Julia Borst/Stephanie Neu-Wendel/
Juliane Tauchnitz (eds.)

Women's Perspectives on (Post)Migration

Between Literature, Arts and Activism – Between Africa and Europe

OLMS

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Potsdamer inter- und transkulturelle Texte (POINTE)
Herausgegeben von Ottmar Ette und Gesine Müller

Band 22

pointe

Potsdamer inter- und transkulturelle Texte

Ottmar Ette, Gesine Müller (eds.)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Julia Borst/Stephanie Neu-Wendel/
Juliane Tauchnitz (eds.)

Women's Perspectives on (Post)Migration

Between Literature, Arts and Activism – Between Africa and Europe

Georg Olms Verlag
Hildesheim · Zürich · New York
2023

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
(DFG, German Research Foundation) – project number 353492083

Open Access funded by the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Bremen

Das Werk ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig. Das gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über *http://dnb.d-nb.de* abrufbar.

DOI: 10.1470/9783487163512
https://doi.org/10.1470/9783487163512

© Georg Olms Verlag AG, Hildesheim 2023
Redaktion: Juliane Tauchnitz, Chiara Montebello
Umschlaggestaltung: Inga Günther, Hildesheim

ISBN 978-3-487-42355-5

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Contents

Julia Borst/Stephanie Neu-Wendel/Juliane Tauchnitz
Women's Perspectives on (Post)Migration:
Between Literature, Arts and Activism –
Between Africa and Europe. An Introduction 9

Juliane Tauchnitz
Stranding in the "Promised Land": Female Perspectives
and Perspectives on Females within
Hispano-Moroccan Literature 19

Koku G. Nonoa
Léonora Miano et son concept de l'identité frontière
au théâtre 37

Aminata Aidara, Mimina Icir Di Muro, Amina Marini
Un'infanzia afroitaliana 63

Maria Kirchmair
"Non sono le pareti rigide che fanno del luogo in cui
viviamo una casa" – Narrando 'l'arrivo':
Oltre Babilonia di Igiaba Scego e *Madre piccola* di
Ubah Cristina Ali Farah 81

Clara Schumann
Gender Relations and Relational Histories in Léonora
Miano's Novels *Tels des astres éteints* and
Ces âmes chagrines 103

Simonetta Puleio, Stephanie Neu-Wendel
Intervista a Kaha Mohamed Aden 127

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Marita Rainsborough
The Aesthetic of Vulnerability: Un-heard Female Voices and the Question of Identity and Recognition in the Work of Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome 137

Hanna Nohe
Ici, mais là-bas: genre et *ethnoscapes* dans deux romans sur la post-migration entre l'Afrique subsaharienne et la *romania : Des Fourmis dans la bouche* (2011) de Khadi Hane et *Adua* (2015) d'Igiaba Scego 153

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah
Due racconti: "Medea e Amir" e "Sandra" 173

Joana Passos
Orlanda Amarílis: Cape Verdean Immigrants, Imperial Memories and Gender Dynamics 179

Julia Borst, Stephanie Neu-Wendel
Decolonized Bodies: Aesthetic Activism in Afrofeminist Blogs from France, Spain and Italy 205

Rotraud von Kulessa, Sabine Schwarze, Maurizio Rebaudengo, Serenella Baggio, Monica Biasiolo, Vera Fänger, Maximilian Gröne
Intervista con Igiaba Scego 253

Joanna Boampong
Coping to Survive? A Study of Female "Afro-Diasporic" Actors of Spain 279

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Danae Gallo González
El pelo afro y la afro-descendencia en España
en el documental *Afro, así es mi pelo* (2013) 303

Joanna Boampong, Julia Borst
Activismo afro en España. Una entrevista con
Desirée Bela-Lobedde 335

Laura Büttgen
Les Afropéennes élèvent la voix: Le potentiel subversif
dans l'œuvre de Léonora Miano 343

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger
"Bahia Houses" at the Crossroad between the Past
and the Present – *Um defeito de cor* (*A color defect*)
by Ana Maria Gonçalves 369

Melibea Obono
Relato: "*Mberbí*: el llanto más grande de las mujeres" 385

Roxane Pajoul
Ni ici, ni là-bas: négocier la relation France-Antilles au
travers des couples mixtes dans la littérature antillaise 403

Contributors 437

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Julia Borst / Stephanie Neu-Wendel / Juliane Tauchnitz

(Bremen/Mannheim/Leipzig)

Women's Perspectives on (Post)Migration. Between Literature, Arts and Activism – Between Africa and Europe. An Introduction

The artwork on this volume's cover was designed by Dar Al Naim Mubarak Carmona, a female artist from Spain and North Sudan combining African and European influences in her work (cf. Quiroz 2013). It shows a woman, most likely the artist as she is wearing an artist's smock with color stains, holding a colorful object reminiscent of a child's windmill. Its colors seem to spill over into the woman's ragtag hair and into the abstract painting behind her, blurring the borders between the subject and the artistic object(s) – the painting and the alluded windmill – portrayed on the artwork.

Its most intriguing aspect for this essay collection is not just that Dar Al Naim Mubarak Carmona herself, being born of a Sudanese father and a Spanish mother, is more than familiar with how it feels to belong to different cultures (cf. Quiroz 2013). The artwork's aesthetics also 'put into color' the blurriness of categories in general and raise the imminent question of what influence the artist herself exerts on this collage: is the painter a constitutive part of it? Does this photograph, by partially covering the subject, precisely foreground the latter? Whichever conclusion the beholder deduces from this contemplation, the work, metatextually, tangles the diverging levels of the artistic process, blurring the lines between the producer, the production itself and its effect(s). And by this, it plays with the notions of (not) being seen or (not) wanting to be seen, with the conceptions of being seen *by* someone or *as* someone and the regulation on *what* we are allowed (or made, or want) to see.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

All these aspects are of particular relevance to the texts this volume gathers. They are closely linked to a range of challenges and problems an individual (or a community) possibly has to face when confronted with a different sociocultural, linguistic, religious etc. context or, specifically, when having migrated from one to another. When does migration end? Does the subject eventually 'arrive' at another place? When does she or he stop being forced to justify and legitimize the (search for an) own position within the so-called "host" society? And what about those who have been born in a society but remain relegated to its margins? Terms such as "host" society or "hostland" (cf. Tölölyan 1996: 30) already condense the (*host*ile) exclusion of an Other, who tends to be reduced to linguistic, perspective, cultural or physical traces of difference. And finally, what does it mean if this Other is female?

These tensions, experienced by Dar Al Naim Mubarak Carmona herself and reflected on in her picture entitled *Inside-Out*, reverberate in the academic, literary and activist texts united in this volume. The notions of not being seen and deciding oneself what one wants to show to the world also play with the fact that most of the female voices dealt with in this publication tend to not been seen or, more precisely, heard by the broader public. Echoing the questions raised by Dar Al Naim's work of art, these voices are "*unerhört*"[1]: a polysemic German term meaning "not being listened to", not being taken into consideration, not being "allowed" to circulate within the public sphere. Simultaneously, "*unerhört*" conveys the idea of transgressive or even candid and unbridled statements and points of views, as they imply a potential to disturb, to startle, to make readers/viewers feel uncomfortable. Following scholar and feminist writer bell hooks' notion, these female voices speak from the "margins" as a space of double meaning: not just a space of exclusion and marginality but a chosen "site of resistance – as

[1] This notion emanated from an international Romance studies conference, the *XXXV. Romanistentag: "Dynamik, Begegnung, Migration"* [35th Conference of the German Association of Romance Studies on "Dynamics, Encounters, Migration"] in Zurich in October 2017. Within this conference, the editors of this book, Julia Borst, Stephanie Neu-Wendel and Juliane Tauchnitz, together with Maria Zannini, organized a seminar entitled "*Un*erhörte Stimmen aus der Afro-Romania: Genderdiskurse im Kontext von Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung 'nach' der Migration". This volume's conceptual focus originates from that seminar and its fruitful discussions.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

location of radical openness and possibility" (hooks 1989: 23). Thus, the African and Afrodescendant female authors and artists whose voices are echoed in this volume challenge thinking patterns of origin and belonging, overthrow labels that try to classify and categorize someone as the Other. They tell "uncomfortable" stories using subversive discursive strategies to challenge established patterns of communication.

The critical analyses and the interviews and literary texts included in this volume all circle around (post)migratory experiences that include varying perspectives on the departure, the migratory process itself and the situation "after" the arrival – though this "after" reveals itself as illusionary for it is questionable whether the migratory experience can be considered completed once the subject arrives somewhere. The studied texts, documentaries, blogs, photographs, etc. share this focus but simultaneously discuss these lived experiences within varied and heterogeneous geographical, linguistic and cultural contexts, often dealing with structural and institutional conflicts in daily life. Consequently, the prefix "post" reflects a spatio-temporal notion of mobility and describes a transitional process. Accordingly, the term "(post)migration" questions the fixity of concepts such as "departure" and "arrival", which conceptually conceal the zones of transit and transition we want to look into in this volume. Our objective is to explore the unsteadiness, frictions and struggles but also the opportunities that emerge at the various stages of the (post)migratory experience.

The authors and activists whose works are dealt with do not shy away from enunciating the clash of self-perceptions and others' perceptions: they are subversive or contentious and are calling on Romance-speaking European societies to realize that hegemonic hierarchies and colonial power structures continue to persist as neocolonial frictions– nowadays not only beyond but also within the respective national space itself. Their voices reveal positionings that frequently oscillate between alienation and belonging, moving between African, European and other (diasporic) spaces. They denounce binary structures of hierarchized sociopolitical categories, as Francophone Cameroonian writer Léonora Miano underlines using the example of Black people in France: "[…] le Blanc et le Noir ne sont que cela: l'incarnation de privilèges ou de leur absence, la représentation du pouvoir ou de l'impouvoir" ([the White and the Black are just this: the embodiment of privileges or of

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

their absence, the presentation of power or of powerlessness], Miano 2017: 15). The authors, artists and activists who speak in this volume thwart any predetermined roles by unmasking and undermining established concepts that have developed into clichés, such as gender, "race" or binary views on identity and alterity. At the same time, they bring into focus a gendered perspective on (post)migration that emphasizes the experiences of the 'female Other' and, not least, their positions as female writers, artists and activists – different areas which, as for instance with regard to Léonora Miano, Melibea Obono and Igiaba Scego, are inseparable and echo each other.

To ensure a plurality of visions and implement an academic approach that we believe needs to be completed by the views of the authors and activists themselves, this volume is meant as a space where all these perspectives engage in a dialogue on several levels. Thus, the authors', artists' and activists' points of view are analyzed by investigating a wide range of different literary, medial and activist formats such as novels, short stories, theatre performances, documentaries or blogs and videoblogs. These analyses are complemented by short and micro-fiction and by interviews with the authors, artists and activists themselves.

Within this volume, we retrace the heterogeneous perspectives on (post)migration exposed by the studied texts and media. These perspectives mirror the different "trajectories of gazes" [traiettorie di sguardi] – to cite the notion coined by Italian writer of Cameroonian origin Geneviève Makaping – that characterize the situation of the (post)migratory subject: the gaze that travels back to the alleged "homeland" to critically re-evaluate conceptions of a so-called cultural "origin"; the gaze that follows the migrating subject on her or his way to Europe and that critically focuses on (lived) experiences in the "hostland" where the subject frequently faces exclusion and discrimination; and, finally, the gaze that crisscrosses usual or anticipated positionings, a transversal gaze that goes beyond Africa and Europe and that highlights the drifting and oscillation of migrating movements.

In the first academic article, **Juliane Tauchnitz** analyzes Najat El Hachmi's prize-awarded novel *L'últim patriarca* (2008) in the context (or at the margins) of *Hispano-Moroccan* literature written by women who are living in the Maghreb or have migrated from there to Spain.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

She explores the innovational narrative strategies and functions El Hachmi uses in her text to picture the ambivalent situation of the female protagonist after having migrated to Catalonia, who defies patriarchal oppression by writing against her father's authority and, thus, ending the line of her family's patriarchs. However, at the same time, Tauchnitz highlights the literaricity of a novel that goes far beyond any autobiographically inspired depiction of a migratory reality connecting Spain and the Maghreb.

In his study of Léonora Miano's play *Révélation: Red in blue trilogie* (2015) and its production by Japanese director Satoshi Miyago and his drama group in France in 2018, **Koku G. Nonoa** immerses in the world of African mythology staged in the play and explores the transcultural voices and identities evoked in both the text and the performance, relating issues of a (colonial) past with our present world characterized by transnational migration and globalization. Particular attention is also paid to "border" identities of "Afropean" women in a postmigratory context.

In the interview that follows, three Italian women – **Amina Marini**, **Minima Icir Di Muro** and **Aminata Aidara** –, all born in the early 1980ies, evoke childhood memories of discrimination and "Othering". At the same time, they reflect on their relationship with the "Other Continent", all three of them having one parent from Europe (Italy) and one from Africa (Senegal or Somalia). What connects their stories is that they delink belonging from a particular geographical space and conceptualize the (memory of) family as a safe space a subject can fall back on when experiencing exclusion in the social sphere.

The focus on memories and relationships thus echoes **Maria Kirchmair**'s observations on contemporary novels. Kirchmair tackles the diasporic condition in *Oltre Babilonia* (2008) by Igiaba Scego and *Madre piccola* (2007) by Ubah Cristina Ali Farah. These novels show that the question of arrival is not only about negotiating transcultural identities in contemporary Italy; it is also tightly linked to the past, as both texts travel back in time to shed light on the situation that made the characters leave their homes in the first place. Kirchmair asks how both novels transform a traumatic experience into a survival strategy that opens up a "space" of becoming and allows the migrated subject to come to terms with the ambivalence of pre- and postmigratory contexts, defining

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"arrival" and "home" not as a concrete place fixed in space and time but as a relational concept, a "network" of memories and affections.

With **Clara Schumann**'s contribution, we revisit Léonora Miano's writing and, more precisely, two of her novels, *Tels des astres éteints* (2008) and *Ces âmes chagrines* (2011), which are analyzed with respect to gender and intergenerational relations. Schumann shows that both novels are characterized by a nuanced engagement with migrant masculinities situated differently in relation to male-dominated white majority society. Furthermore, she studies how Miano modifies the recurrent trope of family relations as a symbol for transatlantic and colonial histories from a female perspective and challenges male traditions in African literatures.

The question of male and female genealogies and traditions is also one of the topics dealt with in an interview with Italian writer, filmmaker and scholar **Kaha Mohamed Aden.** Focusing on several short stories of her anthology *Fra-intendimenti* (2010), Aden brings together her memories of Somalia and her experiences in Italy. She not only focuses on matrilinear relationships as a positive counter-model to male-dominated patterns but also evokes episodes of racist stereotypes towards women in Italy's contemporary society.

Marita Rainsborough's analysis of two novels written by Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome, female writers of Senegalese origin who migrated to Belgium or, respectively, France, is dedicated to cultural conflicts between Africa and Europe that arise within the process of migration and their effects on vulnerable female characters under constant threat of exploitation. By discussing the struggle for recognition depicted in *Le baobab fou* (1982) and *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003), Rainsborough explores the potential of literature and language to disclose silenced stories and to help the subject "heal" from the painful wound of being both fascinated and rejected by the other (culture).

In her article on Khadi Hane's *Des fourmis dans la bouche* (2011) and Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (2015), **Hanna Nohe** draws from Appadurai's notion of *ethnoscapes* and examines how both texts stage a simultaneity of spaces and culture, creating a post-migratory universe. Moreover, she discusses how the two novels unsilence racism in contemporary Ita-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

ly and France and reveal intersectional discriminatory regimes that affect female migrants in particular. Thus, as Nohe points out, both texts can be read in terms of feminist positionings.

In her micro stories *Medea e Amir* and *Sandra*, Italian writer and artist **Ubah Cristina Ali Farah** also tackles daily racism in Italy and its stereotypes, especially the stereotypization of women, which stem from Italy's colonial legacy. She also discusses the ongoing struggle for a birthright citizenship and the discrepancies between inclusion and exclusion in Italy's society.

In *Sandra*, Ali Farah directs our view to migrant communities from Cape Verde, a matter echoing the academic article written by **Joana Passos** that introduces Cape Verdean writer Orlanda Amarílis, whose literary work has been influenced by her own migration experience. In the short stories studied by Passos, Orlanda Amarílis draws a critical balance of discriminatory colonial practices that persist in a (post)migratory space connecting Portugal as a place of longing and the Cape Verde islands as an affective place of belonging. Passos shows how Amarílis depicts female characters as particularly vulnerable to a marginalization of African migrants as outsiders "in transit" or second-rate citizens and reflects on the fragmented identity of the migrant subject oscillating between "home" and "hostland".

In their article on Afrofeminist blogs written and coordinated by members of the African diaspora in France, Spain and Italy, **Julia Borst** and **Stephanie Neu-Wendel** explore to what extent the internet can turn into an empowering space where otherwise marginalized individuals and collectives are able to stage their own narratives and self-images to gain visibility as a community suffering from every-day racism and stereotyping in European societies. They investigate how these blogs discuss Afrodescedance as a marker of shared experiences of both exclusion and belonging. Elaborating on the notion of aesthetic activism, Borst and Neu-Wendel pay particular attention to empowering (self-)representations of African and Afrodescendant women and their bodies to study the discursive strategies aimed at decolonizing those bodies.

In the following conversation, Italian writer, journalist and literary scholar **Igiaba Scego** discusses problematic "labels" such as "literature of migration" and "second generation". She also focuses on the question of "Italianness", its implications for Italians with an Afro-European

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

background and the impact of Italy's colonialism. Scego also sheds light on experiences of discrimination and violence, especially of women, as reflected both in her own works and in (autofictional and autobiographical) texts by "Afro-Italian" authors.

Joanna Boampong's analysis of various media such as blogs, YouTube videos, online news sources, interviews, music and anecdotes describes the challenges African and Afrodescendant people have in dealing with in contemporary Spanish society. Her specific focus is exploring the ways by which "Afro-Spanish" women negotiate their survival and what coping mechanisms they use to face (micro)racism that denies them a place in a space they call home. She also examines the effects of these coping strategies and asks about their impact on these Afro-Spanish women's future actions and interactions as well as on the "Afro-Spanish" experience as a whole.

The question of how one can cope with racism and marginalization and of the empowering role hair can play in this context is also dealt with in the subsequent article. Addressing Javier Sánchez Sacedo's documentary *Afro, así es mi pelo* (2013), **Danae Gallo González** offers a close reading of the discourses on race and blackness articulated by four Spanish women of African descent, who are interviewed in the film. Furthermore, Gallo González's study relates the approach of the documentary to other audiovisual discourses about Afrodescendance that circulate in Romance-speaking European countries, such as "Négritude", to gain new insights into and new impulses for the ongoing debate in Spain.

The topic of Eurocentric beauty standards and stereotyping of African and Afrodescendant women is also dealt with in an interview with **Desirée Bela-Lobedde**, led by **Joanna Boampong** and **Julia Borst**. In this interview, the Afrodescendant Spanish writer and online content creator engages in a conversation about antiracist and Afrofeminist activism within and beyond the digital space. She reflects on the particular situation in Spain, a country lacking a long tradition of Black activism, and explains why aesthetic activism plays a crucial role in empowering racialized women in Spain.

Laura Büttgen ties in with the *Afropean novels* written by Léonora Miano, but from a different perspective: she studies the subversive potential of female Afro-Europeans' voices, which confront us with a

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

conflictive search for identity in contemporary France. By analyzing *Tels des astres éteints* (2008) and *Blues pour Élise* (2010), Büttgen shows that the identities depicted in the novels are shaped by different family tragedies connected to historical wounds caused by colonialism and slavery. She also explores how literature and its linguistic and cultural subversion techniques could culturally emancipate and empower the Afro-French community.

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger's article addresses both a different historical time and a different geographical space than the works explored so far in this volume. She turns to Brazilian writer Ana Maria Gonçalves's novel *O defeito do cor* (2006), which deals with the female protagonist's journeys to the Portuguese colonies (as an enslaved woman) and back to the African continent (as a free woman and migrant) and, once again, back to Brazil to find her lost son. While the (post)migratory situation is a dominant topic in migrant writing in Romance-speaking Europe, Phaf-Rheinberger shows that slavery is a prime concern and omnipresent narrative in texts from the Americas such as Gonçalves's. At the same time, Phaf-Rheinberger's analysis relates historical slavery and "modern slavery" as phenomena that frequently characterize the experience of present-day migration.

In her short story "*Mberbí*: el llanto más grande de las mujeres", Equatorial Guinean author, feminist and LGBTQ+ activist **Melibea Obono** redirects our gaze to the African continent or, more precisely, to the patriarchal society of the Fang people of Equatorial Guinea. Obono writes from a country strongly entangled with Spanish history and culture. Her texts mirror the ubiquitous traces of colonial oppression in the present that, combined with so-called traditional values of the Fang culture, particularly affect women and female children whose bodies are subject to disciplinary actions – a multiple and heterogeneous regime of oppression the short story's female narrator subversively defies.

Finally, **Roxane Pajoul** has our gaze travel to the Caribbean as a marginalized French territory characterized by particular tensions and ambivalences of Caribbean identity amidst French assimilation. She explores the silencing of Francophone Afro-Caribbean writers Michèle Lacrosil and Jacqueline Manicom, whose respective novels *Cajou* (1961) and *Mon examen de blanc* (1972) deal with Afro-Caribbean

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

female characters who have mixed-race relationships and face multiple oppressors. Pajoul elaborates how these female writers were silenced because of the intersection of their race and gender and of those of the characters they portray.

Works Cited

hooks, bell (1989): "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", in: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 36, p. 15-23.

Makaping, Genéviève (2001): *Traiettorie di sguardi: e se gli* altri *foste voi?*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Miano, Léonora (2007): "Noire hémoglobine", in: idem. (ed.): *Marianne et le garçon noir*, Paris: Pauvert, pp. 9-34.

Quiroz, Sandra (16.4.2013): "Dar al Naim Mubarak: 'En Sudán hay quien piensa que las mujeres artistas no pueden tener ideas'", in: *Afribuku*, in: www.afribuku.com/daralnaimart/ (accessed 6 July 2021).

Tölölyan, Khachig (1996): "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment", in: *Diaspora*, 5(1), p. 3-36.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Juliane Tauchnitz

(Würzburg)

Stranding in the "Promised Land" Female Perspectives and Perspectives on Females within *Hispano-Moroccan* Literature

Abstract

The prize-awarded novel *L'últim patriarca* (2008) by Catalano-Moroccan writer Najat El Hachmi deals with dethroning the last patriarch of the narrator's family: her father. While scholars have repeatedly read this work by following El Hachmi's autobiographical traces, I wish instead to examine it regarding how a female author writes about her (or more generally expressed: about a female's) situation 'after' migration. By this, I want to add to this volume's issue both a literary perspective and a literary sociological approach, examining the ambivalent situation of the female protagonist after having moved to Catalonia and combining it with the analysis of the text's innovatory narrative strategies and techniques and thus underlining its literary potential.

1. Introduction

Reflecting on the still little-known *Hispano-Moroccan* literature[1] necessarily includes reflecting on texts written by female authors and on

[1] In this article, the term '*Hispano-Moroccan* literature' (as well as the broader notion of '*Hispano-Maghrebian* literature') will typographically be marked in italics, indicating that this expression is not unanimously used in the academic discourse on this fiction and that it is partially considered critically, especially by Maghrebian scholars, because of its proximity to the historical formula of '*Hispano-Arab brotherhood*' ('*hermandad hispano-árabe*', see e.g., Abrighach 2013: 282), a term instrumentalized during the fascist Franco regime to insinuate a cultural and political proximity between Spain and Arab countries. Though, instead of describing this literary phenomenon as 'Moroccan literature in Spanish' or even 'Moroccan literature of Castilian expression', as some scholars suggest (referring to this debate, see e.g., Chakor/Macías 1996; Gahete et al.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

texts that put female subjects in the foreground, for those works constitute a large and essential part of the literature located between the Maghreb and Spain, between the African and European continents and between their often mutually influenced historical trajectories. And so, it is hardly surprising that the work of a *Hispano-Moroccan* author that so far received the most attention is a novel written by a woman: the prize-awarded book *L'últim patriarca*, published in 2008 by Morocco-Catalan author Najat El Hachmi. Curiously, this novel is written in the Catalan language – thus, how can it be considered as the most visible example of *Hispano-Moroccan* literature (see Ingenschay 2011: 61)? In the context of the present chapter, I would not be able to develop an exhaustive discussion about whether this text forms a part of *Hispano-Moroccan* fiction or whether it should rather be ranked among the more general and global concept of migration literature(s). However, this chapter will start out from the cautious assumption that *L'últim patriarca* can at least be regarded in relation to this literary field of *Hispano-Moroccan* literature for two reasons: first, due to the author's thematic choices, as we will see hereinafter and, second, due to her sociocultural location, which both allow El Hachmi to be regrouped at the very least at the margins of the aforementioned fiction. However, this example already divulges the difficulty of literary classifications in categories such as 'national literature,' a grouping that, in fact, has become obsolete but nevertheless still exists – and is also kept alive by virtue of the national literary prize markets.[2]

Even if El Hachmi's novel has been repeatedly analyzed in the past decade, I wish to examine it regarding this volume's purposes, that is, how a female author writes about her (or more generally expressed: about a female's) situation 'after' migration. By this, I want to add to

2008: 29-32), I am opting for *Hispano-Moroccan* literature as it terminologically focusses on its position between and beyond national (literary) boundaries.

[2] Ana Rueda likewise points out this difficulty of labelling El Hachmi and her works and suggests the terminological revision and extension of those notions: "[…] widen the narrow and reductionist terms of 'Spanish literature' or 'Moroccan literature' because it [El Hachmi's essay *Jo també sóc catalana*] choses to tell a Hispano-Moroccan border experience through the Catalan language" (Rueda 2010: 19; original version: "[…] ensanchar los términos angostos y reduccionistas de 'literatura española' o 'literatura marroquí' porque elige narrar una experiencia hispano-marroquí de frontera a través del catalán").

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

this volume's issue both a literary perspective and a literary sociological approach by regarding El Hachmi's novel less as an autobiographically motivated text. Instead, I wish to view the novel more as, ostensibly, literature in the sense Frühwald et al. concluded in general about the humanities, but that I assess as being applicable to literary specifics, that is, referring to "culture as an embodiment of all human work and life-forms, […] that means that they [humanities] refer in an understanding and explaining way as well as in an enlightening emancipating manner to the cultural shape of the world" (Frühwald et al. 1991: 16; translated by J.T.).[3] But that consideration also implies I have to raise critical questions of how we can deal with literature in such a discussion and where and why there are its limits.

For this, I will start by briefly introducing 'female' *Hispano-Moroccan* literature and linking it to whether there are thematic or structural differences between works of female authors living in the Maghreb and works of those who have migrated to Spain. In this context, I will then present the aforementioned novel by Najat El Hachmi by analyzing some noticeable techniques of the female narrating voice and by examining how those techniques and strategies create a particular female position(ing) referring to both the culture the narrator is 'coming from' and the one where she 'has arrived.'

2. Differing female positionings

Although *Hispano-Maghrebian* authors have remained relatively unknown to the public, some scholars, especially in Spain, Morocco and the United States, have recently started focussing on this authorship, which currently counts more than 60 writers in / from Morocco as well as a few authors in Algeria and Tunisia. This disproportional location of *Hispano-Maghrebian* writers can be explained by the long historical interrelations between Morocco and Spain, which reach back with more than a 1000 years of mutual geopolitical and sociocultural influences

[3] Original version: "Die Geisteswissenschaften beziehen sich auf Kultur als Inbegriff aller menschlichen Arbeit und Lebensformen […], d.h., sie beziehen sich verstehend und erklärend, ferner in Aufklärungs- und Emanzipationsform auf die kulturelle Form der Welt" (Frühwald et al. 1991: 16).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

and connections. If we then consider what the Franco-Algerian writer Assia Djebar noted: that women "from the first times of Islam were bit by bit expulsed from writing as power" in the so-called Arabic cultures (Djebar 1999: 75-76; translation J.T.),[4] the number of female Maghrebian writers who express themselves in Spanish (and / or Catalan) is even more impressive. To mention just some names other than Najat El Hachmi: Rachida Gharrafi, Suad Abdelouarit, Sana Alaui, Oumama Aouad Larech, Sanae Chairi, Karima Aomar Toufali, Laila Karrouch (who publishes in Catalan and Spanish and also translates her Catalan texts into Spanish) or Montserrat Abumalham. From the aforementioned writers, the last two are living in Spain, which is important because this, in no way exhaustive, list is then a juxtaposition of authors being either in Spain or in Morocco but who are not separated or distinguished on the basis of their living place.

So, by taking into account that everybody has such a "place," I do not refer to the geographical site. Instead, we need to ask more precisely *from where these writers speak* (according to Stuart Hall 1990 and Fernando de Toro 1995), which indicates their enunciated location and their *locus* of enunciation. Here, we can clearly note that Najat El Hachmi and Laila Karrouch express themselves from Catalonia (Ingenschay 2011: 68). But other *hispanograph* authors located in Morocco also partially write from such an Iberian perspective (see e.g., Chakor 2007; also Tauchnitz 2016), which is why it is so difficult to decide whether El Hachmi and Karrouch are also *Hispano-Moroccan* writers. On the contrary, the perspective in Montserrat Abumalham's case, though living in Spain, differs from El Hachmi's and Karrouch's as no obvious perspectivation or positioning is visible in her novel *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* (2001; see also Ellison 2017).

But I do not want to dwell on the figures related to these female authors. Rather, I want to turn my attention to the topoi of this fiction, which is essential in positioning these female writing voices. And in this chapter, I will restrict my explanations to authors linked to Spain and Morocco to better compare the emphasis in their thematic choices.

[4] Original version: "[…] dès les premiers temps de l'islam, on a peu à peu expulsé les femmes de l'écriture comme pouvoir […]" (Djebar 1999 : 75-76).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

First of all, it needs to be underlined that a large and heterogeneous spectrum of issues are brought up in *Hispano-Moroccan* narrative and poetic texts.[5] Even though a shift of topics between the two female Catalan authors and others writing from Morocco is evident and meaningful, it should, nevertheless, be clearly said that both 'sides' frequently deal with the relation between Spain and its southern neighbour – yet in different ways that are also linked to the chosen genre, as will be developed in the following passages. Thus, in poetic texts, this transcultural and transnational tie is often evoked – at least as a backdrop – by showing the two countries as mirrors reflecting each other and by pointing out the very often painful awareness of their inseparable connection. Remarkable is that here, where this relation between the two cultures is concerned, the enunciated position of the either male or female lyrical subject hardly plays a role. From Abderrahman El Fathi to Suad Abdelouarit, they all express the sensation of a lost love, often generally personified by Andalusia, and the fact that Spain is trying to neglect this relation.

In narrative texts, in turn, this kind of expressed 'kinship' is equally one of the predominant issues. But here, it is always and strongly dependent on a specific spatial representation. And in this point, the perspectives of El Hachmi and Karrouch, on the one hand, and those of the *Hispano-Moroccan* women who express themselves from Morocco, on the other, differ the most: while the novels by El Hachmi and Karrouch mostly concentrate on one space,[6] the texts published by writers *in* Morocco evoke three spaces:

First, *Morocco* itself (often limited to the country's northern regions), which is drawn as the ground for lives led in misery due to a

[5] So far, no play has been penned by a *Hispano-Moroccan* (or *Hispano-Maghrebian*) female writer.

[6] One could counter though that, in El Hachmis' novel *L'últim patriarca* (2008), Morocco is also a predominant space, especially in the first part when the readership learns about the narrator's father Mimoun and his childhood and youth there. Though, in this case, the storyteller – Mimoun's daughter – establishes a particular situation of distance towards the narrated story as, until the end of this first part, she is hidden behind a pretended omniscient narrator telling the story from an extradiegetic position. Additionally, the daughter speaks clearly and openly from her position in Catalonia – always being aware of the migratory situation she and her family live in. This topic will be scrutinized in the following chapters.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

corrupt political system and due to poverty or to inequality of educational opportunities and predetermined social roles.

Second, the spatial and social *passage in-between the two countries*, that is the Mediterranean Sea, and here the misery linked to Morocco itself finds its superlative: the sea is always presented as the space where a mostly female individual has to face her own death. That does not mean that the narrated human subject always dies in these texts. But the unbearable circumstances in the homeland must be exceeded by the danger of the Mediterranean space to make the reader understand the irrevocable exigency for the narratives' characters to leave their country and, thus, willingly accept the risks of this perilous passage.

And these first two spaces lead to the third type of narrative texts that concentrate on the Moroccan-Spanish ties: some of the works written by female authors located in Morocco focus on the *space of destination*. However, Spain is nearly never presented as a paradisiac *Eldorado* where all former social and economic problems are solved (whereas, in extratextual social reality, it is sometimes still perceived as such according to Bueno Alonso 2012: 34); when drawn as an idyllic and welcoming harbour, then that drawing is just to unmask a character's naïve ideas and contrast them with the relentless revelations of the text's voice about Spain. That is, the narrating instance in those texts is, from the beginning, aware of the frequently illusory conception of the related figures. Additionally striking is that this *space of destination* is often defined homogeneously: the reader is confronted with a disillusioned vision of a country where migrant's wishes do not come true. Thus, Spain is repeatedly presented in a sobering but inflexible way, going from one extreme to another: instead of repeating the stereotypical romantic *locus amoenus*, it turns into a uniform *locus terribilis* for the Moroccan immigrant.

In comparison to this less differentiated perspective on the part of female writers living in Morocco, both Najat El Hachmi and Laila Karrouch draft a more heterogeneous and multifaceted image of their country of residence. The relation between female authors living in Morocco and those residing in Spain can be better captured if we take into account what Francophone postcolonial research has elaborated since the 1980s, if not before, though the comparison manifests the lack of theory formation about *Hispano-Maghrebian* literature(s). I am concretely

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

referring to Hargreaves' distinction between a "first generation of Maghrebian novelists born and raised across the Mediterranean" and a "new generation coming from emigration"[7] (1995: 24), which nevertheless is a problematic and, rightly, much discussed concept. Tahar Djaout pointed out that authors, having migrated, "continue to be inspired by a desire to write 'from the Maghreb,' a desire to insert themselves into a specifically Maghrebian set of problems at the very moment when they have aesthetically and allegorically distanced themselves from the Maghreb" (Djaout 1992: 218) whereas the 'second generation', born in France, sides with the country of residence (cf. ibid.).

The same *glissement* in perspectives is observable in the female *Hispano-Maghrebian* literature(s) with the significant difference that the decisive temporal-spatial shift of migration took place in another way. That means, the viewpoint of the so-called 'first generation' of Franco-Maghrebian immigrant writers is similar to the one of *Hispano-Maghrebian* authors who *did not* migrate. Thus, the Francophone 'first generation' moved physically, whereas the sometimes visible (textual) displacement of Moroccan authors writing in Spanish is a *thought* one. Nevertheless, the comparability between both literatures is visible in specific details such as the positioning within fiction: both address openly their French or Spanish public, which becomes obvious when daily habits in northern Africa or Muslim religious customs are clarified – explanations a Maghrebian reader would not need.

Against the background of this narrow overview of (female) *Hispano-Maghrebian* literature(s), I will now look closer at the novel *L'últim patriarca* by Najat El Hachmi, concentrating on the particular narrative strategies that underline the distance or, inversely, the closeness of the narrator toward her "origins" and toward her life in Spain. But it is also necessary at least to indicate the problems related to such analytic observations.[8]

[7] Original versions: "[…] la première génération de romanciers maghrébins nés et élevés outre-Méditerranée" and "[…] la nouvelle génération issue de l'émigration" (Hargreaves 1995: 24).

[8] For a closer reading of the novel in the sense of an autobiographical fictional text, see Codina 2017.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

3. Breaking with the autobiographical testimony – *L'últim patriarca* by Najat El Hachmi

L'últim patriarca (2008), the novel with which Najat El Hachmi won the prestigious *Premi de les Lletres Catalanes Ramon Llull*, treats the history of the female first person narrator's family. It is divided into two equal parts, the first one retracing the life of her father, Mimoun, a choleric patriarch, who was born in Morocco and left his country and his family to work in Spain until his wife and children joined him there years later. In the second part, the development of the then autodiegetic narrator, Mimoun's daughter, and her process of liberation from the violent and oppressive father become the centres of focus.

What, prima facie, could be understood as the trajectory of a 'classic' *Bildungsroman* (see Ricci 2005, 2011) is combined with a particular textual structure that prevents the reader from applying, from the beginning, any traditional literary patterns. In fact, right in the first sentences, the novel sets an impossible narrative perspective (see Ingenschay 2011: 62):

> This is the story of Mimoun, son of Driouch, son of Allal, son of Mohamed, son of Mohand, son of Bouziane, whom we shall simply call Mimoun. It is his story and the story of the last of the great patriarchs who make up the long line of Driouch's forbears. Every single one lived, acted and intervened in the lives of those around them as resolutely as the imposing figures in the Bible.[9] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: vii)

Even if the narrator did not explicitly hint at the Holy Writ, we would have been able to detect the architextual reference to the biblical construction (a so-called *Isnad*, as we see in the Old Testament in general and in Genesis in particular). Ironically, imitating this archetypical text and recounting how, with Mimoun, this chain of patriarchal hierarchy ended unmistakably announce Mimoun's subsequent decline. Thus, Mimoun's daughter starts her narration by evoking a period of her

[9] Original version: "Aquesta és la història de Mimoun, fill de Driouch, fill d'Allal, fill de Mohamed, fill de Mohand, fill de Bouziane, i que nosaltres anomenarem, simplement, Mi-moun. És la seva història i la història de l'últim dels grans patriarques que formen la llarga cadena dels avantpassats de Driouch" (El Hachmi 2008: 7).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

father's life that she actually cannot talk about *as a witness* because it was long time before her own birth.

Furthermore, two other aspects underline the narrator's essential function and enlarge it discernibly. By evoking an exclusively masculine genealogy, the feminine perspective of the narrating daughter receives even more weight as it only seems to be a story about men. However, a woman is now speaking – a female subject who, though missing in this patriarchal enumeration, holds the power to (re)tell and build her family's story. The performatory potential – through speaking, she *creates* her father as a reduced version of himself – reveals the novel as a subversive enunciative space where the hegemonic "speaking about" is reversed. But also, in the telling, the narrator distances herself from her role as a daughter by showing a noticeable lack of respect for her father and by renouncing the family's hierarchical order as she suggests simply calling him Mimoun. the end of the patriarchy is not just prospectively declared and developed throughout the novel; on the discursive level, it is already fulfilled in the opening sentence.

What does this mean in the context of our reflections? The dense and complex introduction of the novel opens up an enunciative space that radically breaks with established textual and literary categories such as autobiographical testimony, which many migrant writers have repeatedly employed (see also Bonn 1994, 1995).[10] Of course, it contains "reference places" ("lieux de référence"), as Léonora Miano named them (2012: 6). And so, El Hachmi's novel emanates from a concrete situation of enunciation; nevertheless, that does not permit it to be reduced to an exclusively autobiographical reading.

In the same way, *L'últim patriarca* cannot be generally classified as *littérature engagée* (in the sense of the Francocaribbean *Créolité* authors, not Sartre; Bernabé et al. 1993 [1989]). Only in parts does the narration reveal a direct political objective. This occurs, for example, when the text speaks against the patriarchy – which is intensified when, a few pages after the beginning, we can read a Deleuzian 'repetition and

[10] However, Bueno Alonso states that this novel "joins the first texts of Francophone Maghrebian female writers" as she concentrates on the autobiographical aspects in this narration (2012: 38, translation J.T.; original version: "Le roman rejoint les premiers textes des romancières maghrébines francophones; il s'agit d'une narration de type autobiographique […]").

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

difference' of the introductory phrase: "On that day, after three daughters, a first son was born to Driouch of Allal of Mohammed of Mohand of Bouziane, etc." (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 3).[11] Here, all of a sudden, first the women are mentioned, and only *then* are the patriarchs named. In addition, the *et cetera* at the end of that phrase is a quasi-blasphemous indication that the narrator will not simply take over traditional (and religious!) customs but that she will critically revise every detail she knows and had taken for granted. By this, the text reveals a definite rupture with predetermined and allocated female social roles and functions. In this aspect, yes, the novel is decidedly an example of a *literature of commitment* to strengthen the female's position within her culture and society, something made possible or facilitated also thanks to the socio-spatial distance from the country of the narrator's family's origin.

Nonetheless, the repeatedly perceptible commitment on the semantic level is undermined on the discursive one, which often counters the related story. The specific device that leads to questioning the events can be summarized as a *technique of created uncertainty*. It is a complex strategy that combines a narration consisting of insecurity caused by varying and relativizing viewpoints and humoresque insertions ill-befitting the told moments: humour is specifically used in the cruellest situations of the narrator's life. This strategy of created uncertainty engenders an extreme distance to the narrated plot but also entertains doubts if what was read can actually be what is told, that is, it demands a constant requestioning of the lector's reading process.

To explain this point, I will give two significant examples: the first one goes back to Mimoun's adolescence. At the wedding of an older cousin, Mimoun leaves the festivities for a moment to go to the nearby river. There, he is probably violated by his own uncle, which remains an open secret never touched on by any family member. Instead, an adventurous – impossible – story circulates that Mimoun had seen a goat that talked to him in the depth of the night, which would have frightened him to death. The narrating voice alternates between precisely reproducing this obviously fictitious tale, giving exact details of

[11] Original version: "Aquell dia va néixer, després de tres nenes, el primer dels fills de Driouch d'Allal de Mohamed de Mohand de Bouziane, etc." (El Hachmi 2008: 11).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

how the moon shone over the scenario or by repeating what the goat said to Mimoun:

> The moon was shining on the little stream trickling there, and there was *probably* a slight mist, that mist that hangs close to the ground. In the middle of that serene, silent night, a goat rose up on his hind legs on the highest wall of the riverbank and looked at Mimoun. It stared at him and said: Have you seen my son?[12] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 23; emphasis J.T.)

The narrator frames a pastoral idyllic scenery that culminates in a fairy-tale setting when the personified animal starts to address Mimoun. But it is exactly the formulation of this fantastic picture that raises doubts because the narrating voice gives all these details she cannot possibly know. These suspicious descriptions are subsequently even augmented when the reader learns that family versions are circulating of what had happened that night. However, of these versions, the most logical explanation is presented as being the most exaggerated and therefore most incredible story. The narrator describes this taboo in such a harmless way that the incident's atrocity is exponentiated in an inversely proportional way:

> Other non-official versions abound in the family. *Some say* it was the alcohol flowing at the wedding party […]. The most unofficial version of all is the one nobody ever recounts: […] *it isn't beyond the realm of possibility* that, tired of assailing donkeys and hens, [the grandmother's brother had] taken advantage of the euphoria of the moment to find a more human cavity in which to slot his erect member.[13] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 23-24; emphases J.T.)

[12] Original version: "La lluna il·luminava la poca aigua que circulava, lenta, i es devia percebre una boira tènue, d'aquella que només es deixa caure arran de terra. Enmig de la serenor i la quietud de la nit va aparèixer, al damunt de la paret més alta del marge, una cabra ben dreta que esguardava Mimoun. El mirava fixament i li va dir: has vist el meu fill?" (El Hachmi 2008: 33-34).

[13] Original version: "Altres versions no oficials corren per la família. 1) Hi ha qui diu que va ser per culpa de les begudes alcohòliques que corrien pel casement […]. 2) La versió menys official de totes és la que no s'explica mai: […] no és estranya la possibilitat que [el germà de l'àvia], cansat d'envestir ases i gallines, aprofités l'eufòria del moment per buscar una cavitat més humana on introduir el seu member erecte" (El Hachmi 2008: 34).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

As the violation act is developed in such a harmless passing mention, it could easily be overread at first glance, and thus, the story manipulates the reader by using the moment of astonishment to display the full ferocity of the text. In addition, and as seen in the two previous quotations, the text produces insecurity by frequently using expressions such as "probably," "some say" or an implicit double negation ("it isn't beyond the realm of possibility"). Nothing seems to be assured – the most improbable actions exempted. Of course, the uncertainty in this first example is also generated by all this happening long before the narrator was born.

I want to contrast this example with a second one where the same technique is applied, but this time, the focus lies on the narrator herself. In this second case, Mimoun's family is arriving in Spain and seeing for the first time the dreadful hole in which they are obliged to live. Thus, while the mother starts cleaning the flat, the father goes for a walk with the children. When they come back home, the narrating daughter states:

> We wandered for several hours until we got back to the apartment, which was no longer the same. It smelled of the country we'd left behind because mother was already cooking. *We were all happy*, and felt *strange* with that *odd* but pleasant man next to our mother, who'd suffered so much. *We were happy for a long time*. Or that's what I'd always thought, because that first stage *lasted ages*, up to the *strange* incident of the knife at midnight.[14] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 152; emphases J.T.)

The expressively demonstrated happiness, mentioned twice, is at no point credible. First, it is paired with attributes of oddity, which generate an atmosphere of threat that thwarts this pretended idyll. Second, the narrating voice ironizes this image of a harmonious family by stretching the time span of this joyful period "that lasted ages" – though, as the reader discovers immediately in the following sentence, this

[14] Original version: "Vam estar de ruta diverses hores fins que vam tornar al pis, que ja no era el mateix. Feia l'olor del país que havíem deixat enrere perquè la mare ja cuinava. *Estaven contents, tots dos*, i a nosaltres se'ns feia estrany aquell home tan estrany i agradable al costat de la mare, que havia patit tant. *Vam ser feliços molt de temps*. O això era el que jo sempre havia cregut, que la primera època havia estat molt llarga, fins a l'estrany incident del ganivet a mitjanit" (El Hachmi 2008: 172; emphases J.T.).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

interval was of short duration: "But mother says we'd only been back in father's life for three months when the strange incident of the knife at midnight struck […]"[15] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 152). And third, the felicity is directly relativized by the daughter's remark: "[o]r that's what I'd always thought […]," which shows a mistrust in personal memory. Thus, not only is the remembering about the father's life scrutinized; the own perspective is also presented as not being trustworthy and, throughout the whole novel, this remembering act is constantly questioned. At the same time, the openly threatening allusion to a so far unknown episode with a knife is softened by repetition of the word "strange," Thus, while the underlined oddity is somehow used to weaken the credibility of a past but persisting family luck, at the same moment, it intensifies the danger to make the reader understand it affectively by feeling a coming peril. To augment this sensation of menace, the narrator once more employs the technique of literal repetition of complete sentence fragments, which seem to artificially cover the told story by foregrounding discursive methods. So, the chapter concludes with the quoted phrase, and the new passage is entitled: "The strange incident of the knife at midnight"[16] (El Hachmi 2010 [2008]: 153).

And this leads us to a first conclusion. Instead of simply allowing the reader to perceive this novel as a testimonial text about migratory movements and cultural differences that are permanently negotiated, this narration repeatedly draws attention to the textual/material level, to the ludic manipulatory strategies of the novel that increase the artificiality of what is told and give all the discursive power to the narrating daughter of this last family patriarch. By this, the nowhere-named storyteller turns into an almighty puppeteer who degrades the patriarch's role to that of a marionette. And this omnipotence of the narrator again can be read as a blasphemic act: the real power lies no longer in the violent acts of a choleric father but in the act of the daughter speaking.

[15] Original version: "Però la mare diu que no feia més de tres mesos que havíem arribat a la vida del pare quan es va esdevenir l'estrany incident del Ganivet a mitjanit […]" (El Hachmi 2008: 172).
[16] Original version: "L'estrany incident del ganivet a mitjanit" (El Hachmi 2008: 173).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

That means – and this I want to emphasize: *L'últim patriarca* is neither an autobiography nor, as a whole, a text of commitment. The novel definitely takes position referring to the extratextually lived reality of migrants, related to what they socially and culturally carry to their country of residence. In the same way, the narration speaks up strongly against the suppression of women, especially when men legitimate it by referring to (pseudo-)cultural or (pseudo-)religious conditions and heritage. And at the same time, *L'últim patriarca* speaks up against the submission of women in the sense of them accepting this role. But yet, if we focussed exclusively on those aspects, we would "use" the text (as Umberto Eco had differentiated between *interpretazione* and *uso* of literature; e.g., 1995 [1990]: 32-33). Thus, we should avoid reducing the novel to a simple alternative explanatory source on sociocultural and political ongoings and not forget that an author has the right to elucidate the world, and the right not to. And the presented examples have shown that the importance and the force of this narration (also) go beyond its socio-political *engagement* and offer a unique set of discursive strategies and literary techniques that do not simply confirm or oppose an ongoing cultural debate but underline primarily the literaricity of this novel.

Works Cited

Abrighach, Mohamed (2013): "La narrativa breve del Protectorado: los cuentos de Dora Bacaicoa Arnaiz," in: Manuel Aragón Reyes (ed.): *El protectorado español en Marruecos: la historia trascendida*, Volumen II. Bilbao: Iberdrola, p. 281-302.

Abumalham, Montserrat (2001): *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?*, Madrid: Casa de África / SIAL.

Bernabé, Jean / Chamoiseau, Patrick / Confiant, Raphaël (1993 [1989]): *Éloge de la Créolité*, Paris: Gallimard.

Bonn, Charles (1994): "Romans féminins de l'immigration d'origine maghrébine", in: *Notre librairie. Revue du livre: Afrique, Caraïbes,*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Océan Indien. Nouvelles écritures féminines. 2. Femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs: l'état post-colonial, 118(juillet-septembre 1994), p. 98-107.

– (ed.) (1995): *Littératures des immigrations. 1: Un espace littéraire émergent*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Bueno Alonso, Josefina (2012): "Hispanisme et catalanité: enjeux méthodologiques et littéraires d'un transnationalisme maghrébin", in: Claudia Esposito/Edwige Tamalet Talbayev/Hakim Abderrezak (eds.): *Le Maghreb méditerranéen: littératures et plurilinguisme. Expressions maghrébines. Revue de la Coordination Internationale des Chercheurs sur les Littératures Maghrébines*, 11(2), p. 27-44.

Chakor, Mohamed (2007): "El menor," in: Carmelo Pérez Beltrán (ed.): *Entre las 2 orillas. Literatura marroquí en lengua española*, Granada: Universidad de Granada y fundación euroárabe de altos estudios, p. 53-58.

Chakor, Mohamed/Macías, Sergio (eds.) (1996): *Literatura marroquí en lengua castellana*, Madrid: Magalia.

Codina, Núria (2017): "The Work of Najat El Hachmi in the Context of Spanish-Moroccan Literature," in: Juliane Tauchnitz/Julia Borst (eds.): *Migratory Movements and Diasporic Positionings in Contemporary Hispano- and Catalano-African Literatures.* Special Issue of *Research in African Literatures*, 48(3), p. 116-130.

Djaout, Tahar (1992): "Black 'Beur' Writing", in: *Research in African Literatures*, 23 (2), p. 217-221.

Djebar, Assia (1999): *Ces voix qui m'assiègent …en marge de ma francophonie*, Paris: Albin Michel.

Eco, Umberto (1995 [1990]): *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, Milan: Bompiani.

El Hachmi, Najat (2008): *L'últim patriarca*, Barcelona: Planeta.

– (2010 [2008]): *The Last Patriarch*, London: Serpent's Tail.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ellison, Mahan L. (2017): "*Un reino tan lejano*: Yudis, Shahrazad, and the Imaginary Space in the Contemporary Hispano-Moroccan Novel," in: Juliane Tauchnitz/Julia Borst (eds.): *Migratory Movements and Diasporic Positionings in Contemporary Hispano- and Catalano-African Literatures. Special Issue: Research in African Literatures*, 48(3), p. 98-115.

Frühwald, Wolfgang/Jauß, Hans Robert/Koselleck, Reinhart/Mittelstraß, Jürgen/Steinwachs, Burkhart (1991): *Geisteswissenschaften heute. Eine Denkschrift*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Gahete, Manuel/Limami, Abdellatif/Mgara, Ahmed M./Sarria, José/Tazi, Aziz (2008): *Calle del Agua. Antología de la literatura hispanomagrebí contemporánea*, Madrid: SIAL.

Hall, Stuart (1990): "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in: Jonathan Rutherford (ed.): *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, p. 222-237, in: http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ReadingRoom/public/IdentityDiaspora.pdf (accessed 25.03.2009).

Hargreaves, Alec (1995): "La littérature issue de l'immigration maghrébine en France: une littérature 'mineure'?", in: Charles Bonn (ed.): *Littératures des immigrations. 1: Un espace littéraire émergent*, Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 17-28.

Ingenschay, Dieter (2011): "Migraciones e identidades en *L'últim patriarca* de Najat El Hachmi", in: *Iberoromania*, 71-72(1), p. 57-70.

Miano, Léonora (2012): *Habiter la frontière. Conférences*, Paris: L'Arche.

Ricci, Cristián H. (2005): "El regreso de los moros a España: fronteras, inmigración, racismo y transculturación en la literatura marroquí contemporánea," in: *Cuadernos de ALDEEU*, XI (Noviembre 2005), p. 1-26.

– (2011): "Identidad, Lengua y Nación en la Literatura Amazigh-Catalana", in: *Aljamía. Revista de la Consejería de Educación en Marruecos*, 22 (Diciembre), p. 79-94, in: http://www.mecd.gob.es/marruecos/dms/consejerias-exteriores/marruecos/publicaciones/

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

aljamia/revista-Aljamia-22/re-vista%20Aljamia%2022.pdf (accessed 18.2.2014).

Rueda, Ana (2010): "Presentación," in: Ana Rueda/Sandra Martín (eds.): *El retorno / el reencuentro. La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí*, Madrid: Iberoamericana / Vervuert; Valladolid: Cátedra Miguel Delibes, p. 9-21.

Tauchnitz, Juliane (2016): "Langue maternelle, identité et écriture. 'El menor' de Mohamed Chakor – un récit de la 'magrebidad'?," in: Moha Ennaji (ed.): *Le brassage de la culture amazighe et de la culture hassania. Leur relation avec les cultures sub-sahariennes*, Fès: Centre Nord Sud, p. 215-225.

Tauchnitz, Juliane/Borst, Julia (2017): "Introductory Reflections", in: Juliane Tauchnitz/Julia Borst (eds.): *Migratory Movements and Diasporic Positionings in Contemporary Hispano- and Catalano-African Literatures. Special Issue: Research in African Literatures*, 48(3), p. VII-IX.

Toro, Fernando de (1995): "From Where to Speak? Latin American Postmodern/Postcolonial Positionalities", in: *World Literature Today*, 69(1), p. 35-40.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Koku G. Nonoa

(Luxembourg)

Léonora Miano et son concept de l'identité frontière au théâtre

Abstract

The present analysis focuses on some strategies of aesthetic efficacy and their function in the textual and scenic writing of Léonora Miano's *Révélation*. First, *Révélation* is placed in its socio-cultural context. In this process, the theory of 'social drama' and 'aesthetic drama' allow us to identify the interdependent character of historical events and *Révélation* in a different light. We then rely on the concepts of documentary and post-dramatic theater to analyze the socio-cultural potentiality of literature and theater as related to the re-examination and re-orientation of the regimes of perception In doing so, this contribution examines, in turn, some strategies of aesthetic variation related to the frontier identity of the 'Afropean' woman in the theater, beyond the antagonisms between Africa and Europe in the post-migration context, and to the diverse and interdependent character of the human subjects in the current world.

Romancière franco-camerounaise née en 1973 à Douala et lauréate entre autres du *Grand Prix littéraire de l'Afrique noire* en 2011 pour l'ensemble de son œuvre, du *Grand prix du roman métis* et du *Prix Femina* en 2013 pour *La Saison de l'ombre*, Léonora Miano plaide pour une prise de conscience de l'identité frontière. Le concept d'identité frontière se rapporte à l'appréhension ou à la perception du genre humain qui se distingue par son caractère multiple, hétérogène et dynamique, et qui s'observe dans une sorte d'espace d'entre-deux en perpétuelle mouvance de part et d'autre d'une ou de plusieurs frontières fluides. Dans *Révélation* par exemple, premier texte de sa *Red in blue trilogie* (2015), Léonora Miano plante le décor d'une série de scènes de fiction dans un espace singulier où le caractère multiple, diversifié et interdépendant du monde actuel en relation avec son passé esclavagiste

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

et tragique est mis en exergue. C'est dans ce contexte que Judith Graves Miller situe dans son article intitulé « Remapping the Memory of Slavery : Leonora Miano's Theatrical Dream, *Red in blue trilogie* » les textes dramatiques de *Red in blue trilogie* dans la trajectoire de plusieurs romans dans lesquels Miano cherche à rappeler l'impact de la traite des esclaves sur la perception que les Africains contemporains ont d'eux-mêmes et de leur histoire (Miller 2017 : 157-178). *Révélation* fait découvrir un monde mythologique dont la divinité Inyi, une figure féminine créatrice de l'Univers, se retrouve confrontée à une situation inattendue et bouleversante : les âmes à naître rejettent le fait d'être incarnées dans les corps des nouveau-nés aussi longtemps que les Ombres des âmes damnées n'auront pas rendu compte de leurs crimes passés. Par le truchement de cette fiction, Léonora Miano confronte les continents africain et européen à leur complicité mutuelle et refoulée face à la réalité des crimes perpétrés lors du trafic humain transatlantique.

La présente analyse porte sur quelques stratégies de l'efficacité esthétique et leur fonction dans l'écriture textuelle et scénique de *Révélation* ayant trait principalement à la construction de l'identité frontière et afropéenne de la femme d'origine africaine dans le théâtre européen, qui va au-delà des clichés du discours dominant et de la confrontation Afrique/Europe (Nonoa 2018 : 85-95).[1] En outre, il s'agit de porter un regard analytique sur la prise de position de Léonora Miano en rapport avec les identités historique et contemporaine en contact avec les « nœuds de mémoires » et les « guerres des mémoires » (Vergès 2010 : 138). Dans cette optique, cette analyse se base sur les concepts de 'drame social' et de 'drame esthétique' développés dans les années 1970 et 1980 par Victor Turner et Richard Schechner, sur le concept du théâtre documentaire, sur quelques réflexions de Jacques Rancière dans *Le spectateur émancipé* (2008) et sur le *Théâtre postdramatique* (1999) de Hans-Thies Lehmann.

[1] Cette contribution repose sur le remaniement de quelques démarches théoriques et méthodologiques de l'auteur de cet article publiées en 2018 dans la revue littéraire *variations* de l'Université de Zurich sous le titre « Le Théâtre contemporain en Europe face aux variations et défis d'un texte sur l'épineuse question migratoire : *Les Suppliants* d'Elfriede Jelinek » (Nonoa 2018 : 85-95).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access -

Dans un premier temps, l'efficacité esthétique et la production littéraire du texte *Révélation* seront placées dans leur contexte socioculturel. Dans cette démarche, la théorie du 'drame social' et du 'drame esthétique' permettra de cerner sous un autre regard le caractère interdépendant des événements réels et de *Révélation*. Ceci permettra ensuite d'en déduire la potentialité socioculturelle de la littérature et du théâtre en rapport avec le réexamen et la réorientation des régimes de la perception en s'appuyant sur les concepts du théâtre documentaire et postdramatique : il s'agira précisément d'analyser tour à tour quelques stratégies de variation esthétiques portant sur l'identité frontière de la femme 'afropéenne' au théâtre, au-delà des antagonismes Afrique/ Europe dans le contexte post-migratoire, et sur le caractère diversifié et interdépendant des sujets humains dans le monde actuel.

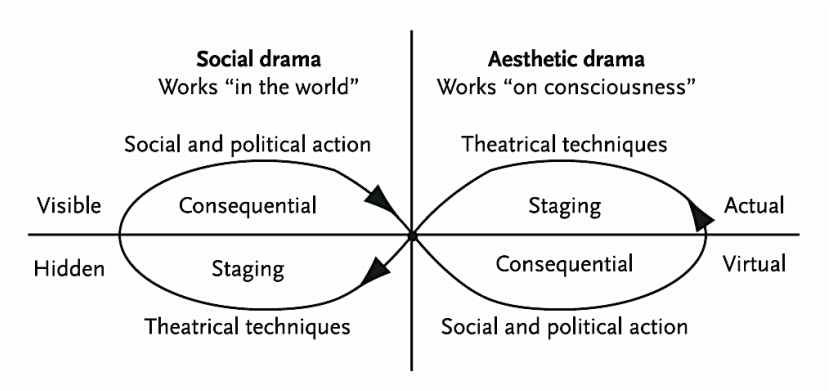
1. *Révélation* à la lumière du 'drame social' et du 'drame esthétique'

La théorie du rapport 'drame social'/'drame esthétique' élaborée par Victor Turner et Richard Schechner dans le cadre de l'art rituel et de la performance élucide les influences ou les impacts réciproques des événements de la vie quotidienne et de la production artistique. Ainsi, l'analyse de *Révélation* à la lumière de ce rapport permet non seulement de démontrer d'un autre point de vue le caractère interdépendant de l'écriture de ce texte et des circonstances historiques intrinsèques à sa production. Cette démarche met aussi en exergue la fonction de l'efficacité esthétique encore attribuable dans le monde d'aujourd'hui à l'art en général et en particulier à la littérature et au théâtre. Dans cette logique, il est important de souligner que l'efficacité esthétique de la littérature et du théâtre ne se revitalise qu'en réponse à une situation historique, socioculturelle et politique ponctuelle. Dans le cas du théâtre, on conviendra avec Victor Turner qu'il retourne toujours à ses racines les plus profondes appelées 'drame social' comme partie intégrante de la vie quotidienne d'une communauté spécifique (Turner 1982 : 11 et sq.) et servant de point de départ à toute action artistique engagée.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

En effet, Turner situe les racines du théâtre dans le ‘drame social’ qu’il subdivise en trois étapes progressives. En partant d’une perspective anthropologique, Turner définit d’abord le ‘drame social’ comme un paradigme qui permet de décrire et d’analyser une sorte de conflit toujours présent dans la vie quotidienne (Turner 1982 : 11). Il perçoit ainsi le ‘drame social’ comme une situation conflictuelle qui émerge constamment à la surface des rapports de force entre individus au cours des activités de la vie sociale et politique. Il remarque que, dans les grandes sociétés modernes, le ‘drame social’ peut s’aggraver et quitter le niveau local pour prendre l’allure de révolutions nationales, ou peut encore prendre, dès le tout début, la forme d’une guerre entre des nations. Pour lui, en s’étendant de la dimension d’une famille et d’un village à un conflit international, les ‘drames sociaux’ révèlent les niveaux « sous-cutanés » (ibid. : 10), c’est-à-dire cachés, de toute structure sociale. On observe de ce fait dans certaines petites sociétés des rivalités entre clans, lignages, familles, entre différentes générations, ou des regroupements religieux et politiques. Turner note également que, dans les sociétés industrialisées par exemple, on assiste ainsi à des formes d’opposition entre classes sociales, groupes ethniques, régions, partis politiques, ou encore à des oppositions sur la base de la question du genre humain, etc. Cette observation ethno-anthropologique permet à Turner de conclure ensuite que les ‘drames sociaux’ tendent à activer et à cultiver les antagonismes basés sur le schéma des classifications ou des catégorisations. C’est pourquoi, selon lui, ils sont toujours en gestation permanente, même dans les périodes apparemment plus tranquilles de la vie sociale : ceci constitue le point de départ et la première étape du ‘drame social’. La deuxième étape touche tous les individus à tout moment en divers endroits et à tous les niveaux de l’organisation de la vie socioculturelle et politique. Partant de ce constat, Turner déduit que la troisième étape du ‘drame social’, celle du mode de réparation – étape qui constitue toujours le début d’une autoréflexion et une prise de conscience –, a effectué un mouvement partant des domaines réservés à la loi et à la religion pour rejoindre ceux des différents genres d’expression artistique (ibid.). La figure suivante esquissée par Richard Schechner (2003 : 215) décrit de manière succincte et visuelle ce rapport d’influence dynamique et réciproque entre le ‘drame social’ et le ‘drame esthétique’ :

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA



Rapport entre le 'drame social' et le 'drame esthétique' (Schechner 2003 : 215)

Sur la base de cette schématisation, il est à noter que la droite verticale/l'axe des ordonnées délimite le 'drame social' et le 'drame esthétique' ; la droite horizontale/l'axe des abscisses montre d'une part les structures cachées et visibles du 'drame social', et d'autre part l'actualité du sujet et l'efficacité virtuelle du 'drame esthétique'. Les trois flèches directionnelles du signe de l'infini font ressortir les mouvements d'influences réciproques et dynamiques du rapport 'drame social'/'drame esthétique', que Schechner trouve productives. Il s'appuie notamment sur le fait que le 'drame social' exerce un impact positif sur le 'drame esthétique' et vice-versa (Schechner 2003 : 214 et sq.). Dans ce qui suit, nous nous efforcerons d'illustrer l'actualité de ce rapport dynamique 'drame social'/'drame esthétique' en s'appuyant sur *Révélation*, en relation avec les circonstances historiques et socioculturelles.

Publié à Paris en 2015, *Red in blue trilogie* se compose des textes *Revélation*, *Sacrifices* et *Tombeau*. *Révélation*, qui ouvre cette trilogie et qui est au centre de la présente analyse, est composée de trois actes subdivisés en trois scènes chacun. L'ensemble des actes met en dialogue et de manière variée des esprits (Mayibuye, Ubuntu et les Ombres) et deux divinités (Inyi et Kalunga) dans l'univers mythologique appelé *misipo* ; c'est là où se jouent toutes les scènes de *Révélation*, et c'est cet univers dont les lois se trouvent pour la première fois profondément ébranlées : en effet, les âmes à naître, représentées par la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

figure et l'esprit Mayibuye, refusent de s'incarner dans les corps des nouveau-nés des femmes du « Pays premier », une première contrée où vécurent des humains, et où règne encore un chaos sans précédent. Il s'agit bien d'une grève inédite motivée par le fait que ces âmes à naître exigent que les Ombres des âmes damnées révèlent les mobiles de leurs crimes du passé tragique, lesquels renvoient à la période historique du trafic humain transatlantique. Afin de trouver une solution, esprits et divinités se rencontrent dans un contexte de liminalité, une sorte d'entre-deux mythologique et liminal exclusivement spatio-temporel dans *misipo*, l'univers fictif de *Révélation* ; là, entre ciel et terre, entre nuit et jour, en présence de la divinité Kalunga, des esprits Ubuntu (esprit des disparus sans sépulture du trafic transatlantique et figure des âmes en peine) et Mayibuye, les âmes reprouvées des Ombres (esprits, figures et catégories complices du trafic transatlantique) comparaissent et prennent tour à tour la parole devant la divinité Inyi dans le troisième acte : elles, les âmes reprouvées, font des révélations ayant trait aux divers degrés de leurs implications variées dans « la capture et la reddition d'êtres humains aux étrangers venus par les eaux » (Miano 2015 : 3).

