Plon, 2006).; Léonora Miano, *Tels des astres éteints* (Paris: Plon, 2008).; Léonora Miano, *Les aubes écarlates* (Paris: Plon, 2009).; Léonora Miano, *Blues pour Élise: Séquences afropéennes Saison 1* (Paris: Plon, 2010).; Léonora Miano, *Ces âmes chagrines* (Paris: Plon, 2011).; Léonora Miano, *La Saison de l'ombre* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2013).; Léonora Miano, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 1: Melancholy* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2016).; Léonora Miano, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 2: Héritage* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2017); Léonora Miano, *Rouge impératrice* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2019).

³ Léonora Miano, *Première nuit. Une anthologie du désir* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2014).; Léonora Miano, *Volcaniques. Une anthologie du plaisir* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2015).

and repeated cases of police brutality directed against young men of African origin in France in the collective volume *Marianne et l'enfant noir*.¹ Miano has had success in the European, African and even American literary scenes despite the fact that only two of her novels to date, *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *La saison de l'ombre*, have been translated into English.² She is currently completing a doctoral degree in Commonwealth Literature at the Université Paris Nanterre.³

Fatou Diome was born in 1968 on the rural island of Niodior in the Sine-Saloum Delta in South West Senegal where she was raised primarily by her maternal grandmother in a modest village environment. She moved to France in 1990 and settled in Alsace in 1994 where she completed a doctoral degree at the University of Strasbourg on the literary and cinematic work of Sembène Ousmane.⁴ Diome's professional career as a writer was launched through the publication of short stories including *L'eau multiple* in 2000 and *La préférence nationale et autres Nouvelles* in 2001.⁵ She followed on with another collection of short stories entitled *Les loups de l'Atlantique* and the novella *Ports de folie* in 2002 and saw her first novel, *Le Ventre de*

¹ Léonora Miano, *Marianne et le garçon noir* (Paris: Pauvert, 2017).

² Léonora Miano [trans. Tamsin Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, (Lincoln: Bison Original, 2010).; Léonora Miano, *The Season of the Shadow*, ed. Gila Walker (Chicago: Seagull Books; University of Chicago Press, 2018). The author has amassed a hoard of literary distinctions and prizes since her first publication in Europe and Africa. These include most recently the Prix Femina and the Grand Prix du Roman Métis (both 2013) for the novel *La Saison de l'ombre*, the Goncourt des Lycéens (2006) and the Prix de l'Excellence camerounaise (2007) for *Contours du jour qui vient*, the Prix Montalembert du premier roman de femme (2006), the Prix Louis Guilloux, the Prix René Fallet and the Prix Grinzane Cavour (2008) in the category of first foreign novel for the Italian translation of *L'intérieur de la nuit*. *Les aubes écarlates* won the Trophée des Arts Afro-Caribéens and was a finalist for the Prix des 5 continents de la Francophonie (both 2010). In 2011, Miano was awarded the Grand Prix littéraire de l'Afrique noire for the entirety of her literary production, nominated for the Prix littéraire de la Porte Dorée for *Blues pour Élise* before receiving the Prix Seligmann contre le racisme in 2012 for *Écrits pour la parole*.

³ Her thesis, being written under the supervision of Claire Bazin, is entitled: "Jamaica Kincaid: l'écriture insulaire". Theses.Fr, 'Thèses.fr'.

⁴ The title of Diome's doctoral thesis is "Le voyage, les échanges et la formation dans l'œuvre littéraire et cinématographique de Sembène Ousmane". Casa Africa, 'Fatou Diome'.

⁵ Fatou Diome, 'L'eau multiple', *Présence Africaine*, 161-162 (2000), 203-06.; Fatou Diome, *La Préférence Nationale Et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2001).

l'Atlantique, published in 2003.¹ Then came the novels *Kétala* and *Inassouvies, nos vies* followed by the tale *Le vieil homme sur la barque* and the collection of poems *Mauve*, and two more novels, *Celles qui attendent* and *Impossible de grandir*.² More recently, Diome published a nonfiction text, a sort of political manifesto which resembles in many ways the critical essays of Miano, in response to the fierce debates surrounding French national identity leading up to the 2017 presidential election.³ This was coupled the same year with a chapter contribution entitled 'Le bleu de la Roya' to the collective work *Ce qu'ils font est juste. Ils mettent la solidarité et l'hospitalité à l'honneur*.⁴ This text brought together the work of several authors on the theme of clandestine migration to Europe critiquing namely the harsh consequences inscribed in law for any civilian found helping irregular migrants on French soil.⁵ Diome's most recent publication was a novel, *Les veilleurs de Sangomar*, published in 2019.⁶

The choice to focus this study on fictional works by Miano and Diome was made based on several factors. Firstly, the authors are both younger members of the fourth and most recent generation of African writers, the same generation that featured in Cazenave's *Afrique sur Seine* (though

¹ Fatou Diome, 'Les loups de l'Atlantique', *Étonnants Voyageurs. Nouvelles Voix d'Afrique* (Paris: Éditions Hoëbeke, 2002b).; Fatou Diome, 'Ports de folie', *Brèves*, September/66 (2002a), 4-12.; Fatou Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (Paris: Éditions Anne Carrière, 2003b).

² Fatou Diome, *Kétala* (Paris: Éditions Anne Carrière, 2006).; Fatou Diome, *Inassouvies nos vies* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008a).; Fatou Diome, *Le vieil homme sur la barque* (Paris: Naïve éditions 2010a).; Fatou Diome; Titouan Lamazou, *Mauve* (Paris: Arthaud/Flammarion, 2010).; Fatou Diome, *Celles qui attendent* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).; Fatou Diome, *Impossible de grandir* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).

³ Fatou Diome, *Marianne porte plainte !* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017a).

⁴ Fatou Diome, 'Le bleu de la Roya', in Béatrice Vallaeys (ed.), *Ce qu'ils font est juste. Ils mettent la solidarité et l'hospitalité à l'honneur* (Paris: Don Quichotte Éditions, 2017b), 85-100.

⁵ Though *La préférence nationale* earned her significant recognition in the French literary field, it was Diome's first novel, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, that brought her true literary acclaim both in France and internationally. Not only did it win the Prix des Hémisphères Chantal Lapicque and the LiBeraturpreis de Francfort prize in 2005, but it was also lauded by many secondary school juries winning the Prix inter-lycéen de Loire-Atlantique/Prix des lecteurs nantais in 2004. Her fourth novel, *Celles qui attendent*, was nominated for the Prix des Librairies, short listed for the Prix littéraire de la Porte Dorée alongside Miano (both 2011) and received the Prix Solidarité in 2012. In 2009, Diome was awarded by the French Minister for Culture the title of 'Chevalier de l'ordre national des Arts et des Lettres de France'.

⁶ Fatou Diome, *Les veilleurs de Sangomar* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2019).

Miano and Diome do not themselves figure in this publication).¹ Secondly, women's writing in African literature is a relatively new phenomenon for, as underscored by Pascale Abadie, "African writing has long been an exclusively male domain".² Although Miano and Diome are readily making names for themselves in the French, African and world literary fields, they remain less intensely studied in academia when compared to contemporary African male authors (namely Alain Mabanckou). Miano and Diome also receive less scholarly attention than more established women writers (including Calixthe Belaya and Ken Bugul who have been writing for longer and who benefit, particularly in the Belaya's case, from a significantly larger audience). Thirdly, both Miano and Diome began publishing in the early 2000s and their fictional works correspond closely in terms of publication dates. The two novels written by Diome and chosen for analysis in this study were published in 2003 and 2010 while those of Miano were published in 2005 and 2009. Close publication dates will facilitate the task of tracking any parallels in the temporal evolution of both authors' literary depictions of the African continent and contemporary Africanity.

I have decided to focus my research on two Sub-Saharan authors originally from different regions of Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa – West and Central – yet linked by certain commonalities due to their respective countries' pasts. Diome is, as mentioned, originally from Senegal in West Africa and Miano from Cameroon in Central Africa. Senegal and Cameroon

¹ I note that both Diome and Miano feature in a more recent book co-written by Cazenave and Patricia Célérier entitled "Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden by Commitment" and published in 2011. The book covers a wide range of African authors and the works of Diome and Miano (Diome's *La Préférence Nationale*, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Kétala* and Miano's *Afropean Soul*) are not examined in any great depth. Cazenave appears to revise some of her earlier claims made in *Afrique sur Seine* in this more recent publication in which the authors argue that "aesthetic as well as political issues are now at the forefront of debates about the African literary canon". Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (Charlottesville; London: The University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 2.

² Pascale Abadie, 'Entre Afrique et Occident: Une nouvelle génération d'écrivaines', *Cincinnati Romance Review*, /43 (2017), 150-64, p. 150.

were both former jewels in the French colonial crown and pivotal sites for French expansion into West and Central Africa, the two Sub-Saharan regions most impacted by French imperialism.¹ Moreover, Cameroon and Senegal, now independent nations, have produced perhaps the most (and most prolific) female writers in the years since their independences in 1960. Despite the factors that appear to lend weight to the appropriateness of comparing the literary production of these two authors, this study is, to the best of my knowledge, the only one engaging in the exclusive comparison of literary works by Diome and Miano.

As literary scholar Ania Loomba explains in her book *Colonisation/Postcolonisation*, literature provides authors from formerly colonised nations with a vector through which to challenge the representational assumptions and stereotypes applied to them by the dominant colonial voice while also revealing the tensions and complexities of the coloniser-colonised relationship and how this impacts on the formation of identities in the postcolonial era.² I have decided to privilege the novel over other literary forms in this study as I believe that the novel offers certain advantages (by virtue of its length etc.) in terms of what authors can and cannot communicate within its pages. The novel is, as noted by Senegalese scholar and author Felwine Sarr, “one of the places where the contemporary African existence is probably best expressed – its collective being and the singular experiences of its individual identities but also its dreams and projections.”³

¹ Cameroon is, of course, a particularly complicated colonial case. It is the only Sub-Saharan nation to have endured the presence of three imperial European powers – Germany, France and England. See: David Kom, *Les perspectives de la colonisation: Les trois colonisateurs du Cameroun. Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

² Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 70-71.

³ Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia* (Paris: Éditions Philippe Rey, 2016), p. 134.

This study will comparatively examine Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* followed by Diome's *Celles qui attendent* and Miano's *Les aubes écarlates: Sankofa cry*. The four texts were chosen among the author's growing corpora for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, though their publication dates are very close, they are yet to be studied in conjunction. Secondly, the texts are all predominantly set in African spaces, which is not the case for all of Miano's and Diome's works. Moreover, the texts employ the *same* African spaces – Diome's novels both take place in Niodior, the author's native island, while those of Miano are set in the fictional Equatorial African nation of Mboasu. The use of consistent African spaces, whether populated or not by the same characters, enables a better appreciation of any transformations across time concerning the authors' textual depictions of Africa and Africanity.

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature and will engage with a wide range of theoretical material most of which is drawn from the fields of postcolonial, diaspora, epistemological and feminist literary theory. Postcolonial theory lends itself well to literary studies concerning the identitarian conceptualisation of both formerly colonised and coloniser peoples. Postcolonial theories and concepts used in this study include, but are not limited to, cultural hybridity (Homi K. Bhabha), diaspora, diasporic consciousness (Nathalie Etoke), (counter-)modernity (Paul Gilroy; Walter D. Mignolo) and various strains of ecocritical discourse (Rob Nixon; Byron Caminero-Santangelo). Theory drawn from gender studies will also feature as an important component of this study. This is somewhat unavoidable given that my selected novels were written by women who, moreover, often place female characters at the heart of their texts. The study will employ various offshoots of feminist theory, namely Africana womanism (Clenora Hudson-Weems) and ecowomanism (Melanie Harris). Despite being primarily gender-based, womanist discourse veers considerably into the

overlapping theoretical territories engendered when postcolonial and gender studies collide.

The project will be divided into two sections each comprising several chapters. Part 1 will examine Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit*. It will focus on the persistence of a narrow Afropean binary positing the superiority of Europe over Africa and resulting in a degraded Afro-continental image. Part 2 will analyse Diome's *Celles qui attendent* alongside Miano's *Les aubes écarlates*. It will underscore the authors' attempts to revalorise African identities through movement beyond colonially-referential Afropea and towards an engagement with the African diaspora (namely that of the Black Atlantic). The chapters of the second part of this thesis will demonstrate Diome and Miano's concrete endorsement of an emancipatory Afro-diasporic consciousness the articulation of which will be shown to be dependent on three elements – a counter-modern, historical and feminine consciousness. I have decided to integrate the literature review throughout the thesis. As such, there is no dedicated literature review chapter. Evoking the relevant scholarship in tandem with the theory and textual analysis will enable me to demonstrate with greater clarity Miano and Diome's movement "from Afropea to the Afro-Atlantic".

PART 1: PROBLEMATIC CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN AFROPEA

Imagine une génération à la fois consciente et savante de ce qu'elle doit connaître. Représente-toi la chose. Ici. Sur la Terre Mère. Au cœur du Pays Premier. Nous ferions des étincelles. Nous ferions pousser des étoiles.¹

J'écris, pour rendre la mémoire à cette Afrique amnésique, celle sans orgueil, si prompte à la conversion, qui renonce à son identité pour se laisser aveugler par des mythes importés, qui ne concernent en rien la culture négro-africaine.²

¹ Miano, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 1: Melancholy*, p. 111.

² Diome, *Impossible de grandir*, p. 311.

Part 1 résumé

Part 1 of this research project focuses on Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit*. Despite their relatively close publication dates and sharing of key themes, these novels are yet to be analysed together. A comparative reading of the two is nonetheless warranted as both texts, I believe, depict a similar image of contemporary African-European relations. They namely portray through fiction a difficult rapport between certain members of the diaspora living and working in Europe and their communities of origin in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the basis of the uncomfortable Afropean identity lies what Miano has identified as a "degraded African self-consciousness".¹ This term refers to the troubled rapport that some African peoples and communities have with their own collective African identity, with their Africanicity, historically and contemporarily abased and invalidated by the dominant cultures of the world and singularly so by (former) European colonial powers.

The first section of this study will draw heavily on theory from many fields including postcolonial, gender and diaspora studies. I will begin by introducing the two selected novels for analysis before briefly considering the contexts of their respective publications. I will then turn to the author's conceptions of their composite cultural identities before framing the concept of Afropeanity in relation to the postcolonial notion of cultural hybridity. I will proceed by outlining the African diaspora and the concept of (Afro-)diasporic consciousness. I will then turn my attention to the textual analysis of the novels demonstrating that the uncomfortable existences of the two female Afropean protagonists ultimately bring into question laudatory discourses surrounding theoretically empowering and emancipatory cultural

¹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 6.

hybridity in the transnational age. I will subsequently analyse two male continental characters engaging in discussion of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism as polarising and extreme discourses that recreate colonial divisions through their promulgation of immutable and hierarchised racial identities. In the last section of textual analysis, I will consider the author's literary representations of the continent's youth through the theme of sacrifice highlighting the dire need to establish an Afro-diasporic consciousness across and beyond national and continental lines.

1.0 Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*

1.0.1 *L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA NUIT*

Both Miano and Diome have been the subjects of some controversy vis-à-vis themes examined in their first published novels. For Miano, this controversy was linked directly to the content of *L'intérieur de la nuit* (henceforth *L'intérieur*) which recounts the story of Ayané, a young woman who returns after years of studying in France to her native village Eku in the imaginary postcolonial Equatorial African nation of Mboasu to be by her dying mother's side.¹ While she is there, Eku is invaded by rebel soldiers, led by the young and idealistic Isilo, who attempt a coup d'état to overrun the government under the guise of restoring honour and unity to African people not yet fully emancipated despite the withdrawal of the former colonial power. Isilo and his rebels impose the horrific sacrifice of a young boy, an action that they defend as being necessary for the reinstatement of communion between clans separated as a consequence of the partitioning of Sub-Saharan Africa during European imperialism. Their sacrifice performed, the rebels kidnap a group of young boys to fill their ranks as child soldiers leaving the village population to come to terms with the traumatic events having unfolded in Eku and their implication in them.

Most of the criticism directed towards Miano's text concerned her depiction of violence and specifically her apparent adhesion to a 'stereotypically' Western conception of African societies as inherently barbarous and singularly so towards their most vulnerable members, in this

¹ Mboasu constitutes the primary scene for all three of the *Suite africaine* trilogy novels (*L'intérieur de la nuit*, *Contours du jour qui vient* and *Les aubes écarlates*). I note that the narrative of *Ces âmes chagrines*, novel in which none of the characters of the *Suite africaine* trilogy are revived, also takes place partially in Mboasu with the remainder of the narrative situated in metropolitan France.

case, children.¹ As French and Francophone literary scholar Valérie Dusailant-Fernades notes, such interpretations led many African readers to accuse the writer of “playing the game of the West”² while the depiction of the cannibalistic ritual even led to a form of commercial censorship in France where certain bookstores refused to stock and sell the novel for its scenes judged “too taboo”.³ In her 2012 article on *L'intérieur*, Janice Spleth argues that the critical response to Miano’s text was disproportionate as it focused predominately on the “parts of the narrative that evoked the violence and inhumanity of the continent’s civil wars”.⁴ Miano has herself defended her authorial undertaking regarding this text and others that she insists “speak to mankind about itself and not only to Africa”.⁵ She elaborates on her consternation at such a literal interpretation of what remains, after all and in her opinion, an artistic creation:

Dès la parution de *L'intérieur de la nuit*, [...] j’ai constaté avec un effroi maintes fois renouvelé depuis, que l’ouvrage n’était pas lu comme ce qu’il était, c’est-à-dire une construction d’auteur, un travail artistique ayant jailli d’un esprit et d’une sensibilité eux-mêmes forgés par un parcours personnel. Le texte a été pris comme un témoignage, alors que je n’ai jamais vécu aucune des situations décrites dans ses pages. Je n’ai jamais habité un village subsaharien, ne me suis jamais retrouvée face à face avec un seigneur de guerre, n’ai jamais assisté à un sacrifice humain. Je n’ai pas enquêté sur les conflits subsahariens de notre temps, ni même sur ceux d’une autre époque. Mon histoire personnelle [...] n’a rien de commun avec celle des personnages du texte.⁶

¹ The cannibalistic scene was particularly negatively received by both critics and readers. For in more in-depth discussion of cannibalism and the novel’s reception, see the following article: Magali Compan, 'Writers, rebels, and cannibals: Léonora Miano’s rendering of Africa in *L'intérieur de la nuit*', *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 34/1 (2010), 81-102. Pierre Soubias’ 2009 article on Miano’s novel probes the author’s use of the themes of extreme violence and horror in a nuanced manner and merits reading. See: Pierre Soubias, 'Maïssa Bey et Léonora Miano: deux romancières face à l’inhumain', *Persée*, Horizons Maghrébins - Le droit à la mémoire/60 (2009), 42-47.

² Valérie Dusailant-Fernades, 'Le sort des enfants de la postcolonie: « Suite Africaine » de Léonora Miano', in Alice Tang (ed.), *L’œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano. Fiction, mémoire et enjeux identitaires* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014), 29-44, p. 32.

³ Trésor Simon Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 25/2 (2010), 101-13, p. 104.

⁴ Janice Spleth, 'Civil War and Woman’s Place in Léonora Miano’s *L'intérieur de la nuit* (*Dark Heart of the Night*)', *Research in African Literatures*, 43/1 (2012), 89-100, p. 89.

⁵ Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 104.

⁶ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 40. In a recent interview, Miano states that literature become for her a means through which to survive traumatising events and that the personal violence that infiltrates her texts

[As soon as *L'intérieur de la nuit* was published, [...] I noticed with a dismay many times renewed since that the work was not read as it should have been, that is as an author's construction, an artistic work having sprung from a mind and sensitivity forged through personal experience. The text was taken as testimony even though I have never experienced any of the situations described in its pages. I have never lived in a Sub-Saharan village, have never found myself face to face with a warlord, have never witnessed a human sacrifice. I did not research contemporary Sub-Saharan conflicts nor those of other periods. My personal story [...] has nothing in common with that of the text's characters.]

Miano has been very explicit in stating that the novel's plot, characters and the violent practices detailed within its pages do not in any manner reflect her life story. The inspiration for her novel was, however, not completely removed from reality and specifically that of the African continent. Miano has previously stated being influenced by a documentary on the phenomenon of child soldiers in an Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo in which a boy recounts being forced to consume the flesh of his murdered brother following the arrival of a militia group in his village.¹ She has also divulged that the choice of setting her story in the imaginary Equatorial African nation of Mboasu,² "a neutral country", was partially motivated by a desire not to "unnecessarily" offend readers as the practices that she details are known of in several Sub-Saharan contexts.³ Miano's deliberate attempt at neutrality in designating a fictional nation was somewhat undermined in Tamsin Black's English translation of *L'intérieur* published in the United States in 2010 by the University of Nebraska Press under the title *Dark Heart of the Night*. The English language title chosen greatly displeased the author through its "clear allusion to Joseph Conrad's late 19th-century work *Heart*

was subsequently and erroneously attributed to Africa. Léonora Miano, 'Le grand entretien: Léonora Miano, Littératures partagées (2/4)', in Christiane Chaulet-Achour (ed.), (DIACRITIK, 2017c).

¹ Léonora Miano, "'L'intérieur de la nuit'" un roman de Léonora Miano. Une traversée des profondeurs de l'Afrique', in *Amina*, (2005b), 68-69, p. 2. In another interview, Miano specifies that the documentary having inspired *L'intérieur* was on child soldiers in Liberia. Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 102.

² Meaning "chez nous les Bantous" [where the Bantus live] in Douala language from Cameroon. Miano, "'L'intérieur de la nuit'" un roman de Léonora Miano. Une traversée des profondeurs de l'Afrique', p. 3.

³ Ibid.

of Darkness”,¹ a text widely criticised since Nigerian writer and critic Chinua Achebe’s 1977 analysis argued for its inherent racism.² For Miano, the title tainting her novel with “Conradian accents” is singularly problematic as it suggests “a discourse on an Africa plunged into darkness. [...] A savage, barbarous and hardly human Africa”.³ Miano was, however, most distressed about the foreword written by Terese Svoboda which the author openly accused of being “full of lies”.⁴ Literary scholar Isabel Hollis-Touré notes that much of the impetus behind Miano’s denunciation of the foreword stemmed from the fact that Svoboda situated the work explicitly in Cameroon, instead of the imaginary country of Mboasu, stating that the text was inspired by Cameroonian history.⁵

The drawing of such a fine line between fiction and reality has led some academics working on *L’intérieur* to draw conclusions resembling those retained by a portion of African readership.⁶ Francophone literary researcher Étienne-Marie Lassi contends that the image projected of Africa across Miano’s entire *Suite africaine* trilogy is one of an unstable, auto-destructive continent ravaged by war and plagued by misery, an image that conforms to those promoted by Western media outlets that rely on stereotypical representations of a “dying” Africa.⁷ Ouattara too, in placing

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Blackwood's Magazine, 1899).

² Isabel Hollis-Touré, 'Strangers in their own Homes: Displaced Women in Léonora Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *Contours du jour qui vient*', in Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (ed.), *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), 17-32, p. 20. See: Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *The Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977), 782-94.

³ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 53.

⁴ Richard Lea, 'Léonora Miano's retrograde foreword', *The Guardian* (Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/mar/18/leonara-miano-foreword>, 2010). See also: Éloïse Brezault, 'Le Discours préfacial dans la traduction américaine de *L'intérieur de la nuit* de Léonora Miano', *Women in French Studies* (2011), 91-102.; Éloïse Brezault, 'Le scandale comme stratégie d'exotisme chez Calixthe Beyala et Léonora Miano: Le rôle de l'institution littéraire face aux auteurs post/coloniaux', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 22/1 (2018), 58-66.

⁵ Hollis-Touré, 'Strangers in their own Homes: Displaced Women in Léonora Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *Contours du jour qui vient*', p. 20.

⁶ Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 104.

⁷ Étienne-Marie Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l'Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 49/3 (2015), 443-57, p. 449.

the author in his category of Francophone African writers of self-hate, has associated Miano's work with a distinctly Afro-pessimistic tone. In his reading of the second instalment of the *Suite africaine* trilogy, *Contours du jour qui vient*, Ouattara establishes an explicit parallel between Miano's literary representation of Africa and African societies and that advanced by Afro-pessimistic journalist Stephen Smith in his highly publicised and controversial 2003 essay *Négrologie: Pourquoi l'Afrique meurt*.¹ Moreover, what Lassi sees as the author's calculated (de)construction and repetition of stereotypical representations has led him to question the degree of critical autonomy that Miano self-attributes suggesting that this image has been carefully manipulated to conform to Western doxa plausibly as a result of the central domination of France and, more specifically, Paris, in the production of Francophone literature.² Lassi has stated that:

Les stéréotypes sur lesquels [Miano] s'appuie permettent à son œuvre de se conformer aux postures idéologiques marquées de sensationnalisme qui définissent l'énonçable, c'est-à-dire ce qui se dit et s'écrit sur l'Afrique dans les sociétés occidentales. Les stéréotypes assurent la présence de la doxa dans l'œuvre. La concordance entre l'œuvre et la doxa, entendue comme l'ensemble des opinions populaires, garantit à son tour une certaine popularité à l'auteure et à son œuvre.³

[The stereotypes drawn upon [by Miano] allow her work to conform to the ideological postures marked by sensationalism that define the enunciable, that is, what is said and written in regard to Africa in Western societies. Stereotypes ensure the presence of doxa in the work. Concordance between the work and doxa, meaning popular opinion in general, guarantees in turn a certain popularity for the author and his/her work.]

Although she makes no comment on the effect that the dominance of Parisian publishing has in Miano's work, Francophone literary scholar Elodie Tang has come to a similar conclusion regarding the Cameroonian author's literary

¹ Stephen Smith, *Négrologie: Pourquoi l'Afrique meurt* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2003).; Ouattara, *La haine de soi dans le roman africain francophone*, p. 143.

² On the subject of Paris as the traditional centre of Francophone literary production see: Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris Éditions du Seuil, 1999).

³ Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l'Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', p. 449-50.

aesthetic. She stresses that Miano projects an excessively “pessimistic” vision of African traditions (compared notably to Senegalese author Ken Bugul’s tendency for disproportionately “optimistic” portrayals of traditional African societies), asserting that Miano and Bugul “are situated at two extremes concerning their vision of Africa”.¹

1.0.2 *LE VENTRE DE L’ATLANTIQUE*

Like Miano, Fatou Diome also had her authorial autonomy vis-à-vis the literary monopoly of Parisian book publishers called into question concerning her first published novel, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* (henceforth *Le Ventre*), which was an instant success in France where it remained in the top ten sellers list for a number of weeks.² In *Le Ventre*, Salie, a Senegalese writer living in the Alsatian city of Strasbourg, attempts to dissuade her brother Madické from immigrating as a young, uneducated man from Niodior Island in rural Senegal to France where he dreams of joining a professional football team. In order to achieve this objective, Salie revisits the stories of other migrants like herself and their hardships faced in France, which, for the most part, contradict the fallaciously embellished versions promoted by these same former migrants in Niodior. Salie is not alone in her quest, having an ally in Ndétare, her onetime school teacher, former migrant himself and coach of the island’s football team. Ndétare also attempts to dissuade the young men from migrating to Europe by promoting Niodior, standing in as a metaphor for the entire African continent, as a viable life

¹ Élodie Tang, *Le roman féminin francophone de la migration. Émergence et identité* (Paris L’Harmattan, 2015), p. 174. I note that Tang restricts her study of Miano’s corpus to the first two instalments of the *Suite africaine* trilogy (*L’intérieur de la nuit* and *Contours du jour qui vient*).

² Wandia Njoya, 'In search of El Dorado? The experience of migration to France in contemporary African novels', (The Graduate School, College of the Liberal Arts The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), p. 6. This PhD thesis has since been reformatted and published as a book: Wandia Njoya, *In search of El Dorado? Immigration, French Ideals and the African Experience in Contemporary African Novels* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008b).

space to invest in. Christopher Hogarth has noted the originality of Diome's female migrant protagonist with regard to the Senegalese writing tradition in which "migration has traditionally been a male domain".¹

Unlike Miano, Diome has never disguised the fact that the inspiration for certain protagonists in her novels and short stories is autobiographical. This is the case notably for her female protagonist, Salie, who features in this first text and again in Diome's most recently published novel *Impossible de grandir* and who is partially based on Diome and her experiences both growing up in Senegal and arriving as an immigrant in France: "Salie is me, there is no mystery to this. This character was forged out of my own story".² In recognition of the strong autobiographical element in her work, Francophone literary scholar Ghislain Liambou labels Diome a "writer of self" as her texts are constantly "marked by slices of [her] life that punctuate the narrative fabric".³ Diome's maiden novel can therefore be considered, at least in part, as autofiction – a literary genre composed of narratives "whose author, narrator and protagonist share the same nominal identity and whose generic title indicates a novel"⁴ – what Gérard Genette termed "fictionalisation of the self".⁵

The controversy stirred by Diome was in regard to one fictional and real-life theme – that of migration – which stretches saliently across the author's and the protagonist of *Le Ventre*'s respective existences. The literary representation of immigration is "at the heart" of Diome's entire literary oeuvre and has understandably been a focal point for much of the

¹ Christopher Hogarth, 'Representations of migrant 'Homes' in France through Senegalese literature', in Nathalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth (ed.), *Gender and Displacement: 'Home' in Contemporary Francophone Women's Autobiography* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 67-83, p. 74.

² Fatou Diome, 'Partir pour vivre libre', in Taina Tervonen (ed.), (Africultures) 2003a).

³ Ghislain Nickaise Liambou, 'Fatou Diome: La déconstruction des mythes identitaires', *Loxias*, 26 (2009), 1-10, p. 3.

⁴ Jacques Lecarme, 'Autofiction: un mauvais genre?', *Autofictions & Cie*, RITM/1 (1993), 227-49, p. 227.

⁵ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), p. 293.

past scholarship.¹ As noted by French and Francophone literary academic Dominic Thomas, migration as a literary trope does not set Diome apart from other Sub-Saharan Francophone authors who have elicited it in their works constantly “from colonial times to the contemporary moment of postcoloniality”.² Yet, whereas other authors have chosen to focus on delivering what he considers to be a “reductive account” of the convoluted workings of the migratory system for African migrants arriving in Europe (with an emphasis on exploitation, incarceration and repatriation), the originality of Diome’s *Le Ventre*, according to Thomas, resides in her treatment of the socioeconomic reasons behind such a systemic desire to migrate and her commitment “to contribute to the process of demystifying the centrality of France as a construct for African youth circulating in the global periphery”.³ In other words, her attempts to deconstruct, delegitimise and dismiss the myth of European Eldorado.⁴ The contentious aspect of this theme has since caught up with Diome off the written page and in the context of increasingly nationalistic and populist rhetoric around the so dubbed ‘migrant crisis’. In April 2014, the author was thrust into the media spotlight following televised remarks on the programme *Ce soir (ou jamais!)*

¹ Rosemary Haskell, 'Senegal in France, France in Senegal: Successful and Failed Transnational Identities in Fatou Diome’s Novels', *South Atlantic Review*, 82/4 (2017), 53-74, p. 53.

² Dominic Thomas, 'African Youth in the Global Economy: Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 26/2 (2006), 243-59, p. 243.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴ See also: Bi Kacou Parfait Diandué, '*Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, métaphore aquatique d’un mirage: idéal brisé de l’Ailleurs?', *Éthiopiennes* 74 (2005).; Catherine Mazauric, 'Fictions de soi dans la maison de l’autre (Aminata Sow Fall, Ken Bugul, Fatou Diome)', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 74/75/Identité et altérité dans les littératures francophones (2006), 237-52.; Liambou, 'Fatou Diome: La déconstruction des mythes identitaires'; Mbaye Diouf, 'Écriture de l’immigration et traversée des discours dans “*Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*” de Fatou Diome', *Francofonie*, Exilées, expatriées, nomades/58 (2010), 55-66.; Atangana Kouna, 'Expérience migratoire et conscience du berceuil dans le roman francophone', in Alice Tang (ed.), *Littérature et migrations dans l’espace francophone* (Yaoundé: Éditions Clé 2012).; Christopher Hogarth, 'Gendering Migrant Mobility in Fatou Diome's Novels', in Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (ed.), *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2016), 54-70.; Denis Assane Diouf, 'Fatou Diome: L’autre visualisation de l’émigré et l’exception dans la mise en écrit de l’émigration', *Éthiopiennes (online)* (90); <http://ethiopiennes.refer.sn/spip.php?article1858>: *Éthiopiennes* 2013).; Jean-Christophe Kasende, '(É)migration et imaginaire social africain dans *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* de Fatou Diome: Construction discursive et référence au mythe de l’*Odysée*', *Études francophones*, 26/1 & 2 (2011), 38-55.

concerning France's immigration policy following a spate of migrant drownings in the Mediterranean Sea. In response to presenter and journalist Frédéric Taddei's question: "After the Lampedusa drama, can we accommodate all of the world's misery?" Diome rebutted:

Quand les pauvres viennent vers vous, il y a des mouvements de foule qu'il faut bloquer, mais quand vous, avec votre passeport et avec toutes les prétentions que cela donne, vous débarquez dans les pays du tiers-monde, là, vous êtes en terrain conquis. [...] vous avez besoin qu'on reste dominé pour servir de débouchés à l'industrie européenne alors il faut arrêter l'hypocrisie, on sera riche ensemble ou on va se noyer tous ensemble !¹

[When poor people come towards you, there are crowds that must be blocked, but when you, with your passport and all the pretensions that provides, arrive in the countries of the Third World, there you are in conquered territory. [...] You need us to remain dominated to serve as market opportunities for European industry so we must stop with the hypocrisy, we will all be rich together or we will all drown together.]

The backlash was virulent with Diome accused of being “ungrateful” in her attitude towards a country, France, “that gave her everything”.² Despite the vigour of her publicised words, the unexpected success of Diome's first novel has been attributed to her ‘soft’ approach towards France's historical and contemporary responsibility in Africa's immigration tragedy. In an interesting article, Robert Nathan suggests that the novel fell short of its expectations by neglecting the broader structural framework and the role of France as the former colonial and contemporary neocolonial power within the “erosive discourses” promulgated by characters such as l'homme de Barbès.³ For Nathan, the fact that the novel did *not* delve into France's African agenda, designed as much for economic reasons as it is to maintain its “international status”, or the phenomenon of seeking to “resist access or expel from its territory those who are inevitably encouraged by the same

¹ Fatou Diome, 'Ce soir (ou jamais)!'.
² Fatou Diome, 'En privé avec Fatou Diome: "Pourquoi l'être humain veut cacher ce que Dieu lui-même a dévoilé?"', in Bigué Bob (ed.), (Enquête +, 2015c).

³ Robert Nathan, 'Moorings and mythology: *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and the immigrant experience', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 24/1 (2012), 73-87, p. 80.

activities to migrate there”, coupled with the novel’s “engaging voice and narrative”, contributed to its positive reception and popularity in France.¹ Others have also suggested that the novel’s success stemmed from its comforting of Western received ideas by placing the onus for characters’ suffering on African traditions which, according to Francophone literary scholar Wandia Njoya, “affirms Western stereotypes about misogyny and desperation in Africa”.²

1.0.3 WRITING BETWEEN AND ACROSS AFRICA AND EUROPE

Both Miano’s and Diome’s novels have therefore been marked by some form of contention regarding their depictions of Africa, her societies and their relations, both historical and contemporary, with Europe (and Western civilisation more broadly). The meeting of these two worlds constitutes a central theme across their literary corpuses with Miano and Diome both proclaiming that being part of the African diaspora³ writing on Africa from Europe enables them to tackle aspects of both cultural divides with certain insight. Diome credits her dual African-European identity with her ability to write “[...] between these two cultures which form a sort of double-sided mirror”, two cultures that she attempts to scrutinise in the same manner: “honestly, with candour and lucidity”.⁴ Not, in her own words, “an immigrant with complexes”,⁵ Diome goes so far as to situate her “country” in the symbolic space bridging Africa and Europe stating that the expression

¹ Ibid.

² Njoya, 'In search of El Dorado? The experience of migration to France in contemporary African novels', p. 60.

³ Discussed shortly.

⁴ Diome, 'Partir pour vivre libre', p. 1.

⁵ Diome, 'En privé avec Fatou Diome: "Pourquoi l'être humain veut cacher ce que Dieu lui-même a dévoilé?"', p. 2.

of her composite identity is facilitated, indeed rendered possible, through the act of writing:

Mais véritablement, « mon pays », il est quelque part dans le pont que je tisse en permanence entre les deux, c'est-à-dire dans l'écriture. C'est là où j'arrive à réunir mes deux territoires. Dans mes livres, il y a un morceau de France dedans comme un chocolat qui fond. Mais pour prendre son élan, il faut avoir un socle. Sans ma part africaine, mes livres n'auraient pas le goût qu'ils ont. Franco-sénégalaise, c'est plus généreux. Dans mes livres, mon Afrique et mon Europe ne se battent pas en duel. Elles ont déposé les armes. Elles sont obligées de dialoguer.¹

[But really, “my country” is somewhere in the bridge that I weave on an ongoing basis between the two, meaning in writing. That is where I am able to reunite my two territories. In my books there is a piece of France like a melting chocolate. Yet to gather momentum, it needs a base. Without my African part, my books would not have the taste that they do. Franco-Senegalese is more generous. In my books, my Africa and my Europe are not waging a duel against each other. They have put down their arms. They are obliged to converse.]

For Miano, Africa “left its mark” and feeds “her imaginary as much as elements coming from elsewhere”.² In her first published collection of critical essays, *Habiter la frontière*, the author speaks at length of her rich ‘border’ identity declaring that she is a “perfectly assumed Afro-European refusing to choose between [her] African and European parts”.³ The concept of Afropeanity, used “to account for authors shaped by Africa and Europe who publish in French”, has become increasingly popular in literary scholarship in recent years.⁴ Miano’s Afropeanity refers to her self-perception as a culturally hybrid individual whose identity effortlessly incorporates elements from her native African and adopted European continents. This was explained by the author in a 2017 interview with French magazine *Télérama*: “To be Afropean is to think that Africa and Europe, whose initial meeting was so disastrous, nonetheless established solid links.

¹ Fatou Diome, 'Fatou Diome. "Je suis là pour gâcher le sommeil des puissants"', in Latifa Madani (ed.), (2015b), p. 3.

² Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25-26.

⁴ Kathryn Lachman, 'The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome', in Dominic Thomas and Nicki Hitchcott (ed.), *Francophone Afropean Literatures* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 32-47, p. 32.

It is to lay claim to both components at the same time. When I call myself Afropean, this signifies that I have inside of me both Africa and Europe coexisting peacefully.”¹ Miano’s own endorsement of Afropean identity is not, however, as clear-cut as it may initially seem to be. In her second published collection of critical essays, *l’Impératif transgressif*, Miano criticises the use of the Afropean label and concept in relation to individuals like herself, that is, Sub-Saharanans living in Europe. She instead states that, for her, the term refers uniquely to people born in Europe with Sub-Saharan origins, people “whose experiences are essentially European”.² In point of fact, if Miano’s first collection of critical essays is very much focused on the concept of Afropean identity, with which the Franco-Cameroonian clearly associated herself at the time of its publication, this more recent collection is very much preoccupied with her identification as a Sub-Saharan African.

¹ Léonora Miano, 'Recontre avec l'écrivaine Léonora Miano', in Nathalie Crom (ed.), (Télérama, 2017b), 40-41.

² Miano, *L’Impératif transgressif*, p. 54-55.

1.1 Afropean identity as cultural hybridity

Miano and Diome have both spoken at length of their composite Afropean identities composed of both African and European elements. The notion of cultural hybridity has drawn an increased amount of attention in the field of postcolonial studies in recent years. This has mainly been in response to the marked increase in global mobility for certain portions of the world's population, their cultural artefacts and knowledge. The term 'hybridity' originates from the field of biology where it refers fundamentally to the fusing of species.¹ It was employed extensively in regard to 19th-century pseudo-scientific discourses in reference to notions of contamination, perversion, inferiority and miscegenation.² In cultural and literary studies, hybridity is used to question notions of purity and homogeneity and opposes essential discourse in regard to culture and identity.³ Cultural hybridity has proven to be a singularly useful construct for conceptualising cultural contact, transfer and mutation in postcolonial studies.⁴

1.1.1 CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AS POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE

Renowned cultural theorist Homi Bhabha is best known in the field of postcolonial studies for applying the notion of cultural hybridity to identitarian conceptions. Though not exact equivalents, cultural hybridity and hybrid identity are intimately related and Bhabha's use of hybridity

¹ Josef Raab and Martin Butler, 'Introduction: Cultural Hybridity in the Americas', in Josef Raab and Martin Butler (ed.), *Hybrid Americas: contacts, contrasts, and confluences in New World literatures and cultures* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 1-18, p. 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

refers essentially to cultural identity.¹ Bhabha himself argues that to use hybridity as resistance:

[...] is not merely to celebrate the joyous power of the signifier. Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory [...].²

Put another way in reference to (post)coloniality, cultural hybridity defined as a position of 'in-betweenness' amidst two cultural entities and corresponding identities, for example, a coloniser and a colonised people, constitutes an anti-authoritarian and emancipatory space within which it is possible to reevaluate the assumptions on which colonial identities are formed and, in doing so, engender "a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority".³ Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's discussions of hybridity in language and the concept of the carnival,⁴ Bhabha developed his idea of cultural hybridity as an extension of the emblematic work of theorist Edward Said whose notion of *Orientalism* has made lasting ripples in the theoretical pond of postcolonial scholarship.⁵ For Bhabha, Saïd's theory, though highly respected for the most part, exhibits a notable deficiency in that it situates agency for discourse predominantly on the side of the European coloniser who is free to designate, theorise and ultimately

¹ Ibid., p. 2.

² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 112.

³ Per Bauhn and Fatma Fulya Tepe, 'Hybridity and agency: some theoretical and empirical observations', *Migration Letters*, 13/3 (2016), 350-58, p. 350.

⁴ Frello Birgitta, 'Cultural Hybridity', in Carol Chapelle (eds), *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 1-4, p. 1.

⁵ See: Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

construct the identity of the non-European, Oriental, 'Other'. For Bhabha, 'orientalising' a colonial subject would consequently end in failure as "the colonial subject is constructed in a repertoire of conflictual positions which render him or her the site of both fixity and fantasy".¹ It is here in the uneven, divided and incomplete nature of this process that Bhabha identifies the potential for resistance.

The idea of cultural hybridity as resistance stems from the notion of cultural identitarian fixity endorsed overwhelmingly by imperial powers as it naturally reinforces the perception of an insuperable divide between coloniser and colonised serving on many occasions to justify the administration and disintegration of societies deemed inherently inferior. Cultural hybridity thus positions itself as an antidote to the static binaries (white/black, civilised/primitive, modern/traditional, beautiful/ugly etc.) that underline coloniality. Many postcolonial theorists have brought attention to the dangers of cultural fixity including Frantz Fanon who, while recognising the need for subordinated peoples to recuperate their repressed histories and affirm their cultural traditions and diversity, warned against identitarian fetishism and calcification. The disruption of fixed poles of identity is at the heart of Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity which he illustrates through reference to an artwork installation by contemporary American artist Renée Green. Entitled *Sites of Genealogy*, this piece explores conceptual dichotomies including whiteness/blackness, above/below and heaven/hell exhibited architecturally in the domestic spaces of a boiler room and an attic linked through a central staircase:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage

¹ Antony Easthope, 'Bhabha, hybridity and identity', *Textual Practice*, 12/2 (1998), 341-48, p. 341.

between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.¹

In sum, cultural hybrids pose a threat to the colonial conception of the world's cultures as pure and unchanging targeting imperial discourse in its "temporal dimension".² In assuming aspects of the coloniser's culture as their own, they disturb the power relations at the heart of any imperial mode "liberat[ing] themselves from the identity-based hierarchy imposed on them by the colonizers"³ and thereby working to undermine the 'us' versus 'them' paradigm or the "hegemonic representations" constructed and maintained by the colonial model.⁴ Most importantly and as demonstrated through Bhabha's reference to Green's work, cultural hybridity caters for a space (the stairwell) in which differences between cultural, social and racial groups can be accommodated and represented without the oppressing factor of hierarchy which litters colonial imaginary through its dependence on binary constructions to which judgements of value are simultaneously attributed.⁵

1.1.2 CRITIQUING CULTURAL HYBRIDITY

It should be noted that Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity is not without its critics. It has been judged to be intrinsically adversarial in the sense that it is defined in practice by what it is not – fixed representations of hegemonic cultural entities – instead of what it is.⁶ This can render treacherous the exploration and application of cultural hybridity as its openness and limitlessness can engender conceptual ambiguity. Other

¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

² Satoshi Mizutani, 'Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha's Post-Historical Thoughts', *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2013), 27-48, p. 36.

³ Bauhn and Tepe, 'Hybridity and agency: some theoretical and empirical observations', p. 350.

⁴ Ibid., p. 351.; Sarah Maitland, "'In-between" a rock and a "third space"? On the trouble with ambivalent metaphors of translation', *Translation Studies*, 9/1 (2016), 17-32, p. 18.

⁵ Easthope, 'Bhabha, hybridity and identity', p. 341.; Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Post-colonial Theory: African Inflections* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p.13.

⁶ Easthope, 'Bhabha, hybridity and identity', p. 342.

scholars have reproached the theory for presupposing and reproducing “the same essentialist notion of culture and identity that it sets out to criticize” as “in order to identify something as ‘mixed’ one needs to presume a preexisting pure form”¹ or for universalising the colonial encounter.² For Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, cultural hybridity is problematic as it assumes a leveled exchange of cultural artefacts and, in doing so, implies a negation and neglect of “the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references”,³ a criticism that remains particularly salient in the context of cultural hybridity issued from coloniality. Indeed, Harald Zapt argues that “discourses of hybridity must be regarded as rhetorical, political and ideological tools that are power-laden” stressing that hybridity “is often invoked and praised” by a specific sub-set of individuals – namely migratory or minority intellectuals.⁴ In this sense, hybridity constitutes a term and a concept prone to being “functionalized strategically”.⁵ Others have suggested that, while it is all well and good for migrant and diaspora populations to proclaim and celebrate their composite identities, this is worth very little in a given milieu if cultural hybridity remains solely the concern of these minority populations as its empowering potential depends on recognition and respect in broader society.⁶ Finally, in recent work, Per Bauhn and Fatma Fulya Tepe have advanced the argument that not all experiences of Bhabha’s emancipatory and anti-authoritarian cultural hybridity are positive. They posit instead that the extent of cultural hybridity’s ‘success’ is largely due to the conditions in which it is achieved

¹ Birgitta, 'Cultural Hybridity', p. 3.

² Mizutani, 'Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha's Post-Historical Thoughts', p. 43.

³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 109.

⁴ Harald Zapt, 'The Theoretical Discourse of Hybridity and the Postcolonial Time-Space of the Americas', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 47/4 (1999), 302-10, p. 304.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bauhn and Tepe, 'Hybridity and agency: some theoretical and empirical observations', p. 352-53.

and, more precisely, whether one's hybrid status expands or diminishes his or her "capacity for agency".¹ This is in line with the comments of Black Studies scholar Sabine Broeck who notes that "what tends to get lost in those enthusiastic formulations of hybridity as the postmodern condition are delicate nuances within hybridity: the question of whether hybridity is chosen or imposed, accepted or rejected is decisive but often remains hidden under a certain aesthetization of the phenomenon."²

¹ Ibid., p. 351.

² Sabine Broeck, 'White Fatigue, or, Supplementary Notes on Hybridity', in J. Kuortti; J. Nyman (ed.), *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), p. 50.

1.2 Defining diaspora

I have thus far demonstrated that the cultural hybridity that Diome and Miano both openly acknowledge, indeed laud, in relation to their Afropean identities and writing is not necessarily, theoretically speaking, a source of emancipatory liberation from constricting binarities as alleged by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Yet before examining the textual deployment of the theme of problematic cultural hybridity in *L'intérieur et Le Ventre*, a few key concepts central to this work need to be outlined. In this section, I will delineate the concepts of diaspora and diasporic consciousness.

The term 'diaspora' stems from the Greek word for 'dispersion' (*diaspeirein*) and was, until recently, used almost exclusively in Judaic studies in regard to the historic exodus of the Jewish people from their ancestral homeland. The term has since been extended beyond the Jewish context to englobe human communities of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. Defining the concept of diaspora concretely is not always straightforward as different scholars offer nuanced interpretations on both its past and contemporary applications. This said, the fundamental characteristics concerning what and who can be deemed to constitute a diaspora remain roughly consistent and very much workable in the context of my research. Emmanuel Ma Mung, geographer and research director at the CNRS,¹ retains two key factors for identifying a diaspora; 1) the idea of dispersal meaning that a diaspora is in its essence and at a minimum "a dispersed social body".² The second factor isolated by Ma Mung concerns the notion of mobility, that is, of migration, which creates distance between diaspora members and the place of origin. This conceptualisation of the

¹ Centre national de recherche scientifique.

² Emmanuel Ma Mung, 'Les vêtements neufs de la diaspora, digressions sur les paradoxes diasporiques', in William Berthomière and Christine Chivallon (ed.), *Les diasporas dans le monde contemporain. Un état des lieux*. (Paris: Karthala-MSHA, 2006), 409-15, p. 411.

notion is enriched by precisions borrowed from the work of a second academic specialising in diaspora research, Gabriel Sheffer, whose 1986 definition highlights three central features of diasporic condition: (1) a maintaining of links with the place of origin, (2) members considering themselves as being of the same ethno-national origin(s) and (3) residing permanently in one or several countries as minority components of their new country's population.¹

1.2.1 THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Despite the apparent, indeed treacherous, straightforwardness implied through Ma Mung's and Sheffer's criteria, establishing the parameters around a theoretical African diaspora has not been a simple task since the term was first employed in regard to Afrodescendant populations by George Shepperson at the International Congress of African History held at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in 1965.² The African diaspora refers, in its most fundamental application, to individuals whose ethnic and racial origins can be traced back to the African continent.³ Nigerian historian Toyin Fayola identifies two 'waves' of the African diaspora referring to that issued from Atlantic slavery as the "old" diaspora while attributing the term "new" diaspora to Africans having left their continent of origin following the abolition of slavery including the migrations of the contemporary

¹ Gabriel Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).; Pauline Peretz, "Diaspora" un concept et une réalité devant inspirer le soupçon?, in *Hypothèses 2004, Travaux de l'école doctorale d'histoire*, (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2005), p. 141.

² Edward Alpers, 'Defining the African Diaspora', *Center for Comparative Social Analysis Workshop* (University of California, 2001), p. 1-3.; Colin Palmer, 'Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora', *The Journal of Negro History (Association for the Study of African American Life and History)* 85/1/2 (2000), 27-32.

³ Harry Goulbourne, 'A Distract of Politics? People of African Heritage in Britain and the Atlantic World', in William Berthomière and Christine Chivallon (ed.), *Les diasporas dans le monde contemporain. Un état des lieux*. (Paris: Karthala-MSHA, 2006), 377-90, p. 379. The term African diaspora is used to refer almost exclusively to people originating from the Sub-Saharan region of the continent and does not, typically, allude to those from North Africa (the Maghrebi diaspora).

transnational age.¹ As he duly notes, “there is no single identity for all black people” and the identitarian heterogeneity of the contemporary Afrodescendant populations that form the African diaspora is the direct result of their dispersion from different places of origin at different points in time and under different conditions into distinct regions characterised by various political, social and linguistic singularities.²

Despite making the distinction between the “old” and “new” diasporas and noting the inherent multifariousness across them, Falola collectively unites both these sub-categories as members of the African diaspora.³ Furthermore, he sees tangible benefits in the unifying qualities of the term and related concept which connect “the histories of different generations of Africans who maintain a connection with Africa irrespective of their era of migration” stressing that the diaspora label provides “a framework” for understanding contemporary Africanity.⁴ As such, the recognition of marked heterogeneity across contemporary groups sharing African ancestry does not invalidate the existence of common elements across various Afro-diasporic communities. Afro-American studies academic Roland W. Walters identifies four essential factors underlying Afro-diasporic identity: (1) an affirmation of African heritage, (2) participation in various aspects and degrees in Pan-African political struggles, (3) a continuing concern with the

¹ Toyin Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014), p. 12, 17. Transnationalism refers to the “various flows and counterflows and the multi-striated connections they give rise to [...] encompass[ing] not only the movement of people, but also of notions of citizenship, technology, forms of multinational governance, and the mechanisms of global markets”. It is a term that is frequently coupled with that of diaspora. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, 'Introduction: Diaspora and Transnationalism. Scapes, Scales, and Scopes', in Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani (ed.), *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), p. 4.

² Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization*, p. 62.

³ Affoua Adjoumani notes that the term “Black” diaspora is frequently used interchangeably with that of “African” diaspora. Such will be the case throughout the present work. Affoua Mia Élise Adjoumani, 'Diaspora noire': De l'état des lieux à une approche comparatiste dans les littératures africaine francophone et afro-américaine', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 21/1&2 (2018), 119-30.

⁴ Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization*, p. 18.

status of Africa and a desire to see this status improved through efforts on behalf of diaspora members and finally, (4) a shared relationship with other “hyphenated” Africans (Afro-Cubans, Afro-Americans, Afro-Brazilians etc.) of the diaspora.¹ With specific reference to the Americas, where the vast majority of communities with African heritage residing outside of Africa are found, sociologist Harry Goulbourne has similarly identified four components underlying the experiences and identities of contemporary Afro-Atlantic populations: (1) the formation of these communities through chattel slavery from the 17th to the 19th century and the experience of “continuing exclusion and domination” from the 19th century onwards into the contemporary era, (2) a common palette of shared myths (concerning real and mythical depictions of Africa and future messianic deliverance) and icons (key emancipatory figures including W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King etc.), (3) a shared set of values,² and, finally, (4) “a kind of moral superiority and an attendant piety bred of suffering, exclusion, and relative powerlessness”.³ The belief in future messianic deliverance coupled with an “attendant piety bred of suffering, exclusion, and relative powerlessness” isolated above by Goulbourne constitute characteristics which have been identified and theorised in some of the most canonical texts on the African diaspora and, namely, in Paul Gilroy’s seminal *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*.⁴ A belief in the redemptive power of past suffering, credence that the experience and awareness of past traumas will contribute to an improved future for all people of African descent whether located on the continent of origin or elsewhere appears to

¹ Ronald Waters, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), p. 385.

² Specifically an emphasis on equality and a sense of inclusiveness with a corresponding permeability of boundaries.

³ Goulbourne, 'A Distract of Politics? People of African Heritage in Britain and the Atlantic World', p. 380.

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London; New York: Verso, 1993). This text will be discussed in more detail in part 2 of this thesis.

have permeated throughout Afro-diasporic populations and specifically those scattered around the Atlantic Basin. Gilroy elaborates:

This idea of a special redemptive power produced through suffering has its ready counterparts in the writings of black thinkers who have, at various times, identified similar relationships between the history of modern racial slavery and the redemption of both Africa and America. The capacity of blacks to redeem and transform the modern world through the truth and clarity of perception that emerge from their pain is, for example, a familiar element in the theology of Martin Luther King [...] which argues not only that black suffering has a meaning but that its meaning could be externalised and amplified so that it could be of benefit to the moral status of the whole world.¹

Following Gilroy's reflection, the African diaspora becomes the site of hope for a brighter future distinct from the traumas and suffering of the past that will not have been endured in vain and that instead carry symbolic meaning and great value. Indeed, for eminent Afrocentric theorist, M. K. Asante, Africa's diaspora, referred to in the singular, is the key to the continent's renaissance and revitalisation.² Falola similarly underscores the empowering symbolic potential that the African continent represents for members of the diaspora, wherever they may be located in the world, as it creates "meaning for their existence as a cultural source to draw on in order to live and survive".³ On a more tangible level, social scientist and migration scholar Robin Cohen stresses that diasporic components of cultural groups play important roles regarding the development of adaptive behavior as they enable a given group to simultaneously "hold to its ethnicity" while establishing "transnational and inter-cultural ties, first with groups sharing similar origins and characteristics, and then more widely".⁴ Diasporic groups can therefore deter from dangerous "tunnel-like" visions of ethnicity that

¹ Ibid., p. 216.

² M.K. Asante, 'L'Afrique et sa diaspora: idées pour une renaissance africaine', *Diasporas noires* (2011), p. 2, 5.

³ Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization*, p. 18.

⁴ Robin Cohen, "Diaspora": Changing Meanings and Limits of the Concept', in William Berthomière; Christine Chivallon (ed.), *Les diasporas dans le monde contemporain; Un état des lieux* (Paris; Pessac: Karthala-MSHA, 2002), 39-48, p. 46.

lead to the creation of stereotypes, discrimination, and in cases, violence.¹ The importance of the African diaspora as an important contemporary site for continental populations is reflected in the 2005 decision of the African Union to declare the African diaspora the “sixth region” of the continent.² Some African writers living within the diaspora away from their countries of birth have voiced similar views concerning the potential of the African diaspora to attribute inherent value to continental identities. This is the case for Congolese (Brazzaville) author Alain Mabanckou who stresses the important role performed by Afro-diasporic populations who, in dispersing themselves throughout the globe, “attempt other adventures that may be beneficial for the valorisation of cultures from the Black continent”.³ In highlighting the important role that the African diaspora plays for continental populations and their self-representations, Mabanckou subtly challenges Cazenave’s central argument in *Afrique sur Seine* according to which “Africa has disappeared from the affective cartography of Afropean writers”.⁴

1.2.2 (AFRO-)DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS

I now turn to ‘consciousness’ for this term is increasingly linked with the notion of diaspora and specifically the valorising role played by ‘conscious’ members of the latter. The word “consciousness” comes from the Latin term *scire* meaning “to know”. In its most basic form, people and/or movements described as ‘conscious’ or ‘with consciousness’ are “in a state of being with knowledge”.⁵ For literary academic Daphne Grace,

¹ Ibid.

² Quayson and Daswani, 'Introduction: Diaspora and Transnationalism. Scapes, Scales, and Scopes', p. 7.

³ Alain Mabanckou, *Le Sanglot de l'homme noir* (Paris: Fayard, 2012), p. 159-60.

⁴ Ayo Coly, 'Afropean Masculinities as *bricolage*', in Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas (ed.), *Francophone Afropean Literatures* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 155-70, p. 158.

⁵ Daphne Grace, *Relocating consciousness: Diasporic Writers and the Dynamics of Literary Experience* (Amsterdam Editions Rodopi, 2007), p. 5.

“consciousness in its most profound meaning has been at worst neglected and at best avoided within [W]estern academia”.¹ She argues, however, that consciousness as both a concept and experience is “particularly relevant to the discussion of postcolonial literatures [...] and diasporic literature”.² To Grace’s thoughts, I add some precisions borrowed from the work of Canadian scholar Cecil Foster in his 2007 book *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest from Freedom* within which consciousness is conceptualised as “a specifically patterned and nuanced way of making sense of the world and the relations of objects in it”.³ Consciousness, according to Foster, does not just come about but instead develops overtime. It is “[...] a culmination that claims for a lineage specific types of choices and decisions that have been made in history.”⁴ Like Mabanckou, Miano promotes the diaspora and namely continental African links with Afrodescendants as a strategy with the potential of engendering a much needed rehabilitation of African self-consciousness which she qualifies as “degraded” in its actual state.⁵ The belief in the valorising indeed salutary potential of the African diaspora has led Miano to endorse the concept of diasporic consciousness, which, though not originally formulated by the author, features heavily across her literary corpus surfacing explicitly for the first time in the postface of the last instalment of her *Suite africaine* trilogy, *Les aubes écarlates*. Diasporic consciousness is perhaps best conceptualised as the link between identity and diaspora in that it bridges the physical condition of diasporic existence with the internal and subjective, though partially ascribed, notion of identity. Jacques Barou, anthropologist,

¹ Ibid., p. 6.

² Ibid.

³ Cecil Foster, *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), p. 15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 6.

sociologist and academic specialising in Sub-Saharan migration to Europe, defines “diaspora consciousness” as:

La conscience d’un lien avec plusieurs communautés dispersées que l’on ne connaît pas forcément, mais dont on sait qu’elles regardent vers le même point de départ, cultivent parfois le même espoir d’y revenir et ne se sentent jamais désintéressées de ce qui peut s’y passer. Ce qui compte dans ce type d’appartenance, c’est le lien et non le projet de retour, que ce soit idéal ou matériel, qu’il s’entretienne ou non par le biais de contacts réguliers avec la terre des origines ou avec les autres communautés. Il suffit de savoir qu’il existe de par le monde des populations entretenant le même type de rapport au passé, portant le même type d’espoir pour l’avenir et actualisant tout cela au présent, par des rituels semblables, pour que se concrétise une conscience de diaspora.¹

[The consciousness of a link with several dispersed communities that one does not necessarily know but that one knows look towards the same point of departure, sometimes harbouring the same hope of return and never feeling disinterested in regard to what goes on there. What matters in this kind of belonging is the link and not the actual return, idealised or material, whether or not this is maintained through regular contact with the homeland and other communities. All that is needed for a diasporic consciousness to materialise is to know that there is throughout the world other communities that maintain the same rapport with the past, hold the same hopes for the future and who actualise all this in the present through comparable rituals.]

Accordingly, diasporic consciousness constitutes more than a sentiment of collective belonging to a migratory group, whether dispersed recently or long ago, as it entails a collective engagement in one’s place of origin and in the lives of those who remain there with the objective of concrete and sustainable improvement. The notion of detachment only holds in terms of spatial distance as diasporic consciousness is dependent on maintaining links with the home country or region through all three temporal dimensions – the past, present, and most importantly, the future. These points, key criteria for forming part of a diaspora, are not the same as being a transitional migrant. For anthropologist Christine Chivallon, the permanence of a community link is an “essential criteria” for all diasporas and, accordingly, for the

¹ Jacques Barou, 'Nouvelles réalités migratoires et nouveaux concepts pour les analyser. L'exemple des notions de transnationalisme et de diaspora', *Écart & liens. L'expérience interculturelle de l'intégration, Écart d'identité*/120 (2012a), 10-15, p. 13-14.

development of diasporic consciousness.¹ Though immigrants may feel a collective sense of belonging within the cultural and/or linguistic confines of a certain migratory group, they do not necessarily feel the need to collectively engage in their birth spaces, nor in the lives of their co-citizens left behind. Moreover, diasporic populations such as those composed of Afrodescendants in the New World, will often not have directly experienced immigration from ancestral territories. In these spaces, the actual act of migrating may have been undertaken by a family member several generations ago. Yet the sentiment of connection with place of origin manifest in Afro-Atlantic societies where the artefacts of African cultures remain clearly visible – in language, food, music, dance, art, philosophy, folklore and religion – remains omnipresent regardless of temporal distance from the migratory act.

Miano's interpretation of diasporic consciousness is heavily influenced by the work of Nathalie Etoke whom the author cites repeatedly across both her fictional and critical works.² Etoke's diasporic consciousness (which she also refers to by the term "*melancholia africana*") advocates for "a cathartic meeting" between Afrodescendant peoples worldwide, most notably between communities dispersed throughout the Black Atlantic.³ Needless to say, there is no one individual African identity. Afrodescendent individuals living throughout the world cannot and should not be reduced to their racial or ethnic origins. The terms used throughout this work – Afro-diasporic consciousness, Africanicity, African identity – all refer to a macrolevel collective identity forged through a common history and shared contemporary experiences and address a challenge to the postracial

¹ William Berthomière and Christine Chivallon, *Les diasporas dans le monde contemporain. Un état des lieux* (Paris: Karthala-MSHA, 2006), p. 31.

² Etoke's theory is also discussed in part 2 of this thesis.

³ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 33, 43.

discourses that have flourished in the globalised world. For race continues to constitute a key construct defining relationships between human beings in the contemporary era. The racial signifier is, in the words of Mbembe, the “inescapable though often denied language” of one’s rapport with self, the world, the Other, with memory and with power.¹ Etoke and Miano remain sensitive to this reality. Miano writes in the preface to Etoke’s *Melancholia Africana*:

La couleur de la peau, qu’on la nomme ou non race, ne disparaîtra pas du paysage, et il n’y a pas de raison de prétendre ne plus la voir. Plutôt que de l’effacer, il faut être en mesure de la regarder sans que cela suscite de malaise. Plutôt que de la surinvestir d’un sens qu’elle ne peut porter, il faut pouvoir comprendre les blessures, les meurtrissures qu’elle cache.²

Skin colour, whether or not we call it race, will not disappear from the landscape, and there is no reason to pretend to no longer see it. Rather than erasing it, we need to be capable of looking at it without it generating discomfort. Rather than over-investing it with meaning it cannot carry, we need to understand the wounds, the bruises it hides.

While recognising the inherent singularities between Sub-Saharan peoples and between Sub-Saharan and Afrodescendent peoples,³ Etoke’s *Melancholia africana* adheres to W. E. B. Du Bois’ Pan-Africanist vision and namely to his connection to Africa and her peoples through an “indescribable feeling”.⁴ The affiliation of continental African populations with Afro-diasporic peoples, in both Etoke and Miano’s opinion, constitutes an essential step for the regeneration and revalorisation of a collectively devalorised African identity. The need for Afrodescendant peoples to rehabilitate collective Africanicity stems from the fact that diverse African identities the world over have been negatively conceptualised by dominant European societies, marked from the continents’ first meeting centuries ago

¹ Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), p. 88.