Le contenu de *Révélation* s'inscrit dans le cadre d'un réexamen littéraire et fictionnel ; c'est par conséquent l'expression d'un 'drame esthétique' qui jette inéluctablement un regard rétrospectif, et qui cherche à rompre aussi avec la négation ou le refoulement la narration dominante et le silence sur une catégorie historique bien identifiable des 'drames sociaux'. C'est dans une telle perspective que Françoise Vergès, dans son article « Wandering Souls and Returning Ghosts : Writing the History of the Dispossessed » (2010 : 136-154), parle d'un « contact de mémoire » et de « nœuds de mémoires » d'où émergent des contradictions qui se revendiquent comme des gestes de reconnaissances. Pour elle (ibid. : 136), le débat actuel en France autour de ce qu'elle appelle la « guerre des mémoires » l'amène à questionner la manière dont l'historiographie sur le sujet de la mémoire, en rapport avec l'esclavagisme, le colonialisme, les guerres etc., est construite dans une perspective de paix dominée par le discours de l'Occident. Elle note par exemple qu'au cours des deux dernières décennies, la race, l'esclavage et la colonie sont devenus des terrains de sujets très discutés en France, en rapport avec leurs historiographies respectives (Vergès

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

2010 : 140) et en tenant compte des questions de l'identité nationale et « l'intégration » des descendants des travailleurs migrants en France (ibid. : 141) : il s'agit précisément d'une démarche qui vise à définir « une nouvelle relation entre les Français et leur histoire » (ibid. : 141) entre autres esclavagiste et coloniale. Dans cette même perspective, et au-delà de la France, l'Agence Norvégienne de Coopération pour le Développement (NORAD) avait déjà soutenu en 2002 pour le compte de l'UNESCO l'élaboration de l'outil pédagogique « Voyages d'esclaves. La traite transatlantique des Africains réduits en esclavage » dans le cadre d'un projet éducatif pour briser le silence sur le trafic humain transatlantique et promouvoir une éducation de qualité. Les toutes premières lignes introductives dudit document stipulent ce qui suit :

> La traite négrière transatlantique est désormais reconnue de manière générale comme un crime contre l'humanité, même dans les pays des deux rives atlantiques qui y ont activement participé. C'est ainsi qu'en février 1999 le gouvernement français a dénoncé la traite en tant que telle et que l'UNESCO a également souscrit à cette démarche en lançant le projet des 'Routes de l'esclave' pour tenter de 'briser le silence' qui, selon l'Organisation, continue d'entourer cette tragédie. Ce projet a pour but d'encourager la production et la vulgarisation des connaissances sur la traite négrière transatlantique, et de promouvoir la paix et le dialogue entre les cultures. (Beckles 2002 : 11)

Force est cependant de constater que la volonté (de tenter) de « briser le silence » sur cette tragédie historique se trouve encore aujourd'hui confrontée à l'émergence d'autres formes de 'drames sociaux' : il s'agit non seulement des préjugés et antagonismes culturels, mais aussi et surtout de la manifestation des phénomènes de « la mémoire enchaînée » (Vergès 2006) et des « troubles de la mémoire », (Vergès 2005 : 179 et sq.), c'est-à-dire des mécanismes de refoulements et d'oublis accidentels liés aux différents degrés de complicité mutuelle de l'Afrique et l'Europe dans cette tragédie en rapport avec les tenants et les aboutissants du trafic humain transatlantique. La complexité du caractère interdépendant des circonstances et des modes complices d'opération qui ont rendu possible ledit trafic, est encore d'une actualité irréfutable et alimente encore l'imaginaire des 'drames sociaux' entre

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

l'Afrique et l'Europe en ce 21ième siècle : par exemple, une « pétition contre une fresque célébrant l'abolition de l'esclavage à l'Assemblée nationale » vise à faire décrocher cette œuvre artistique pendant que Hervé di Rosa, « [l]'artiste dénonce une opération de censure »:

> Deux têtes. Elles sont noires avec de grands yeux bleus, une large rangée de dents encadrées par d'énormes lèvres rouges. Elles regardent en souriant une chaîne qui, l'instant d'avant, les contraignaient, et qui explose sous un choc violent. Cette libération, c'est l'abolition de l'esclavage, décidée par l'Assemblée nationale en 1794, en pleine période révolutionnaire. Cette fresque sur toile a été réalisée par Hervé di Rosa en 1991. Commandée par la RATP, elle trouve sa place dans un couloir du Palais bourbon, qui abrite l'Assemblée nationale. À travers douze représentations, les œuvres illustrent les dates marquantes de l'histoire législative française. 28 ans après son installation, la toile fait à nouveau parler d'elle. Une pétition demandant son retrait, lancée par Mame-Fatou Niang, professeur d'université, et Julien Suaudeau, écrivain, a déjà recueilli plus de 1400 signatures. Tous deux sont de fervents promoteurs de l'identité noire […]. Selon le texte accompagnant la pétition, la représentation des personnages noirs emprunte 'à la fois aux publicités Banania et à Tintin au Congo'. 'Cette 'œuvre' constitue une insulte humiliante et déshumanisante aux millions de victimes de la traite, ainsi qu'à tous leurs descendants', estiment les auteurs. Ils dénoncent notamment que la toile soit exposée dans un lieu aussi symbolique que l'Assemblée. Pour eux, sa présence dans la 'maison du peuple' qu'est le Palais Bourbon, et sa présentation 'dans l'indifférence générale, ajoute l'insulte à la blessure'. La fresque se trouve juste après l'entrée des visiteurs, dans un couloir que les curieux traversent pour se rendre dans une salle où est projeté un film institutionnel sur l'Assemblée. Contactée, l'Assemblée nationale déclare n'avoir eu connaissance d'aucune réaction négative de visiteurs à la vue de la fresque. (Hermans 2019 : s.p.)

Un deuxième exemple d'une autre nature qui retient aussi l'attention se rapporte à une omission qualifiée d'étonnante par Marie-Ange Cristofori dans une courte critique titrée de « Polémique autour du passé négrier du port de La Rochelle » et témoigne de l'actualité de la mémoire enchaînée et/ou troublée, ou encore empreinte de refoulement et d'oubli en Europe, à l'exemple de la France, quand il s'agit de traiter le sujet du trafic humain transatlantique :

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> A travers 11 panneaux, une exposition in situ retrace 800 ans de l'histoire du vieux port de La Rochelle. Richement illustrée, la carte postale est belle mais pas aussi informative que cela. Rien n'était prévu pour évoquer le commerce triangulaire. Or, durant 3 siècles, du XVII[e] au XIX[e], 427 navires sont partis pour la traite transatlantique contribuant à l'activité économique rochelaise.
> La traite rochelaise aurait déporté 130 000 Africains à l'époque.
> Découvrant l'exposition, un collectif d'associations locales s'est ému qu'aucun panneau n'ait été installé, d'emblée, pour aborder ce pan de l'histoire du port. […] Alerté, le maire Jean-François Fountaine a fait corriger le tir : 'La Rochelle a joué un rôle important dans ce négoce des êtres humains. Les Africains étaient déportés et utilisés comme ouvriers dans l'industrie sucrière'.
> En réponse à la demande de ce collectif, un panneau supplémentaire viendra donc compléter et rectifier l'exposition. Son installation est prévue avant le 10 mai, date l'abolition de l'esclavage.
> Un étrange oubli, d'autant que la ville abrite, dans l'ancienne demeure d'un des plus grands négriers, le musée du Nouveau Monde qui retrace cette histoire douloureuse. (Cristofori 2019 : s.p.)

Du côté africain, c'est plutôt la posture de victime qui domine à côté aussi d'une sorte de trouble de la mémoire qui se traduit par le refoulement de la complicité africaine dans la traite transatlantique qu'entre autres l'historien congolais Elikia M'bokolo essaie de corriger dans son article « La dimension africaine de la traite des Noirs ». (M'bokolo 1998) Sur le plan artistique ou des arts du spectacle, « […] il y a mille raisons, malheureusement, de se sentir épuisé avant même d'entrer en salle, lorsqu'on nous invite à entendre l'histoire de la '*déportation subsaharienne*' au théâtre », argumente Régis Bardon dans ses observations critiques en rapport avec la représentation théâtrale de *Révélation* et il continue : « [s]ans doute parce qu'on en a vu un peu trop, des spectacles qui jouaient sur le même lyrisme hystérique et les mêmes performances d'acteurs en colère pour redire à quel point la violence, c'est vraiment violent » (Bardon 2018 : s.p.).

Sur la base de ce qui précède, il est évident que les séquelles des 'drames sociaux' liés au trafic humain transatlantique sont encore activement présentes dans les structures socioculturelles et l'imaginaire des peuples en Afrique et en Europe à l'ère actuelle de la mondialisation : il est question d'une ère de mobilité grandissante pour certains groupes de personnes, de rencontres culturelles et de leurs interactions

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

permanentes qui se manifestent par la construction d'identités diversifiées et dynamiques. Du coup les tendances classiques des 'drames sociaux' à activer et à cultiver les antagonismes, pour reprendre les termes de Victor Turner sur la base des classifications ou des catégorisations du sujet humain, semblent devenir obsolètes et problématiques dans ce 21ième siècle. C'est dans un pareil contexte que Léonora Miano contribue à travers *Révélation* à élucider la part de responsabilité de l'Afrique complice dans la tragédie transatlantique : ceci correspond justement à la troisième phase du 'drame social' où les moyens artistiques, sous la forme du 'drame esthétique', à l'exemple de *Révélation* et de sa mise en scène, entrent en action dans le but d'apporter un autre regard. De même qu'on le remarque surtout dans le troisième acte de *Révélation*, Turner souligne par exemple que l'expression d'un 'drame esthétique' est une sorte d'investigation et de jugement artistiques, et peut punir de la même manière que la loi-en-action (« law-in-action », Turner 1982 : 12). Quelle est alors la potentialité socioculturelle de *Révélation* ?

2. Efficacité esthétique de *Révélation*

Cette partie de l'analyse se limite à quelques éléments de l'efficacité esthétique du texte *Révélation* et de sa potentialité socioculturelle : l'accent porte ainsi sur quelques stratégies esthétiques qui s'apparentent au théâtre documentaire. La comparaison de certains éléments de *Révélation* avec l'approche esthétique du théâtre documentaire permet entre autres de situer l'efficacité esthétique et la potentialité socioculturelle de cette œuvre dans son contexte historique et actuel ; la suite directe de cette partie porte sur le concept d'identité frontière et afro-européenne en rapport avec l'affirmation identitaire féminine post-migratoire.

Le théâtre documentaire, comme défini dans *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, est une forme dramatique du théâtre politique dans la période située après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Cette forme de théâtre est née d'un certain scepticisme par rapport à la possibilité de changer le monde à partir de la scène de théâtre, sur la base d'œuvres artistiques qui sont seulement le fruit de l'imagination. C'est ainsi que le théâtre documen-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

taire se distancie de la fiction et fait valoir son recours aux archives et aux contenus factuels du matériel historique. Le théâtre documentaire est alors une sorte de reportage scénique dont l'auteur joue le rôle d'arrangeur et d'organisateur du matériel documentaire selon une thématique et une perspective données (Wilpert 1979 : 184 et sq.)

Les moments forts du théâtre documentaire en Europe remontent aux années 1960, avec les icônes allemandes de ce genre théâtral : Peter Weiss, Heinar Kipphardt et Rolf Hochhuth. En se référant au tout début de cette forme de théâtre dans le réalisme et le naturalisme au 19ième siècle, et surtout dans les travaux du metteur en scène allemand Erwin Piscator (un des précurseurs du théâtre documentaire) dans la première moitié du 20ième, Weiss, Kipphardt et Hochhuth ont œuvré pour la renaissance du théâtre documentaire dans la deuxième moitié du 20ième siècle, après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Motivés par leurs scepticismes respectifs vis-à-vis de la manipulation de l'histoire, de la falsification de l'information et de la désinformation du public à travers les médias, ils optèrent pour une démarche esthétique particulière pour le théâtre documentaire : une approche scientifique, analytique et esthétique au centre de laquelle se trouve l'authenticité du document ou du matériel pour l'écriture littéraire et scénique.

Si les effets de distanciation (*Verfremdungseffekte*) de Bertolt Brecht étaient basés sur le caractère fictif et imaginé du contenu de la représentation théâtrale, ces techniques remplissent des fonctions similaires dans le cas du théâtre documentaire : ils attirent l'attention du lecteur ou du spectateur sur les faits déjà connus et encouragent une attitude de prise de position consciente, critique et réfléchie en rapport avec le contenu documentaire qui se veut authentique. Ceci posé, il convient maintenant de s'attarder sur quelques éléments rappelant ces stratégies esthétiques du théâtre documentaire dans *Révélation*.

La grande partie des référents documentaires de *Révélation* se trouve dans les notes de bas de page. Par exemple, le concept *Sankofa* précise l'intention et la démarche de Léonora Miano : c'est « […] un mot et un symbole akans. Il invite à connaître le passé pour mieux embrasser l'avenir » (Miano 2015 : 26). C'est aussi dans cette perspective que, pour trouver une issue à la situation inédite de grève des âmes à naître, *Révélation* va s'intéresser à la connaissance de certains aspects du passé criminel des âmes réprouvées (les Ombres) qui « sont fonction

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de la manière dont on se sera comporté lors du trafic humain transatlantique » (ibid.). Soucieux de se mettre au service d'une humanité ressoudée que représente Ubuntu et à qui « une place dans la conscience des peuples » est en train d'être refaite, l'esprit Mayibuyé se montre intransigeant : face à la divinité première et féminine Inyi qui lui rappelle que « par sa défection, la descendance des fils ainés du monde est en grand péril et, avec elle, l'humanité entière à qui elle fait défaut » (ibid. : 20), Mayibuye demeure récalcitrant tout en restant conscient par rapport à son devoir : « Mayibuye. Nous connaissons notre devoir. Le nom que nous avons … en est le rappel » (ibid.). C'est notamment à travers la prise de position de cette figure et esprit des âmes à naître que Inyi se trouve en face de la situation de péripétie où l'harmonie de l'Univers est mise à l'épreuve. Ensuite la signification du nom Mayibuye est évocateur quant à sa détermination à aider Ubuntu à retrouver une place dans la conscience des peuples ; il œuvre dans le même sens à côté de Inyi et Kalunga. Son nom, qui est aussi invocateur vu sa fonction dans la trame de l'histoire, « signifie : *que cela revienne* », comme Léonora Miano prend soin de l'expliquer dans la 5ième note de bas de page avec des références historiques et documentaires : « Le terme [Mayibuye] a été popularisé lors de la lutte contre l'apartheid, au cours de laquelle les militants de l'ANC s'écriaient : *Mayibuye i Afrika* (Que l'Afrique revienne) » (ibid.). Ce terme, Mayibuye, n'implique pas un retour à un passé léthargique, révolu, de l'Afrique, opposé au présent et ayant pour fonction de nourrir une sorte de haine ou d'antagonisme. Au contraire, il s'agit, comme ce fut aussi le cas du théâtre documentaire d'après-guerre et ici surtout à travers la prise de position de Mayibuye, d'une démarche orientée vers un futur meilleur et d'une attitude déterminée à rétablir « ce qui unit les uns aux autres dans la Création » : l'humanité, c'est-à-dire Ubuntu qui est précisément l'incarnation du précepte : « *Je suis parce que nous sommes* » (ibid. : 21). En outre, afin de venir à bout de son devoir, Miyabuye confronte Mueni Kongo Makaba (une des figures des âmes reprouvées de la catégorie complice) avec une interrogation sur la fameuse bulle *Romanus Pontifex* :

> Mayibuye. Mueni Kongo, n'avais-tu pas connaissance de la bulle *Romanus Pontifex* ? La pape Nicolas V y autorisait ton royal ami et ses

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> prédécesseurs à s'emparer du Pays premier, de ses ressources et de ses populations.
> Mueni Kongo Makaba. Non, je ne le savais rien de cette bulle. Je savais en revanche que la déportation était promise aux non-chrétiens. C'est pour cette raison que je suis converti […]. (Miano 2015 : 34)

La réponse négative de Mueni Kongo Makaba est la manifestation de la « mémoire enchaînée » déjà évoquée plus haut, car la bulle *Romanus Pontifex* est dans *Révélation* un référent documentaire se rapportant à un document historique bien connu qui a contribué à l'institutionnalisation du trafic humain transatlantique. Ici aussi, la manifestation de la « mémoire enchaînée » prend la forme du refoulement à travers di-verses stratégies qui s'apparentent au contexte français des « troubles de la mémoire » déjà évoqués. Aussi la référence aux *lançados* dont fait mention Mueni Kongo Makaba a-t-elle un caractère documentaire qui invite à quitter le cadre fictif et mythologique de *Révélation* pour s'attarder sur l'histoire et l'analyse des faits passés sur l'identité des *lançados* en question. Ici aussi Léonora Miano fournit dans la 10ième note de bas de page des pistes à explorer hors de la fiction :

> Les *lançados* étaient des voyous bannis par le roi du Portugal. Ils devaient se métisser avec le temps et former, sur la côte subsaharienne, une caste de marchands sur laquelle reposerait le trafic humain transatlantique. Certains étaient devenus assez prospères pour posséder leurs propres embarcations et se passer du Portugal. Aussi, la couronne portugaise utilisa leurs services. Appelés aussi *tangomaus*, ces aventuriers étaient ceux qui osaient pénétrer l'intérieur des terres subsahariennes pour capturer des personnes et ramener leurs prises sur la côte. Au sujet des *lançados*, on a beaucoup écrit. La vision que l'on en a n'est pas toujours la même. Dans la bouche de notre personnage, nous avons choisi d'en faire des brigands. Pour cela, nous avons retenu la présentation qu'en donne l'historien congolais Elikia M'bokolo, dans son article : La dimension africaine de la Traite des Noirs […]. Ceci posé, nous précisons que Révélation n'est pas un texte historique. (Ibid. : 35 et sq.)

Les stratégies de la littérature ou du théâtre documentaire sont flagrantes dans cette citation : les informations données sur les sources documentaires rappellent la démarche scientifique. Ainsi, la référence au célèbre historien congolais Elikia M'bokolo et son article sur « La

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

dimension africaine de la Traite des Noirs » ont pour fonction de permettre la vérification de l'authenticité de la complicité de l'Afrique (subsaharienne) dans le trafic humain transatlantique. Enfin, à travers sa précision « que *Révélation* n'est pas un texte historique », Léonora Miano adopte la posture du dramaturge documentariste qui insiste sur le caractère artistique de son travail comme le stipule Peter Weiss :

> La scène du théâtre documentaire ne représente plus la réalité saisie dans l'instant, mais l'image d'un morceau de réalité attachée au flux continu de la vie. [...] Le théâtre documentaire est en fin de compte un produit artistique et il doit l'être, s'il veut justifier son existence. [...] ce n'est que lorsqu'il est parvenu grâce à son activité d'analyse, de contrôle et de critique à transformer une matière réelle vécue et à lui conférer les fonctions d'un moyen artistique, qu'il acquiert pleine validité dans le débat critique que l'on mène avec la réalité. Sur une telle scène l'œuvre dramatique peut devenir l'instrument d'une formation de la pensée politique. (Weiss 1968 : 9 et sq.)

Le théâtre documentaire retravaille et réorganise ainsi sur la base des moyens artistiques les éléments ou faits historiques et les 'drames sociaux' encore d'actualité ; l'objectif en est de présenter au public des choix thématiques filtrés et contrastés à analyser, et ceci en rapport avec leur interdépendance socioéconomique et politique. (Ibid. : 7-15)

> Même si les citations documentaires sont retravaillées au ciseau et mises dans un nouveau contexte argumentatif, même si elles se trouvent fonctionnalisées par leur passage sur la scène de théâtre, le public les reconnait et les considère comme bribes d'une 'réalité irréfutable' […]. C'est en jouant sur ce dangereux paradoxe, que les auteurs du théâtre documentaire tentent d'engager le public allemand d'après-guerre dans un travail de deuil […]. En France, comme dans la plupart des pays victimes du régime nazi, le théâtre documentaire transcrit la méfiance profonde de ses auteurs vis-à-vis de leurs propres 'histoires'. (Gelas/Garscha/Martin 2006 : 221)

C'est ainsi que les 'drames sociaux' sont revisités à travers le concept du théâtre documentaire qui « ne se trouve pas [positionné] au centre des faits, bien au contraire il prend l'attitude de l'observateur et jouit d'un regard analytique. [Il] soumet des faits à l'expertise » (Weiss 1968 : 11). Dans ce sens, le contenu de *Révélation* se caractérise aussi, comme déjà vu, par plusieurs référents documentaires ayant une triple

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

fonction : la première est d'orienter et de soutenir la compréhension en rapport avec le contenu fonctionnalisé et mythologique des 'drames sociaux' bien connus ; la seconde suscite une perception analytique et comparée qui oscille entre la fiction et la réalité (historique et actuelle), et invite à un questionnement autocritique des identités africaines transformées qui s'imbriquent avec celles de l'Europe depuis le passé esclavagiste ; la troisième constitue le centre focal de l'efficacité esthétique de *Révélation* : c'est l'*anagnôrisis* (l'action esthétique de la reconnaissance) de l'identité frontière chère à Léonora Miano car elle est l'expression d'une transformation identitaire dynamique de l'être africain et qu'elle est résolument orientée vers le futur. Dans une interview publiée dans la revue littéraire *Transfuge* en septembre 2016, Léonora s'exprime notamment en ces termes :

> L'être africain, subsaharien, qui vas entrer dans le futur est un être transformé, et il faut qu'il fasse la paix avec cette transformation. Il faut qu'il fasse la paix avec le fait qu'une part de lui vienne de ses oppresseurs. C'est avec cela qu'ils sont en lutte, c'est cela qu'ils doivent accepter. L'Afrique s'appelle l'Afrique parce que les Européens l'ont décidé ainsi. Nous sommes des Africains et des Noirs parce que d'autres nous ont définis ainsi. Je comprends la mélancolie, mais je la veux porteuse de créativité. (Miano 2016a : 39)

Ainsi, au-delà de leurs rôles devant permettre d'élucider la responsabilité complice de l'Afrique lors du trafic humain transatlantique, les Ombres sont aussi une catégorie fonctionnelle qui catalyse l'*anagnôrisis*. Le terme *anagnôrisis* désigne, dans *La Poétique* d'Aristote, la reconnaissance : c'est le résultat d'un processus cognitif et affectif qui se caractérise par le passage d'un état de non-connaissance ou d'ignorance à la dimension de connaissance ou d'identification. Ce passage détermine la suite d'une action ou d'une démarche à suivre, ou encore provoque une autre attitude :

> […] la reconnaissance, comme d'ailleurs le nom l'indique, est un passage de l'ignorance à la connaissance, amenant un passage ou bien de la haine à l'amitié, ou bien de l'amitié à la haine chez des personnages destinés au bonheur ou au malheur. (Aristote 1979 : 1452a, 44)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Transposé sur *Révélation*, la fonction de l'*anagnôrisis* permettrait à l'être africain de concéder à cette paix à faire avec la transformation qu'il a subie, et que Léonora Miano désigne par l'identité frontière : notamment elle « préfère parler d'identité frontière non pas comme un lieu de rupture, mais comme un lieu de médiation » (Miano 2016a : 39). Certains éléments d'expression de cette identité frontière sont précisément mis en exergue dans la mise en scène du Japonais Satoshi Miyagi et suscitent par conséquent la réflexion désessentialisées sur ce que peuvent être les voix féminines et identités afropéennes en ce 21ième siècle :

> Le terme 'afropéen' cherche à décrire ces personnes d'ascendance subsaharienne ou caribéenne et de culture européenne : des individus qui mangent certes des plantains frits mais dont les particularismes ne sont pas tellement différents de ceux qu'on peut trouver dans les régions de France. Bien sûr, ces particularités peuvent être ressenties de façon plus forte que chez les Basques ou les Bretons, parce que les gens ont surinvesti la couleur de la peau, lui donnent une valeur exagérée. Il suffit de songer au terme de « métissage » : le fait que son usage soit à la mode signifie bien que nous voyons le monde à travers un prisme racialisé. Il faut formuler le concept d'afropéanisme pour qu'il existe, que l'on comprenne que les Noirs que l'on croise dans la rue ne sont pas forcément des immigrés. Que certains se fichent de l'Afrique, et c'est d'ailleurs leur droit. (Miano 2010a : s.p.)

En faisant appel au terme *anagnôrisis*, l'on constate dans cette citation que la problématique des voix féminines afropéennes se manifeste à travers une constellation identitaire dynamique et conflictuelle au sens du 'drame social' qui oscillent entre une appartenance à la fois africaine et européenne :

> Si mes compatriotes m'ont toujours perçue comme étrange, étrangère, ils n'ont pas pu me faire douter de mon africanité. Très tôt, ce qu'ils mon fait comprendre, c'était que leur monde n'était qu'en partie le mien. Je suis, depuis toujours, une afro-occidentale parfaitement assumée, refusant de choisir entre ma part africaine et ma part occidentale. (Miano 2012b : 26)

En effet, cette prise de position de Miano s'inscrit dans une démarche des voix féminines anti-essentialiste en France dans le contexte des so-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

ciétés européennes postcoloniales et post-migratoires. Dans leur introduction à « De-essentializing ethnicity » dans l'ouvrage collectif *Post-Migration Ethnicity : Cohesion, Commitments, Comparison*, Gerd Baumann et Thijl Sunier font référence à la déclaration de Fredrik Barth lors de l'ouverture d'une conférence universitaire sur l'ethnicité à Amsterdam dans les termes suivants « nous devons reconnaître que [...] les différences culturelles dichotomisées [...] sont largement exagérées dans le discours ethnique » (1995 : 1) Dans ces termes et en s'appuyant sur de récentes études en sciences sociales, les contributions de ce volume explorent les stratégies d´instrumentalisation des identités construites sur la base des catégorisations ethniques, nationales et religieuses. Les voix féminines afropéennes dans leurs expériences des 'drames sociaux' aspirent à une « désessentialisation de l'ethnicité » dans les sociétés post-migratoires en Europe en rapport avec la prise de conscience grandissantes des diversités humaines et culturelles. C'est dans ce contexte que s'inscrit de manière générale l'efficacité des 'drames esthétiques' de Miano en termes de productions littéraires et dramaturgiques afin de catalyser l'*anagnôrisis* en rapport avec le caractère pluriel de l'identité afropéenne. Miano souligne que :

> [d]epuis le début, mon vœu est de produire une littérature afrodiasporique, qui embrasse les peuples noirs, non pas dans l'indifférenciation mais, pourquoi ne pas le reconnaître, dans une sonorité que j'espère les voir reconnaître et valoriser. (Miano 2012 : 73 et sq.)

Cette affirmation de Miano est aussi une invitation au réexamen et à la réorientation des régimes de la perception dans le cadre d'une communauté française plurielle et diversifiée appartenant à une Europe en pleine mutation au 21ième siècle. La partie suivante se focalise sur cette réflexion dans l'écriture scénique de *Révélation* en rapport avec la notion de l'identité frontière et afropéenne.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

3. Écriture scénique de *Révélation* : au-delà des identités afropéennes de Miano

« Si [Bertolt] Brecht engageait résolument les auteurs à ne pas 'alimenter' la machine théâtrale de leurs textes, mais à la transformer […] », comme le souligne Hans-Thies Lehmann, alors le poète, dramaturge et directeur de théâtre allemand Heiner Müller en a déduit « tout simplement qu'un texte qui est fonctionnel pour l'appareil scénique n'est pas un bon texte » (Lehmann 1999 : 72 et sq.). Dans cette optique *Révélation* et sa mise en scène par le Japonais Satoshi Miyagi avec les acteurs et actrices de sa troupe du Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC, Japon) en 2018 à Paris/La Colline illustrent les propos de Brecht : l'on y assiste à une approche de mise en scène qui trouve bien sa place dans le paysage du théâtre européen contemporain, marqué par la pluralité et la diversité de ses formes et techniques : ce paysage théâtral se compose aujourd'hui à la fois, comme le suggère le concept du théâtre postdramatique (ibid. : 134), de diverses formes de textes littéraires et l'art de la performance centré sur le corps, d'une manifestation esthétique de la présence et de la représentation au-delà des stéréotypes habituels, de l'expérience transmise et partagée par des moyens théâtraux divers, du processus et du résultat d'une expérience esthétique renouvelée, de la fiction et de la réalité ou d'une fusion souhaitée de toutes ces caractéristiques (Nonoa 2017 : 152 et sq.). Ce qui saute également aux yeux, c'est que les caractéristiques plutôt postdramatiques « affichent en commun leur distanciation par rapport à l'orbite du modèle dramatique […] et […] ne sauraient représenter une seule et identique mouvance » (Lehmann 1999 : 12) comme le montre la transformation de la *Révélation* dans l'espace théâtral à travers l'écriture scénique de Satoshi Miyagi.

> L'écriture (ou l'art) scénique c'est la façon d'utiliser l'appareil scénique pour mettre en scène – 'en images et en chair' – les personnages, le lieu et l'action qui s'y déroule. Cette 'écriture' (au sens actuel de style ou manière personnelle de s'exprimer) n'a évidemment rien de comparable avec l'écriture du texte : elle désigne par métaphore, la pratique de la mise en scène, laquelle dispose d'instruments, de matériaux et de techniques spécifiques pour transmettre un sens au spectateur. (Pavis 2019: 180)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

L'écriture scénique de *Révélation* se situe au carrefour de plusieurs expressions artistiques et culturelles qui se transforment non seulement en une mouvance plurielle, mais aussi créent à maintes reprises des situations de l'*anagnôrisis* au niveau du spectateurs : face au contenu thématique de *Révélation* combiné à la perspective japonaise de mise en scène, la réflexion des spectateurs oscille entre l'ignorance et la reconnaissance car beaucoup d'éléments de l'écriture scénique échappent au cadre de son imaginaire habituel. De prime abord, il convient de noter que le dispositif scénique de Satoshi Miyagi fait usage d'acteurs et d'actrice dont les corps sur la scène ne sont pas pris au piège de la couleur de la peau et de la catégorisation ou des catégories raciales « blancs » et « noirs ». En second lieu, l'on se rend compte aussi du fait que les acteurs et les actrices japonais qui incarnent les personnages plus précisément les divinités et esprits de *Révélation* se distancient nettement du théâtre classique de la représentation en ne donnant pas du tout l'impression de jouer aux africains et aux noirs (comme par exemples les pièges du *blackfacing*) sur la base du sujet que traite Lénora Miano : au contraire Satoshi Miyagi a opté pour une variation esthétique et scénique qui se démarque des clichés et stéréotypes habituels avec lesquels le terme afropéen rompt. Dans ce sens le point de vue critique de Régis Bardon dans son article « La colline – 'évélation', un mythe pour le temps présent » est très instructif :

> Le spectateur non prévenu, […] celui qui vient sans rien avoir lu ni écouté de ces présentations qui relèvent de la communication et qui brouillent trop souvent la ligne, assiste à une pièce donnée par une troupe japonaise : […] Mais s'il a l'oreille fine et s'il a parfois eu la chance de voir d'autres productions nipponnes, il comprend peu à peu qu'il assiste à un décentrement esthétique comme on en voit rarement. En effet, à mesure que le public écoute ce que les personnages démêlent, il s'aperçoit qu'il entre dans un imaginaire différent, comme on entre parfois chez des étrangers qui nous ressemblent mais dont pourtant le moindre geste nous pose question, dont le moindre trait de culture est à la fois *même* et *autre*. […] C'est alors que le spectateur non prévenu, s'il existe, peut s'apercevoir tardivement, et avec délice, que ces robes étonnantes revêtues par les comédiennes sont des robes africaines – et ne le sont pas. Elles sont les robes d'une culture africaine, perçues par un regard japonais. Toute la gestuelle a l'économie et les courbes calmes des ballets nippons. Peu de mouvements évoquent directement les corps et les rythmes de l'Afrique

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> […]. En revanche les couleurs (gris, noir, brun, ocre) et les sortes de cottes de maille faites de boules de bois trouvent leur origine dans cet imaginaire hybride qui rend une esthétique étonnante. […] Et pour [le] regard européen, saisir, ne serait-ce qu'un instant, la sensibilité de l'autre à l'égard d'un autre, l'esprit d'un dessin japonais dans l'esprit d'un vêtement africain, c'est comme sentir, ne serait-ce qu'un instant, le mouvement de la terre – à savoir un impossible au plus intime de nous-mêmes. (Bardon 2018 : s.p.)

Le contenu de cette citation permet d'affirmer que la potentialité de l'écriture scénique de Satoshi Miyagi est une variation esthétique qui va au-delà des antagonismes classiques Afrique/Europe, « blanc/noir ». En outre l'efficacité esthétique de cette mise en scène s'articule autour du caractère interdépendant des identités humaines à l'instar des identités féminines afropéennes en pleines mouvance et dynamiques dans le monde actuel : le concept de l'identité frontière que défend Léonora Miamo se trouve ainsi matérialisée dans l'écriture scénique de Satoshi Miyagi :

> C'est par [l'identité frontière] que je définis habituellement ma propre identité. Elle est frontalière, ancrée, non pas dans un lieu de rupture, mais, au contraire, dans un espace d'accolement permanent. La frontière est l'endroit où les mondes se touchent, inlassablement. C'est le lieu de l'oscillation constante : d'un espace à l'autre, d'une sensibilité à l'autre, d'une vision du monde à l'autre. C'est là où les langues se mêlent, pas forcément de manière tonitruante, s'imprégnant naturellement les unes des autres, pour produire, sur la page blanche, la représentation d'un univers composite, hybride. La frontière évoque la relation. Elle dit que les peuples se sont rencontrés, quelque fois dans la violence, la haine, le mépris, et qu'en dépit de cela, ils ont enfanté du sens. […] Elle rappelle à ceux qui croient en la fixité des choses, des identités notamment, que non seulement la plante ne se réduit pas à ses racines, mais que ces dernières peuvent être rempotées, s'épanouir dans un nouveau sol. Une plante peut également croiser ses racines avec celles d'une autre, et engendrer un nouvel être vivant. (Miano 2010b : s.p.)

En conclusion, ceci implique un monde non seulement en relation avec son passé tragique dont les parts de responsabilités par exemple entre l'Afrique et l'Europe y sont entrelacées par rapport à la complicité mutuelle dans le trafic humain transatlantique ; c'est aussi la mise en

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

exergue du monde actuel dans un espace d'interférences culturelles dépassant la construction binaire des voix et identités humaines qui ne se réduisent pas aux antipodes de l'identité de la femme afropéenne. Avec le terme afropéen, Miano essaie de négocier dans le contexte européen un compris culturel à caractère hétérogène qui met en exergue une identité hybride qui semble résulter exclusivement des interférences et/ou antagonismes culturels entre l'Afrique et l'Europe : « […] l'Afropéanité […] se définit généralement comme le fait d'*être un Noir perdu parmi les Blancs*. Le terme renvoie à un état existentiel caractérisé par une culture du partage et du déracinement » (Larangé 2012 : 10). Ainsi, l'Afropéanité a essentiellement trait à la question existentielle et identitaire de la diaspora africaine en Europe comme observe Atenarius-Owanga:

> La circulation diasporique et l'expérience de la déterritorialisation ont fait naître une troisième catégorie d'identification dans les musiques hip-hop gabonaises : celle d'Afropéen, contraction de l'africanité et de l'européanité expérimentées simultanément par quelques artistes. Alors qu'ils ne sont guère présents dans les discussions entre jeunes au Gabon, on retrouve les termes afropéen ou afropean dans les langages de la diaspora africaine d'Europe : auprès d'auteurs de littérature (Miano, 2008a, b ; Laurent, 2011), chez des rappeurs circulant entre l'Afrique et les anciennes colonies francophones (comme Baloji et Freddy Massamba), et chez plusieurs artistes gabonais résidant en France depuis des périodes plus ou moins longues, dont la chanteuse Wendy. (Atenarius-Owanga, 2014 : 963)

Ces restrictions et limites de l'Afropéanité comme catégories d'identification sont aussi explicites dans les affirmations de Miano qui, à maintes reprises, fait entendre sa voix sur ce sujet : « [p]ar Afropéen, je n'entends pas parler d'une personne qui, comme moi, serait venue en Europe à l'âge adulte. Il s'agit, à l'inverse, de gens dont le vécu est essentiellement européen, que l'on peut définir comme Européens, et qui ont des attaches subsahariennes » (Miano 2016b : 55). Pour elle, « le mot Afrodescendant […] n'est pas la négation d'autres apports, mais la reconnaissance du fait que, sur les plans symboliques et intimes, les cultures en question présentent de nombreux traits subsahariens » (Miano 2012 : 120). Cependant le choix de l'écriture scénique de *Révélation* va au-delà des limites et restrictions du terme afropéen,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

comme déjà vu, avec des actrices et acteurs japonais faisant d'une part intervenir une perspective extérieure aux antagonismes habituels, et provoquant d'autre part une sorte de rupture ou de suspension esthétique qui ne reproduit pas les 'drames sociaux' sur une scène de théâtre. Dans le sens de cette argumentation, Victor Turner défend l'idée selon laquelle l'expression d'un 'drame esthétique' ne réplique ou ne reproduit pas les normes régissant les structures du 'drame social' (Turner 1982 : 12). Pour sa part, Jacques Rancière affirme :

> Ce que le spectateur *doit voir* est ce que le metteur en scène lui *fait voir*. […] A cette identité de la cause à effet et de l'effet qui est au cœur de la logique abrutissante, l'émancipation oppose leur dissociation. […] Il y a la distance entre l'artiste et le spectateur, mais il y [a] aussi la distance inhérente à la performance elle-même, en tant qu'elle se tient, comme un spectacle, une chose autonome, entre l'idée de l'artiste et la sensation ou la compréhension du spectateur. Dans la logique de l'émancipation il y a toujours entre le maître ignorant et l'apprenti émancipé une troisième chose – un livre ou tout autre morceau d'écriture – étrangère à l'un comme à l'autre et à laquelle ils peuvent se référer pour vérifier en commun […]. Il en va de même pour la performance. (Rancière 2008 : 20 et sq.)

Si le détour fictif et mythologique de *Révélation* rappelle en outre la perpétuation d'une complicité historique et mutuelle, c'est qu'après la période de la tragédie transatlantique, des grandes conquêtes coloniales et impérialistes, à l'heure actuelle des processus de globalisation du capital humain, financier et culturel, les productions littéraires et artistiques proposent une démarche esthétique différente: il s'agit par exemple pour Léonora Miano et Satoshi Miyagi, comme le stipule Jacques Rancière,

> de faire voir autrement ce qui était trop aisément vu, de mettre en rapport ce qui ne l'était pas en vue de produire des ruptures dans le tissu sensible des perceptions […]. C'est là le travail de la fiction. La fiction n'est pas la création d'un monde imaginaire opposé au monde réel. Elle est le travail […] qui change les modes de présentation sensible et les formes d'énonciation en changeant les cadres, les échelles ou les rythmes, en construisant des rapports nouveaux entre l'apparence et la réalité, le singulier et le commun, le visible et sa signification. Ce travail change les coordonnées du représentable ; il change notre perception des événements

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> sensibles, notre manière de les rapporter à des sujets, la façon dont notre monde est peuplé d'événements et de figures. (Rancière 2008 : 72 et sq.)

Au-delà des identités afropéennes, l'efficacité du 'drame esthétique' de *Révélation* de Miano et son écriture scénique invitent à « se demander quelles nouvelles possibilités de la pensée et de la représentation sont esquissées ici pour le sujet humain » (Lehmann 1999 : 21) dans une France et une Europe dans monde contemporain en pleine mutation, « une Europe multiculturelle, héritière d'un passé colonisateur impérial et destination migratoire par excellence aujourd'hui » (de Fátima Outeirinho 2017 : 2).

Bibliographie

Aristote (1979) : *La Poétique*, Paris : Les Belles Lettres.

Beckles, Hilary McDonald (2002) : *Voyages d'esclaves. La traite transatlantique des Africains réduits en esclavage*. UNESDOC Digital Library, in : https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128631_fre (consulté le 17 juin 2019).

Aterianus-Owanga, Alice (2014) : « 'Gaboma', 'Kainfri' et 'Afropéen'. Circulation, création et transformation des catégories identitaires dans le hip-hop gabonais », in : *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 216, p. 945-974.

Bardon, Régis (4.10.2018) : « *Révélation*, un mythe pour le temps présent », in : *Nonfiction*, in : https://www.nonfiction.fr/article-9570-la-colline-revelation-un-mythe-pour-le-temps-present.htm (consulté le 17 juin 2019).

Baumann, Gerd/Sunier, Thijl (éds.) (1995) : *Post-Migration Ethnicity. Cohesion, Commitments, Comparison*, Amsterdam : Het Spinhuis.

Cristofori, Marie-Ange (11.4.2019) : « Polémique autour du passé négrier du port de La Rochelle », in : https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr (consulté le 30 juin 2019).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Fátima Outeirinho, Maria de (30.11.2017) : « Afropéen(nne) : quelques notes autour d'un mot valise », in : *Carnets*, Deuxième série – 11, p. 1-8, in : http://journals.openedition.org/carnets/2380 (consulté le 28 août 2020).

Gelas, Bruno/Garscha, Karsten/Martin, Jean-Pierre (éds.) (2006) : *Ecrire après Auschwitz. Mémoires croisées France-Allemagne*, in : https://www.nonfiction.fr/article-9570-la-colline-revelation-un-mythe-pour-le-temps-present.htm (consulté le 17 juin 2019).

Hermans, Thomas (9.4.2019) : « Pétition contre une fresque célébrant l'abolition de l'esclavage à l'Assemblée nationale », in : *Le Figaro*, in : https://www.lefigaro.fr/arts-expositions/petition-contre-une-fresque-celebrant-l-abolition-de-l-esclavage-a-l-assemblee-nationale-20190409 (consulté le 28 août 2020).

Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2002) : *Le Théâtre postdramatique* (1999), Paris : L'Arche Éditeur.

M'Bokolo, Elikia (1998) : « La dimension africaine de la traite des Noirs », in : *Le Monde diplomatique*, (avril), in : http://www.monde.diplomatique.fr/1998/04/M_BOKOLO/3671 (consulté le 17 juin 2019).

Miano, Léonora (2010a) : « Il faut formuler le concept d'afropéanisme », in : *Le Magazine littéraire*, 22 (décembre), in : http://www.magazine-litteraire.com/actualite/leonora-miano-il-faut-formuler-concept- afropeanisme-22-12-2010-33069 (consulté le 30 juin 2019).

Miano, Léonora (2010b) : « Identité frontalière », in : https://malikabenarabattou.wordpress.com/2010/12/10/identite-frontaliere/ (consulté le 30 juin 2019).

Miano, Léonora (2012) : *Habiter la frontière*, Paris : L'Arche.

Miano, Léonora (2015) : *Red blue in trilogie*, Paris : L'Arche.

Miano, Léonora (2016a) : « Rentrée littéraire », in : *Transfuge*, 101, p. 34-39.

Miano, Léonora (2016b) : *L'Impératif transgressif*, Paris : L'Arche.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Miller, Judith Graves (2017) : « Remapping the Memory of Slavery : Leonora Miano's Theatrical Dream, *Red in blue trilogie* », in : Erica Johnson/Eloïse Brezault (éds.) : *Memory as Colonial Capital. Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies*, Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, p. 157-178.

Nonoa, Koku G. (2017) : « Transgression im europäischen Theaterverständnis? Hermann Nitschs Orgien Mystherien Theater und Christoph Schlingensiefs Aktion 18, 'tötet Politik' », in : Natalie Bloch/Dieter Heimböckel/Elisabeth Tropper (éds.) : *Vorstellung Europa-Performing Europe. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Europa im Theater der Gegenwart*. Berlin : Theater der Zeit, p.141-155.

Nonoa, Koku G. (2018) : « Le théâtre contemporain en Europe face aux variations et défis d'un texte sur l'épineuse question migratoire : *Les Suppliants* d'Elfriede Jelinek », in : *Variations – Literaturzeitschrift der Universität Zürich*, 26, p. 85-95.

Pavis, Patrice (2019) : « Ecriture scénique », in : *Dictionnaire du théâtre*, 4ième édition augmentée, Malakoff : Armand Colin, p. 179-180.

Rancière, Jacques (2008) : *Le Spectateur émancipé*, Paris : La Fabrique.

Schechner, Richard (2003) : *Performance Theory* (1988), London/New York : Routledge.

Turner, Victor (1982) : *From Ritual to Theater. The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York, NY : Performing Arts Journal.

Vergès, Françoise (2005) : « Les troubles de la mémoire », in : *Cahiers d'études africaines*, Éditions de l'EHESS, p. 179-180, in : https://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/15110 (consulté le 30 juin 2019).

Vergès, Françoise (2006) : *La Mémoire enchaînée : questions sur l'esclavage*, Paris : Albin Michel.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Vergès, Françoise (2010) : « Wandering Souls and Returning Ghosts : Writing the History of the Dispossessed », in : *Yale French Studies*, 118/119, p. 136-154.

Wilpert, Gero von (éd.) (1979) : *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur.* Stuttgart : Alfred Kröner, p. 184-185.

Weiss, Peter (1968) : « Notes sur le théâtre documentaire », in : idem : *Discours sur la genèse et le déroulement de la très longue guerre de libération du Vietnam illustrant la nécessité de la lutte armée des opprimés contre leurs oppresseurs*, Paris : Seuil, p. 9-10.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Aminata Aidara / Mimina Icir Di Muro / Amina Marini

(Sète/Pordenone/Cuneo)

Un'infanzia afroitaliana

Abstract

The interview brings together the voices of three Italian women – Amina Marini, Icir Mimina Di Muro and Aminata Aidara – born in the early 1980ies, who look back at their childhood memories. They evoke situations of discrimination and of being treated as "different", discussing the implications for their own identity construction. Furthermore, they recall their relationship with the "Other Continent", all three of them having one parent from Europe (Italy) and one from Africa (Senegal or Somalia). Although their memories differ in many aspects, having been raised in different circumstances, what strikes is the strong intimate connotation of these "other" cultural contexts: "As Mimina Icir Di Muro, who spent her childhood in Senegal and came to Italy, occasionally points out: "For me Cuneo was a kind of little Europe, and the Europeans were like my grandmother." These positive memories are in sharp contrast to experiences of discrimination recalled by all three women: being explicitly excluded and offended by both adults and children but also being treated as "objects", with people touching their hair and – echoing Italian colonial legacies – calling them "belle negrette".

1. Cosa pensavi quand'eri piccola dell'Altro Continente? Quello da cui provenivano uno o entrambi tuoi genitori?

Amina: Vivendo in Europa, per me l'altro continente era l'Africa. Non avevo un'idea precisa di cosa fosse o comunque non ho mai avuto un pensiero preciso. Pensavo all'Africa o meglio alla Somalia sempre in connessione a ciò che accadeva qui. L'Africa rimaneva un concetto geografico.

Per me la Somalia era il posto da cui arrivavano le mie zie e i miei cugini che ha fatto venire in Italia mio padre, dopo mesi e mesi di

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

peripezie in cui ero caoticamente coinvolta tra uffici, amici degli amici, scartoffie, problemi economici ecc. Era un posto difficile in cui vivere e da dove molti volevano scappare. Era il posto dove i miei genitori mandavano i soldi alle loro famiglie o il luogo verso il quale si dirigevano le loro telefonate in una lingua che non conoscevo, con persone che erano di fatto la mia famiglia e con cui non potevo comunicare. Mia madre riceveva audiocassette di ore in cui tutti quelli della famiglia parlavano a turno e ricordo che c'erano dei momenti in cui mia madre mi diceva che chiedevano di me. Mio nonno sapeva qualche parola di italiano e quello era l'unico intervento a cui mia madre mi faceva rispondere personalmente in italiano. La Somalia era il posto in cui mi sono vista in qualche fotografia, ma di cui non ricordo nulla. L'unica volta che ci sono stata avevo quattro anni e mia madre mi ha poi detto che in quell'occasione ero tornata rasata a zero. E che mio padre aveva faticato a riconoscermi un po' perché in quei mesi di assenza ero cresciuta e un po' perché senza capelli sembravo un maschietto.

La Somalia era mia "zia Londra" (vero nome: Rukia) sorella di mio padre che è venuta a vivere a casa nostra e all'inizio non parlava una parola di italiano. Era l'unica donna somala che conoscevo che portava sempre il velo e che vedevo pregare continuamente. Stava sempre in casa e scriveva molto. Faccio fatica a ricordare le nostre conversazioni anche dopo aver imparato l'italiano. *(*Ci sarebbero da premettere una serie di cose per capire bene la situazione ovvero che non vivevo tutti i giorni con mio padre ma solo festività e weekend perché stavo dalle suore e che mio padre non viveva con mia madre).*

La Somalia era mia zia Giamila (sorella di mio padre) e i suoi figli Gibril e Ismail che sono arrivati dopo "zia Londra". Mi ricordo che giocavano a calcio sullo sterrato a piedi nudi e io la consideravo una capacità da "fighi" che si acquisisce solo se hai vissuto in Somalia. Essendo figlia unica da una parte ero felice che ci fossero delle persone della mia età con cui condividere qualcosa, ma di fatto ho condiviso poco *(*ero dalle suore tutta la settimana*) e inconsciamente li vedevo un po' come quelli che rubavano energie, tempo e denaro a mio padre e quindi alla mia infanzia. Non sono certa di aver smesso di pensarlo.

La Somalia erano poi un vasto numero di persone che chiamavo zio, zia, cugino, cugina, nonno, nonna che comparivano e scomparivano e che spesso andavamo a trovare a Milano, Brescia, Roma ecc. Per poi

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

arrivare a scoprire a scuola che non potevo avere più di quattro nonni e che di fatto non ne avevo nessuno.

La Somalia era mia madre, mio padre era (è) da considerarsi un fake (ahahahah). Mia madre quando parlava con me usava un certo numero di parole sempre e solo in somalo, si incazzava come una somala, non ho mai visto una madre italiana incazzarsi come lei, cucinava piatti somali che non ho mai imparato a fare (a parte il tè) ma di cui ricordo bene i profumi. Mia madre per me era somala perché pur parlando molto bene l'italiano aveva una leggera inflessione che notavo (forse solo io) e quando mi scriveva i suoi bigliettini (tutti i giorni) faceva qualche errore grammaticale. Mia madre era somala perché ad un certo punto con una cocciutaggine mai vista, quando avevo 16 anni e nessuna voglia di fare nulla, ha deciso che dovevo imparare il somalo. Santo cielo non potevi insegnarmelo da piccola? Comunque, il sabato pomeriggio non uscivo finché non le ripetevo le frasi, i numeri o le lettere che mi aveva scritto sul quadernetto specifico e ovviamente finché non avevo tirato a lucido il bagno da cima a fondo come tutti i sabati. Era difficile da spiegare una cosa del genere ai miei amici. Era una madre somala.

La Somalia era mia zia Mariam (la sorella di mia madre) che è arrivata in Italia quando ero già adolescente. Aveva un andamento a camminare tipico delle somale e con lei avevo un rapporto da sorella, soprattutto per quanto riguarda cercare di farle prendere le colpe di ciò che combinavo io e non prendermele da mia madre.

Infine la Somalia è il posto in cui mia madre ha voluto tornare dopo 15 anni di assenza perché era triste e sentiva una nostalgia infinita. Ma è tornata più triste e nostalgica di prima con due sacchi neri pieni di oggetti di artigianato che le hanno perso all'aeroporto. Un sacco a cui si era attaccata in modo ossessivo e non riusciva a dormire la notte perché era l'unica cosa che le rimaneva di quel viaggio. C'era poi tutto ciò che si teneva dentro, dei ricordi e delle esperienze che aveva vissuto e che io non ho mai saputo.

Sono andata all'aeroporto a cercarli quei sacchi perché non si dava pace e li ho trovati, ovviamente erano stati persi perché non c'è mai una congruenza tra nomi veri, nomi italiani, soprannomi, nomi scritti, nomi dettati… parenti veri, parenti inventati.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Mimina: Sono nata in Senegal, dove ho trascorso la mia infanzia, quindi per me l'Altro Continente era l'Europa. Ho vissuto fra la capitale Dakar ed Ethiolo, il villaggio di mia madre, situato nel Senegal sud-orientale a circa 800 km dalla capitale. "La mia persona" ha iniziato a prendere forma in questo villaggio sperduto nella savana arborea, dove colline pietrose, ricoperte dalla foresta guineana, sorgono da ampi fondivalle coltivati a macchia di leopardo. Qui le precipitazioni scandiscono il tempo, dividendo l'anno in stagione secca (da ottobre ad aprile) e stagione delle piogge (da maggio a settembre). Proprio in questo "habitat selvaggio" la mia persona ha iniziato a plasmarsi.

L'altro luogo che in un certo senso ha contribuito significativamente alla formazione della mia persona è Golf Sud. Un quartiere di periferia, situato a circa 12 chilometri da Dakar nel dipartimento di Guediawaye. Golf Sud è un quartiere tipicamente senegalese dove regna la confusione e nello stesso tempo l'equilibrio. Un disordine estasiante cattura subito chi si addentra nei vicoli di questo quartiere, ma mano a mano che si trascorre del tempo in questo luogo il caos diventa famigliare, "quasi ordinato", e ci si rende conto che altrimenti non potrebbe essere. Come la maggior parte delle periferie africane Golf Sud è un luogo di transizione tra il mondo rurale e quello urbano, abitato da giovani, donne e uomini che migrano nelle periferie alla ricerca di una diversa fonte di reddito. Qui la gente è molto spesso priva di un mestiere stabile e si inventa attività economiche transitorie e mutevoli che vanno dai lavori più umili a quelli più originali e stravaganti (taxista abusivo, lustrascarpe, venditore ambulante di ghiaccio, venditrici di frutta e verdura, urlatori a pagamento, gestori di calcio-balilla…). In questo "habitat precario", animato, disordinato e colorato mi sono sempre sentita a casa, e ogni volta che ci torno, anche dopo lunghi periodi di assenza è come se non fossi mai partita. Adoro questa sensazione che percepisco dal modo in cui la gente mi saluta e mi guarda. Mi sento una del quartiere. Sensazione che non ho mai provato in nessun altro luogo.

Questo preambolo sui luoghi dove ho trascorso la mia infanzia lo ritengo necessario per spiegare che cosa pensavo dell'Europa quando ero piccola. All'epoca i miei soggiorni in Europa avvenivano una volta ogni due anni circa, solitamente durante le vacanze estive. La mia percezione dell'Europa era condizionata da queste visite estive che facevo con la mia famiglia, e a volte da sola, per andare a trovare i miei nonni

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

paterni. I quali vivevano a Cuneo. Purtroppo ho pochi ricordi lucidi di mio nonno, è mancato quando avevo 3 anni. Mia nonna non ne parlava spesso, ma quando capitava lo faceva con tanta energia e a volte con rabbia. Dalle sue parole si percepiva che era stato un uomo con ideali forti, che aveva tanto amato, ma che alcune sue scelte di vita non le aveva mai condivise. I ricordi di mia nonna invece sono ancora oggi nitidi nella mia memoria, ed in un certo senso hanno molto influenzato la percezione che avevo dell'Europa quando ero bambina. Per me Cuneo era una piccola Europa e gli europei erano come mia nonna.

Mia nonna, Carmen, era una persona forte, intraprendente e stravagante. Aveva lavorato duro sempre per crescere il suo unico figlio (mio padre), e una volta in pensione si godeva la vita al massimo. Era una fumatrice incallita, che adorava passeggiare per Cuneo e sorseggiare del buon caffè nei vecchi bar della città. In Senegal, sia al villaggio che a Dakar, camminavo tanto ma raramente passeggiavo. "Il camminare" aveva sempre un fine, doveva sempre servire a qualcosa: o per andare a portare qualcosa a qualcuno, o per andare a trovare qualcuno, o per raggiungere una meta, o per accompagnare le mamme o le zie al mercato, o ancora quando ero al villaggio per andare a raccogliere la frutta e i tuberi selvatici nella savana arborea. "Il camminare" fine a se stesso per il piacere di farlo e senza una meta precisa non era usuale nel contesto in cui vivevo. Questa consuetudine di mia nonna iniziava a piacermi, e se all'inizio le chiedevo sempre "dove andiamo e perché usciamo", con il tempo era diventata una piacevole abitudine anche per me. Le lunghe passeggiate pomeridiane sotto i portici di Cuneo o sul viale degli angeli, il lungo viale alberato che si estende per tutta la città, mi suscitavano una piacevole sensazione. La stessa sensazione che provavo a Golf Sud il fine settimana quando mia madre vestiva me e i miei fratelli con abiti un po' più belli rispetto a quelli che indossavamo gli altri giorni della settimana. A Golf facevano tutti così il fine settimana: bambini e adulti erano tutti un po' più eleganti. Passeggiare per i portici di Cuneo con mia nonna era un po' la stessa cosa: prima di uscire di casa mia nonna mi metteva un bel vestito e mi sistemava i capelli, e dopo essersi fatta bella anche lei uscivamo di casa per passeggiare senza una meta precisa. Cuneo era tutta così ordinata, pulita, tranquilla e a volte troppo silenziosa. Questa sensazione mi piaceva, ma era come se

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

mi mancasse qualcosa, forse il caos di Golf Sud o i suoni e i rumori di Ethiolo.

A volte a Cuneo mi capitava di sentirmi sola, soprattutto quando trascorrevo le vacanze da mia nonna senza i miei fratelli. Questa sensazione l'avevo provata raramente in Senegal, o forse addirittura non l'avevo mai provata, perché casa mia era sempre molto affollata. Non c'erano occasioni per sentirsi soli, fra gli amici dei miei genitori che periodicamente venivano a trovare la famiglia, e i parenti di mia madre che con necessità o scuse varie si "piazzavano" a casa nostra per mesi o addirittura per anni, non ci si annoiava mai e raramente ci si sentiva soli. A Cuneo invece avevo una stanza tutta per me e non dovevo condividere il cibo con nessuno, potevo mangiare lentamente, in un piatto tutto mio. Non ero abituata. I primi giorni mi gustavo la tranquillità e la serenità di quella casa ma con il passare del tempo mi sentivo un po' sola e a volte mi annoiavo. Ecco, questa era la mia percezione dell'Europa. Per me l'Europa era Cuneo e le cose che facevo quando venivo a trovare mia nonna erano tipicamente europee. Un'altra sensazione che percepivo come tipicamente cuneese, e quindi europea, era "la luce estiva di Cuneo". D'estate a Cuneo c'è luce fino alle 22 di sera e i tramonti sono molto lenti. Questo fenomeno naturale mi affascinava molto perché non ci ero abituata. In Senegal i tramonti sono bellissimi ma fulminei.

Aminata: Per me l'Africa e il Senegal non erano necessariamente legati. C'era uno scarto molto grande tra quello che mostrava la televisione sull'Africa e quello che vivevo io ogni Natale quando andavo in vacanza dai miei parenti a Dakar. L'Africa della televisione era piena di gente sofferente, di bambini con la pancia gonfia, di terra arida, vento secco. E a parte l'ocra, il giallo e il verde, non v'erano altri colori. L'Africa della televisione era la Somalia in guerra e altri paesi come il Congo o il Rwanda dove si dispiegavano i caschi blu e gli uomini in divisa militare. Era un'Africa fatta di savana con elefanti, giraffe e pellicani da una parte e di guerra e fame in città dall'altra. Quella parte che conoscevo io era diversa. Certi miei parenti erano ricchi, molto più ricchi di qualsiasi ricco che avessi conosciuto in Italia: nelle loro case c'era molto personale di servizio tra cui cuochi, giardinieri, autisti, guardiani, cameriere. Le case erano ville e in una di queste il parco era così vasto

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

da contenere tutti i giochi che un bambino può sognare e meravigliosi pavoni che facevano per la nostra gioia la loro stupenda ruota. I miei parenti facevano tanta carità e molte persone bisognose si accalcavano intorno alle loro ville per ricevere aiuto in denaro e in cibo. Vedevo bene quindi, che v'erano persone povere, certo, ma anche persone agiate. Stanca di sentire attorno a me maestre e animatori italiani parlare di quanto bisognasse mangiare a sazietà in segno di rispetto nei confronti dei bimbi africani affamati, come se tutti gli altri del mondo meritassero meno attenzione, mi ero interessata ai bambini della Corea del Nord di cui si parlava alla televisione raccontando di una micidiale carestia che aveva colpito quel paese. Non so se mia madre abbia conservato i disegni che facevo allora, ma penso di sì: visto che volevo a tutti i costi che adottassimo un bambino della Corea del Nord, lo disegnavo insieme a noi nei ritratti di famiglia. Collezionavo foto di bambini orfani di quel paese e le incollavo su un quaderno che mostravo puntualmente a mia madre cercando di persuaderla di questa necessità d'aiutare almeno un bambino di quel "disgraziato" paese. Lei mi rispondeva invariabilmente che avevo così tanti cugini che vivevano in povertà, in Senegal, che di certo non saremmo andati a prendere un bambino coreano sconosciuto: in effetti, anche noi avevamo una parte di famiglia in difficoltà economiche, ma da piccola non me ne rendevo conto. Insomma, non sentivo una particolare empatia per le disgrazie del continente africano, più che per quelle di altri paesi. E già allora ero scocciata dal miserabilismo messo in mostra da televisione e giornali.

2. E che idee avevi, se ne avevi, delle persone appartenenti a minoranze, bianche o nere che fossero, con le quali entravi in contatto?

Amina: Quando ero piccola, dopo avermi strapazzato le guanciotte e arruffato i capelli, dopo avermi detto che bel musetto che avevo e tutto il repertorio, mi chiedevano da dove venivo.

Questa domanda mi faceva incazzare come una iena. Rispondevo: "Sono di Como. Sono nata all'Ospedale Sant'Anna di Como". Mi guardavano con faccia interrogativa, sapevo che volevano che aggiungessi qualcosa, ma io li guardavo con aria di sfida in modo che capissero che non c'era possibilità di appello. Con qualcuno funzionava, pochi a dir

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

la verità. In molti aggiungevano inserendo anche qualche gestualità: "Sì, ma da dove vieni, dico". Pensavo: "Ok vogliono sapere di nuovo perché sono di questo colore". La mia risposta era: "I miei genitori sono di origine somala" oppure quando mi sentivo più audace e provocatoria dicevo: "Intendi da dove viene il mio colore? I miei genitori sono somali".

Tutto questo per dire che a parte il mio nucleo familiare, non mi sentivo di avere qualcosa in comune con altri neri. C'è però da considerare, cosa non da poco, che di neri miei coetanei ne vedevo davvero pochi in giro. Fino alle medie comprese (Como – Dronero) ero l'unica e successivamente alle superiori eravamo in due (Cuneo), all'Università (Torino) la situazione non è migliorata di molto. Difatti dopo aver letto su un elenco di iscritti a un esame lo stesso nome di una delle "finte cugine" che frequentavo da piccola, ho fermato l'unica ragazza nera che vedevo spesso girare a Palazzo Nuovo pensando fosse lei. E poi invece era Aminata!

Quindi direi che questa distanza con gli "altri neri" la sentivo, avevo bisogno di cercarli e al contempo l'unica cosa che avevamo in comune era il fatto d'essere di simili sfumature di marrone. E questa era la posizione che assumevo di fatto con i bianchi. Ammettevo di non avere riferimenti culturali forti a validare la mia supposta "africanità", cioè quella che ci sarebbe aspettati dal mio aspetto fisico. A dir la verità c'era poi un'altra faccia, che era quella che "assumevo" di fronte ai neri. Sentivo il dovere di salutarli tutti, ma dall'altra mi sentivo in difetto e colpevole perché in fondo questa "fratellanza" non la sentivo. Spesso interrogata sulle mie origini ci tenevo a dire che erano i miei genitori ad essere somali, e che io non parlavo la lingua, per mettere subito le cose in chiaro. Probabile che se avessi vissuto con i miei genitori durante le scuole elementari, e non in collegio, mi avrebbero trasmesso di più.

Mimina: In Senegal e in Costa d'Avorio ho sempre risieduto in luoghi periferici o sperduti nella savana, dove la presenza degli europei era rara. Mi capitava di vederne quando mi recavo in città, a Dakar o ad Abidjan. Mi sembravano dei "pesci fuor d'acqua", giravano per le strade della città assistiti da una o più persone del luogo che li accompagnavano ovunque. Erano molto diversi da mio papà, che nonostante fosse bianco sembrava africano. Mio padre si muoveva con famigliarità

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

e serenità dappertutto, per la gente del posto era Edoardo, e non veniva "etichettato" come un *toubab*, termine locale per designare le persone bianche.

A Ethiolo nel mio villaggio materno mi capitava di vedere dei ricercatori europei, specialmente nel periodo delle grandi cerimonie tradizionali, come l'iniziazione maschile o certe danze femminili. Erano perlopiù antropologi, etnomusicologi o medici che per qualche mese conducevano le loro ricerche in quel luogo. Ero molto incuriosita da quello che facevano e dalla maniera in cui si interessavano alle cose. Osservavano attentamente la quotidianità partecipando attivamente alla vita del villaggio. Mi piaceva il loro atteggiamento, e credo che la mia passione per l'antropologia sia nata proprio osservando questi "osservatori partecipanti". Questi europei li percepivo più simili a mio padre, che non a quelli che vedevo in città. Ma gli europei più "enigmatici" li vedevo a Golf Sud in compagnia di Coumba Clandos. Coumba Clandos era una donna molto simpatica, sempre allegra e generosa con tutti, che all'epoca avrà avuto all'incirca l'età di mia madre. Abitava sulla stessa via che passava davanti a casa mia, nel tratto di strada in salita che portava verso il *nyay* (un'area paludosa dove alcuni abitanti del quartiere avevano l'orto). Nel quartiere tutti conoscevano Coumba Clandos perché era diversa dalle altre donne. Io ero molto incuriosita dalla sua persona e dalla sua estetica. Lei non si vestiva come le donne di Golf Sud, compresa mia madre, che mettevano sempre il *pagne*, la tipica gonna africana fatta semplicemente con un pezzo di tessuto rettangolare, colorato e leggero (solitamente cotone), che si lega alla vita. Coumba Clandos metteva i pantaloni e fumava le sigarette come le signore europee. Era la prima donna africana che avevo visto fumare le sigarette. Nel villaggio di mia madre avevo visto donne fumare la pipa tradizionale, ma non ne avevo mai viste fumare le sigarette. Questa cosa mi intrigava molto, così come i suoi pantaloni e il suo canino dorato, che scintillava come una stella ogni volta che sorrideva, illuminando il suo viso nerissimo. Nel mio immaginario era la figura femminile più "occidentalizzata" di Golf Sud. Ogni volta che la vedevo passare, mi fermavo e la osservavo nei minimi dettagli. Aveva sempre un look molto stravagante e vivace, il tutto accompagnato da un portamento maestoso e fiero. Il soprannome Clandos le era stato dato per la sua abitudine di viaggiare sempre in clandos. I clandos sono delle specie di taxi

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

(all'epoca erano quasi sempre delle renault 4 bianche), che con una tariffa più economica dei taxi normali trasportano contemporaneamente diversi clienti con una destinazione comune. Coumba Clandos viaggiava in clandos, e spesso quando tornava a casa era accompagnata da un signore europeo, che non era mai lo stesso. Queste persone la guardavano con ammirazione e sembravano sempre compiaciute. Nella mia innocenza infantile credevo che questi signori, ai miei occhi un po' enigmatici, fossero tutti amici di Coumba Clandos e in un certo senso la mia ammirazione nei suoi confronti cresceva. La vedevo un po' come un'eroina capace di andare d'accordo con tutti. Ovviamente da bambina non sapevo ancora che fosse una prostituta!

Aminata: Abituata ad essere quasi sempre l'unica bambina non bianca, provavo un vago senso di fastidio e di competizione quando incontravo altri "mulatti" o altri "neri", specialmente della mia età. Provavo, allo stesso tempo, una gran voglia di conoscerli. Spesso erano bambini somali, eritrei o etiopi, raramente senegalesi. Quando mi capitava di parlare con loro, sentivo spesso di non avere niente in comune a parte un po' di melanina, e mi sembrava assurdo dover giocare con loro (come alcuni adulti suggerivano) solo perché almeno uno dei nostri genitori era africano. Retrospettivamente, mi rendo conto che probabilmente avevamo molte più cose in comune di quel che credevo, foss'anche solo il trattamento che veniva riservato nella Lombardia degli anni 80-90 alle persone nere. Ma forse proprio per quest'ombra di disagio che conoscevamo bene tutti, finivamo per evitarci come la peste. Quando incontravo uomini adulti neri pensavo che mio padre era più elegante, più bello e più "vero" di loro. Li consideravo senegalesi che camminavano in città o sostavano sul corso principale per rubargli la scena. Li osservavo e mi osservavano quando ero a passeggio con mia madre o con i miei nonni, senza colui che mi aveva così caratterizzato fisicamente. Probabilmente mi osservavano con benevolenza, (oppure pensavano che ero una piccola borghese che si credeva bianca, chi lo sa). Questi uomini erano spesso venditori ambulanti che mi parlavano in wolof e che a volte mi regalavano collanine e braccialetti, disdegnando la mia genitrice. Forse con quest'attenzione esclusiva volevano "richiamarmi alla madre terra africana", ricordarmi chi ero, o forse volevano solo fare un regalino a quella che avrebbe potuto essere loro figlia ma che non lo

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

era, perché la loro bambina era lontana, in Africa, come lontano era mio padre per me. A volte quando tornava dai suoi lunghi viaggi, mio padre, ci portava a casa di Idris, il presentatore televisivo del Gambia. Io lo chiamavo "zio" ma sapevo che non eravamo parenti. E mi chiedevo se anche quei signori per strada erano miei zii posticci, e poi mi domandavo perché nessun amico bianco della famiglia di mia madre mi chiedeva, come lui, di chiamarlo zio. Per quanto riguarda le donne nere, la situazione cambiava. Ho sempre vissuto con donne senegalesi fino ai miei 14 anni, erano parte della famiglia. Ce ne sono state quattro: Marie Louise, May, Khady e Sibo. Ho avuto rapporti diversi con ognuna di loro, relazioni che riflettevano quelle che mia madre intratteneva con loro, quindi non sempre semplici. Erano parenti lontane e vicine, ragazze che avevano meno di trent'anni e che non avevano figli. Non posso dunque dire quale fosse la mia visione "globale" e superficiale delle donne nere che vedevo in città (rarissime tra l'altro), perché ho avuto un'esperienza più intima, da lessico famigliare. Con queste parenti imparavo dei rudimenti di cucina senegalese, a fare e disfare treccine, assorbivo un certo senso dell'umorismo e una buona dose di schiaffoni, quando l'occasione si prestava.

In tutto ciò ovviamente esiste anche la visione che avevo di me stessa in quanto bambina mulatta. Su questo punto c'è da dire che fino alla fine delle elementari avevo l'idea confusa che essere neri significasse anche essere musulmani. La prima volta che vidi in televisione un gruppo di cantanti gospel neri che pregavano battendo le mani in una chiesa, corsi oltraggiata da mia madre, gli occhi appannati di lacrime urlando "Vieni a vedere cosa stanno facendo!". Mia madre guardando quello che indicavo sullo schermo mi disse "E allora?" Io le risposi trafelata che erano persone nere che stavano cercando di farsi passare per bianche. Ne avevo vergogna e alla sera, nel mio lettino, pregavo per loro, africani o afroamericani smarriti che cercavano di rovinare tutto, tutti gli sforzi che noi stavamo facendo per esistere nella nostra diversità. Io stessa, dileggiata dai compagnetti sin dall'asilo per la mia fisicità e il mio credo, pensavo che era importantissimo mantenersi diversi: quindi non bianchi e non cristiani. Resistere, perché se eravamo stati designati per essere "diversi", bisognava esserlo fino in fondo e quindi non solo nell'aspetto, ma anche nel credo. Queste persone nere che si mostravano cristiane si avvicinavano all'Altro adottandone i costumi

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

religiosi, come a rinnegare l'identità musulmana che li avrebbe resi davvero neri. Questi pensieri infantili mostrano lo sforzo che facevo per trovare un senso e un ordine logico a tutto ciò che accadeva attorno a me. Si è intransigenti da piccoli, e a volte intolleranti. Crescere impone (o dovrebbe imporre) l'abbandono di quest'inflessibilità, per questo le persone razziste o integraliste somigliano a volte a dei bambini, nei loro ragionamenti elementari e nelle loro prese di posizione assolute e cieche. Mi sembrava giusto che dei bianchi diventassero musulmani, per empatia nei nostri confronti, ma che dei neri diventassero cristiani no, perché voleva dire essere ancora più "colonizzati". Non conoscevo questo termine, ma la sensazione vaga che provavo è riassumibile in questa parola. Nulla sapevo poi del dominio arabo dell'Africa subsahariana, quindi creavo un mio mondo che mi pareva coerente con quel che conoscevo.

3. Quand'eri bambino/a hai mai discriminato qualcuno per il suo aspetto?

Amina: Di base non ho mai discriminato nessuno per il proprio aspetto o per eventuali differenze o deficit, sarà per sensibilità femminile, sarà perché comunque non ho mai fatto parte di nessuna categoria dominante in nessun ambito. Non ero una secchiona, non ero eccellente nello sport, non ero "popolare", non ero bianca. Quindi in ogni caso avrei avuto ben poco per sentirmi in diritto di discriminare.

Direi che il massimo della discriminazione di cui abbia avuto esperienza nella mia mente ma che comunque non ho mai palesato era rivolta a una bambina che non aveva la televisione in casa. Io non capacitandomene la vedevo come un extraterrestre appioppandole una serie di problematiche che probabilmente non aveva.

Da più grande (superiori) ho fatto un po' la bulla con una mia compagna bassa di statura e nei confronti dei secchioni perché ovviamente era l'unica arma che avevo per sentirmi meno "ciuccia".

Mimina: Penso di non avere mai discriminato nessuno per il suo aspetto, anzi ero sempre molto attirata dalle "persone diverse", perché in un certo senso anch'io mi sentivo diversa. Sempre.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Aminata: Sì, alle elementari un giorno decisi che avrei discriminato un bambino solo perché era magrissimo e aveva una testa piccola. Gli altri bambini spesso lo chiamavano Andrea Stecchino. Io non lo avevo mai preso in giro fino a quel giorno, giorno in cui a ricreazione aspettai che tutti uscissero in cortile e andai in fondo all'aula, dove lui passava il tempo per non farsi rubare la merenda durante la pausa, e gli dissi, esitante: "Andrea Stecchino!" e lui per tutta risposta e con una prontezza fenomenale, come se non aspettasse altro, mi dette un pugno proprio in mezzo al petto. Mi mozzò il respiro e mi fece malissimo. Fu la prima e ultima volta in cui provai a prendere in giro qualcuno. Probabilmente lui stesso aveva assimilato le gerarchie all'interno della classe, della scuola, della società e mai avrebbe accettato di farsi sfottere da una bambina nera, a sua volta oggetto di stigmatizzazione. A partire da quella volta, come se volessi espiare una colpa nei confronti dei bambini "diversi", soprattutto fisicamente, mi capitò spesso di passare del tempo, nel doposcuola, con alcuni compagni handicappati. Conoscevo le loro insegnanti di sostegno, mi informavo delle medicine che questi bambini dovevano prendere, del tipo ti compiti che avevano da fare a casa. Li accompagnavo in giardino e cercavo di capire cosa tentavano di dire. Sapevo che erano discriminati più di me, e che non avrebbero saputo difendersi. Allora immaginavo di poter essere il loro scudo.

4. E sei stata vittima di discriminazione?

Amina: Quando ero piccola c'erano tutta una serie di episodi quotidiani che non so se si possono inserire nella categoria "discriminazione" perché per me stavano nella categoria "scocciature" e variavano dal toccarmi i capelli, le guance ecc., al dirmi "che bella moretta/negretta ecc.", al chiedermi da dove venivo.

Fino alla prima media compresa (Como) non c'è stato nessun bambino che mostrasse interesse per me, le mie compagne avevano tutte i loro baby corteggiatori, ma non me la sento di dire che fosse dovuto al fatto che fossi nera, magari ero solo brutta. Durante le elementari ho comunque avuto sempre vita facile tra i miei coetanei perché ero la migliore amica della bambina più popolare, corteggiata e rispettata sia da maschi che da femmine.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

In quarta elementare è arrivato un ragazzino che si chiamava Gialma, ci siamo subito stati simpatici probabilmente perché avevamo i nomi più strani della scuola. Lui si era un po' innamorato di me e mi ricordo che si arrampicava sul tetto della casa di fianco per arrivare alla finestra delle suore e salutarmi. Lo consideravo un outsider, un po' perché lo era veramente ma soprattutto perché mi riservava questo tipo di attenzione che non avevo mai avuto.

Un episodio di discriminazione se si può dire "violenta" l'ho avuta in colonia a Igea Marina. Avrò avuto 8/9 anni. Ero chiusa nel classico recinto da colonia e un ragazzo mi ha urlato qualcosa più volte in modo che mi girassi e mi ha fatto il terzo dito, io gli ho sorriso. Ho chiesto più volte cosa significasse alle suore e ai miei genitori e nessuno me l'ha detto, l'ho poi scoperto da sola. Mi stupisce ancora come nessuno dei miei coetanei sapesse cosa volesse dire quel gesto… generazione di ingenui senza Google.

In seconda media mi sono trasferita a Dronero e sono sbocciata, doppiamente forestiera, doppiamente esotica con il mio essere nera con l'accento comasco. La possiamo chiamare discriminazione positiva? Sta di fatto che mi sono fatta un sacco di amici e finalmente anch'io ho incominciato ad avere un numero interessante di baby corteggiatori.

Mimina: Quando ero bambina sono stata diverse volte vittima di discriminazione sia in Senegal che in Italia. In un certo senso gli episodi in cui sono stata coinvolta hanno contribuito a "forgiare" il mio carattere. Se da bambina soffrivo per alcuni comportamenti discriminatori nei miei confronti o nei confronti di qualche membro della mia famiglia, crescendo ho imparato a "corazzarmi" e a rispondere a tono alle osservazioni razziste degli ignoranti. I quali nella maggior parte dei casi mi fanno pena per la loro "piccolezza di spirito".

I primi comportamenti discriminatori li ho subiti a Golf Sud, nel quartiere della periferia di Dakar dove ho trascorso gran parte della mia infanzia. In questo "habitat precario", animato e colorato, dove le botte e i litigi fra bambini sono una consuetudine sei obbligato, dall'ambiente che ti circonda, a crescere forte e con la *gueule*, come esprime bene il termine francese per indicare la "faccia tosta". Mi ricordo che avendo la pelle più chiara degli altri bambini a volte venivo derisa dai miei coetanei che mi chiamavano *tomati locoti* (pomodoro in scatola) o *garab*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

bou honk (cespuglio rosso) per i miei capelli crespi e voluminosi tendenti al rosso, cosa che mi faceva enormemente imbestialire. Erano soprattutto i bambini che non mi conoscevano, e che non risiedevano nel quartiere, che mi "etichettavano" in questo modo. Non sopportavo questi appellativi perché mi sentivo a tutti gli effetti una bambina di Golf Sud come i miei coetanei del quartiere. Sovente la mia sopportazione arrivava al limite e sfociava in un litigio o in una baruffa nella sabbia, che però in alcuni casi poteva trasformarsi in un'amicizia importante.

Sempre in Senegal venivo sovente scambiata per una bambina mauritana o peuls (popolazione nomade dell'Africa occidentale dedita alla pastorizia e al commercio). Entrambi questi popoli hanno la pelle ambrata, simile alla mia. Effettivamente osservando i bambini mauritani o peuls la somiglianza con me e i miei fratelli era tanta. Infatti ogni volta che mi recavo in una *boutique*[1] gestita da mauritani o avevo a che fare con i signori peuls che vendevano la frutta per strada, iniziava una conversazione nella loro lingua. Mi salutavano in arabo o in peuls e mi chiedevano che cosa volevo comprare. A furia di essere scambiata per mauritana o peuls avevo imparato a salutare e a ringraziare in queste lingue. Questa cosa la trovavo molto divertente e capivo che avveniva puramente per un equivoco.

Malauguratamente alla fine degli anni ottanta (nel 1989) scoppia la guerra fra il Senegal e la Mauritania. Si assiste nei due paesi a delle cacce all'uomo di tipo razzista e l'orrore è in ogni angolo nelle strade di Dakar. I *narganar* (termine wolof per designare i mauritani) residenti in Senegal, per lo più commercianti, sono costretti a fuggire e a tornarsene nel loro paese, viceversa per i senegalesi residenti in Mauritania. In questo clima di tensione, "l'equivoco divertente" a cui io e i miei fratelli eravamo soggetti regolarmente per il colore della nostra pelle, simile a quello dei mauritani, si trasforma inaspettatamente in una "discriminazione pericolosa" che costringe la mia famiglia a trasferirsi repentinamente in Costa d'Avorio.

Nel 1992, finita la guerra fra il Senegal e la Mauritania, la mia famiglia si ritrasferisce a Golf Sud, nella stessa casa e nello stesso quartiere della periferia di Dakar, dal quale tre anni prima siamo dovuti

[1] Il termine boutique è usato dai senegalesi per designare i negozietti di quartiere che vendono di tutto: alimenti, bevande, cosmetici, prodotti per la casa, scarpe…

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

scappare. La gente del quartiere ci accoglie con molto calore, rendendoci subito partecipi della vita locale, come se non fossimo mai partiti. I miei fratelli ed io non eravamo più in pericolo per il coloro della nostra pelle. Avevo circa 10 anni, iniziavo a capire quale fosse il significato della discriminazione e quanto potesse essere pericolosa e circostanziale.

Un altro luogo dove sono stata sovente vittima di discriminazione è l'Italia. Quando ero piccola i miei soggiorni in Italia avvenivano una volta ogni due anni circa, solitamente durante le vacanze estive che trascorrevo a Cuneo. Qui giocavo e mi divertivo con i bambini della mia età, figli di amici dei miei genitori con la maggior parte dei quali ho stretto dei legami di amicizia forti, ancor oggi duraturi. Ero in un "ambiente protetto". Le persone con cui avevo a che fare conoscevano bene la storia della mia famiglia, e percepivo il loro affetto e la loro gentilezza tutte le volte che trascorrevo del tempo con loro. Talvolta però capitava di avere a che fare con estranei e di essere vittima di comportamenti discriminatori che scatenavano in me sentimenti diversi: rabbia, incomprensione, disagio, e chiusura. Mi ricordo di diversi episodi di bambini che venivano richiamati dai loro genitori e allontanati dal luogo dove io e i miei due fratelli giocavamo. In particolare mi ricordo di due sorelle che avevano all'incirca la mia età, le quali quando erano accompagnate al parco dai nonni giocavano tranquillamente con me e i miei fratelli, quando invece erano con i loro genitori non potevano giocare con noi. Eravamo piccoli, e sia noi che loro non capivamo il perché. I nostri occhi si cercavano anche quando non potevamo giocare insieme, ci salutavamo a distanza con la mano e con un sorriso complice ci divertivamo a farci le boccacce, trasformando questa proibizione in un gioco, come solo i bambini sanno fare.

Un altro episodio che ricordo con più amarezza riguarda un fatto che coinvolse mia madre. Un giorno di fine estate mia madre, i miei due fratelli ed io eravamo diretti all'aeroporto di Milano per prendere un volo che ci avrebbe ricondotti in Senegal. Dalla stazione centrale di Milano prendiamo un autobus navetta, ed una volta sistemati i numerosi bagagli ci accomodiamo nei nostri rispettivi posti. Qualche attimo dopo una coppia di giovani con il posto vicino al nostro si alza, visibilmente infastidita e stizzita dalla nostra presenza. Si mettono in piedi e trascorrono tutto il viaggio in piedi lasciando i loro posti vuoti e coprendosi la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

bocca e il naso con le loro maglie come se sentissero chissà che odore. Non capivo il perché di questo comportamento, ma percepivo un profondo disagio da parte di mia madre, che continuava a ripeterci che fra poco saremmo arrivati a destinazione e che saremmo scesi dall'autobus. Era ovvio, ma lei lo ripeteva come se ci volesse tranquillizzare per un malessere che viveva in quel momento. Questo profondo disagio di mia madre l'ho percepito anche in altre occasioni. Crescendo ho capito che era un sintomo della sua fragilità nell'affrontare tali circostanze, e quello che è stato sempre più difficile per me era sopportare le situazioni discriminatorie che coinvolgevano mia madre, che ho sempre percepito più vulnerabile da questo punto di vista. Non tanto perché accusasse l'impatto di tali fastidiose cattiverie, ma per la sua manifesta difficoltà nel relazionarsi a me e ai miei fratelli durante questi episodi.

Aminata: Sono stata vittima di discriminazione in Italia. Già dalla scuola materna, avevo accettato il fatto che non avrei potuto avere un fidanzatino, ma che avrei solo potuto fare da "messaggera" per le mie amichette, e quindi correre qua e là portando informazioni su regali e disegni. Mi era parso evidente perché sapevo che c'era in me qualcosa di diverso che mi escludeva dal campo di un certo tipo di umanità. Ma non erano le frasi volutamente offensive del tipo "sei nera come la cacca" o "sei marrone come la diarrea" ad avermi dato quest'idea, quanto eventi più sottili.

1) Le suore da cui andavo alla scuola materna (per ragioni lunghe da spiegare i miei nonni avevano fatto in modo che anche se musulmana, frequentassi l'asilo delle suore) un giorno avevano condotto me e altre due bambine mulatte (d'origine somala) nel loro convento per mostrarci alla madre superiora e alle altre suore che non avevano forse mai visto delle bambine come noi. Queste ci avevano dunque detto "ma che belle negrette" tuffando le loro mani nei nostri capelli e schioccando dei baci sulle nostre guance. Poi ci avevano portato a vedere le reliquie di una santa morta. Credo che questa gita verso l'oltretomba servisse loro da scusa per la nostra uscita fuori porta. Poi ci diedero un sacco di caramelle e a casa io raccontai a mia madre, felicissima, la mia giornata. Quando lei si arrabbiò, capii che c'era qualcosa di sbagliato in quello che mi era successo, e inghiottii la delusione nel silenzio.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

2) Durante la ricreazione nel giardino dell'asilo spesso si fingeva di vivere in una casa di plastica dove c'erano sempre due genitori, un figlio (interpretato da un bambolotto o da un bambino) ed eventualmente degli animali domestici. Mi sarebbe piaciuto essere la moglie, o la figlia, ma secondo gli altri bambini potevo fare solo o la cameriera o il cane. Non mi lasciavano interpretare altri ruoli con la scusa che ero marrone e che le persone marroni fanno le pulizie e che i cani sono marroni.

3) Un giorno al parco Ducos volli salire su uno scivolo. Due bambine bionde con i boccoli mi dissero "qui i negri non ci salgono" e mi ostruirono l'accesso alle scale. Quando tentai di salire dallo scivolo stesso, si piantarono in cima. Tornai sui miei passi e mia madre, che non capiva da lontano cosa accadeva, mi chiese perché non avevo giocato con quelle bimbe. Risposi che non mi andava. Ricordo che non volevo assolutamente inquietarla o darle un dispiacere. Una volta le avevo detto che gli altri mi dicevano "negra di merda" e lei si era agitata dicendomi di rispondere per le rime.

Nonostante tutto non mi sono mai considerata una vittima. Da bambina ero convinta di essere speciale: per questo gli altri mi invidiavano e mi facevano delle miserie. Mi accadeva spesso, difatti, alla sera quando dicevo le mie preghiere nel lettino, di essere dispiaciuta e addolorata per gli altri. Mi preoccupavo per loro, nell'oscurità della mia stanza, sotto le coperte. Chiedevo a Dio di perdonarli e, nella prossima vita, di dar loro la fortuna d'esser neri. Cosi avrebbero smesso di essere gelosi. Mi chiedevo anche a cosa dovessi il privilegio di essere stata eletta, assieme a pochi altri, piccola mulatta in un universo bianco.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Maria Kirchmair

(Napoli/Innsbruck)

"Non sono le pareti rigide che fanno del luogo in cui viviamo una casa"[1] – Narrando 'l'arrivo': *Oltre Babilonia* di Igiaba Scego e *Madre piccola* di Ubah Cristina Ali Farah

Abstract

The following contribution focuses on the novels *Oltre Babilonia* (2008) by Igiaba Scego and *Madre piccola* (2007) by Ubah Cristina Ali Farah and will examine the narrative representation of aspects of 'arriving' in a diaspora situation. In the context of colonial and postcolonial developments in Somalia, Italy and Argentina, *Oltre Babilonia* unfolds the intergenerational story of a family, reflecting less the historical events than their traumatic effects on individuals as well as the process of negotiating transcultural identities in contemporary Italy. The novel tells of how to overcome a crisis, of finding a way out of a state of violence by transforming personal trauma into a survival strategy: memory is made narration and language itself becomes the place of a positive transformation, a parallel to *Madre piccola*, that in the context of the globally dispersed Somali diaspora explores the characters' inner fragmentation and their search for strategies to cope with the traumatic loss of the living environment. Spatial movement and itinerancy turn out to open a 'space' of becoming, of self-determination and simultaneous entanglement with the diaspora. By narrating fragments of personal histories, the 'space' of relations determined by collective and intersubjective processes widens and previously unheard voices and perspectives can be reflected on. The arguments relating to these themes are developed in the course of the paper.

[1] Citazione da Farah (2007: 263).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Dall'ultimo decennio del 20° secolo, nel contesto della mobilità e della migrazione mondiali, in Italia è nata la letteratura transculturale contemporanea, che alla fine avrebbe creato le condizioni di partenza per la letteratura postcoloniale. In particolare dal 2005, in via di posizionarsi nel settore letterario, la narrativa postcoloniale in lingua italiana è entrata in una nuova fase sia in termini di quantità che per complessità estetica dei testi. Si tratta di una letteratura delle 'voci inascoltate' che, da un lato, richiama alla mente la storia coloniale e postcoloniale dell'Italia e apre nuove prospettive, dall'altro, riflette sulle esperienze esistenziali degli individui nella tensione tra spazi immaginari e luoghi reali sullo sfondo della globalizzazione all'inizio del 21° secolo. Il presente contributo verte sulla disamina dei romanzi *Oltre Babilonia* (2008) di Igiaba Scego e *Madre piccola* (2007) di Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, che hanno influenzato lo sviluppo della letteratura narrativa postcoloniale italiana in modo particolare.[2]

Entrambi i testi mettono in scena la narrazione della storia coloniale e postcoloniale partendo da storie familiari e accentuando la complessa costruzione dell'identità dei personaggi principali che portano le tracce di quei traumi storici. Le costanti tematiche sono l'elaborazione dei traumi personali e i processi di negoziazione delle identità transculturali nella società italiana contemporanea. *Oltre Babilonia* racconta la storia intergenerazionale di una famiglia nel contesto di sviluppi politici e sociali in Somalia, Italia e Argentina, rispecchiando comunque meno le vicende nella loro dimensione storica che gli effetti traumatici sull'individuo. Sottolineando l'intersezione di corpo, sessualità, linguaggio e soggettività, il romanzo non solo denuncia le violenze subite, ma inscena anche strategie che possono trasformare i traumi e aprire nuovi spazi di speranza. Nel contesto della diaspora somala, anche *Madre piccola* intreccia passato e presente enfatizzando in primo luogo la componente individuale del processo di dispersione diasporica, che allo stesso tempo costituisce un movimento migratorio collettivo. Attraverso la narrazione di esperienze esistenziali estreme, il romanzo indaga

[2] A questo punto, mi permetto di rinviare alla mia monografia *Postkoloniale Literatur in Italien* (2017), che dedica ad ambedue i romanzi un capitolo dettagliato esaminando oltre agli aspetti dello spazio anche le caratteristiche estetiche.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

nell'ambito della diaspora lo stato di lacerazione interiore e la percezione di sé nei momenti di fragilità dei personaggi.

Dunque come si realizza nei testi quello 'spazio' mobile e fluido, in cui i personaggi sono in grado di negoziare e vivere le loro posizioni soggettive e transculturali? Nel tentativo di sfuggire a condizioni di vita precarie, essi a volte decidono consapevolmente di cambiare strada e seguire percorsi imprevedibili, compiono cioè un atto di autoemancipazione contro la rassegnazione della disperazione, avviandosi alla ricerca di un presente che non può essere separato dal passato, che nondimeno vada superato (cfr. Gnisci 2003: 106f.). Le argomentazioni relative a questi temi vengono sviluppate nel corso del contributo con un approfondimento sulle rappresentazioni narrative di aspetti dell''arrivo' nell'esperienza diasporica dei personaggi.

"Trasformo il pianto in una lingua […]"[3]: *agency* in *Oltre Babilonia* di Igiaba Scego

Igiaba Scego racconta in *Oltre Babilonia* la storia di una famiglia dispersa per il mondo, le sue esperienze di esilio e le disuguaglianze sociali e politiche della vita contemporanea in Italia, oltre a vari episodi del passato coloniale e postcoloniale, dell'indipendenza della Somalia e della dittatura militare argentina. La struttura narrativa del romanzo intreccia cinque voci: la protagonista principale Zuhra Laamane, la sua sorellastra Mar, il padre Elias e le loro madri Maryam e Miranda. Nel corso della narrazione i personaggi si confrontano con i loro traumi personali e riflettono inoltre su questioni di identità transculturale nell'Italia di oggi.

Oltre Babilonia tratta il tema dell''arrivo' non tanto rispetto ad un dato luogo, ma inteso come un movimento o una negoziazione continua fra il "sentirsi a casa da nessuna parte" (Suleiman in Babic Williams 2013: 106; tradotto da M.K.) e il "sentirsi a casa ovunque" (ibid.). L'Italia viene percepita da alcuni personaggi come 'seconda casa', un luogo della permanenza temporanea, che può durare talvolta per decenni. Sia Maryam sia Miranda sembrano rimanere legate mentalmente ai loro

[3] Citazione da Scego (2008: 415).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

paesi di provenienza – Maryam pensa alla Somalia con nostalgia, mentre Miranda ricorda traumaticamente le terribili torture della dittatura militare in Argentina –, invece le giovani protagoniste Zuhra e Mar rappresentano una posizione intermedia. Facendo parte della cosiddetta 'seconda generazione' non avvertono la vita diasporica o l'esilio come perdita del 'paese d'origine', tuttavia viene a loro trasmessa l'idea di 'casa' proiettata su un altrove. La narrazione dunque pone domande sul significato di 'arrivare a casa' in un contesto diasporico. Zuhra riflette su dove e cosa potrebbe essere la sua 'casa': la Somalia, il paese dei suoi antenati, ma che non conosce per esperienza personale, e l'Italia, dove è nata e cresciuta, ma dove non di rado è considerata 'forestiera' (cfr. Babic Williams 2013: 106).

Nel romanzo i luoghi dell'azione delineano la topografia del mondo rappresentato, ma la trama, svolgendosi in più luoghi, traduce anche il concetto di ricerca di un'identità transculturale. Tunisi è la città, dove alcuni personaggi s'incontrano frequentando un corso di lingua e proprio perché è un luogo con il quale Mar non sente alcuna affinità – lo descrive come luogo né idilliaco né di libertà personale – si identifica con esso: "Lì si sentiva a casa, perché di fatto non era casa di nessuno, nemmeno dei tunisini. Anzi loro, meno di tutti. Non potevano far niente della loro vita e del loro corpo senza il volere di Ben Ali" (Scego 2008: 330). La relazione metonimica tra la percezione di Mar della sua non appartenenza e la rappresentazione spaziale della città è rafforzata dalla critica alla dittatura di Ben Ali, durata fino al 2011. Nella loro ricerca di identità, i personaggi in *Oltre Babilonia* prendono le distanze dalle strutture di potere egemonico. Questa non è solo una critica alla società italiana: Anche i regimi autoritari in Nord Africa o alcune tradizioni somale sono rifiutati dai personaggi nel loro desiderio di autoemancipazione (cfr. Kleinert 2011/2012: 214).

Le voci narranti in *Oltre Babilonia* abbozzano un quadro complesso, che da un lato mette in luce le varie posizioni di più generazioni nel contesto delle loro esperienze storiche, dall'altro i personaggi sottolineano il sovrapporsi di corpo, sessualità, lingua e soggettività. Ricorrono il motivo del corpo femminile e i simboli della biologia femminile come il liquido vaginale e il sangue di mestruazione, con il rosso che diviene un colore simbolico. I personaggi raccontano di stupro e tortura, dunque di violenza subita dal corpo, e dei percorsi individuali per

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

arrivare a una possibile vita dopo l'atto di violenza. Zuhra sente la necessità di scrivere la sua storia sperando di rappacificarsi con il suo corpo stuprato. Nel prologo metanarrativo riflette sul suo trauma personale: all'età di otto anni è stata mandata in un collegio italiano, dove il bidello l'ha abusata. A causa del ricordo doloroso Zuhra ha perso la capacità di percepire i colori (cfr. Carroli 2010: 213):

> Quindi ci devo andare cauta con le emozioni forti, mi potrei spezzare e poi chi mi ricompone più? Sono senza colori. Senza difese. Vergine. Sola. […] So che mi ha fatto di tutto e mi ha lasciato vergine. Via, andato, sparito. Ecco … però … quello zio si è preso tutti i miei colori, tutti quanti. […] Pian pianino, ho la sacca bella piena di colori. Quando li riavrò tutti, sarò pronta e farò l'amore con un uomo. […] È che senza colori non puoi fare l'amore. […] Ora a dir la verità, nella sacca manca solo il rosso. (Scego 2008: 9ff.)

Mediante la figura retorica della perdita di colori la protagonista rivela che in seguito all'abuso sessuale non è stata più in grado di percepire il colore rosso – metafora delle sue emozioni seppellite. La chiave per superare questa crisi è il confronto consapevole con la storia di famiglia. Nonostante la distanza temporale, le ripercussioni dei traumi subiti dai nonni e i genitori in epoca coloniale e postcoloniale si manifestano anche nella vita di Zuhra, caratterizzata sia dall'assenza del padre sconosciuto, sia dall'alcolismo di sua madre. Elias ha lasciato l'amata moglie e la figlia, ripetendo così la perdita di comunicazione che aveva già segnato il rapporto tra lui e suo padre. La comunicazione interrotta influisce sulla costruzione dell'identità della nipote-figlia che, dopo anni, può finalmente esprimere il suo stesso trauma e rompere il silenzio sulla violenza passata e presente. Il romanzo non si limita però a dimostrare come le esperienze storiche abbiano avuto effetti negativi sul legame fra genitori e figli e sfociavano in un trauma transgenerazionale, ma elabora strategie narrative che permettono il superamento del trauma e il riavvicinamento tra madre e figlia, passato e presente, paese d'origine e diaspora (cfr. Babic Williams 2013: 118f.; Kleinert 2011/12: 207f., 211). "Driven by a desire for transformation", secondo le parole di Piera Carroli (2010: 206), i protagonisti, raccontandosi, si confrontano in modo critico con le loro esperienze – in cammino verso forme di "soggettività nomade", come Rosi Braidotti (2015: 149) concettualizza

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

questo 'spazio' del divenire.[4] Il desiderio di raccontare e con questo l'elaborazione del trauma costituisce il punto di partenza della complessa trama in *Oltre Babilonia* e connette Zuhra con gli altri personaggi. La relazione tra il trauma e l'azione di narrare la propria storia è in effetti lo schema comune a tutti i personaggi: "Everyone in the novel has a story to tell and a wound to heal" (Gazzoni 2013: 229). È dunque attraverso l'atto di raccontare in modo orale o scritto le loro esperienze traumatiche che i personaggi in *Oltre Babilonia* trovano la strada di liberazione fisica e psichica.

Zuhra nel suo racconto, scritto in italiano, rievoca al tempo stesso la madrelingua somala e la tradizione narrativa orale; mette in relazione metaforicamente la lingua con la maternità simbolica che 'si riproduce' in/per fecondazione reciproca (cfr. Carroli 2012: 215f.; Gazzoni 2013: 231): "Quando parla, mia madre è sempre gravida. Partorisce l'altra madre, la sua lingua. Mi piace ascoltarla. […] Assistere al parto di una madre che partorisce la madre" (Scego 2008: 445). L'azione del narrare oppure dello scrivere rappresenta una strategia importante per il superamento del trauma, perché da ciò nasce la capacità d'agire. Il linguaggio diventa così uno 'spazio' di dinamiche sociali, simboliche e fisiche e visualizza il processo di formazione dell'identità individuale. In quanto l'individuo è plasmato dalla lingua, l'uso di segni linguistici comporta che significato e 'identità' sono sempre disseminati e in movimento, mai fissati (cfr. Eagleton 1997: 110ff., con riferimento a Derrida).[5] La lingua stessa diventa dunque il luogo di trasformazione creativa: "Trasformo il pianto in una lingua, in una ribellione" (Scego 2008:

[4] Braidotti sottolinea che il concetto di soggettività non deve essere scambiato con il concetto di individuo o individualismo e descrive la soggettività come un processo socialmente mediato di autorizzazioni e negoziazioni delle relazioni di potere. Il soggetto consiste quindi di "un processo di spostamenti e negoziazioni costanti tra diversi livelli di potere e desiderio, cioè consiste di groviglio e autoemancipazione" (Braidotti 2015: 152; tradotto da M.K.).

[5] Allo stesso modo, Miranda riflette su quante lingue contengono il suo corpo e quello di sua figlia Mar: "Quante lingue ci sono dentro di noi? Tu lo sai, figlia mia? Io lo intuisco, ma non so dire di quante lingue siamo fatte. In noi c'è di sicuro l'ancestrale lingua india, la lingua di Coatlalopeuh. Della fertilità. Poi c'è la lingua della storia, lo spagnolo esportato col sangue e con l'inganno. Ma nella nostra bocca è cambiato, lo sento, si è ingentilito, si è innervato di noi. Non è più la lingua arrotolata dalle consonanti compatte dell'inizio del mondo. Diventa aria e stelle, diventa sole e luna. Si fa carne. Si fa viva" (Scego 2008: 414f.).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

415). Il passaggio tra il racconto orale della madre e la scrittura della figlia pare caratterizzato da continuità e ibridazione. Ragionando su come sia stata plasmata linguisticamente, Zuhra qualifica il somalo di sua madre come lingua orale, "[i]l somalo di mamma è orale, il suo somalo è fatto di storia, poesia, musica e canto" (Scego 2008: 444), mentre lei si esprime in una lingua ibrida tra il somalo e l'italiano, su cui riflette nel seguente brano dell'epilogo:

> Mamma mi parla sempre nella nostra lingua madre […]. Mi chiedo se la lingua madre di mia madre possa farmi da madre. Se nelle nostre bocche il somalo suoni uguale. Come la parlo io questa nostra lingua madre? […] Incespico incerta nel mio alfabeto confuso. […] Ogni suono di fatto è contaminato. Ma mi sforzo lo stesso di parlare con lei quella lingua che ci unisce. In somalo ho trovato il conforto del suo utero, in somalo ho sentito le uniche ninnananne che mi ha cantato, in somalo di certo ho fatto i primi sogni. Ma poi, ogni volta, in ogni discorso, parola, sospiro, fa capolino l'altra madre. Quella che ha allattato Dante, Boccaccio, De André e Alda Merini. L'italiano con cui sono cresciuta e che a tratti ho anche odiato, perché mi faceva sentire straniera. L'italiano aceto dei mercati rionali, l'italiano dolce degli speaker radiofonici, l'italiano serio delle lectiones magistrales. L'italiano che scrivo. (Ibid.: 443f.)

Zuhra e sua madre Maryam comunicano tra di loro in somalo, anche se Zuhra mette in dubbio la sua competenza linguistica e chiama la lingua italiana "l'altra madre". Utilizza le due lingue alternandole: il suo idioma è segnato sia dalla tradizione narrativa orale di sua madre sia dalla lingua della sua identificazione culturale. La contrapposizione accennata di lingua orale somala e lingua scritta italiana nel brano testuale citato viene immediatamente decostruita dalla protagonista che richiama vari registri dell'uso orale della lingua italiana (cfr. Kleinert 2013: 209f.). L'immagine delle due madri disegna un concetto di lingua e identità transculturali, i cui confini nella coscienza sono fluidi. Zuhra usa entrambe le lingue per narrare la sua identità transculturale, che non potrebbe esprimere in una sola lingua. Oltre all'italiano e il somalo, la protagonista ricorre spesso al gergo romano, per di più si è laureata in letteratura brasiliana, parla l'inglese e lo spagnolo e ha deciso di imparare l'arabo. Ciò fa riflettere su come il bilinguismo o il plurilinguismo non facciano parte solo della vita privata o pubblica di una persona, ma siano un elemento costituente dell'identità individuale come anche

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

dell'immaginazione, della memoria finanche del dolore subito. Lingua e rappresentazione narrativa fungono da 'spazio' della formazione del soggetto. Questa formazione può essere descritta come un processo di espressione, di composizione o di scrittura che ha anche l'obiettivo di una trasformazione 'positiva' del soggetto.[6] Attraverso l'azione del narrare e la scrittura, la protagonista in *Oltre Babilonia*, fisicamente traumatizzata, riacquista quell'*agency*, la capacità d'agire per riappropriarsi del suo corpo e della sua sessualità e fidarsi nuovamente delle persone vicine. Ritorna la percezione del colore perduto, il rosso, che le scorre dal ventre, e Zuhra stabilisce una relazione tra il suo corpo e la sua storia da donna nel contesto delle storie di altre donne:

> Macchia umida, estesa. Sembra una stella. Forse lo è. È rossa la sua stella. Un po' umida. Ma bella. Emana luce. Una stella mestruale che brilla solo per lei, infinita. Le forme si disperdono. La stella si allarga. Una costellazione. Dentro la costellazione, la sua storia di donna. E dentro la sua storia, quella di altre prima di lei e di altre dopo di lei. Le storie si intrecciano, a volte convergono, spesso si cercano. Tutte unite da un colore e da un affetto. (Scego 2008: 456)

Associando metaforicamente il sangue mestruale a una costellazione di storie intrecciate, Zuhra in modo simbolico rinvia al superamento della perdita di colori che era metafora della perdita di amore e fiducia. Nel brano testuale la stella mestruata come simbolo fisico, sensuale e intimo congiunge le storie dei cinque protagonisti. Il colore rosso del sangue della mestruazione ricorda le ferite passate e nello stesso tempo rende possibile la nascita del nuovo (cfr. Babic Williams 2013: 119; Gazzoni 2013: 232). La doppia *agency* del corpo femminile e della propria voce si oppone alla storia crudele della violenza coloniale e sessuale. Attraverso la messa in scena metanarrativa della scrittura, Zuhra, come narratrice della trama, esprime se stessa e, come effetto della sua riappropriata capacità d'agire, apre una strada per *arrivare* oltre il suo trauma.

[6] Braidotti descrive il soggetto nomade come "una struttura collettiva (*assemblage*) materialmente collocata e rappresentata, affettiva e relazionale, un punto relais di una rete di relazioni complesse che spostano la centralità delle nozioni di identità fornite con l'indice dell'ego" (Braidotti 2015: 153; tradotto da M.K.). Come "struttura collettiva", spiega Braidotti (ibid.: 154), un "soggetto nomade" tende a una realizzazione affermativa di se stesso.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Riesce ad andare oltre i confini reali e immaginari che limitano interiormente quando non c'è modo di esprimere il proprio 'io'. In questo senso per Zuhra l''arrivo' non equivale a un dato luogo, ma ad uno 'spazio' della trasformazione e del divenire. Corrisponde infine alla speranza di arrivare "oltre Babilonia", a cui allude anche il titolo del libro, uno 'spazio' creativo di pacificazione, un orizzonte simboleggiato da una "sfumatura di rosso" (Scego 2008: 456).

Oltre Babilonia racconta dunque il superamento di una crisi: la protagonista raggiunge una via d'uscita da uno stato di violenza trasformando il suo trauma personale in una strategia di sopravvivenza. Il ricordo doloroso viene reso narrazione e la stessa lingua diventa il luogo di una trasformazione positiva, parallelismo con *Madre piccola*, romanzo a cui si riferiscono le seguenti considerazioni.

Passare allo 'spazio' delle relazioni: *Madre piccola* di Ubah Cristina Ali Farah[7]

Nella letteratura postcoloniale la condizione dello sdoppiamento si riflette spesso nelle ambivalenze emotive e nella scissione dell''io' in seguito a separazioni, spesso involontarie, dal contesto familiare e socioculturale (cfr. Hausbacher 2009: 141). La scrittrice Ubah Cristina Ali Farah nel suo primo romanzo *Madre piccola* (2007) rievoca la Somalia durante il regime di Siad Barre (1969-1991) e il caos successivo al rovesciamento del dittatore quando numerose persone erano costrette a fuggire all'estero. Mediante la messinscena di personaggi dalla complessa concezione psicologica e la rappresentazione delle loro esperienze estreme, *Madre piccola* indaga gli effetti di sviluppi storici sugli individui ed esplora la loro ricerca di strategie per affrontare la perdita traumatica del loro ambiente di vita. La trama svolge i ricordi e le esperienze delle due cugine Domenica Axad e Barni, cresciute insieme a Mogadiscio, circondate dall'affetto della cerchia familiare e poi emigrate in Italia, e infine di Taageere, il futuro marito di Domenica Axad,

[7] Una versione simile di questa parte del presente articolo è stata pubblicata in lingua tedesca con il titolo "'Alienandoci, vivevamo' – Passagen zwischen Träumen und Räumen diasporischer Migration in *Madre piccola* von Cristina Ali Farah" (in: Hertrampf/Nickel 2019).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

che vive negli Stati Uniti. Al centro della narrazione vi è il rapporto tra Domenica Axad e Barni, caratterizzata per la sua presenza materna. Infatti fin dall'infanzia Barni, divenuta orfana da bambina, ha assunto un ruolo di protettrice nei confronti di Domenica Axad; le due figure sono concepite in immagine speculare completandosi a vicenda:

> […] io e Axad insieme ci modulavamo. Lei addolciva il mio impulso, io elettrizzavo la sua quiete. Lei moderava le mie iperboli, io riempivo il suo silenzio. Io ero l'avanguardia, lei la retrovia. Entrambe rischiavamo molto. (Ali Farah 2007: 47f.)

Ciò che congiunge tutti i tre protagonisti collocandosi di continuo nella transizione esistenziale, culturale, sociale e politica della diaspora somala, è il trauma della separazione in seguito a fuga e migrazione. I personaggi cercano una risposta alla domanda su come l'individuo possa superare la perdita del contesto socioculturale e familiare (cfr. Kleinhans 2013: 181f.).

Talora la vita diasporica pone l'individuo in uno stato di mezzo, tra l'essere profugo e vivere contemporaneamente in più luoghi senza sentirsi mai a casa. Il tutto può rafforzare un "decentramento del soggetto" (cfr. *dislocation* seguendo Stuart Hall 1999: 394). Tale 'duplice movimento', che decentra gli individui sia in termini di posizione nel loro contesto socioculturale sia in termini di sé stessi, provoca talvolta gravi crisi d'identità ed estraniazione dalle appartenenze socioculturali vecchie come anche da quelle nuove (cfr. ibid.). La stessa protagonista Domenica Axad rischia di perdersi nelle contraddizioni del suo stato intermedio da "italosomala, *iska-dhal*, nata-insieme, nata-mescolata" (Ali Farah 2007: 95). Figlia di madre italiana e di padre somalo cresce a Mogadiscio in un ambiente culturale ibrido. Dopo la separazione dei suoi genitori, Domenica Axad all'età di nove anni ritorna insieme a sua madre in Italia rinunciando alla lingua somala, un cambiamento con enormi conseguenze sulla formazione della sua identità: il dolore rimosso per la separazione dal padre e dal contesto familiare si esprime ben presto come esaurimento psichico, "come di tradimento subito" (ibid.: 242). Innanzitutto è sconvolta dall'assenza di Barni, sua cugina-sorella amatissima e dalla solitudine insostenibile. Cresciuta in Somalia nel vivace ambiente di una grande famiglia con numerosi coetanei, in

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Italia si ritrova sola come figlia unica in un appartamento isolato con pochi ospiti. Di fronte al dolore di sua madre, Domenica Axad ritiene sleale la sua stessa tristezza e reprime per anni il proprio elementare sentimento da abbandono o meglio rifiuta di prenderne coscienza. Il sentito travaglio interiore tra due contesti culturali e sociali diversi finisce in una relazione simbiotica tra madre e figlia provocando nella protagonista sensi di colpa che si scaricano ripetutamente in forma di autolesioni (cfr. Gagiano 2015: 188). Stilisticamente, questa simbiosi si esprime attraverso l'uso della prima persona plurale da parte della madre, motivo per cui Domenica Axad si ritiene a lungo un soggetto al plurale.[8] La rottura accade nel contesto della guerra civile incipiente nel dicembre del 1990 quando Domenica Axad viene inviata a Mogadiscio da sua madre che spera di rappacificarsi con il suo ex-marito. L'incontro lungamente anelato con suo padre, tuttavia, non si realizza e pochi giorni dopo scappa dalla capitale somala in stato di guerra. In tale circostanza riflette consapevolmente su tutte le esperienze traumatiche del passato, dopodiché si rifiuta di parlare. Tanti anni dopo Domenica Axad spiega in una lettera diretta alla sua psicanalista il motivo della sua scelta:

> Il mio non era un silenzio traumatico, era un silenzio volontario, consapevole. Ma insieme al silenzio questa volta c'era qualcosa d'altro, assai più difficile da comprendere. I tagli riemersero. Erano il trauma del ritorno mancato, l'impossibilità di incontrare mio padre e la consapevolezza che io e mia madre eravamo due creature separate. (Ali Farah 2007: 253)

La protagonista sembra segnata prevalentemente da sentimenti come il dolore di perdita e la malinconia. Secondo Freud il dolore nel senso di tristezza è una "reazione alla perdita di una persona amata o di un'astrazione spostata al suo posto" (Freud 1999: 429; tradotto da M.K.); ma con alcune persone "invece della tristezza si rivela una malinconia" (ibid.). La malinconia si distingue dalla tristezza unicamente nella

[8] Cfr. a questo proposito la seguente citazione testuale: "La prima persona plurale era d'obbligo in queste situazioni. Mia madre la usava abitualmente quando si trattava di noi due, quasi fossimo una stessa essenza, un'identica volontà, un soggetto solo. […] Accettavo di agire in nome di questo soggetto plurale senza troppo interrogarmi se quello che facevo corrispondesse davvero ai miei desideri" (Ali Farah 2007: 249).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"diminuzione dell'autostima che si esprime in sensi di colpa e disprezzo di sé" (Freud 1999: 429; tradotto da M.K.). Domenica Axad può essere descritta come un personaggio melanconico in quanto l'esperienza traumatica dell'incontro mancato con suo padre e la presa di coscienza che sia un individuo autonomo e separato da sua madre evocano nella protagonista il sentimento di perdere la sua famiglia un'altra volta. La protagonista si rifugia così nell'autolesionismo, si incide la pelle rendendo visibile il suo trauma interiore.[9] La sua fragile percezione di sé e la posizione intermedia sentita opprimente per tutta la vita, culminano dopo il ritorno all'aeroporto di Fiumicino, il luogo della sua metamorfosi, dove rompe con la sua esistenza condizionata e decide di vivere nella diaspora somala. L'aeroporto, secondo Marc Augé (2008) un non-luogo senza storia e senza 'identità',[10] segna per Domenica Axad il punto di partenza della sua decostruzione dell'identità. Dopo essersi liberata dal rapporto di dipendenza emotiva con sua madre, la protagonista si muove lungo i non-luoghi e gli spazi di transito descritti da Augé, "a world […] surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Augé 2008: 63). Se il suo ritiro nel silenzio

[9] Cfr. la seguente citazione di testo: "Qualsiasi oggetto appuntito mi serviva. A incidermi, a vedere il colore del sangue. Ragnatele di segni sulla mia superficie. Mi chiedevano cosa mi ero fatta, in molti. Sussultavo: segreti svelati. Ma sai, ero talmente separata. Non riuscivo a parlare. […] Fu perché mi sentivo eccentrica e indefinita che cominciai a torturarmi la pelle? Credevo, forse, di poter separare con la lametta l'ambiguità della mia essenza?" (Ali Farah 2007: 99).

[10] Seguendo il concetto di Augé, "a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity" (Augé 2008: 63), mentre gli spazi "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (ibid.) sono descritti come "non-luoghi". Si applica sia al non-luogo sia al luogo che "[i]t never exists in pure form" (ibid.: 64); piuttosto, "places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it" (ibid.). Quindi il luogo non scompare mai del tutto e il non-luogo non si stabilisce mai completamente, dice Augé; piuttosto, "they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (ibid.). Come non-luoghi oppure "non-places of supermodernity", Augé (ibid.: 63ff.) indica i luoghi di viaggio o i mezzi di trasporto come aerei, navi, treni, autobus, automobili, luoghi di transito come linee ferroviarie, strade o autostrade, luoghi in città come aeroporti, stazioni ferroviarie, porti con traghetti in partenza e ponti di carico, crocicchi, supermercati, ma anche luoghi di breve soggiorno come bar, ristoranti, hotel, spiagge. Il non-luogo crea "[a] temporary identity" (ibid.: 81), un''identità' di anonimato relativo condivisa da passeggeri, clienti o guidatori con altri utenti del non-luogo. Di conseguenza, "[t]he space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (ibid.: 83) – si è soli, ma uguale agli altri.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

esprime una necessità di staccarsi dal mondo e di indugiare in un ambiente protettivo, sembra trovare questa protezione nel cammino, nel viaggio, nel movimento inteso come 'spazio' per divenire e crescere. Il movimento spaziale per Domenica Axad si rivela un'ulteriore strategia di sopravvivenza, quando non è ancora in grado di superare il dolore per il crollo della Somalia in guerra e il vuoto dei suoi genitori. Attraversa così vari non-luoghi: partendo dai call centers di Roma e dalla stazione Termini prosegue lungo le strade infinite della Germania e dei Paesi Bassi fino agli aeroporti del Nordamerica; si sente liberata dal peso della quotidianità e l'attuale ambiente di questi luoghi di passaggi stabilisce una specie di "presente del viaggio" ("present of the journey", Augé 2008: 84). Lo spazio del non-luogo permette di sfuggire alle solite norme. Da passeggera in transito fra i non-luoghi Domenica Axad fa l'esperienza simultanea "of a perpetual present and an encounter with the self" (ibid.). Quando la protagonista raggiunge la consapevolezza "che io e mia madre eravamo due creature separate" (Ali Farah 2007: 253), in accordo con Michel de Certeau (1988: 207), avviene la ripetizione metaforica di un'esperienza decisiva della vita: cioè la distinzione del bambino dal corpo materno. "It is through that experience that the possibility of space and of a localization […] of the subject is inaugurated" (ibid.: 109, con riferimento a Freud).[11] Saper trattare lo 'spazio' significa dunque ripetere l'esperienza dell'infanzia, vuol dire "in a place, *to be other and to move toward the other*" (de Certeau 1988:

[11] Michel de Certeau ha sviluppato il suo ragionamento come segue: La presa di coscienza del "process of detachment from indifferentiation in the mother's body" (de Certeau 1988: 109), quindi lasciando la madre ("sometimes she disappears by herself, sometimes the child makes her disappear", ibid.) permette al "maternal object 'go away' and make *oneself* disappear (insofar as one considers oneself identical with that object), making it possible to be *there* [because] *without* the other but in a necessary relation to what has disappeared" (ibid.). Questo processo mostra metaforicamente l'estensione o la formazione topologica dello 'spazio' e la sua struttura sempre relazionale. Il bambino "who, standing before a mirror, sees itself as *one* ([…] seen as a whole) but [is] *another* (*that*, an image with which the child identifies itself)" (ibid.), realizza il processo di appropriazione dello 'spazio', "that inscribes the passage toward the other as the law of being and the law of place" (ibid.: 110). Questa esperienza d'infanzia è l'esperienza "of the first journey, of birth as the primal experience of differentiation, of recognition of the self as self and as other", spiega Marc Augé (2008: 68) in riferimento a de Certeau; è ripetuta prima di tutto "in the experiences of walking as the first use of space, and of the mirror as the first identification with the image of the self" (ibid.: 68).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

110). Nello 'spazio' diasporico, uno 'spazio‹ di movimento e delle distanze lontane tra oggetti e persone, Domenica Axad riesce a *passare all'altro* e collocarsi come soggetto; muovendosi, la protagonista riconosce di aver perso se stessa a causa di troppa solitudine e dolore dell'abbandono e quindi può finalmente creare le condizioni per superare la perdita di sé. Il mutismo temporaneo si trasforma poi in un bisogno urgente di narrare e scrivere storie (cfr. Barbarulli 2012: 2). Ed è la lingua di sua madre, l'italiano, in cui la protagonista si esprime primariamente e stabilisce così il proprio 'spazio' emancipato, "making it possible to be *there* (because) *without* the other but in a necessary relation to what has disappeared" (de Certeau 1988: 110). Nella precitata lettera sottolinea più volte:

> Parlo difficile, uso costruzioni contorte. Lo faccio soprattutto in principio di discorso, perché voglio dimostrare fino a che punto riesco ad arrivare con la lingua, voglio che tutti sappiano senz'ombra di dubbio che questa lingua mi appartiene. È il mio balbettio, è il soggetto plurale che mi ha cresciuto, è il nome della mia essenza, è mia madre. […] la mia lingua madre che, come ripeto a tutti, è l'italiano, perché non ve n'è nessuna che parlo con altrettanta disinvoltura. (Ali Farah 2007: 253f., 258f.).

La lingua italiana rappresenta dunque quel "territorio retorico" (cfr. Augé 2008: 87) con cui ha familiarità e dove si sente 'a casa'. La narrazione di sé della protagonista in forma di lettera, l'unica comunicazione scritta del romanzo, può essere descritta come un "atto di prendere coscienza di sé" (Gröne 2017: 7; tradotto da M.K.), in quanto scrivendo ricompone i frammenti della sua identità. Contemporaneamente Domenica Axad racconta del suo lavoro da documentarista, che riflette anche la connessione tra la costituzione di soggettività e la produzione di testi: Segue le tracce della diaspora somala sparsa in tutto il mondo e riprendendo con la telecamera le storie narrate, compone un testo sotto forma di documentario, per così dire, che a sua volta funge da matrice per ricercare se stessa.[12] Attraverso il suo lavoro documentario, la

[12] *Madre piccola* sembra quindi riflettere il concetto del soggetto ideato nella teoria poststrutturalista, che lega indissolubilmente la formazione della soggettività alla lingua: sia a livello formale che di contenuto, in forma della lettera scritta e nella riportata testualizzazione di frammenti narrativi sotto forma di documentario. Come ha dimostrato Derrida, l'accesso all'io è stabilito solo con la scrittura, poiché la soggettività può

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

protagonista si mette in collegamento con le voci della diaspora, mentre la sua autoriflessione rinvia al romanzo stesso che per mezzo di frammenti narrativi vagamente interconnessi disegna un ritratto della diaspora somala. Domenica Axad, la cui identità transculturale si rispecchia anche nel suo doppio nome,[13] si considera un filo sottile di una rete estesa, come nel preludio del romanzo si annuncia poeticamente:

> *Soomaali baan ahay,* come la mia metà che è intera. Sono il filo sottile, così sottile che si infila e si tende, prolungandosi. Così sottile che non si spezza. E il groviglio dei fili si allarga e mostra, chiari e ben stretti, i nodi, pur distanti l'uno dall'altro, che non si sciolgono. (Ali Farah 2007: 1)[14]

In *Madre piccola* Ubah Cristina Ali Farah utilizza la metafora del tessuto o della rete: Le storie narrate s'infilano come perle su un filo da incrociarsi e intrecciarsi con altri racconti e storie di vita. Le immagini ricorrenti del romanzo come *filo*, *nodi*, ma anche *legami* o *involucri* si riferiscono alla necessità di intrecciare, di collegare, di raccogliere e di preservare, senza opporsi alle trasformazioni della vita diasporica (cfr. Derobertis 2011: 270f.). I versi introduttivi del preludio suggeriscono un concetto di 'casa' o 'arrivo' non più legato a luoghi specifici, ma definibile attraverso relazioni (emotive) che a volte dal punto di vista geografico sono molto distanti fra di loro, come ha già osservato

---

svilupparsi nell'atto dello scrivere. Il sé è costituito solo nell'atto della scrittura (cfr. Derrida 1999, cit. secondo Gronemann 2002: 18f.).

[13] Cfr. in questo contesto la seguente autoriflessione della protagonista sul suo doppio nome: "Allora io le dico, *abbaayo* io non voglio più chiamarmi con questo nome che fa ridere tutti e lei dice, non ti preoccupare d'ora in avanti ti chiamerai Axad, come il principio. […] Barni ebbe nominato la mia seconda anima, lasciando un segno permanente nel mio stesso nome. Mi chiamò Axad, domenica, come la radice araba dell'uno. […] Di Domenica, ho provato vergogna. Recuperare un nome che tu, Barni, hai scelto per me, pensarti in ogni istante, quando qualcuno lo formulava. Non che io scegliessi. La domanda del nome è qualcosa a cui impariamo a rispondere subito. Io? Una doppia risposta: Domenica o Axad, come preferisci. […] Da qui a dieci anni, per tutti, sono stata Axad. Qualche volta mi mancava il nome che ha scelto mia madre. […] E forse è perché ero stanca di Axad che sono rimasta imbrigliata con Taageere: nessun somalo ha mai scelto, prima di lui, di chiamarmi Domenica" (Ali Farah 2007: 3, 239, 128f.).

[14] La traduzione inglese dell'incipit è "Somali I am" e costituisce il ritornello della poesia *Yamyam* (1977) di Cabdulqaadir Xirsi Siyaad che da un lato allude all'ideologia del regime militare di Siad Barre, dall'altro è correlata con l'infanzia della protagonista e l'inizio della narrazione (cfr. Ali Farah 2007: 272; Gröne 2017: 8).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Comberiati (2011: 120). La protagonista Domenica Axad conferma questo concetto relazionale di identità determinando autonomamente il suo ruolo nel contesto sociale e identificandosi simultaneamente con la diaspora. Metaforicamente, Domenica Axad impersona un filo in espansione per la rete diasporica, "[s]ono il filo sottile, così sottile che si infila e si tende, prolungandosi" (Ali Farah 2007: 1), una traccia della struttura relazionale o dello 'spazio' topologico. Come già menzionato, mette il lavoro di documentarista in relazione all'esperienza diasporica. Attraverso il lavoro con la cinepresa, che unisce frammenti narrativi, così come l'attività della scrittura, che connette diversi fili d'azione, la protagonista supera gradualmente la perdita di sé. Solo quando riesce 'ad intrecciare i fili', così la metafora ricorrente nel romanzo – le tracce della propria identità transculturale e quelle della diaspora –, Domenica Axad è in grado di trovare un equilibrio nella realtà postcoloniale e di 'arrivare' a se stessa tra le cicatrici del passato e le speranze del presente.

I personaggi in *Madre piccola* collocano dunque la loro 'casa' nel movimento, cioè concettualizzano la loro collocazione di sé in uno 'spazio' relazionale determinato da una rete di rapporti interpersonali. Portano con sé i segni di quelle culture, tradizioni, lingue e storie che li hanno plasmati, così come afferma il personaggio Barni nell'epilogo: "La nostra casa la portiamo con noi, la nostra casa può viaggiare. Non sono le pareti rigide che fanno del luogo in cui viviamo una casa" (ibid.: 263). Dopo tanti anni trascorsi nella ricerca di sé stessa, in viaggio per il mondo lungo i percorsi diasporici, Domenica Axad è pronta a rincontrare sua madre e vuole anche mettere al mondo il suo stesso figlio in Italia, paese di sua madre: "[…] voglio che questo figlio nasca qui, terra di mia madre di cui conosco risvolti della memoria, segreti della parola" (ibid.: 135). Quando incontra di nuovo Barni, decidono di formare una famiglia elettiva in cui, in un certo senso, si condivide la maternità di Domenica Axad. Infatti Barni diventa la *habaryar* del neonato: secondo una tradizione somala diventa cioè la sua "madre piccola" ovvero la sua madrina.

Da tutti gli intrecci nelle vite dei personaggi principali, si rivela particolarmente importante il nesso che Domenica Axad aspetta un bambino da Taageere e che Barni di professione fa l'ostetrica. La nascita (l''arrivo') del piccolo Taariikh – in somalo "storia" – sembra intessere

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

un altro filo d'azione nel groviglio delle storie, come se la sua nascita, per così dire, rappresentasse un nuovo nodo dello 'spazio' relazionale o, in altre parole, una svolta della trama nella rete di narrazioni (cfr. Gazzoni 2013: 228). Simile a una storia, in Taariikh confluiscono metaforicamente tanti fili (della trama) prolungandosi oltre le separazioni poste dalla storia, dalla politica, dalla solitudine e dai traumi personali. Come ostetrica Barni sta segnando il principio della vita di Taariikh. Ma esteticamente si rispecchia in questo la *storia* di Domenica Axad, cui principio e divenire sono inseparabilmente legati alla presenza di Barni, "la mia metà che è intera. […] Sono una traccia in quel groviglio e il mio principio appartiene a quello multiplo. Il mio principio è Barni […]" (Ali Farah 2007: 1). Se la scelta del nome di suo padre indica il rinnovamento della sua stessa storia – Taariikh, "perché la storia si rinnovi" (ibid.: 257) – la presenza di Barni a sua volta consente il principio di questa nuova storia. L'arrivo in uno 'spazio' determinato da reti di relazioni emotive sembra rendere possibile un nuovo inizio.

Riassunto

Oltre Babilonia di Igiaba Scego e *Madre piccola* di Ubah Cristina Ali Farah segnavano la narrativa postcoloniale italiana in crescita a partire dal secondo millennio: La trama dei romanzi parte da costellazioni familiari diasporiche ambientate nel contesto storico coloniale e postcoloniale innanzitutto della Somalia e dell'Italia, mettendo in luce però non tanto gli eventi storici, ma piuttosto gli effetti traumatici del colonialismo sui singoli individui sia sul piano fisico che psichico. Indagando tra l'altro il processo di negoziazione delle identità transculturali nell'Italia di oggi, i testi pongono domande su vari aspetti dell''arrivo' nell'contesto della diaspora, argomento preso in esame nel mio contributo. Esperienze di violenza, sentimenti di smarrimento e abbandono segnano i personaggi sia fisicamente che nella loro identità linguistica e personale. Nei romanzi sono elaborate strategie narrative per trasformare i traumi, in altre parole, si assiste al superamento della crisi attraverso la trasformazione di memorie ed esperienze dolorose in una strategia di sopravvivenza. Usando tecniche metanarrative, in *Oltre Babilonia* il ricordo traumatico viene trasformato in narrazione, cioè

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

l'azione del narrare e la stessa lingua diventano lo 'spazio' del divenire. Il processo di espressione attraverso la scrittura per la protagonista ha l'effetto di una trasformazione 'positiva' e con la riappropriata capacità d'agire è in grado di superare il suo trauma personale e di *arrivare* a uno 'spazio' pieno di colori incluso il rosso, il colore perduto e ritrovato, che congiunge metaforicamente la sua storia individuale con le storie di altre donne formando una costellazione di narrazioni intrecciate. Anche in *Madre piccola* i personaggi ricercano modi per elaborare la perdita traumatica del loro ambiente di vita: Vivendo quel distacco dal contesto familiare somalo come profonda lacerazione, la protagonista rischia di perdersi in una crisi malinconica, prima che il movimento spaziale si rivelasse una strategia di sopravvivenza. Nel corso del cammino, si apre uno 'spazio' del divenire in cui gli itinerari e i luoghi di transito rappresentano passaggi verso uno 'spazio' segnato simultaneamente dall'autodeterminazione e dall'intreccio con la diaspora. Componendo i frammenti della sua storia personale, la protagonista racconta anche del suo progetto di un documentario ovvero un testo filmico sulle voci diasporiche e infine, collocandosi in quello 'spazio' di relazioni emotive e narrative, è in grado di elaborare la perdita di sé.

La costellazione di narrazioni in *Oltre Babilonia* e lo 'spazio' determinato da reti di relazioni in *Madre piccola* riflettono come i processi del divenire sono anche collettivi e intersoggettivi in quanto altre persone sono sempre collegate al proprio divenire (cfr. Braidotti 2015: 154). La costellazione o la rete di narrazioni e relazioni è intrecciata dalle protagoniste femminili, accentuando il ruolo stabilizzante delle donne in situazioni instabili come lo è la diaspora. Le loro voci spesso 'inascoltate' si trovano in relazione tra di loro, si raccontano e si fanno ascoltare nella letteratura postcoloniale contemporanea, riaprendo l'archivio della storia dominante ovvero eurocentrica con importanti prospettive critiche.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bibliografia

Ali Farah, Cristina (2007): *Madre piccola*, Milano: Frassinelli.

Augé, Marc (2008): *Non-places. An introduction to supermodernity*, London: Verso.

Babic Williams, Tatjana (2013): "Dismatria. The Quest for a Motherland in Igiaba Scego's Writings", in: Catalina Florina Florescu (ed.): *Disjointed Perspectives on Motherhood*, Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 105-122.

Barbarulli, Clotilde (2012): "Il corpo in scritture migranti", in: *Testo & Senso 13*, in: http://testoesenso.it/article/view/80 (consultato il 10.02.2021).

Braidotti, Rosi (2015): "Nomadische Subjekte", in: Susanne Witzgall/Kerstin Stakemeier (ed.): *Fragile Identitäten*, Zürich/Berlin: diaphanes.

Carroli, Piera (2010): "*Oltre Babilonia*? Postcolonial Female Trajectories towards Nomadic Subjectivity", in: *Italian Studies*, 65(2), pp. 204-218.

Certeau, Michel de (1988): *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

Comberiati, Daniele (2011): "Alterität erzählen: Die Poetik von Cristina Ubax Ali Farah", in: *Zibaldone*, 52, pp. 109-122.

Derobertis, Roberto (2011): "'Holding All the Pieces Together'. Colonial legacies and postcolonial futures in the writings of Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah", in: Annalisa Oboe/Shaul Bassi (ed.): *Experiences of Freedom in Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures*, London/New York: Routledge, pp. 265-274.

Eagleton, Terry (1997): *Einführung in die Literaturtheorie*, Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler.