² Etoke, *Melancholia africana. L’indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 9, 37.

with “all inferiorities and infirmities”.¹ As prominent American philosopher, critic, author and civil rights activist Cornel West underscores, “white supremacist practices enacted under the auspices of the prestigious cultural authorities of the churches, print media, and scientific academics” systematically promoted “Black inferiority”. These continual attacks against “Black intelligence, ability, beauty, and character” required “persistent Black efforts to hold self-doubt, self-contempt, and [...] self-hatred at bay”.² This ultimately resulted in the development of “an internalized association of Blackness with inferiority” and continues to do so for many people of African descent.³

Diasporic consciousness, to which I have added the prefix “Afro” in reference to this specific continental group and associated diaspora, sets out to restore pride and value in Africanicity. This is to be partially achieved, according to both Etoke and Miano, through the restoration of collective memory which links the diaspora back to its Sub-Saharan sources and continental populations to their diasporic descendants. Memory is a central component of Afro-diasporic consciousness, one that garners significantly more weight when one considers that populations with African ancestry in general have been marked perhaps more than any other human group by great historical violence and abasement that began with the Transatlantic slave trade and continued through colonialism and into the postcolonial era. As such, Afro-diasporic consciousness with its emphasis on collective memory restoration entails a certain awareness of past injustices, that is, of history. Here I return to the basic parameters of the word ‘consciousness’ for to be conscious is to be “in a state of being with knowledge”.⁴ For Miano,

¹ Ouattara, *La haine de soi dans le roman africain francophone*, p. 269.

² Cornel West, 'The New Cultural Politics of Difference', *October*, 53 (1990), 93-109, p. 102.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴ Grace, *Relocating consciousness: Diasporic Writers and the Dynamics of Literary Experience*, p. 5.

one catastrophic and defining event in the lives of African peoples both on the continent and in the diaspora is particularly lacking in current Sub-Saharan historical consciousness – the Transatlantic slave trade. In her postface to *Les aubes écarlates* where she first introduces the subject of diasporic consciousness in reference to Etoke's work, she states:

Les peuples africains sont, eux aussi, enfants de la traite négrière. Elle a opéré en eux des mutations que la colonisation n'a fait qu'intensifier. *Les Aubes écarlates* espère, à sa manière sciemment chaotique, le surgissement d'une nouvelle conscience diasporique. Cela n'est envisageable que dans la mesure où l'Afrique subsaharienne acceptera de prendre la traite négrière en considération comme élément fondateur. Qu'elle ne soit pas seulement le motif de griefs vis-à-vis de l'Europe, mais aussi, celui d'une introspection, d'une redéfinition consciente de soi-même, et une main tendue vers tous ceux qu'elle a engendrés, qu'ils le sachent ou l'ignorent.¹

[African peoples are themselves children of the slave trade. It operated within them mutations that were only intensified by colonisation. *Les aubes écarlates* hopes for, in its intentionally chaotic manner, the emergence of a new diasporic consciousness. This is only possible if Sub-Saharan Africa accepts to consider the slave trade as a founding element. That it not be solely the motive for grievances in regard to Europe but also that of introspection, of a conscious redefinition of self and an extended hand to all those that it engendered, whether they know it or not.]

Etoke argues that the inability to recognise and, more importantly, appropriate a past marred by common experiences of suffering, violence and denigration confines Afrodescendant peoples within cycles of self-appraisal erected on notions of permanent mourning, loss and passive powerlessness. In short, in a fundamentally negative and disempowering light. Recognising and appropriating this agonising past is conversely said by the theorist to enable its transcendence and disencumber an avenue towards action, reinvention and revalorisation. For Etoke, there is inherent value in recognising that despite the traumas of the past and a systematic banishment from the bounds of humanity, African peoples survived. It is crucial here to understand the nuanced role attributed to history in Etoke's *Melancholia*

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 270.

africana. The knowledge or awareness of history is only useful if used “for the progress of humanity” in a distinctly future-orientated perspective.¹ *Melancholia africana* is, in essence, concerned with drawing strength from the past in the present in order to secure a better future.

The concept of diaspora and all its ascribed subsidiaries is convoluted and continues to retain the attention of scholars, artists and cultural critics alike. Sociology professor Avtar Brah has even suggested moving away from the concept of diaspora in order to embrace that of “diaspora space” as she conceives of the former as being exclusive to diasporic peoples while the latter is “inhabited” by both indigenous and diasporic populations enabling a true reunification of the “genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’”.² In line with Brah’s comments, Afro-diasporic consciousness in this work will be conceived of as a space inhabited by continental and diasporic Africans rather than as a condition only available to those having left Africa. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in my analysis in part 2 of the present work, movement into Afro-diasporic consciousness is not necessarily dependent on physical displacement and can also occur ideologically and psychically. Finally, I note an important distinction here between W.E.B. Du Bois’ founding notion of double consciousness and that of Afro-diasporic consciousness. Cultural hybridity, when experienced problematically, can be equated with double consciousness as theorised by Du Bois in reference to the specific experience of Afro-Americans’ “twoness”; “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”.³ Du Bois’ double consciousness, referred to by Ouattara as

¹ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 15.

² Avtar Brah, 'Introduction: Situated identities/diasporic transcriptions', *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), p. 16.

³ Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization*, p. 62.; Mark Sawyer, 'Du Bois's Double Consciousness Versus Latin American Exceptionalism. Joe Arroyo, Salsa, and Négritude', in Manning

“cultural schizophrenia”, constitutes a fundamentally negative, painful experience and should not be amalgamated with Afro-diasporic consciousness, an inherently positive and empowering one.¹

Following on from my discussions of Afropeanity, cultural hybridity, diaspora and (Afro-)diasporic consciousness, I wish for the following points to be retained:

- Cultural hybridity (in this study, that of Afropean individuals) is not necessarily emancipatory and anti-authoritarian as many factors influence how it is experienced. It can lead to the persistent opposition of Africa and Europe on a twin-poled, calcified binary;
- This binary representation tends to reproduce colonial rhetoric surrounding the representations of the two continents and their inhabitants with Africa routinely depicted as Europe’s lesser ‘Other’;
- The return to colonial rhetoric informs what has been identified by certain literary critics (Ouattara) as a marked self-hatred vis-à-vis one’s Africanity in the works of some contemporary Francophone African writers;
- Just as the African continent can be and is interpreted as a salutary place of regeneration for diasporic Africans, the African diaspora and its writers can represent an important space for the rehabilitation and revalorisation of Afro-continental identities on the condition that they seek to dismantle the colonial binarities that often dictate their respective writing and publishing environments;

Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones (ed.), *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the global color line* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 135-47, p. 137.

¹ Ouattara, *La haine de soi dans le roman africain francophone*, p. 129.

- The coming together of Afro-continental and diasporic populations in an inclusive transnational space, that of Afro-diasporic consciousness, where knowledge and awareness (that I equate with consciousness) of past sufferings and ultimate survival can be transformed from sites of death, despair and dehumanisation to catalysts for the revalorisation of Africanity both within the continent and across the diaspora constitutes an important function of contemporary African writers.

Linking the above theoretical discussion back to my texts of interest, the underlying argument of this study is that Afropean cultural hybridity as reflected in Diome's and Miano's first novels is shown to be problematic. The Afropean perspective leads to a binary conception of the two continents and their inhabitants in which Africa, her inhabitants, cultures and belief systems are devalued vis-à-vis those of the West. In Diome's and Miano's second novels, however, a movement away from the twin-poled and inherently colonial conception of Afropea towards a marked engagement with the African diaspora of the Black Atlantic becomes apparent. The gradual movement away from hybrid Afropea to the Afro-Atlantic space is the manifestation, in my opinion, of the authors' joint engagement in and commitment to Afro-diasporic consciousness. This is a fundamentally valorising step concerning the authors' literary representations of contemporary Africanity. It removes Africa and Africans (both continental and diasporic) from the hierarchical Afropean binary and cements them and their histories within the dynamic and anti-authoritarian Black Atlantic space that vindicates past and present sufferings indicating, in the process, the promise of a brighter future.

1.3 The uncomfortable aspects of Afropeanity

I now return to the literary representation of cultural hybridity in the corpus texts. I have thus far suggested that cultural hybridity should not be automatically celebrated for its ability to disturb the power relations at the heart of any imperial mode “liberat[ing] [...] from the identity-based hierarchy imposed [...] by the colonizers”.¹ It does not necessarily work to undermine the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ paradigm nor the hegemonic representations constructed and maintained by the colonial model for it can also serve to reinforce binary distinctions for certain groups of people. Broeck’s remark concerning the importance of agency and Bauhn and Tepe’s comment regarding recognition and respect for hybrid status are particularly pertinent for my analysis of Miano’s and Diome’s protagonists as both authors chose to place at the heart of their texts culturally hybrid characters like themselves, that is, young, Western educated women of African origin whose Afropean identities are not necessarily the result of choice nor are they completely accepted by the protagonists or their peers. One cannot conclude, as I will demonstrate below, that Ayané’s and Salie’s fictional experiences of cultural hybridity are inherently positive in *L’interieur* and *Le Ventre*.

A few comments should be made regarding the distinct structures of Miano’s and Diome’s texts as the monologues and dialogues that both Salie and Ayané maintain with themselves, the reader, narratee and other characters are not the only factors revealing of their uncomfortable cultural hybridity. Both texts follow a quasi-linear structure heavily punctuated with anachronistic passages, analepses and prolepses, as defined by Genette.² In

¹ Bauhn and Tepe, 'Hybridity and agency: some theoretical and empirical observations', p. 350.

² Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p. 82.

the case of *Le Ventre*, the narrative is structured around Salie and her brother Madické shifting spatially from one side of the Atlantic to the other, from Senegal to France and back again, and incorporating a patchwork of analeptic detours to insert the secondary stories of numerous characters. The all-powerful narrator in *Le Ventre* is Salie who interjects in the first person to address an unidentified narratee. The result is a very personal, emotive and at times nostalgic text that details the interior turmoil Salie experiences as she attempts to connect with and anchor herself in her home community of Niodior and have her Africanity validated and recognised by those she holds dear and desires to protect while residing in France. The existence of an intradiegetic narratee is said to engender a sentiment of distance in texts, according to Genette, as it imposes a third person between the narrator and the reader. However, it can also be a source of interpretive confusion, minimising the amount of distance felt between the reader and narrator as the narratee is situated at the same intradiegetic level as the narrator and often confused with the reader in a similar manner to the narrator with the author.¹ I would argue that Diome's use of an intradiegetic narratee in *Le Ventre* produces the second effect.

Structurally, things appear much more straightforward in *L'intérieur* where a third person omniscient narrator leads the reader through the narrative. This effectively creates the impression of distance between the reader and the narrator, a distance that is felt in Ayané's attitude towards her own in the first part of the novel and even more so as she attempts to come to terms with the actions of her community of origin whose rejection of her, as is her own of them, is amplified through the traumatic events during and following the militia group's invasion. Miano's distinctly impersonal tone coupled with graphic detailing produces a documentary-like style of writing.

¹ Ibid., p. 265, 66.

This was partly responsible for the negative reception of aspects of the novel as some critics have suggested that it led to a blurring of fiction and reality presenting the texts as “a source of anthropological information on the featured groups”.¹ The marked distance in *L'intérieur* was, however, a deliberate aesthetic choice on behalf of Miano who aspired in constructing her text in this manner for readers to be able to make up their own opinion concerning the events depicted.² In terms of temporality, the narrator makes clear that the invasion of *Les forces du changement* in *L'intérieur* takes place over a single night yet the timeline over which the rest of the narrative runs, the lead up and aftermath of Eyia's sacrifice, is less clear-cut.³ In contrast, the originality of opening and closing *Le Ventre* in reference to real-life football matches aids the reader in explicitly situating the circular narrative along a timeline. The novel commences during a football match between Italy and the Netherlands on the 29th of June during the 2000 European Cup and closes on Senegal's victory over Sweden two years later on the 16th of June during the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

1.3.1 THE MARGINALISATION OF YOUNG FEMALE AFROPEAN CHARACTERS

On the surface, Miano's and Diome's protagonists present notable similarities. Both Ayané and Salie are young, African women originating from countries formerly under French colonial rule and now residing in

¹ Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l'Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', p. 453.

² Miano, "*L'intérieur de la nuit*" un roman de Léonora Miano. Une traversée des profondeurs de l'Afrique', p. 2.

³ *L'intérieur de la nuit* is divided into two parts each containing two chapters. The first chapter of the first part roughly corresponds to the events occurring in Eku prior to the arrival of the militia forces including Ayané's arrival and analeptic passages recounting Ayané's experiences growing up in Eku. Chapter two (part 1) recounts Ié's premonitory vision and the arrival of *Les forces du changement* in the village and Eyia's selection for the human sacrifice. Chapter 3 (part 2) recounts the sacrifice, the departure of the militia group accompanied with nine of the clan's boys and the Inoni's attack on her husband Esa. In chapter 4 (part 2) Ayané leaves Eku and heads to Sombé where she meets Wengisané. Both women then travel back to Eku for the wake before Inoni's confession and suicide. Ayané's brief encounter with Epupa occurs over the last few pages of chapter 4.

France after having followed Frenchmen met on African soil to Europe. Having decided to remain in France despite the end of their respective relationships, the women return at different points in the narrative to their rural African home spaces of Eku and Niodior where neither benefit from complete integration as both have been marginalised from birth for a multitude of reasons yet most notably for the ‘foreign’ status of one of their parents: Ayané’s mother, dubbed “the foreign women” by the villagers, as she was not from Eku but from a neighbouring village, and Salie’s father equally ‘foreign’ as not a local man from Niodior. Furthermore, Salie was born out of wedlock in a conservative Muslim environment within which tradition normally dictates the murder of illegitimate infants at birth. She is spared this fate through the intervention of her maternal grandmother who braves collective condemnation by taking it upon herself to raise her shamed daughter’s child and giving her the name of her biological father, a name that is not shared by any other resident of Niodior.¹ Ayané also bears a name that sets her apart from the rest of the village, one that her parents invented.² As such, both characters are marked from their respective novels’ outsets by names that testify to their designation as ‘Other’ in their communities condemning them, as noted by the narrator in *L’intérieur*, to being alone forever.³

Following Bauhn and Tepe’s conclusion apropos the importance of the circumstances in which cultural hybridity is acquired, it is intriguing to note that neither Salie nor Ayané chose their culturally hybrid status. They

¹ I note Diome’s use of name symbolism in her text. In modifying the spelling of the common Senegalese name Saly, Diome is able to comment on the “sullied” status of her protagonist in her community of origins. The name Madické derives from a Wolof word meaning the “one who is coming” in reference to this character’s burning desire to leave Senegal and migrate to France at all costs. ‘Ndétare’ means “the other” in Serer while ‘Sankèle’ means “the sacrificed”. See: Diome, 'Fatou Diome. "Je suis là pour gâcher le sommeil des puissants"'.; Wandia Njoya, 'A Conversation With Fatou Diome, Author of *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 3/1 (2008a), 163-88, p. 173.

² Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 19-20.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

were instead forced to acknowledge that in the conservative environments of Eku and Niodior, they would never be truly accepted, even if the faults committed by the parents before their births were overlooked, as both characters made the decision to lead lives that do not correspond to those traditionally deemed appropriate. Indeed, these traditional African spaces are portrayed as being inherently static and isolated by Miano and Diome, and perhaps voluntarily so, as often hostile towards, even fearful of, the outside world and its influences. The notion of marginalised female characters in the works of African women writers is not novel and inscribes the fiction of both Diome and Miano in the shadow of that of their predecessors. In her 2000 publication *Rebellious Women. The New Generation of Female African Novelists*, Cazenave asserts that Francophone African women writers of the second generation, meaning those writing from the early 1980s onwards, exhibit in their works a “more aggressive, more insistent” and “directly engaged” female voice.¹ She inscribes their literature within a “mechanism of rebellion” as these second generation authors began to abandon the autobiographical mode that had characterised the literary production of their forebears, the pioneering generation of female African writers, while introducing “the possibility of a different life for a woman beyond her role as wife and mother”.² The promotion of an alternative vision of the roles traditionally assigned to women in the African literary landscape enables these authors to propose new social, political and cultural visions. Most importantly, as underscored by Cazenave in the following extract, the marginalised female protagonist is shown to assume a key role in this novel articulation:

[T]his process of rebellion has been infused within a larger systematic provocation, which is itself articulated in two different movements: first through

¹ Odile Cazenave, *Rebellious women: The New Generation of Female African Novelists* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2000), p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4, 240.

a choice of female protagonists who are marginal in relation to their societies, through the exploitation of cultural zones that until recently have been either taboo or dismissed as unimportant, and through reflection on the hidden mechanisms that explain the increasing instabilities of modern Africa; second, through a search for alternatives to sociopolitical questions about a stagnant postcolonial Africa and through the creation of a stable feminine/feminist voice that breaks with canonical masculine authority.¹

Marginality as a concept can manifest itself in many ways. In the fictional, rural Sub-Saharan spaces of Eku and Niodior, which have remained for the most part beyond the influence of modernity, and singularly Western conceptions of the latter,² my two female protagonists as young, educated and childless women distinguish themselves from what is considered conventional on many fronts. Indeed, Ayané's status as a student and Salie's as a writer are not congruous with the well-defined roles of men and women which remain for the most part unchanging and uninterrupted in a cyclical repetition of life illustrated by the narrator of *L'intérieur's* figurative allusion to a snake biting its own tail.³ In the following passage drawn from the beginning of *L'interieur*, the fixity of these roles is indicated by the French imperfect and conditional tenses, whose use, specifically that of the imperfect as noted by Genette, mark "the intensity of an imagination for which 'everything is a given':"⁴

Les hommes se rendaient sur ces territoires, comme ils voyageaient vers le nord, afin d'y vendre leur force et nourrir leurs familles. [...] C'était aux femmes qu'il incomrait de biner et de sarcler, les hommes ayant le devoir de prendre la route, selon une tradition dont le temps avait gommé l'origine et le sens. [...] Les filles [...] demeuraient sur place, à tourner et à retourner une terre qui ne laissait pousser que ce qu'on lui arrachait. [...] Les filles se marieraient, enfanteraient, se tairaient.⁵

[The men traveled to these regions on their journeys north to sell their strength and feed their families. [...] Hoeing and turning was women's work, the men's

¹ Ibid., p. 4.

² The concept of modernity and specifically its application to non-Western and formerly colonised societies is the source of much debate in academic circles. This will be discussed in greater depth in part 2.

³ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 15.

⁴ Gérard Genette, *Figures I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), p. 224.

⁵ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 13-15.

duty being to take to the road, according to a tradition whose origin and meaning had been clouded by time. [...] the girls [...] stayed put, turning over and over soil that yielded only what was forcibly rooted out. [...] The daughters married, bore children and said nothing.]¹

Miano is clearly critical of the cyclical and rigid roles to which the women of Eku are confined by virtue of their gender which she depicts as inherently devalorising and futile. In the above extract, the use of the verb “incomber” conveys the lack of choice Eku’s women are accorded, “biner” and “sarcler” the strenuous physical exertion involved in these unglamorous tasks and “tourner” and “retourner” the repetitive nature of the work that yields little reward for effort. Despite expending themselves daily and incessantly for the benefit of their kin, the possibility of engendering change vis-à-vis the strict and apparently ineffective functioning of their community remains inconceivable for the women of Eku who are equally expected to remain silent and not make their voices heard. The Eku women’s autonomy is furthermore undermined by the fact that they are required to remain in Eku and cannot, unlike their male companions, move beyond the clan’s territory rendering Eku an open-air prison for its female constituents. Though restricting the women’s movement in this way may appear to be a technique arbitrarily decided on by the clan’s male authority, there was actually a very real, indeed, comprehensible motivation behind such a decision. This will be unveiled in *Les aubes écarlates* and is revealing of Miano’s calls for Sub-Saharan peoples to possess a historical consciousness, one of the central components, I argue, of Afro-diasporic consciousness.

The cyclical and rigid nature of Niodior’s social composition is also inferred through the distribution of roles to characters remarkable for their gendered consistency from the opening pages of *Le Ventre*. Yet, as will be shown, the fixity of Niodior’s gendered roles is not entirely comparable with

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the night*, p. 4, 5.

that depicted in Miano's *L'intérieur*. The reader is quick to learn that domestic duties appear to be the realm of the female villagers. Some of these women are not watching the televised football match that opens the novel and that seems to have united a large portion of the village population as running "late with their domestic chores".¹ The hostess of the house in which the television is located serves a collective meal to all the visitors present and is aided in this task by her daughter, drawing attention to the intergenerational aspect of the fixed gendered modeling. One man, dubbed *Le vieux pêcheur* by Salie, compliments the hostess' culinary talents, as well as those of Niodior's women in general by stating that: "[o]ur women are the only ones who can make such delicious fish couscous [...]"² Although this comment implies that, on the island, cooking falls under the jurisdiction of the female sex, it similarly betrays a sense of appreciation and pride on behalf of Niodior's male community for their female community members. This contrasts with Miano's criticism of the women of Eku's taxing physical labour for which the merits are questionable and male praise completely absent (as are the men themselves). In this respect, Diome's depiction of the roles attributed to Niodior's female population is more laudatory than Miano's and this does not appear to change over the text. In the following extract drawn from the end of *Le Ventre*, in which the implied fixity of Niodior's society is reinforced by the narrator-protagonist through the adverbial phrase "as usual" ("à l'accoutumée"), the repetitive nature of the actions performed, in this case again by women, is far from negatively framed:

Comme à l'accoutumée, les femmes s'étaient levées avec le chant du coq pour agiter le fond des puits, remplir les jarres vidées par les douches de la veille et celles de l'aube, couper le bois, faire tomber les ustensiles par mégarde dans les

¹ Fatou Diome [trans. Lulu Norman; Ros Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2008b), p. 10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

cuisines encore obscurcies par la traîne de la nuit, avant de cajoler le feu pour cuire la bouillie de mil du petit déjeuner qui embaumerait bientôt les salons.¹

[As usual, the women had risen at cockcrow to lower their buckets into the wells, refill the huge earthenware jars for the family's showers, chop wood and clatter about in still dark kitchens, before coaxing the fire to cook the breakfast of millet porridge whose smell would soon fill their homes.]²

The use of “as usual” here does not convey a sense of labourious and fruitless exertion comparable to that characterising Miano’s description of the women of Eku in relation to their domestic duties and suggests, rather, a stable, homely and reassuring routine. The repetitive gestures of Niodior’s women are furthermore portrayed under Diome’s pen as being far from futile for they result in the preparation of a meal to be consumed by their loved ones, the preparation of which will fill these domestic spaces pleasurably with its fragrance. The verb “cajoler” describing the gentle, indeed, loving manner in which the Niodiorois women interact with the fire as a valued cooking implement contrasts with Miano’s women of Eku who desperately rip from the soil anything that they can lay their hands on out of dire need. The author of *Le Ventre*’s praise of Niodior’s women and singularly their culinary gifts is similarly underscored through Salie’s allusion to them as alchemists whose toiling away in the kitchen uniquely “to delight the palate” does not suggest a chore and whose expert knowledge serves to transform the at times meagre foodstuff available in Niodior into culinary gold.³ Indeed, these women are rendered puissant by Diome through their comestible exploits as they themselves become “magicians” – figures endowed with superpowers capable of transforming simple grains of rice into “rubies”.⁴ I will demonstrate in part 2 of the present work that the female characters in *Celles*

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 229.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 163.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴ *Ibid.*

qui attendent are invested with a similar power on behalf of Diome through their roles as mothers, providers and protectors.

In the above extracts, both Miano and Diome appear to paint the nature of ‘women’s work’ in Eku and Niodior in seemingly different lights. One author condemns through her use of vocabulary, imagery and syntax the traditional, indeed stereotypical, roles assigned to women while the other appears to use similar tactics to translate some valorising aspects of these same actions. The distinctive tones of both Miano and Diome can be loosely compared to those of Calixthe Beyala, Miano’s Cameroonian compatriot and Ken Bugul, Diome’s Senegalese predecessor, although the respective standpoints endorsed in the above extracts constitute watered-down versions of the more extreme positions characterising Beyala’s and Bugul’s literary production. The latter, though both preoccupied with the place and status of women in the African societies that they depict, take different approaches in terms of where they place traditional female roles along the devalorising-valorising continuum. The rapprochement of Beyala’s notable endorsement of Western models of feminist thought and Miano’s depiction of gender roles in this particular extract of *L’intérieur* appears plausible on a first-degree level. Considered “an iconoclastic woman of letters of which the talents, controversies and postures have marked feminine Francophone writing”,¹ Beyala and her literary corpus have been consistently read through themes of feminism and gender specifically in relation to her repeated depictions of “African womanhood as one of victimisation and servitude”.² In her book-length study of eight of Beyala’s novels, Clémentine Mansiantima Nzimbu

¹ Nathalie Etoke and Alexie Tcheuyap, 'Présentation: Beyala romancière iconolaste', *Présence Francophone*, 175 (2010), 2010, p. 5.

² Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 93.

posits that the author's "[Western] feminist act of faith"¹ is remarkable from the 1987 publication of her first novel *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*² while Cazenave suggests that this feminist accent is present right across Beyala's literary corpus.³ Comparative literary, African and African American studies academic Ayo Coly states that in Belaya's novels, Africa is continuously portrayed "as a place to run away from" and namely so for the female protagonists that the author commonly places at the heart of her fiction.⁴

Ken Bugul is also often read through the thematic lense of gender-based discourse. However, whereas Beyala's "radical"⁵ feminist perspective has been criticised by some for its framing "within the colonialist discursive construction of the non-Western woman as a poor, illiterate, and helpless object of Western (feminist) rescue and mentoring",⁶ Bugul's texts have demonstrated the development of a feminist stance in an alternative manner. Many paint a laudatory return to the African continent after time spent in Europe and to the restorative value of traditional Senegalese conceptions of the woman, her role and position in society.⁷ This stance is more comparable, at least on a superficial level, with Diome's representation of Niodior's women finding value and enrichment in their communities through the accomplishment of domestic duties traditionally associated with women. This said, Diome extends her depiction of valorising gender roles only so far. On the issue of polygamy for instance, Bugul's and Diome's respective

¹ Clémentine Mansiantima Nzimbu, 'De l'éclatement du noyau familial au discours sur la collectivité dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala', (Université Laval, 2014), p. 1.

² Calixthe Beyala, *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (Paris: Stock, 1987).

³ Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine. A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*, p. 149.

⁴ Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*, p. 93.

⁵ Flora Amabiamina, *Femmes, parole et espace public au Cameroun. Analyse de textes des littératures écrite et populaire*, ed. Marc Quaghebeur (Documents pour l'Histoire des Francophonies/Afrique; Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2017), p. 32.

⁶ Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*, p. 5.

⁷ Alpha Noël Malonga, "'Migritude', amour et identité. L'exemple de Calixthe Beyala et Ken Bugul", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 1/181 (2006), 169-78, p. 171, 173.

postures are distinctly opposed in nature. While Diome is very critical of polygamous unions across almost the entirety of her literary œuvre, Bugul's stance is renowned for its approbatory praise of polygamy. This is most notable in her autobiographical trilogy in which the final volume, *Riwan ou le chemin de sable*,¹ recounts the protagonist's return to her native village in Senegal where she becomes the twenty-eighth wife of an elderly marabout in an attempt to "recover identitarian harmony".² The fulfilment in polygamous union experienced by the protagonist is interpreted by Francophone literary scholar Guy Ossito Midiohouan as depicting a "Ken Bugul who has mourned her fascination for Western culture and feminism à la Beyala" and whose work draws "its strength and beauty from African culture henceforth asserted without shame [...]".³ Whether it be in a step towards Western models of feminist thought or towards the gender conceptualisations of traditional Sub-Saharan societies, both the works of Beyala and Bugul and those of their younger compatriots Miano and Diome are associated in one way or another with the feminine condition and reflect "the multiplicity of feminine discourses" across the world.⁴ This comment concerning the diversity of feminist articulations is central to studies of African women authors for much scholarship and commentary has drawn attention to the intrinsic difficulties of applying Western models of feminism to non-Western contexts including those of Sub-Saharan Africa. I will return to this discussion in more detail in part 2 of the present work.

What is important to note here is that the literary depictions of Eku and Niodior in *Le Ventre* and *L'intérieur* as spaces in which women occupy

¹ Ken Bugul, *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1999).

² Malonga, "'Migritude', amour et identité. L'exemple de Calixthe Beyala et Ken Bugul", p. 173.

³ Guy Ossito Midiohouan, 'Ken Bugul. De l'autobiographie à la satire socio-politique.', *Notre Librairie*, 146 (2001), 26-28, p. 28.

⁴ Irène Assiba D'almeida, 'Problématique de la mondialisation des discours féministes africains', in Chantal Zabus and Danielle De Lame (ed.), *Changements au féminin en Afrique noire. Anthropologie et littérature* (II; Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 27-47, p. 43.

very specific and inflexible roles portends the alienation that non-conforming female characters (including Salie and Ayané) experience in their communities of origin. Yet the young protagonists of both texts are not the only women characters to attempt to assume some form of agency over their lives through calculated choices in relation to education, settlement, child-bearing, championship and love. Ayané's mother Aama, she who attempted to "defy destiny", is another example of such a character conceived of by the Eku collectivity as "a crazy" woman, one who had "tried to act as if she could decide for herself the measure that would determine the dance of her days".¹ As mentioned, Aama is marginalised in Eku due to the fact that she originates from a neighbouring village and is, thus, not an Eku native. Yet she is also marginalised for the attitude and behavior of her husband who refused to comply with Eku's strict conventions including that of customary polygamy. Ultimately, Aama is able to benefit from the material aspects her husband's defiance of strict social and cultural codes provides – she is able to give birth to her child in a hospital and live with her husband as he devises a means to make money locally thereby staying in Eku while the other men remain absent for long periods of time searching for employment. She even benefits from her husband's desire to render domestic chores more manageable for his wife as Ayané's father builds an adjoining, sheltered structure in their *case* so that she is not obliged to cook outside like the other Eku women. He even digs a well for his wife eliminating "the chore of going to fetch water from the spring".² In light of these observations, Aama does appear to benefit from a greater sense of agency concerning her way of life yet this comes at a price. She is alienated by the other Eku women who transform their jealousy into resentment when confronted with "all the

¹ Miano, *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

things she had and which they would never have”¹, a collective anger equally directed towards Aama’s daughter Ayané. In *Le Ventre*, Sankèle is an example of a character who also attempts to garner some agency over the decisions impacting her life. Her desire for and efforts to acquire agency are reflected notably through her decision to fall pregnant to the man she loves in an attempt to oppose her arranged marriage to l’homme de Barbès. This choice, made knowingly by the young woman, results in her physical and social alienation from the community and engenders a great tragedy. Sankèle is hidden from public view for the duration of her visible pregnancy before fleeing the island after the murder of her newborn son by her own father.

The degree of alienation faced by individual female characters depends partially on the way in which these women challenge the status quo underwritten by strong patriarchal structures with some women negotiating agency more successfully than others. Moreover, specific characteristics appear to increase women’s chances of agency acquisition in these highly gender-organised and dependent spaces. Salie’s grandmother in *Le Ventre* defies tradition by sparing the life of her granddaughter. Niodiorois customary practice would have otherwise seen her murdered at birth due to her ‘illegitimate’ status. In *L’intérieur*, village *doyenne* Ié similarly braves certain aspects of patriarchal Eku costume and male authority in general whilst remaining a fervent defender of traditional Eku lore. For instance, Ié consumes certain dishes that are reserved for men with the narrator noting that no other woman would have risked transgressing such social codes. Ié’s consumption of chicken giblets (*gésier de poulet*) is singularly remarkable: it remains in Miano’s native Cameroon a dish traditionally off limits to women. An article published in 2015 examined the transgressive stance of some young women from Yaoundé (namely from university communities)

¹ Ibid., p. 22.

who have begun to disregard this particular culinary taboo and consume the traditionally male-reserved dish.¹ The article authors frame this gesture as one of resistance to male domination suggesting, furthermore, that alimentary taboos are but one of the many components of the “arsenal” exploited by some men to maintain “the order of masculine domination”.² Like certain real-life women of the Cameroonian capital, in violating this alimentary taboo, Ié addresses a subtle challenge to the patriarchal order of Eku. It is important to underscore here that both Ié and Madame Sarr, Salie’s grandmother, are older female characters portrayed as sagacious. This factor alone seems to enable them to wield greater agency when compared to their younger female community members even if this agency is not complete nor unrestricted. Cameroonian academic Flora Amabiamina states that “African traditions, in general, require women to observe a withdrawn position and silence” stressing that certain factors, namely advanced age and social status, can increase a woman’s chances of having her voice heard.³ Indeed, Ié, when attempting to warn village chief Eyoum of the impending rebel invasion, is described by the narrator as having “reached the age when a woman was more than a woman” thereby illustrating that it is due to Ié’s advanced age that she is able to voice her concerns in the face of male authority.⁴ In Miano’s *La saison de l’ombre*, a novel set during the period of the Transatlantic slave trade yet within which the Mulongo clan’s social structures mirror in many ways those of the Eku people, the only women clan members to have their voices heard by male authority are similarly the oldest: “[t]hose who had not seen their own blood for many moons. Those

¹ D. Manirakiza, P. Bilé, and F. Kpoundia, 'Tout ce qui est bon est pour eux ', *Journal des anthropologues*, 140-141 (2015), 133-52.

² Tristan Fournier, 'L'alimentation, arme du genre', *Journal des anthropologues*, (2015) 19-49, p. 32.

³ Amabiamina, *Femmes, parole et espace public au Cameroun. Analyse de textes des littératures écrite et populaire*, p. 20.

⁴ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 38.

that the clan considered henceforth equal to men”.¹ Age and the apparent wisdom that it promotes therefore play an important role in female characters’ agency in rural Mianoian settings impacting singularly upon women’s abilities to challenge male authority, an observation extendable, through Madame Sarr’s strong female character, to Diome’s Niodior.

The affront of her father’s choice of a ‘foreign’ woman as his one and only bride would have perhaps been forgotten had Ayané’s parents decided to raise their daughter in line with Eku village customs. Yet Ayané’s mother Aama decides otherwise. Despite not having benefited from an extensive education herself (she left school at the age of twelve), Ayané’s mother encourages her daughter to pursue her formal education in a conservative traditional setting where “no one had ever had the odd idea of sending [girls] to school”.² As underscored by historian and intellectual Walter Rodney, formal instruction, namely that to which certain colonial subjects were exposed, indeed that which was imposed on them during imperialism, came to be a marker of social distinction. This resulted in educated Sub-Saharan being among the (if not *the*) “most alienated Africans on the continent” whose marginalisation in their home societies increased “[a]t each further stage of education [...]”.³ Francophone literary scholar Romuald Fonkoua similarly calls attention to the fact that African engagement with Western education during the colonial era was often related as a form of exile in the works of Sub-Saharan authors writing in the 1950s and 1960s. Themes of exile from traditional African spaces to foreign ones (namely European) were expressed fictionally in the form of a concrete voyage (for example in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L’Aventure ambiguë* and Camara Laye’s *L’enfant*

¹ Miano, *La Saison de l'ombre*, p. 11.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 5.

³ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Harare ZPH, 1981), p. 275.

noir)¹ or a more symbolic meeting with the coloniser's world through school textbooks.² Ayané's education in a boarding school away from Eku during her adolescence, then as an adult at university in the city of Sombé and finally internationally in France at what is presumably a postgraduate level (she mentions needing to return to France to finish her thesis) contributes substantially to her marginalisation. In Eku, the village doxa does not endorse the idea of a female leaving the community at all and particularly not for the purpose of acquiring an education which differs so greatly from the traditional form delivered to young Eku girls:

Personne n'avait pu vérifier cette rumeur selon laquelle Ayané avait quitté le pays pour une terre lointaine, mais on l'imaginait bien, franchissant les frontières d'un monde qu'aucune femme ne s'était jamais aventurée à explorer. On ne lui avait rien enseigné de valable, et elle ignorait qu'il n'appartenait pas aux femmes de courir les routes. Leur rôle était de demeurer tels des piliers fixés sous le soleil. D'être des fondations et des repères.³

[The rumor was unconfirmed, but it said that Ayané had left the country for a distant land, and they could just imagine her crossing the borders of a world no woman had ever ventured to explore. She had never been taught anything useful and she did not know that it was not for women to roam around. Their role was to remain like fixed pillars under the sun, to be foundations and reference points.]⁴

Ayané's departure to France was not conceived of positively within the ranks of the Eku villagers who struggle to understand and appreciate "l'ailleurs" (elsewhere) as a space for personal enrichment and growth.

In Niodior, the issue of education and specifically one's access to it is also a factor that isolates Salie from the greater community which does not appreciate, as in Eku, the need or the value of educating girls if it is not in terms of their customary or religious duties. Unlike Ayané encouraged by her mother to continue her studies, it is Salie herself who fights from a young

¹ Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris: Julliard, 1961); Camara Laye, *L'enfant noir* (Paris: Plon, 1953).

² Romuald Fonkoua, 'Roman et poésie d'Afrique francophone: De l'exil et des mots pour le dire', *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 67/1 (1993), 25-41, p. 26.

³ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 24.

⁴ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 12.

age for her “first conscious desire, to go to school”.¹ Despite not being enrolled, she repeatedly sneaks “curious” and “intrigued” into the primary school class room of Ndétare. At first she is driven out of the classroom before the teacher tires and enrolls her unofficially at the bottom of his class list.² After remarking Salie’s potential, Ndétare decides to visit her grandmother to persuade her to let her granddaughter continue her instruction. Madame Sarr allows herself to be convinced and gradually implicates herself in her granddaughter’s studies despite her own lack of formal education and illiteracy:

Petit à petit, ma grand-mère se passionna pour mes études. Je pensais toujours qu’elle savait lire et écrire, tant elle surveillait mes révisions du soir devant la lampe tempête. Accoudée à la table du salon, je lisais mes leçons à haute voix, puis je fermais les yeux pour essayer de les réciter. Dès qu’elle soupçonnait une hésitation, elle m’ordonnait fermement : - Relis encore, plusieurs fois, et récite-moi ça mieux !³

[Little by little, my grandmother became enthusiastic about my studying. I still thought she could read and write, she kept such a strict watch over my evening revision by the light of the hurricane lamp. Resting my elbows on the table in the living room, I’d read my lessons out loud, then close my eyes and try to recite them. At the first hint of hesitation, her orders were firm: ‘Read it again, several times, then repeat it better!’]⁴

Access to a specifically Western education becomes a veritable lifeline for Salie, otherwise considered in her conservative home environment as “the incarnation of sin, the devil’s daughter”.⁵ Indeed, she credits it and the particular attention that Ndétare accords her with all her “French cancan steps towards the light”⁶ as well as the role played by her grandmother who, in opening herself to a foreign concept and allowing her granddaughter to study, cleared “a path [...] through the shadows of tradition”.⁷ One cannot

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 42.

² Ibid.

³ Diome, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, p. 70.

⁴ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 45.

⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

help here but to acknowledge the colonial continuum upon which Salie appears to place Africa and Europe; these entities are poles apart – Africa associated with ‘darkness’ and tradition, the ‘unmodern’ or the inherently ‘unmodernisable’ while France, standing in as a metaphor for Europe more generally, is equated with ‘light’. For it should be mentioned that although Western education effectively opens Salie’s eyes to a world of opportunities and new prospects in *Le Ventre*, it similarly leads her at times to abase her African heritage and traditions as these are not always presented by the protagonist as different yet equal to those of Europe. As I will demonstrate shortly, this Eurocentric tendency is also apparent in Ndetaré’s character. Not entirely surprisingly, Salie’s educational success, which eventually plays a role in her departure from Niodior, indeed from Senegal, and her entry into the African diaspora, is also a factor of further exclusion during her childhood on top of her ‘illegitimate’ status recalled constantly by her schoolmates who rile her for her foreign last name. Faced with her impressive academic performance, the parents of these students accuse her of stealing their children’s “opportunities”¹ and even of harbouring occult powers reminiscent of the Eku villagers’ obsession with proving Ayané’s witchery by searching virulently for anything, something to confirm her maleficent essence.²

As asserted by Peter Greschiere, an anthropologist having worked extensively in Miano’s native Cameroon,³ the witch figure has singular connotations in the Sub-Saharan cultural context where it is irrevocably linked to notions of familiarity, danger and the struggle to establish and maintain trust. Witchcraft accusations nearly always occur in intimate social settings (such as the family) and are associated with the breakdown of social

¹ Ibid., p. 51.

² Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 32.

³ Notably with the Maka people of South East Cameroon.

cohesion.¹ As a social and cultural phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa, witchcraft “conveys the warning that seeds of destruction are hidden inside social relations [...] even though these are vital for any human undertaking.”² In Eku, the distrust felt towards Ayané and the perceived threat she represents most certainly stem from the villagers’ collective incomprehension vis-à-vis her own and her parents’ life choices. The Eku villagers’ dogged belief in Ayané’s occult powers therefore serves to further underscore her highly marginalised and alienated status within her community of birth for whom she has become an almost threatening presence. Indeed, the blame for the traumatic events that take place in Eku is partially attributed to Ayané. It is Ié who declares to her on behalf of the village collectivity at the end of the novel: “You are a witch by nature. There is nothing you can do about it, but neither can we. You are the bringer of evil and we cannot accept you among us”.³ The accusation of witchcraft is used to justify Ayané’s indefinite banishment from the clan. She is asked to leave Eku lands after being accorded the right to return once a year during a specific period (so that the villagers are able to perform their protection rituals) to tend to her parents’ graves.

Even when Salie returns to Niodior as an adult, her level of education and resultant career in writing continue to erect what appears to be an insurmountable divide between herself and the other island inhabitants, especially Niodior’s female population, with whom she struggles to establish a point of contact. Her educational level and life choices pose “a constant

¹ The theme of witchcraft accusations, specifically those leveled at children, is a central motif in Miano’s *Contours du jour qui vient* in which the young protagonist is thrown out of her home and abandoned by her own mother who accuses her of being a witch.

² Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. xv.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 138.

threat to the homogeneity of the Niodior community”,¹ one that only reinforces the marginalised status bestowed upon her from birth. The women of Niodior have long considered her to be “a lazybones who couldn’t do anything with her ten fingers other than turn the pages of a book, a self-centered person who preferred to shut herself away and scribble” rather than engaging in ‘feminine’ activities – cooking, chores and childcare.² In an implicit agreement, they do not invite her to penetrate and share their world, leading Salie to the conclusion that “[e]very notebook [...] filled in, every book [...] read, every dictionary [...] consulted was one more brick in the wall dividing us”.³ As Boukary Sawadogo underscores in his 2016 chapter on Diome’s novel, the symbolism of Salie’s non-implication in female socialisation is particularly “remarkable in a socio-cultural context where the ties and solidarity among women are expressed through time spent together in private spaces”.⁴ As a result of this rejection, Salie prefers the company of Niodior’s male inhabitants who are “less hostile” in the sense that they were born into a chauvinist environment and therefore find nothing objectionable or shocking in Salie’s decision to go “against women’s will”.⁵ Though she is spared the oppressive force of the women’s disapproving judgement for prioritising her educational path, expressed physically through the metaphorical beating of their eyelashes that “crack like a whip”,⁶ the writer’s Afropean identity is not experienced any less inharmoniously within this new Niodiorois group who contribute to her cultural hybridity discomfort in novel ways.

¹ Boukary Sawadogo, 'Cross-Atlantic Mobility: The Experience of Two Shores in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', in Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (ed.), *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), 153-68, p.161.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 119.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 120

⁴ Sawadogo, 'Cross-Atlantic Mobility: The Experience of Two Shores in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', p. 161.

⁵ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 120.

⁶ *Ibid.*

1.3.2 SALIE'S PURSUIT OF PROXIMITY AND AYANÉ'S DRIVE FOR DISTANCE

Within the company of this exclusively male group, Salie's Afropeanity is seen as a positive thing for the most part, although superficially, as it represents a goal to be achieved by the young men of Niodior who desire nothing more than to leave their native island and debark on the shores of European Eldorado. Here manifests the degraded African self-consciousness evoked by Miano in *Habiter la frontière* for the young Niodiorois men have no faith in the ability of their African homeland to provide a decent, much less fulfilling, life. This widespread conviction is evidently troublesome as fueled by the fictitious accounts of European life abundantly distributed by characters such as l'homme de Barbès who perverts the reality to inspire respect and esteem from his audience thereby contributing to the "chimeric vision" of Europe.¹ He states to the impoverished and impressionable young men that in Europe "[n]obody's poor, because even those with no work are paid a salary by the state [...] You spend the day snoozing in front of your TV, and you receive the same as one of our highest-paid engineers!"² In attempting to dismantle the deceptive versions of European life for African migrants knowingly promulgated by others, Salie comes into conflict with Niodior's young men including her younger brother Madické. Unlike Ayané who, throughout the majority of *L'intérieur*'s narrative, does not seek to maintain contact with her native Eku community, Salie in *Le Ventre* is characterised by her continual effort to remain attached to and firmly cemented in the thoughts of her loved ones left in Niodior despite the financial and emotional burdens that this causes her. Conversing with Madické often ends in frustration for

¹ Séverine Bates, 'Un miroir aux alouettes ? Des matchs de foot télévisés à la migration africaine en Europe: *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 34/2 (2019), 138-153, p. 139.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 57.

Salie due to his misguided image of her life in Strasbourg which results in him making endless requests for football paraphernalia and castigating his sister for not helping him to reach France. The continuous evocation of football throughout *Le Ventre* reflects Salie's desire for closeness with her brother as she makes her own Madické's "passions, dreams and feelings in order to better understand him and guide him towards the truth".¹ This proximity is reduced to that experienced via the intervention of an inanimate device as Salie watches the same televised football matches as Madické alone in her Strasbourgeois apartment modelling her aspirations for the outcomes on his desires including his idolisation of Italian player Paolo Maldini. Football, in this case, literally enables Salie to travel from France across the Atlantic to Niodior just as it allows Madické to leave his island home for the grand stadiums of Europe:

Chaque fois que les reporters crient le nom, un visage se dessine sur l'écran. À quelques milliers de kilomètres de mon salon, à l'autre bout de la Terre, au Sénégal là-bas, sur cette île à peine assez grande pour héberger un stade, j'imagine un jeune homme rivé devant une télévision de fortune pour suivre le même match que moi. Je le sens près de moi. Nos yeux se croisent sur les mêmes images. Battements de cœur, souffle, gestes de joie ou de désarroi, tous nos signes émotionnels sont synchronisés la durée d'un match, car nous courons derrière le même homme : Paolo Maldini.²

[Every time the commentators shout Maldini's name, a face fills the screen. Thousands of kilometres from my sitting room, on the other side of the earth, in Senegal, on that island barely big enough to accommodate a stadium, I picture a young man glued to a battered old TV set, watching the same match as me. I feel him next to me. Our eyes meet on the same images. Hearts thudding, gasps, outbursts of joy or despair, all our emotions are synchronised while the match plays, because we're right behind the same man: Paolo Maldini.]³

The bodily sensation of synchronicity felt by Salie through the television screen is revealing of her terrible isolation in France where only the lock on her door registers her comings and goings. She accentuates the importance

¹ Kasende, '(É)migration et imaginaire social africain dans *Le ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome: Construction discursive et référence au mythe de *l'Odyssée*', p. 43.

² Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 14-15.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 3-4.

of a second technological device, her telephone, by referring to it as her “umbilical cord”, the figurative and literal cord that allows her to remain connected with the rest of the world not least with her family, her ‘belly’, in Niodior.¹ As explained by Bi Kacou Pafait Diandué in a 2005 article on *Le Ventre*, the stomach has specific symbolic meaning in Diome’s Serer² culture where it represents the emotional pole, “the seat of pain, secrets and speech”.³ Indeed, it is in Niodior, the metaphorical “belly of the Atlantic”, that Salie’s emotional pole is located and where, consequently, she is susceptible to experiencing the most intense emotions which are, on many occasions, not directly traceable to her existence but to that of her loved ones as she takes on their fears, joys, disappointments and dreams. The telephone is not, however, without its drawbacks. On top of the financial burden, Salie also struggles to direct her conversations with Madické towards any subject other than football, receiving only meagre one-word responses when endeavouring to glean information concerning other family members. In a desperate attempt to keep the lines of communication open with those she loves, as a migrant’s greatest prize “remains the love and recognition of those [...] left behind”,⁴ Salie acquiesces:

[...] la passion mûrissante de Madické commençait à me coûter, depuis que j’étais en France. En dehors des heures passées à regarder des matchs pas toujours exaltants, je courais les magasins de sport, la liste des équipements de mon frère à la main. Le téléphone n’était pas seulement le tuyau par lequel France Télécom me suçait le sang, il était devenu mon assommoir.⁵

[[...] Madické’s growing passion had cost me, in the time I’d been living in France. As well as the hours spent watching matches that weren’t always thrilling, I raced through sports shops, my brother’s kit list in my hand. The telephone was no longer just a tube through which France Telecom sucked my blood; it had become a cudgel.]⁶

¹ Ibid., p. 150.

² A West-African ethnic group (and language) heavily present in Senegal and to a lesser extent in Gambia and Mauritania.

³ Diandué, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, métaphore aquatique d’un mirage: idéal brisé de l’Ailleurs?, p. 2.

⁴ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 27.

⁵ Diome, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, p. 62.

⁶ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 39.

Here Diome references Émile Zola's 1877 novel *L'assommoir* variously translated into English as *The Drunkard*, *The Dram Shop* and *The Gin Palace*. The original French language title plays on the verb "assommer" (to stun, to render senseless, to knock out) in reference to the devastating effects of alcoholism and poverty on the lives of the working-class characters the novel chronicles in urban 19th-century Paris. Diome's intertextual allusion serves to highlight the emotional and financial burdens that plague those who migrate and who are repeatedly 'knocked out' by the unrealistic expectations of those they leave behind.¹ Despite the frustration felt by Salie towards her brother, which she plainly divulges: "Frustrated? Yes! I always was after Madické's phone calls",² she remains virulently defensive of him, intervening in the narrative to caution the unidentified narratee against any premature suggestion of selfishness on the part of Madické: "Was he selfish? Say that and I'll cut out your tongue. My brother wasn't selfish, just passionate".³ The narrative technique employed here by Diome merits attention for it confers specific properties to her text. For researcher Denis Assane Diouf, Diome's sophisticated construction around an intradiegetic narratee has three key functions. It allows the author to maintain a point of contact with her reader, attest to the truth of her story, its corresponding related events and information sources and, finally, lace her narrative with a didactic message imbued with her personal experience of immigration in line with the instructional objectives of traditional African tales.⁴ Diome's drawing on didactic African oral forms, which she incorporates into the

¹ *Le Ventre* is marked by significant intertextuality namely in relation to the works of other African authors including Bernard Dadié, Aké Loba and Cheikh Hamidou Kane. See: Paul Touré, 'Jeunesse africaine et paradigme transnational dans *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome', *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 7/1 (2012), 107-24, p. 108.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 54.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Diouf, 'Fatou Diome: L'autre visualisation de l'émigré et l'exception dans la mise en écrit de l'émigration', p. 5.; Rosia Beer, 'Gesturing to an empty theatre? Author, Text and Audience in the Fiction of Fatou Diome and Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland', *RELIEF*, 5/1 (2011), 44-61, p. 47.

novel as a European literary form *par excellence*, in turn reinforces, in a coherent manner, the hybrid nature of her text (which contrasts markedly with her protagonist's uncomfortable cultural hybridity). The structural hybridity of *Le Ventre* is enriched further through Diome's use of linguistic hybridity as she draws on Serer language throughout the text (most notably over the last few pages in the victory song that is sung by the island's young football fans).¹

Salie's protective posture is frequently extended throughout *Le Ventre*, from the intimate defense of her immediate family to that of her native continent, with specific attention given to the broader exploitative paradigm defining contemporary Franco-African relations. This is evident notably through a sustained criticism of globalisation and the dangerous effects it engenders including a marked accentuation of the gap between the global rich and poor. Salie remains highly attuned to this phenomenon by virtue of her status as an African woman living in France. Indeed, in the new world order, the often extolled phenomenon of globalisation is particularly relevant for the postcolonial nations of the South, and singularly for Africa for which, in the words of Etoke, "poverty has become the blinding symbol of the non-participation in the concert of benefits that the globalised third millennium has to offer".² Examples of Salie as narrator's denunciation of globalisation occur at many points throughout the novel. In the first chapter, she critiques the infiltration of Western consumer product advertising including Coca-Cola which "brazenly comes to swell its sales figures" where "drinking water's still a luxury"³ or French company Miko's publicity for an

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 238. Linguistic hybridity occurs across Diome's works. See the following for a discussion of this theme in her 2013 novel *Impossible de grandir*: Christopher Hogarth, "Causer des migraines à Léopold Sédar Senghor": Sub-Saharan Postcolonial Translingual Writing, the Cases of Senegal and Fatou Diome', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 59/4 (2019), 81-94.

² Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 84.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 6.

ice cream which entices young Niodiorois children as they watch the television. The author's choice of vocabulary sourced from contexts relating to religious worship stresses the devotion of the children who adulate and deify the ice cream that they have never had (and will most likely never have) the chance to taste: "They chant the word 'Miko', repeat it the way believers intone their holy book. They look forward to this ice cream as Muslims look forward to the paradise of Muhammad, and come here to await it like Christians awaiting the return of Christ."¹

Salie also castigates the consumer practices of the West whose tourists flock to Senegal to exploit the poverty of its residents and the attitude of the complicit Senegalese government that plays a role in the physical and symbolic plunder of the country. Noting with regret that Western capitalism has spread "into the shade of the coconut trees", Salie decries the actions of foreigners who not only occupy the hotels of the Third World that operate only "for the pleasure of western tourists", but also use their relatively strong capital to engage in sexual tourism exploiting the bodies of Africans in a perverse guided tour of "the landscapes of black buttocks".² As noted by Thomas, Diome's contextualising of a contemporary African community against a backdrop of colonial rhetoric including repeated allusions to slavery, her engagement in "transhistorical contextualization", serves to "underscore the fact that while French-African relations may have changed from colonial relations to postcolonial ones, African interests are not well served", as African bodies remain representative of "the ongoing problem of exploitation in competitive labor markets".³ Joseph Diémé, in his recent chapter on the English translation of *Le Ventre*, has similarly claimed that Diome's rendition of the experiences of African peoples in France "forces

¹ Ibid., p. 7.

² Ibid., p. 140.

³ Thomas, 'African Youth in the Global Economy: Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', p. 252-53.

readers to acknowledge that colonial relations still structure French relations with African people”.¹ He suggests, like Thomas, that the predatory capitalist practices that Diome denounces in postcolonial Senegal – those involving the exploitation of African land and bodies – can be placed in direct dialogue with past Transatlantic slavery and the colonial era.²

Despite her persistent defence of Madické, the African continent and her peoples at large, and this in regard to the practices of the citizens of her adopted country, Salie’s culturally hybrid identity remains a factor of tension, and ultimately, alienation. In Niodior, she not only faces in person the disillusioned vision of her brother, but also that of the other young men all hoping to benefit from the professional opportunities and resultant financial riches they associate with European residency. As she attempts desperately to reason with the young men gathered for a tea break by stressing the reality of African clandestine migration in Europe: “In Europe, my brothers, you’re black first, citizens incidentally, outsiders permanently, and that’s certainly not written in the constitution, but some can read it on your skin”,³ the young Garouwalé accuses her in turn of distorting the truth in order to avoid having to help Madické reach France: “You know that everyone thinks you’re selfish for not helping him leave”.⁴ For the protagonist, who desires nothing more than to spare her brother and the other young men of Niodior from the inherent dangers of disillusioned clandestine migration, highlighted so poignantly during Ndétare’s relation of Moussa’s tragedy,⁵ the attack voiced in the name of the villager collectivity does not

¹ Joseph Diémé, 'Discourse on Immigration: Fatou Diome's Commitment to Human Rights in *The Belly of the Atlantic*', in Félix Germain and Sylvie Larcher (ed.), *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 201-13, p. 202.

² Ibid., p. 208.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 124.

⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

⁵ Discussed shortly.

leave Salie indifferent and reflects the inherently difficult and emotionally taxing position she finds herself in as a Afropean character:

Soudain, je me sentis isolée. Avec qui parler ? Les amitiés d'enfance résistent parfois au temps, jamais à la distance ; la différence des itinéraires nous sépare et ne nous laisse qu'une liste de prénoms qui, petit à petit, perdent leur tête et leur mélodie autrefois rassurante. Chez moi, j'étais nostalgique de l'ailleurs, où l'Autre est mien autrement. Et je pensais à ceux qui, là-bas, trouvent ma tristesse légitime et me consolent, quand l'Afrique me manque. Plusieurs visages se succédèrent dans ma tête, Arrêt sur image ! Et les voilà, tous, qui me souriaient ; j'aurais donné n'importe quoi pour les avoir à mes côtés. Évoquer mon manque de France sur ma terre natale serait considéré comme une trahison, je devais porter cette mélancolie comme on porte un enfant illégitime, en silence et avec contrition.¹

[Suddenly I felt alone. Who could I talk to? Childhood friends may withstand time but never distance; our different paths divide us and leave us only a list of names that gradually come adrift from faces and their once-comforting melody. Back home, I missed being elsewhere, where being 'the other' is my fate in a different way. And I thought of those over there who find my sadness understandable and comfort me when I'm homesick for Africa. Several faces came into my mind. Freeze-frame! And here they all are, smiling at me; I'd have given anything to have them beside me. To talk about missing France on my native soil would be seen as betrayal. I had to carry this melancholy like an illegitimate child, silently and contritely.]²

In the above passage, Salie articulates her fear of being rejected in Niodior if she voices her yearning for France. Yet, as noted by Hogarth, Salie's supposed longing for her adopted homeland is complicated by insights gleaned by the reader into her life in France. Hogarth observes that while Salie "writes at length about the violent patriarchal events that lead to her willing abandonment of her home island", criticising its culture in the process, she makes "no apparent attempt to take part in the French/European culture within which she has taken refuge".³ This observation further complicates her appreciation as an Afropean woman harmoniously experiencing her cultural hybridity.

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 181.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 127.

³ Hogarth, 'Representations of migrant 'Homes' in France through Senegalese literature', p. 79.

No longer welcome at the young men's tea break, Salie decides to spend a few days in the coastal town of M'Bour where she hopes to benefit from a short reprieve from the tension experienced at Niodior. Here she is unknown and theoretically free to reconnect with the African component of her Afropean identity without fear of this being denied by references to her as an individualistic Westerner.¹ Salie's delight at being immersed in her culture of origin is rendered palpable when she hears the sound of the tam-tam drum announcing the holding of a traditional Senegalese wrestling match. This is a sound to which she insists "no daughter from Africa can remain indifferent", even after many long years of absence.² Salie admits here to being truly happy as she concludes that her Africanity is intact as resonating in her interior, that it cannot be damaged by superficial actions including the replacement of "our" *pagnes* by pants, the bleaching of "our" skin and the theft of "our" masks.³ The use of the collective and inclusive possessive adjective "our" ("notre"/ "nos") highlights Salie's adhesion to this collective African identity, "our Africanness",⁴ so often undermined by her diasporic existence. Her confessional address to the 'you' ("vous") narratee is notable as Salie has, throughout her narrative, become somewhat dependent on this unidentified third party who enables her to articulate loudly and clearly and without contestation her African identity so often called into question by her peers. Salie's elation in M'bour at feeling a solid identitarian grounding in her African culture of origin is short lived. Upon her arrival at her hotel, she is called a "Francenabé"⁵ by the receptionist whose behavior towards her is immediately modified upon the presentation of her French passport and resident card and who welcomes her to Senegal

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 141.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 137.

³ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 195.

⁴ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 138.

⁵ Meaning "he or she who comes from France". Francis Estè Awitor, 'Ici et ailleurs: la notion de frontière(s) dans *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome', *Acta Iassyensia Comparationis* 2/16 (2015), 9-17, p. 14.

despite the fact that she also presents an identity card demonstrating her Senegalese origin. Her treatment as a foreigner in her own country saps the rapture Salie had momentarily felt in proximity to the tam-tam as she is reminded that her diasporic status prevents her from being anything but the ‘Other’ regardless of which side of the Atlantic she stands on. She concludes with regret: “A foreigner in France, I was treated like an outsider in my own country: as unacceptable with my residency permit as with my identity card”.¹ This episode, and specifically Salie’s emotional reaction to it, naturally complicates Salman Rushdie’s much publicised claim that “[t]o be a migrant is, perhaps, to be the only species of human being free from the shackles of nationalism (to say nothing of its ugly sister, patriotism”).² In Salie’s case, the ‘shackles of nationalism’ appear to have, at times, great appeal.

One could be mistaken into thinking that Ayané does not care about the alienation that she suffers on behalf of her community of origin as she does not attempt to form, repair nor maintain links with the Eku villagers to the same extent that Salie does in Niodior. This is evident in the abrupt and cold manner in which she returns to Eku village after “an absence people had lost track of it had been so long” to be by her dying mother’s side.³ She arrives in Western dress completely foreign to traditional and isolated Eku and fails to address the villagers, heading instead straight to her mother’s *case*. Though Ayané eventually recognises her gaffe and regrets her cold demeanour, her reticence to engage with her community of origin is certainly comprehensible given the past treatment of her family and herself which has not abated since the death of her father, nor over the three years since her last visit. It is a defensive, distance-inducing posture, distinct from Salie’s

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 139.

² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), p. 124.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 12.

quest for inclusion and validation, adopted by Ayané after having her whole life been (as was Salie) at the bitter end of collectively targeted strategies such as accusations of witchcraft and the like designed to designate her as ‘Other’ and make her feel like her presence was undesired and even feared. Yet while Ayané scrutinises the village where nothing has changed and where the same cycle continues – people are married, men leave and women give birth –, the reader gains a first glimpse into the difficult, and in some ways ambiguous, experience of her imposed cultural hybridity as she comes to the realisation that “no one had time to worry about her or this internal scar she trailed about of being from nowhere”.¹ The term “balafre” (scar) is particularly revealing of the painful aspect of this hybrid identitarian ‘wound’. This remark leads Ayané to reminisce over the years she spent as a university student in Sombé where she met Louis – the European man she married and followed to France. The reason that this relationship failed is similarly revealing of Ayané’s uncomfortable rapport with the notion of difference inherent to cultural hybridity as the reader learns that Louis desired children, a project Ayané did not share, even going so far as to consider the latter irresponsible in reference to the potentially painful consequences that “nebulous identities” engender. As explained by the narrator: “He thought mixed race was a gift. She was convinced that difference always looks cute seen through the eyes of those who are not different, those of the majority, whose decisions influenced the lives of other people and who knew nothing of the indescribable tatters of nebulous identities.”² Haunted to the point of sabotaging her relationship with the man she loves by the difference and alienation suffered in her native Eku, by an enduring sentimental scar of belonging neither here nor there, it is difficult

¹ Ibid., p. 19.

² Ibid., p. 20.

for one to consider Ayané's experience of imposed cultural hybridity in *L'intérieur* as constituting a space for identitarian liberation and emancipatory resistance in the manner advanced by Bhabha. This is plausibly, as Bauhn, Tepe and Broeck have suggested, due to the fact that her arrival in a space of cultural hybridity was imposed under conditions of duress as Ayané came to the conclusion at an early age that exile would be her only option if she was to be able to live life the way she wanted.¹

For Salie in *Le Ventre*, embracing a diasporic existence was also imposed in the sense that she was categorised from before her birth as the 'Other', never destined to integrate the 'us'. Her awareness of this fact was also acquired at a young age: "Already, as a child, incapable of any ulterior motive and unaware of the attractions of emigrating, I'd understood that *leaving*² would be the corollary to my existence".³ Exile was for Salie, like for Ayané, a decision that enabled her to become an active agent in her life, free to make choices for herself in France where she is theoretically less burdened by the weight of social condemnation than in Niodior. Yet despite weighing up the opportunities and obstacles and determining that her freedom was more important than anything, Salie's movement into the African diaspora was not without its mostly affective drawbacks, the lonely writer comparing her "exile" to a "geographical suicide".⁴ Coly similarly notes that although Salie embraces "nomadic homelessness" by the end of the novel, Diome's stance vis-à-vis diasporic existence and the culturally hybrid Afropean identity that this engenders is not as clear cut as *Le Ventre*'s protagonist would perhaps like the reader to believe:

The inconsistent protagonist of Fatou Diome [...] manifests a more reserved, if not suspicious, attitude towards hybridity as a viable discourse of home and

¹ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 40-41.

² Italics in the original.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

identity [compared to that of Calixthe Beyala]. From Diome's description of the ideologically polarized places of identity of her protagonists, hybridity remains a utopian solution because neither place can accommodate a hybrid identity.¹

Kristen Stern concurs with Coly in stressing that there is a fundamental difference in the manner in which Diome and Beyala broach the experience of immigration and the identitarian mutations it produces. Stern argues that "Diome writes [...] in favor of a more realistic understanding of the immigration experience", her "homelessness speak[ing] to a more complex, and even unsettling, resolution to the uprooted nature of the transnational life".²

As evidenced, Ayané's stratagem for enduring her uncomfortable Afropean identity in *L'intérieur* involves a conscious effort to distance herself from Eku and its villagers, indeed from her Africanicity. This strategy diverges markedly from Salie's attempts to remain connected with her community of origin in Niodior despite the alienation that she also experienced as a child. Following the burial of her mother, Ayané desires nothing more than to leave and return to Europe, as "she had nothing more to do [t]here. She had no one left [t]here".³ Her desire to return to France as quickly as possible is reinforced by her knowledge that the airport may soon be compromised as conflicts such as the one looming in Mboasu tend to result in the seizure of strategic zones. Unfortunately, Ayané does not manage to leave Eku before the arrival of *Les forces du changement* and is, like the other villagers, subjected to the traumatic murder of Eyia and other

¹ Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*, p. 121-22.