Farah, Nuruddin (2003): *Yesterday, Tomorrow. Stimmen aus der somalischen Diaspora*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Freud, Sigmund (1999): “Trauer und Melancholie”, in: Anne Freud et al. (ed.): *Gesammelte Werke X. Werke aus den Jahren 1913-1917*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, pp. 428-446.

Gagiano, Annie (2015): “Contemporary Female African Authors Imagining the Postcolonial Nation: Two Examples”, in: Roger Nicholson/Claudia Marquis/Gertrud Szamosi (ed.): *Contested Identities: Literary Negotiations in Time and Place*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 177-195.

Gazzoni, Andrea (2013): “Migrant Storytelling: Trauma, History, Stories and Restoration in Cross-Cultural Literature in Contemporary Italy”, in: Michael Gratzke/Margaret-Anne Hutton/Claire Whitehead (ed.): *Readings in Twenty-First-Century European Literatures*, Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 211-236.

Gnisci, Armando (2003): *Creolizzare l’Europa. Letteratura e migrazione*, Roma: Meltemi.

Gronemann, Claudia (2002): *Postmoderne/Postkoloniale Konzepte der Autobiografie in der französischen und maghrebinischen Literatur. Autofiction – Nouvelle Autobiographie – Double Autobiographie – Aventure du texte*, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms.

Gröne, Maximilian (2017): “Geschichten/Geschichte: Cristina Ali Farahs Roman *Madre piccola*”, in: *Romanische Studien* 7, in: http://blog.romanischestudien.de/cristina-ali-farah-madre-piccola/ (consultato il 10.02.2021).

Hall, Stuart (1999): “Kulturelle Identität und Globalisierung”, in: Karl H. Hörning/Rainer Winter (ed.): *Widerspenstige Kulturen. Cultural Studies als Herausforderung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 393-441.

Hausbacher, Eva (2009): *Poetik der Migration. Transnationale Schreibweisen in der zeitgenössischen russischen Literatur*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Kirchmair, Maria (2017): *Postkoloniale Literatur in Italien. Raum und Bewegung in Erzählungen des Widerständigen*, Bielefeld: transcript.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Kleinert, Susanne (2011/2012): "Memoria postcoloniale e spazio ibrido del soggetto in *Oltre Babilonia* di Igiaba Scego", in: Silvia Contarini/Giuliana Pias/Lucia Quaquarelli (ed.): *Narrativa 33/34: Coloniale e Postcoloniale nella letteratura italiana degli anni 2000*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, pp. 205-214.

Kleinhans, Martha (2013): "Endstation Rom? – Verortungsversuche afroitalienischer Schriftstellerinnen aus Somalia", in: Martha Kleinhans/Richard Schwaderer (ed.): *Transkulturelle italophone Literatur – Letteratura italofona transculturale*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 175-199.

Lombardi-Diop, Cristina/Romeo, Caterina (2012): *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, New York: Palgrave.

Negro, Maria Grazia (2015): *Il mondo, il grido, la parola. La questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana*, Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore.

Reichardt, Dagmar (2013): "Transkulturelle Gewaltaspekte in der zeitgenössischen *scrittura femmile italofona*: Sibhatu, Ali Farah, Ghermandi, Scego", in: Martha Kleinhans/Richard Schwaderer (ed.): *Transkulturelle italophone Literatur – Letteratura italofona transculturale*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 115-137.

Scego, Igiaba (2008): *Oltre Babilonia*, Roma: Donzelli.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Clara Schumann

(Berlin)

Gender Relations and Relational Histories in Léonora Miano's Novels *Tels des astres éteints* and *Ces âmes chagrines*

Abstract

This article tackles gender and intergenerational relations in the novels *Tels des astres éteints* [*Like Estinguished Stars*, 2008] and *Ces âmes chagrines* [*These Troubled Souls*, 2011] by Léonora Miano, currently the most successful francophone female author of Cameroonian origin. Both texts are characterized by a nuanced engagement with migrant masculinities that are situated differently in relation to male-dominated white majority society. These position(ing)s are unpacked using concepts developed by the sociologist R. W. Connell, who differentiates between subordinated and hegemonic forms of masculinity. Furthermore, the article shows how, in the two novels, transatlantic and colonial histories are symbolized through family relations – notably mother-son relationships – and how Miano's use of the trope resembles and differs from manifestations in male-authored African literature and female-authored African American and Caribbean literature. Contrary to interpretations by other researchers, it does not fully endorse a view of Miano as a gender-progressive or 'queer' author.

Léonora Miano is presently one of the best-known and most prolific female authors of African origin on the French literary scene. She has published ten novels as well as a range of publications in other literary genres and has received almost a dozen literary prizes, among them the prestigious *Prix Femina* and the *Goncourt des Lycéens*. Inspired by US American Africana Studies, she is also a theorist of the African diaspora. She adopted the term "Afropéa" to create a transnational space of belonging for Europeans of African descent, who equally define themselves by their European and African or Caribbean heritage (Miano

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

2012: 84). In her fictional and non-fictional works, she bridges the gap between Africans living on the continent and people of African descent scattered in North America, Europe and the Caribbean.

My article focuses on two of the lesser-known of Miano's novels, *Tels des astres éteints* [*Like Extinguished Stars*] and *Ces âmes chagrines* [*These Troubled Souls*], published in 2008 and 2011. *Ces âmes chagrines* was actually the first novel that Miano handed in for publication, but it was only published eight years later because, at the time, her editor believed that books by African authors would only sell if set in Africa (Miano 2016b: 117-118). Whereas the plots of the most prized of Miano's novels such as *Contours du jour qui vient* [*Contours of the Coming Day*, 2006] or *La Saison de l'ombre* [*Season of the Shadow*, 2013] are exclusively played out in Africa, the characters of the novels under study here have immigrated to France and move between Europe and Africa and, in one case, the South American continent. After publishing her "African" trilogy,[1] Miano completed another trilogy by following up on the characters of *Tels des astres éteints* in *Crépuscule du tourment 1 & 2* [*Dusk of the Torment*, 2016a and 2017a], the latter of which are also entirely set in Africa. By contrast, *Ces âmes chagrines* is a self-contained work, and its characters do not reappear in any other works by Miano.

Gender relations have been examined in a number of articles/books on Miano's œuvre (Coly 2014; Jean Charles 2014; Kistnareddy 2019; Laurent 2011; Tang 2014; Unter Ecker 2016), with an entire dossier in the journal *Études littéraires africaines* dedicated to the subject in 2019. The studies highlight the struggle and emancipation of female characters in Africa and the African diaspora, the relationship between mothers and daughters and, more recently, the author's treatment of masculinity. Some of the articles refer to the novel *Tels des astres éteints*, but none take into consideration *Ces âmes chagrines*. Sylvie Laurent's article on Miano and the "third space" (2011) traces African American and Caribbean influences in the author's work and was a productive starting point for my analysis.

[1] Consisting of *L'Intérieur de la nuit* [*Dark Heart of the Night*, 2005], *Contours du jour qui vient* (2006) and *Les Aubes écarlates* [*Dawns of Scarlet*, 2009], see Collini 2012.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

My article will draw on Raewyn Connell's study *Masculinities* (2005 [1995]) to examine the gendered character construction and the engagement with masculinity and femininity in the two novels. These findings will be deepened by criticism of the "Mother Africa Trope" (Stratton 1994) and of the gendered representation of (national) history as a "family drama" (Boehmer 2005: 28) or a "feminist family romance" (Rody 2001: 6), as elaborated by Elleke Boehmer (2005) for African literature and by Caroline Rody (2001) for African American and Caribbean literature.

1. Introducing the two novels

Tels des astres éteints focalizes on three different characters, all in their early thirties, who meet (again) in the city of Paris: Amandla,[2] a woman from French Guiana; Amok, one of the offspring of a bourgeois family in an unspecified sub-Saharan country and Shrapnel, a school friend of Amok's, who, in contrast to Amok, has a rural background and is deeply rooted in local culture. Amandla suffers from the emotional distance of her mother who was abandoned by Amandla's father and since then immersed herself in Afrocentric Rastafari philosophy. Shrapnel never had a mother – he was raised by his grandmother who passes away shortly before the eviction of their village community from their ancestral land. Whereas Amandla and Shrapnel respond to their losses by getting involved in a Pan-African political movement – Shrapnel dreaming of building a cultural center for the African diaspora; Amandla dreaming of "returning" to Africa – Amok feels illegitimate among Black[3] activists because he descends from a collaborator with colonial rule: His

[2] "Amandla" was a rallying cry of the South African anti-apartheid movement and means "power". For a detailed discussion of names and naming in Miano's novel see Etoke (2009).

[3] Here, "Black" refers to the more or less remote Sub-Saharan African descent of individuals, termed "d'ascendance subsaharienne" by Miano. It includes people born on French soil (Miano: "Afropéens") as well as first-generation immigrants from Africa (Miano: "Subsahariens") or the Caribbean. In this article, I use the term "Black" and "Afrodescendant" synonymously. The topicality of these terms stems from the ongoing and sometimes deadly discrimination suffered by Black people in white majority society.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

grandfather had helped France to dismantle an anticolonial independence movement and left an oppressive legacy to his family that articulates itself in the violent misogynous outbursts of Amok's father. Amok retreats to a foreign country because, as his name suggests, he is afraid that the dark force handed down in his family will manifest itself in an act of violence if he sets foot in his home country again.

Ces âmes chagrines tells the conflicted story of a family from a sub-Saharan country named Mboasu (the Douala expression for "at our home") that spans over five generations. The novel focalizes on four characters: the two half-brothers Antoine and Maxime, their mother Thamar, and their grandmother Modi. Antoine and Maxime are constructed as contrasting characters, but they both suffer deeply from maternal neglect. Like Amandla, Thamar was raised by an emotionally reserved mother, who was unable to comfort her daughter after an experience of sexual assault. Consequently, Thamar finds herself in one abusive relationship after another. As for Modi, she never gets over the lost bond with her father, which was broken over her romantic engagement with a freedom fighter whom her father rejected because of his "pagan" background.

The two novels are essentially about the different ways the characters try to come to terms with their painful family history, and, in extension, with the history of their African and Afrodescendant communities. Miano stages family conflict as a means to examine a past that is characterized by violent intrusions and transformations such as slavery and colonization. The author sees African literature ("Littératures" or "Lettres subsahariennes" in her words[4]) as an effort to pay homage to the ancestors that perished in the course of these upheavals and as a way of establishing a lost lineage (Miano 2016a: 25). There are important parallels between Miano's idea of African literature and views of African

[4] In *Habiter la frontière* (2012: 33-57), Miano dismisses the idea of 'African literature' because of its lack of regional specificity, although what she actually deplores is a solely thematic rather than aesthetic critical approach to texts by African authors. She further replaces the designation 'African' by 'sub-Saharan' because 'Africa' was the name given to the continent by European colonizers (Léonora Miano interviewed by Adèle Cailleteau 2020) and because she wants to distinguish the history of sub-Saharan Africa from that of North Africa/the Maghreb. In *L'Impératif transgressif* (2016b), however, the author identifies a mark of style or message of sub-Saharan African literature rooted in the history of slavery and colonization.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

American literature, which saw a rise of historical novels, notably about slavery, from the 1990s onwards. Rody says of the latter historical narratives that "'history' thus acquires the function of communal 'talking cure': its characters, author and readers delve into the past, repeating painful stories to work toward the health of fuller awareness" (2001: 26). This therapeutic function is also present in Miano's texts.

What distinguishes *Tels des astres éteints*, its successors *Crépuscule du tourment 1 & 2* (which focus on Amok and his relations to a number of women) and *Ces âmes chagrines* from Miano's other novels is that there she puts male *and* female characters at the center of the texts, and that, on the whole, the perspectives of male characters even outweigh those of female ones; the three novels share an elaborate and nuanced engagement with masculinity. This engagement culminated in Miano's anthology *Marianne et le garçon noir* (2017b), where different writers and artists discuss the Black male experience in France. The focus on masculine identities also distinguishes the novels from the historical novels of African American and Caribbean female writers analyzed by Rody, to which my article will continue to refer. Rody contends that, in this body of literature, "history is reimagined in the form of a romance: the romance of a returning daughter and a figure I call the mother-of-history" (2001: 3). In the novels under study here, it is not only daughters but mainly sons who return to complicated mother-child as well as father-child relationships.

In African literature, the representation of national history often follows a similar pattern: According to Boehmer, in texts by male writers of the 1928 generation, "[t]he nation as a body of people was imagined as a family arrangement in which the leaders had the authority of fathers and, in relation to the maternal national entity, adopted the position of sons" (Boehmer 2005: 34). The metaphorization of the nation as a mother has a long tradition in African literature and has been challenged by female writers and critics (Lee 1987; Stratton 1994; Boehmer 2005). Like their Caribbean and African American counterparts, some female African writers, such as Calixthe Beyala or Tsitsi Dangarembga, object to the invisibility of the daughter figure in the national family arrangement by focusing on her character and perspective (Boehmer 2005: 106-107). The novels by Miano under study here differ from this feminist current by primarily delving into and thus

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

deconstructing concepts of masculinity. I argue that the occasion for this shift is the destabilization – the crumbling of the façade – of habitual constructions of masculinity in the process of migration.

In *Tels des astres éteints*, the perspectives of the characters Amandla, Amok and Shrapnel are accorded approximately the same amount of narrative time. Apart from a short prologue ("Intro") and a short epilogue ("Outro"), narrated by an unnamed first-person narrator, the novel is told by a third-person subjective and limited narrator, who continually shifts from the perspective of one character to that of another. However, the character the narration momentarily focuses on reflects not only about her- or himself but often about one of the other character's behavior and motives as well. Additionally, a number of situations are (re)told from the perspective of different characters, a technique that Miano continues to exploit in the sequels to *Tels des astres éteints*, *Crépuscule du tourment 1 & 2*. As a result, we get a very balanced picture of the self- and outside perception of each of the characters but without the authoritative air of an omniscient third-person narrator. Simultaneously, however, the novel's ample use of free indirect speech tends to blur the boundaries between a character's thoughts and what another character might think are her or his thoughts. This literary device hints to a certain permeability of the subject, who is never fully distinct from the people around her/him and exists to a large extent in and through the perception of others. Miano's narrative choices reveal a skepticism towards singular authoritative discourses and ideological explanations of the world and, conversely, foreground plurality and the relativity of human experience. In this sense, Miano can be seen as a postmodern author. However, this technique, if not perfectly equilibrated, runs the risk of leaving problematic stances of certain characters as they are. Unless we simply assume that Miano was not sufficiently conscious of gender issues at the time she wrote the novel, we must conclude that the narrative procedure described above leaves certain sexist conceptions in *Tels des astres éteints* unchallenged (see the example referred to below).

As in *Tels des astres éteints*, in *Ces âmes chagrines*, the third-person subjective and limited narrator who switches from the perspective of one character to another prevails. But whereas, in the former novel, the characters' voices are treated equally, the latter features one main

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

character – Antoine – whose point of view significantly outweighs those of the others. The history and thoughts of Modi and Maxime are dealt with at approximately the same length, while the focal perspective of Thamar takes up the least space in the book. The use of free indirect speech is less frequent, and the perspectives of the different characters are more distinct. At the beginning of the novel, directly after the "Intro", we briefly deal with a narrator who appears as an entity apart from the character, and who analyzes the characters' behaviors and addresses her-/himself to the reader. It is a 'hospitable' voice that draws the reader into the world of Antoine and creates a sympathetic distance to the main character's thoughts and actions. However, this independent narrative voice is soon effaced by a non-interfering narration that closely follows one character's actions and thoughts at a time. On the whole, the rest of the narration is more conventional than that in *Tel des astres éteints*.

2. A focus on masculinities

It is useful to approach Miano's construction of male characters with Raewyn Connell's theory of masculinities, as developed in her book of the same title (2005 [1995]). Connell sees masculinity as a set of social practices that is related to a person's body but not in a fixed or unchangeable way. Men distinguish themselves from one another by performing different types of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is the model that has the greatest power and attraction at a certain point in history. In the Global North today, it might be the competitive and goal-oriented masculinity embodied by managers working for big transnational companies, or the "geeky" masculinity acquired by technical expertise. On the other side, we have accomplice and subordinate masculinities. Subordinate, or marginalized masculinities benefit only to a limited extent from what Connell calls the "patriarchal dividend" (ibid.: 79). Given their minority status in European society, the masculinity of Black men can be considered marginalized. In reaction, the members of the Afrocentric brotherhood in *Tels des astres éteints* perform a "protest masculinity" (Connell 2005 [1995]: 109-112) that places itself in constant opposition to European society. As discussed below, however, what appears as protest masculinity in relation to a majority society can

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

exert power over members of a social sub-group, in this case the Black (migrant) community.

Aggressive forms of masculinity are also at the root of the family conflicts set out in the two novels. In both cases, these are associated with colonial intrusion. Amok's grandfather represents a form of militaristic masculinity molded by the former colonial power. He embodies complete autonomy, often an ideal of masculinity. In Amok's words, "[i]l semblait s'être forgé tout seul" (Miano 2008: 46). Amok's grandfather is revered as the one who had made the family name great, and his phallus in the form of his old rifles is still kept under the parents' bed. In *Ces âmes chagrines*, the rigor of the Protestant pastor Masoma, Modi's father, prevents him from reconciling with his daughter who had previously run away with a member of an anticolonial combat unit. The abusive relationship with a Frenchman in which Thamar gets trapped is a metonymy for the European exploitation of Africa – imagined as a female body – because Pierre is actually involved in criminal commercial activities on the African continent.

As Black men living in France, Miano's male characters are confined to a dominated model of masculinity. As first, and in one case second, generation migrants, they also face cultural expectations from both their adopted country and their country of origin. Miano maps out different ways in which men may react to marginalization and conflicting ideals of masculinity. Some of these masculine identities turn out to be more viable than others. In *Marianne et le garçon noir*, Miano wonders if Black men that are continually exposed to racism can be enabled or enable themselves to adopt new and liberating forms of masculinity (2017b: 27).

The "African" ideal of masculinity that emerges from the characters' voices of the two novels is that of a heterosexual, strong, either aggressive or very self-disciplined man who is able to protect and provide for his family. When Amok is sent to France to study, he seems to "freeze" most elements of his masculine identity. He never returns to his home country and decides not to have a family. He does not work to further his career, only to earn enough to be able to sustain himself, and thus refuses to comply with either European or African norms of masculinity. He is an individualist and could be said to reject the notion of identity altogether. The individualism of European society and the

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

anonymity of Paris provide good conditions for Amok's strategy of withdrawal. Shrapnel criticizes his friend Amok for being anything but a 'real Black man'. In contrast to Amok, Shrapnel, who is a former *sans-papier*, works hard to restore his manhood. He does not have a degree or a career to boast of, so recognition by the white majority society is unattainable for him. Instead, he seeks recognition by men of the Black community. However, he also depends on recognition by white women. As Susanne Gehrmann points out in relation to Simon Njami's protagonist in *African Gigolo* (1989), Shrapnel needs the white woman as the Other who can affirm his being in the world (Gehrmann 2009: 148). Shrapnel seems trapped: On the one hand, he feels incapable of living up to the demands of Black women, who often look for a male provider. On the other hand, his white girlfriends reproduce racist patterns by asking for little else than his masculine physical presence.

At the end of the novel, Shrapnel dies unexpectedly. For Ayo Coly, Shrapnel's destiny stands for Miano's dismissal of the collective identity politics the character represents:

> That Miano has Shrapnel die unexpectedly and mysteriously (a way of expelling him from the Afropean narrative the novel is crafting and maybe signalling the non-usability of his paradigm of identity), while Amok, who throughout the novel is the object of failed identitarian rescue attempts by Amandla and Shrapnel, lives on, is an important cue. The narrative destinies of Miano's characters reveal her standpoint on identity and projects of collective identity. (Coly 2014: 163)

Other critics agree that Amok's troubled masculine identity is showcased by Miano as a promising site of new beginnings and alternative masculinities (Kistnareddy 2019; Murray 2019; Unter Ecker 2019). However, I disagree that Amok's evasive identity is presented as a viable counterexample. Amok survives, but, as will be explained in more detail below, he suppresses his desires and does not achieve personal happiness.

While the general mood in *Tel des astres éteints* remains rather gloomy, there is a glimpse of hope in *Ces âmes chagrines*. In the latter novel, Miano again juxtaposes two male characters: the half-brothers Maxime and Antoine. Their cultural background is relatively clearly defined as that of the Sawa people of Cameroon, who live in the coastal

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

regions around Douala. The Sawa or Douala are traditionally characterized by patrilineality and patrilocality, and they functioned as important 'middlemen' during the times of colonial rule (Clignet/Sween 1970; Austen 1999). The explicitness and sometimes affection with which Miano refers to her own cultural background (she was born and raised in Douala) in this early (in terms of attempted, not actual, publication) novel disappears in her later work.

Maxime comes very close to the ideal of African masculinity described above. He is the eldest brother, and as such he is expected to provide for and protect the entire family. He is supposed to accept this role without complaining. He only comes to France to improve his education and moves back to Africa on the first occasion. Maxime embraces the values of his culture of origin and tries to maintain the masculine role assigned to him. However, at the end of the novel it turns out that he lacks the necessary emotional resources to do this.

Maxime's and Antoine's grandmother, Modi, was unable to emotionally commit herself to her daughter Thamar because of her sense of guilt towards her father. Thamar is repeatedly sexually abused and unable to take care of her children. Understandably, she is particularly distant towards her son Maxime who was conceived as the result of rape. When Thamar dies and Maxime's hope for maternal love is finally shattered, he breaks down. He stops speaking and behaves like a small child, thus symbolically returning to the belly of his mother.

> Lorsqu'ils étaient arrivés chez le pasteur Penda, sa grand-mère et lui, Maxime n'était plus capable de dire un mot, son langage se limitant dorénavant à un babil de nouveau-né. Il avait tant régressé en une journée, qu'il n'y avait plus à conjecturer sur l'aboutissement du processus. Max était en train de retourner dans le ventre de sa mère, pour renaître de nouveau, dans une autre dimension […]. (Miano 2011: 260)

In terms of culture and gender, Antoine is a more hybrid character. As opposed to Maxime, Antoine was born and grew up in France. Of his annual summer vacations in Africa, he has only the bleakest memories. His fashion style seems inspired by various local and/or transnational trends: His taste for extravagant clothes can be considered characteristic

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

of the Douala,[5] or as part of a Paris-based metrosexual lifestyle. It also reminds us of the Congolese subculture *La Sape*, which has historically been oriented towards the colonial metropole (De Jong 2018: 113). The *Sape* (*Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*) has its origins in the beginning of the 20th century, when African employees in Kinshasa and Brazzaville began to imitate their white superiors' style of clothing. Through their sense of fashion, they partook in the colonialists' prestige and distanced themselves from other Africans (Estournel 2018: 571).

Like Amok, Antoine does not identify as an African and is skeptical of the idea of fixed identities in general. He has no illusions about the prospects of Black men in French society, and so abandons his career as an architect. Instead, he puts his physical attractiveness and minority status to use and becomes a successful model first, then a star in a television series. Of all the male characters discussed, Antoine is the most successful in adapting to the demands of individualist European society. Antoine puts his personal interests first and is not concerned with family obligations. His pragmatic approach to identity makes it easier for him to struggle along in the Parisian fashion scene. Also, of all the male characters discussed, Antoine is the only one who finds personal happiness. His pragmatism makes it easier for him to forgive himself and others for their mistakes. At the end of the narrated events, he is able to make peace with his painful past.

This pragmatic approach is alien to the character Amandla, who draws her strength from her Rastafari-inspired Pan-African beliefs. In her opinion, in French society Black women are, at least superficially, advantaged over Black men. Whereas Black men are considered a menace to white men's (sexual) potency, Black women are exhibited as evidence of the latter's conquests:

> Ces femmes kémites [Black/Afrodescendant, see footnote 6] qu'on en soupçonnait pas d'en avoir une plus grosse, ne menaçaient en rien le patriarcat nordiste. Au contraire, elles étaient ses trophées. On les avait ravies à leurs hommes, incapables en ce territoire de leur proposer des aires d'épanouissement individuel. Aveuglées par la quête de leur propre réussite,

[5] "Sur ce, il sortit comme un homme, un vrai. Un authentique côtier du Mboasu, pour lequel goujaterie et virilité étaient synonymes" (Miano 2011: 24).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> elles laissaient Babylone jouer un nouveau jeu : la femme kémite contre son homme. Plus elles étaient libres, moins leurs hommes l'étaient. (Miano 2008: 101)

In Amandla's mindset, Black women are able to gain relative freedom only through a white male patron, and only at the expense of Black men. The agency of Black women is thus significantly diminished or marked as illusory. They can either choose to remain a plaything of white supremacy, or work towards the reconstruction of Black male masculinity. It is further suggested that personal fulfilment is something Black women achieve with the help of men rather than by themselves.

Shrapnel has an analogous sexist perception of white women. He sees them as victims of white male oppression and therefore as white men's possession. It follows for him that they are innocent of the crimes white men have committed against humanity, and he makes it a point of honor to 'kidnap' ("kidnapper", ibid.: 116) them from the enemy's camp.

Whereas Shrapnel imagines enslaved Africans as exclusively male ("Ils avaient une terre, une fiancée, des rêves. Ils étaient des hommes", ibid.: 172), Amok empathizes with the enslaved woman, although with limited success:

> Aucune *sœur* [a female member of the Afrocentric brotherhood] n'éprouverait la terreur de la femme ravie aux siens pour satisfaire les caprices du colon. Aucune ne pouvait imaginer le sentiment de souillure après qu'un homme incirconcis vous avait prise. S'il n'était pas circoncis, c'était un enfant. On n'était pas pédophile. C'était un crime. (Ibid.: 208; emphasis in the original)

In a strange reversal of the roles of victim and aggressor, Amok implies that the trauma of raped colonized women derived primarily from the existence of the perpetrator's prepuce rather than the assault itself. Disconcertingly, his sexist stance remains uncontested in the narrative.

On the other side, minor Black women characters, such as Shale, a friend of Amandla's (who also appears in Miano's novel *Blues pour Élise*, 2010), and Ixora, the mother of Shrapnel's son, have an exaggerated and generalizing negative perception of Black men. In their eyes, Black men have become exactly what white racist discourse has always

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

said them to be: "violents, lâches, insensibles, paresseux, irresponsables […] des étalons, des sapeurs, des voyous, des *ambianceurs* […]" (Miano 2008: 105-6, 321; emphasis in the original).

It accounts for the gloominess of the novel that all characters remain 'imprisoned' in their mental framework. They do not manage to overcome personal grievances and continue to nurture a certain self-hatred that also makes it difficult for them to openly approach others. As migrants or children of migrants, they are caught between gendered expectations of their culture of origin and their culture of adoption. However, these expectations are inflected by racist images and practices that circulate(d) in colonial discourse as well as in contemporary French society. In the postmigrant context evoked by Miano, some characters even claim that racism has the power to reverse gender relations between Black men and women. Because, in the novels discussed here, Miano wishes to do justice to the particular position of Black men in French society, she privileges the negotiation of masculinity over a careful engagement with femininity. Significantly, only the 'Afropean' second-generation migrant Antoine is able to successfully negotiate his personal trauma and masculinity.

3. Relational histories

In her literary works as well as in her lectures on literary theory, Léonora Miano aims to symbolically bridge the gap between the historical experience of Africans and the African diaspora. In her opinion, Africans and Afrodescendants need to revisit the injuries of the past in order to achieve an integrated and appreciative sense of self (Miano 2016b: 9-38). For Miano, the founding trauma in African/Afrodescendant history is the crime of slavery, or 'transatlantic deportation' (ibid.: 141), to use the term that she prefers. Colonization also indelibly destabilized African societies and later caused and still causes many Africans to come to Europe to 'grab their piece of the cake'.

Through the character Amandla, the feelings of loss over a broken African lineage as well as a social hierarchy based on color are addressed as effects of slavery on Caribbean societies. The complicity of Africans in the enslavement and oppression of other Africans is brought

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

up by the figure of Amok's grandfather, who helped to crush an independence movement, and by the figure of Antoine's and Maxime's great-grandfather, a pastor who despises other Africans for not devoting themselves (solely) to the God of Christianity. Forms of everyday racism and the French Republic's ambivalent attitude towards its black population are discussed throughout the novels.

In many cases, these painful historical experiences are rendered through gendered images and metaphorized through parent-child relationships. Several critics point out the repressive implications of the "Mother Africa Trope", which positions women as objects rather than "subject[s] of literary texts and of national visions" (Stratton 1994: 54; see also Boehmer 2005; Lee 1987). According to these critics, African female authors consciously reject or modify the trope. For the case of Caribbean literature, Rody gives multiple examples of female writers adopting and altering the allegory of the "mother-(is)land" (Rody 2001: 123). Hereafter, I will comment on how Miano merges woman and land to appropriate the male literary tradition.

In the prologue and epilogue to *Tels des astres éteints*, an unnamed narrator addresses 'us', that is 'Mother Africa', 'Terre Mère', in the second person singular. On these ten pages, Miano's thoughts on the signifier that is Africa and what it means to be Black are spread out in a particularly condensed way. The prologue's and epilogue's narrator in fact continues the male tradition that imagines the African continent as a feminine and maternal figure. However, the tradition is revised, not by declaring Africa a fiction, a signifier without a signified, but by posing 'her' as an estranged and misconceived figure:

> […] la terre qui n'existe pas […] le creux dans lequel tous projettent leur néant. Ils te rêvent de loin, se créent en toi un espace à dominer, à sublimer […] à sauver. Aucun ne saisit véritablement ton épaisseur, ta densité. Pas même tes enfants. Ils ne savent plus que tu vis. Que tu as tes propres désirs, tes rêves à toi aussi, inlassablement effacés derrière la figure qu'ils t'ont construite. (Ibid.: 13)

The narrative voice regrets that Africans and Afrodescendants have been trapped in their skin color through their traumatic history. S/he hopes that someday, 'Black' people will be able to overcome their pain, to reinvent themselves and strip themselves of the meaning of the color

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

of their skin. "Terre Mère" embodies the wish for a matured self-awareness freed from the identitarian constraints imposed by others (skin color) and is vaguely and uncertainly associated with the pre-colonial African continent. This wish is personified in a remote, timidly hopeful mother awaiting the return of her wandering children.

From the male migrant perspective in *Tels des astres éteints*, Africa is imagined as a distant mother as well as a distant lover: "Le pays, c'était comme la femme d'un autre. On pouvait la toucher un peu. Jamais la posséder" (Miano 2008: 44). Both images, that of the waiting mother and the restrictedly available lover, express the emigrants' nostalgic longing for their lost homeland.

In turn, Europe or France are represented both as a young woman – again an object of male desire – and as a father who casts out his illegitimate Black (male) children. Shrapnel's disillusionment with European society is depicted in the following terms: "['Le Nord'/l'Europe] était comme une fille superbe, vêtue d'une robe à paillettes, mais dont les dessous puaient" (ibid.: 146). The Afrocentric brotherhood Amandla and Shrapnel sympathize with is analyzed by Amok as being deeply preoccupied with a hostile 'white father':

> Ces fils-là ne voulaient plus être reconnus de leur géniteur. Ils voulaient seulement hurler leur refus désormais de porter le nom du père […]. Puisqu'on n'hériterait ni de son pouvoir ni de ses biens, on serait pour quelque chose dans ses attaques cardiaques. (Ibid.: 206-7)

Although the *Fraternité atonienne* showcases female activists such as Amandla, its rhetorical rants against powerful white men, interracial relationships and homosexuality reveal a problematic patriarchal and homophobic worldview.

Amandla volunteers in the brotherhood without, however, sharing all their ideas. Whereas the organization's activities and anger focus on France, for her, the only solution for the liberation of people of African ancestry is the physical return to Africa. Conversely, she sees the returnees as an asset for the economic and political liberation of the African continent. Kistnareddy critically comments on Amandla's fixed idea to unite with an authentic "Bantu" man to restore her genealogy. She suggests that, in Amandla's Back-to-Africa vision, "the Black man

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

becomes a breeder, just as in erstwhile slavery periods where his capacity to procreate was needed along as [*sic*] his physical resilience in the fields" (Kistnareddy 2019: 6). The text makes it clear, however, that the intimate reason for Amandla's wish to emigrate to Africa is to symbolically re-unite with her mother, whose only gift to her daughter was the transmission of her Rastafarian beliefs. Paradoxically, Amandla can imagine a mother-daughter reunion only in a symbolic realm on a continent far away from her country of birth:

> Il y avait longtemps qu'elle n'avait pas mis les pieds sur sa côte natale, parce qu'il était toujours si difficile de quitter sa mère. Si elle y retournait, elle ne verrait pas Kemet,[6] ne toucherait jamais le monde intérieur d'Aligossi. (Miano 2008: 342)

In Amandla's and her mother Aligossi's Pan-African philosophical framework, the wish for harmonized gender relations in the Black community plays a pivotal role. Aligossi believes that patriarchy was imported to Africa by European intruders. In her eyes, Black/African men have been tempted by white men to imitate their patriarchal world view. Instead of criticizing them, Aligossi tells her daughter to show understanding for their mistake and to help them rebuild themselves and regain their manhood. Aligossi's and Amandla's conception assigns different social roles to men and women: women are considered the directing, thinking center of the universe, which men are supposed to serve with their physical strength, but women are also imagined as nurturing companions that 'prepare their wounded male soldiers for battle' (ibid.: 339). The heterosexual family is considered the pillar of the emerging Afrocentric society.

What is interesting here is that the condition of alienation is assigned exclusively to Black men, not to Black women. Whereas Black men get psychologically harmed by their marginalized social position, Black women are supposed to be above such things. They should be able to analyze what is happening and come to the men's rescue, even

[6] 'Kemet' is a term from the ancient Egyptian language designating the fertile land in the Nile delta. Afrocentrists assume a cultural continuity from Ancient Egypt to large parts of contemporary Africa and subsume the African continent under the name 'Kemet' (see Asante 2018).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

if these very men do not accept them as equals. Throughout the novel, Black women are portrayed as particularly pragmatic and straightforward. Shrapnel laments that Black women only engage in romantic relations if their partner is financially stable. After his death, Shrapnel's soul lingers somewhere between heaven and earth, in the "Purgatoire des Noirs" (Miano 2008: 379), where he finds only men. He is told that all these men have been unable to let go of their previous lives and unfulfilled tasks, whereas Black women do not hesitate to leave all that behind in order to enter a new dimension. Even though it is revealed that Amandla sometimes resorts to binge eating when feeling lonely, she remains remarkably firm on her convictions and is determined to go through with her plan to resettle in Africa. In my opinion, male characters in *Tels des astres éteints*, especially Amok, are depicted with greater psychological depth than female characters. The female characters remain to a certain extent opaque, and female subjectivity seems in some aspects like a blank space. This blank space also appears in the mysterious figure of "Terre Mère" that I have discussed above, and of which the narrator is not sure if she has been misjudged or simply does not exist.

In *Ces âmes chagrines*, Miano deals with this uneasiness towards female subjectivity by introducing an ambiguously gendered male protagonist. Antoine loves extravagant clothes and spends a significant amount of his time on personal hygiene. He has a penchant for binge eating but does not like sports, and resorts to cosmetic surgery instead. His sexual desire is directed at women with an immature and boyish appearance who display as few maternal attributes as possible. However, Antoine as a character is not altogether convincing: on the one hand his treatment of women is largely instrumental, on the other he is able to accurately detect instances of misogynous behavior. In some ways, Antoine seems like the author's double. His hybridity coincides with Miano's own personal freedom concerning her gender identity, offered to her by her father's unconditional love:

> Je viens de me rendre compte, à plus de 40 ans, que je suis une femme ! Comme mon père était très libéral et que nous étions proches, je savais

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> bien que j'étais une fille mais ça n'avait pas plus de signification que ça ! Je ne me sentais pas proche de la féminité classique. (Miano/Tabapsi 2017: 3)

Antoine further thinks about abandoning the art of performing for the art of writing or painting, whereas Miano turned from music to writing.

4. Hostile fathers, alienated mothers and nurturing grandmothers

The representation of parent-child relationships in *Tels des astres éteints* and *Ces âmes chagrines* shares a number of characteristics with the novels by Caribbean women writers analyzed by Rody (2001). The father figures are all aligned with the white European and colonial father, who does not embrace his 'illegitimate' Black children: the military collaborator and his violent son; Amok's father, the Protestant pastor Masoma; Amandla's light-skinned father, who abandons Aligossi and Thamar's bourgeois lover, who abandons her during their holiday in France. It is the mother figures who are associated with the (lost) African homeland and are expected to reconnect their children with the ancestral past. As it is a past filled with traumatic and degrading experiences, it comes as no surprise that the mother figures who embody this past turn out to be highly problematic.

The mothers of the two novels are all characterized by their absence: either they are emotionally inaccessible or have never been around in the first place. Both Modi's and Shrapnel's mothers have died or were gone for other reasons shortly after their children were born. Amandla's mother leads a reclusive life, has an eating disorder and thus never shares meals with her daughter. Amok's mother silently endures the extreme violence inflicted on her by her husband, forbids her children to cry on her behalf and, for her part, beats her son in order to make him a 'real man'. Kistnareddy comments that "[s]ymbolically, Amok's father could also represent the old French regime and his mother, enduring Africa" (2019: 7). Thamar is raped twice as a girl and is unable to love the children born out of these rapes. For a few years, she manages to care for Antoine, whose father she actually loved, but once in a new relationship, she pushes him away to please her possessive lover.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Modi is unable to show her affection to Thamar, a failure she tries to compensate for by selflessly raising Thamar's rejected children. Additionally, Modi is connected to the resistance fighter Kingué, Thamar's father, and at some point, she refuses to read books and to speak the language of the former colonizer. So at least for her grandchildren, she is a solid and comforting pillar of the family and represents the cultural independence of the subjugated African societies.

In male-authored African literature of the 1950s and 60s, mothers are often represented either as "pillars of tradition" and "guardian[s] of ancestral customs and mores" (Lee 1987: 141) – precolonial 'untainted' Africa –, or as "submissive, betrayed and oppressed" (ibid.: 142) – colonized, 'violated' and compromised Africa. The mother symbolizes the national territory or the African continent that male anticolonial freedom fighters must return to and liberate. In reaction to this Janus-faced mythical mother figure, numerous female authors tend to write about the repercussions of male dominance in the private sphere – the problems of 'real' mothers. Others, such as Calixthe Beyala or Miano in *Contours du jour qui vient* (2006), challenge the imperative to bear children and/or stage mother-daughter instead of mother-son relationships, where 'patriarchal mothers' (Gallimore 1997: 11; see also Asaah 2014; Coste 2019) hamper their daughters' emancipations.

In the Caribbean context, the reclaiming of history by members of the (formerly) oppressed part of the population is an emancipatory, but also highly ambivalent, endeavor because it entails reclaiming "a history of disaster and disempowerment" (Rody 2001: 120). If mothers are equated with the homeland or ancestral communities, they turn out to be very ambivalent figures: On the one hand, they are supposed to be "bearers of culture, connected to the land, idealized objects"; on the other, the mother "has been compromised by colonial history" (ibid.: 120-121). As she depended on complicity with white patriarchy for her survival, she is, in the most derogatory sense, "the white master's whore" (ibid.). Many texts by Caribbean female writers 'solve' this problem by separating the compromised, alienated mother figure from the comforting, authentic mother by one generation: the mothers of the protagonists are represented as bad mothers, whereas their grandmothers embody pure motherliness, and are additionally often associated with mythical figures or resistance fighters (ibid.).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Miano says of herself that she has been influenced by African American and Caribbean, rather than African, literature (Miano 2012: 9-23). Concerning the representation of national history as a family drama/romance, however, the similarities between the different corpora are obvious. In the two novels under study here, we can discern a similar understanding of history to the one set out by Rody for the case of Caribbean women's writing. Whereas women characters from the middle generation such as Aligossi, Thamar and Amok's mother are portrayed as conflicted, emotionally distant and/or complicit in phallocratic authority, Shrapnel's grandmother and Modi share a number of attributes of the 'good' Caribbean mother. Shrapnel's grandmother is symbolically linked to a sacred tree that decays shortly after her own death and the forced relocation of their village. Modi, although far from being an infallible character, is the source of affection and security for her grandsons.

However, in contrast to Caribbean women's writing, the two novels by Miano engage mostly with mother-son rather than mother-daughter relationships. The reason for this might be the lack of identification with female subjectivity I have already mapped out in this article, a result supported by statements of the author herself when she claims that she had not identified as a woman until past the age of 40. However, Miano's approach is also an effort to do justice to the particular position of Black men in European white majority society. The novels by Miano that are set in Africa do not express a comparable sympathetic concern with men's identity struggles because, in the African societies therein described, Black men do not find themselves in a marginal position. It is a paradox of patriarchal societies that boys tend to be nurtured and cared for by feminine figures only, and later learn how to disavow this affectionate, 'feminine' part of themselves. What Miano suggests, or hopes for, is that the experience of (migrant) Black men in white majority societies, i.e., the relative absence of male privilege, has the potential of opening up alternative ways of shaping their masculinities. While in the case of Shrapnel and Amok, we are left to witness their tribulations, Miano gives form to this emancipatory hope by creating the prototypically Afropean figure Antoine, who is the one to improvise most freely his identity and masculinity.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Works Cited

Asaah, Augustine (2014): "La dialectique lutte/paix ou le rapport mère/fille dans *Contours du jour qui vient* de Léonora Miano", in: Alice Delphine Tang (ed.): *L'Œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano: Fiction, mémoire et enjeux identitaires*, Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 189-203.

Asante, Molefi K. (2018): "Meeting Cheikh Anta Diop on the Road to African Resurgence", in: *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, 13(1), p. 4-15.

Austen, Ralph A. (1999): *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and their Hinterland, c. 1600c.-c. 1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boehmer, Elleke (2005): *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, Manchester/Berlin: Manchester University Press.

Clignet, Remi/Sween, Joyce (1970): "Traditionelle und moderne Lebensstile in Afrika", in: Günther Lüschen//Eugen Lupri (eds.): *Soziologie der Familie*, Wiesbaden: Springer, p. 285-322.

Collini, Maria Benedetta (2012): "Le cri, le silence, la parole: La trilogie africaine de Léonora Miano", in: *Ponti/Ponts: Langues Littératures Civilisations des Pays Francophones*, 12, p. 29-49.

Coly, Ayo (2014): "Afropean Masculinities as bricolage", in: Nicki Hitchcott/Dominic Thomas (eds.): *Francophone Afropean Literatures*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, p. 155-170.

Connell, R. W (2005 [1995]): *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Coste, Marion (2019): "Les mauvaises mères dans *Femme nue, femme noire* de Calixthe Beyala et *Contours du jour qui vient* de Léonora Miano", in: *Études littéraires africaines*, 47, p. 67-83.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

De Jong, Nanette (2018): "Displays of Masculinity and Rituals of Display: Congolese Immigration and Xenophobia in Johannesburg", in: *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 31(2), p. 106-118.

Estournel, Nicolas (2018): "Alain Mabanckou and the Sense of SAPE: Self-Creation on the Surface", in: *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 22(5), p. 571-578.

Etoke, Nathalie (2009): "L'Onomastique comme poétique de la (dé)construction identitaire dans *Tels des astres éteints* de Léonora Miano", in: *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 12(4), p. 613-638.

Gallimore, Rangira Béatrice (1997): *L'Œuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala: Le renouveau de l'écriture féminine en Afrique francophone sub-saharienne*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Gehrmann, Susanne (2009): "Black Masculinity, Migration and Psychological Crisis: A Reading of Simon Njami's African Gigolo", in: *Matatu*, 36, p. 141-155.

Jean Charles, Régine Michelle (2014): "Rethinking Paradox: Performing the Politics of Gender, Race, and Belonging in Léonora Miano's 'Écrits pour la parole'", in: *Journal of Romance Studies*, 14(1): p. 73-89.

Kistnareddy, Ashwiny O. (2019): "'Le pays, c'était comme la femme d'un autre': Reconceptualising West African Migrant Masculinity in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and Léonora Miano's *Tels des astres éteints*", in: *Itinéraires [Online]*, 1, DOI: 10.4000/itineraires.6086.

Laurent, Sylvie (2011): "Le 'Tiers-espace' de Léonora Miano romancière afropéenne", in: *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 51(204), p. 769-810.

Lee, Sonia (1987): "Changes in the Mother Image in West African Fiction", in: *Neohelicon*, 14(2), p. 139-150.

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

– (2006): *Contours du jour qui vient*, Paris: Plon.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

– (2008): *Tels des astres éteints*, Paris: Plon.

– (2009): *Les Aubes écarlates*, Paris: Plon.

– (2010): *Blues pour Élise*, Paris: Plon.

– (2011): *Ces âmes chagrines*, Paris: Plon.

– (2012): *Habiter la frontière*, Paris: L'Arche.

– (2013): *La Saison de l'ombre*, Paris: Grasset.

– (2016a): *Crépuscule du tourment 1. Melancholy*, Paris: Grasset.

– (2016b): *L'Impératif transgressif*, Paris: L'Arche.

– (2017a): *Crépuscule du tourment 2. Héritage*, Paris: Grasset.

– (ed.) (2017b): *Marianne et le garçon noir*, Paris: Pauvert.

Miano, Léonora/Tabapsi, Parfait (2017): "L'écriture, le jazz, l'esclavage et moi!", Interview, in: *Mosaïques*, 1, p. 2-3.

Miano, Léonora/Cailleteau, Adèle (2020): "L'unité de l'Afrique est un rêve", in: *Informationszentrum 3. Welt*, 377, in: https://www.iz3w.org/zeitschrift/ausgaben/377_mode/miano_original (accessed 24.09.2020).

Murray, Thomas (2019): "La masculinité à travers l'Atlantique: enjeux identitaires et musicaux dans *Crépuscule du tourment 1* et *2* de Léonora Miano", in: *Études littéraires africaines*, 47, p. 147-162.

Njami, Simon (1989): *African Gigolo*. Paris: Seghers.

Rody, Caroline (2001): *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stratton, Florence (1994): "The Mother Africa Trope", in: *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, London/New York: Routledge, p. 39-55.

Tang, Alice Delphine (2014): *L'Œuvre romanesque de Léonora Miano. Fiction, mémoire et enjeux identitaires*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Unter Ecker, Marjolaine (2016): *Questions identitaires dans les récits afropéens de Léonora Miano*, Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi.

– (2019): "Léonora Miano et Virginie Despentes: lectures croisées des masculinités 'désaxées'", in: *Études littéraires africaines*, 47, p. 131-146.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Simonetta Puleio / Stephanie Neu-Wendel

(Stuttgart/Mannheim)

Intervista a Kaha Mohamed Aden

Abstract

In the following conversation, Kaha Mohamed Aden – writer, playwright, and scholar explains her relationship with what she describes as both her homes, Mogadishu and Pavia, where she has been living since 1987. Through writing in Italian – a language she also perceives as another home –, she aims at reconciling both entities to form a new "living space". Linked to the subject of "casa"/home" are Aden's memories of Mogadishu, now destroyed by the civil war and the war between different clans – a topic particularly important to her since her father, Mohamed Aden Sheikh, was imprisoned for several years as an opponent of Siad Barre's regime. With reference to the collection of (in part autobiographical) short stories *Fra-intendimenti*, published in 2010, the author focuses on Somalia's past (also with regard to the critical periods of Italy's colonialism and its trusteeship administration of Somalia from 1950-1960) as well as on experiences of racism and discrimination in contemporary Italy. Striking is Aden's particular attention to the situation of women: as explained in the interview, she elaborates matrilinear genealogies and strong female characters in order to defeat traditions, such as the patrilinear link between clans in Somalia, and to feature women not as victims but as strong and independent.

Kaha Mohamed Aden, nata nel 1966 a Mogadiscio, è residente a Pavia dal 1987. Ha conseguito la laurea in Economia a Pavia, città nella quale vive e lavora. L'opera di Kaha Mohamed Aden è incentrata in particolare sul rapporto tra la Somalia e l'Italia, anche da una prospettiva post-coloniale, e sui cambiamenti drastici in seguito alla dittatura di Siad Barre e alla guerra civile – un tema che la riguarda molto da vicino per motivi biografici: suo padre Mohamed Aden Sheikh, politico e ministro, venne imprigionato nel 1975 e poi di nuovo dal 1982 al 1989 a causa della sua opposizione al regime del dittatore. Temi ricor-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

renti sono infatti la guerra tra i diversi clan somali e il trauma collettivo di una nazione tuttora scissa e frantumata. L'autrice affronta quest'argomento non soltanto nella raccolta di racconti *Fra-intendimenti*, uscita nel 2010 presso la casa editrice Nottetempo (Roma), ma anche – sotto forma di parabola – in *Dalmar. La disfavola degli elefanti* (uscita per Unicopli nel 2019) e nel documentario *La quarta via* (2012), scritto insieme a Simone Brioni. Ripercorrendo le tappe storiche di Mogadiscio presentate nel docufilm intitolato *La quarta via*, Kaha Mohamed Aden riflette sul collegamento tra la sua città natale e la sua "casa" elettiva Pavia – un filo rosso che si intravede anche nei racconti di *Fra-intendimenti* e che riconduce al tema centrale dell'antologia, la percezione dello spazio post-migratorio.

In più, l'autrice tratta – spesso con una vena ironica – il razzismo quotidiano in Italia, prendendo spunto anche da esperienze personali. *Fra-intendimenti* ne offre vari esempi, come l'autrice stessa elabora nell'intervista. Per quanto riguarda il secondo filo rosso che collega i contributi della presente antologia, cioè il punto di vista delle donne, i racconti di Kaha Mohamed Aden si prestano ad un'analisi approfondita a causa della loro impostazione intersezionale, come messo in rilievo in un saggio di Hanna Nohe: "[…] il soggetto femminile, che è migrato dalla Somalia in Italia, descrive episodi delle sue esperienze d'incontro con nativi della società di arrivo" (Nohe 2020: 88). Infatti, stereotipi, spesso di stampo coloniale, e processi di razzializzazione vengono tematizzati soprattutto dal punto di vista delle donne, come ad esempio nel racconto "Nonno Y. e il colore degli alleati", nel quale un uomo bianco dimostra atteggiamenti denigratori nei confronti della narratrice, essendo "certamente il colore della pelle, oltre all'essere donna, che fa sentire l'uomo in diritto di considerarla subordinata" (ibid.: 95). Sono soprattutto donne forti, intraprendenti e lungimiranti quelle descritte e introdotte da Kaha Mohamed Aden – un invito, un mezzo per analizzare criticamente sia la società italiana – intrisa di stereotipi razzisti e misogini – che quella somala, fondata sul clanismo di stampo patriarcale.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Nel racconto "Autoritratto", il primo della raccolta *Fra-intendimenti*, si trova un racconto autobiografico, in cui Lei descrive le Sue tre nonne, con le quali ha un legame particolare.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Aden [disegnando un albero genealogico]: Queste sono le tre nonne, sono legate a me. Questa è la mamma di mamma e questa la mamma di papà. E questa è la donna che mi ha fatto il rito del *Gardaadis*, che è questo rito che ti fa uscire per la prima volta al mondo. Nel senso che quando nasci stai per una settimana in casa, dopo di che i genitori scelgono una persona che ti deve presentare il mondo. E quindi questa persona è questa Xaawa, che io chiamo nonna, era la zia di mio papà. E lei è una poetessa. I miei hanno scelto lei perché mi facesse vedere il mondo com'è secondo lei. Il 19 marzo, una settimana dopo la mia nascita, fu scelta per condurmi fuori del mio guscio privato. La tradizione vuole che i bambini prendano il carattere della persona che per la prima volta li ha condotti fuori dalle mura domestiche. Il rumore che ho udito, gli odori, il primo mondo che ho visto e sentito, erano suggeriti da lei. I miei, con tutto quello che comporta, hanno deciso che fosse lei a dirigere la mia prima uscita al mondo, il mio *Gardaadis*.

Quindi queste donne sono la mia casa delle emozioni. Le avevo scelte per raccontare questa mia appartenenza, questo mio mondo, *home*. La tradizione vuole che la *home* sia qualcosa legato alla relazione parentale, quindi mantengo la tradizione antica ma la rompo, la cambio. Al posto del maschio, scelgo 'another type of family tree', perché il '*family tree*', l'albero genealogico è quello che lega il clan. Nel caso somalo, l'albero genealogico è patrilineare. E quindi io sono del clan x perché mio padre è di quel clan, perché anche suo padre è di quel clan. Allora io ho detto: al posto dei padri, dei nonni, scelgo le nonne. Quindi rompo con la tradizione senza abbandonarla.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: In più, ha scelto una nonna elettiva.

Aden: *'The family tree'*, cioè l'albero genealogico, sono solo cose di sangue. A me la questione del sangue crea problemi. Allora ho detto: ho bisogno di un antidoto, perché altrimenti diventa una malattia. Devi avere l'antidoto. E quindi aggiungo una nonna elettiva e così suggerisco che tutti possono avere, devono avere, per me, una persona che fa parte del loro mondo, essere la loro casa, più che casa, *home*, che non è un legame di sangue. Può essere una scrittrice, può essere la tua vicina di casa, può essere il tuo prof, può essere la ragazza più bella

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

del mondo, del tuo mondo ovviamente, o il ragazzo. Per questo motivo ho scelto proprio le figure materne, proprio per rompere la questione del patrilineare. La nonna elettiva insomma è un antidoto alla discendenza di sangue e insieme alle altre nonne è un'alternativa alla discendenza patrilineare.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Questo fa anche capire che il concetto di *home*, più che patria o casa, non è legato a un posto fisso.

Aden: Ho deciso di rompere sia la questione somala, sia quella europea che è legata alla terra. Anche perché molti somali stanno cercando di dare un territorio al clan. Dichiarando che noi siamo di tradizione nomade, ma questa è il nostro confine. Come fai ad avere un confine se sei nomade. E quindi adesso stanno nascendo tantissime nazioni. All'interno della Somalia ci sono piccole nazioni dove tutti quelli che ci abitano pensano di essere legati tra di loro, discendono tutti da un avo percepito. Percepito, non reale, perché non lo possono provare. Anche perché come si dice, la madre è sicura ma il padre no. Voglio allontanarmi mantenendo la tradizione. Rompere le tradizioni ma ricordandole. Il lavoro che faccio sulla casa è sempre questo. E tutti i miei racconti sono pieni di ricordi.

L'idea del documentario *La quarta via* partiva anche dalla questione che Mogadiscio è scomparsa, diciamo la mia Mogadiscio, quella che mi era familiare come atmosfera, e il mio *home*, di nuovo, è stato cancellato, completamente distrutto. Quindi quello che c'è adesso è una cosa nuova, non so cosa sia, ma non è Mogadiscio. Mi è stato detto che io non c'entro niente, devo andare da dove discendono i miei avi, che sarebbe verso l'Etiopia. Ma io sono nata da due generazioni a Mogadiscio.

Per questi motivi ho detto alla faccia di quelli che hanno distrutto Mogadiscio, alla faccia di quelli che dicono che non appartengo a Mogadiscio, io vedrò Mogadiscio ovunque io sia. Quindi vedo Mogadiscio a Pavia. Mogadiscio deve esistere, deve comunque esistere ovunque io sia.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Si vede anche all'inizio del documentario, con le mappe che si soprappongono, anche con il fiume che collega tutto con il mare.

Aden: Parto da Pavia, dal Ticino per arrivare all'Oceano Indiano. Sono sempre collegata tra Mogadiscio e Pavia. Sono sempre collegata, non posso darla vinta a loro, i signori della guerra e i loro collaboratori. E quindi dove io vivrò, Mogadiscio sarà sempre con me.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Abbiamo parlato delle donne e dell'albero genealogico matrilineare al posto della tradizione patrilineare. Infatti, anche nei Suoi racconti le donne hanno sempre un ruolo centrale.

Aden: Le donne sono centrali perché molte volte, quando scrivevo in quel periodo, ho incontrato spesso dei luoghi comuni, come se le donne fossero poverine. Le povere somale. Non mi piaceva l'idea, che faceva un po' pena. Le somale non sono tanto fortunate, ma sono forti, non sono poverette. E questo è stato un mio piglio, questa voglia di far emergere la loro forza attraverso i racconti. Questa forza che non è soltanto una forza di resistenza e basta, ma forse anche d'immaginazione, forse di amore e anche forza di cattiveria. Non sono sempre buone, perché c'è questa idea che le donne sono buone, e poi se sei nera è fantastico. Non è detto. Questo luogo comune mi dava fastidio, anche perché a quel punto quando parlavo di colori, nel racconto "Nonno Y. e il colore degli alleati", uno ti dava sempre ragione, togliendoti la capacità di sbagliare. C'è la libertà di sbagliare. Dandoti sempre ragione è come se tu fossi pazza o scema. Non posso avere sempre ragione, solo perché sono nera, oppure non avere ragione perché sono nera, non ha senso.

Alcune sono donne reali, alle quali mi sono ispirata, come Aisha [nel racconto "La casa con l'albero: tra il Giusto e il Bene"], che praticamente è mia zia, che abita a Londra. In realtà non si chiama Aisha, il personaggio l'ho chiamato così, ma è lei. Ed è un personaggio che viene frainteso spesso perché lei ad un certo punto capisce che Mogadiscio sta cambiando. Tra l'altro viene avvertita da un suo amico dell'altro clan che era sempre innamorato di lei. E lui dice: dovete andarvene tu e tuo marito. Lei e suo marito sono dello stesso clan. Gli

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

dice: tu, tuo marito e i tuoi figli dovete andarvene, e lei gli risponde: va bene. Lei lo dice a suo marito ma lui si rifiuta e dice: ma io dove devo andare, sono un benzinaio, non possono credere che io sia con un dittatore, è vero che siamo dello stesso clan, però io non ci ho niente a che fare, sono un signore normale, non sono un miliardario e abito in un quartiere popolare, non possono pensare a una cosa così.

Allora lei non si fida perché conosce la città, ha il polso della città, ha una relazione più forte con la città in confronto a suo marito. Quindi va in giro, chiede in giro, capisce che in realtà deve andare e porta i bambini dove si radunavano gli altri del suo clan per fuggire, quelli che hanno capito che devono fuggire. Quando lei arriva lì, lascia i bambini a quelli del suo clan senza conoscerli, perché lei torna indietro per convincere suo marito. Prima salva i bambini, perché loro non c'entrano niente, poverini. E poi torna indietro per convincere suo marito e tutti dicono: ma non puoi andare lì perché ormai la legge del clanismo ha deciso che c'è un nuovo confine legato all'appartenenza clanica che non si può oltrepassare.

Lei va contro questa legge, va dall'altra parte e quando cammina tutti dicono che lui sarà morto e cosa vai a fare se ammazzeranno anche te o ti stupreranno. Invece lei va e dice: se è morto lo vado a seppellire. Questo mi piace molto perché è un personaggio molto forte e molti pensano che lo sia quando lascia i suoi figli, io invece penso che lo è quando seppellisce suo marito. Lo seppellisce dicendo quella frase: "Caro, non ti preoccupare, sarai sepolto. Come sai bene, incontrerai Munkar e Nakir che interrogheranno la tua anima sulla vita appena vissuta" (2010d: 45). Sono due angeli che quando arrivi nell'aldilà ti chiederanno come ti sei comportato. Allora lei dice:

> Potrai dire che sei stato un buon marito e un ottimo padre ma dovrai anche dire che hai sbagliato a non scappare con noi. Mi rendo conto che è *giusto* che un uomo resista quando si vuole privarlo della sua città, della sua casa, del suo lavoro, del suo mondo e della sua dignità. (Ibid.)

La sua casa, mondo, *Heimat*. "Oltretutto, per nessun motivo ragionevole o accettabile. Ma era *bene* che tu scappassi con noi e io non perdessi lo sguardo dei tuoi occhi. Tra il giusto e il bene hai scelto il giusto e hai sbagliato" (2010d: 45).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Parlo di casa in continuazione, a volte metto anche insieme mondo, casa, emozione, visto che in italiano non riesco a trovare una parola per *Heimat*. Oppure magari esiste una parola ma non la conosco.

Ne parlo anche nel racconto "Il dizionario", che serve per parlare della questione della lingua. I Somali abitano nella lingua. La lingua è la casa, e non la terra. Quindi per me era importante scrivere qualcosa, di quanto io sia estranea, di questa nuova lingua, l'italiano. Faccio un esempio: "La mia nuova casa. […] Il suo bello: sembra di stare in comunità anche se è solo un cortile quello che si ha in comune. Casa a ringhiera" (2010c: 111). Poi ci sono i fiori della signora, dell'amministratora, tutti belli. Però quello che vorrei far notare è che si tratta di una nuova patria da apparecchiare. Poi arrivano i demoni (Ginn):

> […] mi sono accorta che avevo messo a posto quelle poche cose con cui volevo convivere tutti i giorni, mentre avevo messo al centro dell'ingresso di fronte alla porta, come se volessero andarsene, quegli oggetti che non avevano nessuna utilità, ma erano animati da una mia vecchia esistenza. Mi è venuto in mente che in questo paese esistono dei luoghi che possono custodire, tra le tante cose, anche quei ricordi concreti che non si vogliono perdere ma si vuole tenere lontano: le cantine. (Ibid.: 111-112)

Ricordi che non vuoi vedere sempre, che non vuoi vedere spesso, perché magari sono dolorosi, ma non li vuoi neanche perdere, allora li mandi in cantina. La cantina come un luogo metaforico. Ma in realtà, in termini architettonici, noi non abbiamo la cantina, davvero. Abbiamo qualcosa vicino al garage, nelle case della città di Mogadiscio, dove tieni anche i bulloni, degli oggetti, ma la cantina vera e propria non ce l'abbiamo perché non abbiamo il salame, non abbiamo queste cose importanti che si tengono in cantina, che devono rimanere fresche e non umide. No, perché abbiamo sempre la vecchia tradizione nomadica, devi portare poche cose. La cantina è legata a una tradizione sedentaria, non a una tradizione nomadica. Quindi la cantina mi piaceva.

Poi arrivo da questa signora e le dico che vorrei avere le chiavi della cantina e lei mi dice che è scomparsa una sua amica. Io per dire quanto sono lontana di questo mondo, io dicevo se è scomparsa dovete

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

fare denuncia alla polizia e lei disse "cosa c'entra la polizia?". Per lei scomparsa voleva dire un altro modo per dire morta. Però poi torno in casa mia e prendo il dizionario e chiedo come a un oracolo cosa vuol dire scomparso. E scopro vicino la parola eufemismo, che anche quella è un'altra parola complicata. Perché quando ero venuta in Italia mi è capitato che quando guardo nel dizionario mi dà una spiegazione, che già anche la spiegazione non la capisco e poi bisogna andare a cercare di nuovo, lì capisci che sei straniera.

Però avevo il mio intuito. C'era qualcosa che non andava bene perché la signora aveva una faccia triste quando diceva che l'altra era scomparsa. E con questa intuizione io ci gioco, le mie idee, i miei Ginni che sono queste creature che non sono umane ma esistono. Loro ci vedono ma noi non li vediamo e ci giocavamo quando eravamo in Somalia che tra l'altro l'Islam li riconosce come entità e sono come folletti. I folletti mi dicono: no la signora non sta bene, è morta, eh sì, i Ginn sanno le cose!

Quindi introduco nella nuova casa, al lettore che è italiano, la mia vecchia casa. Porto i Ginn, porto la mia difficoltà di capire il nuovo linguaggio, porto la mia estraneità, la mia goffaggine dentro questa nuova casa. Quindi faccio incontrare le due case. Questo è un tentativo di costruirmi una nuova *home*. Insomma, faccio tutti questi giochi di casa e *home*, *home* e casa, ma la mia idea centrale è di ottenere attraverso il racconto una vera e propria *home*. Attraverso il linguaggio.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Infatti volevamo chiedere esattamente questo: se la lingua è la casa, allora adesso l'italiano è diventato praticamente una seconda *home*.

Aden: Non è né seconda né prima, è tutto mescolato. Però anche l'italiano è diventato una *home,* anche se dopo le due di notte i pronomi fanno quello che vogliono. Oppure anche i congiuntivi. Il congiuntivo la mattina presto fa quello che vuole ma poi dopo nel pomeriggio torna tranquillamente.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Non è quindi la grammatica che conta, ma tutto il resto, cioè le situazioni e i sentimenti.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Aden: Sì, i sentimenti.

Quando sei distaccato da una lingua possono per esempio dirti brutte parole, che sì ti dispiacciono ma non hanno la stessa intensità rispetto a quelle dette in somalo oppure per quanto mi riguarda, certe parole nel dirle lo potevo fare con leggerezza in italiano mentre in somalo non me lo sono mai sognato, di fatto e mai mi sognerei.

Poi c'è da dire anche che, con l'andare del tempo, la frequentazione di una lingua, porta che quella lingua assuma più peso nella persona, che le parole di quella lingua corrispondano a dei sentimenti più intensi senza togliere niente alla lingua madre, il somalo, che rimane lì ovunque e nel profondo.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Quindi ormai la lingua italiana fa parte della Sua "identità letteraria" ed è messa in relazione con la lingua somala.

Aden: Si, infatti, l'idea del titolo *Fra-intendimenti* era quella, che questo trattino è dove potrebbero stare insieme. Il "fra" indica che ci sono due parti, ha bisogno di due parti, sempre, e le due parti possono incontrarsi in questo spazio dove possono intendersi o non intendersi.

Puleio/Neu-Wendel: Per concludere l'intervista, magari potremmo parlare del razzismo quotidiano in Italia e come si rispecchia anche nei Suoi racconti.

Aden: Faccio un esempio, tratto dal racconto "Un tè serio bollente". In questo racconto, una signora somala va a cercarsi gli ingredienti per un tè serio, come dicono. Ci vogliono molte spezie, tra cui il cardamomo. Allora lei va a far la spesa e mentre va in giro verso l'erboristeria incontra due ragazze italiane, che con lei si sono "adottate" a vicenda, che si chiamano Elena e Daniela. E loro dicono, dove vai e lei dice: "Devo andare a comprare il cardamomo." E loro le chiedono cos'è, perché non hanno capito bene. Allora lei lo spiega. Vanno e arrivano al negozio e la Somala chiede alla venditrice: "Ma lei ha del cardamomo?" E lei risponde: "Carne d'uomo? Signora, ma noi questa cosa non la vendiamo." Perché lei aveva visto una nera e l'ha collegata al cannibalismo. Siccome non sapeva cosa fosse il car-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

damomo ha subito fatto questo collegamento e inoltre c'era il fraintendimento con il suono. Questo per dire che il razzismo esiste.

Elena e Daniela esistono davvero e ci chiamiamo sorelle perché ci vogliamo bene. Loro chiedono cosa sia il cardamomo, perché a loro non verrebbe mai in mente che io potrei essere una cannibale. La conoscenza, le relazioni personali fanno passare certe idee strane.

Oppure non le hanno mai avute.

Bibliografia

Aden, Kaha Mohamed (2010a): *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo.

– (2010b): "Autoritratto", in: idem: *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo, pp. 7-10.

– (2010c): "Il dizionario", in: idem: *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo, pp. 111-116.

– (2010d): "La casa con l'albero: tra il Giusto e il Bene", in: idem: *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo, pp. 27-54.

– (2010e): "Nonno Y. e il colore degli alleati", in: idem: *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo, pp. 11-25.

– (2010f): "Un tè serio bollente", in: idem: *Fra-intendimenti*, Roma: nottetempo, pp. 89-93.

– (2019): *Dalmar. La disfavola degli elefanti*, Trezzano: Unicopli.

Aden, Kaha Mohamed/Brioni, Simone (Writers); Brioni, Simone/Chiscuzzu, Graziano /Guida, Ermanno (Directors) (2012 [2009]): *La quarta via* [documentary film taken from an oral performance [2007] by Kaha Mohamed Aden], Kimerafilm.

Nohe, Hanna (2020). "Diventare estranea e marginale. Rappresentazioni e autorappresentazioni del soggetto migrante in *Fra-intendimenti* (2010) di Kaha Mohamed Aden", in: *apropos [Perspektiven auf die Romania]* 5, pp. 88-105, doi: 10.15460/apropos.5.1598 (accessed 20.08.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Marita Rainsborough

(Kiel/Lüneburg)

The Aesthetic of Vulnerability
Un-heard Female Voices and the Question of Identity and Recognition in the Work of Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome

Abstract

In their novels, Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome portray fragile female identities characterized by a cultural conflict between Africa and Europe, staging an aesthetic of vulnerability of un-heard voices, dealing with the topics of returning and remaining and the struggle for recognition. The power and strength associated with the erotic promise of the female body is under constant threat from self- and external exploitation. The un-heard female voices try to make themselves heard and to create identities of empowerment in literary writing, to express the demand to be perceived and to be healed, both in the autobiographical and the fictional dimension. The novels emphasize the ambivalence between the fascination with and rejection of the foreign culture. The protagonists experience the hybridity of the narrative identity as a painful wound that requires the experience of return to be healed.

1. Introduction

Female voices, as expressed in the novels *Le baobab fou* [*The Abandoned Baobab*] (2009 [1982]) by Ken Bugul and *Le ventre de l'atlantique* [*The Belly of the Atlantic*] (2003) by Fatou Diome, use fiction to explore experiences of migration, diaspora and/or globalization, touching on the question of recognition and identity when doing so. Diome's and Bugul's novels portray an aesthetic of the vulnerability of un-heard female voices, dealing with the topics of returning and remaining, each

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

from the other aspect. The loss of identity, experienced by the protagonist of Bugul's novel *Le baobab fou* as a chaotic occidental ego state,[1] is an encounter with recognition as misunderstanding, culminating in a maelstrom of losing one's self. "Ces gens riches étaient libres de faire ce qu'ils voulaient, ils absorbaient la diaspora pour l'originalité. 'Nous avons une amie noire, une Africaine', était la phrase la plus 'in' dans ces milieux" (Bugul 2009 [1982]: 123). In Bugul's work, the topic of returning is represented as an act of desperation and rescue. In Fatou Diome's novel *Le ventre de l'atlantique*, by deciding on a future in Africa for her brother Madické, the protagonist Salie displays a reconsideration of her views in terms of a decolonization of thought and action. Identity as a hybrid construction is located in the context of self- and external perception while remaining in Africa is attributed positive connotations as an opportunity on multiple levels.[2]

In these novels, the body as a place "in which power itself is transferred" (Butler 2003: 58) plays a key role from the female perspective, particularly in terms of the erotic and sexual – also with regard to a particular form of vulnerability. In ethical terms, human vulnerability, which, according to Judith Butler, is fundamentally linked to a state of being at the mercy of the other, requires others to perceive the individual; to see and hear them (cf. Butler 2010a). This perception of others, continues Butler, also has a medial aspect that makes aesthetic staging appear as an attempt to make the person concerned visible and audible (cf. Butler 2006, 2010b). This aspect is manifested in the novels as an aesthetic of vulnerability. After investigating the question of identity, vulnerability and recognition, especially on the basis of the recognition theories of Judith Butler, Axel Honneth and Achille Mbembe, the literary works of Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome will be examined as examples of un-heard female voices with regard to the connection between identity, language and memory. Literary writing oscillates between resignation and empowerment.

[1] Ken Bugul refers to "mon chaos occidental" (Bugul 2009 [1982]: 125).
[2] The terms 'Africa' or 'African' used in the essay in a generalizing manner refer to Africa as a conceptual construct.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

2. Identity and recognition: Honneth, Butler, Mbembe, inter alia

Honneth's theory of recognition, which alludes to a struggle for recognition (2016 [1992]), is based on a concept linking identity to recognition; this is, in turn, derived from Hegel's work. In this model of identity, mutual recognition is the basis for subjectivity in reciprocal relationships. "Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self. To be denied recognition – or to be 'misrecognized' [...] – is to suffer both a distortion of one's relation to one's self and an injury to one's identity" (Fraser 2009: 203). This relational model of identity, taking the Hegelian schema as its starting point, is also transposed onto psychological and cultural and political terrain (cf. ibid.). Fraser writes on this subject,

> [a]s a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze of a culturally dominant other, the members of disesteemed groups internalize negative self-images and are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own. (Fraser 2009: 203)

Likewise, Frantz Fanon emphasizes the interdependency of external and self-perception. He argues that being white appears attractive in all respects and is associated with social and economic success, while being black is devalued (cf. Fanon 2008: 26).[3] This devaluation is accompanied by a corresponding self-denigration. Fanon posits – entirely in line with Hegel – that the white master is, however, equally dependent on external perception and a prisoner of his own 'mastery'.[4]

In her theory of recognition, Judith Butler integrates Althusser's theory of interpellation as a concept of subject constitution into Hegel's concept of interpersonality and reciprocity (Butler 1997: 32f.). In doing so, she takes the assumed fundamental vulnerability of all human beings as her starting point and analyses its impact on the formation of the subject. Both interpellation and non-interpellation can be painful for the

[3] He writes for example, "one is white above a certain financial level" (Fanon 2008: 26). He argues that being white is always also associated with socio-economic impulses.
[4] "The white man slaves to reach a human level. [...] The white man is sealed in his whiteness" (Fanon 2008: XIII).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

individual. Since the term 'identity' can be misunderstood as meaning 'remaining-identical-with-one's-self', thus reinforcing an ontologizing viewpoint, Butler prefers to use the term 'subjectivation' (Butler 1997: 83). Performative acts that occur within the scope of iterative displacement result in the reshaping of the categories, norms and values that determine recognition and contempt. Structural reshaping, in particular by the state, go hand in hand with this. Butler therefore emphasizes the options for action available to the interpellated subject (ibid.: 2). For Mbembe, human vulnerability in the African context is linked, especially, to colonial und post-colonial experiences in general and to civil war experiences in particular, which saw brothers become enemies. These experiences manifest themselves in subject formation processes and are linked to the constitution of identity. Working from these observations Mbembe focuses on the aspect of victimization, which prevents individuals from developing a new relationship to themselves and to others (cf. Mbembe 2008: 9).[5] In this context, he advocates coming to terms with traumas and the re-writing of history.

Fraser sees an inherent risk in the identity model of recognition, namely that the economic dimension will be excluded and – similarly to Butler – that identities will be objectified.

> The overall effect of these tendencies is to impose a single, drastically simplified group identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations. (Fraser 2009: 205)

She continues critically,

> [b]y shielding such struggles from view, this approach masks the power of dominant fractions and reinforces intragroup domination. The identity model thus lends itself all to easily to repressive forms of communitarianism, promoting conformism, intolerance and patriarchalism. (Ibid.: 206)

Moreover, the Hegelian premiss of dialogicity is obscured, whereby "accordance with their self-image" (ibid.: 206) should be the primary focus of attention, not the negotiation process. Taking criticism of the

[5] Elsewhere he refers to the ideology of victimization (cf. Mbembe 26.12.2005: 2).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

identity model as her starting point, Fraser proposes a recognition model based on negotiation of social status – the status model – which strives for mutual "recognition and status equality" (Fraser 2009: 206) and in which "the problem of recognition [is situated] within a larger social frame" (ibid.: 210), however, without aiming to oversimplify the relationship between recognition and economic distribution.[6]

> From this perspective, misrecognition is neither a psychic deformation nor a free-standing cultural harm but an institutionalized relation of social subordination. To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued by others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute certain participants in social life as unworthy of respect and recognition. (Ibid.: 206f.)

Within the context of the question of identity and recognition, Fraser views the aspect of possible equal participation of all actors in social life as decisive; an "interaction with others as full partners" (ibid.: 207). She also focuses on the granting "of honor, prestige and esteem within the scope of interaction with others" (ibid.: 209). Fraser argues that this granting is generally linked to economic categories relating to property, labor and class affiliation (ibid.). Taking these theories as a starting point, it can be asked what role the concept of recognition and identity plays in the novels of Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome. What is its significance in terms of self- and external perception, also regarding the gender question, in the authors' fictional works?

3. Between Africa and Europe. Identity, recognition and language in the work of Ken Bugul

Ken Bugul's oral voice develops into a silence; a loss of speech that begins to dissolve into the written word. This loss of speech is caused by her abandonment by her mother as a small child and also simul-

[6] "The result is a partial uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of social prestige" (Fraser 2009: 210).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

taneously symbolizes her place of origin, Africa. The discontinued process of learning her 'mother' tongue, the language of emotions[7] and the norms of African life, which is linked to her leaving the continent, is replaced by learning French language and culture at the village's French school,[8] reinforcing the process of alienation and thus, simultaneously, changing certain aspects of identity and recognition respectively degradation. Ken Bugul mirrors and reflects on these processes in her literature.

> En me parlant, ça me permet aussi de déconstruire un personnage bricolé que j'étais, [...], un personnage inachevé, [...], parce que tout revient à la séparation d'avec la mère [...]. Je déconstruis ce personnage et l'écriture me permet de construire le personnage que je voudrais être. [...] je veux me fabriquer une autre moi-même. (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 124)

When discussing her literary writing, which is an integral element of her search for identity, she refers to a "démarche de déconstruction et de reconstruction" (ibid.: 127). The demand that the – literary – voice be heard "indicates possible dangers which can be implicit in raising your voice, from which he (i.e. Cavell) infers a *gender*-specific turn in the problem of scepticism", which influences the critical dimensions of language in general (Korsmeier in Cavell 2002: 280). For him, writing is an expression of criticism and self-assertion – also with regard to the question of gender, which fights scepticism.

As an autofictional work, Ken Bugul's autobiographical novel *Le Baobab fou* (2009 [1982]) makes it possible to reveal a deep connection between the literary and real-life experiences of the author and protagonist. "Moi qui ai abandonné le baobab qui est le symbole de tout ce que l'Afrique représentait mais que j'identifiais à la mère, la mère

[7] "Toujours donc, il ya a ce contact avec sa mère qui le touche, qui l'embrasse, lui donne le sein, [...] et le berce. Pour moi, tout ça, c'est langage" (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 116). She continues, "Mais je ne vivais pas parce qu'on sait qu'en Afrique, les traditions [...] c'est avec les mères. Ce sont les mères, ce sont les femmes qui s'occupent de la tradition, ce sont elles que sont les gardiennes des valeurs, qui transmettent les messages de la tradition, qui inculquent les valeurs traditionnelles" (ibid.: 118). The author has only been able to approach African traditions through observation (cf. ibid.).

[8] "Je me suis refugiée dans l'école française. Je veux partir vers la terre promise" (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 119).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Afrique parce que ma mère m'avait séparée" (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 119.[9] Language becomes a key driver in the construction of narrative identity in the literary, particularly in the personal sense – while also relating to cultural, ethnic, national and African identity – and is, to an equal extent, linked to the impetus of recognition or contempt. Ken Bugul says of her literary language:

> [...] je me suis fabriqué ma propre langue. Mais un mélange de [...] ce que j'avais acquis avec ma mère dès les premières années de l'enfance, avec la langue de l'école française dans laquelle je venais d'entrer, plus la langue de mes sens [...]. (Ibid.: 121)

The physical-sensual inscription of language reveals the vulnerability of the individual associated with it and in the sense of Butler.

Ken Bugul's formerly un-heard voice makes itself heard in her literary writing, in particular in the form of orality:

> La langue que j'utilise, c'est vraiment un langage parlé: peut-être aussi un besoin de réentendre cette langue; peut-être pour l'intérioriser et peut-être, à la longue, avec les émotions tirées de la relation avec la mère: les bruits, les sons, les premiers mots [...] avant qu'on ne se sépare [...], en même temps le langage que je me suis fabriqué moi-même: peut-être pour mieux m'en rendre compte, [...] l'écrire sous forme orale [...]. (Ibid.: 122)[10]

[9] She continues, "Comme ça je me débarrasse de cette mère Afrique, continent, tradition, qui m'avait laissée. Mais moi aussi j'avais abandonné un baobab. [...] Rejetée par cette école française en même temps, je reviens. Et le baobab! Il était devenu fou! Il est mort!" (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 119f.).

[10] The oral element is linked to the linguistic-musical rhythms of the poetical:

> Il n'y eut jamais de nuit.
> Il n'y eut jamais de matin.
> – Quoi?
> – Qu'est-ce que tu dis?
> Les mains se refermèrent en poings sur les bouches.
> Les mouchoirs de tête devinrent des voiles.
> Les chaussures furent enlevées des pieds.
> Soudain chacun s'en alla de son côté.
> Les chemins furent soudain désertés.
> Les salutations se firent plus brèves.
> Les devantures des maisons se vidèrent.
> La fontaine devint silencieuse.
> Les mots devinrent de brefs soupirs. (Bugul 1999: 11)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

In the process, her style of writing simultaneously and continuously breaks taboos, “Peut-être que les problèmes de tabou, c’est une forme de révolte [...]. C’est inconscient, et je ne dirais pas ça à ma mère; mais il y a une révolte dans le départ de la mère” (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 122).[11] Her style of writing is subject to continual change, which is, in turn, linked to the choice of topic,

> [l]a thématique influence l’intensité du propos et sa rythmique [...]. Pour savoir ce que j’écris, j’ai besoin de l’entendre, et pour l’entendre, j’ai besoin de l’écrire sous cette forme d’oral et de rythmique [...]. C’est parce que je m’entends écrire [...] et comme c’est musical. (Ibid.: 131)

Her literary French bears traits of her mother tongue – its emotionality, tones, smells and touch – the African environment is inscribed in it. “Nous avons appris la langue française dans notre environnement” (ibid.: 137).[12] Learning French in Africa can, argues Bugul, be viewed as ‘appropriation’ (cf. ibid.).

> Quand j’écris en français, je ne pense pas en français et je ne pense pas en wolof non plus. Quand j’écris, je ne pense pas. Je sens des émotions, je sens des odeurs, je vois des couleurs, j’entends des rythmes, et je sens la brûlure de la chaleur du lieu de ma naissance. Donc, dans quelle langue écris-je? C’est cela même la question! (Ibid.: 138f.)[13]

[11] Bugul also writes, “Je regrette, mais [...] je suis peut-être nostalgique! [...] si je devais renaître je serais une profonde Africaine; je n’irais même pas à l’école française. Ça c’est dans mes regrets. J’aurais tellement aimé vivre comme ma copine Nabou Samb que est dans Riwan ou le chemin de sable; avoir été élevée comme elle, avoir été initiée, etc., et puis là peut-être, j’aurais su ce qui est tabou, qu’il ne faut pas faire ici, ce qu’il ne faut pas faire là, etc.” (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 123).

[12] For example, “Fodé Ndao avait réussi à décrocher le fruit tant convoité. En le voyant basculer du haut de l’arbre dans son velours moutarde, couleur de ventre de lionceau, couleur de la savane, le jeune Fodé hurla de joie. Le fruit, hésitant dans l’air, tomba en spirale sur le sol jouché de racines. Fodé le ramassa avec précaution, le palpa pour vérifier s’il n’avait pas éclaté dans la chute. Il était intact” (Bugul 2009: 13).

[13] Bugul’s African mother tongue, Wolof, is out of the question for her as a literary language, “Je suis née dans un village de Ndoucoumane où la langue parlée est un mélange de gestes, de sons, d’attitudes” (Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 139).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

In the same way that it is accepted practice for other artists to use plexiglass, bronze, wood, etc., Bugul exercises her creative freedom when choosing language material (cf. Bugul in Ahihou 2013: 139). "Une langue est un matériau avec lequel vous vous sentez confortable" (ibid.). She continues, [l]orsque j'ai commencé à écrire mon premier roman *Le Baobab fou*, je n'ai pas pensé à la langue. Ce qui était important pour moi était l'évacuation que je faisais à travers l'écriture d'une autobiographie" (ibid.). For Bugul, writing in French is linked to creative freedom,

> L'éciture est un processus de création qui a besoin de liberté. J'écris pour me secouer, me déconstruire à travers l'éducation, la condition sociale, la religion, etc. donc, quand j'écris dans une autre langue je me sens libre. Ce n'est pas une question d'aliénation: c'est une question de choix. (Ibid.: 140)

The use of French within the scope of the artistic creative process is, for Bugul, a precondition for her literary creativity – for her artistic freedom.

Bugul describes herself as westernized and assimilated (cf. ibid.: 126) – also within the context of womanhood. She leads "une vie à l'occidentale" with "l'air d'une Européenne" (ibid.). Her intercultural experiences have resulted in an inner conflict. This conflict is comparable to that of the protagonist of the novel *Le Baobab fou*, who, in the fiction in the Western sense, dreams of the deep attachment inherent in monogamous coupledom which is rooted in romantic love; a desire which will, however, never be fulfilled. On the contrary, the protagonist's dependence on recognition and her loneliness causes her to seek solace in drug excesses, sexual adventures and prostitution; a spiral in which her emotional and physical vulnerability threatens to rob her of herself. Her only possibility of rescue is to return to Africa, where she once again encounters the baobab tree of her childhood, now dead; a symbol of her 'Africanity'. Her un-heard voice employs the unheard-of and obscene in an attempt to provoke. In an interview Bugul complains about the image of Black people in general and Black women in particular in the post/colonial context – endorsing Fanon's arguments, "Et ça, il faut le comprendre dans un contexte historique avec la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

colonisation où l'image du Noir et de la femme noire en particulier n'était pas bonne: et puis de la politique d'assimilation aussi du colonisateur" (Bugul in Ahihou 2013 : 126). This denigration is often coupled with an exotic interest in the other, as dealt with in the novel, "Ces gens riches étaient libres de faire ce qu'ils voulaient, ils absorbaient la diaspora pour l'originalité. 'Nous avons une amie noire, une Africaine', était la phrase la plus 'in' dans ces milieux" (Bugul 2009: 123). Over and above this exotic interest, the exotic otherness frequently triggers sexual desire, which, however, is not accompanied by the envisaged increase in closeness and solidarity.

Both the author and the protagonist reveal a yearning for an unbroken identity, also with regard to womanhood in the traditional-African sense. In the novel *Riwan ou le chemin de sable* (1999) Bugul's fiction describes the process of harmonizing the protagonist's broken identity; the healing of her wounds and the living out of her traditional femaleness. Like Bugul herself, the protagonist becomes the wife of a spiritual ruler with almost thirty wives, experiences polygamy as fulfilling and the competition among the wives as erotically stimulating. She also, however, suffers from jealousy when she loses her position as the ruler's favorite, itself based on the fact that she is his most recent wife, because he takes a further wife. This act in turn, however, causes her to focus on her life as a writer and cultivate her independence. As Fraser posits in her status model, it is the protagonist's status as the serigne's wife[14] with its accompanying material, cultural and social benefits which earn her the recognition of her African environment and give her a feeling of belonging and being appreciated. The novel's protagonist is now, finally, reconciled with herself and succeeds in harmonizing the disparate elements of her hybrid identity. The poetry of Bugul's literary language, inspired by oral culture, allows the female voice to make itself heard and, within the scope of giving birth to the creative act, strengthens the potential linked to it.

[14] His sudden death, which occurs after one of his wives leaves him without warning, brings with it further sweeping changes in the protagonist's life; these changes are, however, not described in the novel.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

4. Self- and external perception. Memory, identity and recognition in the work of Fatou Diome

In Fatou Diome's novel *Le ventre de l'Atlantique,* the belly of the Atlantic becomes a mass grave for poor fishermen, failed emigrants to Europe returning to their homelands, unwanted children and those who transgress social norms. The Atlantic cannot, however, digest everything put into it, "[m]ême l'Atlantique ne peut digérer tout ce que la terre vomit" (Diome 2003: 114). The ocean is, however, also a symbol of freedom – it makes the escape from Africa, to a new life, possible.

> Mais pour tous ici, la France, l'Eldorado, représentait aussi la plus lointaine destination de toutes les escapades et figurait une sorte de lieu mythique de la perdition, le refuge des Pitiamôme-Bopame, les oiseaux libres, envolés de toutes parts. (Ibid.: 136)

Personal, national and/or African identity and gender are all closely interlinked in Fatou Diome's novel *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*. "Ah! Sacrée France, c'est peut-être parce qu'elle porte un nom de femme q'on la désire tant" (ibid.: 202).[15] An erotic facet of yearning for all things French resonates here; the fascination and attraction of a former colonial power, which very few are able to resist.[16] French is considered the "langue de la réussite" (ibid.: 82). The process of writing allows the first-person narrator and protagonist of the novel, Salie,[17] to make her voice heard, whereby her identity is closely linked to her memories and can, simultaneously, be viewed as an act of liberation, despite and because of the pain linked to exile – a combination of freedom and foreignness,

[15] And, "Après la colonisation historiquement reconnue, règne maintenant une sorte de colonisation mentale: les jeunes joueurs vénéraient et vénèrent encore la France. À leurs yeux, tout ce qui est enviable vient de France" (Diome 2003: 53).

[16] The idealized, embellished reports of returnees, visitors and migrants' families reinforce this image of France (cf. e.g. Diome 2003: 83-91). Moussa's fate demonstrates how boys' aspirations to make it big as footballers in France are exploited (cf. ibid.: 95ff.). In common with many other Senegalese boys, Madické, Salie's half-brother, also dreams of a football career in Europe; his idol is Italian football star Maldini.

[17] Salie has been living in Strassburg for almost ten years; she has escaped her guilt about her grandmother, who brought her, a child of shame, up, "L'exil, c'est mon suicide géographique" (Diome 2003: 226).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> [t]ant pis pour les séparations douloureuses et les kilomètres de blues, l'écriture m'offre un sourire maternel complice, car, libre, j'écris pour dire et faire tout ce que ma mère n'a pas osé dire et faire. [...] Ma mémoire est mon identité. (Diome 2003: 227)

Early in life, the protagonist learns the power of words from her grandmother, exploring it for the first time during an encounter with her stepfather:

> Cette histoire, je la répétai mot pour mot à mon beau-père, le jour où, sous l'arbre à palabres, avec tous les hommes de son quartier, il avait osé m'appeler de son nom à lui. J'avais alors dix ans, et depuis il ne m'a plus jamais regardée dans les yeux. Ma grand-mère m'avait appris que si les mots sont capables de déclarer une guerre, ils sont aussi assez puissants pour la gagner. (Ibid.: 78f.)

The female voice is answered with silence, and thus un-heard, and the lowered gaze of the step-father. Salie feels torn between the expectations of her family,[18] itself the eternal link to her home in Africa, and her ambitions, which are connected to France or rather Europe. While she equates Africa with destiny, coincidence and hope, Europe is characterized by a lifestyle based on strength of purpose and achievement.[19] This inner conflict between the cultures defines her identity. "[L]e tourbillon du brassage culturel qui me faisait vaciller les laissait indemnes" (ibid.: 60). In her short stories told in *La Préférence Nationale* (2007 [2001]), the protagonists endure brazen sexual advances by men and, in particular, working conditions as domestic workers or babysitters, which demean them as individuals. This degradation and contempt are juxtaposed with education as a way to gain social recognition in the

[18] The protagonist asks herself, "Qui sont ces gens que j'appelle mon frère, ma sœur, etc.? Qui suis-je pour eux? [...] L'étrangère qui débarque? La sœur qui part? Ces questions accompagnent ma valse entre les deux continents" (Diome 2003: 227). The alien expectations of the others, who expect success, weigh heavily on her. "J'avance, les pas lourds de leurs rêves, la tête remplie des miens. J'avance, et ne connais pas ma destination. J'ignore sur quel mât on hisse le drapeau de la victoire, j'ignore également les grandes eaux capables de laver l'affront de l'échec. [...] L'écriture est ma marmite de sorcière, la nuit je mijote des rêves trop durs à cuire" (ibid.: 14).

[19] "En Afrique, je suivais le sillage du destin, fait de hasard et d'un espoir infini. En Europe, je marche dans le long tunnel de la performance qui conduit à des objectifs bien défini" (Diome 2003: 14).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

academic and literary fields. In this context, the female voice shows itself to be an instrument of power for women which transcends eroticism, altering self- and external perception and the question of the relationship between recognition and identity in writing. In contrast to Salie, Memoria, the protagonist in the novel *Kétala* (2006), uses not words but her body; driving herself to absolute exhaustion as a prostitute. All the painful, degrading experiences are inscribed on her body – which functions as her memory – until it is utterly destroyed. Marked by a terminal illness, she returns to Africa to die, accompanied by her homosexual husband, to whom she is bound by an arranged marriage and whom she has repeatedly and unsuccessfully tried to seduce. France has not been able to fulfil its promise as the country of love for her; a promise she succumbed to in an attempt to save her marriage. Salie, the protagonist in *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, wishes to protect her half-brother Madické from the disappointments she herself has experienced and which are integral to life in the diaspora and successfully encourages him to remain in Africa.[20] In this context, remaining appears a positive alternative to migration.

5. Conclusion – Between resignation and empowerment and the liberating function of literary writing

In their novels, Ken Bugul and Fatou Diome portray fragile female identities (Ricœur 2006: 138) characterized by an internal conflict between cultures, staging an aesthetic of vulnerability manifested in language. "Confrontation with others, whether individuals or groups, reveals the fragility of the narrative identity" (ibid.). This fragility applies, in particular, to portrayals of the vulnerability of the female body in romantic relationships and in prostitution. Literary gender discourses are amplified in the context of self- and external perception 'post' migration, uncovering a heightened perception. The power and strength associated with the erotic promise of the female body is under constant threat from self- and external exploitation. There is, however, also

[20] Her financial assistance allows him to set up a small general store. As a result, he forgets his dreams of becoming a football star in Europe.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

always a fundamental dormant potential for fulfilment. Literary writing is the prerequisite for raising un-heard female voices in Africa and the African diaspora in Europe; to express the demand to be perceived and to be healed, in both the autobiographical and the fictional dimension. By engaging with the issue of identity, writing explores questions of both recognition in its various aspects and of inadequate reciprocity, denigration in self-perception and vulnerability, and thus the related social, economic and political implications. "Only in a reciprocal relationship of recognition with their counterpart does each acting subject become a moral subject who, within the scope of co-existence, is able to act self-determinedly, i.e. freely" (Kwon 2008: 285). The literary world is engaged in an embittered conflict concerning this topic. The creation of a narrative identity leads to conflicts with painful intercultural experiences within the scope of memory processes, characterized by internal conflict and feelings of contempt, and realignments, both of which increasingly include the subjects of returning or remaining in Africa. The novels emphasize the ambivalence between the fascination with and rejection of the foreign culture linked to interculturalism. At the same time, becoming familiar with another culture and the associated process of distancing also allows a critical view of Africa itself, equally characterized by ambivalence. Nevertheless, the experience of once again immersing one's self in African culture following the return proves to be consoling. The protagonists experience the hybridity of the narrative identity as a painful wound that requires the experience of return to be healed. Returning home to die can, as in Memoria's case, also be interpreted as the integration of the disparate into the damaged identity, as harmonization and as a making of peace. Literary writing is a means to construct a 'healed' identity – also in the sense of letting go of the role of victim. Fraser argues that the "language of recognition" represents a new "constellation in the grammar of political claims-making" (2009: 201)[21] and thus does not remain an exclusively private issue. This dimension of the political is expressed as a desideratum in the authors' novels.

[21] Fraser's concern is to develop "a theory of recognition that can accommodate the full complexity of social identities" (Fraser 2009: 202).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Works Cited

Ahihou, Christian (2013): *Ken Bugul: La langue littéraire*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

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

– (2009 [1982]): *Le baobab fou*, Paris: Présence Africaine.

Butler, Judith (2003): "Noch einmal Körper und Macht", in: Axel Honneth/Martin Saar (eds.): *Michel Foucault: Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption: Frankfurter Foucault-Konferenz 2001*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, p. 52-67.

– (1997): *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

– (2006): "Explanation and Exoneration, or what we can hear", in: Judith Butler: *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London/New York: Verso, p. 1-18.

– (2010a): "Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect", in: Judith Butler: *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London/New York: Verso, p. 33-62.

– (2010b): "Torture and the ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag", in: Judith Butler: *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London/New York: Verso, p. 63-100.

Cavell, Stanley (2002): *Die andere Stimme: Philosophie und Autobiographie*, Berlin: diaphanes.

Diome, Fatou (2007 [2001]): *La Préférence Nationale*, Paris: Présence Africaine.

– (2003): *Le ventre de l'Atlantique*, Paris: Anne Carrière.

– (2006): *Kétala*, Paris: Flammarion.

Fanon, Frantz (2008): *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove.

Fraser, Nancy (2009): "Zur Neubestimmung von *Anerkennung*", in: Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch/Christopher F. Zorn (eds.):

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Anerkennung. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Sonderband 21. Berlin: Akademie, p. 201-212.

Honneth, Axel (2016 [1992]): *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Kwon, Su-Hyeon (2008): *Zwischen Universalismus und Partikularismus: Transkulturalität als Ziel moralphilosophischer Rechtfertigungen*, Marburg: Tectum.

Mbembe, Achille (26.12.2005): "Afropolitanisme", in: *Africultures*, in: http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=4248 (accessed 15.08.2017).

– (2008): "What is postcolonial thinking? An interview with Achille Mbembe", in: *Eurozine*, in: http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2008-01-09-mbembe-en.pdf (accessed 15.08.2017).

Ricœur, Paul (2006): *Wege der Anerkennung: Erkennen, Wiedererkennen, Anerkanntsein*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Schmidt am Busch, Hans-Christoph/Zorn, Christopher F. (eds.): *Anerkennung*. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Sonderband 21. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Hanna Nohe

(Bonn)

Ici, mais là-bas : genre et *ethnoscapes* dans deux romans sur la post-migration entre l'Afrique subsaharienne et la *romania : Des Fourmis dans la bouche* (2011) de Khadi Hane et *Adua* (2015) d'Igiaba Scego

Abstract

This paper analyses Khadi Hane's *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* (2011) and Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (2015) by basing itself on Arjun Appadurai's concept of ethnoscapes and bell hooks' reflections on black women's double oppression. It thus sheds light on how both texts, by means of their simultaneity of spaces and cultures, create a universe that can be considered a post-migratory effect of afroromania. Moreover, the article highlights both texts as feminist voices, for they present the main characters' intersectional discrimination and thus render visible and therefore conscious of the inequality concerning race and gender.

1. Introduction

Des Fourmis dans la bouche (2011) de Khadi Hane et *Adua* (2015) d'Igiaba Scego sont deux œuvres de représentantes de l'*afroromania* féminine : la première est originaire du Sénégal et réside à Paris depuis une trentaine d'années ; la deuxième est née et a grandi à Rome, mais ayant des parents somaliens, elle a vécu de près l'expérience de la diaspora somalienne à Rome et la place au centre de ses écrits. Or, tandis que Scego est plutôt reconnue comme écrivaine – nous pouvons le constater à travers sa présence dans les analyses faites dans ce volume – Hane a été moins étudiée, la critique littéraire s'étant concentrée sur des auteures comme Fatou Diome ou Léonora Miano. Cependant, nous verrons, et c'est ce que nous souhaitons exposer ci-dessous, comment

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

toutes deux contribuent à soutenir la prise de conscience de l'*afroromania* féminine et à lui donner une voix.

Ces deux œuvres sont des créations explicitement fictionnelles dans lesquelles une femme arrivée dans la *romania* comme jeune adulte représente la protagoniste autodiégétique. *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* est relaté au passé par Khadîdja Cissé, une femme malienne qui habite à Paris avec ses cinq enfants. *Adua* est narré dans trois formes narratives différentes, la première étant la voix autodiégétique au présent de l'héroïne éponyme, une femme somalienne de plus de 60 ans, habitant à Rome et dialoguant avec la statue de l'éléphant sur la place de la Minerve. Même si sa parution est plus récente, *Adua* a déjà suscité l'intérêt de la critique, tandis que le livre de Hane n'a reçu que peu d'attention jusqu'à présent.

Ainsi, dans ce qui suit, nous essaierons de montrer comment les deux textes créent un univers qui, dans sa simultanéité d'espaces et de cultures, peut être considéré comme effet post-migratoire de l'*afroromania*. Dans le même temps, nous verrons, en nous focalisant sur des protagonistes fémi-nines de ce contexte, comment ils révèlent une double discrimination féminine, de telle sorte que les œuvres représentent deux voix féministes qui exposent et, par conséquent, rendent conscient.e.s de l'inégalité de genre et de *race*. De cette manière, l'article présent complète l'analyse menée par Gaia Giuliani (2019), dans laquelle elle examine le racisme dans l'Italie actuelle en se penchant sur différents domaines discursifs – tels la propagande, les produits culturels, les politiques gouvernementales – de trois phases historiques : l'époque libérale (1892-1914), le Fascisme (1919-1945) et la République (depuis 1946). Ajoutant à l'examen culturel de Giuliani autant l'approche comparée que la dimension littéraire, l'analyse mettra en évidence, d'une part, les similitudes par rapport à la situation des femmes subsahariennes après la migration dans deux pays de la *romania*. D'autre part, grâce à ce que permet la littérature, elle montrera la perspective subjective des femmes migrantes elles-mêmes. Nous procéderons en deux temps. Tout d'abord, nous présenterons le concept d'*ethnoscapes* selon Arjun Appadurai pour démontrer ensuite comment la présence de ce concept dans les textes crée une dynamique entre deux espaces qui caractérise l'expérience post-migratoire de l'*afroromania*. Par la suite, les réflexions de bell hooks sur la double soumission des

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

femmes noires dans la société américaine nous aideront à analyser la situation de genre des protagonistes féminines dans les deux textes.

2. L'*afroromania* : *ethnoscapes* selon Arjun Appadurai

Le terme d'*afroromania* désigne l'hybridité post-migratoire entre l'Afrique et la *romania*, cette dernière se référant aux régions où sont parlées des langues romanes, soit ici l'Europe en particulier. L'idée d'une hybridité culturelle et spatiale est rendue par le concept d'*ethnoscapes* comme le définit Arjun Appadurai dans *Modernity at large* (1996 : 33, traduction de l'auteure) : il se réfère à ces groupes de personnes qui se déplacent et qui « constituent le monde changeant dans lequel nous vivons : touristes, immigrant.e.s, refugé.e.s, exilé.e.s, travailleurs immigrés et d'autres groupes et individus en déplacement ». Avec le mouvement croissant de personnes à un niveau global, les appartenances collectives deviennent également mobiles. Appadurai souligne que cela ne signifie point qu'

> […] il n'y ait pas de communautés ou de réseaux […] et d'autres formes filiales relativement stables. Mais c'est à dire que la chaine de ces stabilités est traversée partout avec le coup du mouvement humain, puisque plus de groupes ont à faire avec les réalités de devoir se déplacer […]. (Ibid. ; traduction de l'auteure)

De cette manière, les frontières des espaces culturels deviennent plus souples. « Culturel », enfin, est selon Appadurai un terme relatif qui se réfère aux différences entre les identités collectives. Au lieu de comprendre « culture » comme une substance donnée, Appadurai préfère l'adjectif et souligne sa capacité à créer un sentiment d'appartenance à un groupe qui se différencie d'autres (cf. Appadurai 1996 : 12 et sq.).

En ce qui concerne les textes analysés, nous y retrouvons cette fluidité de collectifs ethniques. Ainsi, dans *Adua*, le mouvement continue entre la Somalie et l'Italie se traduisent par le fait que trois personnages de trois générations différentes migrent de Somalie en Italie à trois moments historiques distincts : le père de la protagoniste, Zoppe, arrive en 1934 (cf. Scego 2015 : 14) à l'époque du colonialisme italien en Somalie et du fascisme en Italie, qui vise à élargir le territoire colo-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

nial vers la Libye et l'Éthiopie (cf. Pandolfo 2013 :12). Adua, sa fille, s'y rend en 1976 (cf. Scego 2015 : 12),[1] à la suite de l'unification et de l'indépendance de la Somalie en 1960 qui demeure pourtant, dans le sud, sous la tutelle fiduciaire de l'Italie et maintient donc des relations étroites avec l'ancien colonisateur (cf. Pandolfo 2013 : 15). Ahmed, venu en bateau de Lampedusa, y débarque au XXI^e^ siècle, sans que son origine, ni l'année ne soient spécifiées explicitement. De cette manière, l'impression d'un passage continu entre les deux pays s'établit, même s'ils ne sont pas directement liés géographiquement.

Le lien existe, en effet, avec l'histoire coloniale, et également dans la direction inverse : à travers la colonie somalienne, les Italiens étaient présents physiquement, ce qu'illustrent les passages narrés par Adua :

> A Magalo, prima di Siad Barre, molti italiani risiedevano in città. Li vedevi passeggiare al tramonto nei loro abiti eleganti per il corso principale. […] Gli italiani aprivano ristoranti e gelaterie. E i più ricchi avevano piantagioni di banane appena fuori città. (Scego 2015 : 75)

La présence des Italiens se réfère à l'époque antérieure à l'indépendance de la Somalie, dont Siad Barre fut ensuite le premier commandant de l'armée. L'apparence de ces personnes italiennes indique leur statut socio-économique élevé en Somalie, ce qui est renforcé par l'évocation des restaurants et des plantations qu'elles possédaient. Dans les fragments sur Zoppe, les Italiens sont présents à Addis Abbeba, la capitale de ce qui était à l'époque l'Empire éthiopien ou Abyssinie, au moment où les fascistes organisent des négociations diplomatiques qui visent à élargir les colonies italiennes vers l'Éthiopie (cf. Scego 2015 : 94 et sq.). Cette présence italienne en Somalie illustre les rapports de domination dans la colonie. La représentation dans *Adua* se distingue nettement de celle décrite dans *Des fourmis dans la bouche* par Hane, qui met en relief le flux ethnique vers et à Paris.

[1] Nikica Mihaljević et Sonja Carić remarquent la différence que père et fille associent à Rome : tandis que dans les passages consacrés à Zoppe Rome prend des airs quasiment surréels, dans l'imagination d'Adua Rome représente le paradis (cf. Mihaljević/Cari 2017 : 307 et sq.). Or, le passage indiqué par Mihaljević et Carić pour Adua se réfère à l'imagination, lors de laquelle le personnage se trouve encore à Magalo, alors que Zoppe rêve de la Somalie lorsqu'il est déjà arrivé à Rome.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

En effet, dans *Des Fourmis dans la bouche*, la narratrice décrit son entourage social de la manière suivante :

> J'habitais au 13, rue de l'Inconnu, dans le quartier de Château-Rouge, dix-huitième arrondissement de Paris. Notre vieil immeuble, même pas haussmannien, abritait une quinzaine de locataires, dont André, seul Français connu à cette adresse, vivant au rez-de-chaussée avec son caniche Kiki. Tous les autres étaient des Maliens, la plupart dans des foyers polygames et pourvus d'enfants à profusion, mais qui n'hésitaient pas, malgré l'exiguïté, à héberger l'oncle malade, la tante mourante, le cousin ou le parent quelconque, fraîchement débarqué avec pour seul bagage une valise remplie d'air. La tradition interdisait de laisser un compatriote dehors, aussi le gardait-on le temps qu'il fallait pour qu'il trouve des papiers, du boulot, qu'il gagne ensuite la bataille du regroupement familial, pour à son tour perpétuer le rituel. (Hane 2011 : 11 et sq.)

La description de la composition des locataires reflète le flux ethnique : d'un côté, les noms topographiques indiquent le lieu de résidence des sujets migrants, le nom de la rue – « de l'Inconnu » – imaginaire et symbolique, le quartier, l'arrondissement, la ville, le tout faisant allusion à la capitale et à la grandeur françaises, partie de la *romania* occidentale et ancienne puissance coloniale ; de l'autre, la majorité des locataires viennent du Mali : seul un Français habite l'immeuble, « [t]ous les autres étaient des Maliens ». De même, ils suivent les traditions de leur pays d'origine : la polygamie, le nombre élevé d'enfants, l'hospitalité envers les compatriotes. Il est vrai qu'une telle unification et reproduction de schémas, désignant plusieurs peuples tout simplement comme « Africain » (Hane 2011 : 40), tendent à uniformiser et simplifier des structures ethniques et sociales beaucoup plus complexes, ce qui rappelle les réflexions de Graham Huggan par rapport au *postcolonial exotic* (cf. Huggan 2001 : 34). Néanmoins, la focalisation interne de la protagoniste en ce qui concerne le nombre d'enfants – elle en a elle-même cinq – d'une part correspond à cette image, mais de l'autre la différencie par ses réflexions et la présentation détaillée de sa situation concrète.

Cette impression de se trouver en Afrique en plein Paris, la capitale de la France, comme Dominic Thomas (2014 : 25) le repère également dans d'autres œuvres, est exprimée de manière explicite dans le passage suivant :

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> Encombrées des senteurs de Château-Rouge, mes narines frémissaient, mais je restais pendue à ma fenêtre. Ma vue se brouillait à l'éveil de notre Paris à nous. Ici, nous étions encore en Afrique. […] Là, partout sur les trottoirs, se dressaient les étals de fortune des Congolais bradeurs de faux vêtements Versace, de fausses lunettes de soleil Yves Saint Laurent, de montres Rolex contrefaites, de parfums Dior qui n'avaient de Dior que l'emballage, soutenus par une cohue de gens qui ricanaient, obstruaient l'entrée des négoces. (Hane 2011 : 34)

L'adverbe relationnel et locatif « ici » se réfère au lieu géographique mentionné en haut : un arrondissement au milieu de Paris en France ; il s'oppose au toponyme « Afrique » qui désigne tout un continent dont le Nord se trouve à presque deux mille kilomètres de Paris. Ce paradoxe entre l'ici et l'ailleurs représente justement un *ethnoscape,* un collectif ethnique qui a été déplacé de son lieu d'origine et donc de son contexte social et culturel. En effet, le pronom personnel « nous » souligne l'appartenance et l'identification à cette collectivité. Ce sont les impressions sensorielles qui rappellent sa provenance à la protagoniste : les odeurs (« mes narines frémissaient »), la perspective visuelle (« Ma vue se brouillait »), les sons (« une cohue de gens qui ricanaient »).

Dans *Adua*, nous retrouvons également cette fluidité mentale entre les lieux géographiques. Le livre commence presqu'immédiatement de la manière suivante :

> Oggi ho ritrovato l'atto di proprietà di *Laabo dhegah*, la nostra casa a Magalo, nella Somalia meridionale. Era nascosto in una vecchia valigia di peltro che tenevo in magazzino, era in quel posto da secoli e io non me ne ero mai accorta.
> Ora sono in regola. Ora se voglio posso tornare anch'io in Somalia. (Scego 2015 : 9)

À la page suivante, nous saurons qu'en disant ces paroles, la narratrice se trouve au milieu de Rome, à côté de l'obélisque de la place de la Minerve. C'est donc dans cette ville italienne qu'elle raconte sa maison en Somalie. Qui plus est, cette maison à Magalo est redevenue réelle grâce à un morceau de papier qu'elle a retrouvé à Rome. Les réalités d'un côté et de l'autre de l'Atlantique sont donc étroitement entremêlées.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

En outre, de manière semblable à *Des Fourmis dans la bouche*, dans *Adua*, les impressions sensorielles aident le personnage Zoppe à se sentir en Somalie, tout en étant à Rome :

> Zoppe sapeva che la migliore via di fuga era dentro la sua testa.
> Lì ritrovava tutti gli odori perduti della sua infanzia.
> Lì *ano geela, shai addess, beer iyo muufo.*
> Lo zenzero candito.
> La cannella prodigiosa.
> La sua Somalia delle meraviglie.
> Zoppe pensava a tutto questo rannicchiato sul pavimento gelido di Regina Coeli. (Scego 2015 : 33)

Cependant, contrairement à *Des Fourmis dans la bouche*, dans cet exemple d'*Adua*, les sensations n'ont lieu que de manière imaginée : le personnage pense aux différentes odeurs – du gingembre et de la cannelle – afin d'oublier, et par la suite de fuir, pour un instant, la dure réalité de la prison de Rome. L'imagination des odeurs suffit à transporter Zoppe dans la Somalie de son enfance, telle qu'il se la rappelle.

Cela dit, cette fluidité spatiale à l'intérieur d'un groupe ethnique est présente non seulement vis-à-vis de la migration d'individus et de groupes, mais aussi de la transmission d'informations sur le sujet migrant dans la société de provenance. Dans *Des Fourmis dans la bouche*, l'observation des relations sexuelles de la protagoniste autant par la communauté à Paris comme par celle du village africain le montre bien :

> Autant crier ce qui n'allait pas sur les toits de Paris et de Bamako. Une rumeur circulait au pays, selon laquelle je me prostituais en France. Elle fit vite le tour du village. Une lettre y avait été expédiée par le conseil des Sages de Paris, une assemblée de vieux retraités des usines Renault reconvertis en gardiens de mœurs, lettre qui dénonçait la dépendance de mes parents à l'argent sale de leur fille. Le courrier fut lu en public. On avait rassemblé les hommes d'un côté, sur la grande place du village, là où se tient toute réunion de haute importance, les femmes derrière, en retrait. Après moult discussions autour de mon père, on me jugea coupable. On s'était référé à la loi qui interdit à toute fille de bonne famille de s'avilir. Et une Cissé qui couche avec un homme blanc : aïe, thiourrr, Allah ! En plus, je lui avais fabriqué un bâtard. Ou j'avais perdu la raison, ou c'était la France qui m'avait abîmée, tout le monde avait penché pour la seconde explica-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> tion. Selon la coutume, mon père cracha trois fois de suite sur ma mère, pour signifier son mépris, soutenu par l'assemblée des mâles qui envoya au conseil des Sages de Paris un courrier qui le chargeait d'user de tous moyens pour me ramener sur le droit chemin.
> Cela m'avait valu leur convocation à une réunion bidon. Les vieux allaient débattre de ma légèreté. (Hane 2011 : 39 et sq.)

Le fait que la protagoniste entretienne une relation avec un homme blanc est transmis rapidement à son lieu d'origine grâce audit conseil des Sages, un groupe d'hommes compatriotes qui habitent également à Paris – celui-ci est chargé de surveiller la bienséance selon les traditions de leur lieu d'origine. Cette conservation des pratiques culturelles du lieu d'origine équivaut au concept d'*ethnoscapes*, bien que ce soit dans une acceptation traditionnelle et restrictive du terme, en tant qu'identité collective liée à une patrie supposée et maintenue en dépit de la distance géographique. En effet, tel que Brubaker (2005 : 5 et sq.) le signale, tant l'orientation envers une 'patrie' que le maintien d'une identité distincte vis-à-vis de la société d'accueil se sont avérés moins absolus que supposés durant longtemps. En même temps, ces pratiques impliquent également un statut différent par rapport aux genres. Comme le montre la réunion dans le village, les hommes occupent une position sociale dominante et privilégiée : ils se placent devant et le mari crache sur sa femme pour exprimer son mépris, même si celle-ci n'est pas directement coupable. Cette soumission de la femme est maintenue par rapport à la protagoniste, bien qu'elle se trouve en France. Elle nous mène à la deuxième partie : la double soumission des femmes africaines dans la diaspora – à travers la race et le genre.

3. Les femmes de descendance africaine doublement subordonnées : *race* et *gender* selon hooks

Les études non littéraires sur la question du genre en Afrique subsaharienne menées par des Africains subsahariens sont rares. Ainsi, Frantz Fanon, dans *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) commence à l'aborder, et Achille Mbembe, dans *Sortir de la grande nuit* (2010), se focalise avant tout sur des questions de différences postcoloniales, non pas de genre mais de possibilités socioéconomiques, qui sont, par la suite,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

souvent liées aux couleurs de peau. En revanche, bell hooks, auteure de *Ain't I a woman* (1990 [1982]) qui se penche sur la question féminine des femmes de descendance africaine aux États-Unis, n'est pas subsaharienne, mais afro-américaine. Certes, la situation afro-américaine est différente de la subsaharienne, en raison du déplacement et de l'esclavage qui a conduit à une situation d'infériorité et de défavorisation sociale, toujours présente dans les lois Jim Crow jusqu'aux années 1960. Cette situation représente toujours un sujet controversé dans les débats et combats sociaux, comme nous pouvons le voir dans l'œuvre *Gender and Jim Crow* (1996) où Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, historienne américaine blanche, met en lumière des vies de femmes noires activistes entre 1896 et 1920 qui furent longtemps oubliées.

Tout de même, la hiérarchie sociale coloniale liée à une classification selon *race* et *gender*, qui sont la base des réflexions de hooks, sont également applicables aux rapports entre l'Europe et l'Afrique subsaharienne. Ainsi, les colonies anglaises, françaises, hollandaises, allemandes et italiennes tout au long du XIX^{e} siècle introduisirent également un sens d'hégémonie et de toute-puissance occidentale dans ces parties du continent africain, tel que l'indique Walter Mignolo (2011 : 72), si bien que la sensation d'une différence raciale y était, si non omniprésente, sous-jacente. Concernant l'Europe, la situation est encore différente : contrairement aux États-Unis, elle n'a pas connu l'esclavage d'Africains subsahariens de manière immédiate ; en même temps, elle représente les anciens pouvoirs coloniaux qui ont établi un rapport de forces que Mignolo désigne comme *différence coloniale* (cf. ibid. : 36), rapport qui s'est inscrit dans la conception des collectifs de l'Afrique noire.

En dépit de ces différences, l'étude *Ain't I a woman*, menée d'un point de vue afro-américain et féministe, apporte – toujours – un éclairage aux textes analysés. Même si elle se réfère avant tout aux femmes afro-américaines, nous verrons que, tout en considérant les raisons apportées dans les textes, ses réflexions aideront à mettre en évidence certains aspects centraux. Mais d'abord, résumons les observations de la chercheuse afro-américaine.

Hooks présente la thèse que les femmes afro-américaines souffrent d'une double discrimination, tant raciale que de genre (cf. hooks 1990 :

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

7). La souffrance est accentuée par le fait que les deux discriminations sont dépourvues de soutien solidaire par un groupe social fort : autant les hommes blancs que noirs sont en faveur du système patriarcal en vigueur (cf. ibid. : 87) ; les hommes blancs occupent la position supérieure de l'organisation sociale, les hommes noirs aspirent au pouvoir hégémonique des blancs et désirent donc les femmes blanches comme symbole de ce pouvoir hégémonique (cf. hooks 1990 : 112)[2]. En ce qui concerne les femmes blanches, celles-ci, dans leur lutte féministe, excluent, voire ignorent, la situation des noires (cf. ibid. : 87). Ces dernières, finalement, ont tendance, par la longue tradition, à soutenir de manière à la fois consciente et inconsciente le système qui les exclut, affaiblissant et isolant ainsi davantage les femmes qui voudraient protester (cf. ibid. : 120). En tenant compte des réflexions de hooks, analysons maintenant les deux textes de la présente étude.

Effectivement, dans *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* ces thèses se confirment avec quelques exceptions, bien que la trame se déroule en France et non pas aux États-Unis. Ainsi, les hommes blancs sont représentés d'une part par André, le voisin à peine mentionné de Khadîdja (Hane 2011 : 11, 55), et de l'autre par Jacques Lenoir, l'amant de la protagoniste. Jacques Lenoir, qui porte, de la même manière que les rues, un nom à la fois ironique et symbolique, confirme la thèse de hooks, de façon double : il domine la protagoniste en tant que blanc et comme homme. Comme Français blanc, il est bien établi à Paris ; il dirige une société, alors que Khadîdja y travaille comme femme de ménage (Hane 2011 : 143). En tant qu'homme, il réussit à la séduire :

> Au début, son regard furtif me poursuivait. Chaque fois que je donnais des coups de torchon sur les vitres de son bureau, il se contentait de mater sous ma jupe fendue qui dévoilait mes cuisses lorsque je me baissais sur mon seau d'eau savonneuse. […] Ensuite, son inspection avait vite fait le tour de mon corps. Il ne lui avait pas fallu une heure après ce stratagème pour craquer […]. Jacques m'avait épiée pendant tout le temps qu'avait duré le nettoyage de son bureau. […] Les jours suivants, Jacques m'avait harcelée jusqu'à ce que je consente enfin à me laisser prendre dans sa voiture, au fond du parking. Nous avions ensuite renouvelé l'aventure plusieurs fois

[2] Avec cette remarque, hooks confirme la thèse de Fanon, selon laquelle l'homme noir désire une femme blanche, mais chez Fanon c'est également à l'inverse : la femme noire désirerait un homme blanc (cf. Fanon 1952 : 53 et sq.).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> dans son bureau. […] Puis l'entreprise qui m'avait placée dans sa société avait eu écho de ma conduite soi-disant peu professionnelle. […] Pour faute grave, celui-ci [notre employeur] m'avait virée. Et le bébé était né. Je n'avais plus la tête à rechercher un autre emploi. (Hane 2011 : 143 et sq.)

Contrairement à la théorie de hooks, dans cet exemple, la femme noire n'est pas complètement livrée à l'homme blanc. Elle possède tout de même la possibilité de décider si elle cède à ses désirs ou non. Qui plus est, elle tombe amoureuse de cet homme, de manière qu'elle participe librement aux rencontres sexuelles : « Parce que je l'aimais aussi loin que l'on puisse aimer un homme, je brûlais de prendre Jacques à son épouse » (Hane 2011 : 60). Malgré tout, c'est elle qui doit en assumer les conséquences : non seulement elle perd son travail, mais elle donne aussi naissance à un enfant qui est le fruit de cette relation et que Lenoir n'accepte pas (cf. ibid. : 57 et sq.). Ainsi, elle dépend de lui, habitant désormais dans son appartement dont elle ne peut plus payer le loyer. Bien qu'elle refuse de partir, elle est dans une position doublement faible, sans travail ni argent, mais avec cinq enfants à nourrir.

Les hommes noirs sont représentés d'un côté par ceux qui vivent à Paris, formant le soi-disant conseil des Sages, de l'autre par les hommes du clan au Mali. Comme nous l'avons déjà observé dans la première partie au sujet de l'Afrique comme *ethnoscape*, les hommes au Mali jugent la protagoniste coupable de mauvaise conduite. Cela conduit à un rendez-vous avec le conseil des Sages, où des hommes exclusivement l'insultent et ne lui adressent la parole qu'à la fin pour ensuite la faire taire immédiatement (cf. ibid. : 123 et sq.). Représentant la majorité et n'offrant pas à Khadîdja la possibilité de s'exprimer, ils perpétuent l'absence de voix et de droits féminins. La même situation se répète avec les hommes au Mali, ce qui est illustré dans le geste du père de la protagoniste qui crache sur sa femme, comme mentionné dans la dernière citation de la première partie.

Cependant, il existe un personnage masculin qui représente une exception à cette domination masculine noire : le « vieux Jules ». Bien qu'il encourage Khadîdja à suivre la convocation au conseil des Sages (ibid. : 109 et sq.) et qu'il soutienne donc la structure patriarcale, il est également le seul personnage, hormis l'assistante sociale, qui lui ap-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

porte parfois de la nourriture pour elle et ses enfants. Cela peut s'expliquer par le fait qu'en réalité, comme le lecteur l'apprend dans les dernières pages du livre, cet homme est le grand-père de trois des cinq enfants (Hane 2011 : 145). Mais, par ailleurs, lors du rassemblement des hommes mentionné, il est le seul à soutenir la protagoniste moralement. Lorsque le chef du rassemblement accuse la protagoniste,

> Tonton Jules se gratta les trois poils blancs qui lui restaient sur le crâne. […] le vieux Jules émit un son guttural qui laissait paraître sinon sa contrariété, du moins la hâte d'en finir avec la réunion. Contrairement aux autres, il n'avait pas eu ce mouvement de recul qui l'aurait éloigné de moi. Un instant, je lui en fus reconnaissante. (Ibid. : 118)

À l'intérieur des structures fortement patriarcales, ce personnage traite la protagoniste comme un être humain. En effet, il est le seul à ne pas la condamner pour son amour pour un homme blanc lorsqu'elle le lui demande : « –Jules, dis-je, est-ce que c'est mal d'aimer un Blanc ? […] –Tout ce qui vient du cœur doit être accepté comme ça vient, philosopha-t-il » (ibid. : 136).

Concernant les femmes blanches, le texte n'en compte qu'une seule : Madame Renaud, l'assistante sociale. Elle apparait uniquement dans sa fonction professionnelle, ce qui lui confère un rôle moins personnel et plus généralisé. Sa première apparition a lieu au début du roman : elle « salua [la protagoniste] comme une assistante sociale salue son cas social, d'une longue poignée de main » (ibid. : 9). Cette attitude professionnelle est renforcée par la description de sa voix comme « mi-robot, mi-humaine » (ibid. : 10). Par conséquent, elle n'apparaît ni clairement comme féministe ni comme anti-féministe, mais simplement dans sa fonction de défendre les droits et les devoirs sociaux des personnes. Ainsi, elle apporte des produits alimentaires à la protagoniste pour sa famille (cf. ibid. : 46) et elle essaye de la convaincre de porter plainte contre Jacques Lenoir (cf. ibid. : 47), mais elle place aussi ses enfants dans un foyer social, en raison, avant tout, de la difficulté que la protagoniste a pour les nourrir (cf. ibid. : 128). Ce qui caractérise l'assistante sociale est donc moins la défense des droits des femmes que ceux de l'être humain en général.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

En ce qui concerne les femmes noires, en revanche, plusieurs sont évoquées, tant dans le village malien qu'à Paris. Comme l'indique hooks, celles-ci contribuent à leur propre soumission. D'un côté, la mère de la protagoniste, durant l'enfance de cette dernière, ne cédait pas lorsque sa fille la suppliait de ne pas la donner, à treize ans, en épouse à un ami d'enfance de son père :

> J'avais supplié ma mère de ne pas lui octroyer de droit sur mon corps. Es-tu devenue folle ! avait-elle répondu. Comment oses-tu remettre en cause la décision de ton père ? Et en quoi ton mariage te concerne-t-il, d'ailleurs ?' Elle s'était ensuite tassée sur son lit. Le sommier de bambou portait l'abnégation de l'épouse soumise qui ne voulait plus rien entendre. Au contraire, elle répétait la leçon héritée de sa propre mère : le mariage est un don de soi, dévouée doit être une épouse pour assurer l'avenir de ses enfants, le mari a tous les droits, la femme le devoir de les satisfaire. (Hane 2011 : 51 et sq.)

Cet exemple correspond à la thèse de hooks selon laquelle les femmes noires elles-mêmes contribuent fortement à perpétuer leur place de femme soumise. Ainsi, la mère de la protagoniste prêche l'obéissance au père, leçon reçue par sa propre mère. Sa réaction offensée isole sa fille dans sa lutte pour ses droits et la rend donc impuissante.

De l'autre côté, les voisines à Paris se comportent d'une manière semblable en défendant la situation soumise des femmes et en méprisant l'indépendance de la protagoniste. Ainsi, elles acceptent la polygamie qui les défavorise :

> Tante Néné allait sur ses trente ans. Houlèye, arrivée à Paris un mois plus tôt, était présentée comme une aide ménagère, une gamine de dix-huit ans qui allait la soutenir pour les tâches d'intérieur, en particulier celle qui se pratique au lit et qui motiva la décision d'Alioune [son mari] de la prendre pour compagne. […] Tante Néné pointa le doigt vers le ciel, prenant Dieu à témoin de sa gratitude envers Alioune, cet homme bon qui ménageait la santé de sa vieille épouse trentenaire. (Ibid. : 27 et sq.)

Le comportement de ce personnage indique son ambivalence entre ses sentiments sincères et son comportement explicite. Comme le requiert la tradition, elle accepte le fait que son mari prenne une deuxième épouse plus jeune qui soit une concurrente sexuelle. De l'autre, le fait

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

qu'elle raconte cela de manière répétée (cf. Hane 2011 : 27) indique son malheur. Le ton légèrement ironique de la narratrice autodiégétique laisse entendre son avis contraire. Néanmoins, elle n'est point soutenue, car toutes ses voisines la toisent à cause de son rapport avec un homme blanc et tentent de la convaincre de se remarier (cf. ibid. : 28).

En conséquence, la protagoniste ne trouve pas de soutien dans sa lutte contre la soumission parmi les femmes noires. Malgré tout, une femme blanche et un homme noir, c'est-à-dire un représentant des deux autres groupes soumis, l'une par métier, l'autre par responsabilité humaine et probablement familiale, lui offrent leur aide autant qu'ils le peuvent.

Dans *Adua*, la situation est moins nette, car nous nous trouvons face à trois personnages immigrés, de générations, d'âges et de sexes différents, de même que la forme narrative y est variée. Cependant, le premier personnage qui apparaît, à la fois le seul à posséder une voix autodiégétique et dont le nom est aussi le titre de l'ouvrage, est une femme. Grâce à ces raisons narratives et formelles, elle peut donc être considérée comme la protagoniste de l'œuvre. Or, concernant le rôle de genre, nous devons également considérer les autres personnages immigrés, tous d'Afrique subsaharienne : son père Zoppe, qui passe quelques temps en Italie dans les années 1930, et Ahmed, un jeune venu en bateau de Lampedusa ; la narratrice se réfère à ce jeune comme « Titanic » (Scego 2015 : 28).

Le personnage Zoppe représente l'infériorité du sujet masculin noir colonisé par rapport à l'homme blanc. Vivant au moment où la Somalie est une colonie italienne, Zoppe est soumis aux Italiens en tant que sujet colonisé. Cela se reflète dans son activité d'interprète au service des Italiens, d'abord en caserne (cf. ibid. : 18), où sa subordination est illustrée par le traitement raciste d'un groupe de jeunes hommes qui le maltraitent physiquement dans la rue :

> Erano in tre a picchiarlo. Uno lo teneva fermo, gli altri lo riempivano di botte. […] 'Smettiamo, eh ?' disse a un certo punto Beppe. 'Sì, se no così lo ucci-diamo. Ci hanno detto di divertirci un po'. Mica di ucciderlo. Dopotutto è uno che lavora per noi […].' 'Ma se è un negro, a chi può servire un negro? Dai, su, siamo seri.' (Scego 2015 : 14 et sq.)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Le fait même que les trois jeunes fascistes aient vraisemblablement reçu l'ordre de rouer de coups sans raison le personnage noir montre le mépris pour ce dernier et sa soumission physique. La question de l'utilité d'un homme noir traduit le racisme extrême de ces jeunes hommes blancs.

Ensuite, au service d'un fasciste nommé « le comte Anselmi » (ibid. : 66), la subordination de Zoppe se manifeste dans le fait que son patron le traite comme un objet : « 'Mi ascolti, Zoppe, l'ho tirata fuori dai guai perché sono buono e perché lei mi serve. Mi mostri la lingua.' Zoppe ub-bidì. Ormai non sapeva fare altro. 'Che bella lingua rossa, spessa. Mmm… mi piace. Mi sarà utile in Africa […]' » (ibid. : 87). Le comte Anselmi parle de Zoppe comme s'il était un animal que l'on examine en fonction de son utilité physique pour certains travaux, mais non comme homme. Ainsi, le personnage de Zoppe témoigne de la soumission du Noir par rapport au Blanc à travers la situation colonisatrice présentée.

Le jeune immigré de Lampedusa, en revanche, illustre la tension entre race et genre, évoquée par hooks. Ainsi, d'un côté, nous pouvons comprendre qu'en Italie il souffre du racisme, car Adua constate : « sono i miei soldi che lo difendono […] dagli skinhead » (ibid. : 89). De l'autre, il peut se montrer patriarcal face à sa protectrice, même s'il dépend d'elle financièrement et même si elle est plus âgée que lui. Il lui reproche de ne pas s'habiller correctement (cf. ibid. : 114) et la traite de « Puttana », lorsqu'il se rend compte qu'elle a participé à un film érotique dans sa jeunesse (cf. ibid. : 88, 90). Sans s'intéresser au contexte, il la juge selon des critères qu'il n'applique pas à lui-même : alors qu'il reproche un comportement lascif à son épouse, lui-même flirte avec des jeunes femmes en sa présence (cf. ibid. : 89). À travers un tel comportement, ce personnage masculin adopte une attitude patriarcale.

En ce qui concerne Adua, elle correspond, en effet, à la double subordination selon hooks : dans le film pour lequel elle est emmenée en Italie, elle représente une femme africaine qui se définit par son caractère érotique. Elle est donc réduite à son ethnie et à son genre. Ainsi, dès le moment où elle est choisie, seule son apparence compte. Lorsque le jeune trafiquant Omar présente Adua aux Italiens qui recherchent une Somalienne pour leur film, ils disent : « 'Bravo Omar, […] ci hai portato la ragazza giusta.' E un altro del gruppo : 'Ha delle belle cosce, la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

negretta' » (Scego 2015 : 104). Le commentaire sur les jambes d'Adua ressemble à celui du comte Anselmi sur la langue du père de la protagoniste ; tous deux transforment les personnes en objets, les réduisent à leur apparence. De plus, dans le qualificatif du corps féminin de « negretta », qui désigne de manière méprisante une femme africaine, les deux aspects de race et genre sont présents. Ce mépris augmente au moment où Arturo et Sissi, les réalisateurs du film, déjà en Italie, examinent la protagoniste : « Sapevo che miravano al mio corpo. […] Sapevo che prima o poi avrei dovuto pagare quella tassa. […] Non sapevo che mi avrebbero preso tutto. Anche la dignità. Mi feci toccare, palpare, odorare » (ibid. :122). Perdre la dignité indique nettement l'infériorité totale.

Contrairement à la théorie de hooks concernant les femmes blanches, l'une de celles présentes dans le roman n'est pas soumise en tant que femme, mais domine au contraire son mari, comme nous pouvons le voir à la suite du passage cité antérieurement : « Lei ordinava e lui eseguiva. […] E fu allora, mentre ero persa nei miei pensieri, che lei gli ordinò : 'Adesso spogliala, Arturo !' Lui mi guardò con uno sguardo obliquo, vacuamente imbarazzato e sciolse con un gesto il nodo della mia tunica. E per la prima volta fui nuda davanti al mio regista » (ibid. : 123). Dans ce cas particulier, le rapport de forces entre homme et femme est inversé, mais la femme noire reste sur la position inférieure. Tout de même, cette relation apparaît comme particulière dans le roman, ce qui devient apparent dans la scène du repas chez un magnat de la production cinématographique, où d'autres femmes occupent également une position soumise : « Alla festa siamo quasi tutte donne, tutte con straccetti inesistenti a coprire malamente i nostri sospiri. Tutte poi abbiamo un sorriso di plastica che ci deforma la faccia » (Scego 2015 : 133). Durant la soirée, les femmes ne jouent évidemment que le rôle d'objet érotique et sont donc soumises à l'homme possédant les richesses et, par conséquent, le pouvoir.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

4. Conclusion

Dans les pages précédentes, nous avons analysé les aspects spatio-culturels et du genre féminin dans deux textes récents de l'*afroromania* : *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* (2011) de Khadi Hane et *Adua* (2015) d'Igiaba Scego. Dans un premier temps, le concept d'*ethnoscapes* selon Appadurai nous a permis de mettre en évidence l'influence qu'a, dans l'expérience de post-migration, le lieu d'origine sur l'espace d'arrivée. Dans les deux œuvres, le concept apparaît sous l'angle de la fluidité des lieux dans l'imaginaire des protagonistes. Dans leurs pensées, elles pensent un lieu dans l'autre ou se projettent d'un lieu à l'autre, rendant ainsi la présence temporellement simultanée et spatialement identique. Cette simultanéité et cette superposition d'un lieu sur l'autre sont exprimées et créées par le langage et visualisées par l'écriture, et correspondent au terme d'*afroromania*. De plus, *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* contient des mécanismes d'information et de contrôle social à l'intérieur du groupe ethnique qui créent la sensation d'une présence simultanée de l'Afrique à Paris.