² Kristen Stern, 'Performing the Immigrant: The Works of Calixthe Beyala and Fatou Diome', *Paroles gelées*, 28/1 (2014), 79-96, p. 93. I note that not all researchers having studied Diome's text have come to this conclusion concerning the author's depiction of cultural hybridity in *Le Ventre*. Marissa Brown's reading suggests that "[t]he narrative illustrates an empowered hybridized identity that serves to highlight transnational travel as beneficial in a way that addresses past and present inequalities". Marissa Brown, 'Writing Hybridized Identities in Fatou Diome's *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*', *Odyssées/Odyssées*, 41 (2017), 198-209, p. 198.

³ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 192.

clan members. In response to this trauma, and specifically to the knowledge that the clan members did not rebel and yielded to Isilo's order to consume Eyia's flesh, Ayané magnifies her distance-inducing tactic towards her own community with the objective of marking a distinction between herself and 'them'. This is demonstrated in an internal monologue related by the narrator within which the personal pronoun "'they'" ("ils") and possessive adjective "their" ("leur"/"leurs") are repeatedly used serving to communicate the discrepancy made by Ayané between her own perceived lack of responsibility in the events and the collective implication of the other villagers:

“Ils savaient. Tous. Ils en avaient tous mangé. D'un enfant qui, compte tenu de leurs valeurs, de leur conception des liens entre les êtres, était le leur. A tous. Leur fils. Leur petit frère.”¹

[They knew. All of them. They had all eaten it. The meat of a child who, in the light of their values and concept of common bonds, was their own. He belonged to all of them, he was their son, their little brother [...].]²

Yet for Ayané, this simple articulation of difference, the adoption of the binary 'us/them' paradigm so favoured in colonial discourse, does not appear sufficient. She goes further by animalising the people of Eku, her people, by calling into question not only their inaction, passivity, and complicity, but, ultimately, their very humanity.¹

Ayané is initially insensitive to the pleas for comprehension voiced by her aunt Wengisané who endeavours to underscore the reality of human reactions to intense fear when faced with the prospect of death: “Wengisané listened to her niece pouring out the disgust she felt for the people who had agreed to do this. Again, she tried to make her see what fear was, what

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 33.

² Paul Touré, 'Ethics of resistance and fictional minds in Léonora Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *La saison de l'ombre*', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 20/1/2 (2017), 73-94, p. 90.

terrorized humans could be made to do”.¹ In stressing the utter ‘humanness’ of the Eku’s villagers’ fragility and fear, Wengisané implores Ayané to refrain from taking it upon herself to decide whether those not corresponding to *her* criteria are human or not emphasising the fact, presumably in reference to a very present and weighty colonial past, that this is not the first time that such categorisations have been deployed on African soil by others:² “Ayané, my child, don’t think as others have done before you that everyone who doesn’t answer to our criteria is not human”.³ For Hollis-Touré, the politicisation of Ayané’s estrangement in Eku, now recontextualised against the broader historical framework of colonial intervention, represents “the troubling duality of the postcolonial subject”.⁴ Indeed, Wengisané’s intervention underscores the fundamentally uncomfortable manner in which Ayané as an Afropean character inhabits her imposed cultural hybridity and especially her association with the African component of the latter from which she is, once faced with the knowledge of what actually occurred in Eku, determined to distance herself.⁵ The self-preserving component of this strategy is again underscored by Wengisané being angered by her niece’s adoption of the binary conceptions of the human that so influenced and propelled colonial discourse in Sub-Saharan Africa: “You think that their sin will rub off on you and that if people knew, you would be tarred with the same brush. Your humanity would be circumscribed. Basically, you are just

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 132.

² Hollis-Touré, 'Strangers in their own Homes: Displaced Women in Léonora Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *Contours du jour qui vient*', p. 27.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 133.

⁴ Hollis-Touré, 'Strangers in their own Homes: Displaced Women in Léonora Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* and *Contours du jour qui vient*', p. 26.

⁵ I note that prior to learning of the cannibalistic element of Eyia’s death, Ayané attempts to associate herself with the clan’s mourning process, specifically by attending the wake held for the victims. Though driven by the desire to extract information concerning the sequence of events having taken place, Ayané affirms at this time for the first time that she has a place within the Eku community by declaring in front of the entire village that Eku is her home. It is when Ayané is informed by Inoni as to the true nature of Eyia’s death that she dissociates herself from the village collectivity which she dehumanises in the process. Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 181.

thinking of yourself!”¹ Francophone African literary scholar Audrey Small has argued in relation to Salie in *Le Ventre* that “many of the old hierarchical binarisms inherited from the colonial period intersect in the experiences of this central character”.² Although I do agree with this comment, I believe that it is more applicable to Ayané’s character in *L’intérieur*.

Interestingly, Lassi suggests that Ayané has her point of view credited by the narrator in *L’intérieur* due to the profound insight and lucidity ascribed to her character by the author.³ I tend to diverge from this interpretation and suggest that Miano instead credits Wengisané’s point of view over that of Ayané, depicting the older woman as more insightful, astute and comprehensive. For Genette, variations of point of view (baptised “altérations”) can be analysed as changes in focalisation. These changes do not necessarily undermine the overall tone of a given text. Instead, *altérations* can give less information than strictly required according to the focalisation code that governs the text as a whole or, alternatively, more information. In the case of Ayané and Wengisané, the changes in focalisation that play out during their dialogue provide the reader with more information, with a sense of multiplicity and nuance.⁴ The complexities and consequences of passing such severe judgement on the people of Eku are revealed through Wengisané’s character who presents a challenge to Ayané’s one-dimensional sentencing. Through the employment of such a technique, it is difficult to see how Miano could be interpreted as having ‘credited’ Ayané’s point of view especially as the author has previously stated that she never sought to give Ayané “a positive image” nor make her the heroine of the

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 134.

² Audrey Small, 'Immigrants and Expatriates: Status, Agency and Home in the early work of Fatou Diome', *Essays in French Literature and Culture*, 155 (2018), 99-114, p. 104.

³ Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l’Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', p. 453.

⁴ Genette, *Figures III*, p. 211-12.

novel.¹ Furthermore, through the sharp allusion to “Africans”, “all blacks” who “can only see themselves through the eyes of other people”, Miano is able to use Wengisané’s discerning character to extend the depiction of the Eku tragedy far beyond the borders of the village, Mboasu or even the African continent.² Her words serve to reflect a generally impoverished self-perception among people of African descent who have integrated the symbolic violence of a collective imaginary represented in media and literature through “[...] the mode of failure, deficit, handicap, [...] deficiency and congenital defect”.³

In a second interpretation of the conclusion of *L'intérieur*, Coly states that Ayané’s “choice to stay and not return to France reflects her sense of responsibility to the nation-building project”.⁴ I consider this interpretation to be premature, at least in regard to this text, as Ayané’s decision to remain in Mboasu is not yet known at the end of *L'intérieur* and is only confirmed upon the chance meeting of Ayané and the protagonist of *Contours du jour qui vient* in the second volume of the trilogy.⁵ Therefore, one cannot really speak of an open and conscious commitment to the “nation-building project” on Ayané’s behalf at the end of *L'intérieur* as this character merely contemplates the “three ways [that] lay before her, each bristling with thorns and poisonous plants”.⁶ That said, Coly’s comment does draw attention to the fact that Ayané has, by the end of the narrative and following her exchanges with Wengisané, opened her perspective ever so slightly to include the possibility of remaining in Mboasu. This demonstrates a

¹ Miano, “*L'intérieur de la nuit*” un roman de Léonora Miano. Une traversée des profondeurs de l’Afrique’, p. 2.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 134.

³ Sarr, *Afrotopia*, p. 9-10.

⁴ Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*, p. 128.

⁵ *Contours du jour qui vient* is the second published novel of the trilogy but the third in terms of the trilogy’s chronology.

⁶ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 139.

symbolic evolution in her position as a member of the diaspora as she begins to feel a sense of obligation towards her community of origin. This contrasts markedly with her desire to flee her African home space and return to Europe immediately after her mother's death. I recall that active engagement in relation to one's homeland and the peoples who still live there is one of the key defining characteristics of diasporic consciousness according to Jacques Barou.¹ Ayané's nascent nation-building project could be read as the very beginnings of an Afro-diasporic consciousness to be deployed in time well beyond the bounds of Eku.

Coly's reading of Ayané's engagement in the nation-building project is perhaps more appropriate to describe the position adopted by Diome's protagonist at the conclusion of *Le Ventre*. Near the end of the narrative, Salie comes to the realisation that she can no longer discourage Madické from his project of emigrating to Europe without proposing a concrete solution to his tangible problems in Niodior. In a change of tactic, she resolves to identifying "[...] the right idea, enticing enough to persuade him to put down his imaginary suitcases".² Like Ayané's consideration of Wengisané's proposition, the arrival at this conclusion by Salie is somewhat by default as she struggles in the face of an immensely degraded continental image to reestablish confidence in Africa as a site for feasible and fulfilling life through the sole deployment of her "verbal barriers".³ Salie saves up a sum of money, a meagre amount in France yet significant in Senegal, that she offers to Madické in order for him to set up a viable venture on the island: "[n]othing earth-shattering; just a grocer's. It would never be listed on the Stock Exchange, but it would provide a means of making a living that was

¹ Jacques Barou, 'Les immigrés d'Afrique subsaharienne en Europe: une nouvelle diaspora?', *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 28 – Migrations, transnationalisme et diaspora: théorie et études de cas/1 (2012b), 147-67, p. 150.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 150.

³ Ibid.

more secure than fishing and less perilous than being an illegal immigrant”.¹ Though Madické is not initially convinced by the idea, as he still harbours the desire to emigrate, he eventually accepts Salie’s offer and establishes his own boutique on the island. Some researchers have interpreted this conclusion as a strong marker of Diome’s “faith in local solutions”,² achieved over the narrative through her persistent deconstruction of the Eldorado myth and particularly significant for an African writer whose native continent is “often victim of a certain pessimism in the sense that it is generally perceived as a closed society, incapable of evolution and whose inhabitants are lacking in dynamism”.³ It is in this manner that Kasende interprets *Le Ventre*’s conclusion suggesting that it demonstrates the foundation of a “new African historical consciousness” which has been partially constructed by Africa’s postcolonial diaspora “disseminated throughout the world”:⁴

Grâce aux réflexions, à l’intransigeance et à la proposition concrète, bref grâce à la stratégie narrative et discursive de déconstruction menée par Salie qui est installée en France, Madické est convaincu que la terre d’origine, l’Afrique symbolisée dans le roman par l’île sénégalaise de Niodior, peut procurer le vrai épanouissement, une fois prise en charge par ses habitants. [...] La reconversion de Madické incarne symboliquement la nouvelle conscience historique de la Jeune Afrique.⁵

[Thanks to the reflections, intransigence and concrete proposition, in short, due to the narrative and discursive strategy of deconstruction undertaken by Salie living in France, Madické is convinced that the homeland, Africa symbolised in the novel by the Senegalese island of Niodior, can procure real fulfillment once its inhabitants take responsibility for it. Madické’s regeneration symbolically incarnates the new historical consciousness of young Africa.]

As underscored earlier, a certain awareness of history is central to Miano and Etoke’s conception of diasporic consciousness. I remain unconvinced,

¹ Ibid.

² Thomas, 'African Youth in the Global Economy: Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*', p. 258-59.

³ Kouna, 'Expérience migratoire et conscience du berceau dans le roman francophone', p. 293.

⁴ Kasende, '(É)migration et imaginaire social africain dans *Le ventre de l’Atlantique* de Fatou Diome: Construction discursive et référence au mythe de l’*Odyssée*', p. 54.

⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

however, as to how Madické's decision to invest in his African home space can be considered an embodiment of *historical* consciousness. Madické's decision to remain in Niodior has very little to do with his broader knowledge of African struggles in the face of past and present European degradation, domination and exploitation. It appears, rather, to be almost entirely due to Salie's decision to fund his project. Though indicating a newfound faith in Africa, her peoples, cultures and institutions, I believe that historical consciousness as a fundamental component of Afro-diasporic consciousness is embodied much more clearly by a character such as Isilo in *L'intérieur*. As I will illustrate shortly, Isilo's historical consciousness – his knowledge of African history abased and erased by European colonial presence – is a crucial component of his strategy to revalorise and reestablish pride in collective African identity.

Still other scholars have underlined the paradox in *Le Ventre* concerning the causes of and solutions advanced to counter immigratory desires in young African people. For example, Nathan argues that Diome's position on immigration in the novel is ambiguous for she promotes as principal causes of migration intellectual and cultural factors anchored in a mythical idealisation of metropolitan France, an image and a condition that the author attempts to counter with an economic solution made possible by French capital.¹ As such, not only do the immigratory factors explored and solution proposed not strictly correspond, but also in attempting to dismiss the myth of a French or European Eldorado theoretically, in practice Salie actually reinforces this depiction through her use of the economic means put at her disposal by virtue of her life in France. In short, "Salie's answer to discouraging migration is via migration".² In a book-length study on

¹ Nathan, 'Moorings and mythology: *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and the immigrant experience'.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Senegalese cultural production (literature, film and social media), Mahriana Rofheart raises a similar concern in her discussion of the text by asking “if Salie is so concerned with life in Niodior and insistent that moving to Europe is not the answer to financial difficulty, why is she still in France”?¹ In response to her own question, Rofheart suggests that Diome’s novel, through Salie’s “chosen exile”, serves to “highlight the diverse motivations for immigration, not all of them economic”.² I would certainly agree with this interpretation in the sense that Salie’s (and Ayané’s) motivations for leaving their African home spaces are intrinsically bound up in their marginalised statuses, statuses acquired from birth and accentuated through childhood and adulthood through their pursuit of a Western education. A third interpretation holds that Salie’s gesture can be read as a symbolic positioning midway between traditional society, with its emphasis on mutual aid, and the realities of a postcolonial African village embedded in a global market characterised by individualism. Through the promotion of a form of what Francophone literary scholar Samuel Zadi calls “modified solidarity”³ – a compromise founded on the combination of the advantageous aspects of traditional African solidarity with those of Western individualism – Salie is said to unite in a meaningful and harmonious whole for herself and her brother the African and European components of her hybrid cultural identity.

Salie’s gesture and Madické’s acceptance of it draw attention convincingly for the first time in the novel to the advantages of cultural hybridity until now experienced uncomfortably by the protagonist and the Niodiorois villagers. When Salie sends the money to Madické, she is powerless to prevent him from buying a plane ticket in order to reach France

¹ Mahriana Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media* (Lanham; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), p. 84.

² Ibid.

³ Samuel Zadi, 'La « Solidarité africaine » dans *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 25/1 (2010), 171-88, p. 176.

or from attempting the dangerous crossing clandestinely. She has to resolve herself to having faith in him to use the money for the purpose that she has envisioned, something which remains legitimately doubtful in both her mind and the reader's given Madické's reiterated desire to leave Niodior. After a trying period of silence during which Salie prohibits herself from telephoning her brother as she wishes to test the hypothesis that all contact between a migrant living elsewhere and those he or she has left behind is driven by motivations that are seldom disinterested,¹ she receives an unexpected parcel from Senegal. For Salie, this package containing a mere three Senegalese foodstuffs is highly symbolic for it is the first instance of directional change in the Atlantic good exchanges so far characterised by Salie's forwarding of football paraphernalia and the like from Europe to Africa. More importantly, it indicates that someone on the other side of the Atlantic, "over there" in its belly, is thinking about her. The following extract employs the literary device of parallelism – the use of sentence components that are the same or similar in terms of their grammatical structure ("là-bas"; "où") – giving rhythm to the statements made which, consequently, accentuates their persuasiveness in the eyes of the reader:

Ce maigre colis, qui en fera sourire plus d'un, me combla de joie. Ce petit paquet signifiait que là-bas, au bout du monde, dans le Sahel où le sable brûle les semailles, où les vautours sont seuls à se réjouir du passage des troupeaux, là-bas, dans le ventre de l'Atlantique, où seul le sel se récolte à profusion, là-bas donc où il serait plus judicieux de garder ses maigres denrées que de les offrir, quelqu'un pensait à moi avec beaucoup d'amour.²

[This meagre parcel, which would make most people laugh, filled me with delight. This parcel meant that *over there*, at the ends of the earth, in the Sahel where the sand burns your soles, where the vultures are alone in celebrating the passing of the flocks, *over there*, in the belly of the Atlantic, where only salt is harvested in abundance, *over there*, where it would be wiser to hold on to one's paltry goods than give them away, someone was thinking of me with love.]³

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 246.

² *Ibid.*, p. 250.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 179.

Madické calls Salie that very same evening to confirm that she has received the package and takes the opportunity to inform his sister of the success of his shop, which is doing well enough for him to envision the possibility of expanding it. The change in his attitude in relation to Niodior as a viable life space is remarkable as he admits to Salie that he no longer desires to immigrate to Europe and even encourages Salie to return home where “with a bit of money, you can have a good life [...]”.¹ The concessional nature of the project initiated by Salie through the investment of her European capital is revealed through Madické’s decision to adapt the running of his store to the island’s African context, where “relationships take precedence over assets”,² by allowing his fellow villagers to purchase stock on credit. He therefore illustrates that, despite his newfound source of income, financial turnover associated with the plundering tendency of Western enterprise in African contexts, underscored at length throughout *Le Ventre* and in other Diomian texts, is not his priority. Instead, he enriches his community by providing it with a form of tangible social insurance, one that on a micro, immediate level, spares the residents of this isolated corner of Africa from “the terror imposed by insecurity, indigence and lack”.³ The site of this solidarity is located within the liminal, flexible space situated half-way between the continental binaries of Europe and Africa as adopting aspects of both cultural entities like Salie, whose culturally hybrid Afropean identity appears to finally be granted some recognition and respect by her brother as a legitimate and productive existential space. This recognition has a liberating effect on Salie who is momentarily allowed at the novel’s conclusion to envisage the prospect of harmonious diasporic existence. The Atlantic Ocean would appear to constitute, by the end of Diome’s novel, a

¹ Ibid., p. 181.

² Robert, *L’Afrique au secours de l’Occident*, p. 143.

³ Mbembe, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine*, p. 75.

“liquid bridge linking Africa and Europe”,¹ an “interstitial passage”² of cultural hybridity rather than a sole physical and conceptual border separating the two continents and cultures. It has even been suggested by Rosemary Haskell that Salie becomes “the master of two worlds” at the end of the novel as, aided by the Atlantic, she moves “freely from France to Senegal and back again”³ (at least symbolically through her investment in Madické’s future in Niodior). The researcher and literary critic asserts that *Le Ventre* illustrates Elleke Boehmer’s claim that migrant writing is or can be “writing which [...] celebrates national or historical rootlessness and weightlessness [...] an evacuation of commitment”.⁴ Despite what Salie’s own declarations may suggest at the end of *Le Ventre*, this is a conclusion that I embrace with caution. For Diome’s second last novel published in 2013, in which Salie features again as the central protagonist, appears to discount the idea of this character living the life of a ‘fulfilled’ piece of seaweed content to float between European and African shores as the hybrid product of both cultural environments.⁵ Throughout the majority of *Impossible de grandir*, Salie is effectively the neurotic prisoner of her European apartment haunted by the memories of her African childhood and namely the exposure of these memories to her new European entourage. She is, in this text, the ‘master’ of no world as is Ayané who declares to her aunt Wengisané at the end of *L’intérieur* that she has renounced belonging to any place.⁶ In both *L’intérieur* and *Le Ventre*, Ayané and Salie as young, educated female Afropeans ultimately lend weight to Tunisian writer Albert

¹ Diandué, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, métaphore aquatique d’un mirage: idéal brisé de l’Ailleurs?, p. 2.

² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 5.

³ Rosemary Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', *South Atlantic Review*, 81/1 (2016), 136-56, p. 143.

⁴ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 233.

⁵ Diome, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, p. 255.

⁶ Miano, *L’intérieur de la nuit*, p. 199.

Memmi's assertion that "a man [sic.] astride two cultures is rarely well seated".¹

¹ Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 140.

1.4 Polarising discourse in Eku and Niodior

I have thus far demonstrated that both Ayané and Salie as young, Western-educated females living in the African diaspora do not experience their cultural hybridity in an invariably comfortable manner. These characters therefore epitomise the belief held by certain postcolonial critics that emancipatory and fulfilling diasporic existence between two cultures is not necessarily an inherently positive experience. It remains, conversely, very much dependent on the circumstances in which it is achieved – whether forced or voluntary, accepted or rejected. Although largely alienated from their communities of origin, Ayané and Salie are both aware of the concrete struggles their postcolonial African societies face. Both, by the end of their respective novels, feel a sense of engagement vis-à-vis their African home spaces and wish to see the livelihood and wellbeing of Eku's and Niodior's respective inhabitants improved.

In this chapter, I will turn my attention to the presence of two continental male African characters who, like Ayané and Salie, are formally educated and, more importantly, recognise the need for Afro-identitarian reconfiguration and revalorisation south of the Sahara. Yet I will show that the impact of these two male continental characters is negligible for their means are misplaced and extreme. In their dire attempts to stimulate change in Eku and Niodior as metaphors for Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, Isilo in *L'intérieur* and Ndétare in *Le Ventre* both fall unwittingly into the traps of essentialist binaries engaging respectively in Afrocentric and Eurocentric rhetoric. They inadvertently recreate the detrimental Africa-Europe binary so specific to the colonial model which ultimately results in the reproduction, admittedly to varying degrees, of violence and tragedy.

The reader first encounters Isilo when he arrives as night falls over Eku village after the burial of Ayané's mother. This young man, originally from the neighbouring country of Yénèpasi, heads a regiment of *Les forces du changement* who are attempting to overrun the government of Mboasu invested by the former colonial power after independence. Isilo primarily seeks to inspire communion between African populations in order for them to regain a collective sense of pride and cultural authenticity and, in doing so, rehabilitate an Africa that has lost contact with what she once was following years of past colonial and continuing postcolonial domination. A secondary objective of his arrival in Eku is to reinforce his armed forces with fresh recruits. In attempting to convince the villagers of the importance of his mission, Isilo begins a long speech detailing their common ancestry and family ties, which have been, in his opinion, summarily trampled by European colonialism and division in Sub-Saharan Africa:

Vous qui résidez ici, sur cette terre des hautes pentes, êtes les fils d'Ekú. Notre histoire [...] a été malmenée par les colons, et notre famille a oublié d'entretenir les liens qui unissaient les uns aux autres chacun de ses membres. C'est de là qu'est venue notre défaite face aux envahisseurs, et c'est là que réside notre faiblesse actuelle. [...] Nous avons oublié notre nom. Combien de temps cela fait-il, que nous n'avons plus célébré d'union entre descendants d'Iwié et d'Ekú, par exemple ? Voilà en un mot le pacte que nous sommes venus rétablir.¹

[You, who live here on this land of high slopes, are the sons of Eku. Our history [...] was distorted by the colonizers, and our family forgot to maintain the links that bound its different members together. This is why we were defeated by the invaders, and that is where our current weakness lies. [...] We have forgotten our name. How long is it since we celebrated the union between the descendants of Iwié and Eku for instance? This, in a word, is the pact that we have come to restore.]²

While confusing the vast majority of Eku's poor and uneducated clan members, the content of Isilo's enunciations strikes a chord with the young and idealist Epa.³ This comes as no surprise to the reader as the omniscient

¹ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 75-76.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 48.

³ This character will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1.5.

narrator has just, a few pages, earlier drawn attention to the adolescent's resolute support for the armed group and its ambitions in Mboasu vocalised in the face of a disinterested and passive villager collectivity unwilling or unable to engage in discussion regarding all "these political stories".¹ Exasperated by the unchanging situation in Eku, Epa finds in Isilo's speech a means of articulating the frustration he feels as a powerless, impoverished postcolonial citizen in a country only notionally independent since the visible departure of the former colonial power that continues to pull the strings of the corrupt puppet government to the disadvantage of the nation's majority non-elite population. His relatively high level of education (Epa achieved his *brevet*), which is the reason for his direct contact with the rebel leader as he is chosen to translate the latter's words from French to Eku language, is partially responsible for the sense of indignation he harbours. This can be compared to that of Isilo himself who is recognised by Ayané as having studied with her at university in Sombé where he was undertaking a Master's degree in history to become a teacher.² Indeed, just as exposure to education was a factor complicating both Ayané's and Salie's rapports with their communities of origin, access to an education is not portrayed as an inherently positive factor in Isilo's case. It is instead depicted to be both a blessing and a curse as it enables his immersion "into the deep, troubled waters of Africa's past, in the wound still so raw with anyone who knew what had befallen them".³ Knowledge of past continental and diasporic struggles, what I have referred to elsewhere as historical consciousness, is, as already mentioned, an important aspect of Etoke's diasporic consciousness to which Miano and her (increasingly) self-professed Pan-

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 36.

² Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 87.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 61.

African sensibility openly adhere.¹ Historical knowledge is paramount for it enables populations to understand how traumatic pasts engendered significant and long-lasting changes in the structure and functioning of their communities as is the case for Eku where, to give but one example, women were not always restricted to the village confines. The absence of this knowledge, this historical consciousness, spares the Eku villagers from experiencing the same internal discomfort felt by Isilo and, to a lesser extent, Epa. The villagers are, in essence, content in their naivety and remain oblivious of the festering colonial wound that Isilo desperately attempts to draw attention to and that he identifies as being at the source of contemporary diminished African self-consciousness, the obsessive restoration of which has become his lifework:²

Les autres ne souffraient pas. Ils étaient assis sous les arbres et ne comprenaient pas pour quelle raison on était venu les priver de leur repas du soir. Contrairement aux Africains instruits, ils ne s'étaient pas réveillés au matin avec ce mal au crâne, ces souvenirs confus de ce qui s'était réellement passé, et les preuves qu'on avait abusé d'eux parce qu'ils avaient manqué de discernement.³

[The others did not suffer. They sat under the trees and could not understand why this man had come and deprived them of their evening meal. Unlike the educated Africans, they had not woken up one morning with this ache in their brains, these confused memories of what had actually happened, and the proof that they had been exploited because they lacked discernment.]⁴

Like Ayané and Salie, Isilo is somewhat marginalised from his continental kin due to his level of education which renders him sensitive to certain realities that others cannot or do not wish to see. Yet whereas Ayané and Salie live in the diaspora and can therefore retreat from their African home spaces for respite, Isilo as a continental character cannot. He occupies a position of continuous and unmeasured exposure to the degraded self-

¹ Miano, *L'Impératif transgressif*, avant-propos.

² Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 101.

³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 61.

consciousness he so wishes to repair and this geographical proximity is at least partially responsible, in my opinion, for his deviation into extreme discourse and ultimate plunge into violence.

In *Le Ventre*, it is similarly an educated, continental male character who desperately attempts to redress locally an abyssal loss of confidence in Niodior with a specific emphasis on the island's young male population. Like Isilo, Ndétare is an outsider not originally from Niodior. He nonetheless undertakes to pierce this "impenetrable" community in order to spare its offspring from the traps of disillusioned migration, consequential failure and, ultimately, death.¹ He does this by promoting Niodior, and more broadly the African continent, as a viable and fulfilling life space on the condition that it be invested in. This fervent Marxist and former migrant himself having completed a portion of his studies in France, was exiled by the national government to Niodior for his trade unionist activities looked upon disfavouredly by corrupt authorities determined to retain their colonial privileges in the postcolony. In the "insulaire"² micro-society of Niodior, where the distribution of family names that hardly vary "shows the precise map of neighbourhoods",³ Ndétare is kept at a distance. Despite his efforts to integrate the local population by analysing it, its customs and way of life in line with his background in pedagogy and underscored by the narrator: "[h]e'd watched and observed a long time, he'd listened hard, heard a great deal, and made the necessary effort to fit it",⁴ his integration remains underwhelmingly insufficient. This rejection, however, does not prevent him from involving himself in the lives of the youth he so wishes to protect through education and mentorship as he assumes his role as village teacher

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 50.

² In reference to both meanings of the word – "insular" and "islander".

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 50.

⁴ Ibid.

while training the local football team. Yet the impact of his efforts remains questionable. He is undermined as a “Senegalese man from the outside”¹ and by his status as a government employee by the local inhabitants including Le vieux pêcheur who refers to him derogatorily during training sessions as a “performing parrot, paid to instil the whites’ language and customs, [...] a dirty colonizer”.² Isilo is able to capture some semblance of audience, for his speech is delivered while surrounded by a group of heavily armed men who do not hesitate to resort to violent means. The concrete effect of his words, however, remains dubious among the petrified and ignorant Eku villagers. Ndétare’s efforts to denounce the fallacious tales recounted by others including l’homme de Barbès that paint France as the promised land are consistently eroded by his interlocutors’ unwillingness to accord him or his advice any merit. Ndétare, in perhaps one marked contrast to Isilo, does not remain oblivious to this fact as he despairingly implores Salie during her time in Niodior to intervene and aid him in his endeavour:

[D]is-leur, toi qui viens de là-bas ! Peut-être t’écouteront-ils, ils me prennent pour un radoteur insensé. [...] Pourtant, ils entendent, comme nous tous, les informations en langues locales qui parlent des problèmes que rencontrent les nôtres là-bas. Mais rien n’y fait, même pour un poulailler en France ils seraient prêts à gager leur peau. Vas-y, dis-leur l’énormité de cette poutre qui leur crève les yeux et qu’ils ne veulent pas voir.³

[Tell them! You live over there. Maybe they’ll listen to you; they think I’m just a crazy old fool. [...] even though, like the rest of us, they listen to the news in their language and hear reports on the problems our people have over there. But there’s nothing you can do about it; they’re ready to risk their skin for even a rabbit hutch in France. Go on, tell them they’re unable to behold the beam that is in their own eye!]⁴

1.4.1 ISILO’S RECOURSE TO AFROCENTRISM

¹ Ibid., p. 50.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 84.

³ Diome, *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, p. 174-75.

⁴ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 122.

In an attempt to inspire some sense of historical consciousness concerning past continental glory for Sub-Saharan peoples, which he hopes in return will align them with his cause and guarantee their support for the *Forces du changement*'s undertaking in Mboasu, Isilo embarks on a long speech, the content of which is heavily tainted by Afrocentric rhetoric.¹ Like many of the ideological concepts evoked in this research project, the definition of Afrocentricism can be nebulous by virtue of its great malleability and past application in a range of contexts spanning different historical eras and geographies. For prominent Afrocentric scholar M. K. Asante, Afrocentrism is, in its most general application, “[...] a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate.”² Evolving principally in response to the perceived domination of a universally applied Eurocentric worldview, Afrocentrism reconfigures Africa “as the foundation of black diasporic epistemology” promoting re-Africanisation as “the only viable weapon of resistance, survival, and eventual triumph for Diasporic Blacks”.³ It is therefore, like Négritude and Etoke’s diasporic consciousness, Pan-African in nature linking people of African descent across continents, cultures, languages and time with a specific emphasis on historical knowledge as constituting a key revalorising force for a collective cultural identity summarily denied and abased over centuries by dominant European cultural identity. Accordingly, Afrocentric critics reject identitarian

¹ Isilo’s Afrocentric speech runs over approximately four pages (pp. 90-94) half way through the narrative. His speech (pronounced in the first-person) alternates with the observations of the omniscient third-person narrator concerning the thoughts and actions of other characters such as Ayané and Epa. Afrocentric ideology is also a central theme in Miano’s fourth novel *Tels des astres éteints*. See Etoke’s article for a more in depth discussion of Afrocentrism and Kemetism in this novel: Nathalie Etoke, 'L'onomastique comme poétique de la (dé)construction identitaire dans *Tels des astres éteints* de Léonora Miano', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12/4 (2009), 613-38.

² M.K. Asante, *Afrocentricity: The theory of social change* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), p. 2. In Felix Kumah-Abiwu, 'Beyond Intellectual Construct to Policy Ideas: The Case of the Afrocentric Paradigm', *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9/2 (2016), 7-27, p. 9.

³ Tunde Adeleke, 'Africa and Afrocentric Historicism: A Critique', *Advances in Historical Studies*, 4 (2015), 200-15, p. 204.

conceptualisations based on hybridity including W.E.B. Du Bois' theorisation of an Afro-American double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹ This is because Afrocentrism opposes any vestige of European influence on Black identitarian formation and alternatively promotes the “permanence and immutability of [an] African identity” within which one’s Africanicity remains resolutely integral and unscathed in defiance of the ravages of history resulting in, amongst other things, mass geographical displacement.² As noted by Tunde Adeleke, this approach which consists essentially of de-historicising the diverse identities of people of African descent has proven problematic as “it enables Afrocentric scholars to construct a monolithic identity for Diaspora [B]lacks, regardless of location, ignoring the multiple, complex, and complicated historical and cultural experiences”³ that contribute to identitarian formation. Afrocentric discourse thereby discredits the experiences of Afro-diasporic individuals who claim to source a portion of their identity from their adoptive cultures as is the case for Miano and Diome and their respective female protagonists Ayané and Salie.

Much of Afrocentric ideology is based upon the emblematic work of Senegalese historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop who hypothesised cultural continuity across African populations and specifically asserted that the Egypto-Nubian civilisation had Sub-Saharan origins.⁴ In defending the anteriority of African civilisations and retracing the migratory patterns of African ethnicities back to Ancient Egypt, Diop mounted an impressive challenge to Eurocentric scientific and anthropological studies postulating the cultural, social and industrial inferiority of black races. He

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (The Floating Press, 2010), p. 10.

² Adeleke, 'Africa and Afrocentric Historicism: A Critique', p. 206.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).

saw Ancient Egypt as representing for Africa and her diasporic populations the equivalent of classical Greece and Rome for Europeans and went on to posit an African foundation for European civilisation.¹ By claiming ancestry from a civilisation that predates the classical Greco-Roman societies of the European continent, Afrodescendants are, according to Pan-African philosopher Amos Wilson, “trying to take back what European historiography has stolen, completely falsified, to erase the new false identities it placed on the Afri[c]an Egyptian people”.²

In *L'intérieur*, Isilo draws at length on Afrocentrism's consecration of Nubian heritage as he addresses the Eku villagers who do not understand the “meaningless stories” that the rebel leader insists on narrating to them in an attempt to bolster collective historical consciousness.³

Ewo, notre ancêtre commun, était descendant direct de Sekenenrê Taa, pharaon dont l'existence fut dissimulée à la multitude, à cause de l'incontestable noirceur de sa carnation. L'Égypte était peuplée de nègres, et tant qu'il en fut ainsi, elle éclaira le monde. Car, sachez-le, la lumière qui ne luit pas sur nos peaux sombres, nous la recelons à l'intérieur : dans nos cœurs et nos esprits. Ceux qui gouvernent le monde et qui en écrivent chaque jour l'Histoire, en fonction de leurs seuls intérêts, ne peuvent révéler les sources de leur pouvoir. Il faut que vous le sachiez, ce n'est pas uniquement l'Homme qui a vu le jour en Afrique ! Ce sont aussi la conscience et la connaissance qui président à l'édification de toute chose. Tout ce qu'ils savent, c'est de nous qu'ils le tiennent ! Tous les grands prophètes de leurs livres saints sont venus jusqu'ici, boire aux sources de ce savoir et aider leurs peuples à grandir, pour ourdir ensuite contre nous la machination séculaire dont le seul et unique but est de nous cacher à nous-mêmes qui et ce que nous sommes. [...] Tout ça, pour que vous ne preniez jamais conscience de votre valeur et des trésors autres que matériels conservés ici, en Afrique [...].⁴

[Ewo, our common ancestor, was a direct descendant of Sekenenrê Taa, a pharaoh whose existence was kept a secret from the masses because his skin was so extraordinarily black. Egypt was peopled by blacks, and while this was so, she lit the world. For you should know that although our dark skin does not reflect the light, we carry the light within us, in our hearts and in our minds. The people who rule the world and write its History each day according to none but their own

¹ Adeleke, 'Africa and Afrocentric Historicism: A Critique', p. 205.

² Amos Wilson, *The Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness: Eurocentric History, Psychiatry and the Politics of White Supremacy*. (New York: Afrikan World Infosystems, 1993), p. 25.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 60.

⁴ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 90.

interests cannot reveal the sources of their power. You must know that it was not only Man who was born on African soil: it was also mind and knowledge, which inform the edification of all things! Everything they know comes from us! All the great prophets of their holy books came here to drink from the river of knowledge and help their people to grow so that they might then weave their age-old conspiracy against us with the one and only aim of hiding from ourselves who and what we are. [...] All so that you should never become aware of your worth and the spiritual treasures that are kept here, in Africa [...].¹

In the above heavily-Afrocentric speech, one can detect a distinct desire to nullify the negative perceptions of dark-skinned peoples promoted by Europeans, those who “rule the world” and “write its History [...] according [...] to their own interests”. Isilo’s preoccupation with complexion is far from insignificant for, as seen above, a founding element of Cheikh Anta Diop’s anthropological work was concerned with establishing the Black African origins of Egypto-Nubian civilisation. The desire to revalorise African people and their histories by alluding to their skin colour constitutes a direct challenge to historical European pseudo-scientific racism and the subsequent development of racial hierarchies positing the inherent inferiority of everything black or, more accurately, everyone not white. Indeed, skin colour has been exploited since antiquity as one of the key justifications for the segregation of the human race and singularly for the exclusion of certain groups from the human category resulting in extreme human rights violations. Black skin has historically been associated “with evil, inferiority, exclusion, unenlightenment, and cultural backwardness”.² As David Goldenberg underscores, the dichotomous black-negative, white-positive binary has long defined human relations and was evoked over centuries to justify the enslavement of people of African origin. The association of blackness with ‘inevitable’ or ‘natural’ enslavement is “enshrined in the

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 59.

² Foster, *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom*, p. 15.

Curse of Ham”,¹ a Biblical story from the Book of Genesis which recounts Noah’s cursing of Ham’s son, Canaan, and his descendants with eternal enslavement.² The so-dubbed Curse of Ham subsequently became “the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years”.³

By attributing to Isilo a strong Afrocentric discourse, which he delivers to an ignorant and indifferent Eku collectivity, Miano endeavours to draw attention to the chronic loss of historical consciousness within African populations which is not without consequence vis-à-vis contemporary Africanity. This loss, which Isilo holds responsible for Africa’s contemporary weakness,⁴ can be neutralised according to Etoke through the evocation of historic Kemet figures demonstrating feats of ingenuity, intelligence, courage and greatness.⁵ For Sarr, Afrocentrism and its attendant historical consciousness can play a significant role in filling the existential void that centuries of servitude and alienation have hollowed in the personality and psyche of the African individual.⁶ Klah Popo similarly accentuates the importance of Afrocentrism stating that one of its most pivotal tasks is to stimulate a historical consciousness in Afrodescendant populations to enable them to reconnect, both spiritually and intellectually, with their own history, drawing from it “all the individual and collective energy necessary to be reborn of themselves and in front of the Earth’s

¹ David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 2.

² Genesis 9: 24-28.

³ As Goldenberg duly notes, although there is no actual reference in the Biblical story to black skin, Ham came to be widely associated with blackness. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, p. 1.

⁴ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 76.

⁵ Etoke, 'L'onomastique comme poétique de la (dé)construction identitaire dans *Tels des astres éteints* de Léonora Miano' at 620. The term “Kemet” (“Kem” meaning “black”) refers to Ancient/Nubian Egypt. Adherents of Afrocentrism often prefer the label Kemet to Africa as the latter is considered a creation of European imperialism.

⁶ Sarr, *Afrotopia*, p. 89.

nations”.¹ In Isilo’s case, the unifying potential of Afrocentric discourse is grossly undermined by his recourse to extreme violence which, furthermore, betrays a personality crippled by contradictions.² Indeed, Ayané recalls overhearing while at university in Sombé comments concerning Isilo’s inconsistent nature as a person “not cold but frozen inside, insensitive to what happened to anybody else” yet capable of “being moved to tears at the thought of certain historical figures like Shaka and Soundiata”.³

Miano’s attribution of Afrocentricism to Isilo’s character has not (and rather predictably so) been unanimously well interpreted by scholars working on her text. For Francophone literary researcher Éloïse Brezault, Miano hijacks stereotypical themes in order to “show that the quest for pure Africanity [...] is fatal”.⁴ I would agree with this statement for Miano has never in her works, whether fictional and nonfictional, promoted the notion of a ‘pure’ Africa and has inversely stressed the inherently heterogenous nature of contemporary African identities.⁵ Furthermore, Isilo is ultimately shown to fail in his quest to reconfigure and revalorise Africanity, however noble this quest may appear to be, in the third volume of the trilogy *Les aubes écarlates*. For Lassi, Isilo’s anticolonial intentions are all but disqualified by his recourse to violence highlighting the irreconcilable difference between the latter and his actions, and in doing so, reinforcing Western stereotypes concerning the *dark* and *backward* continent:

¹ Klah Popo, *Yovodah et Panafricanisme. Résister pour survivre. S’unir pour renaître* (Paris: Éditions Anibwe, 2012), p. 22.

² Miano, *L’intérieur de la nuit*, p. 87.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 57. Sigidi kaSenzangakhona (18th-19th century), known more commonly as Shaka Zulu, was a powerful Zulu monarch and conqueror. Sundiata Keita founded in the 13th century the legendary Mali Empire which dominated a large portion of West Africa for over 300 years.

⁴ Brezault, 'Le scandale comme stratégie d’exotisme chez Calixthe Beyala et Léonora Miano: Le rôle de l’institution littéraire face aux auteurs post/coloniaux', p. 62.

⁵ “[...] to be an African nowadays is to be a cultural hybrid. It’s living on the border. Recognising this is being honest towards oneself [...]” Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 28.; “Today’s Africans have a mixed culture whether they like it or not.” Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 103.

En attribuant un discours anticolonialiste et la conduite du rituel cannibale au même personnage, l’auteure place ce dernier au cœur d’un paradoxe qui disqualifie son argumentaire. Si les paroles d’Isilo peignent une Afrique triomphante, proche de celle qu’ont rêvée certains chantres de la négritude, ses actes actualisent par contre les représentations occidentales de l’Afrique véhiculées par les mythologies coloniales, à savoir celles d’un continent sauvage, sans culture et sans religion, où des peuplades cannibales, confrontées à la précarité des ressources vitales, s’exterminent dans des guerres tribales.¹

[By attributing an anticolonial discourse and the undertaking of the cannibalistic ritual to the same character, the author places the latter in a paradoxical situation that disqualifies his argument. Whereas Isilo’s words paint a triumphant Africa, one close to what certain Négritude poets dreamed of, his acts actualise in contrast Western representations of African as conveyed by colonial mythologies pertaining to a savage continent without culture or religion where cannibalistic tribes, facing vital resource insecurity, exterminate each other through tribal war.]

According to Lassi, Miano’s depiction of Isilo is one of a character who, in attempting to valorise African societies and histories through Afrocentric ideology, unwittingly corroborates Western received ideas about a ‘savage’ and ‘violent’ continent thereby defending “[...] one of the theses according to which colonisation as a civilizing mission was necessary for Africa which found through it the opportunity to access humanity”.² As such, Isilo’s idealistic Afrocentric rhetoric undermined by his brutal acts in Eku can be interpreted as inadvertently espousing some of the key tenets of Eurocentric discourse similarly built on dichotomous models of thinking and being that ultimately determine who can and cannot claim inclusion within the realm of the human.

1.4.2 NDÉTARE’S RECOURSE TO EUROCENTRISM

The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology defines Eurocentrism as “a thought style in which the assessment and evaluation of non-European societies is couched in terms of the cultural assumptions and biases of

¹ Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l’Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', p. 447.

² Ibid., p. 448.

Europeans and, by extension, the West”.¹ In this sense, Eurocentrism is situated at the opposite end of the binary Africa-Europe ideological scale from Afrocentrism. Yet by virtue of its inception within the dominant discourse of the West and according to respected Marxist economist Samir Amin, Eurocentrism does not constitute a concept or a conscious choice, as Afrocentric ideology could be seen to represent, but rather a paradigm that operates comprehensively within the “common sense” domain in regard to what is considered “obvious and unquestionable”.² Amin posits that the birth of Eurocentrism can be traced back to the emergence of capitalism during the Renaissance while others have suggested that the construct is a more recent phenomenon developing out of the Enlightenment.³ Despite the discrepancies that exist as to the exact era of Eurocentrism’s inception, theorists broadly concur concerning its major characteristics. This concept emerged locally in Europe before being applied globally as the dominant mode of thinking through colonial imperialism, it cannot be detached “from the political, economic and cultural domination of Europe and, later, the United States”⁴ and it is based on discourses of rationality, reason, modernity and progress, values which have been attributed universal status for all humanity, consequently resulting in the perception of non-conforming societies as inferior and “intrinsically culturally backward”.⁵ In *La désobéissance épistémique*, postcolonial theorist and semiotician Walter D. Mignolo stresses the danger surrounding the universalisation of a distinctly European worldview and its tenets (namely modernising rhetoric) which

¹ Syed Farid Alatas, 'Eurocentrism', *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.

² Jean-François Fourny, 'Anatomy of Eurocentrism: On Samir Amin's Eurocentrism and Vassilis Lambropoulos' The Rise of Eurocentrism', *Research in African Literatures*, 25/4 (1994), 189-98, p. 190.

³ Ibid.; Jeremiah Arowosegbe, 'African Studies and the bias of Eurocentricism', *Social Dynamics*, 40/2 (2014), 308-21, p. 310.

⁴ Alatas, 'Eurocentrism'.

⁵ Arowosegbe, 'African Studies and the bias of Eurocentricism', p. 310.

prevents the consideration of any “alternatives to modernity”.¹ Mignolo underscores the fact that “modernity and coloniality are interlocked”, with modernity, based on its assumption of normality and homogeneity in experiences and development, actively cultivating the latter.² It could be argued accordingly that there is a fine line between aspirations for modernity and the tangible, concrete benefits that advancements in this domain do provide formerly colonised peoples of the Global South – health care, access to education and food security – and the possibility of unwittingly falling into a paradigm of continued coloniality that can engender the erosion of postcolonial citizens’ collective faith in their own traditional social and cultural structures.

It is this pitfall that Ndétare teeters dangerously close to in *Le Ventre* in relation to his insistence on enacting change in the islanders’ lives and attitudes. I stress here that Ndétare is depicted over the majority of the narrative to be remarkably neutral, indeed astute and open-minded in the advice he gives. He uses his position as the island’s school teacher and football team coach to promote to Niodior’s youth the possibility of improving their situation, thereby eliminating the need to immigrate elsewhere by stressing to them that they have the option of choosing which aspects of traditional Niodiorois custom they will adopt and which ones they will forgo. Ndétare strongly encourages the men to have faith in their intelligence, reassuring them that this will lead to a more promising future on African soil than any attempt at reaching Europe: “Try not to repeat your fathers’ mistakes and you’ll find that you have more chances to get away than they did, even without going overseas. OK, be prepared to leave and

¹ Walter Mignolo, *La désobéissance épistémique. Rhétorique de la modernité, logique de la colonialité et grammaire de la décolonialité* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2015), p. 46-47.

² He explains that modernity constitutes “a rhetoric that turned a particular narrative into a universal, global process, and, in doing this, managed to conceal the darkest side of modernity which is its permanent reproduction of coloniality.” Ibid., p. 29, 51.

head for a better life, but not with suitcases – with your brain cells!”¹ Salie admires Ndétare’s patience as both characters are confronted with the men’s collective and dogged adherence to the European Eldorado myth that they ardently attempt to debunk. She notes the teacher’s “perseverance”² as Ndétare remains determined to contribute in any way to dissuading these young men from clandestine immigration while recognising the multifarious and tangible difficulties they face in Niodior where the majority receive “nothing but mouths to feed” as inheritance.³

The frustration felt by Ndétare is palpable throughout the narrative as he attempts to change perceptions and, in doing so, improve (at times spare) the lives of the young Niodiorois population by inspiring them to connect and invest in their African home space rather than fleeing it and to modify some of its outdated traditions. His desperation leads him at times to adopt a distinctly Eurocentric tone promoting change in this postcolonial space as an obligation under the banner of ‘imperative’ modernisation. In this sense, he distinguishes himself, on occasions, from Salie and her more “accommodating” stance which Sawadogo, in his article on *Le Ventre*, reads as being “diplomatic rather than dismissive” in the face of divergent worldviews.⁴ This is perhaps in part due to Salie’s membership of the African diaspora. Living in the diaspora means that she is not only cognisant of the diversity of worldviews by virtue of her own cultural hybridity but also able to take reprieve from the distressing situation in Niodior which Ndétare cannot flee and which frustrates him to no end. At one point in the narrative, Ndétare suggests that the contraceptive pill, a modern Western scientific invention *par excellence*, should be surreptitiously introduced into

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 126.

² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴ Sawadogo, 'Cross-Atlantic Mobility: The Experience of Two Shores in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', p. 161.

the island's provisions in order to "make women take it".¹ Despite Ndétare's portrayal as a perspicacious individual through his dismissal of the most archaic and harmful aspects of traditional Niodiorois society and his support of women's activism notably detectable through Salie's reference to the hours the teacher spent "telling his beloved about the great historical figures of all the different resistance movements, including feminism",² Ndétare's attitude to the women of Niodior is less empowering in this case. It fundamentally undermines women's rights to their own bodies and, moreover, demonstrates a certain ignorance in regard to the local realities that Ndétare is seemingly well-positioned to understand. In suggesting that Niodior's female population should be literally drugged without its knowledge, let alone consent, in order to prevent pregnancies, he fails to treat women as "principal actors and decision-makers in matters of reproduction and sexuality – as subjects, not merely objects, and as ends, not only means, of population and family planning policies".³

In their article on a more inclusive and accommodating Third World feminist vision of sexual and reproductive rights, one largely more applicable than notoriously narrow Western feminist discourse in non-Western contexts including that of Sub-Saharan Africa, Sônia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky draw attention to the imperative need to situate women's procreative choices in relation to their individual and collective circumstances. In doing so, they challenge universalising stances on restrictive and imposed contraceptive practices by stressing that the evocation of any female "duty" to "society [...] to abstain from reproducing"

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 126.

² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³ Sônia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky, 'Reproductive and sexual rights: a feminist perspective', in Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole McCann (ed.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), p. 141.

could only come into existence when “all women are provided sufficient resources for their well-being, viable work alternatives, and a cultural climate of affirmation outside of childbearing so that they no longer depend on children for survival and dignity”.¹ This is, of course, not the case for Niodior’s inhabitants many of whom depend on children for survival into older age brackets and whose national government is depicted as largely inefficient and grossly disengaged in the lives of its citizens.² Ndétare is an educated professional, the beneficiary, due to his enviable ‘*fonctionnaire*’ status, of a state income. Although exiled to Niodior, he remains part of a minority of workers in postcolonial Senegal who are guaranteed a retirement pension, an apparatus inscribed by law in the French administrative system by and large bequeathed to Senegal by its former colonial ruler upon independence. He is also, most importantly, a man in an environment where the physical and psychological consequences of having and raising children are very much borne by women. The gender distinctions at play in regard to maternity and childrearing are rendered evident by Diome through her rendition of the story of Sankèle and Ndétare inserted into the novel as an interposed narrative to which I will return shortly.

The tangible circumstances defining women’s lives in Niodior, which feature, among others, a distinct lack of the government support packages such as pensions and maternity benefits that characterise many Western nations’ childcare policies and upon which the resultant attitudes of the Niodiorois towards childbearing are founded, are comparable to those experienced across much of Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to the evident

¹ Correa and Petchesky, 'Reproductive and sexual rights: a feminist perspective', p. 140.

² Salie notes regarding the inhabitants of Niodior: “If they wanted, they could have set up a mini-republic within the Senegalese Republic and the government wouldn’t have cottoned on for years, until the elections came around. Anyway, they’re forgotten on all counts, the dispensary’s almost bare; they rely on herbal infusions for curing malaria. The nation’s father, our President, can offer his paternity if he likes, but here no one expects a thing from his protection.” Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 31.

economic disparities, Correa and Petchesky emphasise the need for postures on reproductive rights and responsibilities to take into account the fact that “different cultural or religious values [...] affect attitudes toward children and childbearing”.¹ As former Malian Minister for Culture and Tourism, author and political activist Aminata Traoré stresses in her 2008 publication *L’Afrique humiliée*, motherhood is not conceptualised in Sub-Saharan cultures in the same manner that it is in European societies. Across Sub-Saharan contexts, being a mother serves to symbolically valorise and bind women in solidarity through their capacity to give life making them feel “invincible” and “immortal”.² Not only can children represent a source of strength and empowerment for Sub-Saharan women, indeed a vector through which the latter can collaborate and garner influence in their societies, but they can also play a tangible role in ending the debilitating poverty of their parents. This will be discussed more in part 2 in relation to Diome’s second novel set in Niodior, *Celles qui attendent*, which presents, in my opinion, a more detailed and, notably, nuanced portrait of the lives led by women in postcolonial Senegal.

1.4.3 ENSUING VIOLENCE AND TRAGEDY IN THE POSTCOLONY

Ultimately, Ndétare’s character demonstrates the need to question the application of any ‘common sense’ and ‘unquestionable’ worldview in non-European contexts, for such a worldview is invariably tainted by dominant and pervading Eurocentric discourse. The application of any purportedly ‘universal’ models of thought outside of the contexts in which they were developed is consistently shown to be problematic and notably in African settings marred by a history of European (in this case French) colonial rule.

¹ Correa and Petchesky, ‘Reproductive and sexual rights: a feminist perspective’, p. 144.

² Aminata Traoré, *L’Afrique humiliée* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2008), p. 264.

According to Njoya, the adoption of Western models of feminist thought in *Le Ventre* serves to block from view the most pressing problems for formerly colonised Sub-Saharan societies – namely their continual exploitation at the hands of their former rulers – and to diminish “African women’s confidence in traditional values”.¹ Whether right or wrong, well-intentioned or not, Ndétare’s theoretical espousal of Eurocentric conceptions of gender relations in an African context results in tragedy in *Le Ventre*. This is evidenced in the story of Sankèle to which I now return.

Ndétare and his lover Sankèle assumed that they would be able to change the conservative mindset of Niodior and annul Sankèle’s arranged marriage to l’homme de Barbès, a marriage organised by the young woman’s father Le vieux pêcheur. They knowingly fall pregnant out of wedlock despite Sankèle’s engagement to another man in a society that, as highlighted by Salie’s miraculous survival by reason of the courageous intervention of her grandmother, condones the asphyxiation of ‘illegitimate’ children at birth. Whereas I have suggested that Salie’s grandmother is able to negotiate the patriarchal social codes of the island and spare her granddaughter’s life, plausibly by virtue of her more advanced age and the respect this ensues, Sankèle and Ndétare are not. As a young woman, Sankèle does not benefit from the social status that age procures and Ndétare, despite being a man in patriarchal Niodior, wields little influence due to his outsider status. Despite their awareness of the island’s strict codes and, therefore, of the potential consequences of their actions, the young couple do not consider leaving Niodior before Sankèle’s pregnancy becomes apparent. When it inevitably does, the young woman is forcibly confined to a room by her father in an effort to keep his daughter’s pregnancy hidden. Sankèle lives the last few

¹ Njoya, 'In search of El Dorado? The experience of migration to France in contemporary African novels', p. 115.

months of her pregnancy alone before witnessing, alongside her powerless mother, the brutal murder of her newborn son by her father who places the infant in a plastic bag before throwing him into the Atlantic weighed down by a large stone. Surprisingly, there is no evidence in the text to suggest that Ndétare attempts to help his beloved Sankèle in the long months she spends confined in her father's house before giving birth. It is only after the newborn's murder that Ndétare intervenes by aiding Sankèle to flee the island so that she can start a new life elsewhere. In escaping the island, Sankèle is effectively liberated from the stifling codes of traditional Niodiorois society yet her freedom comes at great cost for she loses the man she loves, their newborn child and her family in the process.

Isilo's adoption of Afrocentrism similarly results in tragedy in *L'intérieur* as the rebel leader imposes the horrific sacrifice of the young Eyia in front of the powerless villagers who are subsequently forced to consume the child's flesh in a macabre ritual designed to reunite African populations and reinvigorate their diminished continental perception. Isilo declares: "The child whose flesh will be shared out is bringing you the greatest gift in the world: the gift of uniting you by his blood. [...] It will strengthen you by bringing you closer both to each other and to your land."¹ According to Brezault, Miano's fictional depiction of an infanticide begs, more so than any other event, the question as to whether "one can sacrifice one's future [...] on the altar of a past whose trace has been lost?"² I recall that it was this scene that was responsible for much of the controversy following the novel's publication in 2005 in France. Miano stated in a 2010 interview that many Africans, before reading the novel for themselves and instead relying on newspaper articles evoking the cannibalistic ritual, took

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 81.

² Éloïse Brezault, *Afrique. Paroles d'écrivains* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2010), p. 240. Metaphorical sacrifice of African youth will be discussed in more detail in section 1.5.

offence and criticised the author for conveying an image of Africa that was simply not needed.¹

Like incest, cannibalism is one of the great remaining human taboos and its evocation naturally provokes discomfort. Human sacrifice and the consumption of sacrificial victims' remains are certainly not uniquely African phenomena. Both were integral parts of many human societies practised over centuries in almost every corner of the globe – in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. In Sub-Saharan Africa, anthropological work suggests that the consumption of human flesh namely occurred in the Niger and Congo river basins which respectively cover extensive parts of West and Central Africa.² It is important here to distinguish between endo- and exo-cannibalistic practices, endo-cannibalism referring to the consumption of humans from the same community (such as the Eku villagers consuming Eyia's flesh) while exo-cannibalism concerns the eating of people foreign to a given community. British anthropologist Nigel Davies stresses that "ritual and religion were inseparable from human sacrifice" in general, and that cannibalistic practices in Sub-Saharan societies could not be dissociated from the ancestor worship that so characterised (and continues to do so in many cases) the belief systems of African peoples.³ Many Western and Central African tribes were known to engage in endo-cannibalism, and specifically the consumption of an elderly relative.⁴ Eating the flesh of one's relative "was a profoundly religious act on the part of people who preferred to absorb their old and infirm into their own bodies, rather than let them rot in the cold earth".⁵ Inextricable from the

¹ Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 104.

² Nigel Davies, *Human Sacrifice. In History and Today* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981), p. 154.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 15, 161.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161-62.

“deep-rooted African cult of the ancestors”, endo-cannibalism served to create spiritual communion between a people and its ancestors elevated to a godly status after death upon which they assume the role of clan protectors.¹

Isilo’s enactment of an endo-cannibalistic ritual that does have precedence in African societies does not, evidently, dilute the fundamental transgression that the brutal killing of a young child represents. Nor does this knowledge assuage the instinctive unease felt when reading the graphic sacrificial passage in *L’intérieur*. That said, I would suggest that Miano’s decision to impute violence to Isilo’s character was not so much made in order to disqualify his Afrocentric speech and its anti-imperialist undertones, as advanced by Lassi. I would suggest, rather, that this decision was made instead to highlight the impoverished state of contemporary Afro-continental identities that have lost sight of their fundamental values and vision systematically invalidated by centuries of post/colonial domination. I believe that Isilo constitutes a character to whom Miano has attributed much more intellectual and psychological depth, one who remains exemplary of the author’s mission to contribute through fiction to the “rehabilitation of self-consciousness South of the Sahara”.²

Through the destruction and invalidation of their cultures, languages, customs and belief systems, postcolonial citizens struggled to define themselves within the colonially infected and warped cultural identitarian perceptions they were left with upon independence. They consequently appropriated the models of violence that they were previously subjected to under colonial rule. In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe returns to the question of violence as evoked in Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre* which postulated that the colony was founded, maintained, and therefore needed to be

¹ Ibid., p. 156.

² Miano, *L’Impératif transgressif*, avant-propos.

dismantled through violence.¹ Mbembe underscores, *inter alia*, the insidious and all-encompassing manner with which colonial violence seeped into, or rather structured, the postcolonial nations of the contemporary era. In *L'intérieur*, one can detect the continuum of violence described by Mbembe – violence appropriated from the colony and originally administered by “the whites when they came here to take possession of our lives”, who “distorted” history² – which is now enacted in the postcolony by Isilo and his troops who literally take possession of the lives of the Eku villagers by inflicting violence on them and manipulating history which they defend as being necessary for their greater cause. Isilo’s violence substantiates perhaps more than anything Mbembe’s observation that “the violence of death [...] has become *the normal state of things*”³ in the postcolony.⁴

Isilo and Ndétare desperately attempt to stimulate Afro-identitarian rehabilitation in Eku and Niodior as microsocieties reflecting a greater continental phenomenon of degraded African self-consciousness. They thus subscribe to the broader objective of developing an Afro-diasporic consciousness specifically through the establishment of an empowering historical consciousness and the reconceptualisation and recognition of the continent as a viable space for possibility, opportunity and accomplishment. The desperation these two characters feel in regard to this monumental task and their inability to seek refuge from the site of action (as Ayané and Salie can by virtue of their diasporic existences) leads them to engage in extreme Afrocentric and Eurocentric rhetoric. This in turn results in Isilo and Ndétare unwittingly falling into the snares of essentialist cultural binaries, reminiscent of those enacted under colonial rule, that prevent consideration

¹ See in particular the first chapter of Fanon’s essay entitled “De la violence”. Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, p. 5-62.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 48.

³ Italics in the original.

⁴ Mbembe, *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*, p. 217.

of the multiple worldviews which crucially inform the nuanced complexity of contemporary Africanicity. Their essentialist postures are ultimately shown to be unproductive resulting, in one way or another, in violence and tragedy. In sum, although Isilo and Ndétare's ends remain noble, their means are questionable and their impact negligible if not wholly detrimental.

1.5 Sacrificed African youth

In the last chapter of part 1, I will consider the literary depiction of sacrificed African youth incarnated by Epa in *L'intérieur* and by Moussa in *Le Ventre*. In drawing attention to the disastrous effects that the sacrifice of the continent's lifeblood and future engender, Miano and Diome underscore the dire need for identitarian reconceptualisation and revalorisation South of the Sahara.

1.5.1 DISILLUSIONED AND TRAUMATISED POSTCOLONIAL CITIZENS

All of 17 years old and thirsty for justice, the impressionable and idealistic Epa initially welcomes the arrival of the *Forces du changement* militants in Eku as he adheres to their rhetoric hopeful himself for the coming of a “new era”.¹ Like Isilo, Epa is bitterly aware of postcolonial inequality and neocolonial exploitation in African societies ruled by an elite national minority that pillages the wealth and natural resources of countries single-handedly or in complicit collaboration with Western enterprise. The young man's desire for change is not driven by his own ambitions for a better life. It is a collective vision that he holds for the younger generations of the village including his future progeny whom he wishes to see study and “not have to clean up other people's mess” like himself employed as a domestic cleaner in Sombé.²

Epa's direct complicity in the violent acts during the siege of Eku intensifies rapidly when Isilo asks him to depose the elderly village chief in order to test his courage. Though he questions Isilo's motivation in making him perform the assassination, he ultimately acquiesces, wanting to “appear

¹ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 76.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

a man in the eyes of men he so much wanted to join”, takes the knife handed to him and slits the chief’s throat.¹ The facility with which Epa executes Eyoum not only dumbfounds Ayané who witnesses the scene from afar in the tree in which she remains hidden during the invasion but also the executioner himself who, through the voice of the narrator, compares the gesture to that employed when killing “a goat”.² The comparison with an animal reveals the lack of esteem Epa has towards Eyoum, his weakness and passivity as he “[...] watched with distaste as his village chief humiliated himself and thus abased them all. He had always known he was of little worth. The man was weak [...]”.³ A parallel can be drawn between Epa’s disgust at Eyoum and that of village *doyenne* Ié who also equates the chief’s “stupid” death with that of a slaughtered animal who resigns itself to fate without resistance: “He had put up no resistance, no struggle. He just crouched there, like the New Year goat that knows its fate is to be bled to feed the clan”.⁴ In stark contrast to Eyoum’s publicly displayed ‘weakness’, Ié shows no fear in the face of the rebel invasion and instinctively assumes the position of village chief following Eyoum’s swift and lame demise. Francophone literary scholar Marie-Rose Abomo-Maurin notes that Ié’s natural authority is rendered manifest early in the narrative and is reinforced by Eyoum’s unconscious relinquishment of his chief position to Ié as soon as the rebels arrive for he steps back in fear while she remains “unwavering”.⁵ In point of fact, chiefly power was never meant to be held by Eyoum’s family. It was the family of the late and respected clan matron, Io, which Ié integrated by virtue of her marriage with Io’s eldest son, that

¹ Ibid., p. 55.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵ Marie-Rose Abomo-Maurin, 'Femmes et hommes dans la micro-société d'Eku, ou l'éveil féminin dans l'Afrique des villages', in Alice Delphine Tang (ed.), *L'œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano. Fiction, mémoire et enjeux identitaires* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 45-65, p. 49.

was designated by Eku customary law to preside over the clan as chieftains.¹ Yet Ié's family, like many in nonfictional colonial Sub-Saharan Africa, was stripped of its position of authority by agents working on behalf of the European power and eager to see at the head of local clans weaker leaders more sympathetic to the latter's interests. Eyoum's death therefore engenders, though inadvertently, the timid repeal of one of the colonising power's attempts to undermine and at times entirely dismantle social and authoritative codes in Sub-Saharan communities with the objective of rendering the latter more malleable, vulnerable and exploitable. Returning very naturally to the chiefly role that was, in a sense, legitimately her own, Ié takes it upon herself to protect the clan in whatever way she can as she calculates, under immense pressure and upon her realisation that the human sacrifice is inevitable, a strategy devised to spare as many useful villager lives as possible:

Ié avait fait son calcul et élaboré sa stratégie, pendant qu'elle était assise à écouter le verbiage d'Isilo. Ensuite elle avait demandé aux ancêtres de lui pardonner de ne pouvoir protéger tout le monde, de lui accorder la force de persuasion nécessaire pour que le chef des miliciens accédât à sa demande. [...] Ce qui lui importait plus que tout, c'était de sauver des vies utiles. Des vies qui pourraient rebâtir quelque chose, si le mal devait terrasser le clan.²

[Ié had done her sums and worked out her strategy while she had sat listening to Isilo's verbiage. Then, she had begged the ancestors' forgiveness for not being able to protect everybody and had asked them to give her the power of persuasion necessary to make the soldiers' leader to agree to her request. [...] What mattered to her more than anything was to save useful lives, lives that could rebuild something, if the clan was struck down by evil.]³

Ié's chiefly demeanour in such trying circumstances does not go unnoticed by Isilo who is touched by what he sees: a strong woman thinking about the future of her clan and who consents to losing some in order to guarantee a

¹ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 77. This is also Ayané's family as Io is Ayané's paternal grandmother and Ié her aunt as the widow of her paternal uncle.

² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 65.

future for many. He relates this observation back to his own quest for continental rehabilitation and revalorisation musing that, had he witnessed the same attitude and behaviour among Sub-Saharan leaders, he may not have to “cross swords with the fate of Africans”.¹

Unfortunately for Epa, the complete realisation of the terror in which he has implicated himself will only come once Isilo’s plan to sacrifice a child is made clear. It is at this point in the narrative that he seems to grasp the fact that he was actively implicated in the death of a man and not a goat.² Ié has of course, due to her wisdom and powers of prophecy, foreseen this event. She attempted in vain to alert Epa to the consequences of his short-sighted desire to join *Les forces du changement* without full comprehension of what such a decision would entail. When Ié goes to find Epa to translate Isilo’s words she addresses this warning to him: “Take care, Epa. You burn too fast. At least make sure you find out why”.³ Ié’s premonition, though disprovable at the time of its emanation, constitutes a Genettian prolepsis and has the effect of rendering Epa’s experience even more tragic in the eyes of the reader who has been ‘tipped-off’ as to the boy’s seemingly unavoidable fate.⁴ The paradox is striking as this young idealistic villager becomes one of the rebellion’s greatest victims through the loss of his only brother Eyia, the little brother that Epa “loved above all else because [Epa] only had [Eyia]”.⁵ Epa is incapable of protecting Eyia, rendered a passive spectator to the latter’s violent and theatrical murder before being forcibly enrolled in the civil war effort alongside eight other Eku boys.

¹ Ibid., p. 67.

² The narrator reveals Epa’s internal interrogation: “how was he to return to square one, to the point before he had got involved so far as to put a man to death?” Ibid., p. 69.

³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴ Genette, *Figures III*, p. 82.

⁵ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 69.

The abduction of the ennead of children is one of the most emotionally charged scenes in this novel otherwise characterised by a marked emotional detachment and at times clinical objectivity. Here the narrator grants the reader access to the inner most thoughts of the terrified children, the youngest of which implore their mothers for a hypothetical intervention that they nonetheless know will never come:

Mère, fais quelque chose pour qu'ils ne m'emmènent pas ! Je ne veux pas aller faire leur guerre ! Je ne veux rien savoir des pharaons, ni des rives du Nil. Tout ce que je veux, c'est couler ma vie ici chez nous, gravir les collines au point du jour et les redescendre le soir venu... Et puis m'asseoir devant ta case, et regarder ton visage, alors que tu me sers le repas. Et puis entendre ta voix, tandis que je le savoure, me raconter les histoires de quand j'étais petit. Mère, fais quelque chose pour qu'ils ne m'emmènent pas !¹

[Mother, do something to stop them taking me away! I don't want to go to war! I don't want to know anything about pharaohs or the banks of the Nile. All I want is to live my life here at home, climb the hills at daybreak and come back down when evening falls...And then sit in front of your hut and watch your face while you serve the meal. And then, while I enjoy your food, hear your voice telling me stories of when I was little. Mother, do something to stop them taking me away!]²

The mother figure here, embodied by the whole community of Eku women, is rendered utterly powerless and incapable of protecting her own children despite their desperate pleas for her intervention. Extending the maternal metaphor to a continental scale, it is Mother Africa in this passage who is unable to provide the protection, solace and safety that her children so desperately require in the face of acute masculine violence. Through this portrayal, Miano discreetly subverts the much exalted symbol of African maternity; that of the caring and devoted African mother canalised in pre-independence and somewhat utopian Négritude discourse.³ The trope of defective maternal figures reoccurs across both Miano's and Diome's fictional texts where mothers, shown to be inadequate for a multitude of

¹ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 126.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 85-86.

³ Particularly in the poetry of Léopold Senghor. Susan Stringer, *The Senegalese Novel by Women. Through Their Own Eyes* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), p. 148.

reasons, frequently find themselves replaced by older, wiser and more competent (maternally speaking) female figures. The most blatant example of a defective and damaged mother in Miano's body of fictional work is most certainly Ewenji who features in *Contours du jour qui vient*. In this text, Ewenji, who violently abuses her young daughter Musango, is erected as a salient metaphor for a traumatised postcolonial African continent that cannot "love what she has engendered", meaning her children, "as she has no love for herself".¹

Moving beyond the maternal metaphor, it is difficult to read the episode of Eku's stolen children and not draw a parallel with the greater historical context of Atlantic slavery. Slavery appears rather blatantly right across Miano's literary corpus where it is almost always shown to have repercussions in present day African societies that have not yet come to terms with their painful past. This theme will be developed shortly with a brief consideration of Epupa, a character who only appears over the last four pages of the novel yet who enables the explicit link between Eku's tragic razzia, the Transatlantic slave trade and the contemporarily degraded state of African self-consciousness to be made.

As already noted, Diome employs the trope of slavery throughout her novel to highlight the historically unequal power relations still mediating European and African relations. This trope features heavily in chapter six where it combines with the reoccurring theme of football as Salie relates Ndétare's telling of the tragic story of Moussa to the young men of the island in an effort to dissuade them from attempting to emigrate to France in search of hypothetical riches via entry into "the [slave] trade in footballers".² Like Miano's Epa, Moussa is a young, disillusioned man born into the difficult

¹ Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 106.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 174.

realities of rural postcolonial African poverty.¹ The eldest son of a large family, he is forced to abandon his education at an early age due to a lack of funds and leave the village to search for work in the city of M’Bour like Epa forced to leave Eku to find work in neighbouring Sombé. Moussa does not hesitate to seize the opportunity when promised a career as a professional footballer in France by an unscrupulous French recruiter ironically named Jean-Charles *Saviour* (Sauveur).² Like Epa, his driving motivation is very much centered on the collective improvement of the lives of those he loves rather than any quest for individual enrichment as underlined by his decision to prioritise certain projects that he hopes to accomplish upon his return to Niodior: “build a big family building, invest in a motorised pirogue for the village, open a grocery shop for [...] mum – that way there’ll always be something to eat ...”.³

Moussa’s actual existence as an African football recruit in France diverges impressively from the idealised and dangerously ignorant versions circulated by the young men of Niodior. On the other side of the Atlantic, he experiences the harsh realities of racism from his own teammates who degrade and mock him when he expected from them nothing less than “honest camaraderie and mutual respect”.⁴ He is confronted simultaneously with other challenges – homesickness, a grueling training schedule, the harshness of the European winter – all aggravated by the fury of his father who struggles to appreciate the viability of a career in football and castigates his son for not finding “a proper job”.⁵ Moreover, the pressure placed on

¹ For a discussion of Moussa’s character in *Le Ventre* as a figure representing the broader category of indebted African migrants, see Aleksandra Perisic’s article: Aleksandra Perisic, 'Toward the Promised Land: Immigration and Debt in Fatou Diome’s *The Belly of the Atlantic*', *Research in African Literatures*, 50/1 (2019), 80-94.

² Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 96.

³ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Moussa to succeed at all costs is intensified by the football recruiter Sauveur who wishes to monetise his investment. Exposed to this contemporary transactional process, “which smacked of slavery”, Moussa begins to realise that the intrinsic value of young African men as human beings lured from the continent to the football stadiums of Europe is reduced to the performance of their bodies as they are seen as mere “sporting cattle” to be evaluated.¹

It is necessary to step out of Diome’s fictional frame momentarily for the phenomenon that she details in *Le Ventre* regarding Moussa’s personal experience of migration through football is anchored in an acutely nonfictional reality. The status of African football players in Europe has come under increased scrutiny over the last decade amidst accusations of neocolonial exploitation and systemic human, namely child, trafficking.² European clubs often conceive of the African continent’s aspiring athletes as “athletically and technically gifted,” thereby endorsing a pseudo-scientifically racist stance which positions black bodies as fundamentally different from those of other races.³ This is not a new occurrence as Africa has been providing European sport with athletes across numerous sporting disciplines (in particular boxing, basketball, handball and football) since the colonial period.⁴ European clubs are drawn to African players who remain much less costly to attain when compared to footballers from other regions of the world thereby attracting large profits if they are subsequently sold on to another club.⁵ For the average Sub-Saharan family, the recruitment of a

¹ Ibid., p. 65. A disillusioned young African man who wishes to become a professional footballer in France also features in the first short story of Miano’s *Afropean Soul et autres nouvelles* entitled “Depuis la première heure”.

² For a more detailed examination of this particular issue in global football circuits, see the following: Ed Hawkins, *The Lost Boys: Inside Football’s Slave Trade* (London: Bloomsbury Sport, 2016).

³ John Sinnott, 'Human traffic: Africa's lost boys', *CNN International*, 2013.

⁴ Romuald Fonkoua, '[Liminaire/Introduction]: Le Sport, Le Corps, La Culture', *Présence Africaine*, /183 (2011), 7-9, p. 7.

⁵ Sinnott, 'Human traffic: Africa's lost boys'.

child to play professional football in Europe is akin to winning the lottery in terms of the potentially life-changing economic implications. According to the charity Foot Solidaire, which campaigns to raise awareness around the inherent risks of trafficking for young African footballers, approximately 15,000 young players including children are moved from West Africa each year under false pretenses.¹ The founder of the charity and former Cameroonian international Jean-Claude Mbvoumin estimates that the failure rate for these young African players arriving in Europe is 70%.² He speculates that 700 young boys and men depart Cameroon every year in their quest to integrate the professional football circuit in Europe in what is increasingly alluded to as Africa's "muscle drain".³ With the small percentage of young Africans actually realising their dream of integrating European teams as professional footballers, the costs incurred by families and communities are often devastating as the vast majority of these players will not be signed by any European club and, when they are rejected, are left to tackle the issue of returning to Africa alone complicated by the fact that many arrive with illegal documentation.⁴ The schema detailed immediately above reflects by and large that evoked fictionally for Diome's character. When his own body does not meet expectations in France, Moussa has his residency permit cancelled and is effectively sold into unpaid labour on a ship to reimburse the sum invested in him by the recruiter.

In a similar manner to Epa's character, tainted early on in *L'intérieur* by tragedy, the reader gains insight via narrator-protagonist Salie in *Le*

¹ It has been noted that the statistics may in fact be much higher due to a lack of effective monitoring. Kieran Guilbert, 'Chasing dreams: Young African footballers duped, dumped by traffickers', *Reuters UK*, 2015.

² 'Trafic d'enfants: pourquoi la plupart des jeunes footballeurs africains échouent en Europe', *Jeune Afrique*, 2015.; 'Europe's football riches remain an illusion for young players from Africa and Latin America', *The National*, 2016.

³ Sinnott, 'Human traffic: Africa's lost boys'.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Ventre through a Genettian prolepsis indicating Moussa's impending tragedy: "He didn't know it yet, but every step brought him closer to the funeral pyre of his hopes".¹ After being deported back to Senegal and unable to live with the shame and guilt of his 'failed' migration, Moussa drowns himself in the Atlantic where his once coveted, now disposable body is caught in the nets of local fisherman.² Moussa's self-imposed death merits brief consideration for, whereas suicide is a reasonably common literary motive in the works of Western writers, it features relatively rarely as a form of death for the characters of African authors.³ Ouattara associates the suicide of characters in Sub-Saharan Francophone fiction with the manifestation of a profound self-hatred towards their African selves and origins.⁴ Despite the rarity of the phenomenon, Miano's *L'intérieur* also depicts the suicide of an African character, what is more, an Eku one, in a community whose worldview classes suicide, alongside murder, incest and witchcraft, as being among the gravest crimes.⁵ Near the end of the narrative, Inoni kills herself after informing Ayané of what really took place in Eku village on the night of the rebel invasion. Unable to live with the knowledge of what her community (including herself) allowed to happen, namely the murder and consummation of one of its own, she throws herself down the village well. Incapable of comprehending their co-villager's gesture and inherently distrustful of outside influences, the Eku women naturally accuse Ayané of causing Inoni's death through her "disrespect, her mere presence".⁶

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 71.

² Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 114.

³ With a few notable exceptions including Samba Diallo's ambiguous death in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambiguë* and Fara's suicide by drowning in Ousmane Socé's *Mirages de Paris*. Ousmane Socé, *Mirages de Paris* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1937).

⁴ Ouattara, *La haine de soi dans le roman africain francophone*, p. 53.

⁵ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 180.

⁶ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 138.

Moussa's character is emblematic of a double tragedy – that of the international football recruitment circuits which unscrupulously source and dispose of potential players from poor regions of the world as well as that of the unrealistic expectations placed on players from these same regions by their families who remain blinded by the European Eldorado myth to the point of immolating their own progeny on the altar of hypothetical salvation from poverty and in the name of honour.¹ While in France, Moussa is subjected to persistent reprimanding from his father who accuses him of becoming a self-centered Westerner, of adopting a set of values that are not his own, abandoning his family and covering his parents with shame. Upon his return to Niodior, he is initially celebrated by his community who assume that in France he has made a fortune that he will not delay in distributing for the benefit of all. Yet when the true nature of his traumatic existence in France is revealed, Moussa is not comforted or consoled by his fellow villagers but excluded by all, including his immediate family, who add to the internal distress and sense of guilt he already harbours about not having been able to benefit his community in the manner his idealism had led him to envision. Moussa finds but one exception to the blanket disdain directed against him in Niodior with Ndétare becoming his unique confidant. Whereas the Eku community is unable to protect Epa, demonstrating a distressing passivity when he and the other boys are led away to be sacrificed in Isilo's war effort for an Africa reborn, Moussa's community directly contributes to their child's downfall. As noted by Njoya, the passage recounting Moussa's suicide is one of the most poetically written of the novel with the repeated refrain "the tide was rising/the tide rose"² accentuating the impending tragedy while also underscoring the Atlantic

¹ This theme also features strongly in Diome's second published novel, *Kétala*.

² Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 74.

Ocean's determined intervention in Moussa's despair.¹ Mahriana Rofheart has stated that the sea in Senegalese literature "is frequently a place of simultaneous escape and death" and Diome's depiction of the sea in *Le Ventre* appears to conform to this general interpretation.² The Atlantic swallows Moussa, delivering him from his terrestrial suffering in line with its mythical purpose. Yet the Atlantic does not keep his body for long "as the sea knows how to return to the earth what belongs to it".³ Returning to her interpretation of the Atlantic as an intervening force in the affairs of the island's residents through motifs of ingestion and digestion, Njoya states that the ocean "refuses to accept the irresponsibility of human beings, or in more dramatic terms, it rejects Moussa as a sacrifice because the community had not collectively acknowledged the tragedy behind his suffering."⁴ The failure of the community to recognise the harrowing demise of Moussa is, alas, rendered more tragic by the narrator-protagonist who notes that the football team players listen passively to Ndétare's rendition of the young man's story, recounted in order to dissuade them from being caught themselves "in the net of emigration", without actively hearing what he says.⁵

1.5.2 A VAIN SACRIFICE? EVOLVING MENTALITIES IN EKU AND NIODIOR

At the conclusion of both novels, one is led to question whether the sacrifice of Eku's and Niodior's youth, to be extended to that of Sub-Saharan Africa generally, is in vain or whether lessons have been learnt and are now reflected in an evolution of mentalities in these communities. In *L'intérieur*, it is Miano's belated introduction of Epupa in the very final pages of the

¹ Njoya, 'In search of El Dorado? The experience of migration to France in contemporary African novels', p. 92.

² Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media*, p. 83.

³ Njoya, 'In search of El Dorado? The experience of migration to France in contemporary African novels', p. 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 77.

novel that enables the reader to grasp the futility of the sacrifice of Eku's children in a community portrayed by the author as struggling to come to terms with a past (and notably its own responsibilities in that past) that continues to haunt its present thereby trapping it in a repetitive cycle of self-destruction.¹ Ayané encounters Epupa when she returns to the *Prince des Côtes* hotel in Sombé. This young woman, whom Ayané recognises from university and who is described as a “madwoman” by the hotel receptionist, roams the city streets with a burdensome message destined for the entire African continent that she wails indiscriminately in the hope that someone will listen to what she has to say:

Maintenant, il suffit ! Je le dis, et le redis. Suffit de faire semblant, de toujours accuser les autres. Ils ont leurs torts, et leurs mains sont souillées du sang dont ils se sont abreuvés. Mais quoi qu'ils aient pu faire, et quelles qu'aient pu être les manipulations ourdies par eux contre nous, ils ne peuvent porter les crimes qui sont les nôtres. Pouvons-nous continuer à prétendre que des millions de nos fils nous furent arrachés, sans la moindre complicité sur place ? Confessons la faute ! Prenons-en notre part. Je le dis et le redis ! Il est temps de reconnaître que nous avons participé à notre propre saignée... Si nous n'admettons pas les noirceurs du passé, saurons-nous nous défaire de celles qui nous étreignent encore si vigoureusement ? Voici ce jour nos fils en route pour la guerre. Voici qu'une fois de plus, et sans prendre la mer, ils sont privés d'amour et de lumière. Tandis que nous quémardons la culpabilité de l'Occident, à qui nos enfants demanderont-ils réparation ?²

[Now that's enough! I say it again and again: just have to pretend, blame everyone else the whole time. They have their sins, and their hands are stained with the blood they have shed. But whatever they did, whatever their warped conspiracies against us, they are not responsible for our own crimes. We cannot go on pretending that millions of our sons have been snatched from us without the slightest collusion on our part. We must confess our sins! We have to shoulder our part of the blame. I say it again and again! It is time to acknowledge that we have taken part in our own bloodshed ... If we do not own up to the evils of the past, how will we be rid of the ones that still have such a stranglehold on us? Our sons are on the way to war. Again, without putting to sea, they are deprived of love and light. We are claiming that the West should take the blame, but who will our children call to account?]³

¹ This character will be discussed in greater detail in part 2 in relation to *Les aubes écarlates*, novel in which Epupa plays a central role.

² Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 208.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 142.

The use of Epupa, this female “folle”, is noteworthy for Francophone Sub-Saharan authors are known to incorporate in their works characters (singularly narrators) considered to be intellectually subordinate – such as children, animals and drunkards – in order to subvert and challenge Western knowledge categories and resultant power structures.¹ Though she does not intervene as a narrator in *L'intérieur*, Miano's use of Epupa induces a very similar effect. This character representing both an intellectually subordinate (mad) and marginalised (female) character allows the author to accentuate a voice that would otherwise go unheard. Epupa, this female fool, is paradoxically shown through this passage to be one of the most lucid characters in the whole novel as she draws an explicit parallel between past slavery and subjection on African soil, which saw its children snatched from their communities by mainly European forces, and the present events in Mboasu. African populations are now repeating the same crimes against their own, justifying the sacrifice of their children through the continual evocation of Western transgression which sublimates any African accountability in the continent's current state. Epupa's distress at not being heard, at being ignored by those around her, is comparable to that of Ndétare in *Le Ventre*. Yet whereas mentalities do not appear to have evolved by the end of *L'intérieur*, there is an indication that Moussa's sacrifice in *Le Ventre* may not have been entirely in vain.

Diome's novel closes as it opened on a real-life football match, that played between Senegal and Sweden during the 2002 FIFA World Cup playoffs. Senegal's victory over Sweden, one in a long line of many, engenders an important change in the mentalities of the islands' inhabitants and, specifically, in that of Moussa's father who finally comes to realise that

¹ Jesse Welton, 'L'Écran du bestiaire. Narration, indigenization, and strategic exoticism in Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic* and Patrice Nganang's *Temps de chien*', *Francosphères*, 5/2 (2016), 167-82, p. 169, 72-73.

football does represent a viable career for young African men, “the ideal emergency exit for third-world children”.¹ More importantly, the episode serves to stress the idea, novel in Niodior, that a successful football career does not necessarily imply playing for a large European club as the victorious team depicted is the Senegalese national squad. Though Moussa is, of course, not there to witness the transition in his father’s thinking, the belated validation of his choice to pursue a football career by the man who so virulently castigated this enterprise contributing to his tragic death remains symbolic as it suggests that the generations to come will be spared such brutal treatment for following their dreams and aspiring to a better life for themselves and their loved ones. Moussa’s sacrifice, when complemented by Senegal’s victory, is therefore shown to not have been entirely fruitless.

More generally, Diome returns to the football theme at the end of the narrative to highlight what appears to be an evolution in African continental perception.² This is, as noted earlier, observed in Madické’s character who since opening his boutique no longer desires to leave the African coast for the shores of European Eldorado as he is able to perceive a future for himself and value in his community of origin following Salie’s monetary gift. As noted by Rofheart, the novel “ends on a surprisingly pro-nationalist note” with Niodior’s population developing for the first time in the narrative a tentative sense of national pride through the victories of the national football team.³ They unite again for a collective viewing of the match though this time not around the device of l’homme de Barbès, but around the television that Madické has managed to rent for the occasion through the income

¹ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 172.

² As Cazenave and Célérier have noted, football is not in itself a novel theme in African literature. See: Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment*, p. 123.

³ Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media*, p. 85.

generated by his shop. Telephoning his sister to confirm that she has received the parcel, Madické speaks for the first time of football without mentioning a European team or his admiration for Italian player Maldini instead voicing his desire to watch a Sénef match in the national capital Dakar at the Léopold Sédar Senghor stadium.¹ His newfound enthusiasm for Senegal's team, symbolic of a recently activated sense of national, indeed Afro-continental, pride, is reflected in the reactions of the other inhabitants of Niodior, especially its youth. Following their team's victory, they run through the streets dancing, brandishing a Senegalese flag and citing the legend of the lion, Senegal's national totem and the emblem of its football team. Even Niodior's youngest children, consumed as they were with the Miko and Coca-Cola advertisements during the football match that opened the novel, have turned their attention from the televised products to their surroundings, forsaking the same commercials to roam the village and delight in one of the delicacies – coconuts – that their natural environment has to offer. Yet one cannot conclude that Senegal's football victory only impacts emotionally upon Niodior's youth. It has a more general rallying effect and momentarily unites segments of Niodior's community that are, for want of a better word, unanticipated. This includes the noteworthy case of Ndétare and Le vieux pêcheur who embrace each other in their excitement demonstrating the power of football in this instance, or rather any collective conduit for expressing one's national pride, to bridge what appeared to be an insurmountable divide given the tragically painful past the two men share.

¹ Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, p. 50, 251.

1.6 Part 1 Conclusion

Part 1 opened with a discussion of the controversial nature of both *L'intérieur* and *Le Ventre* which, for different reasons, stirred discussion in the public space in regard to their representations of relations between Africa and Europe. After briefly examining how Miano and Diome conceive of their own cultural hybridity as African authors living and working in Europe, I proceeded to outline some of the key theoretical notions necessary to the comprehension and appreciation of this work including, namely, the concept of Afro-diasporic consciousness. I then turned to textual analysis. I argued that the presence in these novels of two marginalised Afropean characters, Ayané and Salie, complicates celebratory postcolonial discourses of cultural hybridity as being inherently positive and enriching. The empowering and emancipatory effect of negotiating between two cultures, two continents and two worldviews is conversely depicted as being very much dependent on the manner in which cultural hybridity comes into being. Although it cannot be said that Ayané and Salie experience their Afropean existences harmoniously, their cultural hybridity does allow them a certain insight into their communities of origin and namely into the presence of a diminished African self-consciousness. I posited that Ayané and Salie are not the only characters concerned with the monumental task of reconfiguring identities South of the Sahara in these texts. They are joined on the continent by two male characters, Isilo and Ndétare, equally cognisant of the need to rehabilitate contemporary African self-consciousness profoundly degraded in its current state. These two continental characters call for the establishment of historical consciousness and a reconceptualisation of the African continent as a valuable life space. Despite their mostly noble intentions, Isilo's and Ndétare's adoption of Afrocentric and Eurocentric postures only leads to violence and tragedy in Eku and Niodior and

reinforces, in turn, the detrimental Africa-Europe binary exploited under colonial domination. In the last section of textual analysis, I considered the place of African youth in the two novels as the prime victims of the diminished perception of contemporary Africanity. Through the characters of Epa in *L'intérieur* and Moussa in *Le Ventre*, Miano and Diome signal the catastrophic consequences of not engaging in the development of an Afro-diasporic consciousness. In the second part of this thesis, I will turn my attention to Diome's *Celles qui attendent* and Miano's *Les aubes écarlates*. My analysis of these texts will suggest an evolution in the perspectives of the authors who begin to turn from the binary vision and problematic cultural hybridity of Afropea on display in *Le Ventre* and *L'intérieur* to embrace the Afro-Atlantic as the opportune space within which to anchor the development of a resistant, revalorising and emancipatory Afro-diasporic consciousness.

PART 2: TOWARDS AN AFRO-ATLANTIC DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Les natifs du Pays Premier sont des captifs non déportés. C'est à l'intérieur d'eux-mêmes qu'ils ont été déplacés. C'est donc en eux que se trouve le chemin du retour. Nous avons tant à faire pour nous reconnecter avec nous-mêmes. Nous définir à partir de nos bases et en tenant compte de nos blessures. Nos pertes incommensurables. Nos possibles plus vastes encore parce que nous avons survécu. Mais la conscience est fragile.¹

L'esclavage n'a pas disparu, il a seulement changé de nature ; devenu économique, il avilit et tue en silence. Et on ose dire que l'Afrique est libre ! Enfin, si on veut, elle est libre. [...] Libre de ne pas mettre en place un vrai et franc panafricanisme, de tenir de belles paroles, au lieu de se tenir pour redresser ensemble le continent.²

¹ Miano, *Crépuscule du tourment, tome 1: Melancholy*, p. 110-11.

² Diome, *Inassouvies nos vies*, p. 169.

Part 2 résumé

Part 2 of this thesis explores the concrete establishment of an Afro-diasporic consciousness in Diome's *Celles qui attendent* published in 2010 and Miano's *Les aubes écarlates* published in 2009. Despite their close publication dates, neither text has been read comparatively alongside the other. I believe that both trace a common trajectory promoting the inclusion of diasporic elements of contemporary Africa in their attempts to revalorise Africanity. More precisely, these novels demonstrate a distinct evolution in the perspectives of their respective authors who turn away from the binary Africa-Europe outlook that characterised both themes and relations between characters in their first novels (*Le Ventre* and *L'intérieur*) to engage with the diasporic spaces of the Afro-Atlantic.

This section will again draw on numerous theoretical fields including postcolonial, diaspora, ecocritical and feminist studies. It will pay particular attention to Paul Gilroy's analysis of Black Atlantic culture in his seminal *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Despite the great influence Gilroy's work has had, it has been criticised for some notable deficiencies which I believe that Diome and Miano address, in various ways and to various degrees, in their novels. I will firstly introduce the novels and summarise the relevant scholarly work on them. I will then outline Gilroy's work in the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies before identifying its key lacunae. I will demonstrate Miano's and Diome's encroachment into Afro-diasporic space through their mirroring of Gilroy's subversive take on Western conceptions of the modern (counter-modern consciousness). This will be shown namely through the study of the child soldier figure in *Les aubes écarlates* and also through a discussion of neocolonial slow violence resulting in community disintegration in both texts. I will then discuss

Miano's and Diome's tendency to bring into dialogue both the histories of slavery and colonisation (including the persistent neocolonial paradigm) thereby expanding upon Gilroy's restrictive use of the Transatlantic slave trade as the central metaphor for Black Atlantic cultural formation (historical consciousness). Finally, I will engage with womanist theory to highlight the central role that African women play in initiating transatlantic dialogue, community healing and emancipation despite their physical embedment within the African continent (feminine consciousness). I argue that it is these three branches of consciousness – counter-modern, historical and feminine – that constitute the fundamental elements of the authors' broader Afro-diasporic consciousness.

2.0 Miano's *Les aubes écarlates* and Diome's *Celles qui attendent*

2.0.1 *LES AUBES ÉCARLATES*

Les aubes écarlates: Sankofa cry (henceforth *Les aubes*) is the third and final instalment of Miano's *Suite africaine* trilogy published by Plon in 2009. This text was in fact written before the trilogy's second volume, *Contours du jour qui vient*,¹ and had its publication strategically delayed as Miano was concerned that, had it appeared directly after *L'intérieur*, she would have been attributed the label of "the writer of war in Africa".² The plot of *Les aubes* again unfolds within the fictional Equatorial African nation of Mboasu where the civil war announced in its initial stages during *L'intérieur* is now at its height. Accordingly, the reader is reunited with many of the characters of the first instalment including Epa, Ayané, Epupa, Eyia, Wengisané, Isilo, Ié and Eso. Epa, the young man who witnessed the brutal execution of his younger brother during *Les forces du changement's* invasion of Eku village before being forcibly enrolled in the war effort in *L'intérieur*, is the novel's protagonist. The text is divided into four parts – *Latérite* (laterite), *Embrasements* (fire; blaze), *Latérite* and *Coulées* (flow) –

¹ *Contours du jour qui vient* relates the social, psychological, and material devastation during the civil war's immediate aftermath as witnessed through the eyes of the young female protagonist named Musango. Narrated in the first-person, the novel opens in a particularly violent manner with Musango recounting her mother's frenzied physical attack against her then nine-year-old self. Her mother, Ewenji, has again accused Musango of harbouring a demon which she holds responsible for her partner's death and their subsequent destitution. Badly beaten, Musango is thrown out of home and onto the streets by Ewenji. The narrative that ensues recounts Musango's long vagrancy as she moves between different social circles bringing her into contact with the war-weary and desperate population. While some of the people encountered by the protagonist attempt to assist in the reconstruction of their traumatised society, others take advantage of the postcolonial chaos to better their fortunes upon the suffering of others. After a brief passage at a humanitarian organisation, nine-year old Musango is captured and sold to a group of traffickers who dissimulate their trade in human beings behind the front of an evangelical church. After three years in captivity, the protagonist eventually escapes and continues her campaign to find and confront her mother again coming into contact with both charitable and malicious components of Mboasu's population. The now 12-year-old's quest for maternal acceptance is concretised in a return to the home of her grandmother, Mbambè, who is able to reconstitute her daughter Ewenji's traumatic past marred by poverty and interpersonal conflict. The recognition of her mother's own suffering eventually aides Musango to arrive at a point of understanding and forgiveness. Musango makes a few appearances throughout the narrative in *Les aubes* at *La Colombe* where Ayané volunteers helping Mboasu's abandoned and mistreated children.

² Yoassi, 'Entretien avec Léonora Miano', p. 106.

each preceded by reoccurring and entirely italicised *Exhalaisons* (exhalations) passages.¹ The first of the *Latérite* chapters recounts in the third-person Ayané's memories of the night Eku was invaded, her decision to remain in Mboasu as a volunteer worker at *La Colombe* and her chance encounter with Epa who is brought to the refuge after fleeing the frontline. At the end of this *Latérite* chapter, Ayané asks Epa to relate what has happened to him since they last saw each other at Eku. Epa's voice is privileged in the following chapter (*Embrasements*) throughout which he narrates to Ayané in a long first-person monologue his experiences as a child soldier under the rebel's command. Epa details the acts of violence inflicted upon and committed by himself and the other Eku children as well as the internal tensions growing within the rebel leadership and how these relate back to macrolevel intrigues concerning the self-serving interests of the ruling political party and foreign neocolonial powers. The second *Latérite* chapter returns to third-person narration and privileges Ayané's perspective as she attempts to come to terms with what Epa has told her and, more generally, with the violence and disorder plaguing Mboasu. Musing over the causes and consequences of the political and social unrest, Ayané identifies the presence of an underlying societal trauma, one that appears to be, furthermore, extendable to the entire continent. It is in this section that Ayané is reunited with Epupa preaching on the streets of Sombé. Ayané accompanies her friend to a local hospital as she is convinced that Epupa, in her heavily pregnant state, is in need of care. Here they meet Dr. Sontané, Epa's former employer, who attempts to help both Epupa and Epa. At the end of the second *Latérite* section, Eso and a group of armed men invade *La Colombe* and take its occupants – Ayané, Epa, Aïda,² Dr. Sontané and the

¹ Etoke has identified these chapter names as relating to the four elements of creation: earth, fire, water and air. Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 69.

² The founder of *La Colombe* refuge.

resident children – hostage. In *Coulées*, again recounted in the third-person, Epupa arrives at *La Colombe* and convinces Eso, while informing him of elements of his own traumatic personal past of which he was unaware, to help her rescue the remaining Eku boys and return them to their families. Here Epupa confronts Ié and pushes her to see her error in neglecting to consider Ayané as a member of the clan while convincing Ayané of her need to accept her place within Eku and all that this decision entails. Ayané, Epa, Eso and the other Eku boys are reintegrated into the clan through a spiritual ceremony performed by the female villagers under the guidance of Epupa, a reintegration that is mirrored, symbolically, by that of past Eku people snatched from their community centuries ago.

The third instalment of Miano's *Suite africaine* trilogy boasts some unique aspects not present in the other two trilogy volumes. As indicated in part 1, this novel includes a postface in which Miano aligns her novel with the theoretical and spiritual perspectives of Etoke's *Melancholia africana* project.¹ Secondary distinguishing features concern the text's switching between first- and third-person narration,² its staging of a male protagonist and its composite title. Unlike the first two instalments, the title of the final novel of the trilogy incorporates words from two other languages alongside French – “sankofa”³ from a West African language (that of the Akan people of Ghana) and the English term “cry”. In the text's postface, Miano specifies that the mixing of these three languages was a deliberate gesture designed to bring together Afrodescendants and their “hybrid reality” (including

¹ See pages 52, 53, 54 and 55.

² In this sense, its structure borrows both from those of *L'Intérieur* and *Contours du jour qui vient* narrated respectively in the third- and first-person.

³ The meaning of this word is explained in a footnote by the author (p. 69): “Sankofa [...] means return to the source, or return to look for what belongs to you, depending on the translation. More broadly, it refers to the need to know the past to advance. Sankofa speaks of the search for knowledge, of critical scrutiny.” See also: Ferdulis Zita Odome Angone, 'Anachronies, oubli et délire de théâtralisation [sic.]. Le Sankofa et la mémoire empêchée chez Léonora Miano', *Carnets. Revue électronique d'études françaises de l'APEF*, 10/2 (2017), 1-12.

linguistic diversity) “not in indifference, but in the recognition of a common matrix”.¹ It is, in other words, a textual call for the establishment of Afro-diasporic consciousness. Sankofa has a corresponding Adrinka symbol the meaning of which is explained by Aïda:²

Sankofa est le nom d’un oiseau mythique. Il vole vers l’avant, le regard tourné en arrière, un œuf coincé dans son bec. L’œuf symbolise la postérité. Le fait que l’oiseau avance en regardant derrière lui signifie que les ressorts de l’avenir sont dans le passé. Il ne s’agit pas de séjourner dans l’ancien temps, mais d’en tirer des enseignements.³

[Sankofa is the name of a mythical bird. It flies forward whilst looking back, an egg stuck in its beak. The egg symbolises posterity. The fact that the bird advances while looking back signifies that the keys for the future are located in the past. It does not mean that one should remain stuck in the past but that one must learn from it.]

The word “Epa” is also an Akan term with a corresponding Adrinka symbol – a stylised handcuff figure – representative of law and justice, slavery and captivity. As with much of Miano’s oeuvre, indeed, the vast majority, the Transatlantic slave trade is central to this text.⁴ The voices of its forgotten victims are clearly articulated during the *Exhalaisons* passages written in the plural first-person and interspersed over the narrative. In these sections, the ancestors reiterate their need to be reintegrated into continental memory in order to transition to the other world and finally be at peace.

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 270.

² Adrinka are visual symbols expressing concepts and aphorisms designed to convey traditional West African wisdom and teachings (generally with strong proverbial base), singularly that of the Ashanti of Ghana and the Gyaman of Côte d’Ivoire. Traditionally dyed onto fabric, they have become commonplace in many decorative forms (clothing, jewellery, pottery, logos and advertising) and their use has been extended beyond Akan ethnic groups. See: W. Bruce Willis, 'The Adrinka Dictionary: A visual primer on the language of Adrinka', (Washington: Pyramid Complex, 1998).

³ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 225.

⁴ “[...] I have obsessions that infiltrate all my texts. I realised that each of my books evokes – even when it only concerns a sentence – the slave trade.” Léonora Miano, 'Léonora Miano: « Il faut formuler le concept d’afropéanisme »', (Le Magazine Littéraire, 2010b). I note that Miano has, in recent years, refrained from using the term ‘Transatlantic slave trade’ instead preferring the term ‘Transatlantic deportation of Sub-Saharan’. For the purposes of clarity, I will use the more readily recognised term ‘Transatlantic slave trade’ throughout this work. See: Miano, *L’Impératif transgressif*, p. 160.

Les aubes, like *Contours du jour qui vient* before it, managed to avoid some of the openly adverse reactions of both the public and the scholarly community that marred *L'intérieur's* release. This is perhaps due to the fact that there is no child sacrifice within its pages, as this episode of the first volume was received particularly negatively.¹ *Les aubes* contains, however, no less violence than the other two trilogy instalments as it traces the “postcolonial chaos”² reigning in this corner of Equatorial Africa. Despite its fictional nature, the text recalls recent and very real postcolonial conflicts on African soil.³ These include the presence of child soldiers and references to strategies employed with the objective of inciting racial hatred and violence on a mass scale.⁴ A third aspect of Miano’s text reflecting real world happenings – thus producing an almost documentary-style setting for her fictional characters – concerns its depiction of the contemporary neocolonial practices of Western nations, singularly former European colonial powers, who intervene and manipulate the functioning of relatively new Sub-Saharan states. This occurs through their propping up of corrupt puppet governments sympathetic to their political, strategic and economic interests and singularly those linked to exploiting the continent’s great natural resources. Though certainly not the sole offender on this front, France is one active former imperial ruler who engages in such practices designed to maintain influence and protect interests both in its *pré carré africain* and on the global stage, a

¹ Though references are made to Eyia’s sacrifice in *Les aubes*.

² Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 60.

³ Trujic in her 2015 article makes the same remark noting Miano’s portrayal of fictional events displaying a marked similarity with contemporary real-life conflicts in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Irena Trujic, 'Faire parler les ombres: Les victimes de la Traite négrière et des guerres contemporaines chez Léonora Miano', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 30/1 (2015), 54-65, p. 55.

⁴ I note the emphasis on radio communication in the civil war plaguing Mboasu and namely in the urban centre of Sombé. Radio played a significant part, amongst many other factors, in the incitement and coordination of violence during the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. The role of public broadcasting was deemed so crucial to the fostering of a context conducive with the development of mass slaughter that the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda found two journalists, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza and Ferdinand Nahimana, founders of the infamous *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, guilty of genocide through the content of their broadcasts. See: Elizabeth Baisley, 'Genocide and constructions of Hutu and Tutsi in radio propaganda', *Race & Class*, 55/3 (2014), 38-59, p. 39.

reality that Miano's native Cameroon is not currently, nor has it been so in the past, immune to.¹ It is indeed France that is implicated in the fictional conflict ravaging mineral-rich Mboasu and its regional neighbours. Though not overtly labelled, the identity of the "former colonial power", as it is systematically referred to by the rebel forces, is revealed through the rather explicit allusions of Isilo and his brothers to a nation completely devoid of any "sense of the sacred" as demonstrated by the fact that its people "decapitated their king".² Taken together, this contextual information is helpful in situating the fictional events narrated in *Les aubes* within a larger, nonfictional framework of violence and struggle for genuine sovereignty in post-independence (Francophone) Sub-Saharan Africa.

Returning to the text proper, *Les aubes* has been the subject of a limited amount of scholarship when compared to other Mianoian texts and is rarely studied in isolation. The work of Etoke is perhaps the most substantial on this text that she analyses independently of the other two trilogy instalments. Etoke and Miano have collaborated on several projects over the past few years with the mutual objective of revalorising Afrodescendant communities, their voices and experiences through the establishment of an Afro-diasporic consciousness. With Etoke living and working in the United States of America and Miano based in France, their efforts to achieve this are undertaken within a markedly transnational perspective. This transnational perspective is similarly reflected in Etoke's commitment to the Mahogany Association – an association founded by Miano in 2010 that aims to provide a meeting space for Afrodescendant

¹ See: François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique. Le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris: Stock, 1998).; François-Xavier Verschave, *De la Françafrique à la Mafiarique* (Brussels: Éditions Tribord, 2004).; Manuel Domergue, Jacob Tatsitsa, and Thomas Deltombe, *Kamerun! Une guerre cachée aux origines de la Françafrique, 1948-1971* (Paris: La Découverte 2011).; Manuel Domergue, Jacob Tatsitsa, and Thomas Deltombe, *La guerre du Cameroun. L'invention de la Françafrique 1948-1971* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016).

² Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 61.

peoples through the vectors of literature, cinema, music and conferences.¹ Furthermore, Etoke has contributed in recent years to two collective volumes coordinated by Miano: *Volcaniques. Une anthropologie du plaisir* and, more recently, *Marianne et le garçon noir*, and is frequently referenced in Miano's critical essays. In turn, Miano wrote the preface to *Melancholia africana* in which Etoke analyses *Les aubes* using the text to stress the importance of developing historical consciousness across populations in Sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, Etoke reads in Miano's text a literary appeal for recognition of the perpetual trauma of the Transatlantic slave trade which continues to wreak havoc in "amnesiac" societies that have been historically unwilling to broach the painful subject.² The collective negligence of this memory has in turn impeded the grief process, any eventual healing and subsequent transcendence. Etoke singularly establishes a parallel in *Les aubes* between the pleas of the forsaken victims of slavery for remembrance in collective consciousness and the contemporary violence plaguing Mboasu:

Léonora Miano révèle en effet que les filles et les fils enfermés dans les oubliettes sous-marines seraient à l'origine du désarroi qui règne au Mboasu. La structure narrative des *Aubes écarlates* se caractérise par l'alternance entre la voix des âmes errantes qui dénoncent l'oubli et la période contemporaine marquée par un devenir captif de l'anomie.³

[Léonora Miano reveals in fact that the daughters and sons trapped in underwater oblivion are at the origin of the turmoil plaguing Mboasu. The narrative structure of *Aubes écarlates* is characterised by alternation between the voices of the wandering souls denouncing forgetfulness and the contemporary period marked by a future held prisoner by anomie.]

¹ Marjolaine Unter Ecker, *Questions identitaires dans les récits afropéens de Léonora Miano* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2016), p. 9.; Anaïs Heluin, 'Mahogany, un pont entre l'Afrique et la diaspora'; Célia Sadai, 'L'afropéanité, entre sociabilité et désir. Léonora Miano et le dispositif du Mahogany', *Africultures*, 3/99-100 (2014), 276-83.

² Ferdulis Zita Odome Angone, 'Anachronies, oubli et délire de théatralisation [sic.]. Le Sankofa et la mémoire empêchée chez Léonora Miano', p. 6.

³ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 60.

Etoke's *Melancholia africana* resurfaces in other critical publications on this text and notably in Germain Nyada's chapter contribution to Alice Tang's edited volume *L'œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano*.¹ Within this piece, Nyada examines the diverse figures and voices of Miano's postcolonial African society in *Les aubes* with a specific focus on those of the woman, the child-soldier and the spirits of slave trade victims. He argues principally that these figures represent the people, often marginalised and silenced, on whose account Miano attempts to depict the imaginations, beliefs, traditions, language and ways of thinking/being. In his conclusion, he advances the need for the establishment of a diasporic consciousness based on collective memory inclusive of traumas related to slavery, colonialism and postcolonialism: the *Melancholia africana* of Etoke.² These themes are again taken up in Irena Trujic's 2015 article "Faire parler les ombres: Les Victimes de la traite négrière et des guerres contemporaines chez Léonora Miano" within which the researcher considers the notable place Miano reserves for the African victims of both past and present continental violence in both *Les aubes* and her more recent novel *La saison de l'ombre*.³ Drawing predominately on the recurring *Exhalaisons* passages, Trujic claims, as does Etoke, that Miano privileges in the narrative the voices of "witnesses *in absentia*" who address a warning to their descendants regarding the dangers of forgetting in contemporary African societies. More specifically, the forgotten "avenge themselves by creating new conflicts and massacres in

¹ Germain Nyada, 'Figures et voix du peuple dans les *Aubes écarlates* de Léonora Miano', in Alice Tang (ed.), *L'œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano. Fiction, mémoire et enjeux identitaires* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 97-111.

² *Ibid.*, p. 108. Though Nyada does not at any point reference Etoke's work, I recall that Miano references Etoke's work explicitly in the postface of *Les aubes* (pp. 270-273).

³ Trujic, 'Faire parler les ombres: Les victimes de la Traite négrière et des guerres contemporaines chez Léonora Miano'.

Mboasu so that history repeats itself until it is remembered that they existed”.¹

An additional study of relevance is the 2011 article by Sylvie Laurent within which, drawing on the entire *Suite africaine* trilogy alongside some of Miano’s Afropean texts,² the historian and academic demonstrates the notable influence of Afro-American and Caribbean spaces in the Franco-Cameroonian’s oeuvre. Miano has, of course, never concealed the deep attachment and sense of connection she feels vis-à-vis the Afrodescendant cultures of the Atlantic world and their writers who she asserts played a significant role in her “self-awakening”.³ The principal argument of Laurent’s copious article centers around Miano’s promotion of a specific conception of contemporary black identity, rather than a continental African identity, that is anchored in a third space (as conceptualised by Bhabha) neither American, African nor European.⁴ Through the author’s drawing on themes common to Black literary spaces, namely those of female American and Caribbean writers including womanism, violence against the female body (singularly as a metaphor for slavery), the centrality of mother-daughter relations including the consequences when these degenerate and the musical metaphor, Laurent credits the Franco-Cameroonian with the formation of “a Black Republic of Letters and a feminine Afrodescendant consciousness”.⁵ She also underscores the role of the Transatlantic slave trade in linking these diasporic spaces and the need for it to be inscribed in collective Afrodescendant memory:

¹ Ibid., p. 57. The themes of memory and forgetting are also taken up in Glora Onyeoziri’s article on *Les aubes*. See: Gloria Onyeoziri, 'Les Aubes écarlates de Léonora Miano: la critique de l'oubli', *Les Cahiers du GRELCEF*, 10 (2018), 71-88.

² Namely *Afropean soul et autres nouvelles*, *Tels des astres éteints* and *Ces âmes chagrines*.

³ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 14.

⁴ Sylvie Laurent, 'Le « tiers-espace » de Léonora Miano romancière afropéenne', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 4/204 (2011), 769-810, p. 771.

⁵ Ibid., p. 799.

Non seulement son écriture emprunte des motifs, des traits de plume et des référents à l'espace littéraire et culturel nord-américain, mais elle [Miano] propose d'en adapter la mémoire. Ce n'est pas tant aux Américains de se souvenir de l'Afrique que l'inverse. Les Noirs nés sur la terre africaine ou bien nés en France de parents africains doivent se comporter comme les membres d'une famille diasporique dont la mémoire est aussi celle de l'esclavage [...].¹

[Not only does her writing borrow patterns, features and references from the North American literary and cultural space but she [Miano] also suggests adopting its memory. It is not so much for Americans to remember Africa than it is the reverse. Black people born on African soil or born from African parents in France must behave like the members of a diasporic family whose memory is also that of slavery.]

Laurent's piece effectively underscores the transatlantic aspirations of Miano's *Suite africaine* trilogy regarding certain specific domains (such as intertextual adaptation of key diasporic tropes and the influence of New World Black musical genres). Though the article is comprehensive, with such a large selected corpus of Mianoian texts (eight cited), aspects of each novel are touched on without great depth. Furthermore, I note that Laurent, despite her recognition of Miano's use of the triangular America-Africa-Europe space, persists in categorising the author as "Afropean",² which, as a concept, is not devoid of contention in academic circles.³

In their respective articles, Marie Benedetta Collini and Étienne-Marie Lassi both consider, albeit from divergent perspectives, the three components of the *Suite africaine* trilogy. I recall that Lassi, in his castigatory toned article, accuses Miano of deliberating representing Africa and Africans in a manner that conforms with Western prejudices in order to secure greater sales of her texts.⁴ He concludes that Miano's texts are

¹ Ibid., p. 797.

² As made evident in the article's title.

³ Discussed below.

⁴ In reference to *L'intérieur* and namely its English translation, Éloïse Brezault has come to a similar conclusion stating that "Miano uses exoticism as a strategy to reinforce her position in the literary market, [a strategy] that becomes an essential mechanism for the work's promotion in the American market". Brezault, 'Le scandale comme stratégie d'exotisme chez Calixthe Beyala et Léonora Miano: Le rôle de l'institution littéraire face aux auteurs post/coloniaux', p. 63.

emblematic of the phenomenon of peripheral-centre discourse recuperation that occurs when a Western reading public characterised by ample purchasing power, a hunger for “scenery change” and a valorisation of cultural difference, retrieves peripheral discourses and draws them into the centre while “reorientating and reframing them in order to maintain the hierarchy of cultural relations”.¹ In the final *Suite africaine* novel, he is particularly denunciative of Miano’s stance in respect to African complicity in slavery suggesting that it depicts European involvement in the tragedy in a positive light consequently vindicating past, present and perhaps future European intervention in Africa.² In her 2012 article “Le cri, le silence, la parole: la trilogie africaine de Léonora Miano”,³ Collini analyses the themes of speech and verbal exchange as privileged forms across Miano’s trilogy with a singular interest in the three protagonists’ itineraries, Ayané in *L’intérieur*, Musango in *Contours du jour qui vient* and Epa in *Les aubes*. She notes that their journeys respectively marked by the verbal attributes of the cry, silence and speech lead to “self-awareness, an acceptance of the past and an opening onto a future of freedom.”⁴

2.0.2 CELLES QUI ATTENDENT

It was not until the publication of her fourth novel, *Celles qui attendent* (henceforth *Celles*) by Flammarion in 2010, that Diome received commendation reminiscent of that engendered by *Le Ventre*. *Celles* again takes up a theme close to Diome’s heart – that of immigration. Yet the novel does so under a new perspective for whereas the author’s other texts predominately focus on recounting the migrant’s experiences moving from

¹ Lassi, 'Recyclage des discours sur l’Afrique et inscription de la doxa métropolitaine dans les romans de Léonora Miano', p. 456.

² Ibid., p. 448-49.

³ Collini, 'Le cri, le silence, la parole: La trilogie africaine de Léonora Miano'.

⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

Africa to Europe or between them, *Celles* focuses almost exclusively on narrating the lives of non-migrants left behind in Senegal. This novel is again set on Diome's native island of Niodior, yet unlike in *Le Ventre*, there is no central protagonist in this text narrated exclusively in the third-person by an omniscient narrator. The literary scene is shared by four female figures: Arame, Bougna, Coumba and Daba. Bougna and Arame are unhappily married middle-aged village women who dream of an existence for themselves, their children and grandchildren free from poverty and indefinite precariousness. In order to achieve this, the two friends concoct a plan to send their adult sons, Issa and Lamine, clandestinely to Europe through a local people smuggling network. As was the case in *Le Ventre*, the rhetoric in rural Niodior paints Europe as a transitory Eldorado: a place to pass through where it is possible to make sufficient money in order to better one's own fortunes as well as those of one's family before returning home to Senegal indefinitely. Conscious of the high hopes placed by their community on the hypothetical successes to be had in Europe and confronted on a daily basis with their mothers' difficult circumstances, Issa and Lamine eventually undertake the perilous journey across the Atlantic to Spain where their long and arduous European campaign begins.

Although the reader does garner snippets of Issa's and Lamine's clandestine experiences in Western Europe, the narrative accent remains firmly focused on the women waiting for news of their loved ones across the Atlantic on the shores of West Africa. Their stories are both individual and collective with the reader coming to know each female character's personality encompassed within the broader narrative of commonalities that underlie their lives as women in Niodior.¹ Arame and Bougna are not alone

¹ In this sense, Diome's portrayal of the Niodiorois women in *Celles* differs from that in *Le Ventre* which, as noted by Hamid Latha, positions Salie's hybrid, diasporic identity against "her representation of the fixed identities of the islander women". This in turn "reinforces the alterity and exoticism of their identities

in their long wait as they are accompanied by their young daughters-in-law, Coumba and Daba, who attempt to endure the desperately lonely life of an irregular immigrant's wife rendered more burdensome by the endemic poverty afflicting the majority of the island's residents. Coumba is able to enjoy Issa's company briefly before his departure and continues, through genuine affection for her husband, to swear on a daily basis "fidelity to an empty room".¹ Daba, on the other hand, who was betrothed to another and married to Lamine after his arrival in Europe following extensive family pressure in relation to his newfound migrant status, starts her marital life knowing nothing but "an empty room".² The young women's eventual reunions with their husbands mark the beginning of two very, to say the least, different and unanticipated trajectories.

The vast majority of the scholarship written on Diome's oeuvre concerns *Le Ventre*, the only text to have been thus far translated into English. Comparatively few researchers have brought their attention to her other texts which, when they are studied, are rarely scrutinised in isolation. One notable exception is Christopher Hogarth's 2014 article "What Will the New Generation Generate? Gendering Accumulation in Fatou Diome's *Celles qui attendent*". In this piece, Hogarth reads Diome's novel through the motives of migration and accumulation (of experiences, wealth, family, memories and myths) demonstrating how both themes are underwritten by gender. Hogarth's article effectively demonstrates the determining role of gender in these interconnected phenomena while stressing that, although "depressing forms of accumulation abound in this novel" for women, *Celles*

and is utilised to affirm a conscious, unambiguous claim to her [Salie's] own, individual, divergent identity." Rizwana Habib Latha, 'Belonging and unbelonging in Fatou Diome's *The Belly of the Atlantic*', *Scrutiny2. Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 21/3 (2016), 15-36, p. 31.

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 186.

² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

does not constitute “an interminable lament” for female characters who eventually “get by”.¹

In “Plotting migritude: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*”, Rosemary Haskell reads the theme of migration across Diome’s works as a form of self-development suggesting that the author both endorses and defies the typically European narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman*.² She demonstrates that while *Le Ventre* disrupts the traditional *Bildungsroman* form through its focus on female migration, *Celles*, through its accent on male migration and female immobility in the home space appears on the surface to restore “the epic masculine monograph of the traditional *bildungsroman*” as characterised by the narrative depiction of an “outward journey and some kind of productive return”.³ She posits, however, that *Celles* is in fact a novel of “female self-realization”. For Haskell, the “spiritual and moral and emotional growth” of the *Bildungsroman* is displayed in the physically stationary female characters of Arame and Dada who “find themselves” and, in doing so, reconfigure the family to which the male traveller, in this case Lamine, returns.⁴

Another researcher who has concentrated her efforts jointly on *Celles* and *Le Ventre* is Kathryn Lachman. In her chapter contribution to Dominic Thomas and Nicki Hitchcott’s edited volume *Francophone Afropean Literatures* entitled “The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome”, Lachman

¹ Christopher Hogarth, 'What Will the New Generation Generate? Gendering Accumulation in Fatou Diome’s *Celles qui attendent*', *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, 38/2 Self and Stuff: Accumulation in Francophone Literature and Art (2014), 1-13, p. 9.

² The *Bildungsroman* is a literary genre composed of novels that consider at their heart the maturation process of their protagonists often vis-à-vis a series of challenges that the latter must overcome in order to develop and reach an improved psychological and/or physical state. The term “bildungsroman” literary translates as “novel of formation”. Gabriele Lazzari, 'Peripheral Realism and the Bildungsroman in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*', *Research in African Literatures*, 49/2 (2018), 107-24, p. 112.

³ Haskell, 'Plotting Migritude: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 144.

⁴ Ibid.

analyses both texts through the theoretical lens of Afropeanism.¹ She comes to the conclusion that, while many researchers refer to Afropea in theory while extending its application in practice out to reach the Afro-Americas, Afropeanism does not constitute an adequate structure for supporting Diome's transatlantic projections. Lachman argues instead in favour of the more flexible interpretive tool of *migritude* writing which, as not restricted to Europe, "better accommodates the broader Atlantic aspirations of Diome's project".² In her chapter contribution, she also raises a second important issue by querying how one is to "include African non-migrants in the discourse of Afropeanism or a global Atlantic?", a question of central concern in *Celles* where the four key protagonists are all non-migrants.³ According to Lachman, what is ultimately unveiled in Diome's work is an aspiration for transatlantic engagement that breaches the boundaries of Afropeanism despite the researcher recognising that Diome's characters remain physically embedded in the Africa-Europe binary. She notes that this physical embedment does not seem to restrict an imaginary extension into the Atlantic in the minds of the characters, though in its preliminary stages, concluding that "Diome's interest in the Atlantic may be best understood as an aspiration for deeper connections across the Atlantic" as opposed to "a reflection of existing Atlantic relationships".⁴ It is worth noting here that Lachman is certainly not alone in picking theoretical holes in the concept of Afropeanism. In fact, of the four individual contributions that consider Diome's or Miano's texts within Hitchcott and Thomas' volume, two advocate for Afropeanism as an effective theoretical framework while two

¹ Lachman's chapter also includes references to Diome's tale *Le vieil homme sur la barque*.

² The neologism 'migritude' "designates both the thematic of immigration that is at the heart of contemporary African works, but also the expatriate status of most of the writers". Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas, 'Introduction: Francophone Afropeans', in Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas (ed.), *Francophone Afropean Literatures* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 1-13, p. 6, 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lachman, 'The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome', p. 45.

imply that Afropeanism is inadequate or in need of adaptation. The latter promote other theories that they believe better accommodate the novels of African authors writing in Europe and notably their extensions into transatlantic space. Lachman is joined in the same volume by Ayo Coly who similarly exposes defects in Afropeanism which she accuses of not adequately reflecting the realities and social landscapes within which African migrant novels are embedded.¹ Like Lachman, Coly proposes a different theoretical model to address Afropea's lacunae: Achille Mbembe's Afropolitanism,² which she suggests provides a more "nuanced approach to race which allows Afropeanism to gain proximity with the planetary humanism of [Paul] Gilroy".³

The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood similarly disputes the credibility of Afropeanism as a theoretical concept framing contemporary African texts and authors. In this work, Coly challenges postnationalist approaches to specifically Francophone African literature by "disputing the celebratory obituary of postcolonial nationalism and the metaphorization of the postcolonial subject as an uprooted, deterritorialized, unfettered, and free-floating migrant".⁴ In her reading of *La Préférence Nationale* and *Le Ventre*, she demonstrates Diome's engagement in an "antiglobalization narrative [which] feeds an anticolonial and nationalist narrative of home and migration" thereby positioning the postcolonial nation as an important space offering "political representation and agency" for postcolonised populations.⁵ Moreover, according to Coly, postnationalist discourses of

¹ Hitchcott and Thomas, 'Introduction: Francophone Afropeans', p. 167. Coly analyses Miano's *Tels des astres éteints* alongside Alain Mabanckou's *Black Bazar* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2009) and Sami Tchak's *Place des fêtes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

² See Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

³ Coly, 'Afropean Masculinities as *bricolage*', p. 164.

⁴ Coly, *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood. Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literatures*, p. xiii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

home and migration, which include hybrid Afropeanism, can engender issues pertaining to ethical accountability as they have a tendency to “dodge the political [...] task of confronting the urgency of local realities and the continuing fact of empire”.¹ She even suggests that many of the scholars who engage in them are compromised as this “engagement implies the destruction of [their] own social location of privilege and the confrontation of their complicity with the forces of neocolonial globalization”.²

I note the paradox that manifests in Coly’s apparently opposed stances – in *Francophone Afropean Literatures* she appears to dismiss Afropeanism for being too locally cemented in favour of a truly transnational “planetary humanism” while arguing for a return to the local in the form of the postcolonial African nation as an important space emblematic of the movement away from deterritorialisation and postnationalist rhetoric in *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood*. I suggest that these apparently contradictory positions reveal most fundamentally the fallibility that Coly, along with Lachman, detect in celebratory Afropean discourses and the academic ardour with which they pursue and propose more adequate models.

The validity of postnationalist rhetoric has also been questioned in relation to my Diomion text of interest by Anna-Leena Toivanen in her 2011 article “Retour au local: *Celles qui attendent* et l’engagement diasporique de Fatou Diome”.³ Within this work, the researcher develops Coly’s reassessment of discourses of deterritorialisation in Sub-Saharan feminine literature, asserting that Diome’s *Celles* effectively criticises postnationalist ideas, upholding the “anti-globalisation narrative” already identified in *Le Ventre*.⁴ In a similar vein to Coly, Toivanen stresses that the novel “draws

¹ Ibid., p. 127.

² Ibid. The issue of neocolonialism in both Diome’s and Miano’s novels will be discussed shortly.

³ Anna-Leena Toivanen, ‘Retour au local: *Celles qui attendent* et l’engagement diasporique de Fatou Diome’, *RELIEF*, 5/1 (2011), 62-77.

⁴ Ibid., p. 73-74.

attention to the uncomfortable aspects of globalisation” while underscoring “the potential of the local” and thereby defying Afro-pessimist attitudes.¹

In the second part of this research project, I will extend upon the existing scholarship on both Miano’s and Diome’s novels in order to illustrate how both authors integrate and endorse a transnational Afro-Atlantic space and corresponding diasporic consciousness beyond the confines of Afropea that was seen to be so crucial (and ultimately restricting) to the identitarian (mis)representations surrounding Africa and her diaspora in *L’intérieur* and *Le Ventre*. If previous research by Lachman has already suggested that Diome fosters “deeper aspirations” for cross-Atlantic connections in *Celles* without concretely identifying through which modalities these can be achieved,² I argue that these transatlantic projections are equally discernible (if not more so) in Miano’s *Les aubes*. I will develop and deepen Etoke’s work on historical consciousness as well as Laurent’s findings concerning a specifically “feminine Afrodescendant consciousness” in *Les aubes* and extend these to Diome’s *Celles*. In response to Coly’s and Toivanen’s criticisms of postnationalism, especially in regard to those who remain markedly immobile in a globalised world, I will demonstrate that movement into Afro-Atlantic space and corresponding Afro-diasporic consciousness are not necessarily dependent on physical displacement such as that engendered by migration. I will use as a base theoretical model Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic, demonstrating how my authors both adhere to and extend his seminal work in the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies. This will enable the exploration of the distinct elements underpinning

¹ Whereas Madické’s character is said by Dominic Thomas to highlight Diome’s “faith in local solutions” at the end of *Le Ventre*, Toivanen interprets the role played by Lamine in *Celles* in a similar manner as it is he who conveys the message at the novel’s conclusion that “the solution is not to be found in displacement but in the efforts and the inventive spirits of people in their local environment.” Ibid., p. 74, 76.; Thomas, ‘African Youth in the Global Economy: Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*’, p. 258-59.

² Lachman, ‘The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome’, p. 45.

Miano's and Diome's specific visions of contemporary Afro-diasporic consciousness.

2.1 Extending Miano's and Diome's novels beyond Afropea

2.1.1 PAUL GILROY'S THE BLACK ATLANTIC

Since its publication in 1993, Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* has left an undeniably significant mark in Afro-Atlantic cultural studies. Through recourse to the, at the time at least, “undertheorised” notion of diaspora, the British sociologist adopts a novel approach to conceptualising the cultural production of Black communities across the Atlantic Basin.¹ In proposing to treat the Atlantic as “one single, complex unit of analysis”, Gilroy positions Black Atlantic culture as a metaculture linking those of the diverse Afrodescendant groups in the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa.² For Gilroy, diaspora “can be employed to project the plural richness of black cultures in different parts of the world in counterpoint to their common sensibilities – both those residually inherited from Africa and those generated from the special bitterness of new world racial slavery”.³ He argues furthermore that Black Atlantic cultural identity has been erected as a counterculture to European modernity and its Enlightenment foundations exalting an adherence to rationalism, scientific reason and progress.⁴ Drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, Gilroy suggests that Afrodescendant peoples reside both inside and outside the modern and that they therefore occupy a space that gives them “critical purchase on modernity itself”.⁵ They are at once shaped by modernity and excluded from it.

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴ Tanya Barson, 'Modernism and the Black Atlantic', in Tanya Barson; Peter Gorschlüter (ed.), *Afro-Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), p. 2.

⁵ Charles Piot, 'Atlantic aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100/1 (2001), 155-70, p. 159.

Privileging ‘routes’ over ‘roots’, Gilroy’s theory is inherently transnational as he moves away from the “narrowness” of the “merely national” to endorse a Deleuzian-derived approach to the “rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation” that he dubs the Black Atlantic.¹ For Gilroy, Black Atlantic cultures are in part defined and distinguished by their “desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity”.² The scholar interprets the concept of the nation and corresponding nationalistic rhetoric as inherently substandard, indeed, perilous; firstly, because he argues that the national concept is outdated and no longer reflects the realities of our globalised world as “neither political nor economic structures of domination are still co-extensive with national borders”.³ Secondly, Gilroy is skeptical of the “tragic popularity” of notions pertaining to the “integrity and purity of cultures” and namely the often racialised relationship (amalgamation) between ethnicity and nationality.⁴ He contends that the identities of the Black Atlantic as a “modern political and cultural formation” are marked by instability and mutability, that they are “always unfinished” and “always being remade”.⁵ His theory of identity as ever-evolving and never fixed is aligned with the work of other theorists in the fields of sociology and cultural studies such as that of Stuart Hall.⁶ Taking aim at the normative essentialism of Black national and Afrocentric discourse, Gilroy identifies a Black Atlantic metaculture in constant renegotiation and reinvention engendering

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi, 19.