En ce qui concerne la situation féminine, les deux œuvres la placent au centre de la narration, mais de manière différente. Grâce aux réflexions de bell hooks qui établit une hiérarchisation en associant les paradigmes de *race* et *gender*, nous avons pu dégager des structures correspondantes dans les deux œuvres. Dans *Des Fourmis dans la bouche* s'observent des exemples pour tous les niveaux de la hiérarchie, à l'exception des femmes blanches représentées par l'assistante sociale, qui apparaît avant tout dans son rôle professionnel. Jacques comme homme blanc figure au sommet de cette hiérarchie, suivi des hommes noirs à Paris et au village malien. Les femmes noires renforcent cet ordre, isolant de cette manière la protagoniste dans sa lutte. En ce qui concerne *Adua*, les trois représentants de trois générations de l'Afrique représentent en même temps trois aspects de l'ambivalence entre *race* et *gender*. Ainsi, Zoppe, le père de la protagoniste, est un exemple du racisme et donc de la soumission des hommes noirs aux hommes blancs, tandis qu'Ahmed le jeune immigré montre la soumission des femmes noires aux hommes noirs. Adua, enfin, est soumise à la fois aux hommes noirs et blancs ainsi qu'aux femmes. Cela dit, de manière semblable à *Des Fourmis dans la bouche*, le personnage féminin blanc

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

représente une exception au schéma selon hooks : Sissi est supérieure à son mari qui doit lui obéir. Même si nous avons noté la position exceptionnelle de cette femme à l'intérieur de l'œuvre, ce rôle supérieur d'un personnage féminin blanc pourrait mettre en évidence une tendance d'émancipation des femmes blanches, soulignant encore davantage la situation soumise des femmes noires.

Fictions inspirées de la réalité, ces textes donnent une voix à deux personnages peu visibles et peu audibles dans leur société. En exposant leur situation, ils indiquent de manière exemplaire la situation de nombreuses femmes dans ce qui a été désigné, dans la présente étude comme l'*afroromania*. Ainsi, ils contribuent à augmenter leur présence dans la conscience collective et par là même peut-être aussi à améliorer leur situation.

Bibliographie

Textes

Hane, Khadi (2011) : *Des fourmis dans la bouche*, Paris : Denoël.

Scego, Igiaba (2015) : *Adua*, Firenze/Milano : Giunti.

Critique

Appadurai, Arjun (1996) : *Modernity at large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis/London : University of Minnesota Press.

Brubaker, Rogers (2005) : « The 'diaspora' diaspora », dans : *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), pp. 1-19.

Fanon, Frantz (1952) : *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris : Seuil.

Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth (1996) : *Gender and Jim Crow. Women and the politics of white supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, Chapel Hill, NC : The University of North Carolina Press.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Giuliani, Gaia (2019) : *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy : Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture*, London : Palgrave Macmillan.

hooks, bell (1990 [1982]) : *Ain't I a woman. Black Women and Feminism*, London/Winchester, MA : Pluto Press.

Huggan, Graham (2001) : *The Postcolonial Exotic. Marketing the Margins*, London/New York : Routledge.

Mbembe, Achille (2010) : *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*, Paris : La Découverte.

Mignolo, Walter D. (2011 [2003]) : *Historias locales / diseños globales. Colonialidad, conocimientos subalternos y pensamiento fronterizo*, Madrid : Akal.

Mihaljević, Nikica/Carić, Sonja (2017) : « Spazi transgenerazionali in *Adua* di Igiaba Scego », dans : Andrea Santamaría Villarroya (éd.) : *Personajes femeninos y canon*, Sevilla : Benilde, pp. 289-317.

Pandolfo, Michele (2013) : « La Somalia coloniale : una storia ai margini della memoria italiana », dans : *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea : Processo penale, politica, opinione pubblica (secoli XVIII-XIX)*, 14(2), p. 1-18, dans : http://www.studistorici.com/2013/08/29/pandolfo_numero_14/ (consulté le 25.08.2021).

Thomas, Dominic (2014) : « Afropeanism and Francophone Sub-Saharan African Writing », dans : Nicki Hitchcott/Dominic Thomas (éds.) : *Francophone Afropean Literatures*, Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, pp. 17-31.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah

(Bruxelles)

Due racconti: “Medea e Amir” e “Sandra”

Abstract

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah – writer, playwright, activist and literary scholar – was born in 1973 in Verona and lived in Mogadishu before returning to Europe (also, among other countries, to Italy) at the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. She has published several novels that link Italy and Somalia, starting with her first novel *Madre piccola* (2007) to the currently latest novel *Le stazioni della luna* (2021), which deals with the highly controversial trusteeship administration of Somalia (1950-1960) by the former colonial power, Italy. The hitherto unpublished micro stories “Medea e Amir” and “Sandra” represent snapshots of everyday life in Italy, seen from the point of view of Italians with roots in both Europe and Africa. “Medea e Amir” features two artists and the still widespread racist stereotypes of colonial legacy, especially with regard to women. The micro story also tackles the question of the still outstanding introduction of birth-right citizenship in Italy. “Sandra” allows a glimpse into everyday life of the Cape Verdean community in Rome and focuses on the friendship of two women of the, in terms of migration studies, so-called “second generation”.

Simonetta Puleio / Stephanie Neu-Wendel: Introduzione

L’opera dell’autrice, librettista, giornalista e ricercatrice Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, nata a Verona nel 1973 e cresciuta a Mogadiscio dove visse fino allo scoppio della guerra civile nel 1991, è incentrata non soltanto, ma in gran parte sulla relazione tra l’Africa e l’Europa, soprattutto tra la Somalia e l’Italia, e sulla situazione della cosiddetta “Generazione 2”, cioè figlie e figli di parenti provenienti da paesi africani, nati in Italia, ma non considerati „italiani“ a causa dello *ius sanguinis*, cioè la cittadinanza per discendenza, tuttora in vigore in Italia.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ali Farah intreccia la sua attività come scrittrice con la ricerca scientifica – avendo conseguito il dottorato in africanistica –, ad esempio come *Writer in Residence* e *Fellow* di università ed enti internazionali, tra l'altro nell'ambito dell'"International Writing Program" dell'Università di Iowa, presso la *Maison des Écrivains Étrangers et des Traducteurs* a Saint-Nazaire, la *Fondazione Civitella Ranieri* e lo *Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies* in Sudafrica. Scrive inoltre per varie testate, ad esempio *La Repubblica*, *Internazionale*, *Nigrizia* and *El Ghibli*, e ha pubblicato sia un vasto numero di racconti che – fino ad ora – tre romanzi: *Madre piccola* (2007, edito da Frassinelli, per il quale Ali Farah ha ottenuto il Premio Elio Vittorini nel 2008), trattato nel presente volume anche nel contributo di Maria Kirchmair, *Il comandante del fiume* (2014) e *Le stazioni della luna* (2021), entrambi pubblicati dalla casa editrice 66thand2nd.

Nel suo romanzo d'esordio *Madre piccola*, tramite una "polifonia di voci",[1] cioè tre narratrici/narratori autodiegetici, Ali Farah si inoltra nella diaspora somala, raccontando percorsi e storie spesso traumatiche di fuga, perdita, dolore, ma anche di speranza e di una possibile riconciliazione con il proprio passato e con i "nemici" secondo la logica clanista somala. L'impatto della guerra civile sui percorsi biografici dei vari personaggi viene cioè intrecciato con l'esperienza "d'arrivo" in Italia, con un focus particolare sulla situazione delle donne, che emergono come forti e in grado di costruire una propria "casa", un punto d'arrivo nel quale sono presenti sia elementi somali che italiani. Anche *Il comandante del fiume* riprende, tramite il personaggio del giovane Yabar, la tematica della diaspora somala e dei rapporti familiari dolorosi. Con *Le stazioni della luna*, ambientato in un arco di tempo dagli anni Trenta fino agli anni Cinquanta del secolo scorso, Ali Farah mette invece in primo piano le conseguenze del colonialismo, soffermandosi su un aspetto ancora poco conosciuto della storia italiana: all'Italia venne, infatti, conferita dalle Nazioni Unite l'amministrazione fiduciaria della Somalia, che durò dal 1950 fino all'indipendenza della Somalia nel 1960.

[1] Cf. Maximilian Gröne (2017): "Geschichten/Geschichte. Cristina Ali Farahs Roman *Madre piccola*", in: http://blog.romanischestudien.de/cristina-ali-farah-madre-piccola/ (ultima data di consultazione: 27.08.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Al centro della trama si trovano di nuovo donne somale e italiane forti e indipendenti, che fanno emergere – con le loro biografie e le loro scelte nella lotta per l'indipendenza – le scissioni interne e persistenti dovute all'eredità della violenza coloniale.

I racconti messi a disposizione dall'autrice per la pubblicazione nel presente volume si riallacciano alla tematica della diaspora, ma anche alla questione dello *ius sanguinis* e agli stereotipi di stampo coloniale, soprattutto nei confronti delle donne, che fanno tuttora parte dell'immaginario collettivo italiano.

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah:

Medea e Amir

Il treno sta prendendo velocità. Ci sediamo rassegnati, il posto di fronte a noi vuoto, il nostro amico non ce l'ha fatta. Invece ecco Romano che arriva, è salito al volo sulla prima carrozza, aveva il turno di notte, giusto in tempo per lasciare il lavoro, andare a casa e prepararsi. La borsa è pesante, ci sono tre bottiglie di Mistrà per mia sorella, dice, a Milano non si trova così l'ho comprato a Roma. Ma cos'è, un prodotto etiope? chiedo ingenuamente. No è un liquore all'anice, e nel dire questo tira fuori la bottiglia con un'etichetta antica, si vede che gli italiani l'hanno esportato in Etiopia quando ci sono stati ed è diventato un "prodotto locale".

Finalmente riassestati cominciamo animatamente – tra telefonate e discussioni – a commentare la serata che organizziamo da settimane: una spedizione a Milano per vedere Medea interpretata da Caterina Deregibus e poi tutti insieme al centro sociale la Pergola a sentir cantare Amir. L'entusiasmo mal trattenuto ci fa trasbordare dai confini dei nostri sedili, si tratta sì di teatro e di musica, ma anche di politica e questo nobilita ulteriormente la "missione": si va perché i nostri amici rappresentano un'idea condivisa, che interpretino il conflitto di una donna-mito o "rimino" su basi hip hop. Il discorso si allarga alle battaglie della rete G2 (seconde generazioni) per il diritto alla cittadinanza, l'atmosfera si scalda e, immersi nella perenne dialettica tra esclusione inclusione, ci accorgiamo del viaggiatore che ammutolito ci osserva da inizio

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

viaggio. Ora facciamo entrare anche lui nei G2, esclama Romano e scoppiamo insieme a ridere: ci starei volentieri, risponde il ragazzo, i miei sono pugliesi e sono cresciuto a Bergamo, capisco quello che dite!

L'esilio, prima di tutto da se stessi, è una condizione connaturata in Medea, vediamo l'ombra contorta di Caterina apparire dietro una superficie opaca, mentre quella che si materializza subito è la sua parola straziata, voce che quasi non riconosciamo. Nelle interviste il regista dice di aver "riconosciuto in lei quella qualità arcaica di donna africana di saper liberare gli istinti", ma forse Caterina, nata a cresciuta a Casale di Monferrato, gli istinti li ha imparati a dominare al teatro stabile di Torino dove si è diplomata e negli anni di seminari e di lavoro che hanno preceduto questa prova. "Mi invitavano alle trasmissioni televisive e pensavano che arrivassi con il cammello e l'asciugamano in testa" dice Amir dal palco della Pergola chiamando gli applausi dei ragazzi presenti prima di regalarci il bis del suo "Straniero nella mia nazione". Sono le tre di notte, la giornata è stata intensa. Mi allontano, ripetendo sottovoce insieme agli altri: s.o.s. bilancio negativo se me chiamano straniero mi giro e gli sorrido.

Sandra

"Amica mia, domenica i miei genitori festeggiano il loro trentunesimo anniversario di matrimonio, venite che ci fa tanto piacere, locale capoverdiano Morabeza, zona Santa Maria del Soccorso." Suona così più o meno così il messaggino di Sandrinha, Sandra con il diminutivo, come l'ho imparata a chiamare molto tempo fa, quando aveva diciannove anni e le differenze di età si sentivano più marcate.

Sei capoverdiana?, mi aveva chiesto nel lungo corridoio della facoltà di Lettere con un accento romano marcatissimo. Io me ne ero rimasta mezza stupita da una parte, Capo Verde all'epoca non sapevo neanche che esistesse.

L'avrei scoperto dopo qualche anno, Capo e Corno d'Africa, è da lì che vengono le più antiche comunità straniere in Italia, donne in maggioranza arrivate come domestiche.

Capocorno! aveva esclamato Jorge travolgendoci, bisogna inventarsi qualcosa con questo nome.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Il *Morabeza* è così, un pensiero gentile, uno spazio ospitale aperto tra archi di cemento armato.

I bambini corrono avanti e indietro, combattono con spade di polistirolo improvvisate nella lunga veranda di serrande chiuse, c'è chi fuma e chi controlla, in un via vai senza sosta tra dentro e fuori.

È pomeriggio, il sole si riflette sulle conchiglie incastonate nell'intonaco azzurro, aria marina e periferia urbana: c'è la paglia sulle pareti proprio come nei locali capoverdiani, mi dice una signora.

Ma non si respira malinconia tra queste quattro generazioni festaiole, le coppie mature e i più giovani ballano stretti, i tavoli straboccano di vivande, mi viene in mente Cesaria Evora che canta scalza sul palco di Villa Ada, *sodade dess nha terra Sao Nicolau*. Sono passati tanti anni dalla sera del concerto, Sandra, una spanna più alta di me, esperta giocatrice di calcio, mi copre le spalle sulla via deserta, mentre cerchiamo segnali per ritrovare la strada perduta.

Sono più grande io, le dico forte e tento invano di scambiare posto, lei sul marciapiede io all'esterno, le macchine che sfrecciano veloci, sfiorandoci appena. Sandra combattiva è sempre stata, ecco perché quando qualche anno l'ho incontrata per caso vestita da dura, non mi son stupita poi tanto. "Cosa ci fai con la divisa della Security?" le chiedo, "Lavoro a Fiumicino, sto ai varchi, mi risponde con un sorrisino; dopo l'11 settembre è scoppiata la fobia per gli aeroporti, così hanno aumentato i controlli". Sono perplessa, credevo che quelli della security fossero poliziotti. "Abbiamo fatto un corso", dice Sandra, "di donne poi ce ne sono parecchie". Io però voglio sapere il più possibile delle apparecchiature, dei passeggeri sospetti. Voglio sapere se tutto questo controllare impedisce alle bombe di passare. Sandra ride buttando i lunghi cappelli indietro e glissa.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Joana Passos

(Minho)

Orlanda Amarílis: Cape Verdean Immigrants, Imperial Memories and Gender Dynamics

Abstract

This article presents an introduction to the literature of Cape Verde and its women authors. Then, it specifically focuses on the works of Cape Verdean woman writer Orlanda Amarílis (1924-2014), who wrote about Cape Verdean immigrants living in Western cities. Gender issues are equally addressed through the representation of the greater exposure of women to poverty, violence and abuse, both in their own country and as immigrants. In her writing, Orlanda Amarílis also explores the split identity of the immigrant, in transit between 'home' and 'host country', highlighting the marginalised status of the immigrant community as a minority culture. Several short stories are analysed as exemplary case studies. The discussion aims at presenting several coherent thematic lines in the works of this Cape Verdean writer, herself an immigrant in Portugal. The aspects of her works most explored in this analysis concern her accounts of immigrants' experiences, the writer's reflections on gender issues and her anti-colonial discourse.

The small archipelago of Cape Verde has long established itself as home to a lively cultural scene in terms of both literature and music. In fact, the first solid literary movement in the set of African literatures in Portuguese was built around the literary journal *Claridade* (1936), a modern, innovative project with an impressive quality considering the available resources and the relative isolation of the archipelago at the time. As for music, the *morna*[1] is well established as a particular musical genre that has achieved great international popularity.

[1] "Morna" is the most emblematic musical genre from Cape Verde. It consolidated between the end of the 18th century and middle of the 19th century. It tends to have a slow

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

The *Claridade* generation set the example and encouraged local writers to represent life in the archipelago, turning to their local reality as a worthy literary subject. This "territorialisation" of writing was a key turning point in the consolidation of a truly local/national literature in the archipelago, beyond the influence of Portuguese and European literatures as aesthetic and philosophical references. At the time (1936), Cape Verde was a Portuguese colony, and like all the literatures born under a colonial regime, it took some time until local writers found a voice of their own, exploring subject matters and literary forms beyond the initial imitative drive, which had been based on colonial influences conveyed to students through formal education.

The magazine *Certeza* (1944) appeared barely ten years after *Claridade,* and this time, women collaborators were included in its pages (there were no women authors in *Claridade*). This paper is about a writer, Orlanda Amarílis (1924-2014), who started publishing her texts in *Certeza,* when she was a young author. This detail is important because it stands as evidence of the writer's initial involvement with the local literature of Cape Verde and its intellectual milieu. Orlanda Amarílis is one of the three main women writers in the Cape Verdean literature, together with Dina Salústio (1941-) and Vera Duarte (1952-). Orlanda Amarílis was the elder of the three, and, after her writer's debut in Cape Verde, she lived most of her adult life as an immigrant, in Lisbon.

Orlanda Amarílis belongs to the generation of writers that witnessed the struggle for the liberation of the five African colonies Portugal held at the time. In tune with the times, there is an implicit anti-colonial discourse in her writing, but, as Amarílis only published her collections of short stories after the independence struggle, her writing does not reveal

rhythm and it includes lyrics, as it is sung by a solo singer accompanied by a set of instruments such as guitar and violin. Cesária Évora was the most famous interpreter of mornas, and she was quite famous in Portugal and France. Mornas are usually sung in "Crioulo", the language of Cape Verde (together with Portuguese), but, in the past, they were sung in Portuguese as well. Currently, there is dissention among Cape Verdean musicians as some want to keep the tradition "pure", while others want creative freedom to adapt *mornas* to contemporary taste and global influences (see Nogueira 2013, and Monteiro 2013).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

the propaganda urgency of the militant writer apparent in the works of many other authors of the 1950s and 1960s from the Portuguese-speaking African territories.

In 1945, Orlanda Amarílis married Manuel Ferreira (a Portuguese scholar and writer who was among the first to acknowledge and promote the study of African literatures in the Portuguese academy) and because of her husband's military career they moved to Goa, which was a Portuguese colony. India gained independent from the British Raj in 1947, when Orlanda Amarílis was living in the small Goan enclave. It is reasonable to conclude that neither Orlanda Amarílis nor her husband could have been indifferent to the political events around them, especially because Goa's integration in India came to be regarded as an example to future liberation movements: if India could be free from Portugal, so could other colonies around the world. But Portuguese decolonisation would be a hard, violent process.[2]

During the majority of the 20th century, Portugal lived under a fascist dictatorship ruled by Salazar (Estado Novo, 1933-1974). Salazar considered the Portugal's colonial dimension essential to the country's economic survival, and at a moment in time when several nations were rethinking their colonial dynamics (in part as a consequence of World War II), he opted instead for repressive colonial policies, including war.[3] Thus, throughout the 1960s, Portugal waged three "colonial wars" – as they were called from a metropolitan perspective. These were, in fact, the "liberation wars" of Angola (1961-1974), Guiné-Bissau (1963-1974) and Mozambique (1964-1974), wars that only ended with the revolution known as The Carnation Revolution, in 1974, which overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship, establishing a democratic regime.

During the 60s and early 70s, political allegiance to the independence movements had been violently repressed in the two archipelagos under Portuguese rule (Cape Verde and S. Tomé and Príncipe), but there was no war there. Initially, Cape Verde joined efforts with Guiné-Bissau, under the leadership of revolutionary leader Amílcar Cabral. Cabral's project was to make the two territories a unique nation

[2] For the historical background see Oliveira (2020).

[3] For complementary sources on the historical background (in Portuguese) see Pinto (2001); see also Rosas/Machaqueiro/Oliveira (2015).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

consisting of a continental part and the ten islands of the archipelago. However, after independence, in 1975, separate independence processes took place, and the two territories became different nations.

Orlanda Amarílis was in a complex position in the middle of all this political turmoil. She was a migrant, travelling to many places as she followed her husband's initial career. At the same time, as I will demonstrate through an analysis of her writing, she was a keen, sensitive observer, and a politically aware individual, who took in what she learned from her many visits to different countries, including other Portuguese colonies. All along, she remained in touch with her Cape Verdean identity, representing Cape Verdean society in her writing and expressing through choice of themes and character construction her own post-colonial awareness, as she criticised the failures and wrongs of the Portuguese administration.

Considering the background of biographical and historical elements mentioned above, I suggest three fundamental topics to understand her collections of short stories: a) immigrants and their status as second-rate citizens; b) immigration and women's vulnerability to abuse c) colonial practices and their legacy of poverty and humiliation. Orlanda Amarílis writes about these topics to expose them and make the reader more aware of social problems affecting migrant communities and their relations to host nations.

Concerning the latter topic, I would like to highlight that her writing is committed to resistance against colonialism in subtle ways that may elude a reader not familiar with the Portuguese/Cape Verdean colonial context. Note that, in a country where people died of hunger, during the dictatorship, the press could not publish anything but celebratory pieces of news, aligned with a nationalist rhetoric and praising order or routine. There was tight censorship, both in metropolitan Portugal and in all its colonies, and since the press was controlled, it was literature that carried through the function of the press, denouncing abusive political practices and state indifference towards the living conditions of the colonised subjects (see Cruz 2011). In this context, the constant reference to poverty in many of Orlanda Amarílis' short stories about Cape Verde is a rebellious gesture. She is not simply negatively representating her homeland, nor is she simply justifying the intense drive to emigrate

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

when you grow up in desolate islands. Rather, she is exposing the lack of alternatives the colonial policies offered to the Cape Verdean population.

The depiction of poverty also justifies emigration. As can currently be seen with the massive numbers of African citizens risking their lives to try for a "better future" in Europe – often sailing in precarious boats across the Mediterranean – Cape Verdeans were, and still are, driven to migration because of scarcity. The representation of this scarcity is, in the context of her works, a justification to "go away", and live somewhere else. Consequently, when reading Amarílis' short stories, European/metropolitan publics are confronted with what I would phrase as a moral duty to be more welcoming to communities in diaspora who are living among mainstream European national cultures. Thus, through her literary writing as a form of minority discourse (see Taborda da Silva/Ferreira Cury (2011), Orlanda Amarílis reveals critical perceptions of centre/mainstream societies as surveyed from the periphery (expressing a migrant, minority, diaspora point of view). This feature amounts to one aspect of her work, keeping it relevant, updated and even urgent.

Probably as a reflection of her own condition as a migrant, Orlanda Amarílis' short stories often address the dual position of immigrants living in a host nation: on the one hand, they live away from their own motherland, always remembering "home" as the affective place where they feel they belong. On the other hand, they live their everyday life in a western metropolis, either as outsiders "in transit" (until they retire to the island), or, enveloped by their own community, as a minority social cell on the margins of a dominant, mainstream culture. However, isolation within the diaspora community never brings with it a positive solution in the universe of this writer's stories, precisely because the community is only relevant to her characters as a protective shield when they feel marginalised by the host nation where they live. Following up on this last point, it is both meaningful and depressing that a narrative line connecting several of Amarílis' short stories on immigrants is the focus on a "moment of truth", when the self-deceiving pleasures of feeling at home in one's host society are exposed as mere illusion. Consequently, I argue there is, in her writing, an ideological and ethical

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

commitment to invite reflection on several socio-political topics related to the living conditions and experiences of migrant citizens.

From the point of view of character construction, the opposition between home and host nation is an essential structural axis to understanding immigrants' internal life in terms of thoughts and emotions. However, there is a collective parallel to the expression of individual (character) consciousness regarding this theme. Emigration is a fundamental dimension in the collective identity of island societies, an identity known to have consolidated as a collateral consequence of sea routes connecting islands to continents, supporting the mobility of people and goods. It is thus impossible to think the literature of Cape Verde without considering emigration themes as a constitutive element in the formation of the Cape Verdean collective identity.

Another point I want to address in the introduction to the short stories to be discussed below concerns the overlapping of gender issues with migrant writing in the works by Orlanda Amarílis. To begin with, most of the protagonists in her short stories are women. Through these women characters, the author discusses gender issues such as women's social roles in a country of emigrants (where, quite often, mothers have to raise a family alone), the social expectations of migrant women, or the enhanced possibility of abuse women face through the complex articulation of economic male power in contrast to the social position of poor young women looking for social integration or social mobility.

1. Orlanda Amarílis and Benjamin's "Chronotope"

As a Cape Verdean emigrant who finally settled in Lisbon, Amarílis often writes about her life back at the archipelago. Whenever she does so, she is in what I call the "memory mode", as the narratives that take place in the setting of the archipelago frequently (but not exclusively) deal with young women or children, as if life "back home" could only be evoked by recalling a previous stage of her life. Indeed, when remembering Cape Verde, her texts represent a small-town, old-fashioned world, where everybody knows everyone else. Likewise, social activities and described events seem to report back to the 1950s or 1960s, when Cape Verde was still a colony.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

By contrast, when Amarílis writes of immigration and immigrants' experiences in Lisbon, she writes "of the present time", representing experiences that do not recede into the past, to her youth in the archipelago. Thus, I argue that different time periods are connected to different spatial references in her work, and this polarity between different times and spaces increases the readers' pleasure and interest by avoiding repetition or monotony, as the stories alternate between different landscapes and different time periods. I will discuss instances of this place/ time duality below, when analysing some of her short stories. Maybe the concept of "chronotope" by Bakhtin is useful here. In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" (1981: 84-85), Benjamin defines the chronotrope as the "(…) the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (ibid.: 84). In the short stories by Orlanda Amarílis, you have the "Cape Verdean chronotope", which I am defining as "past time, set in the islands, memory mode, colonial times" in contrast to the "adult experience of immigration", which is a narrative chronotope related to "contemporaneity (even if narrated in the past tense), modernity, city life, immigrants' experiences, host nation". These are two distinctive universes, two worlds, repeatedly addressed in different short stories.

Note that I am not claiming that Amarílis' short stories are autobiographical, nor is that notion useful here. True, one can say that she surely uses memories from her childhood and youth in Cape Verde. But her personal experiences are not the relevant frame in which to understand her writing. Quite the contrary. Hers is a committed writing, and lived experience may be important as far as it can stand for a more general issue, an exemplary experience, shedding light on Cape Verdean society, essentially, a society deeply dependent on emigration. Moreover, as she narrates immigrants' experiences in western metropolitan cities as instances of "second-rate citizenship", Orlanda Amarílis also exposes ongoing forms of exploitation targeting immigrants, as if colonial practices related to the abusive use of another nation's workforce are dislocated from a colonial setting to the poor neighbourhoods of western cities where underpaid immigrants live.

The repeated reference to the two chronotopes mentioned above gradually makes the reader more familiar with the two most represented

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

alternative universes (Cape Verde and the western city Cape Verdeans have emigrated to). In terms of narrative construction, to "re-use" time/place references is an efficient and economic strategy, which, in fact, cannot be dissociated from Orlanda Amarílis' choice of literary genre: the short story. Her literary works comprise three anthologies of short stories. Although each short story can be read as an isolated unit, a set of thematic lines connects each individual short story (a fragment) to the whole of the book, conferring a stronger impact to the set. Imagine, for example, that her short stories are an album of Cape Verdean memories. In this case, one short story would be the adequate textual equivalent of a single photograph from an album, illustrating a moment, a topical scene. Only when the album is seen as a whole – that is to say, when all the stories in the collection are taken as an ensemble – do the assembled fragments articulate a more complex story.

Secondly, if you isolate the group of short stories on emigrants' experiences as a distinctive thematic set, the plurality of angles gradually introduced by each short story also composes a complex, multi-layered representation of migrants' social marginalization and vulnerability. In both cases, the short story seems an efficient choice to pursue the subject matters Amarílis chose to address, presenting more than one perspective on the discussed issues.

Orlanda Amarílis published three collections of short stories: *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa,*1974, (almost ten years later) *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983) and *A Casa das Mastros*, published in 1989. There are clear thematic and formal affinities between the first two collections of stories, *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* and *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, while the last collection, *A Casa das Mastros*, strikes as a different project. In fact, *A Casa dos Mastros* is mostly devoted to ghosts, the supernatural and the fantastic while previously, in her first two anthologies, instances of this kind of fantastic writing could only be found in one or two stories. I would suggest this change in her work can be taken as an experimental turn towards the fantastic, although she later opted to steer her writing career to children's stories, of which she published three collections as well. However, I am not dealing with this later dimension of

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

her work.[4] Still, the writer's dedication to children resonated in Cape Verde, and in 2017, a literary award under her name was established to acknowledge writers of children's stories. Currently, the future of the award is unclear.

Beyond the three established collections of short stories and her celebrated contribution to children's literature, Orlanda Amarílis also published a few isolated stories included in collective anthologies, and some of her works have been translated into English and German.

2. *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* (1974): Emigrants' Stories

Cais do Sodré is the name of a train station in Lisbon, and Salamansa is the name of a fishing village in the island of S. Vicente, Cape Verde. Between these two places lies an emigration route from Cape Verde to Portugal. Not only were the Cape Verdeans the most visible immigrant community in Portugal in the 1990s (nowadays replaced by the Brazilian community), but emigration was, and still is, a significant social feature in Cape Verdean society, where, typically, most families are brought up by the mother while the father is away working somewhere else. According to Pedro Góis, "(...) *uma componente emigratória de tal modo continuada e consistente* [*que*] *resultou no facto de Cabo Verde ser hoje um dos (poucos) países cuja população emigrada excede a população residente"* [The emigrant flow is so continuous and consistent that, as a consequence, Cape Verde is nowadays one of the (few) countries whose emigrated population exceeds the resident population; 2006: 25]. Góis refers to numbers: for 517,518 Cape-Verdean emigrants living abroad in 1998, there were 438,380 residents (census from 2000). These numbers illustrate objectively the importance of emigration for Cape Verdean society. Consequently, the fact that Orlanda Amarílis chose to write extensively about emigrants seems an adequate representation of the Cape Verdean nation and its core dynamics. In fact, the set of emigrant communities spread throughout the world is called,

[4] See *Folha a Folha* (Page by Page, 1987) with Alberta Menéres; *Facécias e Peripécias* (Jokes and Adventures, 1990); *Tartaruguinha* (Little Turtle, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

among Cape Verdeans, the "11th island", evoking the presence/absence of a significant number of citizens away from their homeland.

In the universe of the three collections of short stories written by Amarílis, *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa* (1974) is the one where emigrants' stories are the most important topic. The collection comprises seven short stories, five of which are related to emigration. "Cais-do-Sodré" (Amarílis 1974: 9-21), "Nina" (ibid.: 25-31) and "Desencanto" (ibid.: 53-64) are about emigrants' experiences in Lisbon. "Esmola de Merca" (ibid.: 67-87) is about the reception of charity goods sent from America by the Cape Verdean emigrant community, and "Salamansa" (ibid.: 115-124) evokes a youth affair of a respectable family man who, in his older years, wonders what happened to his former lover (it turns out she had emigrated to S. Tomé and Príncipe, and is, thus, definitely lost to him).

The other two stories in the collection are "Rolando de Nha Concha" (ibid.: 33-50), which belongs to the fantastic, supernatural trend in Amarílis' writing (the protagonist gradually realizes he is witnessing his own funeral), and "Pôr do Sol" (ibid.: 91-111), about corruption in Cape Verdean society.

As I said above, the stories connected to youth memories are set in Cape Verde ("Esmola de Merca" and "Salamansa") in the "memory mode", while the stories set in Lisbon are narrated as if they were happening in the present tense, even if they imply reflective flash-backs.[5] The chronotope for narratives set in Lisbon represents a society in a hurry, in transit, where immigrants move as they go about their everyday life. Meaningfully, immigrants' stories are often set in a train station, or even on a boat, crossing the river. It seems commuting is a way of life, and, in my opinion, this is an adequate spatial metaphor for those that live (moving) between two worlds: their homeland in the islands, and their host city. Lisbon represents the "here" and "now" of a rushed, work routine, while "home", the archipelago, is a place mostly revisited through memory, "then" and "far away". Note, however, that, as Jane

[5] The fantastic stories as "Rolando de Nha Concha" are set outside of this scheme, because they work under a different logic. Spirits are supposed to transcend time/space referents. And in fact, the focus of the story is internal, that is to say, psychological, as the ghost becomes self-aware.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Tutikian (1999) points out, both of these dimensions have to be simultaneously omnipresent in the works by migrant writers as they are writing from a position of exile, precisely in-between "here" and "there".

Elisa Silva (2014) also discusses the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa* as a reflection on the effects of the emigration experience in the subjectivity of the migrant individual. Silva reads the short stories as instances of the influence of space and dislocation in the construction of one's sense of identity. For the migrant subject, "homeland" is lived through memory, from far away, while the feeling of belonging to a minority culture (in relation to the host country's majority/mainstream community) creates in the migrant subject another sphere of estrangement in relation to the country where he/ she lives. In this way, the emigrant shares a condition of emotional dislocation with the figure of the exile. Both are living "here", in the host country where they live their everyday life, but constantly remembering "there", the place where they feel they belong, where their family and forefathers come from and where their community traditions (food, festivities, family connections, music), as identity markers, originated from. We will see an example of the internal division felt by an immigrant character in the analysis of the short story "Cais-do-Sodré", a few paragraphs below. I shall return to this point.

If, according to Silva, dislocation across distinct geographies constantly (re)shapes the subjectivity of the individual in transit, then, migrant characters are always oscillating between becoming a new person (changed by absorbing the experience of living abroad) and falling back into one's old, "homeland" self, a static self-image, evoked when returning to one's family and the familiar places. But this latter, reassuring sense of self is a fallacy because the subject changes irrevocably. The emigrants who return on holiday to Cape Verde are no long the same subjects who left their island years before, at the beginning of their emigration adventures. Through the years, gains in experience and knowledge will always imply a loss of innocence (and hope), and those returning are changed people.

In her analysis of the collection *Cais-do-Sodré Té Salamansa*, Claudia Pazos-Alonso (2005) explored the narratives of migration from Cape Verde to Lisbon. According to her, the marginalization of immigrants in terms of race and gender (and, I would add, social class) in the

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

short stories by Amarílis represents a metropolitan social universe that undoes the credibility of the lusotropical myth, as conceived by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987), and amply appropriated by the Portuguese dictatorship as a form of nationalist propaganda. "Lusotropicalism" was a (pseudo-)descriptive concept used to promote the idea that an easy co-existence thrived between colonised peoples and the Portuguese administration, in all Portuguese overseas provinces. Reality was very different, either in the colonies or with regards to the reception of immigrants in Lisbon, as Orlanda Amarílis' short stories show. According to Pazos-Alonso:

> Amarilis's protagonists experience a metaphorical dislocation which shakes the very roots of their identity, when, in spite of their superficial apparent integration into the daily life of the capital of the Empire, outward racial markers as well as less prominent gendered differences may suddenly determine their ultimate confinement to an inferior status as a second class citizen, leading to an acute feeling of cultural estrangement. Complete integration, seldom portrayed as a realistic possibility, is however simultaneously presented as less than desirable, because its pre-requisite would be the blanket adoption of a 'white' dominant point of view. (Pazos-Alonso 2005: 47)

There are two important arguments in this paragraph that interest me: First, the idea that the integration of the migrant subject, even if functional, is superficial and apparent, and, second, the perception, by Pazos-Alonso, that Orlanda Amarílis skilfully represented a moment of "revelation" in her texts, when the migrant subject is suddenly confronted with his/her own social marginalization by a small, everyday gesture that assigns him/her a position as a second-class citizen. Note that the forms of social violence considered by Pazos-Alonzo are small everyday gestures, that can be extremely cruel, like pretending not to know someone (as it happens in the short story "Nina"), feeling uncomfortable when meeting other, lower-class, fellow Cape Verdeans ("Cais-do-Sodré"), or, discovering oneself as a coveted sexual object on racial/exoticizing terms, as will be seen below when the short story *Desencanto* is analysed. Pazos-Alonso concludes her analysis by highlighting the complicity of the local bourgeois elite with the colonizer's perspective, indulging in its own privilege, mindless of social concerns.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

On the other hand, I do not endorse Pazos-Alonso's perception that complete integration would imply a denial of cultural difference, or a certain denial of one's own personal history (the principle that, in Pazos-Alonso view, makes full integration less than desirable). Is thinking and acting according to a "white dominant point of view" the best immigrant citizens can hope for if they want to integrate? I do not read this line of thinking in any of Amarílis' stories. It is not immigrants that have to change or disguise who they are. It is the Eurocentric, nationalist frame of mind, often equated with mainstream thinking, which has to change. Writing stories that expose the wrong moral ground on which Eurocentric views are being upheld is Orlanda Amarílis's contribution to bring about this change. In this way, she is using the power of literature to improve public awareness of the problems immigrants face.

3. Immigrants' Experiences in Lisbon

The short story "Cais-do-Sodré" (the first in the collection with the same title) is about a casual encounter in a train station (in fact, the title of the story is the name of a famous train station in Lisbon). Andresa, a well-to-do emigrant[6], recognizes a possible fellow countrywoman waiting for a train:

> You know, I was looking at you because I immediately realized you were my fellow countrywoman", continued Andresa, looking and smiling at the lean figure sitting by her side.[7] (Amarílis 1974: 9; my translation)

[6] In case the reader feels confused, I would like to make explicit that my working definitions of "emigrant" and "immigrant" depend on spatial reference. When I refer to Cape Verdeans who left their homeland, they are an "emigrant". For those who stay in the islands, those who leave are emigrants. For European authorities and for the host nations receiving them, those very same people are "immigrants", the ones who came from abroad to live in European cities.

[7] "Sabe, eu estava a olhar para si porque vi logo ser gente da minha terra", continuou Andresa, olhando e sorrindo para a figura seca de carnes sentada a seu lado" (Amarílis 1974: 9).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

The introduction to the short story is partially misleading because it creates in the reader expectations of communal solidarity among emigrants in Lisbon. But it is not clearly so. Time, distance and, possibly, class, may castrate this initial communal drive. That is what happens to Andresa. After the warm-hearted impulse to establish contact with someone from the same community, disappointment and confusion make her go back on her initial impulse. Internally, Andresa criticizes herself for continuing to talk to people she can no longer relate to:

> Recently this has been happening to her. She sees a fellow Cape Verdean, and she feels the necessity to talk to him/her, establishing a shared connection to remember her own people, her homeland. Then, after contact is established, she feels disappointed. Something does not feel right inside. She does not feel any affinity with the people she left fifteen years ago. People are not the same.[8] (Amarílis 1974: 16; my translation)

Apparently, as pointed out above in reference to Elisa Silva's work, the experience of emigration can cause an estrangement from one's own identity references, a confusing and uncomfortable sensation. However, I think there is more to this story than the sensitive representation of the fragmented identity of the migrant subject (important as that aim already is). Amarílis also manages to represent social class as a barrier that may cut across communal solidarity. That is why, in spite of longing for her homeland – which ignites the impulse to warm up at the sight of any other Cape Verdean – the well-to-do Andresa does not like to identify with the simple, plain woman in front of her. She decides to leave her and goes to the station cafeteria, to sit next to a British woman (I think the detail is a symbolical choice to identify with the western world, denying part of one's biography). In the end, the story contradicts this assimilationist impulse because the main character, Andresa, changes her mind, again. She gives up her pretentious behavior and goes back to sitting next to the poor Cape Verdean woman who was

[8] "De há um tempo para cá acontece-lhe isto. Vê um patrício, sente necessidade de lhe falar, de estabelecer uma ponte para lhe recordar a sua gente, a sua terra. Entretanto, feito o contacto, o desencanto começa a apoderar-se dela. Qualquer coisa bem no íntimo lho faz sentir. Não tem afinidade nenhuma com as pessoas de há quinze anos atrás. Não são as mesmas" (Amarílis 1974: 16).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

already in the train. Andresa decides she will join the poor Cape Verdean, at least for a part of the trip, to offer some company and solidarity until their paths go separate ways.

My analysis of the short story confirms both Elisa Silva and Claudia Pazos-Alonso's readings, but I also think there is a further exemplary/pedagogic dimension to this text, as there is something to be learned from Andresa's hesitation and her final choices: the feeling of communal identification proved stronger than social barriers or the appeal of assimilating into Portuguese society.

Another important idea explored in this narrative concerns the dual internal life of migrants, trying to hold on to their memories of "home", while both "home" and the subject are processes in constant change, complicating the ability of the migrant subject to reconnect to his/her own roots. In the story "Cais-do-Sodré", it is clear that Andresa realizes she has changed on account of the years spent living in Lisbon, as has Cape Verde ("People are not the same").

A second short story dealing with emigration experiences in Lisbon is *Nina*, a narrative about the beautiful, blue-eyed Nina, who pretends she does not recognize her old Cape Verdean friend out of sheer racist prejudice. The two used to be quite close since the narrator, a young man, had once rented a room at her aunt's apartment. He then saw her growing up, from the time she wore plaits to her first nights out, drinking and flirting. They were good party companions, laughing and enjoying their youth, but no love affair ensued. As Nina once coldly told the narrator: "aborrecia-a a ideia de um dia vir a ter filhos de cor" [she was displeased with the idea of having "coloured" kids; 1974: 29]. Apparently, the narrator did not take that comment seriously. At the time it may have seemed immature, a careless mimicry of current stereotypes. The point is that, years later, when he calls her at the train station as their paths accidently cross, the male narrator is not expecting her distant reaction, her denial of their past complicity. Only after she goes away, does he remember the comment, and, this time, he takes it for what it was, a racist, marginalizing comment that reminds the narrator he is not as integrated as he thought he was. He feels naïve, and Nina, the elegant Nina he smiled at, is just a cold stranger ("glacial"), who moves away "(…) e não ouve, ou finge não ouvir" [without listening to him, or pretending not to listen; ibid.: 25).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Each of the two stories above represent a different angle of the complex experiences lived by emigrants in their host country, showing the ways these experiences affect them. So far, Amarílis addressed the longing for feeling as if one were in one's own community, the need to resist the pressure to assimilate, the danger of losing one's affective connections to the homeland, and the dismay felt by those who have to face racism, especially from unexpected corners.

4. Gender Violence and Emigration

The short story "Desencanto", included in the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa,* adds a new angle to Amarílis' immigrants' stories as its plot overlaps gender issues with the minority/marginal position of the immigrant. In "Desencanto", set in Lisbon, a beautiful Cape Verdean girl is commuting to her job in the early morning. As she travels, she is pensive, musing over her failed affairs and mediocre jobs. She feels disappointed, and she is not sure that her emigration adventure has been worthwhile. As she was feeling sad and tired, she noticed a man eyeing her. New possibilities and new hopes suddenly materialize, but her expectations are soon shattered. As they leave the boat, the girl overhears the comment of another man to her admirer: "Malandro, estás a fazer-te prá mulata" [you naughty boy, you are flirting with the *mulata*; Amarílis 1974: 64). In Portuguese, "mulata" means of mixed ascendancy,[9] and it has a current, sensual (sexy) connotation in the masculine imagination. This short comment speaks volumes in terms of gender relations, and its connotation is an insult to the girl's dignity, reducing her to a sexual object on display, worth competing for. At the same time, there is a racist note in this particular comment because the first signifier for her identification/ definition lies in the colour of her skin.

The logical companion piece to "Desencanto" is another short story, "Thonon-les-Bains"*,* from Orlanda Amarílis' second collection of short stories *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (1983). "Thonon-les-Bains" (ibid.: 11-27) is

[9] Etymologically, in Portuguese and Spanish, the word described the progeny of a horse and a donkey. It was then adapted to refer to mixed-race children, acquiring an insulting connotation through the animalization of the people thus described.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

about Gabriel, an immigrant in France, and his sister Piedade, recently arrived from Cape Verde. As soon as Gabriel sent word that he had found a job for his sister, Piedade joined him, and she adapted well. Then, she found a French boyfriend, much older and very quiet, but a convenient choice. Everything is turning out beyond the best hopes the family envisaged. In Cape Verde, neighbours are envious, and Gabriel and Piedade's mother is proud of her children's achievements. One day, during a party thrown by some of her Cape Verdean friends, immigrants like herself, Piedade flirts with a young Cape Verdean. Jean, the French boyfriend, sees their cultural complicity, their shared codes, which he does not know. He decides to leave the party, and Piedade, surprised and despondent, dutifully follows him. On the way out, there is a bathroom at the end of the corridor. Jean quietly locks himself with Piedade in the bathroom and slits her throat, leaving her dead, on the floor. He escapes through the bathroom window. What triggered Jean's murdering jealousy? It is worth quoting the dance scene that aroused Jean's anger:

> Jean felt uncomfortable, a total stranger to the strong taste of garlic and onion. He managed to eat his fish though, and he drank the spicy broth, and then he just stood there, his plate in his hand, watching his girlfriend and her friends moving to and fro around the room, serving food and clearing plates and left overs.
> […] They mixed American music with samba and 'coladeiras'.[10] Whirling dancers took the floor.
> […] Piedade, euphoric as never seen before, grabbed a towel and tied it around her hips, sensually swinging them. Mochinho [a young Cape Verdean man] flirted with Piedade.[11] (Amarílis 1983: 22; my translation)

There is a crescendo in this narrative episode, from feeling culturally excluded to sexual competition. Jean cannot accept that his private, exotic, sex object has a life beyond his control, a culture he cannot

[10] A genre of Cape Verdean music with a strong, fast rhythm.
[11] "Jean sentia-se desconfortado, nada habituado ao sabor forte a alho e cebola. Comeu o peixe como pôde, sorveu o caldo picante e deixou-se ficar com o prato na mão a ver o vaivém da namorada a das amigas a servirem este, a levarem o prato daquele. […] Entremearam música americana com sambinhas e coladeiras. Foi um rodopio sem parar. […] Piedade, numa euforia nunca vista, agarrou uma toalha de rosto, atou-a abaixo da cintura e rebolou as ancas. Mochinho não largava Piedade" (Amarílis 1983: 22).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

understand, a more suitable partner he cannot upstage. My point here is that there is a racist edge to Jean's sexism, and it is the display of Piedade's momentary escape from her assigned place as inferior and dependent - in both cultural and gender terms – that is the real motive for her murder, as a form of punishment.

The reader follows Gabriel's efforts to provide a decent funeral to Piedade, and the painful task of writing home telling of the sad news.

As a consequence of that crime, the police extradited the immigrants involved in the party under the accusation of them being troublemakers. Gabriel's silence is the most dramatic twist in the plot. He says nothing because he knows that an immigrant cannot accuse a French citizen. Were they legal immigrants? If Piedade never existed officially, is there a murder enquiry? In the story, Gabriel and his friend are expelled from France under the accusation of being troublemakers, and that will be the end of Piedade's murder as far as French authorities are concerned. But Gabriel has other plans: he emigrates to Switzerland, just across the border from "Thonon-les-Bains", and he starts looking for Jean… If he finds him, Piedade will be avenged. The irony in this sad story is that the ones who are accused of being "troublemakers" by the French law, are, in fact, the victims of this violence: Piedade was murdered and Gabriel is broken hearted and has lost his job and life prospects. Who is the legal system protecting? The European murderer.

Another topic for reflection, suggested by the plot, concerns the seduction of older, European men by younger women they recognize as vulnerable (outside of law's protection, isolated from mainstream society, poor). I think this murder story, by Orlanda Amarílis, makes a powerful point about the vulnerability of women immigrants, invisible to European law.

Contrary to what one might think from the story analysed in the last paragraphs, women are seldom victims in Amarílis' stories. They are instead resourceful survivors. For example, in "Salamansa", the last story in the collection *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*, a middle-aged man strolls through his big house remembering Linda, a prostitute he had met many years before and with whom he had fallen in love. She was his first love, and their affair lasted for years, even after he got married to a convenient wife. Then, one day, during one of his visits to Linda, they argue because she is drunk and he had just seen the sailor boys

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

leaving her house. The fight becomes violent, physical, and they break up after that night. But Linda's sarcastic screams still ring in his hears ("you only rule over me, here", she said, displaying her sex). Salamansa is a small village, where everybody knows everybody. Fired by this memory, the man enquires about Linda among the maids. He then discovers that she has emigrated to S. Tomé and Princípe in an attempt to improve her living conditions. Even this little piece of information shows Linda's agency and initiative, and it is the well-to-do protagonist who feels left behind.

Other instances of empowered emigrant women are "Requiem" (Amarílis 1983: 123-132) and "Luna Cohen" (ibid.: 47-64), two stories from the collection *Ilhéu dos Pássaros* (ibid.) about a different kind of emigrant: the college student. They represent a post-independence Africa, exploring new opportunities and struggling to define its own future as a post-independence continent. The protagonist of "Requiem" is a young woman experiencing a writer's block. During the story, while partying in a bohemian Lisbon atmosphere, she gradually realises that her mistake is to write of things she does not know well. Instead of pursuing themes that do not seem to inspire her, this young writer realises she has to go back home, and write of her own Cape Verdean society. Only then will a creative path unfold. Metaphorically, what is at stake is an exercise in dis-assimilation, the self-checking exercise of the postcolonial writer, in the self-assertive process of un-learning some of the things a westernised formal education had taught her, and which were making her forget who she was and where she was coming from.

Note that I do not take this plot as an autobiographical note at all. Amarílis' writing is diversified. When she wants to write about Cape Verde she does so, but when she chooses to situate her narratives in other countries or societies she does so confidently. She is too mundane, too well travelled to express that kind of parochialism. I would rather take this narrative as a warning to other (younger) writers trying to find their own voice.

As for the short story "Luna Cohen" (which takes the name of its young female protagonist) it is about an academic researcher on a working visit to Ibadan, Nigeria. This narrative represents the new cosmopolitan African intelligentsia, who travels, discusses world politics and is well aware of the threat of neo-colonialism. As Luna Cohen notes:

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> It seemed she was already in Europe. The sound of an orchestra playing in one of the lounges reached them. It was a private party, a multinational company party, possibly a meeting of oil tycoons. Europe and imperialism were beyond that door. On this side, it was exploitation territory.[12]
> (Amarílis 1983: 62-63; my translation)

The above quote is a good example of Amarílis' political awareness, as well as evidence of her commitment to anti-colonial ideas. Colonialism has to be confronted in both its former traditional form and in its contemporary mutations, as transparent networks of power that hide politics behind economical manipulation through multinational companies. In this particular short story, Luna Cohen's growing awareness of neocolonial formations has a specific target: Israel. As she listens to several colleagues talking about the formation of the state of Israel, the protagonist of the story wonders where the collective identity of Jewish Africans should lie. For herself, the question is crystal clear: she is first and foremost a Cape Verdean. But the perplexities of this particular character have wider reverberations concerning internal rivalries inside the African continent and the necessity to question blind allegiance to projects that may not offer the best solutions to manage the future of the continent. Moreover, the fact that the reader follows one young woman in the process of developing her own political literacy sets an important example to think feminine agency and the role of women in post-independence societies.

This last point is equally relevant in what concerns African literary voices. It is true that things are changing in how African literatures are being received among international audiences, and writers like Tsi Tsi Dangaremba, Yvonne Vera or Chimamanda Adichie, just as the Mozambican Paulina Chiziane and the Angolan Ana Paula Tavares, have conquered their place at the core of their own national canon. However, their success does not diminish the fact that, just like in many western literatures, for each of these feminine names there are several famous male writers. My contention is that with the limited time

[12] "Parecia já estar na Europa. Até eles chegava o som de uma orquestra num dos salões. Era uma festa privada, uma festa de multinacionais, possivelmente um encontro de magnates de petróleo. A Europa e o imperialismo ficavam para além daquela porta. Deste lado era a exploração" (Amarílis 1983: 62-63).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

awarded to an academic subject, quite often, syllabuses tend to select the three or four "main writers" from a specific country, and it just happens that the most successful women writers in that specific universe may not be among a representative "top five". It was the impact of gender studies that introduced a discipline of enquiry regarding those writers who stayed "in the shadows", acknowledging the specific contribution of women to modern African literatures as an important dimension of the culture they represent, and one that has to be acknowledged, disseminated and studied.[13]

5. The Postcolonial Perspective

There is another important dimension to the stories by Orlanda Amarílis which connects local politics, colonial memories and post-independence disappointment. This part of her work is mostly relevant for Postcolonial Studies in the Portuguese speaking world, and I am currently developing a project where Orlanda Amarílis's work will be addressed in a comparative platform with other women writers from Portuguese speaking countries.[14]

In this paragraph I would like to discuss her short story "Esmola de Merca" (1974: 67-87) as an example of postcolonial writing. The general frame for interpreting the story has to evoke the effort put forward by the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933-1974) to hide from international awareness its disregard for the colonial citizens under its responsibility. "Esmola de Merca" is about the arrival of a ship with donations from Cape Verdean emigrants living in America ("Merca"). The main character of the story, Tinina, is a young woman who is invited to help, as

[13] Yet again, a writer such as Orlanda Amarílis, who has received wide critical acclaim, is out of print in Portugal. The last available editions are either from the 1980s (*Ilhéu dos Pássaros*) or 1990s (for *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*). As I verified the references of papers published in Brazil, I was dismayed to find out that students refer back to the Portuguese editions they have in their libraries.

[14] I am part of the team researching the role of women artists – including writers and film makers – in civil resistance against the Portuguese and Brazilian dictatorships of the 20th century (WOMANART project). As Portugal still held African colonies at the time, all contemporary anti-colonial writings produced by African women were forms of resistance against the Portuguese dictatorship (http://ceh.ilch.uminho.pt/womanart/).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

a volunteer, in the distribution of goods to impoverished Cape Verdeans. The description of the women waiting to receive charity help is telling of their living conditions:

> Most of the poor were dirty, old women, with deeply set eyes, and matted hair because of dust and lack of grooming, hidden underneath a worn-out scarf. Some of them clung to their walking sticks, walking the way from Ribeira Bota, dragging their bare, cracked feet until the yard of the house.[15] (Amarílis 1974: 75; my translation)

I consider this passage more than a sensitive and well-written description. It speaks volumes in terms of social criticism, and it implies a rebuke to whoever is politically responsible for these people. Secondly, note the gender reference to poverty. It is well established that women have a higher probability than men of becoming destitute in developing countries, especially because of their inferior access to education and jobs.[16] Lastly, through the thoughts of the character Titina, the reader can follow notes on the anti-colonial consciousness-raising embedded in Amarílis's writing:

> 'This is not a solution; it settles nothing', she thought, staring beyond her godmother who remained leaning on the bed, her elbows on the iron bedstead.
> 'It does not even amount to a provisional solution. The Cape Verdeans who emigrated to Lisbon also send second-hand clothes, shoes, dry bread. Gentlemen, they even send dry bread for islanders to dip it in water and mitigate hunger.[17] (Ibid.: 70-71; my translation)

[15] "Na sua maioria eram mulheres velhas, andrajosas, de olhos encovados e cabelos engasgados pelo pó e falta de pente, escondido debaixo do lenço vincado de tanto uso. Parte delas viera arrimada ao seu pau de laranjeira, desde a Ribeira Bota, a arrastar os pés descalços e gretados até ao meio da morada" (Amarílis 1974: 75).

[16] UNICEF Press Release on girl's education and poverty eradication, see: https://www.unicef.org/media/media_11986.html.

[17] "Isto não vem remediar nada, pensou olhando para além da madrinha. Esta continuava encostada à cama, os cotovelos apoiados ainda no rebordo de ferro. Nem chega a ser um remendo, pensou ainda. Os patrícios de Lisboa também mandam roupas usadas, calçado, pão seco. Senhores, até mandam pão seco para a nossa gente amolecer em água e enganar a fome" (Amarílis 1974: 70-71).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

After attending to the distribution of charity goods, Titina feels such a disgust for the poverty she saw that she leaves the charity site feeling sick. A last bitter note on the narrative is the Carnivalesque look of the people dressed up with whatever clothes they can assemble, as if they were "um fantoche de cores, um desgraçado palhaço de um circo sem nome" [a colorful puppet, a clown fallen from grace in a nameless circus; 1974: 87]. Symbolically, this kind of charity takes away people's dignity.

Finally, and still thinking through postcolonial theory, I also would like to mention here a specific group of Amarílis' fantastic stories, present in any of her collections for adults. In the case of the narratives set in Cape Verde, I think references to possession stories, rituals, old sayings or popular beliefs can be a means to assert Cape Verdean culture, promoting it internationally. The self-assertion of local cultures through literature is a well-established means to contribute to the "dis-assimilation" of Eurocentric discourses, upholding one's heritage and history. These anti-colonial strategies go as far back as the *Négritude*[18] movement or the Harlem Renaissance.[19] The point here is that, as Ngugi Wa Thing'o[20] pointed out, decolonisation still is an unfinished process, and nativism, if it stays wary of fundamentalist deviations, can be a productive strategy to recuperate local cultures, distorted (or even erased) by the impact of colonialism.

I believe that, in the case of Orlanda Amarílis' works, the exploration of supernatural themes represents a genuine interested in reviving Cape Verdean mythologies and beliefs, traditions she knew from her childhood through the tales of old maids, such as the secondary characters she often mentions. In her first collection (*Cais-do-Sodré té*

[18] See Césaire, A. (2004), *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris: Présence Africaine; Damas, L.G. (1947), *Poètes d'expression française [d'Afrique Noire, Madagascar, Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Indochine, Guyane] 1900–1945*, Paris: Seuil and Senghor, L.S. (1948), *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; Senghor (1964), *Liberté I*, *Négritude et humanisme*, Paris: Seuil.

[19] See Alain Locke (1925), *The New Negro*, New York: Touchestone. See also, Langston Hughes (1959), *Selected Poems by Langston Hughes,* New York: Vintage Classics Edition.

[20] See Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1981), *Decolonising the Mind, the Politics of Language in African Literature,* London: James Currey.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Salamansa, 1974), the unique short story that would belong to this category is "Rolando de Nha Concha". As for the second collection (*Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, 1983), I would list, again, a single story: "Luísa Filha de Nica". On the contrary, as I said above, the last collection, *A Casa dos Mastros* (1989) reveals a clear turn to the fantastic – either going back to Cape Verdean lore, as in "Bico-de-Lacre", or exploring other fantastic references, such as urban gothic (say, for example, the short story "Laura"). The group of short stories that revives Cape Verdean popular beliefs and superstitions, I take as a means of cultural self-assertion, praising Cape Verde's identity and heritage.

6. Final Remarks

The above discussion is aimed at presenting several coherent thematic lines in the short stories written by Orlanda Amarílis. In this way, the reader has been offered an insight into all her works (excluding the children's stories). The aspects of her works that were most explored in this analysis were her accounts of immigrants' experiences, the writer's reflections on gender issues and her anti-colonial discourse.

I hope to have demonstrated that Orlanda Amarílis is a rich and talented writer who rightly deserves to be acknowledged as one of the main Cape Verdean writers, with a very contemporary work in what concerns the harsh problems migrant subjects face. Currently, I am afraid she may have lost some visibility in the Cape Verdean literary system, being a writer who lived away from Cape Verde. Amarílis started publishing her works in 1975, and she acquired visibility and acknowledgement during the 1980s. At that time, and for the ensuing decades, her work was an object of critical acclaim, and she also profited from the impact of gender studies, a research area that encouraged a greater research focus on women writers. Nevertheless, currently, she seems to have been overshadowed by big names in Cape Verdean literature, such as Arménio Vieira or Germano Almeida, both awarded the Camões Prize, the highest literary award in the Portuguese speaking universe. Promisingly, Orlanda Amarílis was recently celebrated in the

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

2019 edition of the literary festival of Sal, Cape Verde, for her "contribution to steer the development of prose writing in Cape Verde" (see Magalhães 9.6.2019).

Works Cited

Amarílis, Orlanda (1974): *Cais-do-Sodré té Salamansa*, Coimbra: Centelha.

– (1983): *Ilhéu dos Pássaros*, Lisbon: Plátano.

– (1989): *A casa dos mastros*, Linda-a-Velha: Alac.

Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981): *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Cruz, Inês (2011): "Cabo Verde em Tempo de Censura: o descaminho do jornalismo e a missão de denúncia da literatura", in: Margarida Calafate Ribeiro/Jorge Sílvio Renato (eds.): *Literaturas Insulares*, Porto: Edições Afrontamento, p. 63-79.

Góis, Pedro (2006): *Emigração Cabo-verdiana para (e na) Europa e a sua inserção em mercados de trabalho locais: Lisboa, Milão, Roterdão*, doctoral tesis, Coimbra: Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra.

Magalhães, Chissana (9.6.2019): "3ª edição do Festival de Literatura-Mundo do Sal homenageia Orlanda Amarílis e Goethe", in: *Expresso das Ilhas*, in: https://expressodasilhas.cv/cultura/2019/06/09/3a-edicao-do-festival-de-literatura-mundo-do-sal-homenageia-orlanda-amarilis-e-goethe/64180 (accessed 17.01.2022).

Monteiro, Atanásio (2013): *A Transversalidade da Morna na Lusofonia*, M.A. thesis, Viana do Castelo: Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo.

Nogueira, Gláucia (2013): "Tradição Versus Inovação na música de Cabo Verde: luta de gerações, espaços ou ideias?", in: *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Canção*, 3(jan-jun), p. 69-93.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Oliveira, Pedro Aires (2020): "Decolonization in Portuguese Africa", in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, in: https://research.unl.pt/ws/portalfiles/portal/3628524/PedroAiresOliveiraDecolonizationPortugueseAfrica.pdf (accessed in June 2020).

Pazos-Alonso, Claudia (2005): "Race and Gender, Orlanda Amarílis' *Cais do Sodré té Salamansa*", in: *Revue Lusotopie*, XII(1-2), p. 45-53.

Pinto, António Costa (2001): *O Fim do Império Português. A cena internacional, a Guerra Colonial e a Descolonização, 1961–1975*, Lisbon: Livros Horizonte.

Ribeiro, Margarida Calafate (2011): *Literaturas Insulares*, Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

Rosas, Fernando/Machaqueiro, M./Oliveira, Pedro Aires (2015): *O Adeus ao Império. 40 Anos de Descolonização Portuguesa*, Lisbon: Nova Vega.

Silva, Elisa Maria Taborda (2014): "Cais do Sodré Té Salamansa: o cabo-verdiano em exílio", in: *Cadernos CESPUC*, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, p. 65-74, in: https://zarpante.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/4672-18482-1-pb.pdf (accessed 12.6.2019).

Silva, Elisa Maria Taborda/Ferreira Cury, Maria Zilda (2011): *Revista do CESP*, 31(46, jul-dec).

Tutikian, Jane (1999): "Inquietos olhares: a construção do processo de identidade nacional nas obras de Lídia Jorge e Orlanda Amarílis", in: *VIA ATLÂNTICA*, 2(julho).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Julia Borst / Stephanie Neu-Wendel

(Bremen/Mannheim)

Decolonized Bodies: Aesthetic Activism in Afrofeminist Blogs from France, Spain and Italy

Abstract

This chapter introduces a comparative perspective on Afrofeminist blogs written and coordinated by members of the African diaspora in France, Spain and Italy. The article first highlights the relevance of digital media as a means of empowerment and as a space for the re-negotiation of identity constructions. Then, by focusing on the textual and visual representations of African and Afrodescendant women and their bodies, it explores how these digital platforms conceptualize Afrodescendance and Blackness. They point to painful experiences of racism and feelings of marginalization while also offering a shared and meaningful narrative of identification. The analyzed examples show that Afrofeminist blogs open up a space where racialized women discuss what it means to be Black in Europe. But they do more: they also generate alternative and affirmative narratives of Afrodescendance and Blackness that oppose the stereotyped and racist imageries still circulating in French, Spanish and Italian societies. In this context, the article explores representations of the Black female body that play a crucial role in a new digital aesthetic activism that challenges Eurocentric beauty standards and aims at decolonizing those bodies by means of a subversive aesthetics.

In this chapter, we take a comparative look at blogs written and coordinated by members of the African diaspora – that is, persons of African descent that live outside the African continent following coerced, induced or voluntary migrations and relocations in the past and the present (c.f., e.g., Boyce Davies 2008; Falola 2013: 1-2) – in France, Spain and Italy. These blogs all share an Afrofeminist perspective inspired by decolonial and, in particular, Black feminist theory (cf., e.g., Hill Collins 2000; Vergès 2019) which, referring to the continuous struggle of

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Afrodescendant women to regain their voice within a context of feminist thinking, "place[s] Black women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis" (Hill Collins 2000: vii). One of the ways they do this is by revealing these women's intellectual tradition and unmasking the "intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender" (ibid.: 8). Dealing with everyday racism and stereotyping as well as with the potentials and challenges of multiple attachments and transcultural identities, these blogs tend to discuss Afrodescendance and "Blackness" as a marker of shared experiences of both exclusion and belonging.[1] Elaborating on the notion of aesthetic activism that identifies the body as both subject to racist/symbolic violence and a potential space both of resistance to a racist regime of representation and also of self-empowerment (cf. Hall 1997 in general), we pay particular attention to (self-)representations of African and Afrodescendant women and their bodies on these blogs and discursive strategies that aim at decolonizing these bodies.