⁶ Hall has suggested that “[...] perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation”. Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (ed.), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392-403, p. 392.

“a hybrid counterculture of modernity in the real and metaphorical journeys of African-descended peoples across the Atlantic”.¹

Two key factors underpin Gilroy’s analysis – mobility and exchange. To demonstrate the central role played by both these elements in the creation of a Black Atlantic counterculture of modernity, Gilroy embraces the imagery of ships crisscrossing the ocean as a ‘chronotope’, a term he borrows from Bahktin:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol of this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons [...]. Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.²

Focusing on the image of the ship, Gilroy draws attention to the aquatic bridging points that join the different regions and cultures of the Black Atlantic. The transoceanic chronotope of the ship in movement (as opposed to anchored at quay) reflects Gilroy’s appreciation of Afrodescendant identities as multcentred and their cultural forms as “inescapably hybrid”.³ Yet it also serves a second purpose drawing attention to the Middle Passage. Slavery is indeed key to Gilroy’s Black Atlantic world, shaped from its very beginnings around systems of “political domination and racial terror”,⁴ such as those initiated by the Middle Passage and perpetuated through the plantation regime. Yet the racial terror of slavery that dislocated Afrodescendant peoples both individually and collectively is also responsible for the syncretism that gave rise to Black Atlantic cultural expressions such as music, dance and literature. As such, the fundamental

¹ Yogita Goyal, 'Africa and the Black Atlantic', *Research in African Literatures*, 45/3 (2014), 5-25, p. v.

² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 4.

³ Piot, 'Atlantic aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic', p. 158.

⁴ Ibid.

violence which gave birth to Afrodescendant cultures of the Atlantic similarly engendered cultural forms that refuse to “perpetuat[e] a sense of victimhood, cultural exclusion and inferiority”.¹

Etoke and Miano’s collective plea for the creation of a proactive Afro-diasporic consciousness similarly calls for an exploitation of this painful past for the purposes of identitarian rebirth and cathartic artistic creation rather than its incessant evocation in order to maintain Afrodescendants in a static and passive position of victimhood.² For instance, the infliction of unspeakable suffering on African slaves during bondage gave rise to today’s celebrated Black Atlantic musical forms (spirituals, gospel, jazz, soul, funk, hip hop, rhythm and blues etc.). Etoke explains how their development is directly related to the experiences of enslaved Sub-Saharan peoples in the Americas:

Leur situation a donné naissance à des formes musicales qui révèlent l’échec d’un système de déshumanisation incapable d’éradiquer ce qui justement fait l’homme ; cette énergie du dedans qui affronte et surmonte l’épreuve. Arrimé à une fragilité irréversible d’où il puise sa résistance, le cri rythmique de l’esclave, c’est l’espérance, l’endurance et la foi, aux prises avec l’adversité. Les spirituals ont servi de fondation à différents genres musicaux [...] qui négocient les contradictions inévitables d’une identité marquée par la violence fondatrice. Identité qui travaille à la libération d’un devenir sans cesse menacé par l’histoire tragique à l’origine de sa naissance.³

Their situation gave birth to musical forms that reveal the failure of a dehumanising system incapable of eradicating precisely that which makes man; that energy from the inside that confronts and overcomes the ordeal. Irreversible fragility from which s/he draws her resistance, the rhythmic cry of the slave is hope, endurance and faith grappling with adversity. Spirituals served as foundations for different musical genres [...] that negotiate the inevitable contradictions of an identity marked by foundational violence. [An] identity that works towards liberating a future constantly threatened by the tragic history at the origin of its birth.]

¹ Barson, 'Modernism and the Black Atlantic', p. 2.

² See: Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 24-25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Music is similarly one of the key Black Atlantic cultural products examined by Gilroy. He contends notably that it is through these musical genres, “ritualised, social forms”, that Afrodescendant communities conserve their “closeness to the ineffable terrors of slavery” and that they have grown “in intense proportion to the limited expressive power of language” vis-à-vis the terror of the plantation regime.¹ The preeminence of music across the “diverse black communities of the Atlantic” not only testifies to the foundational place that Transatlantic slavery had in their development but similarly attests to the “intercultural conversations” that continue to define them “in their essential connectedness”.²

Both Etoke and Miano stress that these genres are “emblematic” of Afro-diasporic consciousness and they have had a singular influence on Miano’s life and writing.³ The author has spoken at length of her passion for jazz, which she shared with her father. She even considered a career in music as a jazz singer before her first texts were published.⁴ With its African roots, European influences and elaboration in the specific context of the New World, jazz represents for Miano “that mixing of elements that did not always come together happily but that made something beautiful”.⁵ The influence of Black Atlantic music is most evident in Miano’s Afropean texts yet also surfaces in the author’s African corpus including the *Suite africaine* trilogy.⁶ *Les aubes* is in fact structured as a jazzistically-inspired musical piece. Each of the main characters represents an instrument with its own specific role to play in the composition. The central position of Epa in the

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 73, 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 73, 102.

³ Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 30, 34.; Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 272.

⁴ Léonora Miano, 'Léonora Miano: "La littérature, l'esclavage, le jazz et moi"', in Parfait Tabapsi (ed.), (2017a).; Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 16, 17.

⁵ Brezault, *Afrique. Paroles d'écrivains*, p. 229-30.

⁶ For example, the novel *Tels des astres éteints* features chapters named after jazz pieces and includes a “soundtrack” with a list of the namely jazz musicians and songs mentioned throughout the narrative.

text is attested to by the author's decision to attribute to him the part of ensemble singer whose substantial monologue during "*Embracements*" comes to "pierce the narrative as a solo would" while Ayané's character is likened to a "dull yet powerful bass" and Epupa's to a "set of drums", capable of being played softly yet equally prone to "vibratory outbursts".¹ *L'intérieur* likewise follows an AABA jazz structure while *Contours du jour qui vient* was fashioned in the image of a musical piece whose movements are heavily influenced by Negro spirituals such as "(Sometimes I feel like a) Motherless child" and "Wade in the water".² The influence of African American musical forms constitutes one of the key elements substantiating the Afro-diasporic nature of *Les aubes* which, as will become clear throughout this chapter, transcends both continental Africa and binary Afropea to embrace a transnational Black Atlantic space similar, though not identical, to that of Gilroy.³

2.1.2 CRITIQUING GILROY'S AFRICA-EXCLUSIONARY, MASCULINIST AND ANGLOCENTRIC BLACK ATLANTIC

Although most agree that the *Black Atlantic* made an undeniably important contribution to its field and that, furthermore, it retains much of its relevance despite having been published nearly three decades ago, many scholars have been critical of certain aspects of the book.⁴ One of the most

¹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 19.

² Ibid., p. 18-19.

³ For a more in-depth discussion of the African American musical influences within Miano's *Suite africaine trilogy*, see the following articles: Laurent, 'Le « tiers-espace » de Léonora Miano romancière afropéenne'; Véronique Petetin, 'L'Afrophonie de Léonora Miano', *Études*, 9 (2017), 83-92.; Catherine Mazauric, 'Débords musicaux du texte: Vers des pratiques transartistiques de la désappartenance (Léonora Miano, Dieudonné Niangouna)', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 27/1 (2012), 99-114.

⁴ According to John Gruesser, "[t]he black Atlantic model is valuable for four major reasons. First, Gilroy's brave attempt to rewrite the history of modernity to include slavery and its attendant racial ideology raises important questions that theorists and historians of the modern era have long needed to address. Second, the black Atlantic accounts for and underscores the many cross-cultural interactions among black American, black British, black West Indian and to a lesser extent African philosophy, music, literature, and political discourse that a sizable portion of postcolonial theorists have chosen not to emphasize. Third,

common criticisms leveled against Gilroy's Black Atlantic is its less than satisfactory handling of Africa.¹ Cultural anthropologist Charles Piot is but one of many who have underscored the *Black Atlantic's* problematic exclusion of Africa from discourses of the modern. Scrutinising Gilroy's stance (as well as that of Hall) in his 2001 article "Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic" he states that:

In *The Black Atlantic*, the focus of transatlantic exchange and connection is largely on the Caribbean, the United States, and Britain. Africa bears little more than passing reference, and then, notably, only Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Southern Africa – sites repatriated by freed American slaves and intensively settled by Europeans – are mentioned. Similarly, in Hall's important work on diasporic identity, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Africa figures only as an imagined presence for Afro-Caribbean peoples. This omission not only silences a major entity in the black Atlantic world but also leaves unchallenged the notion that Africa is somehow different – that it remains a site of origin and purity, uncontaminated by those histories of the modern that have lent black Atlantic cultures their distinctive character – and thus risks reinscribing a conception of culture that Gilroy, Hall, and many of the new diaspora scholars otherwise spend much of their work critiquing. This ellipsis also suggests, of course, that Africa has played little role in the development of black Atlantic cultural production, other than as provider of raw materials-bodies and cultural templates/origins – that were then processed or elaborated upon by the improvisational cultures of the Americas.²

In my opinion, Piot rightly stresses that the Black Atlantic's focus remains squarely centered on the Afrodescendant cultural production of the Americas and Europe. Moreover, he claims that in its failure to engage in discussions of the modern in Africa, Gilroy effectively relegates the whole continent to the ranks of the "unmodern"³ and reinforces that which he criticises so vividly in Afrocentric discourse including Négritude: its promotion of a

Gilroy convincingly argues that transatlantic (particularly European) travel profoundly influenced the political stances of key African American figures. Finally, he effectively employs postcolonial theoretical concepts in his often brilliant readings of the texts of these black Americans". John Gruesser, *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic* (Athens; London: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 17.

¹ See the following articles: Stuart Green, 'The African diaspora in Europe: New Atlantic routes and roots in the music of Concha Buika', *Journal of Romance Studies*, 14/2 (2014), 50-61.; Goyal, 'Africa and the Black Atlantic'.; Simon Gikandi, 'Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic', /3 (2014).

² Piot, 'Atlantic aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic', p. 156.

³ Gikandi, 'Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic', p. 241.

“prehistoric mystical Africa frozen in time”.¹ Drawing on his own fieldwork in a rural area of Northern Togo, Piot counters this by demonstrating that Africa is not uniquely the static origin of diasporic communities as implied by Gilroy but is also influenced by Black Atlantic cultural production which feeds back into local African communities and impacts significantly upon their development. African American Studies scholar Yogita Goyal explains that while Gilroy “rightly critiques Afrocentric frameworks of return to Africa”, he also fails to propose “any alternative way of thinking about Africa” offering “little guidance as to how to extend this particular model to Africa”.² The result is a “static” Africa set apart from the “otherwise fluid models” of the Black Atlantic.³ In regard to Gilroy’s “bracketing”⁴ or “sidelining”⁵ of certain regions (singularly Africa but also the Caribbean),⁶ I would add that there is a definite accent placed on the North Atlantic and specifically African American thinkers and artists (including W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglas, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Martin Robinson Delany) and that Gilroy’s Black Atlantic is, consequently, largely Anglocentric. Melissa Schindler, John Gruesser and Stuart Green also note a distinct lack of South-South dialogue and engagement with non-Anglophone intellectuals in Gilroy’s work.⁷

¹ Yogita Goyal, 'Africa and the Black Atlantic', p. v.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. vi.

⁵ Lucy Evans, 'The Black Atlantic: Exploring Gilroy's legacy', *Atlantic Studies*, 6/2 (2009), 255-68, p. 260.

⁶ Michelle Wright, 'Middle Passage Blackness and its Diasporic Discontents: The Case for a Post-War Epistemology', in Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken (ed.), *Africa in Europe. Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 217-33, p. 218. Also see on this subject Norval Edwards' essay: Norval Edwards, 'And Some Routes Not Taken: A Caribcentric Reading of *The Black Atlantic*', *Found Object*, 4/27-35 (1994).

⁷ Melissa Schindler, 'Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic', *Research in African Literatures*, 45/3 (2014), 72-90 at 76.; Green, 'The African diaspora in Europe: New Atlantic routes and roots in the music of Concha Buika', p. 52.; Gruesser, *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, p. 97.

Critics have also taken aim at the gender distinctions at play in Gilroy's Black Atlantic which, according to some, posits the space as liberating for men only while Black Atlantic women remain "static and domesticated".¹ This is the central argument in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' 2009 piece entitled "The black feminine domestic: a counter-heuristic exercise in falling apart".² The gender distinction is similarly taken up by Schindler who pursues the feminist critique of Gilroy's theory in addition to its notable Anglocentric angle in her study of Black Lusophone women writers of Brazil and Mozambique.³ Postcolonial scholar Simon Gikandi has raised a further interesting point in relation to Gilroy's text by questioning its treatment of the Transatlantic slave trade. For Gikandi, Gilroy "detours historicity"⁴ by transforming slavery as the prime "historical crucible for modern blackness" into a metaphor while neglecting the central roles played by colonialism in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵

In light of the above criticism, the remainder of this research project will focus on the ways in which Miano and Diome simultaneously adhere to and reevaluate Gilroy's Black Atlantic model by addressing some of its key lacunae. I will argue that both authors bring into question Eurocentric discourses of the modern axed on notions of linear time and developmental progress in Sub-Saharan African contexts thereby reinstating Africa as a central component in Black Atlantic critiques on modernity (counter-modern consciousness). Their techniques for doing this simultaneously bring into dialogue the histories of slavery and colonisation (including persistent neocolonial paradigms) thereby addressing some of the criticism leveled

¹ Green, 'The African diaspora in Europe: New Atlantic routes and roots in the music of Concha Buika', p. 59.

² Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'The Black Feminine Domestic: A Counter-Heuristic Exercise in Falling Apart', *Symbiosis*, 13/2 (2009), 101-25.

³ Schindler, 'Home, or the Limits of the Black Atlantic'.

⁴ Simon Gikandi, 'Introduction: Africa, Diaspora, and the Discourse of Modernity', 27/4 (1996), 1-6, p. 2.

⁵ Yogita Goyal, 'Africa and the Black Atlantic', p. vi.

against Gilroy's marked tendency to neglect the role of colonial traumas other than the Transatlantic slave trade in Black Atlantic cultural formation (historical consciousness). Through this perspective, slavery *and* colonisation will be shown to be much more than simple metaphors as they engender concrete consequences within the contemporary African societies fictionalised in *Les aubes* and *Celles*. Furthermore, Miano's and Diome's novels will demonstrate the development of a specifically female-driven Afro-diasporic consciousness thereby highlighting the key role that African women (not necessarily migrant) play in initiating transnational dialogue within an emancipatory Black Atlantic space (feminine consciousness).

2.2 Counter-modern Afro-diasporic consciousness: Questioning modernity and its premises in Sub-Saharan African spaces

I have shown that there is a general tendency to recognise Gilroy's text for its "considerable worth" while acknowledging its potential for further "expansion and development".¹ In this section, I aim to demonstrate my authors' promotion of an African counterculture of modernity that restores the continent as a key player within Black Atlantic space. In promoting what I consider to be a more nuanced take on "modernity and its discontents"² in *Les aubes* and *Celles*, Miano and Diome break from the tradition-modernity binary that tended to define relations between African and Afropean characters in *L'intérieur* and *Le Ventre* and from the specific model of Occidental modernity seen to be peddled by some characters (namely Ayané, Ndétare and, to a lesser extent, Salie). As noted by Gikandi, the questioning of "colonialist notions about progress, time, and subjectivity" has been and remains at the centre of postcolonial literary production and this observation is easily extended to Miano's *Les aubes* and Diome's *Celles*.³ In these texts, the authors draw attention to the shortfalls of a specific vision of modernity characterised by Enlightenment principles of progress, reason and capitalist enterprise, a project that, despite its humanist accents, has historically served a restricted portion of humanity.⁴ While simultaneously promoting the existence of plural worldviews more in line with the experiences having fashioned the "ambivalent perspective" of Black Atlantic peoples towards "Western notions of progress",⁵ Miano and Diome express reservations

¹ Evans, 'The Black Atlantic: Exploring Gilroy's legacy', p. 257.

² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 45.

³ Simon Gikandi, 'Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73/3 (2012), 309-28, p. 311.

⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 43.

⁵ Gruesser, *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, p. 17-18.

towards modernity's universalist application and singularly regarding what Gilroy identified as its "hubristic confidence in its own infallibility".¹ I will firstly consider Miano's employment of the figure of the child soldier to frustrate the terms of Eurocentric modernity as premised on binary categories of being and notions of linear time and developmental progress. I will then consider both author's representations of neocolonial slow violence fueled by predatory capitalism and resulting in community disintegration in *Les aubes* and *Celles*.

2.2.1 THE FIGURE OF THE AFRICAN CHILD SOLDIER

To date, the place of the child soldier in Black Atlantic counter-modernity formation has been widely overlooked. This is underscored in Goyal's 2014 introduction to the special issue of *Research in African Literatures* on Africa and the Black Atlantic within which she queries "[h]ow might the increasingly visible figure of the child soldier in contemporary African fiction intersect with the black Atlantic interrogation of freedom and modernity, historical violence and its shaping of contemporary culture and politics?"² Indeed, this is a timely question to ask for the phenomenon of child soldiers has left an ineluctable mark on recent Sub-Saharan history. International law prohibits the recruitment of any human being under the age of 18 into nonstate armed units and criminalises that of people under the age of 15 by both state and nonstate groups.³ Despite this explicit restriction, J. A. Kearney notes in his 2010 article that many nonstate armed groups "show little concern for international law and continue with child recruitment on a fairly large scale" noting, furthermore, that ten of the 23 countries in which

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 43.

² Goyal, 'Africa and the Black Atlantic', p. x.

³ J. A. Kearney, 'The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 26/1 (2010), 67-94, p. 68.

children are known to participate in armed conflict are situated in Africa.¹ Child soldiery is “as old as” warfare itself and is present across many of the world’s regions.² That said, Africa remains a hotbed for the recruitment of children into hostilities hosting approximately 40% of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers worldwide.³ The most infamous cases of this in recent history are perhaps the Sierra Leonean and Liberian civil wars of the 1990s/early 2000s which saw the rise of notorious warlord figure Charles Taylor and his equally infamous Small Boys’ Unit.⁴ In Uganda and neighbouring countries, the Lord’s Resistance Army, founded by Joseph Kony in 1987, continues to be implicated in the recruitment of children into armed conflict. Whereas the definition of what constitutes a “child” according to international law institutions is relatively clear-cut, grasping what a child soldier’s engagement in war actually entails is more convoluted and context-specific. Alcinda Honwana, professor of Anthropology and International Development and former researcher at the United Nations, specifies that the child soldier in the Sub-Saharan context refers to:

[T]he type of fighter who often fills the ranks of guerrilla and rebel groups, inadequately trained and outfitted, often operating under the influence of drugs. Such soldiers harass, loot, and kill defenseless civilians indiscriminately. Not only do they show their victims no mercy, they may even fail to distinguish between friends and foe, kin and non-kin.⁵

¹ Ibid.

² David Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: child soldiers and the international protection of children in Africa's conflict zones', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45/2 (2007), 207-31, p. 208.

³ Ibid. Child soldiers have been involved or are currently involved in conflicts in Angola, Mozambique, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, The Central African Republic, Uganda, South Sudan, Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire and Chad. For more information on child soldiers in Angola and Mozambique specifically, see the following publication: Alcinda Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

⁴ Taylor was arrested in 2006 and charged with crimes relating to the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflict by the Sierra Leonean Special Court and International Criminal Court in The Hague. He was convicted of aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes in 2012 and is currently serving a 50-year prison sentence in the United Kingdom. See: Francis, 'Paper protection' mechanisms: child soldiers and the international protection of children in Africa's conflict zones', p. 224, 225.

⁵ Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, p. 51.

With such a harrowing portrait of what child recruitment into armed conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa actually entails, it is not entirely surprising that the figure of the child soldier has drawn an increasing amount of scholarly and popular attention in cultural production since the early 2000s. There has been a veritable explosion of works – both literary and cinematographic – that place the African child soldier at the centre of their plots: novels by Francophone and Anglophone Sub-Saharan authors as well as several highly successful film productions including *Blood Diamond* (2006) and more recently *Beasts of no Nation* (2015) adapted from the novel of the same name written by Nigerian-American author Uzodinma Iweala.¹ Miano is certainly not the first Francophone African author to exploit this theme which is perhaps most readily associated with the novel *Allah n'est pas obligé* by Ivorian author Ahmadou Kourouma.² In this text, the young Birahima recounts his experiences in the first-person (à la Epa) as a child soldier during civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone. A second novel published in 2002, *Johnny Chien Méchant*,³ by Congolese (Brazzaville) chemist and author Emmanuel Dongala, similarly finds literary inspiration in real-life conflicts taking up the theme of child soldiers in Equatorial Africa during the Congolese civil war of the late 1990s.⁴

How should this particular figure be interpreted in text? Solely as a metaphor for continental Africa engulfed in postcolonial chaos, or as Stephen Smith rather infamously put it in 2003, “a land of massacres and famine, death place of all hope”?⁵ Recent scholarship suggests that the latter constitutes an overly simplistic interpretation of child soldiery in literature

¹ Uzodinma Iweala, *Beasts of No Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).

² Ahmadou Kourouma, *Allah n'est pas obligé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000).

³ Emmanuel Dongala, *Johnny Chien Méchant* (Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 2002).

⁴ This novel is again written in the first-person with the narrative switching chapter by chapter between its two young protagonists.

⁵ Smith, *Négrologie: Pourquoi l'Afrique meurt*, p.13.

and that this figure can instead be read in relation to dominant conceptions of modernity, namely for the challenges it presents to modernity's driving narratives of linear time and developmental progress as well as binary categorisation, notions themselves intimately affiliated with Western imperialism, its justification and implementation. Philosopher Peter Osborne stresses that:

[I]t was through the temporalization of the founding geopolitical difference of colonialism that the concept of modernity first came to be universalized, and, thereby, thereafter, to subordinate the differential between itself and other 'times' to differences within a single temporal scheme of 'progress', 'modernization' and 'development'.¹

In other words, the European colonial enterprise in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere cannot be dissociated from hegemonic conceptions of time and modernity, themselves indissociable from Enlightenment rationalism, which has historically spoken for Africa as "modernity's other", as "primitive to Europe's modern", and therefore desperately lacking in "futuraity".² Literary scholar Maureen Moynagh stresses that the "old notion" underwriting colonial logic, that pertaining to a 'delayed' Africa playing catch up with an 'advanced' Europe, appears to have been reinvigorated of late.³ One of the most notable manifestations of this is reflected in the Western tendency to categorise recent political upheavals in postcolonial Africa in terms of pre-modern 'tribal' or 'ethnic' conflicts while turning a convenient blind-eye to historical factors relating to (post)colonial rule and the increasingly destructive issue of neocolonialism and its neoliberal compeer.⁴ Such perceptions contribute to what Mbembe describes in *Sortir de la grande nuit*

¹ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 21.

² Maureen Moynagh, 'The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction', *Comparative Literature*, 69/3 (2017), 315-37, p. 316.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁴ *Ibid.*

as a contemporary “era that strives to reinstall the old myth that the West alone has a monopoly on the future”.¹

The child soldier in contemporary African fiction can be employed (or deployed) precisely with the objective of challenging this myth as a literary figure that constitutes “a vehicle” for critiquing “modernity as a particular time consciousness” and its “attendant geopolitics.”² As both child, thereby associated with “potentiality” and “futuraity”, and soldier, this figure effectively “does violence to th[e] normative aspirations [of modernity] by seeming to promise a violent and corrosive future”.³ Put another way, the notions of linear progress and development so inherent to Western discourses of modernity and the colonial model come unstuck when confronted with the figure of the child soldier – as a child, s/he is a young, innocent being for whom progressive modernity appears to promise much and, as a soldier, an active agent in the infliction of heinously violent crimes against other human beings and, therefore, the embodiment of all that is ‘uncivilised’, ‘backward’ and threatening to modernity’s future-orientated, ‘enlightening’ ambitions. Moynagh establishes a compelling parallel between African child soldier fiction and the Western progressive literary form *par excellence*, the *Bildungsroman*. She notes that while much of child soldier fiction has been read through the lens of the *Bildungsroman* genre as coming-of-age texts which demonstrate the “frustration of free and full development” and “deferred maturation”, African child soldier fiction is best conceived of as “anti-*Bildungsromane*” – as fiction that tends to disrupt the *Bildung*⁴ of *Bildungsroman* by challenging and deforming developmental

¹ Moynagh’s translation. Ibid. Mbembe’s original citation: “La nôtre est une ère qui tente de remettre au goût du jour le vieux mythe selon lequel l’Occident a, seul, le monopole du futur”. Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 240.

² Moynagh, 'The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction', p. 315.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “[...] a temporality that echoes the developmental thrust of modernity itself”. Ibid., p. 316.

time and its corollary of “ideally-imagined modern(izing) development”.¹ Moynagh asserts that developmental time (inaugurated by the period of childhood) is not so much deferred or delayed in these texts as it is simply thwarted or “short-circuited” by the child’s involvement in war.² In these texts, development finds itself instead “supplanted by ruthless transformation” while “narratives of freedom and formation [are] replaced by narratives of coercion and deformation”.³

The child soldier thus frustrates specifically Eurocentric conceptions of modernity by undermining their particular time-consciousness axed on notions of developmental progress and linearity. Yet there is another aspect of this figure that similarly presents a challenge to dominant notions of the modern: his/her transgressiveness. As noted by Katunga Joseph Minga in his 2012 doctoral thesis, the child soldier constitutes “one of the most challenging concepts confronting the modern mind”.⁴ The very confronting nature of the child soldier originates in his/her ambiguity, hybridity, for s/he is inherently noncompliant; s/he refuses to conform neatly to the borders established by the “modern mind” between dichotomous categories as “[s/]he is both perpetrator and victim”,⁵ blatantly menacing as a soldier and essentially vulnerable as a child.⁶ The hybrid nature of the child soldier whose transgressive identity moreover “brings into question the traditional contours of childhood” is similarly underscored in Marie Bulté’s 2016 doctoral thesis entitled “Visions de l’enfant-soldat: construction d’une figure

¹ Ibid., p. 319.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Katunga Minga, 'Child Soldiers as Reflected in the African Francophone War Literature of the 1990s and 2000s', (Faculty of Humanities: University of Witwatersand, 2012), p. ii.

⁵ Other dichotomies noted by Minga that find themselves fundamentally undermined through the image of the child soldier include those distinguishing between civilians and combatants, the protected and protectors, initiates and initiated, and the human and non-human. Ibid., p. 63.

⁶ Charlène Walther, 'Études littéraires africaines, "L'enfant-soldat : langages et images"', *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 224/32 (2011), p. 1.

dans les littératures africaines”.¹ This identitarian ambiguity, combined with the figure’s ability to disrupt developmental linearity, are manifest in the child soldier characters that Miano places at the heart of *Les aubes*.²

If the decision to draw on the figure of the child soldier can, in itself, be interpreted as a literary gesture frustrating the terms of modernity and particularly its axing on a linear time-consciousness, Epa’s extremely ambiguous character could be read as a further challenge to any Western notions of the modern as based on dichotomous categorisation. It is in the first of the two *Latérite* chapters that the reader is reintroduced to this character as he lies bedridden at *La Colombe* under Ayané’s watch. Despite having directly witnessed the brutality of which Epa has recently shown himself capable,³ Ayané does not reduce Epa to the status of soldier, to a merely threatening being, placing the narrative accent instead on his inherent humanity. For Ayané, he is not just “one of those children of the war”, he is “much more than that” for “it is not the same, when one knows them. When one remembers them little, grasping the *pagne* of their mother”.⁴ These children “do not [just] grow in the wild like weeds”, “[a] women suffers bringing them into the world”.⁵ Epa’s youth and inferred vulnerability are

¹ Marie Bulté, 'Visions de l'enfant-soldat: construction d'une figure dans les littératures africaines', (École doctorale Arts, Lettres et Langues: Université Rennes 2, 2016), p. 74. Bulté draws on the representation of the child soldier in a range of Anglophone and Francophone African literary texts. Her doctoral thesis is the only resource found that considers the child soldier figure in Miano’s *Les aubes*. However, with such a large primary corpus (11 works in total), her analysis of *Les aubes* is not as comprehensive as it could be and, furthermore, remains focused on the child soldier as a witness. Bulté’s thesis does not directly engage with the theme motivating my study of Epa in *Les aubes*, that is, Miano’s use of the child soldier figure to undermine Eurocentric narratives of the modern axed on linear progress and development.

² Miano’s work has already been associated with postmodernism defined by French sociologist, philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard as an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris: Minuit, 1979) at 7. See the following article: Buata Malela, 'Jeu littéraire et transformation du sujet diasporal: La postmodernité de Léonora Miano', *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, 42/1-2 (2011), 153-74, p. 155.

³ I recall that it was Epa who slit the throat of the elderly village chief Eyoum in *L'intérieur*. Chronologically speaking, this event must have occurred only a few months prior to Epa’s arrival at *La Colombe* for he was 17-years-old when Eku was invaded and is only a few months off turning 18 when he arrives at the refuge. Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 56.

⁴ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

also underscored by the narrator – he is constantly referred to in this section as the “adolescent”, the “young [person]”, the “boy”, or the “child”.¹ The very threatening aspect that Epa could plausibly embody as a former soldier is moreover undermined by the pitiful condition, both physical and mental, that he finds himself in – he arrives at *La Colombe* in an “almost comatose state” with his feet “shredded” and is visibly distressed, upon his awakening, as he inquires as to the fate of other Eku boys whom he had no choice but to leave at the front line.²

It becomes apparent early in the narrative that Epa represents a challenge, even within the already challenging domain of child soldier figures, to the dichotomous categorisation which propels dominant notions of the modern and unmodern. Unlike the much younger kidnapped Eku boys, Epa was enrolled at the age of 17, right on the cusp of what the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) defines as a child.³ Epa’s encroachment on the age of adulthood associated with mental maturation, moral integrity and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong only further complicates the reader’s apprehension of his active involvement in warfare. That said, Kearney notes that the distinction made between childhood and adulthood in African societies is not the same as that in the Western world where the age of 18 is generally retained as the decisive element distinguishing a child from an adult.⁴ In many Sub-Saharan contexts characterised, demographically speaking, by their pronounced youth – a so-called ‘youth bulge’⁵ – “children are regarded as having the responsibility

¹ Ibid., p. 19, 21, 23, 26.

² Ibid., p. 23-24.

³ “[...] a child means every human being below the age of 18 years.” ‘The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child’, in Organisation of African Unity (ed.), (http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/child/achpr_instr_charterchild_eng.pdf, 1990), Article 2.

⁴ Kearney, ‘The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction’, p. 71.

⁵ 44% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s population is under the age of 15 years making it the youngest region in the world. See: Dominique Tabutin and Bruno Schoumaker, ‘The Demography of Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1950s to the 2000s’, *I.N.E.D "Population"*, 59/3 (2004), 455-555, p. 500.

to contribute to the livelihood of their families”.¹ Such was Epa’s case. Forced to give up his education and find work in Sombé to support his family, his childhood had in many ways already been forfeited by the lack of opportunities available for youth in Mboasu and, by extension, postcolonial Sub-Saharan Africa.

At least in terms of his initial adhesion to Isilo’s revolutionary rhetoric, Epa’s recruitment as a soldier confirms what Honwana has claimed vis-à-vis nonfictional conflicts in Africa involving children whose recruitment is more often than not neither entirely voluntary nor involuntary. The distinction between these poles is rather “blurred” and, at times, “entirely absent”.² As the narrator notes through Ayané, Epa “had wanted to make his dreams a reality. To fight. To change the world”.³ The reader’s perception of this character and the knowledge of his child soldier past is thus complicated by two key factors – his relatively old age and the knowledge that he was initially supportive of and sympathetic to the rebels’ cause. In short, *Les aubes* from its very onset gives substance to the utter complexity characterising the child soldier phenomenon by juxtaposing Epa’s ambiguous, conflicting and unsettling character with the rumours circulating in Sombé concerning the “ferociousness” and the “determination” of the child soldiers said to inflict “multiple humiliations” on the general population “without batting an eyelid”.⁴

Driven by the need for answers including the desire to know what has become of the other Eku children, Ayané asks Epa to recount his experiences since she last saw him during the fatal night at Eku village. Thus begins Epa’s long analeptic first-person monologue (*Embracements*) during which

¹ Kearney, 'The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction', p. 71.

² Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, p. 37.

³ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22, 23.

the extent of the violent acts both committed by and inflicted on Eku's kidnapped children is exposed to both Ayané and the reader.¹ Among the episodes recounted by Epa is the children's attack on a foreign-owned diamond mine and their merciless slaughter of the workers present. Epa recalls:

Au bout d'un moment, ce n'était plus qu'un travail. Nous faisons tous la même chose. Personne n'était seul avec sa conscience. Nous étions nombreux. Habitué les uns aux autres. Unis, en quelque sorte. Nous n'avions pas peur. Nous ne ressentions rien. Nous n'en avons pas le temps. Les plus jeunes d'entre nous ont, eux aussi, tranché des gorges.²

[After a while, it was nothing more than a task. We were all doing the same thing. No one was left alone with his conscience. We were many. Accustomed to each other. United in a way. We were not afraid. We did not feel anything. We did not have the time. The youngest among us, they too, slit throats.]

The structure of this passage is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, the series of short clauses serve to reinforce the rapidity and fitfulness of the actions narrated by Epa in a manner that somewhat resembles the movements of a hurried child inexpertly wielding a machete. Secondly, the anaphoric structure lends emphasis to the fact that this was a collective undertaking. This is similarly underscored by the opposition between the personal pronoun "we" ("nous") and the indefinite pronoun "no one" ("personne"). Moreover, the passage effectively highlights the process of desensitisation that the children have had to undergo in order to disengage from the brutal acts they are forced to perform. In noting simply that they "had no fear" and "didn't feel anything", Epa confirms what anthropological studies on conflicts involving child soldiers have already indicated: that the "inducement to suppress natural emotion [is] virtually unavoidable" for the manifestation of emotions is equated with weakness and can render child

¹ This section (pp. 43-122) represents approximately one quarter of the entire novel.

² Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 77-78.

soldiers “liable for execution”.¹ Such is the fate reserved for one of the young conscripts summarily shot after being caught crying while thinking of his mother.² The above extract contrasts markedly with the passage in *L'intérieur* in which the third-person narrator describes the intense emotions experienced by the same children as they are led away from their mothers to join the war effort. If the children are described by narrator Epa as not feeling anything in *Les aubes* and certainly not any sense of fear, it is their fear, and namely that of death, that pervades the text in *L'intérieur*:

Tous, ils frissonnaient et transpiraient à la fois. Ils avaient peur. La même peur qui les avait opprimés au cours de ces trois heures qu'ils venaient de vivre : celle de mourir. Parce qu'on avait toujours peur, lorsqu'on sentait la mort rôder. Si elle venait à pas feutrés, si elle prenait son temps au travers d'une longue maladie, on avait le temps de s'accoutumer à ses traits. Mais au cours de cette nuit, elle avait plusieurs fois frappé sans sommation. Alors, ils avaient la trouille, et au fond de son cœur, chacun se disait qu'au moins, il ne serait pas seul.³

[All of them were shivering and sweating. They were afraid, with the same fear that had oppressed them during the three hours they had just lived: the fear of dying. For they were afraid when they sensed that death was on the prowl. If it came stealthily, if it took its time via a long illness, there was time to get used to its features. But on this night, it had struck several times without warning. So they were scared, and deep down, they thought that at least they would not be alone.]⁴

In a relatively short period of time, the Eku boys' childhood has been “short-circuited” by their involvement in war and development usurped by the “ruthless transformation” of these children into mechanical killing machines.⁵ As such, the *Bildung* of the *Bildungsroman* illustrated through Miano's treatment of her child soldier characters in *Les aubes* is not so much delayed, frustrated or deferred than it is comprehensively aborted. Given the extent of the children's collective transformation through war and even before learning of their fate, the reader is left to ponder whether there is any

¹ Kearney, 'The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction', p. 73, 74.

² Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 71.

³ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 126-27.

⁴ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 86.

⁵ Moynagh, 'The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction', p. 319.

hope for the Eku children to meaningfully reintegrate into their community. This preoccupation similarly haunts Epa who remains convinced at this point of the narrative of the impossibility of the children's (and singularly his own) redemption: "We had committed too many crimes on this one day to ever envision a normal life. Those assassinations would live in us [...] like an incurable *mal*. Nothing would cure us. [...] we didn't have our place in Eku anymore".¹ Before considering the author's fictional response to this predicament, one faced moreover by child soldiers in nonfictional conflicts, I turn to a second important character who similarly problematises dominant conceptions of modernity by blurring the lines between supposedly dichotomous categories and, specifically, those erected between victim and perpetrator and, by extension, innocence and guilt, good and evil.

Eso featured briefly in *L'intérieur* and has his story exposed in detail by more than one character (Epa and Epupa) across *Les aubes*. The reason that Eso was able to interact in Eku language in the first of the trilogy instalments is finally elucidated for it is revealed by Epa during his monologue that Eso is originally from Eku. Kidnapped as a child from the market in Sombé some years ago, Eso was trafficked to neighbouring Yénèpasi where he was sold to peasants and rendered a slave. The vestiges of this traumatic period of his life have left very physical reminders on his skin; a long scar crosses his face from chin to forehead and he has a triangular-shaped hole in his skull from a machete blow. However, perhaps most traumatic for Eso, now a young adult, is the persistent belief that his family did not attempt to find him and bring him home. After managing to escape his captors, Eso attempted to return to Eku but lost his way. He came across Isilo as the latter was preparing the war effort in Yénèpasi – the same war effort he would subsequently bring to Mboasu – and who substituted his

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 79.

family by becoming “a big brother to him”, his only perceived protector.¹ On one hand, the trauma of Eso’s kidnapping and enslavement as a child coupled with his firm belief that he was abandoned by his Eku kin position him rather unambiguously in the ‘victim’ category. However, Epa’s subsequent rendition of the very violent and cruel acts that Eso is capable of and appears to enjoy inflicting at times on civilian populations with no direct connection to the civil war raging in Mboasu disrupts the reader’s apprehension of him as a mere victim. Eso’s slaughter of European religious sisters at the *Perpétuel-Secours* convent is particularly demonstrative of his cruelty for there was no strategic advantage to be had vis-à-vis *Les forces du changement*’s broader objectives. Despite his loathing of Europeans, Epa is incapable of justifying this act of gratuitous cruelty, a symbolic act of violence against what could be read as a metaphor for European incursion into Sub-Saharan Africa and her traditional belief systems. Opting for the first time during his monologue to spare Ayané the details concerning the manner in which these women were “massacred” by Eso, Epa confesses to both her and the reader: “I found nothing in me to justify that act. The death of those nuns did not bring us anything, did not change anything, made no sense”.² As he constantly oscillates between two seemingly dichotomous categories, Eso is represented as both victim and perpetrator. His transgressive nature placed alongside that of protagonist Epa and the child soldier figure more broadly brings into question modernity’s tendency to classify along neat, binary lines. Moreover, thwarted childhoods, which play an active role in the engagement in violent civil war “itself emblematic of a corrosive modernity”, dismantle linear, developmental time and undermine modernity’s future-orientated ambitions in Miano’s *Les aubes*.³ The novel

¹ Ibid., p. 48.

² Ibid., p. 88.

³ Moynagh, 'The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction', p. 319.

can therefore be considered, alongside other African child soldier fiction, to illustrate “not a failed version of modernity so much as modernity’s failures”.¹

If the child soldier is routinely employed in contemporary African literature to frustrate the conceptual borders of modernity and its axing on progressive linearity in a manner that can be likened to Gilroy’s interpretation of a counterculture of modernity in Afro-Atlantic populations, Miano’s child soldier figure similarly brings into question the notion of geographical borders and singularly their dismantlement. I recall that movement beyond national borders is a cornerstone of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic space. The viability of the nation as defined by physical boundaries is similarly challenged in *Les aubes*: the civil war opposing the powerholders in Mboasu’s North with the dispossessed of the South brings into question the notion of national unity in ‘unnatural’ nations such as those of Sub-Saharan Africa whose borders were arbitrarily erected by European colonial powers during the Scramble for Africa at the end of the 19th century. The very notion of the national frontier is indeed associated by some with a Eurocentric worldview. Mbembe posits that “[t]he desire for borders [...] groups together assorted neo-revisionist and provincialist currents that are united in their vehement rejection of any vision other than Western of the Western world itself and the world of others”.² Miano has signaled her own distrust for borders stating that she considers the notion of the ‘nation’ to be inherently “hawkish”.³ It is therefore not utterly unexpected that the child soldier figure in *Les aubes* undermines the existence of national borders, a “modern institution” *par excellence*.⁴ He does this by constantly moving

¹ Ibid, p. 319-20.

² Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 149.

³ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 84-85.

⁴ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 227.

across them (between Mboasu and Yénèpasi and in proximity to other neighbouring countries) and through his recruitment in *Les forces du changement*'s ranks for, under the leadership of Isilo, this military group labours the political objective of dismantling artificially imposed boundaries.

Isilo's aspirations for Pan-continental solidarity are well detailed in *L'intérieur* as he lectures the Eku villagers on the need to reunite dispersed members of communities sharing common lineage in order to see a new Africa reborn from the ashes of colonial destruction, gangrenous postcolonial mismanagement and ravenous neocolonial exploitation. This desire is reiterated in *Les aubes* by Epa who notes Isilo's "obsession with re-organising the continent in large ethnic groupings" in order to "recreate harmony".¹ Indeed, *Les forces du changement*'s leader remains particularly attached to the kidnapped Eku boys by virtue of a common ancestor linking their clans "today separated by a border".² Though Isilo's aspirations to do away with colonially-erected frontiers appear justified in theoretical terms, even noble given the manner in which these borders were arbitrarily imposed, the task at hand proves to be anything but straightforward as he is undermined by the presence of his two brothers. The motivations of the latter for engaging in warfare are revealed in *Les aubes* to hinge on the desire for wealth and power through their integration into the African political elite rather than their rejection through revolution of everything that this political class and its retention of power facilitated by European complicity represents. Isilo is eventually disposed of by his own brothers when it becomes apparent that his genuine yearning for large-scale political and social reform is not aligned with their individual ambitions for material

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 52.

² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

ascension. Despite the fact that his revolution is ultimately unsuccessful, Isilo's ambitions for Pan-continental solidarity beyond the borders of the nation are not without relevance in *Les aubes* and mimic both Miano's and Gilroy's calls for movement away from the "narrowness" of the "merely national" in line with the transnational cultures of the Black Atlantic.¹

The child soldier in Miano's *Les aubes* is inseparable from the African physical environment and conflicts concerning who has control over the continent's great natural resources. This observation is not insignificant in relation to Miano's and Diome's texts as both authors draw on the overriding theme of neocolonial intervention in African spaces as constitutive of a persistent colonial paradigm that is, as illustrated, fundamentally bound up with notions of modernity, the modern and the modernisable. As will become apparent, the perspective endorsed by Miano and Diome in *Les aubes* and *Celles* differs significantly from that of certain characters in *L'intérieur* and *Le Ventre* who tend to espouse the 'need' for Africans and Africa to embrace and enact a specific vision of Occidental modernity. In the next section, I will draw on postcolonial ecocriticism to demonstrate that the environment and its exploitation are evoked by the authors as a key conduit through which to criticise neocolonial practices underwritten by Western-centric (and anthropocentric) notions of modernity themselves axed on dualistic (and masculinised) conceptions of reason and progress. These violent practices ultimately result in the degradation of African landscapes and communities and singularly in the dislocation of their male constituents. Their stories trace the contours of a continuing exploitative paradigm that the authors relate to a greater history of predatory capitalism at the very origins of the Black Atlantic. In establishing this parallel, Miano and Diome bring into dialogue the Transatlantic slave trade and (neo)colonialism thereby breaching

¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 4.

Gilroy's slavery-centred Afro-Atlantic counter-modernity while positioning Africa as a key contributor to the "anti-capitalist nature of Black [Atlantic] politics".¹

2.2.2 POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN WRITING

Broadly defined, ecocriticism "examines the relationship between the physical environment and literature"² taking an "earth-centred approach to literary studies".³ Ecocriticism emerged in the Anglo-American literary field in the 1980s and had by the early 1990s come to occupy a relatively important place in the humanities.⁴ Ecocritics seek to align their work with "efforts directed at understanding environmental degradation" as they search for "less destructive ways of living with and within nature than those offered by the dominant modern ways of the world".⁵ The underlying objective propelling ecocritical thought may seem unproblematic, even neutral, yet how one proposes to live "with and within nature" is inherently dependent on one's conception of nature, itself fundamentally culturally- and context-bound. The application of Western ecocriticism has quite naturally encountered problems once extended beyond the context within which and for which it was initially conceived. This is the case notably for African authors and their textual representations of African environments.

¹ Ibid., p. 202.

² Douglas Vakoch, 'Introduction: A Different Story', in Douglas Vakoch (ed.), *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 9.

³ Cheryll Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (ed.), *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xix.

⁴ Gregory Garrard, 'Problems and prospects in ecocritical pedagogy', *Environmental Education Research*, 16/2 (2010), 233-45, p. 233.

⁵ Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, 'Introduction', in Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers (ed.), *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 1-21, p. 3.

For postcolonial literary ecocritic Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Western ecocritical discourse has tended to occlude environmental degradation in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the at times convoluted historical factors having led to it.¹ For instance, the mainstream conservationist approach adopted by Western ecocriticism tends to “overlook environmentally destructive extractive industry” in African contexts.² It also promotes as a central component of its environmental protection strategy the creation of enclaves, for tourists and/or industry, “from which local communities are evicted and excluded”.³ Game reserves showcasing African wildlife and catering to a privileged clientele are a clear example of this type of conservationist stance as are mining and other extraction sites run by large multinational corporations who fly in workers from abroad rather than training and employing local people. Such a perspective, which again may seem innocuous, indeed benevolently intended, is nonetheless buttressed on a more troubling narrative: that which depicts Africans “as lacking the proper environmental sensibility and knowledge to take care of precious biodiversity hotspots.”⁴ It insinuates, fundamentally, that for environmentalist efforts in Africa to be successful, they need to be conceived of and implemented by non-Africans as Africans themselves are not capable of enacting effective strategies.⁵ Denied any agency in regard to their environmental knowledge, traditions or even priorities, African populations across the continent are alienated from their own lands in a ‘the West knows best’ process Caminero-Santangelo has dubbed “colonial conservation”.⁶ Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan have

¹ Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), p. 2.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

similarly underscored the difficulties of implementing Western ecological discourses in non-Western contexts and, specifically, in postcolonial spaces with a history of European domination. In their 2010 book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Literature, Animals, Environment*, they draw attention to the contemporary phenomena of ‘biocolonialism’ – a process through which the “allegedly world-saving potential of science is seconded for self-serving Western needs and political ends” and ‘environmental racism’ – “the environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalized or economically disadvantaged peoples”.¹

Blindly applying Western environmental discourse and strategy within Sub-Saharan contexts can therefore be conceived of as another form of cultural imperialism which abases the ‘ignorant’ African in the face of the ‘knowledgeable’ European. Underlying this criticism is the recognition that there exists on Earth a plurality of worldviews concerning the natural world, its symbolism, uses and abuses. Postcolonial ecocriticism was born in response to concerns like these. The merging of ecocritical and postcolonial cultural studies was intended to decentre and at times counter the Eurocentric undertones of literary ecocriticism and render it more responsive to imperialism, to the lived experiences of those living in formerly and currently colonised spaces whose distinct voices and belief systems have traditionally been marginalised if not entirely ignored.² Yet the fusion of the two fields of scholarship has not been straightforward. As Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt explain in *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, scholars associated with postcolonialism have tended to see ecocritics as “furthering an often unself-conscious settler or colonialist

¹ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 4.

² Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 9, 10-11.

project” while those associated with ecocriticism have tended to consider postcolonial critics to be “alarmingly blind to environmental degradation or unreasonably suspicious of ecological discourse”.¹ Despite these initial teething problems, there is a substantial and growing body of scholarship committed to an ongoing dialogue between ecocritical and postcolonial discourse.

Due to the vast cultural, historical and geographical diversity of the postcolonial world and its literature, postcolonial ecocriticism engages in a varied range of subjects that all relate, in one way or another, to the environment as lived and experienced by humans and other living beings – food security, immigration, forced displacement, deforestation, overfishing, pollution, burial rites and rituals, animist religious practices, global warming, capitalism, natural resource management, globalisation and the erection of borders (both physical and more recently economic) are all subjects that postcolonial ecocritics and ecocritical writers privilege. Despite the great diversity of the field and Africa’s prominent place in the postcolonial landscape, Sub-Saharan literature has long been underrepresented in postcolonial ecocritical discourse.² Some postcolonial ecocritical theorists have made concerted efforts over the last few years to address this lacuna. Such was the initiative behind Caminero-Santangelo and Garth A. Myers’ collective volume on postcolonial ecocriticism in African texts, *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, published in 2011. Despite engaging with the work of a wide range of authors of African origin, the researchers themselves note in relation to their jointly edited volume the regrettable lack of Francophone literature, an

¹ Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, ‘Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice’, in Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (ed.), *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2010), p. 4.

² Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 8-9. The only real exception to this is South African literature.

underrepresentation of West African literature and a certain emphasis on the writings of white African authors.¹

According to Caminero-Santangelo, ecological writing in Africa has a marked tendency to prioritise social justice through the exploration of lived environments and livelihoods, representations of nature, power and privilege.² In a similar vein, Lassi has stressed that African novels (Francophone in his work) “use environmental questions to articulate the psychological, political, economic and social concerns that characterise the postcolonial realm.”³ The African continent has a very heavy imperial past, a past from which many contemporary social issues stem. It is therefore not entirely surprising that African authors who write on environmental justice issues are also closely affiliated with anticolonial writing.⁴ For postcolonial ecocritic Rob Nixon, Africa’s “most visible environmental martyr” is none other than Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa – a Nigerian poet, memoirist, essayist, novelist and television producer.⁵ Though Saro-Wiwa’s life work focused on environmental justice, he brought attention to the intersecting nature of ecology, human rights and coloniality by underscoring the devastating impacts of the neocolonial paradigm in supposedly independent Nigeria. Saro-Wiwa campaigned peacefully for years to mobilise his fellow Ogoni people against the destruction of their homeland and fishing waters in the Niger Delta. The environmental degradation he sought to bring attention to and ultimately prevent was caused by the activities of Royal Dutch Shell Oil

¹ Caminero-Santangelo and Myers, 'Introduction', p. 13.

² Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 7.

³ Étienne-Marie Lassi, 'Introduction: De l'engagement sociopolitique à la conscience écologique: les enjeux environnementaux dans la critique postcoloniale', in Étienne-Marie Lassi (ed.), *Aspects écocritiques de l'imaginaire africain* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2013), 1-17, p. 7.

⁴ Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 28.

⁵ Rob Nixon, 'Slow Violence: Literary and postcolonial studies have ignored the environmentalism that often only the poor can see', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57/40 (2011a), p. 4.

Corporation and facilitated by a complicit Nigerian State. In 1995, Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP¹ leaders were executed by the Nigerian military under Sani Abacha's dictatorship and in collaboration with the multinational oil company.²

Both the work and life of Saro-Wiwa demonstrate the close relationship between ecological degradation and social disempowerment in African contexts. They bring attention to the fact that there is “a long history of environmental degradation in Africa by imperial capital operating with impunity”³ while underscoring the role that continued foreign interest and investment in the continent's great natural wealth currently plays in undermining the establishment of genuine sovereignty in notionally independent states. Benefitting almost exclusively the African political elite and the large corporations and foreign governments it collaborates with, the continent's celebrated natural wealth conceals a very dark neocolonial underbelly. National decision-making in African states, often weak as arbitrarily created through imperial conquest and division, is rendered vulnerable to interference while the economic investment of Western governments not only enables them to “wield political influence” over local governments but also to foster the growth of capitalism from which they directly benefit.⁴ Many postcolonial theorists and writers have drawn attention to this predatory paradigm. Kwame Nkrumah, anticolonial revolutionary, fervent Pan-Africanist and first president of Ghana, was one

¹ Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples, the movement founded by Saro-Wiwa in 1990.

² In June 2009, Shell Oil agreed to pay more than 15 million U.S. dollars to a group of Nigerian plaintiffs composed of family members of the victims including Saro-Wiwa's son. Four of the widows of the so-called 'Ogoni Nine', Esther Kiobel, Victoria Bera, Blessing Eawo and Charity Levula, are still seeking justice for their husbands. In 2017, they filed a civil writ in a Dutch court against Shell Oil for complicity in their husbands' executions. See Amnesty International's coverage of the case: 'Nigeria: Shell complicit in the arbitrary executions of Ogoni Nine as writ served in Dutch court'.

³ Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 1.

⁴ Jack Woddis, *An introduction to neo-colonialism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), p. 86.

of the first to warn against the rise of neocolonial practices in independent Africa. In the words of Nkrumah himself, colonisation did not perish following independence for it remained in place merely achieving “a new guise”.¹ Nkrumah singularly predicted the influence that foreign economic investment would have on the political affairs of newly independent nation states and, consequently, upon the interests of Sub-Saharan populations. In a similar vein, Mbembe has qualified decolonisation in Sub-Saharan Africa as a “*non-event*”² for it simply “opened the way to neocolonialism”.³

The plundering of natural resources against which Saro-Wiwa and others have raised their pens constitutes a quintessential example of what Nixon has dubbed ‘slow violence’. Slow violence refers to violence “that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not typically viewed as violence at all”.⁴ In our tendency to consider violence as an inherently spectacular, explosive phenomenon, we fail to recognise the forms of slow violence that play out incrementally in proximity to the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations located for the most part in the Global South. Casualties of slow violence, both human and environmental, are more likely to go unnoticed and uncounted.⁵ Sub-Saharan Africa is the perfect location for slow violence implemented and facilitated through the persistence of an exploitative (neo)colonial paradigm to take root. It is a region chronically underrepresented in global media, an entire geographical zone that projects, at least in prevailing Western imaginaries,

¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism. The last stage of imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons 1965), p. 31.

² Italics in the original.

³ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 58.

⁴ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011b), p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the image of a land fraught with “irredeemable chaos and violence”.¹ The marginalisation of Sub-Saharan Africa on many fronts means that bringing attention to slow violence as a particularly insidious form of violence can be problematical. That said, Nixon has argued that literature can play an important role in rendering the phenomenon “accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses”.² I am of the opinion that Miano and Diome do just this in their novels.³

2.2.3 NEOCOLONIAL SLOW VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY DISINTEGRATION IN MBOASU AND SENEGAL

Slow violence in the form of ravenous exploitation of natural resources is latently present across *Les aubes*. It even features in the chapter names. The term “Latérite” is highly symbolic in the context of extractive industries as it refers to a specific type of soil found in tropical climates, a distinctly red-coloured soil that is rich in minerals (namely iron and aluminium). The laterite soil of Mboasu is a reminder in Miano’s novel of Sub-Saharan Africa’s great natural resources, the same ones that find themselves at the heart of the civil war raging throughout the region. There are numerous references among the *Forces du changement*’s leadership regarding the necessity to secure key national assets throughout Mboasu’s oil- and diamond-rich territory in order to finance the war effort and, more pressingly, garner influence and leverage vis-à-vis the Western nations who control the resources and, therefore, much of the economy. Such is the alleged strategy behind the child soldiers’ sacking of the diamond mine

¹ Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 1.

² Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 15.

³ For an ecocritical reading of Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, see Yasmina Fawaz’s recently submitted PhD thesis: Yasmina Fawaz, ‘Re-Imagining Environmental Waste: An Ecocritical Reading of Contemporary African Women Writers’, (Faculty of the Graduate School: University of Texas, 2018).

under the command of Eso. Epa agrees in principle with the objectives Isilo has set for *Les forces du changement* for he too would like to see concrete action taken to restore Africa's and Africans' "dignity" including the instauration of a continental currency and the processing of natural resources locally. He also laments the plight of past figures of African unity and resistance, such as Nkrumah, Lumumba, Sankara and Mandela, hoping that others will come to "finish their work".¹ Even before coming into contact with the rebel group, he attempts to stir a reaction among his fellow Eku clan members in regard to their "resource curse" – the paradox of their ensuing poverty in a region boasting considerable natural wealth.² Epa's frustration, aggravated by the Eku villagers' collective disinterest and lack of ambition to see their own livelihood improved, is palpable in *L'intérieur*:

Et il insistait. C'était pourtant simple : au Sud, en dehors de la grand-ville qu'avaient édifiée les colons et qui avait été un comptoir prospère, il n'y avait rien. Dans les mines, par un accord non écrit mais très ferme entre les Occidentaux qui les exploitaient et le militaire gradé qui les possédait sans titres mais avec certitude, on n'employait que des types issus de sa région natale. Alors ces richesses leur appartenaient, et ils n'en voyaient pas la couleur.³

[And he went on. It was simple: in the South, apart from the city which the colonizers had built and which had been a prosperous trading post, there was nothing. In the mines, by an unwritten but incontrovertible agreement between the Westerners who operated them and the commissioned officer who owned them without title but with conviction, only guys from the region where he was born were employed. So, these riches belonged to them and they were not seeing the proceeds.]⁴

It is important to stress here that, in insisting that local people have control over and benefit from their environment's natural resources, Epa is not motivated by the idea of possessing great individual wealth, as Isilo's

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 64.

² The term "resource curse" is increasingly evoked to describe the specific case of Sub-Saharan Africa where abundant natural resources have not translated to better living conditions for the vast majority of citizens who live in overwhelmingly disadvantaged conditions. Mark Langan, *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018), p. 47.

³ Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 57.

⁴ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 35.

brothers are ultimately shown to be and is, conversely, motivated by aspirations for greater community cohesion and dignity made possible through employment and prosperity. Epa desperately wishes for Eku's male population to be able to remain on their ancestral lands with their families, for children to grow up in the presence of their fathers. This is, of course, a privilege that he and his brother, along with the other Eku children, were never accorded.¹ Epa is aware that the Eku men's periodic sojourns in the company of their wives and children represent "their only source of joy", and that the option of remaining with their families would be available to them if they were able to find employment in the diamond mines of Mboasu's South.² Excluded from this source of revenue, an environmental enclave, the Eku men are instead forced to set off far afield in their desperate search for menial labour in exchange for which they are paid "a pittance".³ The consequences of this exclusion are not merely economic but also psychological. Most of Mboasu's population have come to "doubt the value of their existence" and are not even convinced that they are "fully alive" or if their lives have any significance.⁴ Such a degraded sense of their own inherent value as human beings is reflected in their troubling passivity in relation to the preservation of human life during the rebel invasion of Eku.

As seen in part 1, neocolonial interference into African spaces is a key theme of Diome's first novel. In *Le Ventre*, the author castigates the capitalist paradigm at play in postcolonial Senegal, in particular the consequences of Western tourism (including sexual) encouraged by a corrupt and rapacious local African elite, and how this negatively impacts upon the livelihood of

¹ The third-person narrator in *L'intérieur* notes that priority employment in the mines for local Eku men was one of the demands formulated by Io's family as the traditional holders of authority and that this was one of the reasons that the colonial order ousted the family from power replacing it with more malleable subjects. Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit.*, p. 77.

² Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 92.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 210.

local populations. That said, there is very much an accent in *Le Ventre* on the idea that much of the poverty of Niodior could be substantially alleviated if the island's residents were to abandon certain traditional practices (for instance polygamy engendering large families). Poverty is, in this sense, shown to be at least partially generated from inside the community. In *Celles*, however, the narrative accent is very much placed upon the destructive economic and environmental practices of an outside force – that of predatory Western enterprise (and the capitalist model more generally) – and how these directly contribute to social disintegration as a direct catalyst for African male migration. *Celles* opens with a prologue alluding to the female figures, their daily challenges and successes that form the narrative backbone of the text, stressing the central role that these women occupy at the heart of their communities as well as the role they are compelled to perform when their men migrate abroad in the quest for greener pastures:

Arame, Bougna, Coumba, Daba, des mères et des épouses de clandestins, comme tant d'autres ; toutes différentes, mais toutes prises dans le même filet de l'existence, à se débattre de toutes leurs forces. Chacune était la sentinelle vouée et dévouée à la sauvegarde des siens, le pilier qui tenait la demeure sur les galeries creusées par l'absence. Outre leur rôle d'épouse et de mère, elles devaient souvent combler les défaillances du père de famille, remplacer le fils prodigue et incarner toute l'espérance des leurs. De toute façon, c'est toujours à la maman que les enfants réclament à manger. Féminisme ou pas, nourrir reste une astreinte imposée aux femmes. Ainsi, dans certains endroits du globe, là où les hommes ont renoncé à la chasse et gagnent à peine leur vie, la gamelle des petits est souvent remplie de sacrifices maternels.¹

[Arame, Bougna, Coumba, Daba, mothers and wives of clandestine migrants, like so many others; all different, but all caught up in the same net of existence, struggling with all their strength. Each was the sentinel destined and devoted to the safeguard of her own, the pillar holding up the home on galleries hollowed by absence. In addition to their roles of wife and mother, they had to compensate the shortcomings of the father of the family, replace the prodigal son and embody all of the hope of their own. Either way, it is always from the mother that children ask for food. Feminism or not, feeding remains a constraint imposed on women. As such, in certain parts of the globe, where men have given up on hunting and scarcely make a living, children's bowls are often filled with maternal sacrifices.]

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 11.

If the abject poverty of Niodior Island (and the difficulties its women experience trying to feed their children) is brought to the fore in the above passage and others, the fact that this was not always the case is similarly underscored by the author early in the narrative. By embedding the story of Abdou – the island’s grocer – in the second chapter, Diome is able to elucidate for the reader the exact circumstances that led to the women’s dire situation. Before establishing his shop, Abdou was a successful fisherman at a time when “the sea was full of fish, artisanal fishing was flourishing and those who confronted the waves, even if they were not rich, knew nothing of poverty”.¹ Life along the “generous” Atlantic Ocean’s coastline was “a life of labor, a modest life” yet a “happy life” because “mothers tucked away their satisfied little ones without having to worry about the next day”.² Yet the island’s serenity was not to last. It was “shattered” following the arrival of Western-owned and operated trawlers who “pillage the local fishing resources [...] all along the Senegalese coastline”.³ The fishermen’s wives must now go without the sea bream and swordfish they so prize as these are “raked in by European boats for more affluent taste buds”.⁴ If Abdou was perspicacious enough to foresee the impending ruin of the local fishing industry – he sold his fleet, settled his debts and invested in the grocery store – the same cannot be said for the other men of the island whose traditional means of providing for their families were decimated through the incursion of Western commercialism into African spaces. Some of these men (including Lamine and Issa) now turn again to the sea, less in search for its natural bounty than in a desperate quest to navigate across it.

¹ Ibid., p. 23.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Miano and Diome both draw attention in their novels to the devastating effects of neocolonial interference and, singularly, to the damaging exploitative practices of Western enterprise in their fictional Sub-Saharan environments. In doing so, the two authors take a political stance through fiction on contemporary African affairs, but they also, whether consciously or not, engage in a more theoretical discussion concerning the underlying ideals that drive the capitalist machine.¹ Whereas I demonstrated that aspects of this discourse are endorsed by certain characters in *Le Ventre* and *L'intérieur*, there is in *Les aubes* and *Celles* evidence of a subtle turning away from the Western world and its characteristically lauded modernity as a pivotal reference point for African societies. If ecological slow violence justified by calls for essential modernisation and driven through predatory capitalist practices results in social disintegration, specifically through the separation of young men from their communities of origin, Miano and Diome seem to suggest in *Les aubes* and *Celles* that this is not the only pathway available. For instance, at the end of *Celles*, Lamine returns to Senegal from Europe with the necessary funds to improve the living standards of his family. He is thus assisted in Africa by European capital, by the opportunities made available to him in the West much like Madické in *Le Ventre* aided by his sister Salie's capacity to make money in Europe. Yet Diome also presents the local accomplishments of Ansou, Lamine's double character in many ways as his half-brother, the former lover of Daba and father of her child, offering an alternative vision of what it means to lead a successful and fulfilling life.

Ansou's character effectively demonstrates that it is possible to survive, indeed thrive, in Senegal and by extension in Africa, and that,

¹ I note that not all of the large corporations involved in Sub-Saharan Africa are European. American, Canadian, Australian and increasingly Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern companies are all active investors.

consequently, there is no ‘need’ to go to Europe. Unlike Lamine, whose French education “opened his eyes” to a ‘modern’ world he found inherently more appealing than the traditional one into which he was born, Ansou embraces the traditions of his forbearers, perfecting his craft to become a “seasoned mariner” and invests in his local space in which he sees inherent value.¹ He benefits from opportunities never made available to Lamine. Ansou’s father, himself a fisherman, entrusts his son with the captaincy of his pirogue upon retirement. Yet the resources left to Ansou are by no means exorbitant and the narrative accent instead placed on his very industrious nature as a “dogged” and “astute” young man who multiplies income streams with his sole pirogue.² With his crew, Ansou gathers salt which he transports and sells in neighbouring Gambia, returning to Niodior with essential provisions for his community purchased at a cheaper price than in Senegal. This is indeed a courageous undertaking for, as stressed by the omniscient third-person narrator, braving the Atlantic Ocean with such heavy loads is a “real test”.³ Yet the benefits outweigh the risks and protect the young sailor from an even greater horror that many on the island are all too familiar with – that of poverty. Ansou’s existence in Niodior is arguably more satisfying than that of Lamine whose initially celebrated European immigration concretely translates as a miserable and perilous life as underscored by Diome in the following passage:

En réalité, le retard et le dénuement ne sont pas du côté que l’on pense. Pendant que les expatriés souffraient du froid, logeaient dans des squats miteux, couraient les soupes populaires, risquaient leur vie pour des emplois de forçats, dribblaient les pandores lancés à leur trousses, hantaient les zones de rétention, s’adonnaient aux amours de circonstances, larmoyaient devant les avocats commis d’office qui leur obtenaient des délivrances momentanées, les jeunes restés au village, portés par une liberté qu’on ne sent que chez soi, travaillaient vaillamment et contribuaient à l’essor du pays.⁴

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 15, 213.

² *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

[In reality, underdevelopment and destitution are not where we think they are. While expatriates were suffering from the cold, sheltering in shabby squats, frequenting soup kitchens, risking their lives for slave labour, dribbling the cops hot in their heels, haunting retention zones, engaging in romances of convenience, weeping in front of state appointed lawyers who obtain temporary deliverance for them, the young people who remained in the village, driven by a sense of freedom only felt at home, were working valiantly and contributing to the country's growth.]

While Lamine's clandestine migration to Europe begins to lose its lustre, most definitively for himself but also for his family left to battle the hardships of poverty at home, Ansou walks through Niodior "with pride" in the knowledge that his family is cared for and well fed.¹ Furthermore, as an artisanal fisherman, Ansou importantly makes a life and a living for himself by respectfully and sustainably drawing on the natural resources of his local environment, unlike the Western trawlers who engage in large-scale and indiscriminate plundering of natural resources to which they do not, theoretically, have claim. If in *Le Ventre*, Diome's interwoven stories of African experiences in and in relation to France sketch the contours of a pervasive neocolonial paradigm that "generates a culture of dependency and perpetuates the belief that African subjects cannot survive without the assistance of the former colonizer",² an Afropean paradigm, it is in *Celles* that a vision of success completely detached from the former imperial power and its singular version of modernity finally materialises.

¹ Ibid., p. 213.

² Diémé, 'Discourse on Immigration: Fatou Diome's Commitment to Human Rights in *The Belly of the Atlantic*', p. 207.

2.3 Historical Afro-diasporic consciousness: Connecting the histories of slavery and (neo)colonisation

In both *Les aubes* and *Celles*, the neocolonial enactment of slow violence with regard to Sub-Saharan Africa's natural resources is framed against historical and contemporary plundering of its human resources. The region, once a "bottomless well from which others drew their growth", is still being exploited from the outside, an exploitation made possible, as was the case in the past, by "a local hand ready to participate in the crime".¹ Such references in Miano's text evidently allude to the Transatlantic slave trade, an institutional system based on labor exchange and profits, fundamentally underpinned and driven by modern capitalist principles,² what Gilroy has referred to as "capitalism with its clothes off".³ The triangular trade, "a veritable haemorrhage",⁴ lasted over hundreds of years from the end of the 15th century up until the end of the 19th century and resulted in the capture, deportation, forced enslavement and death, in the New World colonies, Europe and Africa, of millions of West and Central African men, women and children.⁵ It would be nigh on impossible to skeletonise the consequences of such a devastating and large-scale operation described by French historian Jean-Michel Deveau as "the most gigantic tragedy of all human history in proportion and duration".⁶ The summary of another historian, David Northrup, efficiently outlines the short- and long-term effects engendered by

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 209.

² James Fenelon, 'Genocide, Race, Capitalism: Synopsis of Formation within the Modern World-system', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 22/1 (2016), 23-30, p. 24.

³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 15.

⁴ Robert, *L'Afrique au secours de l'Occident*, p. 101.

⁵ It should be mentioned that the Transatlantic slave trade was not the only industry based on the commerce of human beings from Africa. There was also the East African slave trade, sometimes called the Arab slave trade, the Oriental slave trade or the Indian Ocean slave trade, which both lasted even longer than the Transatlantic Slave Trade and internal commercial trafficking within the African continent. Falola, *African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization*, p. 33.

⁶ Quoted in Christine Chivallon, 'L'émergence récente de la mémoire de l'esclavage dans l'espace public: enjeux et significations', *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, 89 (2002), 41-60, p. 2.

Atlantic slavery both locally in the American, African and European continents and transnationally between them:

First, it brought many millions of Africans to the Americas (four times the number of European immigrants who settled there down to about 1830), leaving a permanent cultural and genetic imprint on many parts of the New World. Second, the creation of slave labor systems in the New World was associated with the first phase of European expansion and the rise of capitalism. Third, the end of the slave trade was the subject of a massive abolitionist campaign that scholars widely have seen as one of the great turning points in Western moral consciousness. Finally, the Atlantic slave trade has been seen not only as affecting Africa during the four centuries of its existence but also as leading to the later European takeover of the continent and causing its present-day underdevelopment.¹

Suffice it to say that Atlantic slavery led to catastrophic cultural, political and social repercussions for the captured as well as those left behind. One of the more substantial repercussions identified by Northrup was the African continent's depletion of resources, both human and other, which effectively rendered its regions vulnerable to later European domination.

2.3.1 THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, CONTEMPORARY HUMAN EXPLOITATION AND THE SPECTRE OF SLAVERY IN *CELLES QUI ATTENDENT*

Though the slave trade and its consequences feature more prominently in Miano's work than in that of Diome, important traces that testify to its ever-present legacy are still present in *Celles* where they are frequently evoked in relation to the natural world and specifically the ocean, a "favorite Diome trope".² The Atlantic Ocean is symbolic in terms of the evident connection it has with Atlantic slavery,³ a clear metaphor and cause (as was the case for Moussa and Sankèle's baby son in *Le Ventre*) of death. It also plays an important role in Africa's contemporary migration crisis provoked

¹ David Northrup, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p. xiii.

² Haskell, 'Plotting *MigrITUDE*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 143.

³ Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media*, p. 83.

in part by neocolonial woes and exacerbated by a well-entrenched and collectively held belief in the ‘need’ to escape. Diome recalls as such that “[m]igration from third world to first in the post-colonial, and global age [...] is often a deadly activity”¹ for young Senegalese migrants just as it was during slave sourcing in the same region centuries ago. Neither of these phenomena, that of past slavery and contemporary clandestine migration, can be dissociated from a history of racially-based dehumanisation across the Black Atlantic region. In Diome’s novel, it is the Atlantic Ocean that effectively connects these histories into a fluid and continuous story of human exploitation. As French political scientist and historian Françoise Vergès astutely points out, slavery, more than any other event, best echoes our contemporary era “of massive migration, massive fabrication of disposable people [and] massive and growing inequalities” stressing that “the return of [this] economy of predation [...] rests again on the belief in infinite resources and the desire of the powerful to impose their rule.”²

In *Celles*, the connection between slavery, the global economic system and its dependence on expendable human beings is rendered salient through the omniscient narrator’s rendition of Lamine’s experiences working in a port in Dakar prior to leaving for Europe.³ Employed as a “modern-day galley slave”, he is exposed here to the “extreme lengths men will go to for a salary”.⁴ In exchange for a pitiful wage – barely enough to be survive on – Lamine and his friend from Niodior work from dawn to dusk unloading merchandise in the holds of immense cargo ships, a symbolic image in itself

¹ Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 139.

² Françoise Vergès, 'Wandering Souls and Returning Ghosts: Writing the History of the Dispossessed', *Yale French Studies*, Nœuds de mémoire: Multidirectional Memory in Postwar French and Francophone Culture/118/119 (2010), 136-54, p. 144.

³ See on this subject: Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (California: University of California Press, 2012).

⁴ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 66.

vis-à-vis Transatlantic slavery. They do this until his friend collapses and dies asphyxiated by ammonia. Those who had hired Lamine and his friend to remove the stock from the ships had known about the presence of the highly toxic substance. Yet they had not thought it necessary to provide basic precautionary material, for masks and gloves were thought to be worth more than the young men's "pauper lives".¹ Those responsible for the 'accident' that unnecessarily cost a 25-year old his life were never prosecuted and no indemnities were paid to his grieving family. The capitalist model assigns a monetary value to these young African men that it considers mere "livestock to be exploited for the benefit of others".²

Young men are not the sole victims in African spaces of the exploitative and predatory practices of global capitalism. While waiting for their sons to send money from Europe, Bougna and Arame rush to sign up to a microcredit project on the island organised and coordinated by French banking giant Crédit Mutuel. Not understanding the finer points of monthly payments and interest rates, they both spiral into debt. This episode of the novel, which may appear trivial, is in fact revealing of several levels of criticism of behalf of the author. Firstly, it points to the huge societal deficiency that a lack of education for women engenders, for Arame and Bougna do not understand the jargon surrounding the microcredit conditions and sign their contracts with a simple cross. This is due to the fact that both women are illiterate.³ Secondly, the microcredit episode also highlights the economic exploitation of poorer countries of the Global South by the wealthier ones of the Global North. For, although it could be argued that in the current capitalist era large financial bodies exploit the wealthy and the

¹ Ibid., p. 67.

² Ibid., p. 210.

³ This is not a new point of criticism in Diome's work for the author has spoken at length, both directly and through her previous novels, of the dire necessity to educate girls in Africa for the benefit of the whole continent.

non-wealthy in an equally ravenous manner without taking into consideration the different financial and social circumstances of the developed- and developing-world citizen, Diome opted to identify the French group behind Arame and Bougna's microcredit misadventure. I would suggest that such a choice was not made innocuously and that in designating a financial organisation from France, Senegal's former colonial ruler, Diome again engages in what Thomas dubs "transhistorical contextualization".¹ As the narrator notes, "humanitarian capitalism does not exist",² and, whether consciously intended or not, Arame and Bougna's bleeding at the hands of a Western bank is merely another indicator of "the ongoing problem of exploitation in competitive labor markets".³ This episode, alongside others, suggest that neither capitalism nor globalisation work in a positive manner for vulnerable developing-world citizens who continue to be exploited, as was the case in a not too distant Black Atlantic past, by the world's dominant forces.⁴

In *Celles*, the spectre of slavery still haunts contemporary African migration and particularly so during the Niodioirois women's long and desperate wait for news from their sons who have embarked on the risky transoceanic journey to Europe. Prior to Lamine's and Issa's confirmed arrival in Europe, terror fills the hearts of clandestine migrant mothers in Senegal when the national radio announces that a pirogue of 40 skulls has run ashore on the Brazilian coastline. From one side of the Black Atlantic to the other, the slave ship that inspired Gilroy's chronotope continues to sail.

¹ See page 85, note 3.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 182.

³ Thomas, 'African Youth in the Global Economy: Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', p. 252-53.

⁴ Audrey Small, 'Sociétés d'accueil et de *teranga*. Emigration and immigration in three texts by Fatou Diome', *Francosphères*, 8/1 (2019), 41-55, p. 53. For a discussion of Diome's portrayal of cosmopolitanism and globalisation in *Le Ventre*, see the following article: Georgy Khabarovskiy, 'Le Cosmopolitisme à l'épreuve de la mondialisation dans *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 30/2 (2015), 159-70.

Aboard it in *Celles* are more faceless “dead without sepulchre”, unknown victims that the mothers cannot help but imagine adorned “with their son’s faces”.¹ Luckily for Bougna and Arame, Issa and Lamine are not among those having perished in the Atlantic and they eventually return to Niodior’s shores from Europe. Gilroy’s ship thus charts both “complex maneuvers of lamentable loss” and, for the lucky few, “recovery”² for the Atlantic is an ambiguous site in *Celles* – both the “cemetery for the dreams of many young men who attempt the adventure to the West”, “a nurturing mother for fisherman” and “a place of encounter” between the African, European and American continents.³ According to Lachman, Diome’s rendition of the clandestine migrants’ tragic New World fate places historical Atlantic slavery and the contemporary exploitation of African peoples in conversation thereby allowing the author to subtly pierce through the Afropean binary.⁴ The Atlantic Ocean, this “liquid bridge linking Africa and Europe”, an Afropean bridge of which Diandue speaks in relation to *Le Ventre*, has been expanded in *Celles* to include a substantial deviation into Black Atlantic territory.⁵

2.3.2 WANDERING SOULS AND WATERY GRAVES IN *LES AUBES ÉCARLATES*

The explicit connection between historical slavery and contemporary clandestine migration fueled by neocolonial exploitation is similarly underscored by Epupa in *Les aubes*. Miano’s most insightful character recognises that “[e]very makeshift boat throwing itself into the ocean to reach Europe resays [slavery] in an inane manner as the drowned of the

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 152.

² Paul Griffith, *Art and Ritual in the Black Diaspora. Archetypes of Transition* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), p. 240.

³ Sawadogo, 'Cross-Atlantic Mobility: The Experience of Two Shores in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*', p. 167.

⁴ Lachman, 'The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome', p. 44.

⁵ Diandué, '*Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, métaphore aquatique d'un mirage: idéal brisé de l'Ailleurs?', p. 2.

present go too to populate that nation of forgotten people”.¹ *Les aubes* is in fact dedicated “to the memory of those who breathe on these pages and in the hope of fraternities [with them]”,² the exhaling souls who inhabit this forgotten maritime nation and whose sorrowful voices and melancholic complaints open the novel. The victims of historical slavery have seen their ranks inflated by those having perished in the numerous conflicts that have marred the continent since the end of slave sourcing in West and Central Africa. The souls stress this point themselves when they state in chorus at the beginning of the novel during the first of the *Exhalaisons* passages:

*Nous ne comptons plus, ni les années, ni le nombre de ceux qui vinrent nous rejoindre. Ils sont légion de suppliciés en vain, de sacrifiés à la folie. Ils sont cohortes d'âmes en peine qui errent, suppliant que la chaîne de l'oubli leur soit enfin ôtée. Ils se joignent à nous pour refuser la paix aux sans-mémoires. À leur cri comme au nôtre, l'oreille des vivants reste sourde. Ainsi, les défunts privés de sépulture hantent la parturiente. Invisibles, imperceptibles, ils élisent domicile près du malade qu'une fièvre terrasse. Pénètrent le corps. Ravagent la vie.*³

[We no longer count, neither the years nor the number of those who have come to join us. The tortured in vain, the sacrificed to madness are many. They are cohorts of souls in pain who wander, beg for the chain of forgetfulness to finally be removed from them. They join themselves to us to refuse peace to those without memory. Their calls like our own have fallen on the living's deaf ears. Thus, the dead deprived of a sepulchre haunt the parturient. Invisible, imperceptible, they take up residence near the ailing struck by a fever, penetrate the body. Ravage life.]

Regardless of the historical period that saw them sacrificed (precolonial, colonial or postcolonial), the wandering souls of *Les aubes* all demand the same thing. As indicated in the above passage, they are weighed down by a heavy chain that is not so much the physical chain of slavery, though this reference is certainly pertinent, but the figurative chain of non-remembrance which proves just as burdensome, if not more so, to their limbo existence between worlds. Intervening directly in the narrative, they refuse

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 267.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11, 13. Italics in the original.

categorically that any peace be accorded to those without memory and reclaim the reinstatement of their existence in collective continental consciousness. Their message is clear; if recognition is not made, they will continue to wreak havoc on the African continent for their non-remembrance is intimately linked to its identitarian disorientation consisting of the neglect of a part of itself, its dead, and resulting in the repetition of violent tragedies such as those currently plaguing Mboasu.

In the Western literary canon, the presence of the dead among the living (and especially deceased figures that actively intervene in the lives of other characters) is generally associated with gothic or fantastic literature. These are literary genres where prosopopeia, a rhetorical device that consists of speaking through another person or object that should not, *a priori*, be able to intervene in the narrative, is common. Lending voice to animals, inanimate or abstract objects, imagined or absent people serves to dramatise the actions being described textually and to provide another perspective on them. In Miano's novel, prosopopeia allows for a markedly Sub-Saharan worldview to infiltrate the narrative. This is a worldview in which, as underscored by Nigeran author Ben Okri, "the dead are not really dead" and "the ancestors are still part of the living community".¹

The contemporary tragedies through which the souls' collective fury manifests take numerous forms spanning from tyrannical dictatorships, to profiteering prophets, to the desperate plight of clandestine migrants who "throw themselves into the water, thinking they will find an opportune shoreline"² like Diome's young Senegalese men in *Celles*. Although it is Epa who is solicited by his brother on behalf of the collective dead, he is not the

¹ Jean Ross, *Contemporary Authors Interview (with Ben Okri)*, ed. Donna Olendorf (Contemporary Authors, (Detroit: Gale Research, 1993) 337-41, p. 337-38.

² Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 39.

only living character in Miano's novel to feel the souls' omnipresence. The latter are in direct contact with the medium Epupa and leave sensory clues as to their limbo existence that other characters are able to detect. For instance, when the reader is re-introduced to Ayané in the first of the *Latérite* chapters at the novel's opening, she has just awoken from sleep recalling the sound of chains lugged over a wooden floor and truncated calls for "San... San Ko...Ko...".¹ Moreover, both Ayané and Dr. Sontané detect a marine odour in the presence of Epupa. This is because the wandering souls, who attempt to communicate through Epupa, reside in waterways, "this territory of the in-between", where they wait "wide-eyed under the water" to be "given the way" to the afterlife.² The aquatic reference naturally alludes to the millions of African men, women and children who died "deprived of food, hanged, thrown overboard" during the Middle Passage and whose remains lie at the bottom of the Atlantic, this region "as vast as it is obscure".³ I will return to the symbolism with which Miano invests water and waterways at the end of this chapter for, if water played a central role in the death of countless Sub-Saharanans during the Transatlantic slave trade and continues to do so when one considers contemporary clandestine migration such as that depicted in Diome's *Celles*, water also constitutes a fundamental element in the reintegration of lost community members past and present into an Afro-diasporic consciousness that extends, by virtue of this dark past and notably its survival, well beyond the physical borders of the continent.⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 17.

² Ibid., p. 39, 189, 266.

³ Ibid., p. 39, 123.

⁴ I note that the themes of water and memory (namely that related to the Transatlantic slave trade) reoccur across Miano's corpus. They feature prominently in the last of her short stories ("Camarões") in *Soulfood équatoriale*. For an analysis, see: Tess Do and Charlotte Mackay, "Vision afropéenne sur la cuisine camerounaise dans *Soulfood équatoriale* de Léonora Miano: genre, mémoire et construction nationale", in Tégua Bogni (ed.), *La cuisine camerounaise. Mots, pratiques et patrimoine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018), 95-130.

Through my analysis of the figure of the child soldier and neocolonial slow violence in *Les aubes* and *Celles*, I have shown that Miano and Diome both demonstrate and build upon Gilroy's seminal Black Atlantic model by bringing into question Eurocentric discourses of the modern axed on notions of linear time and developmental progress and closely affiliated with capitalist practices in Sub-Saharan African contexts. In doing so, the authors reinstate Africa as a major figure of the counter-modern in the Black Atlantic formation. Whereas Gilroy was principally concerned with Transatlantic slavery as the key antecedent to Black Atlantic counter-modernity thereby neglecting, according to some, the role of prolonged colonial encounters across the region, this section has demonstrated that Miano and Diome bring into dialogue the histories of slavery and (post)colonisation to denounce literarily the continual exploitation of African peoples. This part of the thesis is shorter than the others as I will return to the issue of contemporary human exploitation and the memory of slavery in the last chapter. In the next section, I will demonstrate how Miano and Diome develop a specifically female-driven Afro-diasporic consciousness highlighting the key role that African women (not necessarily migrant) play in initiating transnational dialogue within Black Atlantic space theorised by Gilroy as emancipative for Black Atlantic men only.

2.4 Feminine Afro-diasporic consciousness: Reinstating African women in Black Atlantic dialogue

2.4.1 FEMINISM, BLACK FEMINISM AND WOMANISM

In its simplest definitional form, ‘feminism’ refers to “political activism by women on behalf of women”.¹ It has generally been associated with internationalism, with a movement aiming to emancipate all females worldwide “under the guise of global feminism”.² Yet this model of transnational feminism has come under intense scrutiny from non-Western feminists of colour and postcolonial feminists who see in the application of a supposedly international framework attempts to universalise and reduce the diverse and context-specific experiences of women the world over within a concept theorised by and for the hegemonic category of white, heterosexual, middle-class women from namely the United States of America and Europe.³ Novel models of feminist thought have since been devised which are said to accommodate the tangible differences across feminist expressions and ambitions in the Global North and Global South.⁴

¹ Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole McCann, 'Introduction: Feminist Theory, Local and Global Perspectives', in Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole McCann (ed.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016b), 1-7, p. 1.

² Kathy Davis and Mary Evans, 'Introduction – Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Travelling Theory', in Kathy Davis and Mary Evans (ed.), *Transatlantic Conversations: Feminism as Travelling Theory* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 8-9.

³ Ibid.; Kim and McCann, 'Introduction: Theorizing Feminist Times and Spaces' at 12.; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles', (Francis and Taylor), p. 537.

⁴ As noted in the introduction to Seung-Kyung Kim's and Carole McCann's jointly edited volume, the terminology of Global North and Global South is not perfect for it “does not adequately convey the political configuration of the world”. I, like them, “use it as the best approximation available”. Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole McCann, 'Introduction: Theorizing Feminist Times and Spaces', (Taylor and Francis), p. 14.

These models include Third World feminism, often evoked interchangeably in relation to other feminist strains including multiracial and transnational feminism,¹ which formed alongside the various nationalist movements having marked the histories of formerly colonised regions of the world.² Though “unstable” and at times confusing, all these terms ultimately converge to “denote a political commitment, strategic unity, a community of belonging, from which oppositional consciousness and significant theoretical insights can emerge”.³ In more concrete terms, Third World feminism and its variants account for the differences in women’s preoccupations across geographies, ethnicities, races and cultures.

Distinctions between different strains of feminist discourse are not made solely in cases of transnational appropriation and attribution and are equally necessary when considering female populations of a same region, indeed nation-state, marked by different political, socio-economic and cultural specificities.⁴ This is notably the case for Black feminism which developed among the largely disadvantaged African American community of the United States. As Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Evelyn Simien duly observe in their 2006 piece, “Black antisexist thought is complex and multifaceted [having] overtime [...] evolved and taken varied forms.”⁵ For the Combahee River Collective, Black feminism emerged from “the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual

¹ Ibid., p. 24, 25.

² Geraldine Heng, "'A Great Way to Fly': Nationalism, the State, and the Varieties of Third-World Feminism', in M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (ed.), *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 30.

³ Kim and McCann, 'Introduction: Theorizing Feminist Times and Spaces', p. 25.

⁴ For a discussion on the Afro-feminist movement in contemporary France, see: Silyane Larcher, 'The End of Silence. On the Revival of Afrofeminism in Contemporary France', in Félix Germain and Silyane Larcher (ed.), *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 69-88.

⁵ Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Evelyn Simien, 'Revisiting "What's in a Name?" Exploring the Contours of Africana Womanist Thought', *Frontiers*, 27/1 (2006), 67-89, p. 84.

Black women's lives".¹ It aims to reposition Black women's experiences of oppression on multiple fronts of which two are key – in terms of gender and race – as Black women face challenges distinct from both those of both Black men and white women.² A certain “legacy of struggle” remains inherent to Black feminism equally tainted by an Afrocentric “consciousness” as forged in part out of non-gendered movements for Black nationalist emancipation in the United States.³ A resultant defining feature of Black feminism is its so-called “humanist vision”, its uniting against all forms of oppression and not simply against those rooted in gender.⁴ Accordingly, it has been advanced that men, including the notable examples of Du Bois and Douglas (who both feature as key figures in Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*), can also be considered Black (male) feminists.⁵

The humanist accent of Black feminism is reflected in African American writer Alice Walker's preference for the term “womanist” over “feminist” outlined in her anthology *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*.⁶ In a 2009 article, Cynthia Robinson refers to womanism as an expansive form of Black feminism while specifying that the former does diverge slightly from the latter in the sense that it is “more inclusive than Black feminism”.⁷ Social theorist Patricia Hill Collins asserts that the two terms are commonly used interchangeably to label the “black women's standpoint” while similarly noting the tendency for many black women to be wary of the term “feminist” highly associated with “whiteness”.⁸ In the much-quoted words of Walker, “womanist is to feminist as purple to

¹ Kim and McCann, 'Introduction: Theorizing Feminist Times and Spaces', p. 26.

² Patricia Hill Collins, 'Defining Black Feminist Thought', p. 384.

³ Ibid., p. 386, 89.

⁴ Ibid., p. 397, 98.

⁵ Ibid., p. 384.

⁶ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983).

⁷ Cynthia Robinson, 'The Evolution of Alice Walker', *Women's Studies*, 38 (2009), 293-311, p. 307.

⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, 'What's in a name? Womanism, Black Feminism and Beyond', *The Black Scholar*, 26/1 (1996), 9-17, p. 9-10, 13.

lavender”,¹ a woman “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” and “not a separatist”.² Through its accent on non-separatism and inclusiveness, womanism theoretically allows Black women and men to engage in partnership in relation to gender oppression, for Black men are equally in need of liberation. In this sense, womanism constitutes a more moderate and docile form of commitment to social justice compared to other feminisms including Black feminism and the classic Western model. Though it has historically appealed to women of African descent, Walker’s conceptualisation of womanism is, in theory, not limited to a specific group and “expands to all races and ethnicities”.³

Womanist theory has resonated in Sub-Saharan contexts where feminism is often equated, whether rightly or wrongly, with the “radical Western version”: one that “preaches the rejection of men and equality of the sexes at any price”,⁴ “a manhating ideology that rejects marriage and motherhood” and that is, as such, “inconsistent with traditional African values” that tend to valorise both.⁵ Womanism, of which I will consider two theoretical offshoots in relation to Miano’s and Diome’s novels – Africana womanism and ecowomanism –, will prove to be more compatible with my authors’ conceptions of gender relations and community cohesion in Sub-Saharan spaces as, while defending women and decrying their multiple oppressions, neither author appears to overtly and comprehensively endorse a classic feminist vision. Miano has stated that, contrary to what she had read regarding her own writing, she does not “propose feminist literature as such”

¹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, p. xii.

² Collins, 'Defining Black Feminist Thought', p. 398.

³ Robinson, 'The Evolution of Alice Walker', p. 307.

⁴ Rangira Béatrice Gallimore, 'Écriture féministe? Écriture féminine? Les écrivaines francophones de l'Afrique subsaharienne face au regard du lecteur/critique', *Études françaises*, 37/2 (2001), 79-98, p. 82.

⁵ Susan Arndt, *The Dynamics of African Feminism, Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002), p. 228.

and that this is not “what guides [her] representation of women”.¹ Diome’s antisexist stance is marked by even more subtle gradations. The author is, as evidenced through my discussion of *Le Ventre*, distinctly preoccupied by questions relating to discrimination and oppression on the basis of gender in addition to and in concert with many others pertaining to race and class that include those occurring at a continental level (such as the economic exploitation of developing nations by wealthy ones). Furthermore, references abound in her fiction to the works of Simone de Beauvoir (cited in *Le Ventre*, *Celles*, *Impossible de grandir* and *Les veilleurs de Sangomar*) suggesting that this French feminist has had a particularly significant influence on Diome’s literary aesthetic and broader worldview. Finally, critics of her work have not hesitated to label her literary trajectory “feminist”.² That said, Diome has demonstrated a certain opposition, however minimal, to the feminist label describing herself as a “moderate feminist”. This has perhaps more to do with the discrepancies surrounding the definition of feminism, for Diome’s vision, sensitive to the plight of both women and men, appears more humanist than feminist. She has stated: “I often say that I am a moderate feminist. [...] I do not want women to be mistreated but I do not want men to be mistreated either. [...] To be a feminist, for me, is more than anything to be supportive of the rights of humans.”³ For Haskell, *Celles* is the most “retro” of Diome’s texts in terms of its feminist stance.⁴ This is certainly a valid conclusion, for *Le Ventre* is characterised by a more explicit espousal of Western feminist discourse (detectable, for example, in both Salie’s and Ndétare’s characters). Yet rather

¹ Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, p. 31.

² Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 145.

³ Fatou Diome, "'J'écris pour apprendre à vivre". Entretien avec Fatou Diome', in Mbaye Diouf (ed.), *Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, (2009), 137-51, p. 142.

⁴ Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 145.

than being seen as outmoded or archaic on this front, I would suggest that in *Celles*, Diome is simply promoting a more nuanced vision of gender relations specific to distinct contextual and cultural factors and that, in doing so, she broadens the gamut of what forms gender oppression and, most importantly, resistance to it, can take. An Africana womanist reading of *Celles* will reveal a more Afro-diasporic perspective on women and gender relations in regard to those depicted in Diome's first novel.

In light of the intercultural and cross-racial breadth of Walker's womanism and in recognition of the need for a distinctly Afro-centered paradigm to cater for knowledge production in the intersecting fields of gender, literary and Black studies, scholar and author Clenora Hudson-Weems proposed a model of womanism – Africana womanism – specifically anchored in the experiences of women of African descent and privileging the concurrent existence of multiple oppressive factors relating to “race, class and gender”.¹ The term ‘africana’ in its most general application alludes to people of African origin living either within continental Africa or throughout the diaspora. Africana womanism, like Etoke's *Melancholia africana*, is therefore Pan-African in perspective transgressing borders to assemble in its theoretical lens the life experiences of Afrodescendant populations worldwide.² Though sharing points of commonality with African feminism,³

¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25/3 (2001), 137-45, p. 137.

² Clenora Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 149-62, p. 149.; Naomi Nkealah, '(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges', *Journal of Literary Studies*, 32/2 (2016), 61-74, p. 66.

³ African feminism is described in the following terms by Sierra Leonean African feminist theorist and critic Filomina Chioma Steady: “African feminism combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings. It can be defined as that ideology that encompasses freedom from oppression based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual, and class biases. It is more inclusive than other forms of feminist ideologies and is largely a product of polarizations and conflicts that represent some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering [...] It can be argued that this type of feminism has the potential of emphasizing the totality of human experience, portraying the strength and resilience of the human spirit and resounding with optimism for the total liberation of humanity. African feminism is, in short, humanistic feminism [...] intrinsically a moral and political statement for human survival and well-being”. Filomina Chioma Steady, 'African Feminism: A

Black feminism and Walker's womanism (namely in regard to their shared humanistic quality), Hudson-Weems stresses, as evidenced in the following extract drawn from her seminal text *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, that Africana womanism is not an exact equivalent of any of these aforementioned approaches:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism, and moreover, to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism.¹

Much conflation, confusion and controversy have been stirred in relation to the distinctions between the various currents of Black feminism and womanism to the point where bickering over what name should encompass Afrodescendant antisexist ideology may seem puerile and impede the pressing task of addressing the issues at hand and concretely improving Africana lives.² However, the act of naming must not, according to Hudson-Weems, be neglected.³ Indeed, naming is central to Africana womanism, itself grounded in African cosmology, in which the concept of *Nommo* or "the proper naming of a thing" is primordial for it is this act which brings it "into existence".⁴ *Nommo* (self-namer, self-definer) is one of 18 Africana womanist 'descriptors' proposed by Hudson-Weems which also include

Worldwide Perspective', in Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley, and Andrea Benton (ed.), *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1987), 3-24, p. 4-5.

¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming ourselves* (Troy: Bedford Publishers, 1993), p. 24.

² For a more in-depth discussion around the conflation and controversy surrounding Black feminism, womanism and Africana womanism, see: Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 'Revisiting "What's in a Name?" Exploring the Contours of Africana Womanist Thought'.

³ Pamela Yaa Asantewaa Reed, 'Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family', *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25/3 (2001), 168-76, p. 169.

⁴ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', 137-45, p. 138.

being in concert with male in struggle, whole, authentic, flexible, a role player, respected, recognised, spiritual, male compatible, respectful of elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering, nurturing and, in relation to female-female relationships, engaged in genuine Black sisterhood.¹ My discussion of Africana womanism in *Celles* will restrict itself to two of these descriptors – that of the nurturing mother engaged in genuine female sisterhood.² I will also consider intermittently throughout the chapter male-female compatibility.

Though the application of African American literary theory in the study of Francophone postcolonial African texts may intrigue some, this approach is aligned with current interdisciplinary calls for the two fields to be placed in direct dialogue. Such is the central objective behind John Gruesser's 2005 publication *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African-American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic* in which he argues that "certain concepts of postcolonial literary theory can be usefully applied to African American literary studies [...] and vice versa" and that such an approach ultimately serves "to enrich both fields".³ I note, furthermore, that many African feminists have taken up the womanist label, such as Nigerian literary critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. Such a framework would appear to be additionally warranted when one considers, as discussed in part 1 of the present work, that both Miano and Diome have made clear the significant role that their membership of the African diaspora has had upon the formation of their worldviews which they reflect, in turn, in their writing.

¹ Ibid., p. 137-38.

² I note Uchenna Bethrand Anih's recent article on *Celles* which does engage very briefly with womanist theory (namely in relation to the important place accorded in Sub-Saharan societies to motherhood) without, however, engaging in detailed literary analysis of the latter in this text. See: Uchenna Bethrand Anih, 'Les handicapés dans l'imaginaire de Fatou Diome: Une relecture de *Celles qui attendent*', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 21/1&2 (2018), 53-67.

³ Gruesser, *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, p. 2, 3.

Others may argue that while a paradigm catering for racial discrimination has evident application in the Afro-diasporic spaces of the Americas, it appears less pertinent, *a priori*, in continental Africa. Yet if the conception of racial relations in both Diome's and Miano's novels is widened to include those that play out on a continental scale through neocolonial intervention as a perpetuation of a colonial model built fundamentally on binaries (including racial), then the issue of race retains much of its relevance.

Previous studies on women's writing in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa have been criticised for not engaging with non-Western visions of gender relations. In her 2000 study on the works of key Sub-Saharan authors including Mariama Bâ, Aminata Sow Fall, Calixthe Beyala and Werewere Liking, seasoned scholar Nicki Hitchcott recognises that "any study of African women's writing which ignores the socio-cultural context of its production is not an activity which is ideologically acceptable" as it would not result in comprehensive readings of the texts.¹ While acknowledging the importance of a culturally-specific gender lens in the study of African texts, she, nevertheless, analyses the texts in her study almost exclusively through Western feminist frameworks.² I am determined in my analysis of Diome's and Miano's texts to avoid this oversight.

In regard to the Anglophone-Francophone divide, Anglophone theorists in both Africa and the diaspora have been much more dynamic in terms of conceptualising new forms of thinking and being in relation to gender and gender-based discrimination in Sub-Saharan settings than their Francophone counterparts replicating, in many respects, the general lag of postcolonial studies observed in some Francophone institutions.³ The most

¹ Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 6.

² Hitchcott does not discuss Walker's womanism until the last chapter of the book (p. 158).

³ With notable exceptions, for example, the work of French academic and author Jean-Marc Moura. See in particular: Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: PUF, 1999).

active gender theorists in Sub-Saharan Africa are nearly all Anglophone and, coincidentally, Nigerian.¹ The Abidjan-based and Cameroonian-born writer and performer Werewere Liking is perhaps the only Francophone African woman to have attempted to theorise through her ‘misovire’ concept her aspirations for gender relations in Sub-Saharan Africa.² I also note Beyala’s culture- and gender-based ‘féminitude’ discourse which, though promising, remains underdeveloped and specifically so for the purposes of this thesis.³ In sum, I maintain that womanist theories, and Africana womanism in particular, provide an appropriate model through which to track transnational feminine Afrodescendent consciousness in relation to gender relations and oppression intertwined with that engendered by factors linked to class and race insomuch as there are distinct and undeniable common denominators underlying Africana women’s realities the world over.⁴ Womanism will be shown to be a fruitful analytical tool for analysing both Diome’s *Celles* and Miano’s *Les aubes*.⁵

2.4.2 AFRICANA WOMANISM IN *CELLES QUI ATTENDENT*: MOTHERHOOD, SISTERHOOD AND MALE-FEMALE COMPATIBILITY

¹ Including Buchi Emecheta, Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, Obioma Nnaemeka and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí. See: Buchi Emecheta, 'Feminism with a Small 'f'', in Kirsten Holst Petersen (ed.), *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1986), 173-85.; Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994).

² The term “misovire”, translated loosely by Cameroonian literary scholar and writer Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi as “manhater” (though she notes that this translation does not convey the concept’s complexity), was coined by Liking and refers to what women become when their expectations of male-female relationships based on mutual complementarity are not met. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women’s Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 96. See also: Eunice Fonyuy Fombele, 'Mythoform and the Misovire Consciousness: A Gender Conceptual Renewal Strategy in Werewere Liking’s *It Shall be of Jasper and Coral*', *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 6/4 (2016), 369-79.

³ See: Christina Angelfors, 'Féminitude et négritude: discours de genre et discours culturel dans l’oeuvre de Calixthe Beyala', *Présence Francophone*, 75 (2010), 32-50.

⁴ Carolette Norwood, 'Perspectives in Africana Feminism, Exploring Expressions of Black Feminism/Womanism in the African Diaspora', *Sociology Compass*, 7/3 (2013), 225-36, p. 234.

⁵ Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism is not without its critics. See: Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 'Revisiting "What's in a Name?" Exploring the Contours of Africana Womanist Thought' at 75, 78, 79, 80.

Whether consciously or not, Diome endows each of the four female protagonists of *Celles* with Africana womanist traits, consequently inscribing her text within a transnational Black Atlantic space. The fact that this Africana womanist aesthetic is predominately visible through the Niodiorois woman's status as a community "pillar"¹ by virtue of her assumption of the traditional roles of mother and wife would most certainly astound supporters of classical feminism which tends to prioritise specific economic, political and social channels for female emancipation.² Yet this is not at all foreign to advocates of Africana womanism which promotes in its essence the Afrodescendant woman's emancipatory role as nurturer and mother to all in her community, roles within which she is able to express her resistance to certain forms of oppression. The image of the protecting and nurturing mother is of course not foreign to Francophone Sub-Saharan fiction. The mother figure was exploited at length and often extrapolated to a continental scale as the incarnation of Mother Africa by Négritude writers in their fight against European imperialism.³ That said, Diome's (and Miano's) respective representations of motherhood in contemporary Sub-Saharan contexts are far more nuanced and discerning than the somewhat idealised and reductive accounts of Négritude's mostly male poets. For example, Diome and Miano do not hesitate to depict in their novels the 'bad'

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 11.

² Major currents of classic feminist thought tend to be wary if not overtly suspicious of wifehood and, to a lesser extent, motherhood. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that "[t]he tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness [...] but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine. The first twenty years of woman's life are extraordinarily rich [...]; she discovers the world and her destiny. At twenty or thereabouts mistress of a home, bound permanently to a man, a child in her arms, she stands with her life virtually finished for ever" and that "[t]he great danger which threatens the infant in our culture lies in the fact that the mother to whom it is confided in all its helplessness is almost always a discontented woman: sexually she is frigid or unsatisfied; socially she feels herself inferior to man; she has no independent grasp on the world or on the future". Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, [trans. H. M. Parshley] (Harmondsworth, 1953 [1949]), p. 496, 528-29. See also: Jeffner Allen, 'Motherhood: The Annihilation of Women', in Joyce Trebilcot (ed.), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 315-30.

³ A theme particularly present in the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor. Stringer, *The Senegalese Novel by Women. Through Their Own Eyes*, p. 148.

mother, a figure which remains taboo in many Sub-Saharan societies where ‘good’ mothers are venerated and, above all, expected.¹ In stark contrast to the defective or absent parental and maternal figures in *L’intérieur* and *Le Ventre*,² the mother characters (not necessarily biological) of *Celles*, and to a lesser extent *Les aubes*, distinguish themselves by virtue of their impeccable drive to nourish and nurture their children for whom the mere prospect of a future existence even slightly rosier than their own constitutes the ultimate reward for their tireless efforts and boundless sacrifices. Although mothers are valorised in these latter texts, the difficulties, pains and failures met by all the women characters at some point in the narrative demonstrate a more insightful and certainly realistic appreciation of Sub-Saharan motherhood, indicating that Diome and Miano are cognisant of how difficult the mother role can be and particularly in contexts marred by additional oppressive factors such as abject poverty and violent civil war. Reading these texts diverts from Négritude’s hollow accounts of African motherhood and from “the nostalgic hymns dedicated to the African mother confounded with man’s angst vis-à-vis Mother Africa” that Senegalese author Mariama Bâ, speaking on behalf of all African women, described as desperately insufficient.³

No one character in *Celles* incarnates the role of the caring and nurturing mother quite as convincingly as Arame, the first of the Niodiorois women to have her literary portrait sketched by the author. All of Arame’s aspirations for a better life for both herself and her family are placed on the hypothetical success of her second son Lamine for, after losing her eldest child in a fishing accident, Arame became the mother figure, the sole carer

¹ Petetin, 'L'Afrophonie de Léonora Miano', p. 90.

² With the notable exception of Salie’s grandmother in *Le Ventre*.

³ Mariama Bâ, 'La fonction politique des littératures africaines écrites', *Écriture française dans le monde*, 5/3 (1981), 3-7, p. 6.

and provider for the latter's seven children abandoned by their own mothers following the death of their husband.¹ This is a burden Arame carries alone despite the weighty physical presence of her husband Koromâk towards whom she feels nothing but anger and resentment even though she is one of the rare women in Niodior, this "stronghold of polygamy", to have the enviable status of first and only wife.² These rancorous sentiments stem from the fact that her union with this much older man was not entered into willingly and was the result of an arranged marriage concocted by her parents, in spite of her objections, when she was merely 18 years old.³ Some 31 years later, Arame still harbours bitterness towards both her parents and the man they forced her to marry, intensified by the fact that elderly and ailing Koromâk is bedridden and unable to work. It is henceforth alone that Arame desperately attempts to meet the needs of her family including those of her abhorred husband towards whom she feigns compassion "out of respect for the two sons she gave him".⁴ In such circumstances, Arame's children have come to represent one of her sole sources of pleasure as demonstrated by the continual juxtaposition throughout the narrative of her "joy" at being a mother and the "pain" she feels in wifedom.⁵

I note that if Diome accentuates the emotional suffering experienced by Arame as a result of her forced marriage, the author similarly draws attention to the negative impact of the unhappy union on her husband. For in the case of Arame and Koromâk, "the pain of the executioner often resembles that of the martyr" and neither party remains unscathed.⁶ Koromâk is an intriguing character depicted to be at once a "despot", a "tyrant", a

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ The narrator notes that Koromâk is as old as Arame's father. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105-06.

“burden” and an inherently vulnerable and lonely old man.¹ Trapped in the arthritis-ridden body that has become his “gaol”, Koromâk is a “prisoner of the emptiness” that he creates around himself and that “torments him atrociously”.² His tyrannical behaviour towards his wife Arame and family – his tendency to “insult, order and demand” – is in fact the reflection of the “burning lack of love” he feels and the knowledge that he has never been able to make his wife happy.³ These insights provided by the third-person omniscient narrator prevent Koromâk’s character from being read too superficially in *Celles* and concur with Diome’s humanist rather than feminist vision sensitive to the suffering of both men and women.

In the image of the “family-centred”, collectivist and protective Africana womanist,⁴ Arame’s very existence and rare moments of elation revolve exclusively around those of her remaining child and grandchildren for whom she is willing to defy the island’s patriarchal social structure. The reader is acquainted with this aspect of Arame’s personality early in the narrative and it remains unwavering throughout. For instance, upon the death of her first son, Arame refuses to impose the “sacrifice” of levirate marriage,⁵ the practice of obliging a man to wed the widow(s) of his deceased brother, out of love for her remaining son defying the “guardians of tradition” who nevertheless attempt “everything” to force her compliance.⁶ Arame is similarly quick to defend her children even if this means going against her husband, an individual that her milieu instructs she should “venerate in all

¹ Ibid., p. 15, 29, 103, 04.

² Ibid., p. 104.

³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴ As opposed to the individual-right seeking Western feminist. Nahed Mohammed Ahmed, 'An Africana womanist Reading of the Unity of Thought and Action', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22/3 (2017), 58-64, p. 61, 62.

⁵ “Le lévirat” in French, practised in many regions of the world including by numerous African ethnic groups and notably in tandem with polygamy.

⁶ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 15.

circumstances”.¹ When Lamine, unable to find work prior to his departure to Europe, is described by Koromâk as “unworthy” and castigated for failing the many who depend on him, Arame rushes to her son’s defense despite her realisation that her family’s eventual salvation does effectively depend on a successful future for her son.² If Koromâk does not hesitate to abase his wife by ascribing to her the shortcomings of her child in line with the island’s teaching that “a good mother is identified through the success of her son”, it is Arame’s role as family protector that confers upon her infinite respect on the part of her grandchildren who revere their grandmother in keeping with Hudson-Weems’ descriptors of the respected and recognised Africana womanist.³ Indeed, Arame has no need to enforce the grandchildren’s obedience as this she obtains “naturally” in return for the tenderness she accords them.⁴ If their grandmother has “weaved her world around them”, she is no less central to their own lives described metaphorically by the omniscient narrator as “their oasis in the middle of the desert”, “the watchman who transforms herself into a shield to protect them from all adversity.”⁵

Arame is certainly not the sole protagonist in *Celles* to find in her role of mother the spiritual respite, psychological strength and daily motivation needed to weather the storm of her difficult life. Indeed, motherhood appears to be among the primordial impetuses of all four main characters as demonstrated by the young Coumba who similarly turns to her child in her search for a reason to persevere during her husband’s long absence. During Issa’s European sojourn, without news of her loved one and languishing in “the depths of [her own] melancholy”, the young bride resolves to carry on

¹ Ibid., p. 26.

² Ibid., p. 59.

³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵ Ibid., p. 86, 113.

motivated by the sole desire to provide her son with love, “everything that she herself [is] missing”.¹ This resolution is strengthened following Issa’s devastating temporary return to Niodior during which the reality of his life lived in Europe is dramatically and humiliatingly exposed. In a cruel twist of irony, it is Coumba, she who married for love, who is left heartbroken when her husband returns from Europe with an unannounced second spouse and three children. Following this hurtful betrayal and the breadth of the emotional torment engendered, the only certainty that Coumba can cling to is her child – the son she “loves more than anything” and for whom she is ready “to sacrifice everything” even if this means “remaining married to a man who now belongs to someone else”.²

Celles, like Diome’s other texts, employs narrative techniques and styles inspired by, or directly sourced from, Serer mythology and Sub-Saharan oral cultures more broadly often in the form of tales, adages, maxims and proverbs.³ It is through recourse to a Serer legend that Diome chooses to convey the strength of the family-focused and ambitious Niodiorois woman embodied by a specific recurrent figure, that of the female warrior, the “model” of Africana womanhood according to Hudson-Weems.⁴ It is in reference to this particular image, accompanied by its corollaries of sacrifice and bravery, that Arame describes her friend Bougna: this “tenacious” woman whose “obstinacy” to see both their sons reach Europe at whatever cost reminds Arame of the legend of Queen Diâhère Tèw No Mâd – one of many Guelwaar women warriors reputed for “placing the honor and happiness of their sons above everything”.⁵ For the legend sung

¹ Ibid., p. 231.

² Ibid., p. 238.

³ Diouf, 'Fatou Diome: L'autre visualisation de l'émigré et l'exception dans la mise en écrit de l'émigration', p. 6.

⁴ Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', p. 144.

⁵ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 81.

by the griots and inserted into *Celles*' storyline as an embedded narrative recounts that Queen Diâhère Tèw No Mâd did not hesitate to sacrifice her own life in order to "save the throne of her beloved husband" and, in doing so, secure her son's future.¹ Classic feminists have demonstrated that myth can represent a "repressive and oppressive" force for women, one that can be called upon to enforce "gender bias, moral codes and behaviour in order to normalize men's visibility on the power platform".² Though this observation is certainly pertinent in the Western contexts, it does not seem to be applicable in *Celles* where the myth of Queen Diâhère Tèw No Mâd empowers women by underscoring their inherent strength, power and visibility in society. Mythic imagination, in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, is responsible for structuring "human thought and actions", shaping "lives and values" and standing in as "a basic source of socialization, identity construction, role sharing, and self-perception".³ In his Master's thesis, Gabriel Ernewein asserts that the dynamic between the legendary queen and her husband, whom she ultimately disobeys by committing suicide, reveals the precolonial Guelwaar woman's independence vis-à-vis male authority and represents a source of inspiration for her contemporary descendants.⁴ He interprets the inclusion of such a myth as proof "that an African feminist movement is possible" through a return to one's culture of origin and that there is no need "to borrow anything from the West".⁵

The figure of the woman warrior in *Celles* is not restricted to the four female protagonists and is extended to englobe other women of the region

¹ Ibid., p. 85. A griot is a West African storyteller, praise-singer, historian, musician or poet. Griots are central to African oral tradition and singularly to the transmission of collective memory and history.

² Fombele, 'Mythoform and the Misovire Consciousness: A Gender Conceptual Renewal Strategy in Werewere Liking's *It Shall be of Jasper and Coral*', p. 369-70.

³ Ibid., p. 369.

⁴ Gabriel Ernewein, 'Émergence d'un féminisme africain dans la littérature africaine féminine postcoloniale. Étude diachronique du féminisme dans trois romans sénégalais', (Département d'Études françaises: Université Concordia, 2016), p. 55.

⁵ Ibid., p. 55-56.

and, perhaps, the whole of West Africa, including an unidentified group who initiate and coordinate a successful people trafficking syndicate.¹ In the contemporary context of large numbers of Sub-Saharan migrant deaths at sea, attributing the term “modern-day warriors” or “heroines” to such an organised body could be considered controversial.² Yet such an attribution needs to be placed in the socio-cultural context of contemporary Senegal and other Sub-Saharan regions where immigration to Europe by any means is considered to be a concrete solution to the endemic poverty and other disadvantageous factors that cumulate in the general perception, especially present among the youth, of an extremely limited number of opportunities for professional, economic and material ascent. As Rosia Beer notes in her article, the French Eldorado myth entertained by Senegalese youth and maintained by the perception of relatively wealthier returning migrants in *Le Ventre* (and also in *Celles*, my emphasis) is “inseparable from the realities of life in Senegal”.³ Accordingly, if it is accepted by these sea-faring populations that the ocean will collect its due in the form of human casualties during the treacherous ocean crossings – regrettable collateral damage in the name of a greater cause – these women who “dare to brave administrative injustice” are nevertheless credited by those in their community with attempting to “secure the future” of the region’s children.⁴

I have thus far discussed the accent placed in Diome’s *Celles* on the figure of the nurturing and caring Africana mother completely devoted to the survival of her children to the point of sacrificing her own self-fulfillment in a restricted patriarchal environment. The personal sacrifices made by these ‘women warriors’ take many forms – from the never-ending and laborious

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 100.

² Ibid.

³ Beer, 'Gesturing to an empty theatre? Author, Text and Audience in the Fiction of Fatou Diome and Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland', p. 47.

⁴ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p.100.

chores that the women perform daily throughout the novel to the surrender of their pride when they are forced to repeatedly solicit the charity of the local shop owner Abdou in order to purchase on credit basic foodstuff to feed their families. Yet none of the sacrifices which they endure is perhaps as great as that which sees them resign themselves to remaining in unhappy marriages. For, contrary to what many may assume, divorce is available to the Muslim women of Niodior, at least in theory, with both Bougna and Coumba contemplating this option, however briefly, at some time in the narrative.¹ In practice, however, divorce is rendered inaccessible due to the intervention and intersection of the “multitude of injustices” faced by these postcolonial women of the Global South.² Despite her fury at having been forsaken for the first wife, subsequently reinforced by her husband’s decision to welcome a third, divorce is inconceivable for Bougna for many reasons, mostly because of her economic dependence on her husband and, more precisely, the money sent by the first wife’s offspring. Bougna’s refusal to leave her husband, for whom she no longer feels anything but deception and “tenacious” resentment, accentuates the issue of economic disempowerment among notably (but not exclusively) developing-world women.³ As the narrator pertinently asks and leaves the reader to ponder: “Where would she go with her abundant progeny?”⁴ It is similarly Coumba’s economic dependence on Issa (or rather on Issa’s European wife) that prevents her from divorcing her husband following his long absence and climatic treachery. In opting to remain married, all Coumba hopes for is “enough to live on” both for her first son and the second child she learns she is carrying, the news of

¹ Diome’s Niodior is heavily governed by Islamic culture and religious conventions which allow a Muslim woman to access divorce from her husband through the khul’ system. See: Corinne Fortier, ‘Le droit au divorce des femmes (khul’) en islam : pratiques différentielles en Mauritanie et en Égypte’, *Droit et Cultures*, 59/Actualités du droit musulman : genre, filiation et bioéthique (2010), 59-83.

² Diome, ‘“J’écris pour apprendre à vivre”’. Entretien avec Fatou Diome’, p. 142.

³ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 46.

⁴ Ibid.

which is not received joyously by the young woman for it represents a second weight shackling her to an unhappy “matrimonial home”.¹ Bougna’s decision to remain married to Wagane despite her employment of tactics designed with the distinct objective of sabotaging the so-called “bastard”, is also influenced by another factor – her ‘spouse’ status which reigns supreme in Niidoirois society no matter how much grief it engenders.² For the situation of women who leave their husbands is regarded in this social and cultural setting as “unflattering”,³ and singularly so for a woman “of her age”.⁴ Here readers of Diome are reminded of the degrading treatment that was reserved for Salie in *Le Ventre* on behalf of her community of origin following the news of her divorce. The male villagers invariably place the blame for such a ‘failure’ entirely on Salie as the ‘defective’ woman in the relational equation for, in their male-centred worldview, “[a] donkey never leaves good hay”.⁵ The privileging at all costs of the ‘wife’ label similarly recalls Musango’s (Miano’s) criticism of the “sacrosanct wife status” which results in mothers overlooking the abuses perpetrated by their husbands on their children or, what is worse, blaming their children for the crimes of which they are victim with tragic consequences in *Contours du jour qui vient*.⁶

What is ultimately reiterated through the above discussion is the necessity for a context-sensitive framework, such as Africana womanism, through which to examine the conditions of patriarchal oppression met by women the world over. As Diome pertinently illustrates in *Celles*, the oppression suffered by the women in her native region of Senegal, and

¹ Ibid., p. 238-39.

² For example, Bougna sees the acquisition of items on credit from Abdou’s shop as a manner through which to attack her husband (financially) in place of her dream of “striking him” physically. Ibid., p. 22.

³ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Diome [trans. Norman; Schwartz], *The Belly of the Atlantic*, p. 37.

⁶ Miano, *Contours du jour qui vient*, p. 104.

presumably other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, is perhaps better understood as a myriad of oppressions in the plural – patriarchal, admittedly, but also economic, class-based and educational, intertwined, interacting and stemming from historical and continuing racial dominance. However, if oppressions can take many forms, then so can resistance and it is important to underscore that endorsing the traits of the Africana womanist does not mean being devoid of power and therefore unable to wield any influence in one’s community. The exercise of agency in global Southern contexts does not always resemble that promoted or sanctioned by the feminisms of the Global North. Geraldine Heng notes that advocates of classic feminism are often “surprised by the strategies, appearance, and forms of feminism that emerge and are effective in Third-World contexts” which tend to be axiomatically catalogued as inflexible and stiflingly patriarchal.¹ These diverse expressions have drawn an increasing amount of critical attention as the idea of a universal ‘one-fits-all’ model of feminism loses scholarly favour.

Deniz Kandiyoti proposes the term “patriarchal bargain” to refer to the numerous ways in which women strategise within the “set of concrete constraints” that define various manifestations of patriarchy.² Drawing on examples from non-Western contexts including a case study from Sub-Saharan Africa,³ Kandiyoti suggests that through patriarchal bargaining, women are able to “influence both the potential for and specific forms of [their] active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression” suggesting furthermore that a feminist consciousness would be better understood through examination of women’s short- and medium-term strategies for

¹ Heng, "A Great Way to Fly": Nationalism, the State, and the Varieties of Third-World Feminism', p. 30.

² Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', in Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole McCann (ed.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016), p. 103.

³ From Burkina Faso.

dealing with patriarchy across divergent social locations.¹ A patriarchal bargain is an act of negotiation, “a difficult compromise” through which the genders “accommodate and acquiesce” yet “which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated”.² Examples of this form of strategic opposition occur in both Miano’s and Diome’s oeuvres. For instance, in *Le Ventre*, the patriarchal bargain enabling Salie’s grandmother to intervene and save her granddaughter’s life manifests itself in her decision to marry her daughter off to a cousin eager to project an image of increased virility and boost his progeny by acquiring a second wife for which no dowry is required. This is indeed “a difficult compromise”, for in order for Salie’s grandmother to defy the customary lore surrounding children born out of wedlock, spare and raise Salie, she must sacrifice her own daughter by condemning her to an unhappy marriage that conforms with Niodior’s patriarchal code. She is, in a certain manner, giving her own daughter the chance at a ‘normal’ Niodiorois life that would otherwise have been unattainable for her as an unwed mother. In *L’intérieur*, the most explicit example of village *doyenne* Ié’s ability to bargain with patriarchal oppression and exercise some degree of resistance occurs when she manages to negotiate with the invading male rebels during the nocturnal insurgency of Eku. Her intervention here again depends on a “difficult compromise” for in order to secure the survival of as many useful lives as possible, she must consent to losing others. I would like to suggest in the following sub-section of this chapter that solidarity in the form of genuine sisterhood, one of the cornerstones of Hudson-Weems’ Africana womanist perspective, similarly represents a form of patriarchal bargaining enabling women in African contexts to support each other and, in doing so, negotiate, garner influence and even, as I will demonstrate with the

¹ Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', p. 103, 11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

case of Arame, blossom in an inherently restrictive environment. Moreover, the establishment of genuine and non-hierarchical sisterhood between women from different generations allows these women to attend to that which they hold most dear – the survival and success of their children – which ultimately assures their own survival and relative success both psychically and materially.

The tropes of female friendship and women’s solidarity are considered defining features of the literary tradition of African women writers.¹ For African and Francophone literary studies academic Obioma Nnaemeka, the importance of such tropes in terms of female agency cannot be neglected for it is “through friendship, sisterhood, and solidarity” that African women “appropriate and refashion oppressive spaces” reinventing themselves in the process.² Although sisterhood is an integral part of Western feminist models, it assumes a specific form and purpose in the context of African women whose lives are characterised by a myriad of oppressive forces that white women do not generally confront and certainly not concurrently. The importance of sisterhood in Afrodescendant contexts is therefore amplified by its ability to address multilayered and intersecting issues relating to class- and race-based oppressions in tandem with evident gender imbalances. Sisterhood in Black women’s writing has come to represent “a safety net and a breath of fresh air in a suffocating, constraining environment” through which women “survive and gain freedom”.³ Hudson-Weems joins Nnaemeka in underscoring the latter’s fundamental importance for African women while clarifying exactly what she means when alluding to this

¹ Laura Dubek, 'Lessons in Solidarity: Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Bâ on Female Victim(izer)s', *Women's Studies*, 30 (2001), 199-233, p. 212.

² Obioma Nnaemeka, 'Introduction: Imag(in)ing Knowledge, Power, and Subversion in the Margins', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *The Politics of (M)othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-26, p. 19.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18, 19.

specific form of female bonding which should be distinguished, in her opinion, from other relationships between women:

There is no substitute for sisterhood, and while the traditional family is of key importance to the Africana womanist, she recognizes her need for this genuine connection between women, one that supports her in her search for solace in her time of need, and offers insight in her time of confusion. While there have been attempts to define all types of female relationships, lesbian relationships included, as a form of sisterhood, this particular kind of sisterhood refers specifically to an asexual relationship between women who confide in each other and willingly share their true feelings, their fears, their hopes, and their dreams. Enjoying, understanding, and supporting each other, women friends of this sort are invaluable to each other.¹

Hudson-Weems has previously employed the concept of sisterhood in the study of Sub-Saharan texts that she deems exemplary of an Africana womanist perspective. This is notably the case for Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, considered a pioneering work in the field of feminine Sub-Saharan literature. Within this epistolary novel, protagonist Ramatoulaye recounts her life in a series of letters written to her friend during her four month, 10-day widow seclusion period following the death of her polygamous husband.² In her letters to Aïssatou, she evokes her life story, suffering, family relations and relationship with her husband before the arrival of a second spouse. Many read in Bâ's text an explicit denunciation of the female condition through its representation of polygamy as "destructive, oppressive and responsible for women's misfortune".³ Hudson-Weems considers the text to be a model of Africana womanism, through the central role it accords to female friendship and solidarity, stating that protagonist Ramatoulaye is the embodiment "of

¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism & Race & Gender in the Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2009), p. 65.

² This period, the *iddat*, is practised in Muslim societies such as Senegal where approximately 90% of the population is of Islamic faith. Rizwana Habib Latha, 'Feminisms in an African Context: Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 50/African Feminisms (2001), 23-40, p. 23, 24.

³ Kadidia Sy, 'Women's relationships: Female friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Love*, Mariama Bâ's *So long a letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything good will come*', (Department of English: Georgia State University, 2008), p. 134.

the true Africana womanist”.¹ Through their strong female bond, their sisterhood, the women are able to support, counsel and care for each other, to “join forces” in a patriarchal environment.² The strength and flexibility of their solidarity is even more remarkable considering that, despite having lived through much of the same experience, both women choose different paths in reaction to the pain inflicted by their husband’s decisions to welcome second spouses: Aïssatou leaves her marriage to start afresh far from Senegal in New York while Ramatoulaye decides to remain on her own. Betty Taylor Thompson similarly attributes to Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre* the Africana womanist label, highlighting specifically the continual importance Ramatoulaye places on family remaining stoically undeterred by the devastation engendered and felt in the heart of her own vis-à-vis this primordial Africana womanist foundation.³

For Hudson-Weems, genuine sisterhood, like that depicted between the female characters in Bâ’s novel, should constitute the objective for all Africana women for this bonding represents “one sure way of bringing about ultimate success, for the sharing of one’s life experiences often gives what is needed for that success.”⁴ Sisterhood thereby presents an occasion to grow from the exchange of experiences, both positive and negative, with other women in an environment of mutual support more likely to lead to favourable outcomes than a comparative environment devoid of such female solidarity. Offering women a channel through which to bring to light, transmit and appropriate skills for negotiating with patriarchy and other oppressive forms, sisterhood is in itself a form of patriarchal bargaining. I

¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), p. 96-97.

² Sy, 'Women's relationships: Female friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Love*, Mariama Bâ's *So long a letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything good will come*', p. 4.

³ Betty Taylor Thompson, 'Common Bonds From Africa to the U.S.: Africana Womanist Literary Analysis', *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25/3 (2001), 177-84, p. 179.

⁴ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*, p. 67.

will consider two specific types of sisterly relationships in my study of *Celles* – those formed between female friends and between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. These relationships are the most prominent in *Celles* where those between mother and daughter, though present, remain peripheral to the narrative.

In *Celles*, it is the close relationship between Arame and Bougna which is perhaps the most emblematic of Hudson-Weems' Africana sisterhood. Diome employs vocabulary typically evoked to describe the experience of eating pleasurably and copiously to describe the women's friendship, a "delicious complicity" that Arame and Bougna "relish in".¹ This choice of vocabulary serves to highlight the relative rarity of such a friendship on the island, an occurrence as rare and exceptional as the experience of eating well and to one's fill. It is in each other's company that the two friends chose to accomplish the many physical chores that punctuate their arduous daily routines. It is together that they haul water from the well, work in the fields and cut wood in the mangrove to feed the kitchen stove. Yet, more importantly, the time Arame and Bougna spend together represents an opportunity to share their inner-most thoughts and counsel each other regarding possible means through which to improve their respective circumstances. In line with Hudson-Weems' interpretation concerning the invaluableness of such female solidarity for Africana women, the narrator of *Celles* notes that "in this environment, reliable and durable friendships are the most lucrative of investments".² The two women are indeed conscious of the value of their "exceptional complicity"³ as evidenced by Arame's willingness to defy "old tribal laws" and come to Bougna's defense when the latter is implicated for an umpteenth time in a

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

row with her younger co-wife, a far removed member of Arame's family. Despite admitting her friend's noted tendency to be "provocative" and "cunning" towards her husband's other spouses, Arame recognises that "the ties connecting her to her friend [are] worth more than the few genes she shares with that distant cousin".¹ In return, Arame is open to receiving her friend's guidance as Bougna is genuinely motivated by the desire to see Arame's life conditions improved even if the advice offered is at times shortsighted and the means employed to put it into practice morally questionable. When Bougna convinces Arame to find a wife for Lamine, she does not aspire to make another woman suffer in marriage as she herself does on a daily basis. She herself did not even consider this possibility when pressuring Issa to find a wife, blinded as she was by jealousy and driven by her desire to compete with the first co-wife. In counseling Arame, Bougna's wishes to see her friend in the company of a daughter-in-law, one who is additionally able to ease the heavy burden of running a household alone, and, most crucially, likely to ensure her friend's son's eventual return to Niodior.² Though it is Bougna who initially comes up with the idea of sending their children to Europe, it is together that the friends refine the plan that eventually sees Issa and Lamine embark for Spain. Bougna and Arame are naturally anxious concerning the potential danger of their clandestine immigratory project yet remain convinced that the destinies of their sons, to which their own are inseparably linked, will not improve if the latter remain in Senegal. It is again in each other's company that the mothers search for and find solace regarding the conflicting feelings of wanting to protect their sons while concurrently ascribing wholeheartedly to the belief that their only hope for a better life requires that they be put in harm's way. After unveiling

¹ Ibid., p. 42.

² Ibid., p. 80.

her idea to her friend, Bougna's "fear and guilt" are somewhat soothed by the serious and sincere consideration Arame accords her proposition for, as the narrator remarks, "another mother was ready, as was she, to send her son to the galleys" in order to guarantee his future.¹ Arame, having already lost a child to the sea, is more hesitant yet allows herself to be convinced by her friend. With Issa and Lamine relieved to learn that their mothers have come to the same conclusion as themselves regarding their *need* to reach Europe, the two friends redouble their efforts in order to amass the sum of money needed to pay for their sons' passage across the Atlantic.