As studies on diasporic communities' uses of the digital space confirm, the internet, and in particular Web 2.0, represent an interactive space where constructions of identities and shared experiences are negotiated, for they provide "the opportunity for reflection and the ongoing construction of the self" (Siapera 2012: 174; also Kreknin/Marquardt 2016: 10; Bailey/Georgiu/Harindranath 2007: 2-3). Furthermore, the internet notably bears the potential to provide visibility for otherwise marginalized groups whose members can become "active

[1] When talking about 'blackness' or 'race' in the following, we need to emphasize that we understand those terms as discursively constructed categories of differences that arose within a context of colonization and colonial ideology and that describe a lived political and social reality in a modern/colonial world characterized by multiple experiences of discrimination and racism. Accordingly, Mark Terkessidis (2004: 98) argues that the "racialization" of the Other gives rise to a relation of inequality by "naturalizing" difference. As Röggla rightly states, 'racialized' categories as 'black' or 'white' are fictions, but, notwithstanding, fictions that have fairly real effects on the lives of people, such as in the presence (or absence) of certain privileges, and that, therefore, need to be voiced (cf. Röggla 2012: 17-20; also Hall 2019: 109-110).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

agents in their own representation […] through articulating digital ethnic, religious and gender identifications" (Leurs 2015: 25; also Siapera 2012: 185; Love 2019: 60).[2]

Critical research has shown that digital platforms, consequently, allow diasporic communities such as the Afrodiasporic communities in Europe to establish digital counterpublics. Those challenge and destabilize hegemonic narratives by revealing alternative views and staging the community's members' own self-images that thwart mainstream perspectives within a society (cf. Fraser 1992: 123; Bailey 2007: 212; Borst/Gallo González 2019: 290). With this paper, we correspondingly want to raise awareness to the fact that, accordingly, Afrodiasporic identity constructions are not only discussed in fiction and theoretical writing but tend to be addressed on a large scale in the internet, for instance in decentralized and participatory formats such as blogs. Counteracting the hegemony of Western narratives on Afrodiasporic communities,[3] these digital platforms open up spaces that turn into a potential tool of empowerment since they reveal the communities' very own narratives and strengthen their participation in the producing of knowledge (cf. Love 2019: 58).

As a first step, we enhance our initial conceptual remarks on the relevance of digital media and blogs as a space for constructing and challenging identities of Afrodiasporic communities in France, Spain and Italy. As a second step, we zoom in on selected case studies to analyze textual and visual representations of African and Afrodescendant women and their bodies in Afrofeminist blogs from those countries. One feature shared by these blogs is the underlying assumption that a decolonization of aesthetics may foster the self-awareness and empowerment of women of African descent and, thus, advance a decolonization of thinking.

[2] For a critical discussion of digital divides in this context cf., e.g., Leurs 2015: 19-21; Borst/Gallo González 2019: 287-288.

[3] By the term "Afrodiasporic communities", we refer to communities constituted by people of African descent who live in the diaspora, that is, in our context, in Romance-speaking European countries.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Afrodiasporic Communities and Aesthetic Activism in Cyberspace

Activists such as Desirée Bela-Lobedde state that, until a few years ago, there were basically no bloggers of African descent that deal with the experiences of African and Afrodescendant people in Spain for instance and/or write in Spanish (Bela-Lobedde 2018: 160-161). Nowadays, however, there is a rising number of digital platforms (such as webzines, digital databases, blogs, YouTube channels and other video blogs) as well as initiatives related to Afrodiasporic communities in social media networks (e. g., Facebook, Instagram or Twitter) that tackle issues concerning Afrodiasporic communities in different European countries using other languages but English and are coordinated and/or written by members of these communities. They are written by individuals or collectives of bloggers and refer to national and transnational contexts (such as for instance *Afrøpean – Adventures in Afroeurope* or *Live Unchained*). The huge number of platforms that can now be found is remarkable for it identifies the internet as an influential space where Afrodiasporic communities can gain visibility and shape their own narratives. The internet's potential as an empowering space is particularly significant if we consider its ambivalence as, according to the European Network Against Racism's Shadow Report, it also plays a major role in "forming opinions about migrants" (ENAR 2016: 15) and is frequently instrumentalized by far-right movements to spread false information (ibid.).

The extensive online presence of Afrodiasporic voices is certainly not just due to a rising trend in times of an increasingly interactive and participatory digital era of what is widely called the Web 2.0, allowing users to interact and collaborate to an unprecedented extent: A global trend of people branching out into the internet, sharing their lives and thoughts, commenting on others and being commented on. Rather, it may also be seen as a conscious decision to reach beyond established patterns of literary and theoretical writing, for both the academic and publishing worlds – although to different degrees with respect to the three countries covered in this paper – have continued marginalizing Afrodiasporic voices and self-presentations (cf. Crumly Deventer/

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Thomas 2011; Brancato 2009; Passos 2008; Romeo 2018).[4] Correspondingly, Françoise Vergès highlights the importance of the digital in counteracting a hegemony of Western narratives, for "social networks and the digital can be re-appropriated and used to connect peoples through the [African] continent and beyond" (Vergès 2017: 46). She argues that such networks "have facilitated conversations in the world of culture, arts and politics" and opened up "new routes of circulation [where] uncharted forms of emancipation emerge" (ibid.). Likewise, Afro-German writer and activist Noah Sow emphasizes the resistive potential of seizing these new channels, as "[t]here is much power in addressing each other" (Sow 2017: 29) and, thus, taking advantage of alternative spaces of enunciation such as the digital (ibid.: 30):

> For the first time, the tools to research *and* verify *and* publish our stories, herstories, histories are entirely in our own hands – if we so wish. Today we choose how we deal with cultural gatekeeping. […] We can self-publish digitally, reach anyone who is interested, and use networks to get the word out, autonomously and on a global scale. (ibid.; her emphasis)

As Kathleen Connolly argues, marginalized voices can consequently "use cyberspace as a medium to participate in the production of knowledge and argue with or protest against attitudes they view as incorrect or unjust" (2015: 146).[5]

Furthermore, the digital space allows for a dynamic processuality of producing texts that can be modified, extended, contradicted, commented on, and so on and so forth. In particular of interest in this context are blogs, often displaying a multitude of different posts that commonly reach from diaristic, intimate topics to thoughts or comments on news,

[4] The significance of the internet not only becomes evident if we consider the rising number of digital platforms coordinated by Afrodescendant people in Europe but also if we bear in mind the rising trend to crowd-fund projects by Afrodescendant people on digital platforms such as in the case of Amandine Gay's documentary *Ouvrir la voix* [*Speak Up*] or *Metamba Miago: relatos y saberes de mujeres afroespañoles* [*Metamba Miago: Stories and Knowledges by Afrospanish women*], edited by Deborah Ekoka in 2019.

[5] For the (transnational) interrelatedness of many Afrodiasporic digital platforms, cf. Borst/Gallo González (2019) who study examples from Spain and Portugal. Many blogs not only link to each other but re-post (to some extent translated) texts from other platforms and networks.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

current events, social issues etc. (cf. Serfaty 2004: 248). Due to their conceptual and medial flexibility, they foster ambiguities, ambivalent and even contradictory positionings as well as an openness to transformation (cf. Serfaty 2004). Correspondingly, they bear the potential to display a constantly developing and heteroglossic discourse that, according to Connolly, is not controlled by "an overarching narrative voice" (Connolly 2015: 151). As Viviane Serfaty (2004) argues, they open up a space where bloggers are enabled to express and negotiate a certain self-image or self-presentation, mediated through both written text *and* videos and pictures; that is, in our context, a space where subject positionings are discursively produced (cf. Kreknin/Marquardt 2016: 2) and that therefore allow Afrodiasporic identity constructions to be discussed.

When talking about identity constructions, we refer to Stuart Hall's well-known assumption that identity is "[n]ot an essence, but a *positioning*" (Hall 1996: 113) that "is always in process" (ibid.: 110) and needs to be re-negotiated. Correspondingly, individual and/or collective positionings of bloggers emerge within the posts, positionings situated within a contradictory and ambivalent context of self-perceptions and perceptions by others (cf. Kreknin/Marquardt 2016: 2). Thus, writing back to stereotyped perceptions of the "Black Other", the bloggers have been trying to re-appropriate a discourse on Afrodescendance and Blackness, exposing and oppugning those biased narratives as well as "defin[ing] their own humanity and affirm[ing] it in one another" (Love 2019: 70). We argue that, by doing this, they claim "Afrodescendance" as a shared narrative that allows them to identify with and, furthermore, to conceptualize positionings of the in-between, which are characterized by both enriching experiences of multiple attachments and disturbing experiences of racism and exclusion.

As gender and media theorist Lisa Nakamura states, the internet is "a place where race happens" (Nakamura 2002: xii). She also emphasizes the limits and opportunities of digital forms of representation and self-representation in this context: "Images of race on the Net are both 'stereotyped' at times […], and at other times, race is deployed in creative coalition building that creates a sense of community and racial identity online" (ibid.: xiii). It is this potential of "imagining" a community (cf. Anderson 2006) that should be kept in mind when looking

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

at the examples, an imagining of a community based on shared images and narratives that sustain a notion of commonality and allow for "strategic positions for self-expression" (Bailey/Georgiu/Harindarath 2007: 2). Accordingly, the narratives on Afrodescendance and the associated experiences and feelings articulated in the blogs elaborate a vision for those who otherwise frequently feel silenced to identify with, creating (new and/or alternative) self-images that oppose a biased image forced on people of African descent by a Eurocentric gaze, as criticized by Frantz Fanon in his groundbreaking book *Black Skin, White Masks*.[6]

When it comes to the exclusion and stereotyping of the "Black Other", both Fanon (2008: 91) and Hall (1997) have highlighted the decisive role of the "racialized" body for the persistent functioning of racism, for it seemingly makes "difference" visible. Hall argues that the "representation of 'difference' through the body became the discursive site through which much of this 'racialized knowledge' was produced and circulated" (Hall 1997: 244). In his text "The Spectacle of the 'Other'", Hall shows that popular stereotypes often refer to physical characteristics of people of African descent such as hair texture, facial features or skin color, as stereotyping "*reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference'*" (ibid.: 258; his emphasis; also 249 and Hill Collins 2000: 89). In the same essay, he highlights that meaning is always floating and, even though stereotyping might try to fix meaning by representation, "meaning begins to slip and slide" (Hall 1997: 270, also 228), which is why meaning can be "trans-coded" and re-appropriated by "wrench[ing], or inflect[ing it] into new directions" (ibid.: 270). It is precisely this re-appropriation of concepts such as Afrodescendance and Blackness and their meaning and the subversive aesthetics of representation of Black female bodies in cyberspace that we want to study in this paper.

As to French society in the present, where Afrodiasporic communities continue crusading for "social and political visibility" (Fila-

[6] However, worthy of bearing in mind is that these self-representations and counter-images may also still convey elements of colonial and Eurocentric stereotypes: "Afroeuropean self-making […] must be understood against both the historical background of colonialism and the contemporary politics of othering, both of which they seek to undo in a move of self-definition, but which they also perpetuate in some respects" (de Witte/Scarabello 2019: 319).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bakabadio 2018: 169), Sarah Fila-Bakabadio has used a similar approach to study representations of the Black female body as a "site of tension and political struggle" (ibid.). She calls this phenomenon "to 're-present', which means inventing new images of a specific subject (in this case, black women) to modify its social, political, and historical significance" (ibid.: 170), that is, people of African descent are "attempting to present blackness in their own terms" (ibid.).[7] Following a rich tradition of Black cultural movements such as "Black is beautiful" (Hall 1997: 270), Spanish blogger and author of African descent Desirée Bela-Lobedde refers to the notion of "aesthetic activism" [activismo estético][8] to challenge Eurocentric standards of beauty that, according to Patricia Hill Collins, are "standards used by White men, White women Black men, and, most painfully, one another" (2000: 90). As Bela-Lobedde explains in her blog, "aesthetic activism" – an activism that is both feminist and antiracist – claims "the beauty of afro hair and black skin" [la belleza del cabello afro y la piel negra] and, correspondingly, promotes alternative aesthetics and beauty standards that empower people of African descent to "work on their identity" [trabajar su identidad] and that invite them on a journey (*viaje*) to discover their African heritage (Bela-Lobedde, no date). The medial (r)evolution and the possibilities offered by cyberspace are crucial in this context, as argued by German journalist and writer Hengameh Yabhoobifarah, as "[a]esthetic, self-determined and positive representations of bodies that disrupt this confining norm [a norm determined by a 'white gaze' according to Yagboohifarah] have first become visible to us in such a prominent position with the rise of Instagram & Co" [Ästhetische, selbstbestimmte und positive Darstellungen von Körpern, die diese

[7] Cf. also Fila-Bakabadio 2014 on the topic of the creation and evolution of (female) beauty standards within Afro-French communities: "The point of this chapter is to show that attempts to define black beauty contribute to the racialization of Afro-French identities whose cultural and historical specificities are shadowed by the experience of a race-based discrimination. It also shows that black people use this racialization to invent aesthetic models for Afro-Frenchness stemming from exchanges between global/local and dominant/minority aesthetic codes from the circulation of images among France, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States" (2014: 80).

[8] If not otherwise indicated, all translations of quotes into English are ours.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

einengende Norm sprengen, sehen wir erst seit Instagram & Co. an so populärer Stelle; Yagboohifarah 2019: 74; cf. also Love 2019: 54].[9]

In a first step, we give a short overview of the blogs' main objectives and their efforts to offer tools of self-affirmation. In a second step, where we focus on exemplary case studies from France, Spain and Italy, we turn our attention to representations that provide examples of African and Afrodescendant women and their bodies as sites of resistance and self-empowerment.

Afrofeminist Blogs as Tools of Self-Affirmation and Empowerment – An Overview of Examples from France, Spain and Italy

If we consider digital platforms coordinated by Afrodiasporic people in general, we can sum up that the blogs deal with three pivotal issues. First, the denouncing of racism, stereotypization and marginalization as everyday experiences of people of African descent who are refused a place within European societies. Second, given this experience of exclusion, a focus on African and Afrodiasporic culture and cultural artefacts as a means of self-empowerment and self-affirmation. And third, the discussion of the potentials and challenges of multiple belongings and transcultural identity constructions; a discussion that also includes the question of how to label these identity constructions (cf., e.g., Borst/Gallo González 2019: 303). A key claim of many is that they want to open up a space where people of African descent in Europe can speak up and become visible, tell their own stories and visions; a space where they can affirm both their Afrodescendance and their relation to European societies and cultures, and, as stated in the blog *Afrøpean*, "explore the […] interplay of black and European cultures, and the synergy of styles and ideas brought about because of this union".[10]

Turning to blogs that share an Afrofeminist perspective, many of those deal with gender issues and intersectionality and, thus, share an Afrofeminist perspective as, for instance, *Afroféminas*, *EFAE – Empo-*

[9] For the significance of cyberspace for what is widely called the fourth wave of feminism cf., e.g., Cochrane (2013).
[10] "About", *Afrøpean*, afropean.com/about/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

deramiento Feminino Afrodescendiente en España or *Desirée Bela* in Spain, *Badassafrofem*, *Les Bavardages de Kyémis*, *Mrs. Roots*, *Peripheries* or *La toile d'Alma* in France and *Nappytalia* and *AFROselvaggio* in Italy, to name but a few.[11]

Conceptualized as a symbolic space of solidarity, empowerment and visibility, these blogs' main objective is to give women of African descent a voice and to enable them to speak up. The French blog *Les Bavardages de Kiyémis* [*Kiyémis's chatters*] has a vivid subtitle in this context: "An Afropean who makes noise" [Une afropéenne qui fait du bruit]. On the one hand, the blogger evidently claims a space within France and Europe by using the term "afropéenne", tying in with an ongoing debate in France that tries to capture "multiple belongings" [des appartenances multiples] (Miano 2012: 84) of French women and men of African descent "who wish to provide a space for both of them within themselves, […] combine them without establishing a hierarchy" [qui souhaient arbiter en eux les deux, […] les mélanger sans les hiérarchiser] (ibid.; cf. also Dechaufour and Chalaye 2015). On the other hand, the use of the expression "faire du bruit" is significant since it is not a neutral term but a statement in several ways: first, the blogger does not ask for permission to speak up or hold off the power of her voice to be heard over a long distance. Second, she does not speak in a diplomatic manner but with a subversive tenor, the expression "faire du bruit" reminding us of decolonial critic Maldonado-Torres's concept of the cry of the colonized other – a cry that represents "a call of attention to one's own existence" (Maldonado-Torres 2010: 110) and "the revelation of someone who has been forgotten or wronged" (ibid.: 48). "Faire du bruit", thus, represents an act not only of mourning but one of resistance as well in terms of an affirmation to have a story to tell, or, as the blogger herself says: "rediscover the history of our fights, of

[11] Apart from those, there are also a few feminist blogs that, among other topics, tackle issues concerning African and Afrodecendant women, such as *Locas del coño – Sororidad como autodefensa feminista*, *Radio Africa Magazine* or *AfroItalian Souls*. Moreover, there are also collective blogs and online magazine such as *MWASI*, a website on which the Afrofeminist collective of the same name posts on its members' political fight against the discrimination of Black women, or *Lallab Magazine,* whose focus is on Black and non-Black Muslim women and their fight against racist and sexist oppression.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

our forces, of our combats, finally see our brilliances that have been unjustly erased […]. It's beautiful to see us resist AND live, standing, dignified and proud" [redécouvrir l'histoire de nos luttes, de nos forces, de nos combats, voir enfin nos brillances injustement effacées […]. C'est beau de nous voir résister ET vivre, debout, dignes et fièr.Es.][12]

Correspondingly, the blogs do not simply give Afrodescendant women a voice but also value their knowledge and experiences. Likewise, the blog *Afroféminas* highlights that these digital platforms serve as a "fundamental tool for our collective liberation" [herramienta fundamental de nuestra liberación colectiva].[13] In an interview, journalist and blogger Lucía A. Mbomío Rubio points out that *Afroféminas* strives to make people listen to the very heterogeneous and polyphonic discourse of this community that, within *Afroféminas*, speaks for itself and is not just spoken about (cf. Olías/Campos/Caballero Medina 2016). Similarly, blogger Desirée Bela-Lobedde, formerly know under the pseudonym "La Negra Flor" [The Black Flower], previously used the neologism "afroblogger"[14] to describe her own ideological impetus, that is to fight biased images of Africa and its diaspora, to praise Afrodescendant cultures and to "empower Black women through esthetic activism" [empoderar a las mujeres negras desde el activismo estético] (Bela-Lobedde 2018b: 83).

As tools of self-empowerment, the blogs we are considering are written in particular for African and Afrodescendant people in France, Spain and Italy. This target audience becomes apparent if we read, for instance, the About section of *Badassafrofem* by director and blogger Amandine Gay. She understands her blog as a means of self-articulation and self-affirmation, for she repeatedly states that she does not write the blog to educate people who are not aware of their potential privileges – and these addressees include not only non-Black people, but, from her intersectional perspective, men, heterosexuals, non-disabled etc.: "I'm not here to PROVIDE YOUR education but to share and exchange points of view to finally enrich our reflections mutually" [je ne suis pas là pour FAIRE VOTRE éducation, mais partager et échanger des points

[12] "De la joie en politique", 4 March 2017, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/de-la-joie-en-politique/ [22 Jan 2021].
[13] *Afroféminas* on Instagram, www.instagram.com/p/BUPdvFjlBg4/ [22 Jan 2021].
[14] Cf. "Afro Blog", www.negraflor.com/afro-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de vue afin d'enrichir mutuellement nos réflexions].[15] Yet, as Gay's wording shows, she does primarily speak to women of African descent but not exclusively to them: rather, she says '*votre* éducation', inviting everyone to read what she has to say. Interestingly, the internet plays a particular role in this context, as, according to Gay, it represents a space that does not allow for ignorance anymore, for it is a freely accessible tool for self-education:

> No excuses for your ignorance since the information, […] that allows you to understand better the world, the wheels of power, the repetitions of history, the strategies of erasure or of promotion of memory, in short, the world in which we live, is there, a mouse click away.
> Pas d'excuses pour votre ignorance car les informations, […] celles qui vous permettent de mieux comprendre le monde, les rouages du pouvoir, les répétitions de l'histoire, les stratégies d'effacement ou de promotion des mémoires, bref le monde dans lequel nous vivons, sont là, à un clic de souris.[16]

Answering to a multiple discrimination of Afrodescendant women due to gender, race, sexuality, religion and so on, the blogs are conceptualized as spaces of both rebellion and self-empowerment as well as of solidarization of Afrodescendant women. According to the blog *EFAE – Empoderamiento feminino afrodescendiente en España* [*Female Afrodescendant Empowerment in Spain*], it is this multiple discrimination that has left a vacuum within Afrodiasporic communities, for female voices are underrepresented within these groups. Therefore, the EFAE collective, founded in 2016, considers itself an "answer to the necessity of female representation in spaces of Afrodescendant empowerment" [respuesta a la necesidad de representación femenina en los espacios de

[15] "Juste une mise au point", 24 Sept 2017, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].
[16] "Juste une mise au point", 24 Sept 2017, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021]. Cf. also Love about the internet as a tool of sharing knowledge: "In pedagogical terms, DBF [Digital Black Feminism] is a manifestation of a communal learning space that cultivates knowledge and understanding. DBF allows for Black women to spearhead conversations about beauty (double) standards, class, gender, politics, and race while providing a counterspace to combat issues such as police brutality, misogynoir, anti-blackness, and social injustices" (2019: 70).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

empoderamiento afrodescendiente].[17] Consequently, the blogs call on women – and other socially marginalized gender identities – to gather their voices and become protagonists in "our fight for visibility of the Black woman" [nuestra lucha de visibilización de la mujer negra].[18] The Afrofeminist collective MWASI, founded in 2014, declares a similar goal, for the contributors complain that Black women (and Black people who at birth have been considered women) were invisible as political subjects (cf. also MWASI 2018: 20). They point to "the necessity to federate, to exchange and to express oneself on questions related to Black Women" [le besoin de fédérer, d'échanger et de s'exprimer sur les questions liées aux Femmes Noires],[19] to establish a transnational solidarity among Afrodescendant women in Africa and the diaspora (cf. ibid.: 21, 85) without neglecting the heterogeneity of that community. In this context, most blogs also denounce the scandalous shortcomings and "blindness" [aveuglement] (Vergès 2019: 29) of Western feminism, whose claim for alleged universalism only poorly disguises its hegemonic attitude, for it does not represent "racialized" women and their claims.[20]

In the following, we analyze representative Afrofeminist blogs from France, Spain and Italy – *Badassafrofem*, *Les Bavardages de Kiyémis*, *Afroféminas*, *Diario de la Negra Flor/Videos de la Negra Flor*, and *Nappytalia* – to study in detail how those blogs discuss Afrodiasporic identity constructions and their relatedness to Afrodescendance and Blackness in the French, Spanish and Italian context. In this setting, we emphasize the representations of Black female bodies which, as the Afrofeminist collective MWASI compellingly states in its manifesto-like text *Afrofem* (2018), are controlled by a biased Western gaze and "assigned, by violence, to a defined space and social role" [assignés par

[17] "Inicio", efaeblog.wordpress.com/ [22 Jan 2021].
[18] "Acerca de", efaeblog.wordpress.com/acerca-de/ [22 Jan 2021].
[19] Description at the collective's YouTube channel, also: www.youtube.com/channel/UCpvYggTh_FmUGKY1sowymEQ/about?disable_polymer=1 [22 Jan 2021].
[20] Cf., e.g., *Afroféminas'* refusal to join the general feminist strike in Spain on 8 March 2018, as the bloggers criticize that Spain's hegemonic feminism does not represent "racialized" women's opinions and claim ("Por qué *Afroféminas* no se sume a la Huelga Feminista", 5 March 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/03/05/porque-afrofeminas-no-se-suma-a-la-huelga-feminista/ [22 Jan 2021]; see also the provocative "Letter to White Feminism" [Lettre au féminisme blanc] in MWASI (2018: 42-43).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

la violence à un espace et un role social défini] (MWASI 2018: 102), a racist practice that can only be overcome by making them widely visible and revealing Afrodescendant women's "flamboyance" [flamboyance]: "To make our lives shine isn't an option, it's a necessity." [Faire briller la beauté de nos vies n'est pas une option, c'est une nécessité] (ibid.: 105).

Badassafrofem and *Les Bavardages de Kiyémis* (France): Reclaiming and Re-Signifying Black Bodies

An interesting example is the afore-mentioned blog *Badassafrofem* written by Afrofeminist activist Amandine Gay, who is also the director of *Ouvrir la voix*, a crowdfunded documentary officially released in 2017 in which 24 women discuss their identities as Black women in France and Belgium, denounce racism as a collective experience that they share living in a 'white'-dominated society and also air grievances within afro communities such as sexism or homophobia (cf. Kodjo-Grandvaux 2016; Marlier 2016). The digital space plays a central role in Amandine Gay's work and activism, as she crowdfunded her documentary via *Kickstarter*, has been promoting it online by uploading clips on *YouTube* for instance, has a twitter account (@OrpheaNegra) and writes the above-mentioned blog *Badassafrofem*.[21] Its subtitle is: "Afrofeminist or ABL (AngryBlackLady) in terms of the moon, Pansexual option Sorceress. If you aren't ready to question your privileges, keep your distance to this blog!" [Afroféministe ou ABL (AngryBlackLady) en fonction de la lune, Pansexuelle option Sorcière. Si vous n'êtes pas prêt.e.s à remettre vos privilèges en question, tenez-vous à distance de ce blog!].[22] It vividly illustrates the blog's main goals: those are, first, reveal the intersections of discriminatory practices women of African descent suffer based on skin color, gender and sexuality, and,

[21] Cf., e.g., www.kickstarter.com/projects/1172129246/ouvrir-la-voix?lang=de, ouvrirlavoixlefilm.fr/, www.youtube.com/user/orpheonegra/videos, twitter.com/orpheanegra?lang=de [all 22. Jan 2021]. For her online activities cf. also "!!! Juste une mise au point: le retour !!!", 12 Jan. 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].

[22] badassafrofem.wordpress.com/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

second, subversively challenge privileges that are justified by those categories. Likewise, it indicates a belligerent tone that asks for an active resistance against others' ascriptions about women of African descent.

Correspondingly, Gay puts the blog's main goals as follows: "My work is about the deconstruction of cultural and historical re-appropriation to which Black people, in particular, women, queers and handicapped, have systematically been victims." [Mon travail porte sur la déconstruction de la réappropriation culturelle et historique, dont les Noir.e.s, en particulier, les femmes, les queers et les handicapées ont été systématiquement victimes].[23] She, thus, advocates an active resistance against a hegemonic narrative that reduces Black people to passive victims of History: "The history of Black people is rarely presented as a history of action; we're the passive victims of History" [L'histoire des Noir.e.s est rarement présentée comme une histoire de l'action, nous sommes les victimes passives de l'Histoire].[24] Accordingly, she asks Afrodescendant communities to themselves ensure that they do not just speak up but that their voices also get heard:

> It isn't enough to produce tools of emancipation; one also needs to be in a position to assure its diffusion if one wishes that they get undamaged to the ears of those concerned. The reason why I do not stop to incessantly repeat that we need to reappropriate narration.
> [Il ne suffit pas de produire des outils d'émancipation, encore faut-il être en mesure d'en assurer la diffusion si l'on souhaite qu'ils arrivent intacts aux oreilles des concerné.e.s. Raison pour laquelle je ne cesse de marteler que nous devons nous réapproprier la narration].[25]

In this context, a positive re-appropriation of the symbolic dimension of what it means to be Black plays an important role. As the blogger states, being Black holds a certain ambivalence, for it embraces a history of oppression while implying the need to transcend this oppression by offering resistance and to conceptualize alternative, self-

[23] "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].
[24] "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].
[25] "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

empowering visions of Blackness that are, for instance, inspired by transnational Black movements:

> Black because I carry the stigmata of the history of enslavement and colonialism on my skin. If someone tells me […] about my gazelle body, touches my hair […], presumes that I am a sex animal and of limited intelligence. I don't see there anything harmless. I see there the slave market, […] the violations on the plantations, scientific racism and its misty theory according to which Black people were the missing link between white men and the ape. Well, BLACK, with all the specific experiences of inherited discrimination it includes […]. BLACK with all its strategies of auto-defense put in place by Black women and men throughout centuries: maroonage, panafricanism, afrofeminism and all the politics of resilience of which we are the authors.
> [Noire parce que je porte les stigmates de l'histoire esclavagiste et coloniale sur ma peau. Lorsque l'on me parle […] de mon corps de gazelle, qu'on me touche les cheveux […], qu'on présuppose que je suis une bête de sexe et d'une intelligence limitée. Je n'y vois rien d'anodin. J'y vois le marché aux esclaves, […] les viols dans les plantations, le racisme scientifique et sa fumeuse théorie selon laquelle les Noir.e.s étaient le chaînon manquant entre l'homme blanc et le singe. Donc NOIRE, avec tout ce que ça comporte d'expériences spécifiques de discriminations héritées […]. NOIRE avec tout ce que ça comporte de stratégies d'auto-défense mises en place par les femmes et les hommes Noir.e.s au fil des siècles: marronnage, panafricanisme, afro-féminisme et toutes les politiques de résilience dont nous sommes les auteur.e.s.].[26]

This quote evidently links Gay's individual experiences as an Afrodescendant woman in France to a shared transnational history characterized by colonial and epistemological violence and its persistence to the present day or, as she declares, "I inscribe myself into the History of the Afro diaspora" [je m'inscris dans l'Histoire de la diaspora Afro].[27]

Simultaneously, the quote demonstrates the physicality of these experiences. Thus, Gay writes that she is Black because she bears the stigmata of a history of enslavement and colonialism on her skin, and she

[26] "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].
[27] "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

also reveals that her body is the site at which a racist discourse hits. Through her body, she is assaulted as a Black woman. It is her body where she suffers racist adscriptions by Others, adscriptions that deny her very own humanity by tagging her "a gazelle", the "missing link between white men and apes". Such a view of her body, soaked by racist clichés, turns her body into an "assaultable" body, one that could be raped on the plantations, one that can be touched without permission, as we can read in the quote above. As the examples illustrate, Gay, as an Afrofeminist, refers not only to the Black body in general but to the Black *female* body in particular, for it suffers the intersections of different discriminatory practices: her body is not only "racialized" but simultaneously "sexualized".

However, Amandine Gay refuses such a misappropriation of her bodily self and re-defines the body as a space of resistance that turns racialized and gendered body features into tools of emancipation. Mentioning in her blog that she is "body-positive", she reminds her readers of the necessity to embrace their bodies as valuable and beautiful, as something that does not need to be hidden or disguised but displayed self-confidently. Accordingly, Amandine Gay not only mentions that she has been a nude model and a burlesque dancer herself, as a way to self-determinedly dispose of her body, but also adds pictures to this statement that celebrate Black bodies as strong, beautiful and diverse, pictures that challenge the afore-mentioned perception of the Black female body as a site of oppression for they show the body not as an object dominated by others but as an expression of the Self's agency.[28]

Another interesting example of a self-confident visibilization of the Black female body can be found in a blog post where Gay discusses the phenomenon of the "niafous", a term used to label Black girls who are seen as too loud and vulgar, who are said to wear too much make up and to have a bad taste in clothes, etc. As Amandine Gay states, this phenomenon has entered a mainstream debate in France in particular due to French director Céline Sciamma's film *Bande de filles* [Girlhood], released in 2014, which deals with Black female youth gangs in

[28] Cf., e.g., the pictures of the post "Mise aux points sur les I et aux barres sur les T", 26 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/a-propos-de-ce-blog/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

France. Through this example, Gay raises the problem of shame that many members of the Afrofrench community feel towards girls such as the "niafous", who seem to confirm stereotypes (and in particular physical stereotypes) of what mainstream French society considers as "typically black". Consequently, Gay harshly criticizes the Afrofrench community's ignorance of its own heterogeneity and asks its members to re-discover the "niafous" as a self-confident way "to be 'unapologetically Black', that is 'Black without complexes'" [d'être 'unapologetically Black', à savoir 'Noires et sans complexes'],[29] that is, as a way for them to occupy the public space with their bodies and to become visible as who they are without making concessions to others.[30]

Our second example from the French context is Afrofeminist blogger Kiyémis and her blog *Les Bavardages de Kiyémis,* which is inspired by her own experiences as a young woman of African descent in France and includes reflections and comments on recent events, news or sociopolitical debates – some of the experiences that she also addresses in her poem collection *À nos humanités révoltées* [*To Our Humanities In Revolt*], published in 2018.

In "Scander tant qu'il le faudra l'évidence" [Chant as much as evidence requires], a revealing blog post from 2016, Kiyémis describes Black women's invisibilization and dehumanization through the Others' gaze. Again, it is the body that becomes a target of racism and sexism:

> Your body, object of disgust or of excessive fantasy, can be touched, grabbed, studied, without your consent. It is attacked, assaulted. It is colonized, claimed by others than yourself. It isn't yours anymore.
> [Ton corps, objet soit de degoût [sic], soit de fantasme démesuré, peut être touché, agrippé, étudié, sans ton autorisation. Il est agressé, violenté. Il est colonisé, revendiqué par d'autres que toi. Il ne t'appartient plus.][31]

[29] "Niafou Is The New Punk", 8 March 2015, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/2015/03/08/niafou-is-the-new-punk/ [22 Jan 2021].
[30] Cf. in this context also "Un corps c'est tout un monde", 8 Febr. 2018, badassafrofem.wordpress.com/category/societe/ [22 Jan 2021].
[31] "Scander tant qu'il le faudra l'évidence", 16 Dec. 2016, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2016/12/16/rappeler-sans-cesser-levidence/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

She narrates a similar experience in another post that has the meaningful title "Regards" [Looking]:

> Do you see me?
> I know that you see my skin.
> Do you see me?
> I know that you see my hair.
> Do you see me?
> I know that you see my breasts and my buttocks.
> […]
> [Est ce que tu me vois?
> Je sais que tu vois ma peau.
> Est-ce que tu me vois?
> Je sais que tu vois mes cheveux.
> Est ce que tu me vois?
> Je sais que tu vois mes seins et mes fesses.][32]

There, the poetic speaker is, once again, reduced to her body, a body interpreted by the Others' gaze in this very poem. Kiyémis also addresses this topic in her poem "Femme noire, territoire" [Black women, territory; cf. Kiyémis 2018: 33]. She is not seen as a human being, as an "I". Instead, Others just see particular physical features that echo a colonial discourse characterized by racist stereotypes of Blackness, that is skin color, hair texture and sexuality. This hypocrisy of the alleged acceptance of the Black body in Western societies is likewise denounced by the Afrofeminist collective MWASI, who states how that body is only accepted if its characteristic features – and the following quote names the same features as Kiyémis – are repressed:

> This is an imposed figure [this politic of respectability; our addition] which is only feasible if our *skin* isn't too dark, if our *hair* is wisely tamed, our *voluptuousness* dissimulated, our natural beauty sufficiently altered to suit what others expect of us.
> [C'est une figure imposée [cette politique de la respectabilité] qui n'est réalisable que si notre *peau* n'est pas trop foncée, notre *chevelure* sage-

[32] "Regards", 14 March 2015, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2015/03/14/gaze/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> ment domptée, notre *volupté* dissimulée, notre beauté naturelle assez altérée pour convenir à ce qu'on attend de nous.] (MWASI 2018: 103; our emphasis)

In both of her posts above, Kiyémis denounces such a gaze by expressing her desire to not be seen as the "racialized Other" but as an individual human being in its dignity and beauty with, as she says elsewhere in "Regards": "My magnificent black skin. My twinkling black skin […]. My sparkling black skin […]" [Ma peau noire magnifique […]. Ma peau noire scintillante […]. Ma peau noire étincelante].[33] In the 2016 post, Kiyémis underlines this argument by using pictures showing self-confident, strong and beautiful women and not hiding their heterogeneity. In particular, the animated picture of women in a pool is interesting as the woman in the front looks the readers right in the eye, confronting their biased gaze, and the other woman in the back virtually seems to splash the readers to make them wake up and see the perfidiousness of racist stereotypes.

That Kiyémis considers the body as an ambivalent site of both stereotyping and self-empowerment is made clear in other posts as well, for instance, when she denounces the bigotry of Western feminism, for it misinterprets the femininity and sexiness of Black women as vulgar. Kiyémis argues that Western feminism does not see the subversiveness of bodily performances as a means of self-determination and emancipation, which she illustrates by mentioning artists such as Beyoncé or Nicki Minaj, often attacked by feminists for being too sexy, or "twerking", a dance style often considered as sexually provocative: "And this makes me laugh because one will say this, one will slam Amber Rose and Beyoncé who twerks but I've never seen any attempt to tear to pieces Dita von Teese because she did striptease" [Et puis ça me fait rire, parce qu'on va dire ça, on va clasher Amber Rose et Beyoncé qui twerke mais je n'ai jamais vu d'essai descendant Dita Von Teese parce qu'elle faisait de l'effeuillage].[34] Also in "Les Négresses sales" [Dirty

[33] "Regards", 14 March 2015, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2015/03/14/gaze/ [22 Jan 2021].
[34] "La politique de respectabilité VS le twerk: faites vos jeux", 23 Febr. 2015, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2015/02/23/la-politique-de-respectabilite-vs-le-twerk-faites-vos-jeux/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Black Women], a poem published in her book *À nos humanités révoltées*, she plays with the discriminatory stereotypes imposed on Afrodescendant women by re-interpretating them as moments of resistance:

> […] Look at us.
> Dirty Negresses.
> Niafous.
> Bitches.
> Darkies.
> Look at us.
> Protest, powerful.
> Realize the unthinkable.
> Set on fire.
>
> Look at us.
> Ugly.
> Aggressive.
> Hysterical.
> Menacing.
> Terrifying,
> Magnificient. […]
>
> [Regarde-nous.
> Les négresses sales.
> Les Niafous.
> Les Putes.
> Les Noirtes.
>
> Regarde-nous.
> Protester, puissantes.
> Réaliser l'impensable.
> Foutre le feu.
>
> Regarde-nous.
> Laides.
> Agressives.
> Hystériques.
> Menaçantes.
> Terrifiantes,
> Magnifiques.] (Kiyémis 2018: 34-35)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Another insightful aspect concerning *Les Bavardages de Kiyémis* arises from the blog's intersectional perspective not being limited to racism and sexism but, likewise also tackling weight as another discriminatory regime based on standardized beauty ideals that Black women are confronted with and that turn the body into a political space. To that effect, Kiyémis states:

> As a curvy black woman […], beauty is something political. […] I regain this right to love myself […]. I regain it by looking at women that look like me. Proud, beautiful women who radiate sensuality, beauty.
> [Mais en tant que […] femme ronde noire […], la beauté c'est encore quelque chose de politique. […] Je reconquiers ce droit à m'aimer […]. Je le reconquiers en regardant des femmes qui me ressemblent. Des femmes fières, belles, qui respirent la sensualité, la beauté.][35]

This last sentence puts in a nutshell what can briefly be said about the impact of whole different kinds of blogs, blogs that explicitly focus on beauty, fashion and lifestyle. There are numerous examples in all three countries: *Black Beauty Bag*, *Gaëlle Prudencio*, *Sofia Black*, *Miss Black Glamour* or *Natural Black & Beautiful*.[36] Although they do not explicitly foster the theoretical discussion on Blackness, they nevertheless stage women of African descent as beautiful since they show the female body in its diversity with respect to hair, skin color, weight and so on, and, thus, offer these images that Kiyémis mentions in the quote above: images of other women that look like her. Moreover, we can also find categories such as "Afro-Revolutionaries" [Afro Revolucionarias/os] at *Sofia Black*, for instance, where Afrospanish women and men with natural hair are interviewed and the political dimension of natural hair is alluded to. To what extent the diversity of beauty ideals and natural hair play an essential role in the studied blogs will become evident if we now have a look at some more examples from the Spanish and Italian context.

[35] "Allez viens, on se libère", 22 Dec. 2014, lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2014/12/22/allez-viens-on-se-libere-2/ [22 Jan 2021].
[36] Cf. www.blackbeautybag.com/, gaelleprudencio.com/, www.sofiablack.com/blog/, missblackglamour.com/, naturalblackandbeautiful.blogspot.com/ [all 22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Afroféminas and Desirée Bela-Lobedde's Online Activism (Spain): Challenging Eurocentric Beauty Standards and Celebrating Black Bodies

Afroféminas [*Afrofemales*] is a Spanish blog founded in 2013 and written by many different bloggers of African descent in Spain and elsewhere. According to Antoinette Torres Soler, it is mostly around 10 bloggers that collaborate with *Afroféminas* (cf. Civieta 2017). If one has a closer look on the authors of the posts, one sees that *Afroféminas* really bring together Afrodescendant women from around the globe, for there are bloggers from numerous Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas as well as translated posts that put the issues being dealt with by Afrospanish women in a global context (cf. also Borst/Gallo González 2019: 299-304). *Afroféminas*'s blog posts, often based on the bloggers' personal experiences and frequently supplemented by theoretical reflections, deal with issues such as every day events, culture, fashion, education, Spanish society and history from the perspective of women of African descent.

One of the central issues discussed in the posts is the experience of everyday racism in Spain such as the devaluation of African and Afrodescendant women's hair texture or their stereotyping in advertising, for instance. In many posts, there is a specific focus on microracisms, that is, circumstantial gestures in everyday life that are nevertheless offending and violating as they rely on discriminatory stereotypes, for instance when a person says, as one blogger writes, that "*Although* you are black, you are attractive as you have smooth features" [*Aunque* seas negra, eres guapa porque tienes rasgos suaves].[37]

In two of her videos from 2013 entitled "Being a Black Woman in Spain" [Ser mujer negra en España], online content creator Desirée Bela-Lobedde confirms that this form of racism plays a major role in Spanish society, which in general identifies itself as non-racist, by reporting similar experiences such as being continuously confronted with

[37] "MicroRacismos", 24 March 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/03/24/microracismos/ [22 Jan 2021]. Felipe Espinoza Garrido et al. describe such a temporarily exclusion of people of African descent by the notion of "contingent belonging", that is "a conditional belonging that is strategically granted and revoked, meted out by 'white Europe' when useful to its own interests" (2019: 2).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

the prejudices that Black people cannot be Spaniards and are believed to not work in a decent job, etc.[38] Correspondingly, many blog posts on *Afroféminas* deal with the anger of bloggers who are turned down or (temporarily) excluded by Spanish society, characterized by "normative whiteness" (Espinoza Garrido et al. 2020: 2) but nevertheless their home – an experience that gives rise to ambivalent subjectivities in particular in the "postmigratory context" for, as Espinoza Garrido, Koegler, Nyangulu and Stein argue, "white European ideology does not cope with the status of someone 'racially different' yet not 'only just arrived'" (2020: 3).[39]

When reading *Afroféminas*, the omnipresence of the Black female body is conspicuous, for it is both written about in the blog posts and represented in the pictures that illustrate the written texts. Numerous posts tackle the "racialization" of the Black female body that often goes hand in hand with racist stereotypes such as the passionate and savage Black woman or the alleged messiness and impurity of women of African descent's natural hair, harshly criticizing the discriminatory practice of *Othering* in Spain.[40] Hence, this offensive "interpretation" of the Black female body by others is portrayed as a hostile appropriation of this body, which adds to other acts of aggression, as for example, virtually physical assaults as described in some posts that deal for instance with the invasive touching of hair without asking. Likewise, the significant role of skin color when it comes to others' perceptions of women of African descent is emphasized in many posts: some describe the experience that Black skin is often seen by others as an essential marker for exclusion in Spanish society and as a purportedly unambiguous hint that someone must "be from somewhere else" or others deplore the phenomenon of "colorism" [colorismo], which gives rise to a further hierarchization of African and Afrodescendant women, in particular in a

[38] Cf. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fevqny1XMbo and www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnT6aK0ce8I [both 22 Jan 2021].
[39] For an overview of topics tackled on *Afroféminas* cf. Borst/Gallo González 2019.
[40] Cf., e.g., "3 estereotipos de la mujer negra que deben dejar de existir", 29 May 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/05/29/3-estereotipos-de-la-mujer-negra-que-deben-dejar-de-existir/; "Reconociendo esterotipos racistas: Jezebel, la negra isaciable", 20 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/20/reconociendo-estereotipos-racistas-jezebel-la-negra-insaciable/; "Mujeres negras y el despojo de sus cuerpos", 30 June 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/06/30/mujeres-negras-y-el-despojo-de-sus-cuerpos/ [all 22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

context of *mestizaje* (being of mixed race) that makes people perceive allegedly privileged forms of lighter skin color.[41]

At a second glance, it catches one's eye that a particular type of photograph accompanies many posts that discuss the above-mentioned experiences. Frequently, these photos aesthetically stage the beauty of Black skin and natural hair, turning them into symbols of empowerment. They, thus, visualize the bloggers' claims for emancipation and self-determination, as the following quote clarifies: "My skin […] is memory, it is history, it is force, it is love and beauty" [Mi piel […] es memoria, es historia, es identidad, es fuerza, es amor y belleza].[42] If one browses the blog posts on *Afroféminas*, one can easily see that, prevalently, these pictures visually contradict the denounced discriminatory practices by unveiling a heterogeneity of beauty that challenges a Eurocentric and racist idea of what is understood as beautiful.

Similarly, Desirée Bela-Lobedde, together with Deborah Ekoka from *United Minds*, launched the campaign *#yosoymipropiocanondebelleza* [#Immyownbeautyideal] in 2017. On her YouTube channel, Bela-Lobedde called on Afrodescendant women to make their beauty visible in cyberspace, asking them to upload selfies on Instagram and Twitter using the hashtag "I am my own beauty ideal" and to retweet photos uploaded by others. These photos would all appear in a video exalting ("exaltar") the beauty of African and Afrodescendant women with the objective of normalizing it and of creating role models for others (cf. also Galaup 2017).[43]

---

[41] Cf., e.g., "Colorismo: conceptos del feminismo negro", 22 Aug. 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/08/22/colorismo-conceptos-del-feminismo-negro/, "Colorismo en la comunidad afro: el privilegio de la piel clara", 24 June 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/06/24/colorismo-en-la-comunidad-afro-el-privilegio-de-la-piel-clara/, "No soy sólo negra", 15 Apr. 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/04/15/no-soy-solo-negra/, "Mujer migrante y afroespañola: ¿Te sientes Española?", 15 Febr. 2019, afrofeminas.com/2019/02/15/mujer-migrante-y-afroespanola-te-sientes-espanola/, "¿Lo que no se nombra, no existe? Llamemos lo negro por su nombre: negro", 26 Jan 2019, afrofeminas.com/2019/01/26/lo-que-no-se-nombra-no-existe-llamemos-lo-negro-por-su-nombre-negro/ [all 22 Jan 2021].

[42] "Por qué te ofende mi piel?", 25 June 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/06/25/por-que-te-ofende-mi-piel/ [22 Jan 2021].

[43] Cf. "Yo soy mi propio canon de belleza. Campaña en redes sociales", 24 Apr. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHJWWCLgWsM; "Campaña Yo soy mi propio canon

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bela-Lobedde, author of the autobiographical text *Being a Black Woman in Spain* [*Ser mujer negra en España*] (2018) whose title echoes her two *YouTube* videos mentioned above and that deals with her experiences of being a Spanish woman of African descent, started her blog – formerly known as *Diary of the Black Flower* [*Diario de la negra flor*] and renamed as *Desirée Bela* in 2018 – with the initial aim of advocating for a "normalization" of natural hair in Spanish society. Highlighting the entanglements of aesthetics and identity, she dedicates herself to what she calls "activismo estético" [aesthetic activism], which aims not only at challenging stereotypes but also at promoting a decolonization of "racialized" persons' bodies and creating role models to

> empower black women […] and help them to work on their identity respecting the naturality of their afro features and their skin color, overcoming the aesthetic slavery and apartheid that Eurocentric beauty ideals impose on people.
> [empoderar a las mujeres negras […] y a ayudarlas a trabajar su identidad desde el respecto a la naturaleza de sus rasgos afro y al color de su piel, superando a la esclavitud y el apartheid estético que imponen los cánones de belleza eurocéntricos.] (Bela-Lobedde 2018b: 83)[44]

In this context, she ties in with MWASI's critique that Eurocentric conceptions of beauty "deny what we are, […] force us to deny ourselves" [nient ce que nous sommes, […] nous obligent à nous renier nous-mêmes; MWASI 2018: 101], which is why a non-hegemonic aesthetics is urgently needed (cf. also ibid.: 110-111).

The notably aesthetic pictures that can be found on social networks such as Twitter under the hashtag *#yosoymipropiocanondebelleza* consciously expose those bodily features mentioned by Bela-Lobedde, features that tended and still tend to be devalued by beauty ideals influenced by a colonial legacy and a Eurocentric perspective of beauty. The self-representations posted under the campaign's hashtag do not only reveal the beauty of bodily features depreciated as inferior by such a discriminatory perspective but, by exposing – or one might even say "celebrating" – those features visually, transform them into acts of

de belleza", 2 May 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjzjducGAak [both 22 Jan 2021].

[44] Cf. also "Quién soy", www.desireebela.com/quien-soy/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

resistance, for these photos allow women of African descent to re-appropriate their own bodies by reclaiming their genuine beauty and acknowledging that "I'm beautiful as who I am!" [¡soy bella como yo!].[45]

Comparable to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "strategic essentialism", these visual self-representations promote a common aesthetic, in some way homogenized, that allows women of African descent to gain visibility as a collective and to challenge the bias of Western beauty ideals (cf. Spivak 1988: 204-205; Spivak 1984/85: 184; Castro Varela/Dhawan 2015: 191). The same strategy can be observed in the case of the photos on *Afroféminas*. There, one blogger explicitly confirms that the Black female body turns into a "political weapon" [arma política]: "If it curls like this, if it expands like this, it is to make sure that we are seen, let's say it is like a spare room. A method to gain space with the body, since often it is not possible with the voice" [Si se riza así, si se expande así, es para asegurarse de que somos vistos, digamos que es como un espacio de reserva. Un método de ganar espacio con el cuerpo, ya que muchas veces no puede ser con la voz].[46]

Although *Afroféminas* and the campaign initiated by Desirée Bela-Lobedde both explicitly emphasize the heterogeneity of African and Afrodescendant women's beauty by revealing a vast picture of different and unique women, the staging of "typical" features (considered characteristic of people of African descent) in the pictures reflects an essentialist construction of Afrodescendance and Blackness that transforms the negative experience of "being different" into a positive moment of empowerment. This transformation becomes evident in blog posts' titles such as "Mi hair, my identity" [Mi pelo, mi identidad] or "My hair, my crown" [Mi cabello, mi corona], which highlight the entanglements of aesthetic activism, questions of identity and affirmation of one's own African descent.[47] Consequently, the aesthetization of the Black female

[45] "No soy bella como tú… ¡Soy bella como yo!", 4 Dec. 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/12/04/soy-bella-como-yo/ [22 Jan 2021].
[46] "El pelo, la diversidad y por qué el Orgullo debe ser interseccional: testimonio y reflexión", 1 July 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/07/01/el-pelo-la-diversidad-y-por-que-el-orgullo-debe-ser-interseccional-testimonio-y-relexion/ [22 Jan 2021].
[47] "Mi pelo, mi identidad", 11 Dec. 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/12/11/mi-pelo-mi-identidad/; "Mi cabello, mi corona", 10 Nov. 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/11/10/mi-cabello-mi-corona/ [both 22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

body turns into acts of resistance that counteract the marginalization of African and Afrodescendant women in Spain.

Likewise, as another blogger argues, the liberation of imposed beauty ideals, by cutting straightened hair and letting it grow naturally, represents an act of emancipation and bears the potential to symbolize the "acceptance of being Afrodescendant" [aceptación del ser afrodescendiente].[48] Or, as we can read elsewhere: "For us, though, hair continues being a slow process of acceptation, of self-respect, of recognition and self-esteem" [Para nosotras, sin embargo, el cabello continúa siendo un lento proceso de aceptación, de amor propio, de reconocimiento y autoestima].[49] At the same time, it is a subversive act against colonial practices of control and oppression of women of African descent that aimed at "erasing our identities" [borrar nuestras identidades].[50]

Correspondingly, the pictures in *Afroféminas* endorse the associated texts in which the bloggers speak up to denounce the stereotyping of women of African descent. As self-representations, they become a means to "[c]laim the right to be black in a world that prefers to invisibilize us" [reivindicar el derecho a ser negro en un mundo que prefiere invisibilizarnos].[51] To create spaces for their beauty and complexity,

[48] "Mi pelo, mi identidad", 11 Dec. 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/12/11/mi-pelo-mi-identidad/ [22 Jan 2021].
[49] "Mi cabello, mi corona", 10 Nov. 2016, afrofeminas.com/2016/11/10/mi-cabello-mi-corona/ [22 Jan 2021].
[50] "El cabello es politico, el cabello tiene género y tiene raza", 14 Sept. 2017, afrofeminas.com/2016/07/26/el-cabello-es-politico-el-cabello-tiene-genero-y-tiene-raza/ [22 Jan 2021]. The blog *EFAE* even opens up a historical perspective in this context, for a translation of a blog post from *Le Blog du Griot* points to a tradition of Black women's resistance with respect to their hair: it tells the story of the law in Louisiana in the 18th century that forced Black women and women of color to wear a sort of a turban or headscarf (*tignon*) to disguise their hair. First thought to draw of the attention to the eye-catching hairdos common among Black women at that time and, thus, make them less visible, Black women subversively defied the law's objective by wearing very noticeable headgears that "las hacia mas bellas y seductoras" [made them more beautiful and seductive] ("Cuando las mujeres negras tenían que cubrirse los cabellos para evitar la envidia de las mujeres blancas", 30 March 2017, efaeblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/30/cuando-las-mujeres-negras-tenian-que-cubrirse-los-cabellos-para-evitar-la-envidia-de-las-mujeres-blancas/ [22 Jan 2021]).
[51] "No soy morena, soy negra!!!", 24 Sept. 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/09/25/no-soy-morena-soy-negra/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"to decolonize us, not only aesthetically but also mentally and intellectually" [decolonizando[nos], no solo estéticamente, si no también mental y intelectualmente][52] and, consequently, to enable their dignity as equal human beings. Correspondingly, one blogger writes:

> To acknowledge the diverse beauty of diverse women is a small step towards acknowledging other values of other cultures and destroying the myth of occidental superiority. We are all worthy and we all deserve recognition.
> [Reconocer la belleza diversa de las mujeres diversas es un pequeño paso rumbo a reconocer los demás valores de las demás culturas y deconstruir el mito de la superioridad occidental. Todas somos dignas y merecemos ser reconocidas.][53]

Likewise, *Afroféminas*'s coordinating team explicitly explains this exposure of the Black female body as beautiful as a means of gaining self-esteem, of becoming visible and of objecting to established visualizations of beauty: "It isn't frivolous; it is struggle. As we are beautiful" [No es frívolo, es lucha. Porqué nosotras somos bonitas].[54]

Yet, similarly to Amandine Gay in *Badassafrofem*, the bloggers of *Afroféminas* do not disguise the ambiguity of what it means "to be Black". The poetic text "Why does my skin offend you?" [¿Por qué te ofende mi piel?] alludes to this ambiguity by staging Black skin as a site of both historical violence and resistance *and* beauty:

> Don't stop, watch her scars. They have been here for years, […] discrimination and barbarism are inscribed in my skin, but it keeps being beautiful, admire it. […] But my skin is strong, it doesn't matter how much you hurt it, […] it is reborn and dazzles. It knows how to heal itself and it is a specialist for fights. It knows how to defend itself; it is a lioness defending its puppies […]. Don't underestimate it.

[52] "Mi estética: una resistencia social", 20 Aug. 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/08/20/mi-estetica-una-resistencia-social/ [22 Jan 2021].
[53] "6 ejemplos de micro racismos contra las mujeres Negras", 22 May 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/05/22/6-ejemplos-de-micro-racismos-contra-las-mujeres-negras/. For the diversity of beauty cf. also afrofeminas.com/2015/07/06/la-dichosa-obsesion-de-la-belleza/ [both 22 Jan 2021].
[54] "Somos bellas y por eso lo mostramos", 25 Nov. 2014, afrofeminas.com/2014/11/25/somos-bellas/ [22 Jan 2021]. Cf. in this context also Hill Collins 2000: 169.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> [No te detengas, observa sus cicatrices. Han estado ahí por años, […] la discriminación y la barbarie están marcadas en mi piel, pero sigue siendo bella, admírala. […] Pero mi piel es fuerte, no importa cuánto la dañes, […] renace y deslumbra. Sabe sanarse sola y es especialista en luchas. Sabe defenderse, es una leona protegiendo a sus cachorros […]. No la subestimes.][55]

The emphasis on and affirmation of African and Afrodescendant women's beauty on *Afroféminas*, however, refrain from establishing new exclusionary perceptions of beauty. Instead of just showing standardized esthetical pictures, the blog also includes a post on African American activist and breast cancer survivor Ericka Hart, who became famous for attending the Afropunk Festival in 2016 topless after having had a double mastectomy. With this, Hart wanted to raise awareness for breast cancer and "reclaim my sexuality".[56] Her scarred body, thus, represents an act of resistance against a racist and patriarchal society that marginalizes her for being Black, a woman *and* ill, and, at the same time, it symbolizes the heterogeneity of beauty at large. Another insightful example in this context is a blog post on US-Haitian blogger Mama Càx who, due to cancer, had to have her leg amputated.[57]

Additionally, *Afroféminas* also opens up a space where the Black female body, at first an object interpreted by others, turns into a subject with a voice, capable of telling her own story. It is an emancipatory act, as vividly described by Grada Kilomba: "as I write, I *become* […] the author and the authority on my own history. […] I become the absolute opposition of what the colonial project has predetermined" (Kilomba 2008: 12; her emphasis). Why speaking out is so important, is illustrated in posts that denounce the limited perspective of Western feminism since it does not speak for Afrodescendant women who suffer

[55] "¿Por qué te ofende mi piel?", 25 June 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/06/25/por-que-te-ofende-mi-piel/ [22 Jan 2021].
[56] "Op-Ed: Why I Decided To Attend Afropunk Fest Topless, Showing My Mastectomy Scars", 1 Sept. 2016, afropunk.com/2016/09/op-ed-why-i-decided-to-attend-afropunk-fest-topless-showing-my-mastectomy-scars/ [22 Jan 2021].
[57] Cf. "Ericka Hart, la imagen afro de la superación del cancer de mama", 30 March 2017, afrofeminas.com/2017/03/30/ericka-hart-la-imagen-afro-de-la-superacion-del-cancer-de-mama/; "La historia de superación de Mama Càx", 22 Apr. 2018, afrofeminas.com/2018/04/22/la-historia-de-superacion-de-mama-cax/ [both 22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

from the intersections of discriminatory practices for being not only Black or women but Black women. The bloggers, thus, put into practice a decolonization of thinking, as described in many posts, and participate in the elaborating and divulging of African and Afrodescendant women's knowledges (cf. also Borst and Gallo González 2019). They destabilize and unhinge long-standing, discriminatory master narratives and categories of thinking by providing a space to "raise OUR voices" [alzar NUESTRAS voces].[58]

This raising of voices yields to the emergence of alternative and different narratives of self-affirmation that enable the blog's readers to think out of the box, to embrace difference. Unsilencing hitherto marginalized perspectives, blogs such as *Afroféminas* give rise to the "producción intellectual" [intellectual production][59] essential to empower women of African descent:

> A production that reflects on our problems, our experiences and our body as black women. Networks of women searching to empower themselves and to propose solutions to their questions, the search for a positive esthetics and a resignification of our bodies, as our esthetics is also politics, a decolonized politics that first and foremost needs decolonized bodies.
> [Una producción que reflexione sobre nuestros problemas, nuestras experiencias y nuestro cuerpo como mujeres negras. Redes de mujeres buscando empoderarse y proponer soluciones a sus cuestiones, la búsqueda por una estética positiva y la resignificación de nuestros cuerpos, ya que nuestra estética igualmente es política, una política descolonizada, que antes de todo necesita de cuerpos descolonizados.][60]

[58] "¿Qué propones para tener más visibilidad como mujer afrodescendiente?" 16 Sept. 2017, afrofeminas.com/2016/08/21/que-propones-para-tener-mas-visibilidad-como-mujer-afrodescendiente/ [22 Jan 2021].
[59] "Yo soy porque nosotras somos", 12 March 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/03/12/yo-soy-porque-nosotras-somos/ [22 Jan 2021].
[60] "Yo soy porque nosotras somos", 12 March 2015, afrofeminas.com/2015/03/12/yo-soy-porque-nosotras-somos/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Nappytalia (Italy): "Natural" Hairstyles as Self-Affirmation and Markers of Diversity

Many of the issues tackled in *Afroféminas* can also be found in the Italian blog *Nappytalia*, a blog founded in 2014 by Evelyne Sarah Afaawua, whose parents are from Ghana but who has been living in Italy most of her life. Although her blog is dedicated to "Afro-Italian Nappy Girls, the Natural Hair Movement made in Italy" and primarily addresses women, it is less critical with respect to Western feminism than the other examples studied so far but tends to challenge Western beauty ideals in general, including both women's and men's perspectives. Apart from *Nappytalia*, other blogs and websites, generally operated by individual women, promote alternative beauty ideals and focus on hairstyle like, for instance, *AFROselvaggio* (on Pinterest) or *Natural Black & Beautiful*. The latter focuses also on "natural hair", combining practical tips with autobiographical posts that describe, for example, the journey towards becoming "natural". There are also collective websites, such as *AfroitalianSouls*, which point explicitly to the diasporic community as a whole. Other networks, such as the *Afroitalian Power Initiative*, promoted, amongst others, for instance by former Minister for Integration Cécile Kyenge, aim more precisely at increasing the social, political and economic impact and visibility of the diasporic community.[61]

Nappytalia started as a page on Facebook but has now evolved into a multi-faceted "universe" of different activities inside and outside the internet, such as the successful start-up Nappytalia Eco Bio Cosmetics SRL that, according to Evelyne Sarah Afaawua's online shop, specializes in products for natural Afro hair[62]. Furthermore, Evelyne Sarah Afaawua and her team organize social events, like workshops and the

[61] Cf. for further information https://timeforafrica.it/afroitalian-power-initiative [22 Jan 2021].
[62] https://www.nappytalia.srl/ [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

NappyHour,[63] and she has received several awards, both for her entrepreneurship and for her blog.[64]

Many of *Nappytalia*'s blog postings deal with practical questions regarding hair and hairstyle. In this context, some posts reflect on racism and racist images and descriptions of (female and male) bodies of African and Afrodescendant people and their hair, including a historical perspective. The post "Being Nappy is a serious thing" [Essere Nappy è una cosa seria], for instance, stresses the colonial and Eurocentric origins of beauty ideals regarding the Black female body: "[*B*]*lack beauty* goes against everything Western society has imposed as worldwide beauty ideology […]" [la *bellezza nera* si oppone a tutto ciò che la società occidentale ha imposto come ideologia di bellezza mondiale].[65] Thus, political and social activism and the discussion of beauty ideals are intertwined: "Nappytalia promotes natural hairstyles as an anti-racist practice that challenges dominant white-based aesthetic canons […]. It also encourages young people to research, discuss, and redefine their African roots and heritage" (de Witte/Tr 2019: 327). In fact, many blog posts relate back to the mentioned "African heritage", stressing, at the same time, the solidarity between Black women in Africa and in Afrodiasporic communities worldwide. Furthermore, issues such as freedom, liberation, self-esteem and happiness are some of the core ideas of *Nappytalia.* How much these issues are interrelated with the representation of the female body, and especially with hair, becomes clear when taking a closer look at the term "nappy", as it is used within the context of *Nappytalia*. As Zine Magubane, associate professor of sociology and African diaspora studies at Boston College, highlights in an article from 2007, the term has a racist background:

> Nappy, a historically derogatory term used to describe hair that is short and tightly coiled, is a preeminent example of how social and cultural ideas are transmitted through bodies. Since African women first arrived on

[63] Cf. http://www.nappytalia.it/nappytaliaontour2016-nappy-hour-milano/ [22 Jan 2021].
[64] E.g., the Money Gram Award in the category "Young Entrepreneurs" in 2015 and the Africa Italy Excellence Award as Best Blogger in 2016. Cf. http://www.nappytalia.it/stampa/ [22 Jan 2021].
[65] Sara Bentass, Evelyne S. Afaawua, "Essere Nappy é una cosa seria", 1 Febr. 2018, www.nappytalia.it/essere-nappy-e-una-cosa-seria [22 Jan 2021], their emphasis.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> American shores, the bends and twists of our hair have become markers of our subhuman status and convenient rationales for denying us our rightful claims to citizenship.[66]

However, the use of "nappy" in *Nappytalia* reverses the original meaning: as Evelyne Sarah Afaawua emphasizes, it is to be understood as a composition of the words *Naturally* and *Happy*.[67] Accordingly, a denigrating term becomes an expression of self-esteem and freedom, and, thus, can be considered as a kind of "counter-narration". As Geneviève Makaping, who was born in Cameroon and has become an Italian citizen, points out in her essay/diary *Traiettorie di sguardi*. *E se gli* altri *foste voi?* [Trajectories of looks. And if the *other* were you?],[68] "[i]t is a case of negation of individuality, of the other's identity […], a negation planned by those who hold the power for very precise aims" [Si tratta della negazione della individualità, dell'altrui identità […], negazione programmata per scopi ben precisi da coloro che detengono il potere] (Makaping 2001: 39). Still, the employment of basically racist, discriminating terms remains a highly discussed subject, as Makaping states for herself: "I am not a 'woman of color'. I am a Negro" [Io non sono una 'donna di colore'. Sono una Negra; Makaping 2001: 38].[69] Claiming the right to use a denigratory term for her self-description causes uneasiness because it holds a mirror to those who are convinced they use apparently "politically correct" terms, such as the cited "woman of color", which, nonetheless, carry the weight of discriminatory, colonial thinking.

Makaping's assertion is to be understood within the context of institutional and everyday (micro-)racism in Italy, as illustrated by

[66] Pet 2007, cit. from www.commondreams.org/views/2007/04/12/why-nappy-offensive [22 Jan 2021].
[67] "La Genesi…Afro-Italian Nappy Girls. Il Natural Hair Movement made in Italy", no date, www.nappytalia.it/afro-italian-nappy-girls/ [22 Jan 2021].
[68] The parallels to the aforementioned post "Regards" by Kiyémis are striking: Makaping also refers to strategies of 'Othering' and to being reduced to an object, conforming to racist stereotypes of colonial heritage.
[69] Makapings's discourse echoes the self-affirmative movement of the *Négritude*, founded by Caribbean and African authors such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor in the 1930s in France. Cf. also Achille Mbembe's study on the origin of the concept of 'race' in *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013), where the author puts into evidence that the processes of "racialization" is still not outgrown (cf. also Banaré 2013).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

various examples from her own private and working experience. Accordingly, as blogger Evelyne Sarah Afaawua states in one of her more "programmatic" post, letting her hair grow in a "natural" way is not only a personal choice within the context of individual, personal freedom, but also a statement about Italy's society:

> I am Italian, but, at a certain stage in my life, a series of questions casted doubt on my *identity*, hence a crisis and the rediscovery of something extremely beautiful: my *diversity*. Being Italian and Ghanese, the rediscovery of my *roots*, being the proof of the harmony both cultures can have, all of this showing through my *hair*. […] We are Italians, but with Afro hair, daughters and sons of mixed couples, we are a new generation of Italians who do not want to forget their origins, claiming their ignored identity.
> [Sono italiana, ma ad un certo punto della mia vita una serie di domande hanno messo in dubbio la mia *identità*, da lì una crisi e la riscoperta di una cosa bellissima: la mia *diversità*. L'essere italiana e ghanese, la riscoperta delle mie *radici*, essere la prova dell'armonia che entrambe culture possono avere, manifestando tutto attraverso i miei *capelli*. […] Siamo ragazze/i italiane con i capelli riccioafro, figli di unioni miste, una nuova generazione di italiani che non vogliono dimenticare le proprie origini, rivendicando la propria identità ignorata.][70]

As becomes evident from her blog post, Evelyne Sarah Afaawua's definition of identity goes hand in hand with difference. Her understanding reflects what we stated earlier: she claims a transcultural identity, and her self-definition as *Italoghanese* or *Afroitaliana* is not intended as a demarcation marker. On the contrary, it is meant to make the heterogeneity of Italy's society visible – a heterogeneity which, as she points out, is largely ignored by the political and public discourse.[71]

[70] "La Genesi…Afro-Italian Nappy Girls. Il Natural Hair Movement made in Italy", no date, www.nappytalia.it/afro-italian-nappy-girls/ [22 Jan 2021]; her emphasis. In a former version of her post, however, Afaawua addressed girls and women while, in this latest version, she also speaks to men.