The strong sisterhood binding Arame and Bougna does not end after Issa and Lamine arrive in Europe. The "rare" mandates the young men send to their mothers from across the other side of the Atlantic prove to be rather meager.² As they had done prior to their sons' departure, Arame and Bougna join forces in an attempt to feed their growing families by selling the excess wood and shellfish they collect and even establishing a small food stand. As noted by researcher Kadidia Sy, the association of women both formally and informally in economic ventures in Sub-Saharan Africa requiring a coordination of efforts creates "solid ties", cultivating "a rare form of female solidarity" the benefits of which are not restricted to the women directly involved but felt by "the community as a whole".³ Moreover, economic freedom for women is crucial in contexts where, although tradition dictates that their needs are to be met by their husbands, wives and mothers cannot depend financially on husbands as is the case for Arame and Bougna as well as for their daughters-in-law Coumba and Daba. Although not revolutionary in that it does not "eliminate all [their] worries", the solidarity between the

¹ Ibid., p. 63.

² Ibid., p. 180.

³ Sy, 'Women's relationships: Female friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Love*, Mariama Bâ's *So long a letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything good will come*', p. 11.

friends working in partnership on their modest stall selling doughnuts and peanuts does enable them to “improve the ordinary”.¹

Sisterhood in *Celles* does not only manifest itself in friendship but also in the relationships forged between different female family members. The institution of polygamy naturally presents a challenge to the establishment and preservation of supportive female solidarity. Yet, as Diome eloquently demonstrates in *Celles*, this is not always the case and the cultivation of genuine and non-hierarchical sisterhood may have a role to play in this distinction. At the conclusion of the novel, the reader is confronted by what appears to be an intergenerational reproduction of the individual itineraries of the four protagonists, an approximate duplication of their stories which clearly distinguishes two ‘winners’ in the collective European gamble – Arame and Daba, and two ‘losers’ – Bougna and Coumba. It is Arame and Daba who find themselves united with the men they love – for Arame, both with her son and her first love, now new husband and father of her children, and for Daba with the husband she thought would never accept her following her infidelity and whose acceptance engenders in Daba genuine feelings of affection. Bougna and Coumba are, conversely, left bitterly disappointed – Bougna no longer recognises “the son” who left her side for Spain all those years ago, for Issa has turned into “the man” that she will henceforth only see for a month every year after having put everything in place to ensure his return.² Coumba, who like Bougna, married her husband for love, is now herself trapped in the snares of a polygamous union having lost the husband she waited so patiently for not so much to his second European wife but to Europe, this continent that she holds responsible for stealing him from her.

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 238.

I contend here that it is the establishment of an authentic and intergenerational sisterhood between Arame and Daba characterised by respect, understanding and a willingness to learn from each other's experiences that plays a role in this duo's ultimate successes. I am not alone in having come to this conclusion. Haskell too has identified this character duo, and specifically Arame's character, as the site of "significant moral and spiritual and emotional change".¹ Arame's and Daba's stories are mirror images of each other – both were forced into marriages with men that they did not love and both in their unhappiness fell into the arms of their respective childhood sweethearts, unions which produced children – Lamine and his older brother for Arame, and Daba's daughter fathered by her one-time fiancé Ansou. What is perhaps most curious for the reader is the fact that it is Arame, whose marital suffering had been emphasised to until this point, who actively plays a part in this narrative doubling. Blinded by her desire to see her son return to Niodior and desperate to appease for the trauma she presumes caused by her own confession concerning the identity of Lamine's actual father, Arame prioritises what she believes is best for her son and herself in actively engineering his marriage. Ironically, given the manner in which his own couple came to be, it is Koromâk who cautions his wife against "forcing destiny" through the pressure placed on Daba's family, and therefore on the young woman herself, to annul her engagement with Ansou and marry Lamine.² For the first time in the novel, it is Koromâk who endorses the voice of reason, for he has experienced first-hand the tragic consequences that such unions can engender. Arame, this motherly figure normally so considerate of others, conversely fails to recognise that she is effectively recreating for the young Daba the same set of circumstances

¹ Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 150.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 175.

responsible for her own marital misery. Driven by shortsighted and at times rather egotistical desires, such as wanting to be able to, like Bougna, “savour long hours of rest” freed from the bulk of her domestic chores, she pushes ahead with her project conscious that Daba’s family will not allow their child to decline a marriage proposition with an immigrant based in Europe.¹ It is only after becoming aware of Daba’s pregnancy in the absence of Lamine, the very visual proof of her extra-marital relationship, that Arame comes to the realisation that she has exposed the young woman to the same pain that was once inflicted upon herself by others not the least concerned for her own happiness in a “cruel repetition of fate, a terrible cycle”.² A deep sense of guilt impinges upon her conscience as she wonders if she will ever be able to “forgive herself” for potentially rendering her daughter-in-law “as unhappy as herself”.³ She has effectively broken the silent pact of sisterhood by sacrificing the wellbeing of another woman in the pursuit of her own interests.

After identifying in Daba’s plight the shadows of the organised marriage that “devastated her own life”, Arame decides to appease for her faults as well as those of her daughter-in-law in a confessional letter to her son in which she reveals for the first time the truth concerning her own painful past.⁴ Her gesture is one of love for her son, for she comprehends the necessity for him to possess all the elements of the saga having unfolded during his absence in order to make an informed choice, but also for her daughter-in-law. Although she does not wish to interfere with the decision that her son alone must make, having witnessed the fateful consequences engendered by her meddling in his marriage, her resolution is reflective of a

¹ Ibid., p. 176.

² Ibid., p. 228.

³ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

return to genuine sisterhood. Not only does it denounce the many ills caused when young women and girls have little or no say in whom they marry, but, in relating her own experience, Arame draws a direct parallel between herself and her past actions and those of Daba. Wagering on the love and respect of her own son, as well as his intimate knowledge of his parents' disastrous relationship, her own *long letter* underscores the fact that Daba's behaviour is entirely comprehensible, indeed human, given the circumstances of her engagement and marriage and that she understands more than anyone the oppressive factors, patriarchal and other, having driven her daughter-in-law into the arms of another. This demonstration of female solidarity distinguishes Arame from the other women in the village. None of them seek to understand the personal torment behind what they deem (or rather feign to deem) the most scandalous of acts. Even the most "unvirtuous" among them intend to make Daba "their spittoon".¹ Indeed, many of these women engage in vicious rumour-mongering and abasement of Daba, the same suffered by Arame, as agents of the patriarchal order uniquely concerned with their own reputations and self-elevation at the expense of another. Bougna is, unfortunately, not immune to this female *non*-solidarity as she too takes part in the common practice of "indexing the expiatory victim and legitimising her collective repulsion", an "effective" yet "cowardly" way to avoid being accused of sanctioning the "undignified conduct of the young woman".² As I will show shortly, this is perhaps due to the notable lack of sisterhood in her own household where the relationships between female family members are characterised by bitter rivalry and attempted sabotage. The very hypocritical and misogynistic aspect of Niodior's social code is reinforced to the reader through the

¹ Ibid., p. 218.

² Ibid.

castigatory tone of Bougna's and the other women's comments regarding Daba. For these constitute reproaches to which Issa and Lamine, by virtue of their male gender, will never be subjected on behalf of the community at large despite the young men prostituting themselves through much of Western Europe.¹

In a further effort to reinstate the sisterhood she was responsible for disrupting, Arame apologises to Daba for her responsibility in what she now sees was the catalyst for all the young woman's heartache. She also stresses her profound desire to see her daughter-in-law remain by her and her son's side. Drawing on the sea imagery so typical of Diome's fiction, Arame attempts to calm Daba who is, in her distressed state prior to Lamine's return, unsure as to what her destiny holds:

Continue à mener ta barque du mieux que tu peux, et n'aie pas peur de l'avenir. Aucun banc de sable ne t'attend à l'horizon, mais deux bras de mer : ou Lamine te pardonne et tu restes ici avec nous, ce que je souhaite de tout cœur, ou il te rejette et Ansou sera ravi de te récupérer, avec ta fille. Quoi qu'il advienne, ta navigation va se poursuivre auprès de quelqu'un qui t'adore. Pardonne-moi d'avoir fait de toi l'épouse d'un absent, car tous tes soucis découlent de là. Pardonne-moi, ma grande.²

[Continue to navigate your boat to the best of your ability, and do not be scared of the future. No sandbank awaits you on the horizon, only two arms of the sea: either Lamine forgives you and you stay here with us, this is what I hope for with all my heart, or he rejects you and Ansou will be delighted to get you and your daughter back. Whatever happens, your navigation will continue on near someone who loves you. Forgive me for making you the wife of an absentee because all your troubles stem from this. Forgive me my dear.]

The ability to apologise constitutes a fundamental component of genuine sisterhood according to Hudson-Weems who warns against the "pride and self-centeredness" that "disallow[s] [women] a sense of humility that would enable [them] to apologize, particularly when [they] have wronged each

¹ Toivanen, 'Retour au local: *Celles qui attendent* et l'engagement diasporique de Fatou Diome', p. 71-72.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 248.

other”.¹ It also indicates the establishment of a non-hierarchical sisterhood which places Arame and Daba in positions of equal importance and value in the relationship as opposed to other mother-daughter-in-law dynamics in Niodior which are heavily vertical and power-laden. Indeed, the effect of Arame’s apology is liberating for Daba who, though at this stage unaware of the parallelism linking her life story to that of her mother-in-law, is deeply touched by Arame’s humble and sincere sharing of emotions. This is “a woman and a moment experienced together” that she will never forget.²

The reunion of Daba and Arame as mother- and daughter-in-law in intergenerational and non-hierarchical female solidarity is symbolised concretely in *Celles* by Arame’s implication in Daba’s daughter’s rearing. As noted by Nigerian feminist scholar Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, “[i]n many African societies, there is no sisterhood without motherhood” and it is in co-mothering that “the most profound sisterly relations are to be found”.³ Previously uncertain as to how she should behave towards her daughter-in-law’s child and now solicited by Daba for maternal advice, Arame is once again able to endorse the role which pleases her most and gives her life meaning – that of the mother. Following Arame’s apology, the exchanges between the two women around their communal mothering, deemed “the essence of community building”⁴ by Oyèwùmí, serve to cement a relationship of mutual support and suggest, for Daba’s infant daughter, the promise of a future within a protected haven of strong Africana womanists united both in sisterhood and motherhood against the “multiple injustices”

¹ Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism & Race & Gender in the Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama*, p. 90-91.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 249.

³ Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, 'Introduction: African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood, and Other Foreign Relations', in Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (ed.), *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood, and Other Foreign Relations* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 1-24, p. 13.

⁴ Ibid.

of their patriarchal environment.¹ Through their female bonding, Arame and Daba effectively create “the nurturing new family structure” to which Lamine returns and from which every family member benefits.² For Haskell, such an evolution and subsequent reconfiguration of the female community is comparable to a “symbolic migration” undertaken at home, one that is just as important (if not more so) than that physically undertaken by men.³

Haskell’s comment is certainly valid. Yet community reconfiguration in *Celles*, including local changes instigated by females, is also complemented by the changes enacted by returning African males. Lamine’s acceptance of Daba imparts a new-found openness towards issues of infidelity nourished both by his experiences of precarious clandestine migrant life in Europe and his deep respect and love for his mother. His decision fundamentally conveys an appreciation of Daba as his equal, marking a distinct divergence from the traditional views of patriarchal Niodiorois society. Here I return to the male-female rift inherent in classic feminism that womanists, and namely Africana womanists whose adherents “do not see their male counterparts as their primary enemy as does the White feminist [...]”,⁴ reject. For Hudson-Weems, there is urgency for Africana men to come together with their African women to firstly eliminate “racist influences in their lives, with the realization that they can neither afford nor tolerate any form of subjugation, female subjugation included”.⁵ The stories of Arame, Daba and Lamine eloquently converge to display the importance of male-female complementarity based on an appreciation of the oppressive

¹ Diome, "'J'écris pour apprendre à vivre'. Entretien avec Fatou Diome', p. 142.

² Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 151.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', p. 143.

⁵ Ibid., p. 141.

forces that both unify and differentiate the genders in the united quest to improve Africana lives.

If it is genuine female sisterhood borne from mutual suffering and understanding that comes to define the relationships between women family members under Arame's roof, the same cannot be said for Bougna's ménage. The female occupants here are no less victims of oppressive, including patriarchal, forces, the most blatant manifestation of which is polygamy. Polygamy, meaning a man marrying more than one wife,¹ is a common practice in many regions of the world including Sub-Saharan Africa where it is inscribed in law as a legitimate marital form in many countries including Diome's native Senegal and Miano's Cameroon. This institution remains the subject of much debate especially in the areas of women's, feminist, African and Africana studies. While polygamy is generally abhorred in Western feminist circles and by some prominent African feminist critics, such as Senegalese politician, activist and writer Awa Thiam,² other African feminists and Africana womanists, including Filomina Chioma Steady and Hudson-Weems, have voiced their opposition to "the idea that African women should make the European marriage model the ideal" endorsing what Pamela Reed considers to be "a more culturally- and historically-sensitive position".³ For Steady, polygamy can lead to "socioeconomic security and cooperation" for women, which in turn frees them from "absolute male domination".⁴ Similarly, Nigerian playwright and dramatist Zulu Sofola suggests that polygamy can have positive repercussions for African women

¹ Also referred to by the term "polygyny" and to be distinguished from the practice of polyandry in which a woman marries more than one husband.

² Reed, 'Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family', p. 171. See: Awa Thiam, *La Parole aux négresses* (Paris: Denoël-Gauthier, 1978).

³ Reed, 'Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family', p. 172.

⁴ Filomina Chioma Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-culturally* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company 1981), p. 17.

and for female solidarity more generally. Sofola has stressed that sharing a man openly as a commodity with other women has the effect of rendering him less central to the individual woman's life meaning that the relationship she has with her child(ren), paramount to the Africana womanist dynamic, becomes her primary focus. She even suggests that educated African women in monogamous unions spend too much time fretting over potential rejection on behalf of their husbands. Consequently, they begin to perceive every other woman as a possible threat to their security which, in turn, impedes the process of establishing sisterhood between women united to "fight a common enemy".¹ Though I do not necessarily agree with Sofola's standpoint, nor with her isolation of the 'educated' African women as being the only one seemingly concerned by these sentiments, I do believe that she raises an important issue in relation to the representation of polygamy in *Celles* when she refers to perceived threats provoked by fear and jealousy and the adverse effects that these can have on the founding of genuine sisterhood, for such is the atmosphere that reigns in Bougna's household.

Bougna is described by her close friend Arame as being "one of these women who make polygamy into a permanent problem".² Arame thereby insinuates that polygamy does not *necessarily* have to be disempowering nor disunifying for the women involved and should be judged on a case by case basis. In Bougna's case, the institution of polygamy makes it very difficult to envisage any potential for cultivating strong female solidarity as her relations notably with her husband's first wife are marred by vicious hostility. Indeed, apart from her numerous domestic chores as both a wife and a mother, Bougna's life revolves around competition and rivalry within

¹ Zulu Sofola, 'Feminism and African Womanhood', in Obioma Nnaemeka (ed.), *Sisterhood, feminisms, and power: from Africa to the diaspora* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 51-64, p. 62-63.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 43.

her polygamous marriage which “keep her busy from morning to evening”.¹ Though, like many of the Niodiorois women, she had very little say in marrying Wagane, Bougna was very much in love with the husband she desperately wished to “keep all to herself”² and with whom she had six children. Like Coumba, she felt a deep sense of betrayal when the latter turned his attention back to the first wife before adding insult to injury by marrying a third. Harboursing deep sentiments of “disgrace, abandonment and tenacious rancour”, Bougna’s desire to achieve a “brilliant revenge”³ becomes her primary objective trapping her “in a battleground in which animosity and competition are the rules, rather than bonding and solidarity”.⁴ In point of fact, Bougna’s motivation for sending Issa to Europe partially stems from the duel she wages daily with the first wife whose own children’s educational and professional successes feed directly into her jealousy. Bougna’s daughter-in-law Coumba is no less exposed to this lack of female solidarity which seems to have permeated throughout all the female-female relationships of the household. Coumba does briefly attempt to establish some sense of sisterhood with the daughter-in-law of the first wife by confiding in her only to realise that her hope for a sense of complicity between herself and the latter as young women subordinated to the authority of their husbands’ domineering mothers is futile and even risky. Devoid of sisterly relations in her home, languishing in Issa’s absence, and conscious that Bougna’s “excessive ambitions” for her son are to blame for her own marital solitude, Coumba’s relationship with Bougna, despite being ‘allied’

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., p. 44.

³ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴ Sy, 'Women's relationships: Female friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Love*, Mariama Bâ's *So long a letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything good will come*', p. 13.

in the divided household, suffers as she begins to “curse her mother-in-law in proportion to her yearning for her husband”.¹

If not entirely lacking, the sisterhood that defines Bougna and Coumba’s ménage and the relationship linking the two as mother- and daughter-in-law cannot be deemed genuine or non-hierarchical in the same manner as that which comes to unify Arame and Daba. If Bougna is offended by Issa’s taking of a second wife, it is not so much because she sympathises with the deep sense of betrayal and hurt felt by Coumba, after having herself lived through a very similar experience, but rather because she is concerned about the image his choice of wife presents to the community she is so eager to impress. Taking her son aside, Bougna does not hesitate to critique the European woman’s attitude towards her African co-wife whom she treats like a “maid”, her attire judged too revealing, and her manner of asking unbridled questions.² Not once does she reproach Issa for his immense insensitivity vis-à-vis Coumba’s love, devotion and subsequent devastation nor manifest any sense of solidarity in regard to these emotions that she would seemingly be well placed to comprehend. Bougna is, as Haskell has stated, less “reflective” and “inclined to self-examination” than her friend Arame.³ She is unable to draw on her own personal experiences of patriarchal oppression to bond with her daughter-in-law Coumba in a meaningful and productive manner as Arame and Daba are able to do. Through the character of Issa’s second wife, the “porcelain lady”, Diome underscores the immense obstacles generated by polygamy which tend to threaten the establishment of genuine sisterhood between female family members.⁴ Her portrayal of the European wife as an ignorant and

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 148.

² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³ Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*' p. 148.

⁴ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 234.

imperceptive individual who naively states to Coumba that as co-wives they will be “like sisters” additionally brings to bear the many social, racial, cultural and economic factors that undermine Western feminism’s exaltation of transnational female solidarity for all women.¹ Through the female Niodiorois community’s covert mocking of Issa’s benighted second wife (compared with a goat in the below passage – far from the most intelligent of animals)² and her reductionist, highly exoticised and romanticised view of African ‘culture’, Diome castigates, as she has done in other texts,³ the practice of polygamy in Sub-Saharan societies in which women do not necessarily have a choice:

Madame se disait *tolérante* ! La pauvre chèvre sautillait hardiment sur un champ de mines qu’elle prenait pour des patates douces ! Ses clichés sur la polygamie, la supposée grande famille solidaire, aggravaient sa berlue et la rassuraient, quand toutes les femmes du village ne souhaitaient que sa disparition. Elle, l’européenne, qui venait saboter le maigre espoir laissé par les âpres luttes féministes. Elle, qui avait le choix, venait en traîtresse dire à celles qui étaient obligées de se soumettre que ce dont elles se plaignaient était très supportable. Quand la dernière des paysannes soulignait sa bêtise, cette aveuglée de l’exotisme culturel clamait son soi-disant amour de la culture africaine et se déclarait ravie d’avoir été acceptée par la famille d’Issa.⁴

[Madam thought she was *tolerant*! The poor goat was bouncing boldly on a minefield that she thought made of sweet potato! Her clichés on polygamy, on the so-called big supportive family, aggravated her delusions and reassured her when all the other women of the village wanted nothing more than for her to disappear. She, the European, who had come to sabotage the slim hope left by bitter feminist combats. She, who had the choice, had come as a traitor to tell those that were obliged to suffer that what they were complaining about was very bearable. When the most peasant-like of the women pointed out her foolishness, the [European woman] blinded by cultural exoticism proclaimed her purported love for African culture and declared herself delighted to have been accepted by Issa’s family.]

In the above passage, polygamy is portrayed as the very ‘battle ground’ upon which warring visions of female emancipation confront each other – a

¹ Ibid.

² I recall that Eyoum was also described as a goat by both Epa and Ié during his demise in Miano’s *L’intérieur*. See page 129.

³ Namely in *Le Ventre*.

⁴ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 235.

metaphor made salient through Diome's use of war vocabulary – “minefield”, “sabotage”, “combats”, “traitor”. The author's choice of language also reflects the destruction, both social and affective, that polygamy, much like war, can engender. Hogarth similarly identifies polygamy, which he reads as a form of accumulation, as being “heavily criticized” in this novel.¹ Yet I would suggest that even if Diome's denunciation of polygamy appears intransigent, the narrative unfolding of *Celles* suggests a more nuanced perspective on behalf of its author.

Through Arame's character, Diome indicates that polygamy can work for women, indeed work well, on the condition that it is entered into under the right circumstances. For it is polygamy, the same marital institution responsible for both Bougna and Coumba's misery, that allows Arame to reunite with the man she has always loved and who fathered her children and become a happily married woman for the first time in her fifties.² It is important to note that there are several crucial features distinguishing Arame's fulfilling polygamous union from the demeaning marriages of Coumba and Bougna. Arame dictates the conditions of her marriage opting to remain in her own home and receive her husband for “romantic dates”.³ Her model of polygamy is modified and tailored to her own needs. Arame is, furthermore, under no obligation to remarry. She is not pressured by the financial burdens that push many Niodiorois widows to seek a new marriage as Lamine has returned from Europe with the means to support his family.

¹ Hogarth, 'What Will the New Generation Generate? Gendering Accumulation in Fatou Diome's *Celles qui attendent*', p. 4. Arsène Magnima Kakassa comes to a similar conclusion regarding Diome's depiction of polygamy in his chapter on *Celles* within which he argues that the author uses polygamy to denounce “an obsolete culture”. Arsène Magnima Kakassa, 'Féminité et marginalité dans la prose postcoloniale: essai de réflexion sur la polygamie et le mariage arrangé dans *Celles qui attendent* de Fatou Diome', in Àngels Santa (ed.), *La marginalité dans le roman populaire* (Lleida: Edicions de la Universitat de Lleida, 2018), 153-68, p. 167.

² Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 276. A parallel can be drawn here with Ken Bugul's representation of personal fulfilment in polygamous marriage in her largely autobiographical *Riwan ou le chemin de sable*. See page 70.

³ *Ibid.*

Her decision therefore reflects a deep-seated belief in the inherent value of marriage despite the torment engendered throughout her lengthy union with Koromâk. In seeking personal fulfilment with a man through matrimony, Arame demonstrates that wifedom is important to her and that male-female compatibility is a central component of her humanist worldview. Another important factor defining Arame's polygamous union is the existence of genuine sisterhood, for Arame's two co-wives welcome the news of their husbands' "gallant plan", conscious and respectful of the fact that Arame preceded them "in their husband's heart".¹ Accordingly, it would seem that her polygamous marriage is devoid of the jealousy that so characterised those of Bougna and Coumba. In marrying Ansou's father, Arame achieves through polygamy, shown elsewhere in *Celles* to be such a destructive force in families, to reunite her family. Again placing her family's interests above her own, obtaining her son's blessing for the union is her only prerequisite. Lamine, eager to see his parents reunited, gives his blessing freely as he wishes to get to know his father having for years suffered with the woeful substitute of Koromâk. Furthermore, through his intention to recover his real name, that will be passed to his daughter and that he will share with his brother Ansou, he is effectively becoming a self-definer upholding the notion of *Nommo*, "the proper naming of a thing" said to bring it "into existence"² in Africana thought. It is therefore in her patriarchal bargain with polygamy, a symbol *par excellence* of male domination and female oppression, that the family-centered and male-compatible Africana womanist Arame is finally able to reconcile wifedom, motherhood and sisterhood. Ultimately, Diome's four female protagonists give substance to the Serer lullaby sung by Arame to soothe her granddaughter and taken up by Niodior's women in chorus at

¹ Ibid.

² Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', p. 138.

the end of the novel emphasising the fact that “a man is never insignificant in a home”.¹ Yet they also highlight that this home is never complete without the presence of a strong woman, the central pillar of Africana womanism.

2.4.3 ECOWOMANISM IN *LES AUBES ÉCARLATES*: CARE, NATURE AND COMMUNITY HEALING

The influence of Africana womanism as a theory derived from African sources and elaborated upon in the Afro-diasporic spaces of the New World is evident in *Celles*. Its inclusion in this text indicates both the existence of a long-standing relationship between the African continent and its Atlantic diaspora while advocating for “deeper connections across the Atlantic”.² In modeling transnational dialogue across Afrodescendant spaces, Diome subtly pierces through the binary Afropean paradigm that characterised *Le Ventre*. If Gilroy’s Black Atlantic space is criticised for only holding emancipatory potential for Black Atlantic men, Diome’s *Celles* confers an important role upon African women as actors in their own emancipation. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider Miano’s development of a feminine consciousness as a key component of broader Afro-diasporic consciousness in *Les aubes* through another offspring of womanist theory – that of ecowomanism.

To parody the words of Walker, ecowomanist is to ecofeminist as womanist to feminist. Grasping the nuances of ecowomanism therefore implies a basic understanding of ecofeminist discourse. Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood defines ecofeminism as “a response to a set of key problems thrown up by the two great social currents of the latter part of

¹ Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 247, 86.

² Lachman, 'The Transatlantic Poetics of Fatou Diome', p. 45.

this century – feminism and the environment movement”.¹ It was French feminist Françoise D’Eaubonne who coined the term in her 1974 book *Le féminisme ou la mort*² within which she postulated a correlation between women’s oppression and that of nature in the form of increasingly widespread and large-scale environmental degradation.³ The category of nature, according to ecofeminists, “is a field of multiple exclusion and control” in which the classification of certain human groups, including women and racial minorities, as being closer to nature than others, as “lacking the full measure of rationality or culture”, substantiates their inferior status thereby justifying their oppression.⁴ The ecofeminist stance is one in which women consciously position themselves “with nature”⁵ and against the violence inflicted on both nature and women by men. There are many strains of ecofeminist thought – something of an umbrella term. One can be a socialist ecofeminist, a cultural ecofeminist and even a radical ecofeminist. Despite the diversity of the field, ecofeminists broadly align with the same principles and aim to give “positive value to a connection of women with nature”, a connection that has previously been accorded “negative cultural value” in Western societies.⁶

If ecofeminists strive to revalorise both women and the natural world through the re-attribution of value to the connection between them, then how one conceives of the natural world and namely one’s connection to it become crucially important. It is essential to recognise that the Western conception of the environment against which ecofeminists revolt constitutes nonetheless

¹ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge 2003), p. 10.

² Françoise d’Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974). For an English translation, see: Françoise d’Eaubonne, 'Feminism or Death', in Elaine Marks and Isabelle De Courtivron (ed.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

³ Jean-Luc Gautero, 'Françoise d’Eaubonne, éco-féminisme et anarchie', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 24/2 (2016), 179-91, p. 179.

⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the dominant milieu in which their ecological sensitivities are shaped and, consequently, has an important impact on their strategies for revalorising both the feminine and the natural. Ecofeminism thus finds itself confronted with the same criticism addressed to mainstream feminism and ecocritical discourse in the sense that it cannot cater for diverse context- and culture-bound conceptions of nature. For instance, traditional African environmental sensibilities differ greatly from those promulgated in Western societies. Cameroonian author Jacques Fame Ngondo is one prominent African critic to have questioned the suitability of ecocritical literary analysis in the works of Sub-Saharan authors for precisely this reason. He has suggested the elaboration of an African ‘cosmocriticism’ to better accommodate an African worldview in which distinctions between the dead and the living, the human and the nonhuman, do not necessarily overlap with or equate to those that underpin Western ecocritical thought.¹ Similarly, fellow Cameroonian author and academic Godfrey B. Tangwa has put forward an alternative for ecocritical discourse in African contexts baptised ‘eco-bio-communitarianism’. He elaborates on the necessity for a framework catering for a distinctly African worldview:

The precolonial traditional African metaphysical outlook can be described as eco-bio-communitarian [...] implying recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans. This contrasts with the Western outlook, which might be described as anthropocentric and individualistic. Within the African traditional outlook, human beings tend to be more cosmically humble and therefore not only more respectful of other people but also more cautious of their attitude to plants, animals, and inanimate things, and to the various invisible forces of the worlds. [...] Within that world-view the distinction between plants, animals, and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual, is a slim and flexible one.²

¹ Cécile Dolisane-Ebossè and R.H. Mitsch, 'Jacques Fame Ndongo: An Interview with Cécile Dolisane-Ebossè', *Research in African Literatures*, 41/1 (2010), 166-71.

² Godfrey Tangwa, 'Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics', in Kwasi Wiredu (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 387-95, p. 389.

Ndongo's cosmocriticism and Tangwa's eco-bio-communitarianism both propose theoretical blueprints through which African perspectives on nature in literature could be better accommodated and explored. Yet they fail to engage a gender-focused critique of the environment. Ecowomanist theory, however, proves to be particularly useful for the exploration of the borderlands of postcolonial, gender and ecological studies. It is singularly fruitful for analysing the materialisation of a female-driven and nature-bound healing paradigm at the end of *Les aubes*.

Melanie Harris describes ecowomanism as a discourse acknowledging “the importance of multidimensional womanist race-class-gender analysis regarding environmental justice issues”, one that serves “to uncover the concerns of women of color, and African and African American women in particular”.¹ Ecowomanism is, like Walker's womanism, a product of the Black Atlantic. Elaborated in African American religious communities, it retains many aspects of the continental African cosmology from which it derives.² The most prominent feature of the ecowomanist paradigm, that which sets it apart from mainstream ecofeminist conceptions of nature and subsequent ecological praxis, is its grounding in an African religious perspective positing connectedness between “the realms of nature, divinity, and humankind”, a diasporic worldview that travelled with African peoples across the Atlantic and into the New World during the Transatlantic slave trade.³ Like ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism, ecowomanism is inherently suspicious of modernity and the underlying dualisms that define its logic.⁴ It rejects hierarchised conceptions of nature as inferior to culture

¹ Melanie Harris, 'Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion, and the Environment', *The Black Scholar*, 46/3 (2016), 27-39, p. 28, 33.

² Melanie Harris, 'Ecowomanism: Earth Honoring Faiths', in Melanie Harris (ed.), *Ecowomanism, Religion and Ecology* (Netherlands: BRILL, 2017c), 1-3, p. 1.

³ Harris, 'Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion, and the Environment', p. 33.

⁴ Melanie Harris, 'Reshaping the Ear: Honorable Listening and Study of Ecowomanist and Ecofeminist Scholarship for Feminist Discourse', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 33/2 (2017a), 158-62, p. 160.

and instead advances an ethical imperative of care towards the earth and its inhabitants in accordance with the belief of necessary and harmonious communion between the natural, human and spiritual worlds. In this respect, “honoring the earth” is akin to “honoring the community”, composed of both human and non-human elements, and both conducts are central to “honoring the self”.¹ Through the application of ecowomanist values including agency, interconnectedness, and intergenerational sharing, Afrodescendant women have a singularly important role to play in healing communities, earthy, natural and human, and in exposing and challenging the “structural systems of violence” that have historically oppressed them.²

Across *L'intérieur* and *Les aubes*, it is men who wield violence against other humans and the environment. The militia members who invade Eku are all men led by three men – Isilo, Isango and Ibanga. They impose the sacrifice of a child and kidnap nine other children to fill their ranks. These male children are exposed to and participate in great violence – pillaging villages, attacking strategic (the diamond mine) and nonstrategic (the convent) sites and committing mass killings of innocent civilians. A detrimental fraternity is established as men exert violence on their own ‘brothers’ – Isilo is killed by his two brothers, by those who had “always watched over him”, when it becomes apparent that his desire for veritable politico-social change is not aligned with their own aspirations for personal wealth and power.³ Epa, considered by Isilo to be his protégé, his “son”, witnesses the brutal killing of his own brother by his self-proclaimed father and mentor.⁴ Eso, having suffered great violence himself as a child, imposes violence on his Eku ‘brothers’ during their time as child soldiers.

¹ Harris, 'Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion, and the Environment', p. 28.

² Harris, 'Ecowomanism. An Introduction', p. 1.

³ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Such violence evidently results in trauma and it is the women in Miano's novels who attempt to pick up the pieces of their traumatised communities after the violent passages of men. In *L'intérieur*, it is the female Eku villagers who are left to attend to both their dead and their grief in the absence of most of the male community members after the rebels' invasion. They are simultaneously confronted with masculine violence originating from outside their community and "masculine failure" on the inside, bringing into question traditional conceptions of the masculine role in a society "where men are shown to be incapable of protecting their own".¹ In *Les aubes*, the reader is again confronted with the violence of men in the form of wandering armed rebel groups and child soldiers. It is again women who attempt to repair their war-torn society. The three female friends, Ayané, Wengisané and Aïda, attempt this by mothering – by rescuing and caring for Sombé's many displaced and traumatised children at *La Colombe*. Yet it is Epupa who best epitomises the healing community ambitions of ecowomanism in *Les aubes*. Epupa, like Isilo, is a former history student. This is significant in itself for, in choosing to educate herself about the continent's past, Epupa is able to access a dark epoch that so many of her continental peers are unaware of or unwilling to explore. Branded a 'folle' at the end of *L'intérieur* and across much of *Les aubes*, Epupa's insights are ultimately shown to be the most effective in healing the continent's traumatised self-image by reconciling its community members past and present. Importantly, this healing is shown to be dependent on three factors – women, nature and historical consciousness.

By virtue of her medium abilities, Epupa is able to locate and subsequently reintegrate Eku's missing (mostly male) community members

¹ Abomo-Maurin, 'Femmes et hommes dans la micro-société d'Ekou, ou l'écriture de l'éveil féminin dans l'Afrique des villages', p. 46.

– Epa, Eso, the kidnapped Eku children and Ayané. She does this by performing the Sankofa ceremony, a ritual that draws on African religious practices and in which natural elements, notably water, play a vital role. Water is, of course, a symbolic element in both literature and life across many civilisations yet it assumes specific functions and symbolism in the Sub-Saharan context.¹ In preparation for the spiritual and, to a lesser extent, physical reintegration of Epa, Eso, Ayané and the Eku children back into the clan, each individual is bathed in specially prepared water at *La Colombe*. The objective of this first bath is to purify them. Once accompanied back to Eku village, the bathing gesture is repeated with water infused with plants known to “house spirits”.² This time, it is the Eku women who collectively perform the gesture in a symbolic return “to the source” for those having been alienated, for a multitude of reasons, from their community.³ Bathing in water in African religious contexts “cleanses the initiates of previous impurities, drives away evil forces and protects them”.⁴ Water cleansing specifically targets “mystical impurities”, those incurred “through broken taboos, the commitment of crime, and contamination by evil magic or curse”.⁵ The cleansing Sankofa ritual permits the Eku boys including Eso and Epa, all former child soldiers, to be, at least in part, cleansed of the impurities contracted through their participation in atrocities. It is the solution proposed by Epupa and the female community members of Eku to remedy the “incurable *mal*” for which Epa believed no redemption would be possible.⁶ As will be discussed shortly, the implications of the ritual

¹ For French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, water is a profoundly feminine and maternal element. It is, furthermore, the “natural symbol of purity” whose regenerating connotations are reflected in the myth of the Fountain of Youth. Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942), p. 70-71, 149, 57.

² Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 244.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁴ Camille Talkeu Tounounga, 'The Liquid of the Gods', *UNESCO Courier*, May (1993), 38-39.

⁵ John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religious Thought* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), p. 154.

⁶ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 79.

undertaken by the Eku women under the guidance of Epupa extend well beyond these individual cases serving to rehabilitate and heal the whole community dispersed in both time and space. It is the occasion for all Eku community members to be ‘cleansed’ of a collective wrongdoing concerning their relinquishment of “the most sacred of duties”.¹

For Ayané, the Sankofa ritual is singularly significant for it is the first time that she has been implicated in a ritual “associating all the members of the clan” she who, as seen in *L’intérieur*, was marginalised from birth because of her parents’ choices and even banished from Eku following the rebels’ insurrection.² Washed as it were of her parents’ ‘faults’ through water, Ayané is finally able to make peace with her formidable aunt Ié. The latter’s feet are imprisoned in mud by Epupa who uses her medium abilities in conjunction with the mystical properties of water to force the village elder, now acting chief, to see the error in her judgement of the “daughter of the stranger”.³ Unable to escape the mud by herself, Ié is obliged to accept Ayané’s help and, more importantly, recognise her as a daughter of the clan. She, along with the other female Eku villagers, apologises to Ayané, itself a highly symbolic gesture. As illustrated, the ability to apologise is a fundamental component for the establishment of genuine sisterhood according to Hudson-Weems. In *Celles*, it was shown to be a crucial factor in the success of Arame and Daba’s intergenerational and non-hierarchical sisterhood, the foundation of which reflected a spiritual, moral and emotional evolution that laid the bases for a new family structure, a healed family structure.⁴ Ayané too apologises to her aunt for she has come to understand that she too contributed to her own marginalisation and that, despite her

¹ Ibid., p. 12.

² Ibid., p. 244.

³ Ibid., p. 232.

⁴ Haskell, 'Plotting *Migritude*: Variations of the *Bildungsroman* in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* and *Celles qui attendent*', p. 151, 52.

claims to the contrary in *L'intérieur*, she had in fact “always wanted this, without knowing how to create it”, “a connection to origin, anchorage”, “roots”.¹ Newly (re)integrated into the Eku community, Ayané asks Ié to teach her the traditions that her marginalised status prevented her from knowing and Ié accepts to do so in an intergenerational sharing of knowledge, a key ecowomanist value. The reader notes a marked evolution in Ayané’s attitude towards the traditions and rituals of the Eku people. She no longer, as was the case in *L'intérieur*, holds them “in contempt” instead attributing to them inherent worth.² She has, in short, come to recognise the value of her Africanicity, an Africanicity that, as will be shown shortly, Miano extends well beyond the African and European continents thereby discontinuing the binary Afropean dynamic at play in *L'intérieur*. Ayané’s reintegration is concretely symbolised by Ié’s use of her name for the first time which the Eku women agree to inscribe in the clan’s lineage. Ié consenting to use Ayané’s name reflects the latter’s existence within the Eku clan, something which had previously been so vehemently denied.³ It inscribes her within Eku’s collective memory, for it is a name that the ancestors will now recognise in the spirit world, yet also in its future for children yet to be born will bear it.⁴ The healing force of the female-driven Sankofa ritual leaves Ayané feeling “appeased” and “assembled” as she reflects that the “thicknesses” and complexities of her previously uncomfortable hybrid identity are finally forming “a coherent whole”.⁵

Prior to arriving at Eku and performing the Sankofa ritual which closes *Les aubes*, Epupa lambasts in the streets of Sombé: “Those who died never left! It does not date from today that the blood of our own reddens the dawn

¹ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 245.

² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

³ See the concept of ‘Nommo’ (pages 224; 259).

⁴ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 246.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

and that we find ourselves captive of their torment...I say: Sankofa! That they live in our memory. Sankofa! That the past teach us who we are at present”.¹ Here Epupa once again draws attention to the intimate link connecting past continental traumas (namely Transatlantic slavery) to the those currently plaguing Mbaosu. For historian Jean-Pierre Chrétien, the slave trade had a long-lasting effect on the psychology of those who suffered its terror and even on that of their descendants who collectively integrated a “mental framework based on distrust towards strangers and power”, a framework that was subsequently reinforced during colonialism.² The devastating intergenerational effects of Transatlantic slavery are rendered saliently perceptible in *L'intérieur* and *Les aubes*. In Eku, the villagers’ collective fear of anything from the outside (including Ayané’s mother, the ‘stranger’) can be linked back to historical trauma suffered at the hands of an invading force generations ago. When eight men disappeared in the forest bordering Eku, the community made the decision to no longer frequent this part of its territory and to confine its women, previously free to come and go as they pleased, to the village. The eight clan members thought to have been taken by “creatures unknown to humans”,³ by “savage beasts”,⁴ were in fact snatched from their community by other men and destined to be sent across

¹ Ibid., p. 161-62.

² Jean-Pierre Chrétien, 'L'Afrique, un village sans histoire? ', in Jean-Pierre Chrétien (ed.), *L'Afrique de Sarkozy. Un déni d'histoire* (Paris: Karthala, 2008), 35-89, p. 58. Whereas canonical theories of trauma tend to restrict trauma's pervasive impact to the lifespan of the individual who suffered it, the notion that collective trauma can be transmitted over generations is now well established in postcolonial studies. See in particular the work of Stef Craps: Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2014).; Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, 'Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels', *Studies in the Novel*, 40/1/2 Postcolonial trauma novels (2008), 1-12. For a discussion of the specific case of intergenerational slavery trauma transmission in Afro-American communities, see the work of Ron Eyerman: Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the formation of African American identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a more in-depth discussion of postcolonial trauma manifestation and transmission relating to both slavery and colonisation in Sub-Saharan Africa in Miano's fiction (*Contours du jour qui vient*), see: Charlotte Mackay, '(Post)colonial trauma, memory, and history in Léonora Miano's *Contours of the coming day* [Contours du jour qui vient]', *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 23/2 (2018), 1-15.

³ Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 4.

⁴ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 236.

the Atlantic Ocean to the New World colonies as chattel slaves. Lassi explains below how, in refusing to frequent the forest and integrate into collective memory what occurred there centuries ago, the Eku community is effectively turning its back on its own community members (including those that went on to populate diasporic spaces) while maintaining itself in an essentially passive position as mere victims of history:

En intégrant la forêt dans le discours social comme un espace notoire d'insécurité, en refusant de la fréquenter, les Ekus marquent une rupture définitive avec les huit disparus qui y ont été enlevés. Ils manquent ainsi l'occasion de faire entrer l'esclavage dans leur histoire et de l'assumer à leur manière en instituant dans la forêt un rituel commémoratif qui aurait le double avantage de conférer une valeur positive à cet écosystème, lequel demeurerait alors un territoire maîtrisé, et d'établir une communication spirituelle qui maintiendrait les locaux d'Eku et leurs congénères de la diaspora dans la même communauté. Pour Miano, la frontière intangible que représente la forêt se compare à un mur de protection qui ampute la localité d'une partie de son territoire et de ses sujets. Une telle frontière confine en même temps la communauté dans le rôle passif de victime de l'histoire et limite sa perception du monde et son sens de l'initiative. C'est pour cette raison que la nouvelle conscience historique que l'auteur préconise pour panser les blessures ignorées de l'âme africaine se traduit aussi dans ses romans par un nouveau regard sur les frontières.¹

[By integrating the forest into social discourse as a notoriously insecure space, in refusing to go there, the Ekus are marking a clean break from the eight people who were kidnapped there. As such they lose the opportunity to integrate slavery into their history and to assume it in their own way through the establishment of a commemorative ritual in the forest that would have the double advantage of conferring positive value to that ecosystem that would become, subsequently, a mastered territory, and to establish spiritual communication that would maintain Eku locals and their diaspora congeners in the same community. For Miano, the intangible border that the forest represents is comparable to a protection wall that amputates from the locality a part of its territory and its subjects. At the same time, such a border confines the community to a passive victim role in history and limits its perception of the world and its sense of initiative. It is for this reason that the new historical consciousness that the author promotes to dress the ignored wounds of the African soul also translates in her novels through a new vision of borders.]

In *Les aubes*, the reintegration of Eso, Epa, Ayané and the Eku children through the Sankofa ritual is mirrored symbolically by that of the

¹ Étienne-Marie Lassi, 'Léonora Miano et la terre natale: Territoires, frontières écologiques et identités dans *L'intérieur de la nuit* et *Les Aubes écarlates*', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, 27/2 (2012), 136-50, p. 143.

clan's past ancestors who finally recover their place in the collective memory of their living descendants. Their story is revealed to the village collectivity by Epupa who, by virtue of her knowledge of continental history, is well placed to establish historical consciousness, a central component for the development of an Afro-diasporic consciousness. This is the same historical consciousness that Isilo aspired to see established across continental populations. Yet whereas his desperate recourse to extreme Afrocentrism and violence ultimately prevented him from achieving this objective and resulted in the creation of a destructive brotherhood, Epupa's nonviolent practices encouraging spiritual healing through awareness of history and its consequences are successful. The Eku women's reintegration of living and deceased clan members reflects a significant evolution in their collective mentality. They come to realise that the Eku community survives well beyond the geographical bounds of the village as it lives on within members of the diaspora both past and present.¹ Importantly, men are not excluded from this novel community vision. Through the re-integration of Eso, Epa and the other Eku boys, men are invited to collaborate with their female counterparts and to assume new roles in a community healed by women just as Lamine does upon his return to Senegal from Europe in *Celles*.

Furthermore, the Eku women decide to no longer position themselves passively in regard to history's traumas by recovering, by dint of Ayané's courage, their "right" to move freely around their environment (including the forest) and into other spaces.² If this is extended to a continental scale, a rather inescapable consideration given Miano's constant references to the victims of Transatlantic slavery, Sub-Saharan Africa is shown to exist well beyond continental borders. She continues to exist within diasporic spaces

¹ Ibid., p. 139.

² Ibid., p. 247.

as it was not only her human resources, her “industrious arms”,¹ that were snatched during the Transatlantic slave trade. The loss was above all spiritual for it was “pieces of her soul” that the slaver ships took far way.²

Having re-established the spiritual connection between the Eku villagers and their diasporic components past and present, Epupa leaves the village. She arrives at the banks of the Tubé River and dives into its waters in her own ritual bathing gesture designed to extend the work performed in Eku throughout the entire continent and “cleanse this land” and herself for it is as if she has carried for too long the collective crimes and suffering of her people, a burden from which she must be delivered.³ Here Epupa again comes into contact with “those who perished during the Middle Passage”, the dead “having no name in the land of their fathers” and for whom “there had never been an abolition”.⁴ Yet whereas the dead that Epa saw accompanying his brother in *Embracements* were chained together and their faces concealed, those Epupa sees in the water, the “meeting-point between the visible and invisible world”, and metaphoric Atlantic Ocean not separating Africa from the Americas but connecting her to them, are no longer chained down.⁵ They are dancing joyfully and, moreover, have regained their faces, their human identity, reconstituted through the Sankofa ritual which reinstated them into continental history and memory. The living and the dead of Eku “are finally communing with other in appeasement”.⁶ The natural, human and spirit realms, previously destabilised, have returned, by virtue of the healing force of women and nature, to a state of interconnected cosmic harmony. This community healing is, symbolically,

¹ Miano, *L'Impératif transgressif*, p. 167.

² Ibid.

³ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 265.

⁴ Ibid., p. 266.

⁵ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religious Thought*, p. 149.

⁶ Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 255.

the result of the efforts of continental African women and not of those of any exterior force or influence. Miano thus attributes to the African continent the keys to her own regeneration.

Throughout *Les aubes*, Miano reiterates her plea for Afrodescendants to unite around the traumatic memory of slavery not for the purpose of guilt attribution or retribution, but in recognition of the “common matrix” linking all African peoples and particularly those scattered around the Atlantic Basin.¹ What then is the specific role of water and namely immersive bathing in the Sankofa ritual and how does it reflect the development of an Afro-diasporic consciousness that stretches from continental Africa into the diasporic spaces of the Black Atlantic? As noted earlier during my discussion of ecowomanism, African spirituality across the continent traditionally seeks communion with nature as a means of “achieving harmony with the divine”.² The natural world, and singularly waterways, are prominent in traditional African cosmology where they constitute the privileged “abode of the spirits”³ rendering springs, ponds, rivers, streams, oceans and lakes “the great aquatic temples of Africa”.⁴ Water based rituals and beliefs were one of the many cultural artefacts to travel with African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. Even after converting to Christianity, displaced and enslaved African peoples maintained their animist religious beliefs in bodies of water as “associated with supernatural power”.⁵ River baptisms are one key example of how this water-based spirituality mutated with the new and imposed

¹ Ibid., p. 270.

² Bryan Sinclair, 'Merging Streams: The Importance of the River in the Slaves' Religious World', *The Journal of Religious Thought*, 53/54/2-1 (1997), 1-19, p. 2.

³ Tounounga, 'The Liquid of the Gods'. (This worldview is very much present in Eku where village *doyenne* Ié recalls in *L'intérieur* that the dead reside “in the gusts of wind, the lapping of the spring and even in the insignificance of the centipede.” Miano [trans. Black], *Dark Heart of the Night*, p. 121.

⁴ Sinclair, 'Merging Streams: The Importance of the River in the Slaves' Religious World', p. 2.

⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

Christian environment and even provided Africans in the Americas with a means to continue to practise their spirituality somewhat covertly.¹

Even today in Afro-diasporic spaces, water continues to hold symbolic meaning associated with “ideas of healing, rebirth, newness, and purity” and features as a key component of Afro-Atlantic religions linked by the common legacy of slavery.² Water-based rituals abound in Afro-Cuban Santería and Afro-Brazilian Candomblé.³ In Haitian Vodou, water is evoked during ceremonies that connect the island’s inhabitants with the religious roots of their ancestors hailing from modern-day Benin, Togo and Nigeria. According to Tounounga, “Haitians believe that they can conquer that mythical Africa whence all the spirits came, by way of subterranean waters” making watery passages one of the key conduits through which a redemptive return to the African homeland can be spiritually achieved.⁴ The watery connections resulting from slavery are, however, not only visible in the Afro-religions of the New World but also in its literary traditions. Literary scholars have underscored the important place that water-based rituals and offerings hold specifically in contemporary feminine Afro-diasporic literature and how these relate back to Atlantic slavery, its memory and diasporic connections back to Africa. As noted by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory,

¹ “The very features of Christianity peculiar to slaves were often outward manifestations of deeper African religious concerns, products of a religious outlook towards which the master class might otherwise be hostile. By operating under cover of [this Baptist rite], vital aspects of Africanity, which some considered eccentric in movement, sound, and symbolism, could more easily be practiced openly. Slaves therefore had readily available the prospect of practising, without being scorned, essential features of African faith together with those of the new faith”. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 35-36. See also: Sinclair, 'Merging Streams: The Importance of the River in the Slaves' Religious World', p. 6-7.

² Griffith, *Art and Ritual in the Black Diaspora. Archetypes of Transition*, p. 7.

³ Many Afrodescendant religions throughout the Caribbean, North and South America celebrate Yemoja, a Yoruba-based water deity and goddess of the natural world and namely “aquatic zones of communication, trade, and transportation such as oceans, rivers, and lagoons”. Yemoja is closely associated with African water deities such as Olókùn (Nigeria) and Mami Wata (West and Central Africa). Solimar Otera and Toyin Falola, 'Introduction: Introducing Yemoja', in Solimar Otera and Toyin Falola (ed.), *Yemoja. Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), xvii-xxxii, p. xix.

⁴ Tounounga, 'The Liquid of the Gods'.

“[h]ealing rituals [...] serve as a unifying link in the works of black women writers” where they generally involve “[...] water and motion and are intricately connected to reenactments of the Middle Passage and subsequent voluntary and involuntary migrations”.¹ “[A]ncestrally embedded, consecrated, and divinized”, water is sacralised in the texts of Afrodescendant women writers of the Atlantic Basin in the name of “those who eternally rest on the ocean floor” and out of a yearning for connections with them.² An ecowomanist reading of *Les aubes* similarly suggests that female voices in concert with the natural elements, namely water, play an important role in healing traumatised Black Atlantic communities by bringing them into spiritual interconnectedness. If the works of many Afrodescendant women authors in the Americas accentuate a symbolic and spiritual return to an African homeland through watery passages, what is novel in *Les aubes* (and to a lesser extent *Celles*) is the directional change as a continental woman writer seeks connections with and across the Black Atlantic. Water here serves to “de-continentalise” et “de-nationalise” the continent, to “inscribe it in a connected history, a global history”.³ This history redefines what Africa is and, namely, where she can be found for Africa has become “a deterritorialised reality, an identitarian, historical and political transversality [...] present in diasporic spaces”.⁴ Mbembe concurs with Miano when he asserts that “Africa no longer constitutes a centre. She is now made of poles between which there is constantly passage, circulation and spawning. These poles feed into and across each other. They form

¹ Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, 'Introduction: On Their Way to Becoming Whole', in Elizabeth Brown-Guillory (ed.), *Middle Passage and the Healing Place of History: Migration and Identity in Black Women's Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 1-13, p. 3.

² Anissa Janine Wardi, 'The Cartography of Memory: An Ecocritical Reading of Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*', *African American Review*, 45/1-2 (2012), 131-42, p. 134.

³ Françoise Vergès, 'Afriques océaniques, Afriques liquides', in Alain Mabanckou (ed.), *Penser et écrire l'Afrique aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2017), 50-59, p. 51.

⁴ Miano, *L'Impératif transgressif*, avant-propos.

cultural regions, slicks and deposits from which African creation continuously draws”.¹

My womanist readings of both *Celles* and *Les aubes* have demonstrated the development of a distinctly feminine Afro-diasporic consciousness in Diome’s and Miano’s latter novels when compared to *L’intérieur* and *Le Ventre*. In their more recent texts, the authors position women as important actors in a transatlantic space connecting through history, memory and continual struggles both continental and diasporic African women in their quest for community healing and betterment. In doing so, Diome and Miano build upon Gilroy’s highly masculinised Black Atlantic by adding a substantial feminine perspective to its emancipatory prestige. In terms of gender-based oppression more broadly, the authors ultimately stress the fact that the “feminist battle is not uniform” and that it “takes roots in places as generators of meaning”.²

¹ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 224.

² Amabiamina, *Femmes, parole et espace public au Cameroun. Analyse de textes des littératures écrite et populaire*, p. 27.

2.5 Part 2 Conclusion

Part 2 began with an introduction to *Les aubes* and *Celles* – their respective plots, reception and the scholarly work already undertaken on them. After detailing the contentions surrounding Afropean theory as a suitable theoretical tool for analysing these texts alongside those of other contemporary diasporic African authors, I argued that a revised and extended version of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model would be more appropriate for accommodating what some researchers have identified as a specifically transatlantic disposition in both *Les aubes* and *Celles*. Gilroy’s theory of cultural formation in the Afro-diasporic spaces of the New World has had an immensely important impact (and continues to do so to this day) on the fields of diaspora and postcolonial studies. Yet it has also been criticised for several important shortcomings. Scholars of Gilroy’s work have noted that it is hamperingly Anglocentric, excludes the African continent from discussions of the (counter-)modern and relies almost exclusively on Transatlantic slavery as the formative element of Black Atlantic culture while neglecting the region’s heavy colonial past and neocolonial present. Furthermore, Gilroy’s Black Atlantic is a highly masculinised space in which creative and emancipatory initiatives are overwhelmingly attributed to Afrodescendant men at the expense of Afrodescendant women.

I argued that Miano and Diome both concur with Gilroy’s model while addressing some of its key lacunae. I demonstrated that both authors re-instate the African continent as a key component in the counter-modern discourse that characterises the Afrodescendant communities of the Atlantic Basin (counter-modern consciousness). My analysis of the child soldier revealed that this figure is used in Miano’s *Les aubes* to challenge dominant conceptions of Occidental modernity axed on linear time consciousness and developmental progress. I then engaged with postcolonial ecocriticism to

highlight the role of predatory capitalist practices in both *Les aubes* and *Celles*. Neocolonial slow violence was shown to ultimately result in the disintegration of Sub-Saharan environments and societies and namely in the separation of men from their communities. I discussed Miano and Diome's propensity to bring into dialogue the histories of both (neo)colonialism and the Transatlantic slave trade thus tracing the contours of a persistent racially-based exploitative paradigm around the Atlantic Basin (historical consciousness). Finally, I considered Miano and Diome's promotion of continental African women as major initiators of transatlantic dialogue (feminine consciousness). My womanist readings of *Celles* and *Les aubes* exposed an approach to gender relations that is more anchored in African sensibilities having travelled across the Atlantic and into the Americas when compared to the more classic feminist visions displayed in *L'intérieur* and *Le Ventre*. It similarly illustrated the important role that African women (not necessarily migrant) perform in the healing of traumatised Black Atlantic communities. These three forms of consciousness – counter-modern, historical and feminine – constitute, in my opinion, the defining elements composing Miano's and Diome's visions of Afro-diasporic consciousness.

General Conclusion

Si les Africains veulent se mettre debout et marcher, il leur faudra tôt ou tard regarder ailleurs qu'en Europe. [...] L'Afrique devra porter son regard vers ce qui est neuf. Elle devra se mettre en scène et accomplir, pour la première fois, ce qui n'a pas été possible auparavant. Il faudra qu'elle le fasse en ayant conscience d'ouvrir, pour elle-même et pour l'humanité, des temps nouveaux.¹

J'appelle de tous mes vœux une connaissance intime des bouts d'Afrique dispersés qui n'a de sens que si elle autorise la construction d'une mémoire commune soumise aux dissensions historiques et intimes.²

The present study investigated the literary portrayal of the African continent, her peoples and identities in the works of two contemporary Francophone Sub-Saharan women writers, Léonora Miano and Fatou Diome. Its aim was to demonstrate a marked evolution across their novels in terms of collective Afro-identitarian revalorisation through the theoretical concept of Afro-diasporic consciousness. Analysis of Diome's *Le Ventre* and *Celles* and Miano's *L'intérieur* and *Les aubes* reveals the authors' increasingly ardent commitment to rehabilitating and revalorising contemporary Africanity through fiction. This revalorisation was shown to be dependent on movement beyond the bounds of restrictive and colonially-referential Afropea and towards transnational engagement, through the recognition of common history, memory, spirituality and contemporary plights, with Africa's Black Atlantic diaspora – her “double”.³ Although this Afro-diasporic engagement is arguably more discernible in Miano's literary aesthetic, it is also apparent in that of Diome.

The authors appropriate some of the key objectives of Négritude writing in that they address an increasingly conspicuous challenge to

¹ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 243.

² Etoke, *Melancholia Africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, p. 33.

³ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 45.

exclusive and binary Eurocentric conceptions of seeing and being. They ultimately enhance Négritude's tenets by providing a more nuanced vision of the African continent, her relations with the West and contemporary African identities dispersed throughout the world. They refrain from subscribing to idealised and utopic visions of Africa and instead promote models of collective Afro-identitarian revalorisation that emphasise the need for lucid and objective appreciation of past and present traumas, assumption of collective responsibility in these traumas and a selective retention of traditional values within a transnational and evolving world. More generally, my analysis of Miano's and Diome's novels disputes Cazenave's claim that postcolonial Francophone African authors living and working in France are largely disinterested in their continent and communities of origin having turned their literary attention "towards themselves and their own experiences".¹ To employ Cazenave's own terminology, the "gaze" of Miano and Diome remains firmly settled on Africa, albeit, on an Africa that is no longer contained within continental borders. In these texts, Africa has progressively been transformed "[...] into a global territorial signifier, one that exceeds Africa as "place" [...] but from which Africa itself is never absent".²

I do not believe that this study should be dissociated from real-world political and social happenings. As late Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi stated in the preface of his novel *L'État honteux*, "the novel is, apparently, a work of imagination. Imagination must, however, find its place somewhere in some reality".³ The desperate clandestine migrants, worried mothers, lonely wives, aspiring professional football players, wounded child soldiers,

¹ Cazenave, *Afrique sur Seine. A New Generation of African Writers in Paris*, p. 30-31.

² Dominic Thomas, *Black France: Colonisation, Immigration, and Transnationalism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 22.

³ Sony Labou Tansi, *L'État honteux* (Éditions du Seuil, 1981).

belittled menial labourers, dispossessed villagers and passionate history graduates that Diome and Miano evoke in their texts are inspired by real people who exist off the written page. If Diome's and Miano's novels teach us anything, it is that people of African origin are still suffering in a supposedly 'post-racial' era from the racially-based and devaluing discourses that so defined their ancestors throughout modern history. This has had, and continues to do so, an important impact on African people and their conceptualisation of Africanity as underscored through Miano's remarks concerning diminished self-consciousness in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is reflected, according to Ouattara, in a return to colonial rhetoric buttressed on self-hatred in the works of some contemporary Francophone African writers.

There is, therefore, a need to engage with discourses (literary and other) that rehabilitate and re-attribute value to an important part of our global humanity. Literature has a crucial role to play in such an endeavour and can work in tandem with real-world political and social movements. This is increasingly the case for 'engaged' authors like Miano and Diome who have, in the last few years, turned their attention to writing nonfictional texts on issues of social, cultural and fundamentally human importance including clandestine migration, neocolonial domination and debates around issues of national identity in the context of increasingly populist rhetoric in Europe and elsewhere. The Black Lives Matter movement has managed to draw an increasing amount of attention over the last few years to the fact that young African American men are still being shot dead at an alarming rate in the United States. Miano evokes the Black Lives Matter movement in her essay *L'impératif transgressif*, stating that even if "the American context is not the same as that of Sub-Saharan nations", it still greatly informs a broader issue

of “racial categorisation” that exists transnationally.¹ The movement has since crossed over the Atlantic to establish itself in France where French citizens of Sub-Saharan descent are taking up the call for an end to race-based police violence. Even in Melbourne, Australia, a country with its own traumatic colonial and ensuing postcolonial issues and where I wrote the majority of this thesis, African Australians have been the target of police discrimination solely on the basis of their Sub-Saharan ethnicity.² What links these diverse populations and their contemporary experiences of discrimination and violence across three continents is their Sub-Saharan heritage. This observation alone undermines the claims made by some in regard to the advent of a colour-blind or post-racial era.

In their own way, Miano and Diome as contemporary Sub-Saharan authors are attempting through fiction to re-write Africa and her peoples’ place in the world. Their work is important in the decade dubbed that of “people of African descent” by the United Nations in a bid to “encourage States to eradicate social injustices inherited from history and to fight against racism, prejudice and racial discrimination to which people of African descent are still subjected”.³ My thesis, “From Afropea to the Afro-Atlantic: A study of four novels by Léonora Miano and Fatou Diome”, contributes in its own modest way to this project yet its scope remains limited. Further research could and should consider representations of Sub-Saharan peoples and contemporary Africanity in the works of women writers from the continent and living in the diaspora across Anglophone, Hispanophone, Lusophone and indigenous African language spaces.

¹ Miano, *L'Impératif transgressif*, p. 154.

² See: Anthony Kelly, 'An end to racial profiling in sight', *Crime and Justice*, Insight /8 (2013), 44-46.; Melissa Phillips, 'Mistreating minorities: Victoria Police and racial profiling', *The Conversation* (2013).; Peter Seidel and Tamar Hopkins, 'No one should be stopped by police just because they're black', *The Age*, 19/02/2013.

³ Unesco, 'International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024)'.

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Annex

**De l'Afropea à l'Afro-Atlantique : une étude de
quatre romans de Léonora Miano et Fatou
Diome**

2.2 Conscience afro-diasporique *contre-moderne*:¹ La mise en cause de la modernité et ses fondements dans les espaces subsahariens

Nous avons montré la tendance générale des critiques à accorder une « grande utilité » au texte de Paul Gilroy tout en reconnaissant le réel potentiel qu'apporterait un « élargissement et développement » de ce dernier.² Dans cette section, nous avons pour objectif de faire ressortir la promotion des deux écrivains d'une contre-culture africaine de la modernité qui rétablit le continent comme acteur clé dans l'espace de l'Atlantique noir. En promouvant ce qui s'avère être une approche plus nuancée à l'égard de « la modernité et ses mécontentements »³ dans *Les aubes écarlates* et *Celles qui attendent*, Leonora Miano et Fatou Diome rompent avec la binarité tradition-modernité qui, nous l'avons vu, définit les relations entre les personnages africains et afropéens dans *L'intérieur de la nuit* et *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Elles rompent également avec un modèle singulier de la modernité, celui de la modernité occidentale, qu'endossent certains personnages (notamment Ayané, Ndétare et, dans une moindre mesure, Salie) dans leurs premiers romans. Comme le note Simon Gikandi, le questionnement des « notions coloniales de progrès, temps et subjectivité » a été et reste au cœur de la production littéraire postcoloniale et cette observation s'applique aisément aux romans de L. Miano et de F. Diome.⁴ Dans ces textes, les écrivains attirent l'attention sur les lacunes d'une version singulière de la modernité caractérisée par des principes hérités de l'époque des Lumières tels le progrès, la raison et l'entreprise capitaliste, un projet

¹ Nous proposons le terme « contre-moderne » comme équivalent du terme anglais « counter-modern ».

² L. Evans "The Black Atlantic: Exploring Gilroy's legacy", *Atlantic Studies*, 6/2(2009), p. 260.

³ P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London; New York, Verso, 1993, p. 45.

⁴ S. Gikandi, "Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73/3(2012), p. 311.

qui, malgré ses accents humanistes, a historiquement servi les intérêts d'une proportion restreinte de l'humanité.¹ Tout en promouvant l'existence de multiples et différentes visions du monde qui correspondent davantage avec celles ayant façonné la « perspective ambivalente » des peuples de l'Atlantique noir envers les notions occidentales de « progrès »,² Miano et Diome font part de leurs réserves quant à l'application universelle de la modernité et, plus précisément, à l'égard de ce que P. Gilroy identifie comme « sa confiance arrogante en sa propre infaillibilité ».³ Nous nous pencherons dans un premier temps sur la figure de l'enfant-soldat dans le texte de Miano, figure qui sert à fragiliser les conventions d'une modernité eurocentrique. Nous examinerons ensuite les représentations littéraires de la violence néocoloniale dans *Les aubes écarlates* et *Celles qui attendent*.

2.2.1 LA FIGURE DE L'ENFANT-SOLDAT AFRICAIN

À ce jour, la place de l'enfant-soldat dans la formation d'une contre-modernité dans l'Atlantique noir a été largement négligée. Ceci est souligné par Yogita Goyal dans son introduction à un numéro spécial de la revue *Research in African Literatures* consacré à l'Afrique et à l'Atlantique noir. La chercheuse pose la question suivante : « Comment la figure de plus en plus visible de l'enfant-soldat dans la fiction contemporaine africaine peut-elle se rattacher à l'interrogation de l'Atlantique noir sur la liberté et la modernité, la violence historique et la façon dont cette dernière a donné forme à la politique et à la culture contemporaines ? »⁴ Cette question est légitime car le phénomène des enfants-soldats a inéluctablement marqué l'histoire récente subsaharienne. Le droit international interdit le recrutement

¹ P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 43.

² J. Gruesser, *Confluences. Postcolonialism, African American Literary Studies, and the Black Atlantic*, Athens; London, The University of Georgia Press, 2005, p. 17-18.

³ P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 43.

⁴ Y. Goyal, "Africa and the Black Atlantic", *Research in African Literatures*, 45(3), p. x.

de toute personne de moins de 18 ans dans des groupes non-étatiques armés et érige en infraction celui de personnes de moins de 15 ans dans des groupes armés étatiques et non-étatiques.¹ Malgré cette restriction explicite, J. A. Kearney remarque dans un article publié en 2010 que de nombreux groupes armés non-étatiques sont peu soucieux du droit international et continuent de recruter des enfants à grande échelle. Il souligne, en outre, que 10 des 23 pays au monde dans lesquels il est avéré que les enfants participent à des conflits armés se trouvent en Afrique.² Aussi « ancien » que la guerre elle-même, le recrutement d'enfants dans des conflits armés persiste dans de nombreuses régions du monde.³ Cela dit, l'Afrique demeure un foyer clé du recrutement mondial d'enfants-soldats abritant environ 40% des 300 000 enfants-soldats estimés dans le monde entier.⁴ Les cas les plus tristement célèbres d'enfants-soldats de l'histoire récente se rapportent sans doute aux guerres civiles en Sierra Leone et au Liberia (années 1990-début des années 2000). Ces conflits ont vu l'émergence du chef de guerre notoire Charles Taylor et sa tout aussi infâme unité militaire composée de jeunes garçons – son *Small Boys' Unit*.⁵ En Ouganda et dans les pays voisins, L'Armée de résistance du Seigneur, fondée en 1987 par Joseph Kony, continue d'être impliquée dans le recrutement d'enfants dans des conflits armés. Si la définition de ce qui constitue un « enfant » selon le droit international et ses institutions est relativement claire, saisir ce qu'implique l'engagement d'un enfant dans une lutte armée est plus complexe et propre au contexte spécifique du conflit. Alcinda Honwana, professeure d'anthropologie et de développement international et ancienne chercheuse aux Nations Unies,

¹ J. A. Kearney, "The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction", *Journal of Literary Studies*, 26/1(2010), p. 68.

² Ibid.

³ D. Francis, "Paper protection' mechanisms: child soldiers and the international protection of children in Africa's conflict zones", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45/2(2007), p. 208.

⁴ Ibid. Voir aussi : A. Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, Philadelphia, The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

précise que le terme « enfant-soldat » dans le contexte subsaharien se réfère au :

Type de combattant qui remplit les rangs de groupes paramilitaires ou de rebelles, [qui est] inadéquatement formé et équipé, [et qui] opère souvent sous l'influence de drogues. Ces personnes harcèlent, pillent et tuent la population civile sans défense de manière indiscriminée. Non seulement elles ne montrent aucune pitié à l'égard de leurs victimes mais elles peuvent être amenées à ne plus faire de distinction entre ami et ennemi, parent et étranger.¹

Avec un tel aperçu de ce qu'implique concrètement l'enrôlement d'enfants dans des conflits armés en Afrique subsaharienne, il n'est pas surprenant de constater que la figure de l'enfant-soldat africain dans la production culturelle a attiré de plus en plus d'attention de la part du public en général, mais également des chercheurs de diverses disciplines depuis le début des années 2000. Il y a eu une véritable explosion de travaux littéraires et cinématographiques qui placent l'enfant-soldat au centre de l'intrigue : des écrivains subsahariens de langue française et anglaise ainsi que plusieurs films à grand succès dont *Blood Diamond* (2006) et, plus récemment, *Beasts of no Nation* (2015), film adopté du roman du même titre de l'auteur nigérian-américain Uzodinma Iweala.² Miano n'est certainement pas le premier écrivain d'Afrique francophone à exploiter ce thème que l'on attribuera sans doute plus aisément au roman *Allah n'est pas obligé* de l'écrivain ivoirien Ahmadou Kourouma.³ Dans ce texte, le jeune Birahima raconte à la première personne (tout comme Epa dans *Les aubes*) son expérience en tant qu'enfant-soldat pendant les guerres civiles au Liberia et en Sierra Leone. Un deuxième roman publié en 2002, *Johnny Chien Méchant*,⁴ par le chimiste et auteur congolais Emmanuel Dongala puise son inspiration dans un véritable conflit dans lequel étaient impliqués des

¹ A. Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, p. 51.

² U. Iweala, *Beasts of No Nation*, New York, Harper Perennial, 2005.

³ A. Kourouma, *Allah n'est pas obligé*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000.

⁴ E. Dongala, *Johnny Chien Méchant*, Paris, Le Serpent à plumes, 2002.

enfants-soldats, celui de la guerre civile du Congo-Brazzaville à la fin des années 1990.

Mais comment interpréter la figure singulière de l'enfant-soldat dans les textes littéraires ? S'agit-il uniquement de la métaphore d'une Afrique continentale plongée dans le chaos postcolonial, terre, selon Stephen Smith, « de massacres et de famine, lieu de mort de tout espoir ? »¹ De récentes études suggèrent que cette interprétation de l'enfant-soldat en littérature serait excessivement simpliste et réductrice. Elles estiment que la figure peut et devrait être lue plutôt par rapport aux conceptions dominantes de la modernité. Qu'elle soulèverait des questions concernant des éléments moteurs de la modernité tels le temps linéaire et le progrès développemental. Qu'elle remettrait également en question la tendance marquée de la modernité à catégoriser de manière hiérarchisée et binaire. Ce sont des notions intimement associées à l'impérialisme occidental, à sa justification et à sa mise en œuvre. Le philosophe Peter Osborne explique que :

C'était à travers la temporalisation de la différence fondatrice géopolitique de la colonisation que le concept de modernité s'est d'abord généralisé et qu'il a ensuite subordonné le différentiel entre lui et d'autres 'temps' à des différences au sein d'un régime unique temporel de 'progrès', 'modernisation' et de 'développement'.²

En d'autres termes, l'entreprise coloniale européenne en Afrique subsaharienne et ailleurs ne peut être dissociée de conceptions hégémoniques du temps et de la modernité. Ces notions sont elles-mêmes indissociables du rationalisme des Lumières qui a historiquement parlé de l'Afrique en tant que figure du 'non-moderne' primitive à l'égard de « la modernité

¹ S. Smith, *Négrologie: Pourquoi l'Afrique meurt*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2003, p.13.

² P. Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London, Verso, 1995, p. 21. Notre traduction de la citation originale: "[I]t was through the temporalization of the founding geopolitical difference of colonialism that the concept of modernity first came to be universalized, and, thereby, thereafter, to subordinate the differential between itself and other 'times' to differences within a single temporal scheme of 'progress', 'modernization' and 'development'".

européenne », une entité qui manque désespérément de « futurité ».¹ La critique littéraire Maureen Moynagh souligne que cette « vieille notion » qui sous-tend la logique coloniale, celle relative à une Afrique ‘arriérée’ qui tenterait de rattraper son retard vis-à-vis une Europe ‘avancée’, semble s’être revitalisée ces derniers temps.² Elle transparait notamment dans la tendance occidentale à qualifier les crises politiques en Afrique postcoloniale en termes de conflits prémodernes ‘tribaux’ ou ‘ethniques’ tout en fermant les yeux sur la domination (post)coloniale et les effets de plus en plus dévastateurs du néocolonialisme.³ De telles perceptions contribuent à l’ère contemporaine que Achille Mbembe décrit dans *Sortir de la grande nuit* comme étant « une ère qui tente de remettre au goût du jour le vieux mythe selon lequel l’Occident a, seul, le monopole du futur ».⁴

L’enfant-soldat dans la fiction contemporaine africaine peut être employé précisément avec l’objectif de déstabiliser ce mythe en tant que figure littéraire constituant « un véhicule » pour la critique de la modernité comme vision singulière du monde et du temps.⁵ En tant qu’enfant, associée de ce fait aux valeurs de « potentialité » et de « futurité », et soldat, cette figure fait violence aux « aspirations normatives [de la modernité] » de par la promesse qu’elle véhicule d’un avenir corrosif et sanguinaire.⁶ Autrement dit, les notions de progrès et de développement linéaires si fondamentales au discours occidental sur la modernité et au modèle colonial se fissurent lorsqu’elles sont confrontées à la figure de l’enfant-soldat. En tant qu’enfant, c’est un jeune être innocent pour lequel la modernité progressive semble beaucoup promettre, au moins sur le plan théorique. En tant que soldat, c’est

¹ M. Moynagh, "The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction", *Comparative Literature*, 69/3(2017), p. 316.

² Ibid., p. 317.

³ Ibid.

⁴ A. Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010, p. 240.

⁵ M. Moynagh, "The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction", p. 315.

⁶ Ibid.

un agent actif dans la commission de crimes atroces à l'égard d'autres êtres humains et, donc, l'incarnation de tout ce qui est 'barbare' et 'arriéré'. L'enfant-soldat menace, de ce fait, les aspirations 'éclairées', 'civilisées' et prospectives de la modernité. Maureen Moynagh établit un parallèle convaincant entre la fiction africaine dans laquelle figurent des enfants-soldats et la forme littéraire occidentale progressive par excellence, le *Bildungsroman* (ou roman de formation). Elle fait observer que, tandis que beaucoup d'œuvres littéraires sont lues à travers l'optique du *Bildungsroman* en tant que récits narrant « l'insatisfaction d'un développement illimité et complet » ou la « maturation différée » d'un jeune personnage, la littérature africaine illustrant des personnages enfants-soldats devrait être conçue comme « anti-*Bildungsroman* » – comme une fiction qui tend à perturber le genre en défiant et en déformant le « développement moderni(sant) idéalement imaginé » sur lequel le *Bildungsroman* se fonde.¹ M. Moynagh affirme que le temps développemental (inauguré par la période de l'enfance) n'est pas tant retardé ni différé dans ces textes mais plutôt entravé ou « court-circuité » par la participation active de l'enfant à la guerre.² Dans ces textes, le développement se trouve tout simplement « supplanté par une transformation impitoyable » et les récits « de liberté et de formation » remplacés par des récits de « coercition et de déformation ».³

La figure de l'enfant-soldat sert donc à ébranler une conception spécifiquement européenne de la modernité en minant la conscience du temps qui la sous-tend, conscience bâtie sur les notions de progrès développemental et de linéarité. Pourtant, cette figure comporte une deuxième caractéristique qui remet en cause cette conception prépondérante de la modernité : son aspect transgressif. Comme le remarque Katunga

¹ Ibid., p. 319.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Joseph Minga dans sa thèse doctorale, l'enfant-soldat constitue « l'un des concepts les plus complexes auquel se heurte l'esprit moderne ».¹ La nature perturbatrice de l'enfant-soldat émane de son ambiguïté, de son hybridité, car il s'agit d'une figure intrinsèquement anticonformiste. Elle refuse de se conformer aux catégories dichotomiques établies par « l'esprit moderne » car elle est à la fois « bourreau et victime »,² ouvertement menaçante en tant que soldat mais foncièrement vulnérable en tant qu'enfant.³ Marie Bulté fait également ressortir la nature hybride de l'enfant-soldat dont l'identité transgressive remet en question les contours traditionnels de l'enfance dans sa thèse doctorale intitulée « Visions de l'enfant-soldat : construction d'une figure dans les littératures africaines ».⁴ L'ambiguïté identitaire de l'enfant-soldat ainsi que sa capacité à interrompre la linéarité développementale sont manifestes dans les personnages des *Aubes écarlates*.

Si la décision de peupler son texte de personnages enfants-soldats peut en soi être considérée comme un geste littéraire servant à contrecarrer une modernité axée sur une conscience temporelle linéaire, les caractéristiques spécifiques des personnages créés par Miano y contribuent également. Le personnage extrêmement ambigu d'Epa représente une atteinte supplémentaire à une conception singulièrement occidentale du moderne basée sur une catégorisation dichotomique. Dans *Les aubes*, le lecteur retrouve Epa à La Colombe où il repose alité après s'être évadé du front. Bien qu'Ayané soit consciente de la brutalité dont il est capable ayant assisté elle-même à l'assassinat du chef du village de sa main dans le premier volet de la trilogie, elle ne réduit pas Epa au statut de soldat, à une simple menace,

¹ K. Minga, "Child Soldiers as Reflected in the African Francophone War Literature of the 1990s and 2000s", Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersand, 2012, p. ii.

² Ibid., p. 63.

³ C. Walther, "Études littéraires africaines, "L'enfant-soldat : langages et images", *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 224/32(2011), p. 1.

⁴ M. Bulté, "Visions de l'enfant-soldat: construction d'une figure dans les littératures africaines ", École doctorale Arts, Lettres et Langues, Université Rennes 2, 2016, p. 74.

mettant au contraire l'accent sur son humanité inhérente. Pour Ayané, Epa n'est pas simplement « un de ces enfants de la guerre », il est « plus que cela » car « [c]e n'est pas pareil, quand on les connaît. Quand on se souvient d'eux petits, agrippés au pagne de leur mère ». ¹ Ces enfants « ne poussent pas dans la nature comme de la mauvaise herbe », « [u]ne femme souffre en les mettant au monde ». ² La jeunesse d'Epa et sa vulnérabilité sont soulignées par le narrateur – il est « le jeune », « l'adolescent », « l'enfant » ou « le garçon ». ³ Tout aspect menaçant qu'il pourrait éventuellement incarner en tant que soldat est également sapé par l'état (physique et psychique) pitoyable dans lequel il se trouve ; il arrive à La Colombe « quasiment comateux », les pieds « en sang » et est visiblement dans un état de détresse aiguë lorsqu'à son réveil il s'enquiert au sujet des autres garçons d'Eku qu'il a dû abandonner au front en s'évadant. ⁴

Il devient évident tôt dans la narration qu'Epa représente un cas particulier qui met en question la catégorisation dichotomique sur laquelle se fondent les notions dominantes du moderne et du non-moderne. A la différence des autres garçons enlevés d'Eku, Epa a été enrôlé à l'âge de 17 ans, au seuil donc de l'enfance selon la Charte africaine des droits et du bien-être de l'enfant (1990). Selon cette charte, un enfant est « tout être humain âgé de moins de 18 ans ». ⁵ L'empiètement d'Epa sur l'âge adulte associé à la maturation mentale, à l'intégrité morale et à la capacité à distinguer entre le bien et le mal complique l'interprétation du lecteur de ce personnage activement engagé dans une guerre. Cela étant, J. A. Kearney nous rappelle que la distinction faite entre l'enfance et l'âge adulte dans les sociétés

¹ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, Paris, Plon, 2009, p. 20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 19, 21, 23, 26.

⁴ Ibid., p. 23-24.

⁵ "The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child", in Organisation of African Unity (ed.), (http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/child/achpr_instr_charterchild_eng.pdf, 1990), Article 2.

africaines n'est pas forcément identique à celle qui prédomine dans le monde occidental, où l'âge de 18 ans est généralement retenu comme critère décisif distinguant un enfant d'un adulte.¹ Dans le contexte subsaharien qui se caractérise, sur le plan démographique, par sa forte jeunesse – le prétendu « excès de jeunes »² – les enfants n'ont pas droit à l'insouciance. Ils portent, au contraire, de grandes responsabilités dans la mesure où ils doivent contribuer à la subsistance et à la survie des leurs.³ Tel est le cas d'Epa, obligé de délaisser son éducation prématurément pour trouver un emploi afin de soutenir sa famille. Son enfance a été, à bien des égards, sabordée par le manque chronique de possibilités pour les jeunes au Mboasu et, par extension, à travers l'Afrique subsaharienne postcoloniale.

Le recrutement d'Epa en tant qu'enfant-soldat, du moins en ce qui concerne son adhésion initiale à la rhétorique révolutionnaire d'Isilo, semble confirmer ce qu'affirme Alcinda Honwana à propos de conflits réels en Afrique subsaharienne impliquant des enfants ; selon elle, le recrutement de ces derniers n'est souvent ni volontaire, ni involontaire. La démarcation entre ces deux pôles est plutôt brouillée et, par moments, totalement inexistante.⁴ Comme le souligne le narrateur à travers le personnage d'Ayané, Epa « avait voulu faire de ses rêves une réalité. Combattre. Changer le monde ».⁵ La perception du lecteur de ce personnage et de son passé d'enfant-soldat se trouve donc compliquée par deux facteurs clé – l'âge relativement avancé d'Epa et la connaissance qu'il était, au départ, favorable à la cause des rebelles. En somme, *Les aubes*, dès son ouverture, confirme la grande complexité du phénomène des enfants-soldats en exposant le

¹ J. A. Kearney, "The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction", p. 71.

² 44% de la population subsaharienne a moins de 15 ans, ce qui fait de l'Afrique subsaharienne la région la plus jeune du monde. Voir : D. Tabutin and B. Schoumaker, "The Demography of Sub-Saharan Africa from the 1950s to the 2000s", *I.N.E.D Population*, 59/3(2004), p. 500.

³ J. A. Kearney, "The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction", p. 71.

⁴ A. Honwana, *Child soldiers in Africa*, p. 37.

⁵ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 20.

personnage ambigu, conflictuel et troublant d'Epa et en le confrontant aux rumeurs qui circulent à Sombé concernant la « férocité » et la « détermination » des enfants-soldats qui infligent sans ciller « de multiples humiliations » à la population.¹

Poussée par un besoin de réponses à ses questions concernant le sort des autres enfants d'Eku, Ayané demande à Epa de lui raconter ce qui lui est arrivé depuis la dernière fois qu'ils se sont vus au village la nuit fatale de l'invasion. Ainsi débute le long monologue analeptique d'Epa dans le chapitre « Embrasements » pendant lequel l'ampleur des actes violents perpétrés par les enfants enlevés d'Eku est révélée à Ayané mais également au lecteur.² Parmi les épisodes que raconte Epa figure l'attaque par les rebelles d'une mine de diamants et le massacre impitoyable des employés qui se trouvaient sur place. Epa rapporte :

Au bout d'un moment, ce n'était plus qu'un travail. Nous faisons tous la même chose. Personne n'était seul avec sa conscience. Nous étions nombreux. Habités les uns aux autres. Unis, en quelque sorte. Nous n'avions pas peur. Nous ne ressentions rien. Nous n'en avions pas le temps. Les plus jeunes d'entre nous ont, eux aussi, tranché des gorges.³

La structure de ce passage est remarquable à plusieurs titres. Premièrement, la série de courtes phrases sert à renforcer la rapidité des actions racontées par Epa créant une cadence qui ressemble quelque peu à celle qu'aurait un enfant pressé manipulant maladroitement une machette. Deuxièmement, la structure anaphorique met l'accent sur le fait que cette attaque est un engagement collectif. Cela est souligné, en outre, par l'opposition entre le pronom sujet « nous » et le pronom indéfini « personne ». L'attribution de la responsabilité est ainsi floue, incombant à la fois à tous et à personne. Par ailleurs, le passage met en évidence le processus de désensibilisation que les

¹ Ibid., p. 22, 23.

² Cette section (p. 43-122) correspond à approximativement un quart du roman.

³ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 77-78.

enfants ont dû subir afin de se dissocier des actes brutaux qu'ils sont forcés d'accomplir. En constatant qu'ils n'avaient pas peur, qu'ils n'avaient rien senti, Epa confirme ce que certaines études anthropologiques sur des conflits armés impliquant des enfants ont déjà indiqué : que l'incitation à réprimer une émotion naturelle est quasiment inévitable car la manifestation d'un état émotionnel peut être assimilée à de la faiblesse et mettre en danger la vie de ceux et de celles qui en font preuve.¹ Tel est le sort réservé à un jeune conscrit qui est abattu sommairement lorsqu'un rebelle le surprend en train de pleurer en pensant à sa mère.² Le passage précédent contraste sensiblement avec le passage de *L'intérieur* dans lequel la narrateur décrit les émotions intenses qu'éprouvent ces mêmes enfants au moment de la séparation de leurs mères. Si les enfants ne ressentent rien pendant le massacre à la mine dans *Les aubes*, c'est bien leur peur, notamment celle de mourir, qui pénètre le texte dans *L'intérieur* :

Tous, ils frissonnaient et transpiraient à la fois. Ils avaient peur. La même peur qui les avait opprésés au cours de ces trois heures qu'ils venaient de vivre : celle de mourir. Parce qu'on avait toujours peur, lorsqu'on sentait la mort rôder. Si elle venait à pas feutrés, si elle prenait son temps au travers d'une longue maladie, on avait le temps de s'accoutumer à ses traits. Mais au cours de cette nuit, elle avait plusieurs fois frappé sans sommation. Alors, ils avaient la trouille, et au fond de son cœur, chacun se disait qu'au moins, il ne serait pas seul.³

En un laps de temps relativement court, l'enfance des garçons d'Eku se trouve « court-circuitée ».⁴ Leur développement est usurpé par leur engagement dans une guerre entraînant leur « transformation impitoyable » en machines à tuer.⁵ Ainsi, la *Bildung* (formation, éducation) du *Bildungsroman* qu'illustre le traitement des personnages enfants-soldats sous la plume de Miano n'est pas tant différée qu'entièrement interrompue,

¹ J. A. Kearney, "The Representation of Child Soldiers in Contemporary African Fiction", p. 73, 74.

² L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 71.

³ L. Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, Paris, Plon, 2005, p. 126-27.

⁴ M. Moynagh, "The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction", p. 319.

⁵ Ibid.

sabordée. Étant donné l'ampleur de la transformation collective des enfants d'Eku en raison de leur participation à une guerre et même avant de connaître leur sort définitif, le lecteur est amené à se poser la question de savoir s'il existe un espoir pour ces enfants de pouvoir un jour réintégrer leur communauté. Cette préoccupation hante pareillement Epa qui demeure convaincu à ce stade du récit de l'impossibilité d'une rédemption collective. Il s'épanche : « [n]ous avons commis trop de crimes au cours de cette seule journée pour envisager une vie normale. Ces assassinats nous habiteraient. Ils seraient en nous, comme un mal incurable. Rien ne nous guérirait plus. [...] [n]ous n'avions plus notre place à Eku. ».¹

Avant d'examiner la réponse fictionnelle qu'apporte Miano à une telle impasse, nous nous tournons vers un deuxième personnage enfant-soldat important. C'est un personnage qui, tout comme Epa, problématise la conception dominante eurocentrique de la modernité en estompant les lignes entre des catégories supposément dichotomiques comme celles qui distinguent le bourreau de la victime et le bien du mal.

L'histoire d'Eso est racontée en détail par Epa et Epupa dans *Les aubes* bien que le lecteur rencontre ce personnage pour la première fois dans *L'intérieur*. La raison pour laquelle Eso peut s'exprimer en langue eku est enfin élucidée par Epa pendant son monologue. Eso est également originaire d'Eku. Il a été enlevé sur le marché de Sombé plusieurs années auparavant quand il était lui-même enfant. Eso a ensuite été trafiqué vers le Yénèpasi, un pays voisin, et vendu à des paysans qui l'ont réduit en esclavage. Cette période douloureuse a laissé des traces sur sa peau ; une longue cicatrice lui barre le visage du menton au front et un trou en forme de triangle sur son crâne est le vestige d'un coup de machette. Toutefois, le souvenir le plus

¹ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 79.

traumatisant pour Eso, maintenant adulte, est sans doute sa conviction profonde que sa famille n'a pas cherché à le retrouver pour le ramener au village. Ayant échappé à ses geôliers, Eso a tenté de retourner à Eku mais il s'est perdu en chemin. Sur la route il a croisé Isilo alors que ce dernier préparait déjà son entrée en guerre au Yénèpasi, guerre qu'il amènerait par la suite au Mboasu. Isilo est devenu la famille d'Eso, « [c]omme un grand frère pour lui », son seul défenseur.¹

D'une part, le traumatisme de l'enlèvement et de l'asservissement d'Eso, auquel s'ajoute sa ferme croyance en l'inaction des siens, le place clairement dans la catégorie des victimes. Or les actes violents et cruels dont Eso se montre capable – et qu'il semble, par moment, aimer infliger à des civils innocents selon le récit fait par Epa – n'ont aucun rapport avec le conflit faisant rage au Mboasu. Le lecteur peine alors à le considérer comme une simple victime. Le massacre de religieuses qu'Eso coordonne au couvent Perpétuel-Secours est particulièrement révélateur de sa brutalité, cet assaut ne présentant aucun avantage stratégique à l'égard des objectifs plus larges des Forces du changement. Malgré la haine qu'il éprouve envers les Européens, Epa est incapable de justifier cet acte de cruauté gratuite. Les religieuses pourraient toutefois être interprétées comme symboles de l'incursion européenne en terre africaine et de la destruction de ses systèmes de croyances traditionnels.

Epa décide pour la première fois dans son monologue d'épargner à Ayané les détails concernant la façon dont les femmes du couvent se font massacrer par Eso. Il avoue à Ayané ainsi qu'au lecteur « [j]e n'ai rien trouvé en moi pour justifier cet acte. La mort de ces nonnes ne nous apportait rien, ne changeait rien, n'avait pas de sens ».² Oscillant en permanence entre deux

¹ Ibid., p. 48.

² Ibid., p. 88.

catégories en apparence dichotomiques, Eso est représenté comme étant à la fois victime et bourreau. Sa nature transgressive, qui conforte celle du narrateur Epa et de la figure de l'enfant-soldat plus généralement, remet en question la tendance marquée de la modernité occidentale à classer et à différencier selon des conceptions rigidement binaires. De plus, les enfances ratées – qui jouent d'ailleurs un rôle actif en ce qui concerne l'engagement des jeunes dans des guerres civiles violentes elles-mêmes « emblématiques d'une modernité corrosive » –, démontent la notion du temps linéaire du développement en abîmant les ambitions prospectives de la modernité dans *Les aubes*.¹ Le roman peut alors être considéré, au même titre que d'autres textes littéraires africains dans lesquels figurent des personnages enfants-soldats, comme illustrant non pas « une version ratée » de la modernité mais plutôt les défaillances intrinsèques de cette dernière.²

Si l'enfant-soldat est couramment employé dans la littérature africaine contemporaine pour troubler les frontières conceptuelles d'une vision singulière de la modernité – rejoignant ainsi la thèse de Gilroy dans *L'Atlantique noir* au sujet l'existence d'une contre-culture afrodescendante de la modernité –, chez Miano ce personnage met également en question la notion des frontières étatiques et, plus précisément, leur démantèlement. La liberté de mouvement au-delà des frontières internationales est en effet l'une des pierres angulaires de l'Atlantique noir de Gilroy. La viabilité de la nation telle que définie par des limites géographiques se trouve à son tour interrogée dans *Les aubes* : la guerre civile qui oppose les détenteurs du pouvoir du nord aux dépossédés du sud soulève des questions à propos de l'unité nationale dans des nations 'non naturelles' telles celles qui composent l'actuelle Afrique subsaharienne et dont les frontières ont été façonnées et

¹ M. Moynagh, "The War Machine as Chronotope: Temporality in Child-Soldier Fiction", p. 319.

² Ibid, p. 319-20.

refaçonnées par des forces étrangères depuis La Ruée vers l’Afrique au 19^{ème} siècle. La notion même de frontière est associée, par certains, à une vision du monde fondamentalement eurocentrique. Mbembe souligne que « [l]e désir de frontières [...] rassemble des courants néorévissionnistes et provincialistes fort hétéroclites dont l’unité réside dans le rejet quasi viscéral de toute vision autre qu’occidentale à la fois de l’Occident lui-même et du monde des autres ».¹ Miano a également signalé son propre dédain, voire sa méfiance, envers la notion de nation qu’elle considère comme foncièrement « belliciste ».² Il n’est donc pas déconcertant de constater que la figure de l’enfant-soldat dans *Les aubes* fait abstraction des frontières nationales, une « institution moderne » par excellence.³ L’enfant-soldat le fait en se déplaçant constamment d’un côté de la frontière à l’autre (entre le Mboasu et le Yénèpasi et d’autres pays limitrophes) mais également à travers son recrutement dans les rangs des Forces du changement, organisation qui, sous la direction d’Isilo, a pour objectif politique d’éliminer des frontières de l’époque coloniale imposées de manière arbitraire et artificielle.

Les aspirations d’Isilo pour une solidarité pan-continentale sont détaillées lorsqu’il sermonne les villageois d’Eku sur l’impératif de réunir des communautés partageant une lignée commune. Isilo est convaincu de cette nécessité afin de voir une nouvelle Afrique renaître des cendres de la destruction coloniale, de l’incompétence postcoloniale et de l’exploitation néocoloniale. Ce vœu est réitéré dans *Les aubes* par Epa qui reconnaît l’obsession d’Isilo au sujet de la réorganisation du continent « en grands ensembles ethniques » pour que soit récréée, rétablie « l’harmonie ».⁴ En effet, le leader des Forces du changement demeure particulièrement attaché

¹ A. Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 149.

² L. Miano, *Habiter la frontière*, Paris, L’Arche, p. 84-85.

³ A. Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 227.

⁴ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 52.

aux enfants kidnappés d'Eku en vertu d'un ancêtre commun qu'auraient en partage les deux clans « aujourd'hui séparés par une frontière ».¹ Bien que les aspirations d'Isilo relatives à la suppression des frontières coloniales semblent justifiées en termes théoriques, même nobles étant donné la façon dont ces frontières ont été érigées, la tâche à effectuer s'avère difficile, voire impossible. De plus, la posture d'Isilo est compromise par la présence de ses deux frères dont la motivation en faveur de la guerre est nettement moins honorable. Cette dernière repose sur un désir cupide de richesses et de puissance rendues accessibles par le biais d'une intégration dans l'élite politique autochtone au lieu d'un rejet catégorique de tout ce que cette élite et sa rétention du pouvoir représentent. Isilo est finalement éliminé par ses propres frères lorsqu'il devient manifeste que son désir de réformes politiques et sociales à grande échelle n'est pas en accord avec les ambitions individuelles et matérialistes de ses frères. Même si la révolution d'Isilo se solde par un échec, ses ambitions pour une solidarité pan-continentale ne sont pas sans pertinence dans *Les aubes* car elles reflètent le plaidoyer de Gilroy au sujet d'un éloignement nécessaire de « l'étroitesse » du « strictement national » en phase avec les cultures transnationales de l'Atlantique noir.²

L'enfant-soldat dans *Les aubes* est indissociable de l'environnement physique et des conflits touchant aux immenses ressources naturelles du continent africain. Cette constatation n'est pas négligeable par rapport aux romans de Miano et de Diome puisque les deux écrivains s'appuient sur le thème primordial de l'intervention néocoloniale dans les espaces subsahariens comme élément constitutif d'un paradigme colonial tenace. Comme indiqué précédemment, ce paradigme est fortement imbriqué dans

¹ Ibid., p. 53.

² P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, p. 4.

les notions de la modernité, du moderne et du ‘modernisable’. Cependant, comme il sera exposé ci-après, la perspective qu’adoptent respectivement Miano et Diome dans *Les aubes* et *Celles* diffère de manière significative de celle que véhiculent certains personnages de *L’intérieur* et *Le Ventre*, qui tendent à promouvoir l’idée d’une adoption ‘impérative’ de la vision singulièrement occidentale de la modernité. Dans la section qui suit, nous puiserons dans les études écocritiques postcoloniales afin de montrer que l’environnement et son exploitation sont le conduit clé par lequel les auteurs peuvent exprimer leur critique des pratiques néocoloniales souscrites par une notion eurocentrique (et anthropocentrique) de la modernité. Cette modernité est elle-même axée sur des conceptualisations dualistes (et masculinisées) de la raison et du progrès. Ces pratiques violentes entraînent la dégradation des paysages, ce qui a pour conséquence la dislocation des communautés par le biais de l’exode de leurs composantes masculines. Les récits de ces hommes tracent les contours d’un paradigme d’exploitation que les deux auteurs associent à l’histoire du capitalisme prédateur aux origines mêmes de l’Atlantique noir. Miano et Diome instaurent ainsi un dialogue entre la traite transatlantique et le (néo)colonialisme. De ce fait, elles ouvrent une brèche dans la contre-modernité afro-atlantique de Gilroy fortement centrée sur l’esclavage et la plantation tout en positionnant l’Afrique comme contributeur clé à la nature résolument « anticapitaliste des politiques de l’Atlantique noir ».¹

2.2.2 ÉCOCRITIQUE POSTCOLONIALE ET ECRITURE SUBSAHARIENNE

Au sens le plus large du terme, l’écocritique, qui a vu le jour dans le domaine littéraire anglo-américain dans les années 1980, « examine la

¹ Ibid., p. 202.

relation entre l'environnement physique et la littérature »¹ et adopte « une approche géocentrique envers les questions d'ordre littéraire ». ² Les écocritiques cherchent avant tout à « comprendre la destruction environnementale » afin de promouvoir des modes de vie moins destructeurs envers l'environnement et de sensibiliser aux multiples dangers qu'encourt ce dernier, dangers attribuables, en majeure partie, à l'activité humaine. ³ L'objectif sous-jacent de l'écocritique peut paraître neutre, voire anodin, mais la façon dont est conçu un traitement moins destructeur à l'égard de l'environnement physique est fondamentalement liée à sa conception individuelle de la nature, conception elle-même ancrée dans une culture et dans un contexte particuliers. Par conséquent, l'extension de l'écocritique en tant que grille de lecture au-delà du contexte initial pour lequel et dans lequel elle a été théorisée peut, tout naturellement, poser problème. Il en est ainsi pour l'utilisation de l'écocritique traditionnelle dans les textes d'écrivains subsahariens.

Selon Byron Caminero-Santangelo, l'écocritique a tendance à minimiser, voire à masquer, la dégradation environnementale en Afrique subsaharienne ainsi que les facteurs historiques complexes qui y contribuent. ⁴ En effet, le discours écocritique privilégie l'approche conservationniste négligeant, entre autres, les mouvements de justice environnementale qui, eux, accordent une grande importance au vécu de l'être humain en tant que composante clé du monde naturel. ⁵ Il se dessine au

¹ D. Vakoch, "Introduction: A Different Story", in Douglas Vakoch (ed.), *Feminist Ecocriticism: Environment, Women, and Literature*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2012, p. 9.

² C. Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis", in C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm (ed.), *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. xix.

³ B. Caminero-Santangelo and G. Myers, "Introduction", in B. Caminero-Santangelo and G. Myers (ed.), *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2011, p. 3.

⁴ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2014, p. 2.

⁵ L. Buell, "Letter, Forum on Literatures of the Environment", *PMLA*, 114(October 1999), p. 1091-92.

cœur de cette dynamique conservacionniste une rupture séparant nature humaine et nature non humaine, une conception foncièrement anthropocène de l'environnement qui reflète la vision du monde judéo-chrétienne dominante. La création en Afrique subsaharienne d'enclaves touristiques et/ou industrielles auxquelles sont interdites d'accès les populations locales est emblématique de l'approche conservacionniste.¹ Les réserves animalières mettant en spectacle la faune du continent au profit d'une riche clientèle en sont également un exemple prégnant tout comme les sites miniers et extractivistes dirigés par des multinationales qui font venir des travailleurs de l'étranger au lieu de former et employer du personnel sur place. Cette perspective, qui peut paraître anodine, se construit cependant sur une narration beaucoup plus dérangeante : celle qui dépeint les peuples africains comme dépourvus d'une sensibilité environnementale adéquate et d'une connaissance permettant la prise en charge de zones précieuses en termes de biodiversité.² Elle insinue que les efforts mis en place pour gérer et protéger l'environnement naturel en Afrique subsaharienne doivent être assurés par d'autres, par des étrangers, *a priori*, par des occidentaux.

Privés de leurs terres et ressources, les peuples africains voient invalider leurs connaissances, traditions et même priorités en matière écologique dans un processus de « conservation coloniale ».³ Graham Huggan et Helen Tiffin ont également souligné les difficultés intrinsèques que pose le discours écocritique occidental dans des contextes non occidentaux et, singulièrement, dans des espaces postcoloniaux forgés par et à travers une longue histoire de domination européenne. Dans leur livre publié en 2010, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Literature, Animals,*

¹ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 2, 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2

³ *Ibid.*

Environment, ils soulignent deux phénomènes contemporains inquiétants : le biocolonialisme – un processus par lequel la science et son potentiel en matière de gestion environnementale ne sont exploités « que pour servir des besoins et fins politiques occidentaux » et le racisme environnemental – « le traitement discriminatoire réservé aux peuples socialement marginalisés et économiquement désavantagés ».¹

Une application aveugle du discours et de la stratégie écocritiques environnementaux dans les contextes subsahariens peut donc être perçue comme une autre forme d'impérialisme culturel qui abaisse l'Africain 'ignorant' face à l'Européen 'compétent' et 'savant'. Sous-tendant cette critique est la réalité qu'il existe sur la planète une multitude de visions du monde naturel, de son/ses symbolisme/s et de ses us et abus. L'écocritique postcoloniale a été développée en réponse à ce genre de préoccupations. La fusion des études écocritiques et postcoloniales vise à décentrer et, par moments, à contrer l'optique eurocentrique de l'écocritique littéraire, la rendant ainsi davantage sensible aux conséquences de l'impérialisme, au vécu de ceux et celles qui vivent dans des espaces anciennement et actuellement colonisés et dont la voix et les croyances ont traditionnellement été marginalisées sinon complètement ignorées.² Cette fusion n'a pas été sans heurts. Dans *Postcolonial Green : Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, Bonnie Roos et Alex Hunt expliquent que, d'un côté, la critique postcoloniale demeure méfiante envers l'écocritique estimée apolitique et donc insensible au contexte impérialiste dans lequel elle est née, et que de l'autre, l'écocritique juge que la critique postcoloniale fait abstraction de la

¹ G. Huggan and H. Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 4. Notre traduction.

² B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 9, 10-11.

dégradation environnementale.¹ Toutefois, Patrick D. Murphy identifie plusieurs points de confluence jugeant que les études postcoloniales et écocritiques ont en partage la même préoccupation principale : celle qui vise « l’extension d’une considération morale équitable et de la justice sociale à l’égard des peuples exclus, exploités et opprimés ».² La littérature africaine représenterait un terrain particulièrement propice au rapprochement des deux domaines selon Anthony Vital.³

En raison de la grande diversité culturelle, historique et géographique du monde postcolonial et de ses littératures, l’écocritique postcoloniale s’interroge sur un vaste éventail de sujets tous associés, d’une manière ou d’une autre, à l’environnement tant qu’il est vécu et expérimenté par les êtres vivants y compris humains. La sécurité alimentaire, l’immigration volontaire et involontaire, la déforestation, la surpêche, la pollution, le réchauffement climatique, les pratiques ancestrales animistes, le capitalisme, la gestion des ressources naturelles, la mondialisation et l’érection de frontières (physiques aussi bien qu’économiques) sont parmi les sujets privilégiés par les théoriciens de l’écocritique postcoloniale et par les auteurs subsahariens d’œuvres littéraires écologiquement engagées.

Malgré la grande diversité du domaine de recherche et la place importante que l’Afrique occupe dans le paysage postcolonial, la littérature subsaharienne a longtemps été sous-représentée dans les études écocritiques postcoloniales.⁴ Au cours des dernières années certains théoriciens ont fait des efforts concertés afin de combler cette lacune. Telle est l’initiative prise

¹ B. Roos and A. Hunt, “Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability, and Justice”, in B. Roos and A. Hunt (ed.), *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, Charlottesville, The University of Virginia Press, 2010, p. 4.

² P. D. Murphy, “Letter, Forum on Literatures of the Environment”, *PMLA*, 114(October 1999), p. 1099.

³ A. Vital, “Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology and Life & Times of Michael K”, *Research in African Literatures*, 39/1(2008), p. 87.

⁴ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 8-9. La seule exception à ce constat étant la littérature sud-africaine.

par Byron Caminero-Santangelo et Garth Myers dans leur volume *Environment at the Margins : Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Cette publication analyse à travers une optique écocritique postcoloniale les textes de nombreux écrivains d'origine africaine. Les directeurs du volume constatent cependant le manque regrettable de littérature francophone et la surreprésentation d'auteurs blancs.¹ De même dans leur article « Against Authenticity : Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism », Cara Cilano et Elizabeth DeLoughrey insistent sur le besoin impératif d'étendre le champ de recherche au-delà du seul monde littéraire anglophone.² C'est en vue de pallier ces carences que nous suggérons une lecture écocritique postcoloniale des romans de Miano et Diome, écrivains phares de l'Afrique noire francophone.

Caminero-Santangelo souligne la tendance marquée de l'écriture écologique en Afrique noire à favoriser la justice sociale en mettant en exergue la relation étroite entre l'environnement naturel et le pouvoir – aussi bien ceux qui le possèdent que ceux qui en sont dépourvus – ce dernier constituant un élément clé de tout paradigme colonial.³ Dans la même veine, Étienne-Marie Lassi estime que nombreux sont les auteurs subsahariens qui « se servent des questions environnementales » pour aborder les « préoccupations d'ordre psychologique, politique, économique ou social qui caractérisent l'univers postcolonial ».⁴ Le continent africain a un lourd passé impérial, passé duquel découlent maints problèmes sociaux contemporains. Il n'est donc pas surprenant de constater que les écrits

¹ B. Caminero-Santangelo and G. Myers, "Introduction", p. 13.

² C. Cilano and E. DeLoughrey, "Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 14/1(2007), p. 81, 82.

³ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 7.

⁴ É-M. Lassi, "Introduction: De l'engagement sociopolitique à la conscience écologique: les enjeux environnementaux dans la critique postcoloniale", in É-M. Lassi (ed.), *Aspects écocritiques de l'imaginaire africain*, Bamenda, Langaa RPCIG, 2013, p. 7.

d'auteurs subsahariens écologiques sont intimement liés au projet anticolonial.¹ Pour l'écocritique postcolonial Rob Nixon, le « martyr » environnemental africain « le plus visible » n'est autre que Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa, un poète, essayiste, romancier et producteur de télévision nigérian.² La vie et le travail de Saro-Wiwa mettent en évidence les interstices et les rapprochements qui se forment lorsque se heurtent justice environnementale, droits humains et colonialité en soulignant les impacts dévastateurs du paradigme néocolonial dans un Nigéria supposément indépendant. Saro-Wiwa a lutté pacifiquement pendant des années pour mobiliser la population de sa région natale du Sud-est nigérian dans le Delta du Niger contre la destruction de leur environnement naturel terrestre et aquatique par l'industrie pétrolière occidentale, destruction facilitée par un gouvernement nigérian corrompu. En 1995, Saro-Wiwa et huit autres membres du MOSOP³ ont été exécutés à la suite d'un procès truqué par un tribunal militaire nigérian sous la dictature de Sani Abacha en collaboration avec Royal Dutch Shell Oil en 1995.⁴

Le cas de Saro-Wiwa illustre la relation étroite entre la dégradation environnementale et la déresponsabilisation sociale tout en sensibilisant au fait qu'il existe sur le continent africain « une longue histoire de dégradation environnementale provoquée par le capitalisme impérial opérant en toute

¹ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 28.

² R. Nixon, "Slow Violence: Literary and postcolonial studies have ignored the environmentalism that often only the poor can see", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57/40(2011), p. 4.

³ Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples, mouvement fondé par Saro-Wiwa en 1990.

⁴ En juin 2009, Shell Oil a accepté de verser plus de 15 millions de dollars américains à un groupe de plaignants nigériens composé des membres de la famille des victimes dont le fils de Saro-Wiwa. Quatre veuves des 'neuf d'Ogoni' – Esther Kiobel, Victoria Bera, Blessing Eawo et Charity Levula – réclament encore justice pour leurs maris. En 2017, elles ont entamé une procédure civile judiciaire auprès de la justice néerlandaise contre Shell Oil pour la complicité de cette société dans l'exécution de leurs maris. Voir l'article suivant d'Amnesty International : 'Nigeria: Shell complicit in the arbitrary executions of Ogoni Nine as writ served in Dutch court', <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/shell-complicit-arbitrary-executions-ogoni-nine-writ-dutch-court/>.

impunité ».¹ Il fait également ressortir l'influence que continuent à exercer le capital et les investissements étrangers qui tendent à saper toute tentative d'établissement de souveraineté nationale dans des États théoriquement indépendants. Profitant de manière quasi exclusive à l'élite politique autochtone, à des multinationales et gouvernements étrangers, la course au patrimoine naturel du continent africain masque à peine sa face cachée néocoloniale. Le processus décisionnel national dans les États africains, souvent faibles puisque créés de manière arbitraire par la conquête et la division, est rendu vulnérable à l'interférence tandis que l'investissement économique de gouvernements étrangers (non pas exclusivement occidentaux) permet à ces derniers non seulement d'« exercer une influence politique » sur les gouvernements locaux mais également de favoriser l'essor du capitalisme dont ils tirent directement profit.² De nombreux écrivains et théoriciens postcoloniaux ont accusé l'existence et la persistance de ce paradigme prédateur. Kwame Nkrumah, révolutionnaire anticolonial, fervent panafricaniste et premier président du Ghana, a été l'un des premiers à mettre en garde contre la montée des pratiques néocoloniales dans les États africains nouvellement indépendants. Selon ses propres termes, la colonisation n'a pas péri suite aux indépendances puisqu'elle est demeurée en vigueur assumant simplement « une nouvelle forme ».³ Nkrumah a singulièrement prédit l'influence qu'allait exercer l'investissement économique étranger sur les affaires politiques des nouvelles nations indépendantes du continent et, par conséquent, sur les intérêts des populations subsahariennes. De même, Mbembe a qualifié la décolonisation

¹ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 1.

² J. Woddis, *An introduction to neo-colonialism*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1967, p. 86.

³ K. Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism. The last stage of imperialism*, London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965, p. 31.

en Afrique subsaharienne de « *non-événement* » car elle aurait souvent et simplement « ouvert la voie au néocolonialisme ». ¹

Le pillage des ressources naturelles que dénoncent Saro-Wiwa et d'autres penseurs continentaux constitue un parfait exemple de ce que Rob Nixon appelle « la violence lente ». La violence lente désigne une violence qui « se produit progressivement et loin des yeux », une violence « usante » et « dispersée dans le temps et les espaces » que nous n'aurions pas tendance à qualifier de violence. ² Notre considération habituelle de la violence en tant que phénomène spectaculaire, soudain et incontrôlé nous empêche de reconnaître les formes moins frappantes et graduelles que prend la violence lente et qui visent les populations les plus pauvres et vulnérables. ³ Les victimes humaines et environnementales de la violence lente sont innombrables et susceptibles de passer inaperçues. ⁴ L'Afrique subsaharienne représente en effet un lieu propice à l'éclosion de cette forme particulière de violence qui sévit à cause de la persistance du paradigme (néo)colonial d'exploitation et d'extraction. C'est une région du monde qui souffre d'une sous-représentation chronique dans les médias, une zone géographique qui projette, au moins dans la pensée dominante occidentale, l'image d'une terre ravagée « d'un chaos et d'une violence irrémédiables ». ⁵ Cette marginalisation sur plusieurs fronts peut rendre difficile la mise en valeur des procédés de la violence lente en tant que forme particulièrement insidieuse d'agressivité et de dépossession. Cela dit, Nixon est de l'avis que la littérature a un rôle important à jouer en rendant « accessibles et

¹ A. Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 58.

² R. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 2.

³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵ B. Caminero-Santangelo, *Different Shades of Green. African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, p. 1.

tangibles » la violence lente et ses conséquences humaines et non humaines.¹ Nous sommes de l'avis que Miano et Diome font tout autant dans leurs romans respectifs.

2.2.3 LA VIOLENCE NEOCOLONIALE LENTE ET LA DESINTEGRATION COMMUNAUTAIRE DANS *LES AUBES* ET *CELLES*

La violence lente figure comme thème récurrent et latent dans *Les aubes*, roman dans lequel elle prend la forme d'une exploitation avide des ressources naturelles et humaines. Elle figure même dans les noms des chapitres. Deux chapitres du roman portent le nom de « Latérite », terme hautement symbolique dans le contexte des industries extractivistes. Il désigne la terre rouge riche en ressources minérales (notamment en fer et en aluminium) qui se trouve dans les zones tropicales dont celles qui recouvrent la vaste majorité de l'Afrique subsaharienne. Ce nom rappelle en effet que la guerre civile qui fait rage au Mboasu est intimement liée au contenu de son sous-sol. Dans *Les aubes* le commandement des Forces du changement remarque à plusieurs reprises l'importance stratégique des ressources naturelles et le besoin impératif de les contrôler afin de financer l'effort de guerre. Plus urgent encore, le contrôle des ressources naturelles permettrait d'exercer une influence auprès des multinationales occidentales qui les exploitent et administrent ainsi qu'une bonne partie de l'économie. Telle est la stratégie derrière l'attaque menée par les enfants-soldats sous le commandement d'Eso contre la mine de diamants. Epa partage, en principe, les objectifs des Forces du changement puisqu'il voudrait voir la mise en œuvre de mesures concrètes en vue de rétablir la dignité de l'Afrique et des Africains, telles que l'instauration d'une monnaie continentale et le

¹ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 15.

traitement local des matières premières. Tout comme Isilo, il regrette amèrement le combat d'anciennes figures africaines de résistance et d'unité tels Nkrumah, Lumumba, Sankara et Mandela, et espère que d'autres se présenteront pour « achever leur œuvre ». ¹ Avant même d'entrer en contact direct avec les rebelles, le jeune protagoniste des *Aubes* essaye en vain de sensibiliser la population de son village natal à la « malédiction » ² des ressources naturelles dont elle souffre et de provoquer une réaction parmi ceux et celles qu'il estime lésés par l'état postcolonial failli. Sa frustration, exacerbée par le désintérêt collectif des villageois, est palpable dans *L'intérieur* :

Et il insistait. C'était pourtant simple : au Sud, en dehors de la grand-ville qu'avaient édifiée les colons et qui avait été un comptoir prospère, il n'y avait rien. Dans les mines, par un accord non écrit mais très ferme entre les Occidentaux qui les exploitaient et le militaire gradé qui les possédait sans titres mais avec certitude, on n'employait que des types issus de sa région natale. Alors ces richesses leur appartenaient, et ils n'en voyaient pas la couleur. ³

Il importe de noter qu'en insistant sur le droit des peuples locaux à tirer profit des ressources naturelles qui les entourent, Epa n'est pas motivé pas le désir de s'enrichir à titre personnel contrairement aux frères d'Isilo. Il aspire, au contraire, à une cohésion communautaire et une réhumanisation collective rendues possibles grâce à un accroissement de la prospérité. Cet adolescent idéaliste souhaite vivement que les hommes de son clan puissent demeurer auprès de leurs familles et que les enfants du village grandissent en compagnie de leurs pères. Car ceci est un privilège auquel ni Epa ni son petit frère Eyia n'ont eu droit. Dans le village Eku, les hommes sont obligés de s'absenter pour trouver du travail au loin. Epa est conscient que les séjours

¹ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 64.

² Un terme de plus en plus employé pour désigner le phénomène paradoxal touchant les pays subsahariens très riches en matières premières dont les profits astronomiques ne bénéficient qu'à une petite minorité au détriment de la grande majorité. M. Langan, *Neo-Colonialism and the Poverty of 'Development' in Africa*, London, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018, p. 47.

³ L. Miano, *L'intérieur de la nuit*, p. 57.

périodiques des hommes au village représentent « leur unique source de joie », que les hommes de son village ne vivent « que dans cette perspective », et que la possibilité de demeurer à Eku leur serait ouverte s'ils pouvaient trouver un emploi dans les mines de diamants du sud du Mboasu.¹ Exclus de cette source de revenu, les hommes d'Eku sont obligés de partir loin à la recherche désespérée de menus travaux leur permettant de « gagner leur pitance ».² Les conséquences de cette exclusion ne sont pas qu'économiques. Elles sont aussi psychologiques car la plupart des Eku en sont venus à douter « de la valeur de leur existence » – ils ne sont plus « certains d'être pleinement en vie » et encore moins convaincus « qu'ils le soient de manière signifiante, significative ».³ Cette estime de soi dégradée, ce déni de leur valeur intrinsèque, est manifeste dans la passivité troublante des Eku à l'égard de la préservation de la vie humaine lors de l'invasion des rebelles.

Comme nous l'avons souligné dans la partie 1 de cette thèse, l'intervention néocoloniale dans les espaces africains est un thème clé du premier roman de Diome. Dans *Le Ventre*, l'auteur fustige le paradigme capitaliste en jeu au Sénégal en faisant ressortir les conséquences négatives du tourisme occidental (y compris sexuel) sur la subsistance des populations locales. Cela dit, il y a bien dans *Le Ventre* un accent sur le fait qu'une bonne partie de la pauvreté à Niodior pourrait être considérablement allégée si les habitants de l'île abandonnaient certaines pratiques traditionnelles (par exemple, la polygamie engendrant des familles nombreuses). Dans ce sens, la pauvreté est représentée comme étant partiellement générée depuis l'intérieur de la communauté. Dans *Celles*, en revanche, l'accent narratif est bel et bien placé sur les pratiques économiques et environnementales

¹ Ibid., p. 136.

² Ibid., p. 132.

³ L. Miano, *Les aubes écarlates*, p. 210.

destructrices d'une force extérieure – celle de l'entreprise capitaliste occidentale (et du modèle capitaliste plus globalement) – et la façon dont cette dernière contribue à la désintégration sociale en tant que catalyseur direct de l'exode masculin. *Celles* s'ouvre sur un prologue évoquant les figures féminines, leurs défis et réussites quotidiens, qui forment l'épine dorsale de la narration. Le prologue accentue le rôle que ces femmes jouent au cœur de leur communauté, de même que celui qu'elles sont obligées d'endosser lorsque leurs hommes migrent vers de plus verts pâturages :

Arame, Bougna, Coumba, Daba, des mères et des épouses de clandestins, comme tant d'autres ; toutes différentes, mais toutes prises dans le même filet de l'existence, à se débattre de toutes leurs forces. Chacune était la sentinelle vouée et dévouée à la sauvegarde des siens, le pilier qui tenait la demeure sur les galeries creusées par l'absence. Outre leur rôle d'épouse et de mère, elles devaient souvent combler les défaillances du père de famille, remplacer le fils prodigue et incarner toute l'espérance des leurs. De toute façon, c'est toujours à la maman que les enfants réclament à manger. Féminisme ou pas, nourrir reste une astreinte imposée aux femmes. Ainsi, dans certains endroits du globe, là où les hommes ont renoncé à la chasse et gagnent à peine leur vie, la gamelle des petits est souvent remplie de sacrifices maternels.¹

Si l'extrême pauvreté de Niodior (et les difficultés qu'éprouvent ses femmes à nourrir leurs enfants) est au premier plan dans ce passage ainsi que dans d'autres, le fait que cela n'a pas toujours été le cas est également souligné tôt dans le récit. En incorporant l'histoire d'Abdou – l'épicier de l'île – dans le deuxième chapitre, Diome éclaire pour le lecteur les circonstances exactes ayant mené à la situation catastrophique des femmes. Avant d'ouvrir sa boutique, Abdou était pêcheur alors que « la mer était poissonneuse, la pêche artisanale florissante », quand « ceux qui affrontaient les vagues, s'ils n'étaient pas riches, ignoraient tout de la vraie pauvreté ».² La vie au bord de la côte d'un Atlantique « généreux » était « une vie de labeur, une vie modeste » mais une vie toutefois « heureuse » « puisque les mères bordaient

¹ F. Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, Paris, Flammarion, p. 11.

² Ibid., p. 23.

leurs petits rassasiés sans avoir à s'inquiéter du lendemain ». ¹ Pourtant la sérénité de l'île n'a pas duré. Elle a éclaté à l'arrivée de chalutiers occidentaux qui se sont mis à « piller les ressources halieutiques [...] sur toute la côte sénégalaise ». ² Les femmes des pêcheurs doivent maintenant se passer des daurades et des espadons si prisés et désormais « ratissés par les bateaux européens pour des papilles plus nanties ». ³ Si Abdou a été assez perspicace pour prévoir l'effondrement imminent de l'industrie locale de la pêche – il a vendu sa flotte, réglé ses dettes et investi dans une épicerie – nous ne pouvons pas en dire autant des autres hommes de l'île dont le moyen traditionnel de subsistance a été ruiné suite à l'incursion du commerce occidental dans les espaces africains. Certains de ces hommes (dont Lamine et Issa) se tournent dès lors vers la mer, non pas en quête de ses ressources naturelles mais dans l'espoir de la franchir et d'accoster, éventuellement, sur une rive plus attrayante.

Miano et Diome insistent toutes les deux dans leurs romans sur les effets dévastateurs de l'intervention néocoloniale et, singulièrement, sur ceux liés à l'industrie occidentale. Ce faisant, elles prennent position politiquement quant aux affaires africaines mais également, consciemment ou non, à propos d'une discussion davantage théorique sur les valeurs sous-tendant la machine capitaliste. Nous avons montré que plusieurs aspects de ce discours sont véhiculés par certains personnages dans *Le Ventre* et dans *L'intérieur*. La violence écologique lente justifiée par l'appel pour une modernisation indispensable mise en place par des pratiques capitalistes prédatrices et ayant comme conséquence principale la désintégration sociale, notamment la séparation de jeunes hommes de leurs communautés d'origine, est de vigueur dans ces premiers romans. Nous constatons pourtant dans *Les*

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Aubes et *Celles* un détournement, subtile mais significatif, du monde occidental et de sa modernité caractéristiquement encensée comme ultime point de référence pour les sociétés africaines. Miano et Diome semblent suggérer dans *Les aubes* et *Celles* qu'il existe d'autres possibilités, d'autres façon de faire et de vivre. À la fin de *Celles*, par exemple, Lamine retourne au Sénégal avec les fonds nécessaires pour améliorer concrètement la qualité de vie de sa famille. Il est donc assisté en Afrique par du capital accumulé en Europe, par des opportunités lui ayant été offertes parce qu'il était en Europe, de façon analogue à Madické dans *Le Ventre* aidé par la capacité de sa sœur Salie à gagner de l'argent en Europe. Or, face à la réussite relative de Lamine, Diome présente également celle, locale, d'Ansou – le double de Lamine à plusieurs égards en tant que demi-frère de Lamine, ancien amant de Daba et père de son enfant. Ainsi, Diome offre une image alternative de ce que signifie mener une vie réussie et épanouie.

Le personnage d'Ansou démontre de manière convaincante qu'il est possible de survivre, voire de bien vivre, au Sénégal et par extension en Afrique subsaharienne et qu'il n'existe donc aucun impératif, aucune nécessité de partir pour l'Europe. Contrairement à Lamine dont l'éducation française « lui avait ouvert les yeux sur un autre mode de vie » qu'il trouve plus séduisant que celui proposé par son île natale, Ansou embrasse les traditions de ses ancêtres et perfectionne petit à petit son art pour devenir « un marin aguerri ».¹ Si Lamine dédaigne son espace local et cherche à le fuir, Ansou y voit de la valeur. Certes, Ansou bénéficie d'opportunités auxquelles Lamine n'a jamais eu accès. Le père d'Ansou, lui-même marin, confie à l'heure de sa retraite le capitanat de sa pirogue à son fils. Toutefois, les ressources dont dispose Ansou ne sont pas excessives et l'accent narratif est placé au contraire sur le tempérament assidu du jeune homme

¹ F. Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, p. 15, 213.

« opiniâtre » et « astucieux » qui travaille à multiplier ses sources de revenu avec son unique pirogue.¹ Avec son nouvel équipage, Ansou récolte du sel qu'il transporte et vend ensuite en Gambie revenant à Niodior avec des produits de première nécessité achetés moins chers en Gambie qu'au Sénégal. Comme le souligne le narrateur omniscient, ceci est une initiative courageuse, une « véritable épreuve » qui implique d'affronter l'océan Atlantique avec « de lourdes charges ».² Les avantages de cette opération sont supérieurs aux inconvénients et permettent au jeune marin d'échapper à un danger encore plus redoutable que connaissent la grande majorité des insulaires – celui de la pauvreté. La vie que mène Ansou à Niodior est décidément plus satisfaisante que celle de Lamine dont la migration en Europe initialement célébrée se traduit en réalité par une existence périlleuse et misérable comme le décèle le passage suivant :

En réalité, le retard et le dénuement ne sont pas du côté que l'on pense. Pendant que les expatriés souffraient du froid, logeaient dans des squats miteux, couraient les soupes populaires, risquaient leur vie pour des emplois de forçats, dribblaient les pandores lancés à leur trousses, hantaient les zones de rétention, s'adonnaient aux amours de circonstances, larmoyaient devant les avocats commis d'office qui leur obtenaient des délivrances momentanées, les jeunes restés au village, portés par une liberté qu'on ne sent que chez soi, travaillaient vaillamment et contribuaient à l'essor du pays.³

Alors que la migration clandestine de Lamine vers l'Europe commence à perdre de son éclat, pour lui-même et pour sa famille obligée d'affronter seule les adversités quotidiennes concrètes de la pauvreté, Ansou se promène « fier » à Niodior avec la certitude que les siens sont à l'abri de toute détresse matérielle, morale et psychologique.⁴ En outre, Ansou en tant que pêcheur artisanal puise dans les ressources naturelles qui entourent son île natale de manière respectueuse, responsable et durable à la différence des chaloupiers

¹ Ibid., p. 213.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

occidentaux qui pillent sans discernement et à grande échelle des ressources aquatiques sur lesquelles ils n'ont, en théorie, aucun droit. Si dans *Le Ventre* les histoires entrelacées des expériences africaines à l'égard de la France trahissent la persistance d'un paradigme néocolonial systématique qui « génère une culture de dépendance et perpétue la croyance selon laquelle les sujets africains ne peuvent survivre sans l'assistance de l'ancien colonisateur »,¹ un paradigme afropéen donc, il est dans *Celles* qu'une vision de réussite complètement détachée du pouvoir impérial et sa version singulière de la modernité se matérialise enfin.

¹ J. Diémé, "Discourse on Immigration: Fatou Diome's Commitment to Human Rights in *The Belly of the Atlantic*", in F. Germain and S. Larcher (ed.), *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848-2016*, Lincoln; London, University of Nebraska Press, 2018, p. 207. Notre traduction.

De l'Afropea à L'Afro-Atlantique : une étude de quatre romans de Léonora Miano et Fatou Diome

Résumé

De récentes études dans le domaine de la littérature francophone subsaharienne suggèrent que les auteurs subsahariens vivant et écrivant en Europe présentent dans leurs œuvres une image fondamentalement dévalorisante de leur continent d'origine. Cette thèse analyse la représentation textuelle du continent africain et de l'africanité dans les romans de deux auteurs contemporains subsahariens écrivant sur l'Afrique depuis l'Europe – la Camerounaise Léonora Miano et la Sénégalaise Fatou Diome. Cette étude vise à déterminer si Miano et Diome présentent dans leurs textes respectifs une image dévalorisante de l'Afrique subsaharienne et de l'africanité de façon générale ou, inversement, s'il existe dans leur fiction des éléments témoignant d'un engagement dans un projet de revalorisation identitaire. À travers le concept théorique de conscience afro-diasporique, concept qui s'appuie sur les études postcoloniales, diasporiques et féministes littéraires, cette étude met à jour une évolution marquée de la production littéraire de Miano et Diome. Elle fournit une analyse comparative du *Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) de Diome et *L'intérieur de la nuit* (2005) de Miano suivie par celle de *Celles qui attendent* (2010) de Diome et *Les aubes écarlates : Sankofa cry* (2009) de Miano pour mettre en évidence l'engagement de plus en plus ardent des auteurs à réhabiliter et revaloriser l'africanité contemporaine à travers la fiction. Cette revalorisation identitaire s'inscrit dans un mouvement qui déborde les confins de l'Afropea en tant qu'espace binaire et colonial et, dans un élan international, aborde les espaces de la diaspora africaine outre-Atlantique.

Mots-clés : Léonora Miano ; Fatou Diome ; fiction ; Afropea ; Atlantique noir ; conscience afro-diasporique

From Afropea to the Afro-Atlantic: A study of four novels by Léonora Miano and Fatou Diome

Summary

Recent research in the field of Francophone African literature has suggested that contemporary Sub-Saharan authors living and writing in Europe present in their works a fundamentally devalorising image of their continent of origin. This thesis considers the textual representation of the African continent and Africanity in the novels of two contemporary Sub-Saharan authors writing in French on Africa from Europe – Léonora Miano from Cameroon and Fatou Diome from Senegal. The study seeks to determine whether Diome and Miano present in their texts a devalorising image of Sub-Saharan Africa and Africanity more broadly or, conversely, whether there is evidence in their fiction of a commitment to a project of Afro-identitarian revalorisation. This study demonstrates a marked evolution across the literary production of Miano and Diome through the theoretical concept of Afro-diasporic consciousness informed and developed upon by theory drawn from postcolonial, diaspora and feminist literary studies. It comparatively analyses Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) and Miano's *L'intérieur de la nuit* (2005) followed by Diome's *Celles qui attendent* (2010) and Miano's *Les aubes écarlates: Sankofa cry* (2009) to reveal the authors' increasingly ardent commitment to rehabilitating and revalorising contemporary Africanity through fiction. This revalorisation is shown to be dependent on movement beyond the bounds of binary and colonially-referential Afropea and towards transnational engagement with Africa's Black Atlantic diaspora.

Keywords : Léonora Miano; Fatou Diome; fiction; Afropea; Black Atlantic; Afro-diasporic consciousness

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