[71] Everyday racism, rooted in Italy's colonialism, as well as institutional racism are, in fact, burning issues in Italy, as has become evident for instance when Cécile Kyenge, born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was nominated Minister for Integration in 2013: she was attacked severely, with clear racist attitudes, not only by "notorious" right-wing opinion makers but also by other members of parliament. Cf. on the topic of racism and colonialism in Italy also, for instance, Romeo 2018, Makaping 2001 and the publications of the research project *InteRGRace* (International Research Group on Race and Racisms), www.intergrace.it [22 Jan 2021].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Evelyne Sarah Afaawua also encourages her followers to make themselves visible. For instance in *Nappytalia*, images of the body and especially of hair styles play a crucial role in this process, as emphasized by the play on words "where hair and identity interweave" [dove capelli ed identità s'intrecciano].[72] In a post from March 2017, Evelyne Sarah Afaawua defines accepting natural hair as a political factor: "To accept the nature of natural Afro hair is a *POLITICAL STATEMENT*; it is a *DENIAL* of the standardization of beauty canons; it promotes *DIVERSITY*, inviting people to be *AUTHENTIC***.**" [Accettare la natura del capello Afro al naturale è un *POLITICAL STATEMENT*, è una *ABNEGAZIONE* alla standardizzazione dei canoni di bellezza, è una promozione alla *DIVERSITÀ*, invitando le persone all'*AUTENTICITA'*].[73]

This statement recalls the examples from France and Spain, for *Nappytalia*'s bloggers likewise invite their readers to go against stereotyped and canonical ideas of beauty and share their experiences. As Evelyne Sarah Afaawua encourages her readers to share their opinion on the topic with her, on *Nappytalia* there are likewise several blog posts with autobiographical content. Similar to *Afroféminas*, these posts are often accompanied by images of different "Afro" hairstyles. These illustrations, including both "private" snapshots as well as staged, more "professional" pictures, reflect core issues of *Nappytalia*, such as self-esteem and an alternative view on beauty. As stated by the author of one blog post, the photographer Michael Yohannes confirms that

> currently, within society and in the part of the world where I live, *my Western features are appreciated more than the African features*. This is why, through some of my photographic works and now also through my style, I try to emphasize and/or improve people's view on this aspect.
> [attualmente, nella società e nella parte di mondo nella quale vivo, *i tratti occidentali della mia persona vengano apprezzati di più dei tratti africani*. Per questo motivo attraverso alcuni miei progetti fotografici e ora anche

[72] www.nappytalia.srl/shop-online-prodotti-ecobio-per-capelli-ricciafro-e-ricci/ [22 Jan 2021].
[73] "Il viaggio dell'accettazione. Accettarsi per amarsi", 31 March 2017, www.nappytalia.it/il-viaggio-dellaccettazione/ [22 Jan 2021]; her emphasis.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> attraverso il look, cerco di enfatizzare e/o migliorare la percezione che hanno le persone su questo aspetto.][74]

Accordingly, one of Yohannes's photographs on *Nappytalia* shows a group of young women, all wearing Afro curls, sitting on the grass in a park, laughing at each other, apparently enjoying the moment, as they all look relaxed, full of self-esteem.[75] Thus, this photograph seems to match the aforementioned citation from the blog's main editor: "Happily natural, an awareness that results in an expression of happiness while reappropriating one's own personality and body" [Felicemente al naturale, una presa di coscienza risultante in una espressione di felicita' nel riappropriarsi della propria persona].[76] In short, *Nappytalia* puts into practice a union of personal experience and political statements. Body and hair are being reclaimed by their owners, who are encouraged to refrain from following stereotyped (Western) canons of beauty.

Although blog posts are stressing the aspect of international solidarity, there is nonetheless a clear focus on Italy:

> The success of *Nappytalia* is to be found in its blending of inspirational elements derived from different socio-historical contexts and in its giving voice to a specific Afroitalian experience. It fills a void for locally situated practices and discourses on natural hair and black beauty, as it is written in Italian […]. (de Witte/Scarabello 2019: 329)

What is more, as shown for instance by the aforementioned statements by Evelyne Sarah Afaawua, the blog posts stress diversity as well as a self-understanding as Italians, thus challenging the notion of "Italianness" [italianità] understood in terms of "whiteness", which, as various essays and fictional texts written by Afrodescendant women (and men) clearly testify, is still the hegemonic notion when it comes to discussing the "national character".[77] As de Witte and Scarabello elaborate,

[74] "La fotografia identitaria", 5 May 2017, www.nappytalia.it/la-fotografia-identitaria-di-michael-yohannes/ [22 Jan 2021]; his emphasis.
[75] "La fotografia identitaria", 5 May 2017, www.nappytalia.it/la-fotografia-identitaria-di-michael-yohannes/ [22 Jan 2021].
[76] "La Genesi…Afro-Italian Nappy Girls. Il Natural Hair Movement made in Italy", no date, www.nappytalia.it/afro-italian-nappy-girls/ [22 Jan 2021].
[77] Cf., e.g., the short stories in *Nuovi imbarazzismi. Quotidiani imbarazzi in bianco e nero... e a colori* (2004) by Kossi Amékowoyoa Komla-Ebri.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"[t]hese new Afro and African identities advanced by young Europeans do not turn away from Europeanness (as dominant identity models would assume: the more African, the less European), nor simply add to Europeanness ('multicultural' identities), nor even mix with Europeanness ('hybrid' identities), but are in and of themselves European" (2019: 330). However, central figures of Black activism in Italy, such as Italian writer Igiaba Scego whose parents are from Somalia, denounce the challenge of being accepted as such, with Scego, for example, arguing that

> Europe prefers not to see us. It treats us like unauthorized bodies within national contexts, forever foreigners. For the continent, we are displaced, we are considered like belonging to somebody else, while in fact we belong to it, made in Europe.
> [L'Europa preferisce non vederci. Ci tratta come corpi estranei della nazione, perenne stranieri. Per il continente siamo fuori posto, siamo considerati roba altrui quando di fatto siamo roba sua, made in Europe.] (Scego 2017)[78]

Correspondingly, by staging themselves – their bodies, their hair, their approach to life – as independent, strong and self-determined, *Nappytalia*'s bloggers challenge stereotypes that arose from a colonial ideology and claim their own aesthetics for various reasons. First, they present an alternative to standard Italian (Western) beauty ideals, based, to put it bluntly, on skin color as the main feature with regard to "Italianness".[79] Second, the images conveyed clash with the way women perceived as "non-white" were exploited during the period of Italian colonialism – images that are still recurrent in the way "non-white" women are perceived and staged as "exotic".[80] Third, successful business women like Evelyne Sarah Afaawua cause a crisis for the

[78] Cf. also the discussion of the concept of Afropeanness as a claiming of space for Blackness within European societies as in Pitts 2019: 1.
[79] An exemplary case is the national beauty contest *Miss Italia*, analyzed by Sca Njegosh. She cites the polemics that arose when Denny Méndez, born in Santo Domingo, was elected Miss Italia in 1996; her election was "contested by a part of the jury because of her not 'representing' the 'typical' Italian beauty" [viene contestata da una parte della giuria perché non 'rappresentativa' della 'tipica' bellezza italiana] (2018: 18).
[80] Cf., on these topics, Di Barbora 2018 and Giuliani et al. 2018.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

attribution of "minor" works, for instance as housekeepers, to Black women in Italy, thus overcoming the "white hegemony" [egemonia bianca] and the "thick invisible line that separated them from whiteness" [la spessa linea invisibile che li separava dalla bianchezza] (Giuliani 2013: 257).

Conclusion

To conclude, we can briefly summarize that the analyzed examples show that Afrofeminist blogs open up a space where women of African descent raise their voices to discuss what it means to be Black in France, Spain and Italy. They conceptualize Afrodescendance and Blackness as ambivalent experiences by pointing to a painful experience of racism and feelings of exclusion while also invoking a meaningful narrative to identify with and embrace. Accordingly, the blogs generate alternative and empowering visions of Blackness that oppose stereotyped and racist images of African and Afrodescendant women, which continue to circulate in French, Spanish and Italian societies. As we elaborated, the Black female body plays an essential role in this context, for the blogs reclaim and re-appropriate this body, previously an object of racist and sexist attitudes, to, self-determinedly, create new and empowering images of Blackness and womanhood or, from an intersectional perspective, Black womanhood within a European context.

Yet, research on blogs and other digital platforms written and/or coordinated by people of African descent in European countries is only at its beginning and more comprehensive analyses of this extensive field of research are an evident desideratum for further academic writing. Within the Italian context, what strikes, when comparing the different "national" contexts, is the lack, of avowedly Afrofeminist blogs such as *Afroféminas*. Thus, it would be challenging to uncover the – political, social – reasons for such a difference. Another compelling topic for further analysis is the ambivalent discussion of belonging and contradictory (re-)positionings within European and / or African contexts in many blogs, which frequently goes hand in hand with negotiating the terms used to denominate this "in-between" of Afrodiasporic identity constructions in a European context. Within the Afrofeminist

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

context, it would be also challenging to take a closer look at its entanglements and differences with regard to European Feminist movements, criticized, as our examples have shown, for perpetrating a "white" hegemony. Moreover, it would be promising to look into the entanglements of writing in cyberspace and theoretical and / or literary writing as many online activists have recently published printed texts as for instance Desirée Bela-Lobedde (*Ser mujer negra en España*, 2018), Lucía Mbomío Rubio (*Hija del camino*, 2019), Kiyémis (*À nos humanités révoltées*, 2018), MWASI (*Afrofem*, 2018), Antoinette Torres Soler (*Vivieno en modo afroféminas*, 2018) or Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti (*E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italiana*, 2019). The rising digital presence of Afrodiasporic voices in Europe has become so wide and varied that it is calling to be echoed in increasing studies on the topic.

Works Cited

Anderson, Benedict (2006): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso.

Bailey, Olga G. (2007): "Transnational Identities and the Media", in: Olga G. Bailey/Myria Georgiu/Ramaswami Harindranath (eds.): *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 212-230.

Bailey, Olga G./Georgiu, Myria/ Harindranath, Ramaswami (2007): "Introduction: Exploration of Diaspora in the Context of Media Culture", in: Olga G. Bailey/Myria Georgiu/Ramaswami Harindranath (eds.): *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 1-8.

Banaré, Eddy (2013): "Review of Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre*", in: *Lectures*, online version (18 October), in: https://journals.openedition.org/lectures/12451 (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Bela-Lobedde, Desirée (2018a): *Ser mujer negra en España*, Barcelona: Penguin.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

– (2018b): "*La negra flor*, Barcelona", in: Odome Angone (ed.): *Las españolas afrodescendientes hablan sobre identidad y empoderamiento*, Madrid: Verbum, p. 81-83.

– (no date): "Quién soy", in: *Desirée Bela*, in: https://www.desireebela.com/quien-soy/ (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Borst, Julia/Gallo González, Danae (2019): "Narrative Constructions of Online Imagined Afro-diasporic Communities in Spain and Portugal", in: *Open Cultural Studies*, 3, p. 286-307.

Boyce Davies, Carole (2008): "Introduction", in: idem (ed.): *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora. Origins, Experiences, and Culture. Vol. 1*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, p. xxxi-lviii.

Brancato, Sabrina (2009): *Afro-Europe: Texts and Contexts*, Berlin: Trafo.

Castro Varela, María do Mar/Dhawan, Nikita (2015): *Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung*, Bielefeld: Transcript.

Civieta, Óscar F. (2017): "'El feminismo negro no está en los libros, no exisste, ni la comunidad negra lo conoce.' Entrevista con Antoinette Torres Soler", in: *El Diario*, 24 Jan, in: https://www.eldiario.es/aragon/sociedad/feminismo-libros-existe-comunidad-conoce_0_605090360.html (accesssed: 22.01. 2021).

Cochrane, Kira (2013): "The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women", in: *The Guardian*, 10 Dec, in: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Connolly, Kathleen Honora (2015): "Parejas Mixtas. African-Spanish Couples in Cyberspace", in: Debra Faszer-McMahon/Victoria L. Ketz (eds.): *African Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Texts. Crossing the Strait*, Burlington: Ashgate, p. 145-159.

Crumly Deventer, Allison/Thomas, Dominic (2011): "Afro-European Studies: Emerging Fields and New Directions", in: Ali Behdad/Dominic Thomas (eds.): *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 335-356.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Dechaufour, Pénélope/Chalaye, Sylvie (eds.) (2015): *Afropéa. Un territoire culturel à inventer*, Special Issue of *Africultures*, p. 99-100.

Di Barbora, Monica (2018): "Colonizzare la Bellezza. Fascismo ed Estetica Femminile tra Razza e Classe (1935-1941)", in: Gaia Giuliani et al. (eds.): *Tavola Rotonda. Visualizzare la Razza e Costruire la Bellezza in Italia (1922–2018)*, *Italian Studies*, 73(4), p. 5-10, in: DOI: 10.1080/00751634.2018.1521539 (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Espinoza Garrido, Felipe/Koegler, Caroline/Nyangulu, Caroline/Stein, Mark U. (2020): "Introduction: African European Studies as a Critique of Contingent Belonging", in: idem (eds.): *Locating African European Studies: Interventions, Intersections, Conversations*, London: Routledge, p. 1-28.

European Network Against Racism (2016): *Racism and Discrimination in the Context of Migration in Europe: ENAR Shadow Report 2015-2016*, in: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport_2015x2016_long_low_res.pdf (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Falola, Toyin (2013): *The African Diaspora. Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization,* Rochester, N.Y.: Univ. of Rochester Press.

Fanon, Frantz (2008): *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Fila-Bakabadio, Sarah (2014): "Black Beauty Politics and the Afro-Modern French Woman", in: Jacque Lynn Foltyn (ed.): *Crafting Allure: Beauty, Culture and Identity*, Amsterdam: Brill, p. 79-88.

– (2018): "Media and the Politics of 'Re-presentation' of the Black Female Body", in: Félix Germain/Silyane Larcher (eds.): *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, p. 169-183.

Fraser, Nancy (1992): "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in: Craig Calhoun (ed.): *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, p. 109-142.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Galaup, Laura (2017): "Me siento indefensa al denunciar insultos como 'negra de mierda' y ver que la justicia los archiva. Entrevista con Desirée Bela-Lobedde", in: *El Diario*, 20 Feb, in: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/Afrofeminas-afrofeminismo-Desiree_Bela-Lobedde-Fiscalia-delitos_de_odio_0_613139494.html (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Giuliani, Gaia et al. (2018): "Introduzione", in: idem (eds.): *Tavola Rotonda. Visualizzare la Razza e Costruire la Bellezza in Italia (1922–2018)*, *Italian Studies*, 73(4), p. 1-5, in: DOI: 10.1080/00751634.2018.1521539 (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Hall, Stuart (1996): "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in: Padmini Mongia (ed.): *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, London: Arnold, p. 110-121.

– (1997): "The Spectacle of the 'Other'", in: idem: *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage, p. 223-290.

– (2019): "The Multicultural Question", in: David Morley (ed.): *Essential Essays, Volume Two: Identity and Diaspora*, London/Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, p. 95-133.

Hill Collins, Patricia (2000): *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 10th edition, New York: Routledge.

Kilomba, Grada (2008): *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*, Münster: Unrast.

Kiyémis (2018): *À nos humanités révoltées*, Toulouse: Métagraphes.

Kodjo-Grandvaux, Séverine (2017): "Amandine Gay, porte-voix afroféministe", in: *Le Monde*, 7 Dec, in: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/12/07/amandine-gay-porte-voix-afro-feministe_5045147_3212.html (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Kreknin, Innokentij/Marquardt, Chantal (2016): "Einleitung: Subjekthaftigkeit, Digitalität, Fiktion und Alltagswirklichkeit", in: *Textpraxis: Digitales Journal für Philologie*, (2), p. 1-20, in: https://

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

www.uni-muenster.de/Textpraxis/innokentij-kreknin-chantal-marquardt-einleitung-das-digitalisierte-subjekt (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Leurs, Koen (2015): *Digital Passages: Migrant Youth 2.0. Diaspora Gender and Youth Cultural Intersections*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Love, Ashley (2019): "Digital Black Feminism", in: Diana C. Parry et al. (eds.): *Digital Dilemmas: Transforming Gender Identities and Power Relations in Everyday Life*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 53-71.

Magubane, Zine (2007): "Why 'Nappy' Is Offensive", in: *The Boston Globe*, 12 Apr, in: https://www.commondreams.org/views/2007/04/12/why-nappy-offensive (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Makaping, Geneviève (2001): *Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli* altri *foste voi?*, Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson (2001): "The Cry of the Self as a Call from the Other. The Paradoxical Loving Subjectivity of Frantz Fanon", in: *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture*, 36(1), p. 46-60.

– (2010): "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept", in: Walter D. Mignolo/Arturo Escobar (eds.): *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, London: Routledge, p. 94-124.

Marlier, Fanny (2016): "'Ouvrir la voix': Le documentaire qui donne la parole aux femmes noires", in: *Les Inrockuptibles*, 21 Dec, in: https://www.lesinrocks.com/2016/12/21/actualite/ouvrir-voix-documentaire-donne-parole-aux-femmes-noires-11895051/ (accessed: 21.01.2021).

Miano, Léonora (2012): *Habiter la frontière*, Paris: L'Arche.

MWASI, Collectif Afroféministe (2018): *Afrofem*, Paris: Syllepe.

Nakamura, Lisa (2002): *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, New York: Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Olías, Laura, Miguel Campos/Caballero Medina, Pedro (2016): "Racismos cotidianos: 'Para ser negra, eres muy guapa'", in: *El Diario*, 21 Jan, in: https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/VIDEO-Racismos-cotidianos-negra-guapa_0_475602880.html (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Passos, Joana (2008): "Talk Black and Think Beyond. The Reception of African Literatures in Portugal and the Self-definition of Postcolonial Nations through Literature", in: Marta Sofía López Rodríguez (ed.): *Afroeuropeans: Cultures and Identities*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 65-78.

Petrovich Njegosh, Tatiana (2018): "Miss Italia: Genere, Razza e Bellezza Nazionale nell'Italia Contemporanea", in: Gaia Giuliani et al. (eds.): *Tavola Rotonda. Visualizzare la Razza e Costruire la Bellezza in Italia (1922–2018)*, *Italian Studies*, 73(4), p.14-19, in: DOI: 10.1080/00751634.2018.1521539 (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Pitts, Johny (2019): *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe*, London: Allen Lane.

Röggla, Katharina (2012): *Critical Whiteness Studies und ihre politischen Handlungsmöglichkeiten für Weiße AntirassistInnen. INTRO – Eine Einführung*, Wien: Mandelbaum.

Romeo, Caterina (2018): *Riscrivere la nazione: La letteratura italiana postcoloniale*, Firenze: Le Monnier.

Scarabello, Serena/De Witte, Marleen (2019): "Afroeuropean Modes of Self-Making: Afro-Dutch and Afro-Italian Projects Compared", in: *Open Cultural Studies*, 3, p. 317-331.

Scego, Igiaba (2017): "Gli afroeuropei e l'invenzione del colore della pelle", in: *Internationale*, 26 Febr, in: https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/igiaba-scego/2017/02/26/afroeuropei-razzismo (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Serfaty, Viviane (2004): "From Self-Explanation to Self-Justification: Some Functions of Online Diaires and Blogs", in: *ranam: Recherches Anglaises et Nord-Américain*, 37, p. 247-256.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Siapera, Eugenia (2012): *Understanding New Media*, Los Angeles: Sage.

Sow, Noah (2017): "Diaspora Dynamics: Shaping the Future of Literature", in: *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 11(1), p. 28-33.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1984/1985): "Criticism, Feminism and the Institution", in: *Thesis Eleven*, 10/11, p. 175-187.

– (1988): *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Routledge.

Terkessidis, Mark (2004): *Die Banalität des Rassismus. Migranten zweiter Generation entwickeln eine neue Perspektive*, Bielefeld: Transcript.

Vergès, Françoise (2017): "Digital Africa", in: *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 11(1), p. 45-49.

– (2019): *Un féminisme decolonial*, Paris: La Fabrique.

Yaghoobifarah, Hengameh (2019): "Blicke", in: Fatma Aydemir/Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (eds.): *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, Berlin: Ullstein, p. 69-81.

Cited Blogs

Afroféminas: https://afrofeminas.com (accessed: 22.01.2021).

AfroitalianSouls: https://www.afroitaliansouls.it (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Badassafrofem: https://badassafrofem.wordpress.com/ (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Les Bavardages de Kiyémis: https://lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com (accessed: 22.01.2021).

Desirée Bela (formerly: *Diario de la Negra Flor*): https://www.desiree-bela.com (formerly: https://negraflor.com/) (accessed: 22.01.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Desirée Bela at YouTube (formerly: *Los vídeos de la Negra Flor*): https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCD2PvnvIOlrggwIgL0iId-g (accessed: 22.01.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Rotraud von Kulessa / Sabine Schwarze / Maurizio Rebaudengo / Serenella Baggio / Monica Biasiolo / Vera Fänger / Maximilian Gröne

(Augsburg/Torino/Trento/Roma)

Intervista con Igiaba Scego[1]

Abstract

The following conversation stems from a webinar with the Italian writer, journalist and literary scholar Igiaba Scego. Scego, who was born in Rome in 1974 and whose parents are from Somalia, has published several novels and short stories, among them *Oltre Babilonia* (2008), *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010), *Roma negata* (together with the photographer Rino Bianchi), *Adua* (2015) and, in 2020, the novel *La linea del colore*. Among her currently latest publications are *Figli dello stesso cielo. Il razzismo e il colonialismo raccontati ai ragazzi* (2021), as an editor together with Chiara Piaggio the anthology *Africana. Raccontare il continente al di là degli stereotipi* (2021) and the novel *Cassandra a Mogadiscio*, published in 2023. Scego's works often deal with themes such as transcultural identities and the link between language, literature and identity. They also represent counter-narrations of Italy's colonial past, with references to the relationship between Somalia and Italy. In the collective interview, Scego explains, among other topics, the discrepancies and difficulties encountered when dealing with "labels" such as "literature of migration" and "second generation". She highlights the importance for many writers (and, in general, for Italians whose families came to Europe from African countries) of discussing what it means to be "Italian" – an issue that leads to further "uncomfortable" questions about Italy's colonialism. Furthermore, Scego speaks about the anthology *Future. Il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi* from 2019, edited by her, a collection of short stories written by Italian women who reflect, often in autofictional narratives, upon their European and African background and their discriminatory experiences in Italy. Scego points out as striking how the authors deal with fear not only of

[1] L'intervista è il risultato di un Webinar sul tema *Lingua, Letteratura e identità* organizzato da Rotraud von Kulessa e Sabine Schwarze (Università di Augusta) nel mese di luglio 2020. Ringraziamo Monica Biasiolo per la trascrizione.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

discrimination but of physical violence too, a topic also present in Scego's own novel *La linea del colore*.

von Kulessa: Sono molto lieta di presentarvi Igiaba Scego, scrittrice italiana e ricercatrice in Letterature Romanze, in particolare Letteratura Spagnola e Italiana. Scego è nata a Roma da genitori somali. A partire dal 2003 ha pubblicato numerosi racconti e romanzi, tra cui *Oltre Babilonia* (2008), *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) e *Adua* (2015). Quest'anno, a febbraio, è uscito *La linea del colore*. Purtroppo i romanzi fin qui non sono ancora stati tradotti in tedesco. Uscirà, tuttavia a settembre-ottobre una raccolta di quattro suoi scritti in tedesco per una casa editrice che lavora sugli autori italiani e che pubblica autori italiani, in particolare, romanzi brevi. Sarà il primo testo di Scego che esce in tedesco, quantunque si speri di vedere anche la traduzione di *La linea del colore*.

Le opere di Igiaba Scego trattano spesso temi dell'identità transculturale e la riscrittura della storia coloniale italiana, così come anche il legame tra lingua, letteratura e identità.

Scego: Salve a tutti, sono molto contenta di essere qui con voi, anche se a distanza. Un giorno spero di vedervi tutti in presenza. La cosa interessante anche per me è che voi mi poniate domande, così almeno interagiamo e rendiamo il tutto più dinamico. Ho notato semplicemente che è una cosa che rende il dialogo molto più affascinante visto che manca la presenza fisica. Ho pensato di parlare innanzitutto con voi sia del mio percorso e del mio percorso all'interno di percorsi collettivi. Come è stato detto prima, ho iniziato a scrivere nel 2003, quando in Italia era già cominciata la cosiddetta 'Letteratura della migrazione', un termine che, a oggi, molti rifiutano. Molta letteratura è stata etichettata così per molto tempo. Cos'era? Cosa includeva questa etichetta? Includeva i libri scritti da migranti e poi, successivamente, scritti dai figli di migranti; entrambi, chiaramente, presentano delle differenze che poi vi illustrerò. Uno dei primi libri, come sapete, è stato quello di Pap Khouma. Pap Khouma ha scritto un libro che è diventato un piccolo best-seller, *Io, venditore di elefanti*, insieme a Oreste Pivetta. È un libro a quattro mani, in cui Pap Khouma racconta la sua esperienza di

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

ambulante, tra le varie città italiane… Rimini, Riccione, la Costa Adriatica, quindi la sua esperienza migratoria, il suo non essere andato in Francia, che è molto interessante come aspetto, essendo lui finito in un Paese terzo. La Francia era quasi la meta obbligatoria dei senegalesi, perché la Francia era l'ex Paese colonizzatore. Invece Pap, come molti senegalesi, negli anni Novanta, sceglie di venire in Italia e racconta le sue vicissitudini. All'epoca l'Italia aveva cominciato a intuire il fenomeno migratorio, un fenomeno che inizia per la nazione italiana più o meno negli anni Settanta. I primi ad essere arrivati qua (io, al momento, sto facendo un lavoro su questo, avrete una sorpresa ad ottobre, un po' di articoli sul tema) sono stati i somali e gli eritrei, quindi persone provenienti dalle ex-colonie, e le capo-verdiane. Sottolineo le capo-verdiane perché sono arrivate soprattutto donne da Capo Verde, che poi hanno messo su famiglia in modo molto atipico. I figli delle prime capoverdiane erano figli di donne che lavoravano come badanti, che facevano quindi un lavoro di cura, e marinai capoverdiani che andavano verso l'Olanda. Infatti poi i ricongiungimenti familiari sono avvenuti da parte di queste donne capoverdiane che stavano in Italia con questi uomini che si erano nel frattempo stabiliti in Olanda. Questo è stato il primo nucleo migratorio. Poi si è avuto un grosso numero di migranti negli anni Ottanta e negli anni Novanta: persone provenienti dal Senegal, dal Marocco e da vari altri Paesi. Quindi l'Italia, tra gli anni Ottanta e Novanta, comincia a capire che non è più solo Paese di emigrazione. Badate bene: l'Italia non ha mai smesso di essere Paese di emigrazione. Gli italiani hanno sempre e comunque emigrato. Però, nello stesso tempo, parallelamente, è diventato Paese di immigrazione. È chiaro che, a un certo punto, questa immigrazione ha cominciato a sentire l'esigenza di narrarsi, di autonarrarsi, perché, in qualche modo, i primi servizi (non so se li avete mai visti, è veramente qualcosa che si dovrebbe fare come esperienza)… i primi servizi sulla migrazione erano servizi molto dimessi dove l'Altro è veramente considerato X, quasi uno sconosciuto. L'Italia è passata dall'avere studenti africani degli anni Settanta ad avere immigrati, e non si è saputo bene raccontare l'Altro. È per questo che l'Altro, a un certo punto, ha preso la parola, ed è questa la cosa importante. Pap Khouma è stato il primo, uno dei primi a prendere la parola, soltanto che gli mancava la lingua e anche questo è un fattore interessante. Cioè lui aveva tantissime cose da dire in quel

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

momento, tante esperienze, ma non aveva l'italiano per dirlo. E, quindi, è per questo che si sono creati questi libri a quattro mani. Non è stato l'unico. Un altro esempio è Salah Metnani con *Immigrato*. Salah Metnani ha presentato questo suo libro come diario quasi, anche se c'è molta fiction, molto romanzo, però confesserà questo solo negli anni successivi. Oggi Salah Metnani è un giornalista della RAI, inviato in Medioriente, e con più precisione in Nord Africa. Però il suo debutto avviene come scrittore. È interessante che anche lui abbia scritto questo libro scritto a quattro mani, cioè molto era suo, la scrittura tuttavia, l'italiano, era di qualcun altro. Questo perché ve lo dico? Questo perché è importante? È importante perché sicuramente porta dei contenuti nuovi dentro la letteratura italiana, però è interessante anche vedere la lingua, perché quella usata non è una lingua creativa ancora, è una lingua molto standard, quasi accademica in certi punti, quasi didascalica in altri punti, quindi una lingua un po' ingessata. Non so se avete fatto questa esperienza, soprattutto leggendo oggi, con lo sguardo di oggi, *Io, venditore di elefanti*… È un libro che ci dà tantissime informazioni, ma con una lingua molto… quasi una gabbia, no?... E tu dici, ma dov'è il wolof? Perché il multilinguismo, in quel momento, è ancora da venire, intendo il mischiare le lingue, il mischiare gli schemi. Questo non è avvenuto nella prima fase, che però è stato un periodo molto importante perché contenutistico. Servivano contenuti nuovi. Soprattutto questi libri non erano destinati a un mercato globale, ma erano destinati soprattutto agli Italiani e alle Italiane; era questo il pubblico di riferimento, e lo scopo era far capire agli Italiani e alle Italiane che il loro Paese stava cambiando anzi, era cambiato. Questo era il succo della faccenda. Poi però hanno cominciato a scrivere migranti, diciamo persone che venivano da un altrove con una scelta consapevole, senza più un autore esterno che li aiutava a mettere su carta il contenuto. Comincia, dunque, ad esserci un'autorialità. E questo è stato uno *step* molto molto importante perché, comunque, si comincia anche una sorta di sperimentazione linguistica. C'è uno schema anche mentale diverso che entra nella pagina, altri riferimenti storici, altri riferimenti linguistici, quindi abbiamo tutta una serie di autori che vanno da Kossi Komla Ebri, che scrive *Imbarazzismi*, a Amara Lakhous con *Scontro di civilità per un ascensore a piazza Vittorio*, ma ce ne sono tanti… Christiana de Caldas Brito, una psicologa brasiliana, che scrive secondo me uno dei racconti

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

più interessanti di questo periodo che si chiama *Ana de Jesus*, dove lei crea praticamente una lingua ibrida tra portoghese e italiano; e uno dei libri per me più interessanti è *Princesa* di Fernanda Farias De Albuquerque. Il libro sarà pure letto da De André che ne farà una canzone omonima. Princesa era una donna transgender brasiliana che si trova in carcere. Lì incontra Iannelli, un ex-brigatista e decidono insieme di scrivere un libro su Princesa, su di lei, su Fernanda. Ed è interessante perché questo libro ha più lingue, più strati in quanto non ci sono solo Fernanda e Iannelli, ma al centro c'è anche un signore sardo che faceva da intermediario tra le due ali del carcere, perché, come ho detto, entrambi si trovavano in carcere quando hanno incominciato a scrivere… e quindi è uscito fuori un libro che era iper-, multi-, ultra-linguistico, cioè dove c'era portoghese, italiano, ma anche sardo. Poi, quando Sensibile alle Foglie lo manderà in stampa, del libro sarà fatta una revisione linguistica che renderà, purtroppo, molto più piatta la lingua, cioè si toglierà molto portoghese e quasi totalmente il sardo. Però la sua prima versione era quella che vi ho raccontato. Ed è un testo molto interessante perché ti fa vedere, secondo me, più passaggi, più livelli linguistici e anche più livelli contenutistici. Intanto è la storia di una transgender e già questo fa capire che c'é una frontiera da oltrepassare, che è la frontiera del genere. Scegliere, appunto, di essere qualcun altro, qualcun altro che è la tua vera te stessa, e questo già ci pone davanti a una scelta non binaria del nostro essere al mondo. C'è quindi questa frontiera del gender e in più c'è anche questa frontiera reale tra Brasile e Italia e due lingue neolatine, italiano e portoghese che a un certo punto dialogano nella testa di Fernanda. È un libro anche molto doloroso, perché comunque Fernanda spiega le discriminazioni che subisce, spiega come non viene accettato il suo corpo, spiega la trasformazione del suo corpo, spiega la durezza della migrazione, la durezza della strada. A un certo punto, infatti, si prostituisce… quindi è un testo davvero ricco. Secondo me non c'è stato più un testo così scritto da migranti in Italia, perché è veramente di rottura su tutto, su tutti gli schemi che uno può avere in mente. E, soprattutto, scritto in un tempo in cui di tante di queste cose non si parlava, per esempio di tutte le discriminazioni che subiscono le donne transgender, ma anche gli uomini transgender, cioè, quando dico uomini, intendo quelli che fanno la *transition female-male*… Sono argomenti che non sono assolutamente trattati. Quindi è stato un libro molto

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

di rottura. Le brasiliane, sia Christiana de Caldas Brito che Fernanda Farias De Albuquerque, hanno messo molto dentro la letteratura italiana.

Poi arriviamo alla fase che mi riguarda anche un po' più da vicino, anzi no, prima di arrivare a questa c'è una persona che va citata, che fa parte di questo gruppo ma allo stesso tempo non ne fa parte, che è Helena Janeczek.

Helena Janeczek, voi la conoscete bene, perché è stata Premio Strega con *La ragazza con la Leica.* Helena scrive da tanto tempo e ha un passato che veramente attraversa la storia del Novecento europeo, con i genitori di origine polacca, ebrei-polacchi che finiscono ad Auschwitz. I suoi genitori si sono conosciuti ad Auschwitz e, a un certo punto, decidono che la Polonia non fa per loro e si trasferiscono in Germania, a Monaco. Poi lei fa un'ulteriore migrazione. Helena, in qualche modo, va via dalla Germania e viene in Italia. E diventa scientificamente una scrittrice italiana. Cioè lei non è una scrittrice né tedesca né polacca, ma è una scrittrice italiana perché fa, come molti suoi colleghi, ad esempio come fa Amara Lakhous, una scelta di lingua. Cioè lei decide – e questa è una decisione presa quasi a freddo – di scrivere in italiano. E chiaramente questa sua scelta porta a uno stile diverso, anche nella scrittura. Questo lo racconta bene Ágota Kristóf in *L'analfabeta*. Se non lo avete mai letto, ve lo consiglio perché Ágota Kristóf spiega come dall'ungherese è arrivata al francese, e come il francese… lei, all'inizio ha scritto i suoi libri con il vocabolario vicino, con frasi semplici, frasi concise, perché naturalmente non è la tua lingua madre e, quindi, devi fare comunque un lavoro su te stesso. Effettivamente quella precisione nella lingua, lo stare attenta ai vocaboli… io lo vedo anche in Helena Janeczek. Helena Janeczek è comunque lineare quando scrive, non ha quei barocchismi tipici della letteratura italiana. Noi, in qualche modo, infiorettiamo di più. Helena è però diventata scrittrice italiana, cioè ha portato dentro alla letteratura italiana qualcosa di nuovo, anche uno sguardo europeo sul Novecento molto di rottura. Ed è questo che a me interessa di più. *Lezioni di tenebra* di Helena Janeczek è un libro straordinario che vi consiglio appunto di leggere.

È chiaro poi che, a questo punto, arriviamo noi. Noi siamo figli/e di migranti. Abbiamo alle nostre spalle la migrazione dei nostri genitori, i paesi dei nostri genitori, paesi che soprattutto quelli della mia genera-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

zione più che i più giovani hanno anche conosciuto, hanno anche vissuto in parte, quindi hai già la lingua, non l'hai persa la lingua del Paese d'origine, però sei effettivamente italiano al 100%, oltre che somalo, eritreo, etiope, ecc. al 100%, o indiano al 100%. Quella migrazione fa parte di te e soprattutto l'Italia fa parte di te, in quanto sei nato e cresciuto in questo Paese. Quando sono uscite fuori – e dico uscite perché si tratta principalmente di donne, e non so il perché, ma effettivamente sono uscite più donne nel periodo della cosiddetta 'seconda generazione' (termine che a me non piace molto, perché come dice il rapper Mahmood noi non siamo secondi a nessuno!) queste figlie della migrazione non hanno il dilemma della lingua, come lo poteva avere Kossi o Helena o Amara. Non ce l'hanno perché sono state scolarizzate in Italia. L'italiano non è quasi, ma è madrelingua insieme alla madrelingua del Paese d'origine. I trucchi dell'italiano ci appartengono, come ci appartiene il dialetto. È chiaro dunque che con le figlie dei migranti escono nuovi temi. Non più il viaggio, perché molti dei libri scritti da migranti erano su questo, sulla discriminazione, sulla nostalgia del Paese d'origine. I libri scritti da figlie di migranti, in questa fase soprattutto, ma l'ho visto anche… – e poi ve ne parlerò della fase nuova, ossia delle nuove promesse della migrazione… – sono libri che parlano dell'identità: chi siamo? Italiani? Non italiani? Italiani quanto? Un quarto italiani o mezz'italiani? Che cos'è l'Italia? Ad un certo punto l'identità è centrale. Che cos'è l'Africa? Questa identità che diventa così centrale porta molte autrici a scavare nella storia dell'Italia, e si cominciano così a fare domande scomode alla nazione; più che alla nazione alla narrazione *mainstream* che la nazione dà di se stessa. E questo l'ho visto in me, l'ho visto in Gabriella Ghermandi, l'ho visto in Cristina Ali Farah, l'ho visto in modo diverso anche in Gabriella Kuruvilla. Gabriella Kuruvilla è un po' più 'rap'… io la chiamo… io dico sempre che Gabriella Kuruvilla scrive… lei è indiana di origine… il padre è indiano, la mamma è italiana, e lei si sente… lei quando la definiscono 'scrittrice migrante' dice: "Sì, la mia massima migrazione è tra un quartiere e l'altro di Milano, cioè la mia migrazione è stata quando sono andata a Corso Buenos Aires". Una grandissima migrazione! Lei è più metropolitana. Effettivamente questo scavo storico esiste, e io l'ho visto in me. Io, ad un certo punto, ho sentito l'esigenza di capire come mai ero nata in Italia. Perché non è così ovvio! I tuoi genitori sono venuti dalla

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Somalia… potevi nascere a Parigi, Amsterdam, Londra, New York, sei nata invece a Roma. Perché sei nata a Roma? Allora, quella Roma là, che cosa significava per i miei genitori? Perché erano finiti a Roma? Erano finiti là per il colonialismo, cioè per il retaggio coloniale che era rimasto. La Somalia, il mio Paese d'origine, è stata colonia italiana fino al 1941. Dal 1950 al 1960 ha avuto l'amministrazione fiduciaria italiana, ovvero quando è finita la guerra, quando l'Africa ha dovuto essere decolonizzata, in qualche modo le Nazioni Unite hanno dato il compito – una a caso! – all'Italia di insegnare la democrazia ai somali. I somali non erano contenti perché 1) gli era ritornato il vecchio padrone coloniale e 2) perché nessuno teoricamente ti può insegnare la democrazia. La democrazia la crei tu, non è che te la insegnano. E, quindi, sono dieci anni, quelli citati, che vanno ancora studiati, e comunque abbastanza particolari. Però questo che ha significato per la Somalia? Che fino agli anni Novanta la cultura italiana era abbastanza presente nel Paese. Dopo gli anni Novanta no, perché l'Italia lascerà la Somalia in balia della guerra, quindi l'abbandonerà. Però, fino a quel momento, c'è molta cultura italiana sul territorio. I documenti erano scritti in italiano, le canzoni erano in italiano… Questa cosa la ripeto sempre… mia sorella mi chiede se Gianni Morandi ha fatto un nuovo disco, perché lei ascoltava Gianni Morandi e mio fratello mi diceva che le serate danzanti dell'Uruba, che era un hotel a Mogadiscio, finivano con *Ciao* di Pupo, quindi Pupo, Gianni Morandi, Celentano, soprattutto Celentano, e Mina, erano cantanti conosciuti in Equatore. Anche in Etiopia. In Etiopia era conosciuto molto Julio Iglesias, le canzoni italiane di Julio Iglesias. Quindi questa cultura pop italiana… c'era la Loison che faceva i dolci italiani, c'era la Casa d'Italia… Effettivamente era una realtà molto legata all'Italia. Io ho visto sempre persone scrivere bigliettini in italiano. All'inizio pensavo fosse normale poi ho cominciato a capire che non era normale, che c'era qualcosa in mezzo tra questi due Paesi. E, allora, ho cominciato a scavare, all'inizio sulla mia identità, poi sempre di più sull'identità della nazione, perché la Somalia, come l'Etiopia, l'Eritrea e la Libia fa parte della narrazione della nazione italiana. Cioè, sarebbe monco non sapere cosa è successo lì, non sapere che sono stati usati i gas, ecc. Quindi, personalmente, la mia identità si lega anche alla ricerca storica che ho fatto. E questo ha rivoluzionato anche la lingua perché io sono partita da un multilinguismo molto aperto. *Oltre*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Babilonia è un libro dove mischio molte lingue, mischio il somalo, lo spagnolo, l'arabo e l'italiano, mentre in altri libri non è che l'italiano è diventato standard ma, in un qualche modo, non aveva più bisogno di mostrare il suo multilinguismo, in quanto il multilinguismo era già nella costruzione della frase, nello schema, nel creare le immagini. E ho capito una cosa di me, però l'ho capita nel tempo… e parlo per me… che i miei romanzi risentono molto della forma somala di raccontare la storia. Non è che la storia nasce da sola, hai bisogno di raccontarla a qualcuno. *La linea del colore* è una lunga lettera che la protagonista scrive a un certo Ulisse Barbieri. A un certo punto nella lettera scritta a Ulisse Barbieri entrano altre lettere e dialoghi, però, diciamo, che forma, è un dire a qualcuno la propria storia, e io ho riscontrato questo schema in molti miei romanzi. C'è sempre bisogno di un interlocutore fisico: in Adua era l'elefante, qui è Ulisse Barbieri, cioè c'è sempre bisogno di un grande orecchio. Questo è molto tipico della Somalia, cioè il racconto orale, l'oralità. Io mi sono resa conto che molti degli schemi che mi ha dato la mia famiglia entrano nei romanzi in questo modo, e quindi piano piano ho abbandonato questo multilinguismo, anche perché dipende molto anche dai temi che uno si sceglie. *La linea del colore* è un libro sull'Ottocento. Non è che potevo farcirlo di parole somale, no? È chiaro. Il contenuto e la forma, a volte, dialogano insieme. Solo un'ultima frase sui miei libri… Io, quest'anno, oltre che a scrivere *La linea del colore*, ho curato un'antologia che si chiama *Future*. Ed è stato interessante per me perché volevo vedere come le giovani generazioni afroitaliane… io ho scelto un segmento, diciamo, di questo mondo legato alla migrazione, ho scelto le figlie nere delle migranti in qualche modo… volevo vedere persone più giovani di me che percorso avevano fatto, che sogni e che aspettative avevano su quest'Italia. Ho raccolto alcune voci, giovani e meno giovani, e devo dire che è stata una grande scoperta, anche un po' triste in effetti. Scoprire quanta rabbia ancora c'è, quanta rabbia circola tra le giovani, una rabbia per un razzismo ideologico che sta diventando sempre più ideologico. E, poi, la cosa che mi ha colpito nel libro, è che in tutti questi racconti c'era una sorta di paura per la propria incolumità fisica. Ed è stato molto interessante notare per me anche un'altra cosa, forse un po' più di natura tecnica-letteraria… Mentre molte autrici, figlie di migranti, che hanno cominciato a scrivere nel 2005, quindi che oggi sono intorno ai loro 40/50 anni,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

prediligevano in qualche modo la fiction, cioè prediligevano il romanzo come scelta (si scriveva più creatività, narrazione rispetto a un racconto personale), le giovani generazioni preferiscono l'auto-fiction, ovvero la narrazione biografica è preponderante. In un certo senso è come essere ritornati a quel racconto di Pap Khouma, ma con una forma linguistica realmente autoctona, cioè realmente vera, propria. Non che quella di Pap Khouma non lo fosse, ma in Pap Khouma era mediata da quella del giornalista italiano. Invece qui la lingua, la vita si possiede, perché sei di qua in un certo senso, però sei anche non di qua, quindi questo in qualche modo crea ancora molta rabbia, ma anche una voglia di essere protagonisti della propria storia. Questa cosa tra fiction e non fiction è qualcosa che sto esaminando e cercando di capire come evolverà, ossia se le scrittrici che stanno emergendo adesso continueranno a fare auto-fiction o magari comincerà anche lì una ricerca identitaria attraverso la forma romanzo. Questa è una cosa che dobbiamo capire nel tempo.

Se ora avete delle domande…

von Kulessa: Grazie tante. Penso, cara Igiaba, che tu abbia fatto un riassunto completo di quella letteratura che si chiama 'italofona', 'di migrazione', ecc. Forse potremmo parlare di queste etichette dopo, poiché queste possono costituire un problema.

Schwarze: Igiaba ha raccontato tanti aspetti che dimostrano un'identità plurima. Mi interessa naturalmente il lato linguistico perché tu, Igiaba, hai varie volte sottolineato il plurilinguismo, hai parlato dell'italiano come la tua lingua, ma hai parlato anche della Somalia come il tuo Paese d'origine. Quindi, dal punto di vista linguistico, in questo miscuglio di varie lingue, che fai in piena coscienza, tu hai una gerarchia. Per te l'italiano è la lingua della scrittura… Quale è la lingua di origine dei tuoi, della tua famiglia, le altre lingue? Cioè il plurilinguismo è per te una cosa del tutto normale? E quali sono le funzioni delle varie lingue? Oppure le metti allo stesso livello?

Scego: È chiaro che c'è una lingua dominante che è l'italiano perché, comunque, è anche la lingua del mio mestiere, della scrittura, anche dell'elaborazione mentale e culturale… queste cose le faccio sempre in italiano. Il somalo è la lingua della famiglia: io parlo con la mia famiglia

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

di origine in somalo, con mia madre, i miei fratelli, ecc., ed è la lingua che io vedo al pari dell'italiano. Non è una lingua del lavoro, è una lingua che uso solo in ambito privato, ma proprio perché la scrittura è legata molto anche all'ambito privato ha delle ricadute dentro la scrittura; cioè ogni tanto ti viene in mente qualcosa e ti viene in mente solo in somalo… e quindi italiano e somalo dialogano, io ho sempre visto italiano e somalo dialogare molto nella mia testa. Però è chiaro che non c'è solo l'italiano e il somalo, perché ci sono tante lingue che ci abitano per un motivo o per un altro. Magari in una lingua sappiamo solo leggere e scrivere, tipo l'arabo. Io, l'arabo, per ragioni religiose lo conosco un po' ma non potrei farci una conversazione letteraria, come sto facendo con voi. È chiaro che è una lingua rituale che entra nel nostro quotidiano almeno cinque volte al giorno quando preghi, ma in generale entra nel nostro quotidiano. Altre lingue sono quelle che uno si sceglie come compagne di viaggio nel cammino, e sono lingue che ti aprono dei mondi, perché ogni lingua, ogni libro, ogni situazione che ci succede apre uno spiraglio. Io sono laureata in spagnolo, sto studiando portoghese, e come tutti voi uso l'inglese per comunicare, per leggere. Ultimamente leggo molto di più in inglese… tra *Guardian*, *New York Times*, cioè molti giornali li leggo in inglese; lo spagnolo mi ha aiutato a capire cosa significava 'razzismo strutturale' perché se non avessi letto Cervantes in spagnolo forse non l'avrei mai capito. Ad un certo punto c'è una scena nel *Don Quijote*, dove – lo dicevo pure l'altra sera – Sancho Panza incontra il suo vicino di casa musulmano Ricote, e lui non doveva essere lì, perché come sapete gli ebrei e i musulmani erano stati espulsi dalla Spagna, gli ebrei nel 1492, i musulmani nel 1609; però lui era ritornato lì con un gruppo di tedeschi e si stava facendo vedere in pubblico a mangiare carne di maiale vistosamente, perché era l'unico lasciapassare che poteva avere la carne di maiale, mentre poi Cervantes ci descrive il pasto e capisci che Ricote, il vicino di casa musulmano, la sua identità non l'aveva persa perché ci sono anche tutta una serie di cibi legati alla cultura araba e islamica, non solo olive, le cose dolci, ecc. Quindi, anche se una prova a celare la sua identità questa fuoriesce. Ed è da lì che ho capito cosa significa 'razzismo strutturale', cioè significa che vieni relegato ai margini e devi fingere: o il tuo corpo verrà distrutto o devi fingere di essere qualcun altro. È un po' come ci dice Woody Allen in *Zelig*. Zelig, il protagonista, pur di non essere

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

considerato un ebreo da scacciare, diventa continuamente qualcun altro. Quel film mi ha molto colpito perché è un film che spiega benissimo cosa sente chi è discriminato. Chi è discriminato, affettiva-mente, desidera essere qualcun altro per non essere discriminato più. E Woody Allen lo spiega in una maniera perfetta secondo me. E quindi lo spagnolo mi ha aperto a tutti questi testi che forse non avrei mai letto, quelli di Galeano ma anche dei sudamericani. E, dal Sudamerica, breve è stato il passo per andare in Brasile che è l'unico Paese in cui non si parla spagnolo. Si parla portoghese, e devo dire che il portoghese è una lingua veramente del cuore. Adesso sono anche molto migliorata nel parlarlo. Perché io amo la lingua portoghese, amo soprattutto la canzone brasiliana, e vedo quanto ascoltare i grandi nomi della cultura brasiliana, come Giberto Gil, Maurizia Monte, ma ce ne sono molti altri, …, dicevo: quanto ascoltare questi cantautori, che non sono solo cantanti, ma compongono anche, mi abbia aiutato effettivamente per arrivare a quella poesia, a quella costruzione della frase. C'è, ad esempio, una canzone che parla di morte sul lavoro, che è costituita da tre parti: in tre parti l'autore scambia le frasi, e racconta tre storie che è la stessa storia di distruzione del corpo. È una canzone pazzesca. Quindi, la poesia me l'hanno insegnata i brasiliani, cioè, senza il Brasile, forse sarei una persona molto più povera. Io penso che il mondo sarebbe più povero senza il Brasile.

E poi ci sono anche linguaggi che non sono lingue, tipo il teatro. Io devo molto al linguaggio teatrale, soprattutto ai miei amici teatranti, drammaturghi, perché seguendo i loro laboratori – ho seguito molto i laboratori di Daniele Timpano e Elvira Frosini: loro facevano laboratori di drammaturgia con attori – è stato meraviglioso. Attraverso il lavoro attoriale – io osservavo, non sono un'attrice – riuscivo a capire quanto si potevano scrivere meglio i dialoghi, quanto si poteva fare tramite i dialoghi e, devo dire, che quello è stato un linguaggio importante.

von Kulessa: Grazie mille, cara Igiaba. Mi sono segnata una frase che hai detto: "Ogni lingua apre un mondo." È una frase importante, quindi anche tu concepisci il plurilinguismo come un arricchimento, non una perdita di identità. Io, quando cambio lingua, prendo anche un'altra identità, un'altra pelle, e ci si può benissimo sentire a casa in una lingua ritenuta 'lingua del cuore', una lingua che si è scelta.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Alcune settimane fa abbiamo fatto un webinar con due scrittrici francofone e abbiamo questo concetto della 'francofonia', che è un atteggiamento molto coloniale. Secondo me non è la stessa cosa con l'italiano in Africa. Queste due scrittrici hanno detto che l'Africa salverà il francese. È stata una cosa molto interessante perché si parla ancora tanto di francese in Africa, mentre in Europa stiamo tutti parlando un inglese *pidgin*, più o meno sviluppato, dimenticandoci delle nostre lingue. Mentre 'l'Africa salverà il francese', dicevano. Dunque la 'francofonia' sarebbe adesso l'Africa. È comunque vero che ci sono diversi scrittori di origine africana che hanno adottato l'italiano come lingua di scrittura, come Pap Khouma che hai citato, che hanno anche forse scelto l'italiano per non dover scrivere nella lingua coloniale. Come viene percepito quest'aspetto? Per gli scrittori che sono cresciuti in un contesto coloniale, come il caso tuo… per l'Italia…

Scego: È un po' diverso il caso mio, perché io non sono nata in Somalia, ma in generale i somali amano molto l'italiano. Quelli che lo parlano, che sono due generazioni più grandi di me, o una generazione, amano molto l'italiano perché è la lingua della loro giovinezza, la lingua della scuola, tanto che ho visto migranti somali vedere la tv italiana come gli emigrati italiani. È buffa questa cosa. Programmi come *Chi l'ha visto?* – io non guardo mai niente –, ma programmi come questi, ad esempio, i miei cugini li vedono e sanno tutto. Li vedono da fuori con il satellite. Io penso che per i somali non ci sia mai stato questo contrasto enorme... Il colonialismo italiano, badate bene, è stato durissimo, ma i somali – non so dire gli eritrei – … ma i somali lo hanno sempre vissuto come 'ok, è andata', quindi vedono più i legami culturali rispetto al male che è stato fatto, anche se di male ne è stato fatto tanto. Però quella rivendicazione sul 'non voglio scrivere nella lingua coloniale' io l'ho vista solo in uno scrittore Nuruddin Farah. A me, personalmente, non ha mai pesato scrivere in italiano perché io sono nata in Italia, sono italiana. Effettivamente è la mia lingua, non ho questi problemi. Il punto è mettere dentro la letteratura italiana temi nuovi, quindi anche 'quel coloniale' che è in qualche modo problematico metterlo nei libri, cioè far capire. Poi io mi sono occupata molto di urbanistica coloniale, ecc., cioè ho cercato di fare uno scavo storico più che un rifiuto linguistico. Quest'ultimo non mi interessa. Poi penso, sai, che la 'francofonia', il

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

legame con la Francia sia proprio un'altra cosa rispetto a noi. Il colonialismo italiano è stato breve e orrendo, però è anche a un certo punto finito. Negli anni Novanta è veramente finito. Quello francese, secondo me, non è mai finito, è questo il punto della faccenda. Noi quello che dovremmo fare, in questo momento in Italia, è uno scavo sul passato, perché il colonialismo non è conosciuto, non si studia, non si sa. Però, se adesso uno va in Somalia, non si parla mica italiano; si parla turco o si parla arabo, e quindi l'Italia quei legami li ha persi perché si è – di base – lavata le mani delle sue ex-colonie; poi sono rimasti alcuni, tra virgolette, affari sporchi dopo gli anni Novanta. L'Italia – secondo me – quello che dovrà esaminare del colonialismo è il post-colonialismo nel periodo Mani Pulite, che ha creato molti problemi, tipo al mio Paese, quando sono stati versati dei rifiuti tossici nel mare somalo. Quindi andrebbe scavata un po' di storia. Ed, effettivamente, quello che è rimasto sul legame – io penso sia quasi psicologico – sono le *gaffe* che l'Italia continua a fare sugli eritrei… quasi da riempirci un libro… L'ultima è stata la nave Diciotti fermata e non fatta sbarcare, ecc. piena di eritrei. È un ulteriore sgarbo che l'Italia fa all'Eritrea dopo averla colonizzata. Quindi la storia è un po' complessa. È diverso: c'è questo passato coloniale che non viene risolto in nessuno dei due Paesi, ma effettivamente ci sono anche molte differenze.

von Kulessa: Sono d'accordo con te per quanto riguarda la Francia e l'atteggiamento sempre coloniale. Ci sono altre domande? Abbiamo diversi specialisti tra di noi che hanno lavorato sulla 'letteratura italofona'…

Rebaudengo: Volevo fare una domanda che fuoriesce dal colonialismo italiano in Africa. Io vengo da Torino, in cui questa questione è decisamente meno sentita rispetto a Roma, ma c'è una fortissima comunità albanese… Gli albanesi sono un altro frutto dell'espansione – se vogliamo – coloniale italiana, seppure di breve durata. Negli anni Novanta, però, hanno avuto un ruolo molto importante, anche loro con una diversità linguistica enorme, perché la lingua albanese non è una lingua neolatina. Igiaba ha citato il colonialismo italiano, è vero che è l'Impero di Etiopia, ma è come se fosse solo africano… volevo invece sapere

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

cosa ne pensava anche di questa parte del colonialismo italiano che in Italia è sentita…

Scego: Non è che ho un pensiero molto preciso. Io ho proprio studiato il colonialismo italiano. L'altro giorno ho scritto una cosa… non è che essere neri ci rende tuttologi… stavo pensando al viso di Beyoncé. Beyoncé ha creato quest'Africa assurda, inesistente, molto tribale, con una faccia pitturata di bianco, ecc., poi vai a scoprire che lo staff che ha usato è africano, nigeriano. E tu dici: "È lo stesso immaginario degli esploratori dell'Ottocento!"

Io, devo dire la verità, sulla storia dell'Albania e del fascismo, di quello che il fascismo ha fatto nella ex-Jugoslavia so delle cose per sommi capi, il tutto andrebbe approfondito. Però una cosa posso dire dell'Albania che è molto interessante. Gli albanesi, dopo essere venuti in Italia, essere stati discriminati e tacciati di criminalità, sono oggi il gruppo migrante che si è meglio integrato in questo Paese. Cioè è molto interessante vedere la parabola degli albanesi in Italia, di come poi alcuni sono ritornati nel Paese di origine, quindi ci fa capire che qui la migrazione è qualcosa di veramente complesso. Sono 195 paesi differenti, persone che hanno origini differenti. In Italia c'è questa 'ossessione bianco-nero' in questo momento storico, dove è anche un 'nero annacquato' perché non vede le nostre diversità, ma vede solo la nostra pelle, però io sono diversa da una ruandese, una persona di origine ruandese è diversa da una persona di origine tunisina e una persona di origine tunisina è diversa da una persona di origine maliana. Tuttavia adesso siamo considerati 'neri generici'. C'è un po' una confusione di massa; e c'è anche questo avvicinare la nostra esistenza all'esistenza degli afroamericani, che sono tutt'altra cosa rispetto a noi. Hanno anche una storia di lotta più dura, più lunga. Invece l'Italia è fatta proprio di queste differenze. Sono contenta che sono stati citati gli albanesi perché ci sono albanesi, persone rumene, i loro figli, i figli dei sudamericani, dei peruviani, degli argentini, dei brasiliani, l'Est Europa, l'Africa, tutta diversa l'Asia, quindi questa transculturalità italiana non so quanto è stata colta a fondo dalle istituzioni e anche da chi fa libri. Oggi ho scritto un articolo che non so quando uscirà e che ho cominciato con questa frase: "Sono una sopravvissuta…", perché in effetti io mi sento un po' una sopravvissuta delle lettere italiane, perché è molto difficile, per noi

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

che abbiamo un'altra origine, scrivere, pubblicare, farci conoscere, farci pubblicizzare. Ieri per me è stata una bella giornata perché mi hanno messo in finale nel Premio Napoli, e ho pensato: "Questo è il secondo premio del Sud Italia che si accorge di me". Perché il Sud Italia è vicino alle tematiche che tratto. Per me è una coincidenza interessante perché noi siamo considerati molte volte 'non letteratura italiana', ma siamo sempre considerati 'testimonianza', ed è sempre molto faticoso essere dentro a una letteratura che spesso non ti vede. E noi, afrodiscendenti, siamo i più fortunati perché, almeno, alcuni di noi hanno pubblicato. Altre persone, di altre origini, fanno ancora più fatica di noi, perché proprio non viene percepita questa diversità italiana, una transculturalità molto più complessa del bianco e nero di cui parliamo.

Rebaudengo: Certo è un mondo variegatissimo. E poi non è più un plurilinguismo, è un multilinguismo.

Baggio: Saluto Igiaba. L'ho sentita con molto piacere. Lo dico subito: io sono una storica della lingua italiana e ho fatto molta attenzione a come parla, e parla in modo spontaneo, in modo vivace, dando grande importanza alla spontaneità del linguaggio. Mi sembra un bell'approccio con l'Italiano e anche una prospettiva… Questo mi pare davvero importante e sono contenta che sia avvenuto anche attraverso l'impatto, immagino non semplice, con le istituzioni scolastiche, culturali – forse l'università è meglio della scuola –. Insomma constato che Igiaba ha potuto entrare bene a contatto con l'italiano parlato dai suoi coetanei nel mondo che la circondava, perché, appunto, sento nel suo italiano, molto alla romana, questa presa diretta della realtà linguistica.
Mi dispiace però sentirla parlare tanto di identità; capisco che è un discorso necessario e forse anche dovuto, ma credo che, in quello che ci sta dicendo e nel modo in cui ce lo sta dicendo, ci sia una generosità, un'apertura, una curiosità e anche una grandissima capacità di abbracciare lingue e culture diverse che fa un po' a pugni con l'idea dell'identità, che io trovo sempre costrittiva nelle sue delimitazioni. Però, appunto, capisco anche la necessità tutto sommato di segnare il territorio, questo mi è chiaro. Io credo però che lei ormai sia grande e abbia anche diritto di staccarsi da questo schema.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Scego: Io, in realtà, sono già fuori schema, secondo me. Cioè, più uno scrive libri, più gli altri mettono le etichette sopra i libri. Me ne sono resa conto soprattutto adesso, con l'ultimo, che è un romanzo tardovittoriano e ha una storia molto precisa di una donna afroamericana nativa americana che decide di venire in Italia facendosi aiutare da dame di carità, abolizioniste, illuminate, che poi vediamo nel corso del romanzo poco illuminate, soprattutto una. La protagonista viene in Italia perché è un'Italia che lei ama dalla letteratura, cioè lei legge l'Italia, si fa un'idea dell'Italia, dopo che si legge *Corinna* di Mme de Staël. Si fa quest'idea ma, arrivando in Italia, vede tutt'un'altra Italia, ed è molto interessante, come, in un qualche modo, riesce a mediare tra quello che ha in testa e quello che vede, l'ambiente in cui sta, che è poi un ambiente artistico, perché lei diventa un'artista, ma effettivamente un'artista dentro un circolo chiuso che è il circolo degli americani a Roma, e quindi più che dall'Italia lei deve difendersi dal razzismo degli americani a Roma. Ci sono quindi tutte le dinamiche. È un contesto dove, però, anche gli italiani sono oggetto di razzismo, perché *Corinna*, questo famoso libro, se uno lo legge con gli occhi di adesso è angosciante. Cioè lei non viene considerata degna, la Corinna, perché mezza italiana; ossia questo essere 'mezzo sangue' non va bene anzi, quando scoprono che è mezza inglese, questa cosa la migliora, però deve morire perché lui, il protagonista maschile, Nelvil, non può sposarla perché è italiana. Quando muore fa quindi un favore a tutti. Ed è tutta una roba allucinante. È un libro molto anche di descrizioni, ecc., ma se uno va al succo della trama, è terribile, è come *Via col vento.* Era un libro molto letto all'epoca e io l'ho usato apposta questo libro come modello, perché volevo far vedere anche tutta la complessità dell'essere italiani. Io ogni volta lo spiego e la gente strabuzza gli occhi. Io vivo i miei vari aspetti, ossia l'essere italiana, musulmana, somala, nera, ecc. ecc., e ognuno vede un pezzo ma nessuno vede mai l'italianità. L'italianità, o anche gli insulti verso l'italianità pensano che a noi non colpiscano. Ma come fanno a non colpirci? Non è che io sono russa, sono italiana, quindi quando vedo un film come *Eat Pray Love* … ho dovuto vedere tantissimi film sul Grand Tour, su come erano trattati gli italiani fuori, su tutto questo filone ultimo di film ambientati in Italia che c'è da mettersi le mani nei capelli, tipo *Under the Tuscan Sun* o *Eat Pray Love* con Julia Roberts; ho letto anche il libro. Il libro è leggermente meglio, ma

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

non troppo – lei arriva a Roma, e a Roma non c'è l'acqua calda, a Roma ci sono questi latin lover, ci sono tutti che stanno mangiando, mangiano troppo, sono anche tutti un po' stupidi e tu dici: "Ma veramente pensano questo di noi?" È chiaro che io è da molto tempo che ho superato gli schemi perché effettivamente so di essere molte più cose insieme. Per me è chiaro. Il problema è che non è chiaro per gli altri, sia in Italia sia fuori dall'Italia. Molto spesso quando dico che sono un'italiana nera, tipo negli Stati Uniti, è fantastico!, perché loro nemmeno sanno che esistono i neri in Italia e dicono: "Davvero esistono i neri in Italia?", e quindi gli devi spiegare tutto quanto. Effettivamente entriamo in un mondo quasi sconosciuto. E poi, a me, spesso mi dicono: "Tu sei una scrittrice africana". Io li guardo e rispondo: "No, non sono una scrittrice africana, sono una scrittrice europea", e questa cosa non è che va tanto giù alle persone. E io dico: "Scusate, ma una è nata in Europa, è cresciuta in Europa, scrive in una lingua europea, secondo voi come fa ad essere africana?" Effettivamente ha un'origine africana, quindi al limite magari 'afroeuropea'. Sei comunque dentro alla delimitazione 'scrittrice europea', perché quello che scrivi risente del luogo geografico in cui cresci. A me sembra logico, ma non è così logico. Cioè quando io ho scritto questo romanzo, come lo definisco io 'tardo-vittoriano', ho dovuto studiare come queste donne si vestivano, poverette!... con mussola, ecc., veramente una tortura!... e guardavo la moda tra il 1865 e il 1870 – che è cambiata tantissimo in quel tempo – e cercavo anche di avere dei modelli di scrittura ottocentesca. E i miei modelli sono europei, effettivamente. Io ho pensato a Jane Austen, quasi per tutto il romanzo ho pensato a Jane Austen, perché Jane Austen descrive piuttosto con dettagli precisissimi il mondo in cui vive. Non è una scrittrice romantica, per niente romantica; tutti pensano che sia una scrittrice rosa ed è la cosa più sbagliata del mondo. Lei, in tutti i suoi cinque romanzi, parla di una cosa sola, che non è l'amore, ma sono i soldi. È stata la lezione più utile della mia vita: io, in questo libro, non ho dimenticato i soldi. Per me è stato molto importante far capire come fa Lafanu Brown ad arrivare in Italia senza soldi. Chi l'aiuta? Chi le dà i soldi? Quindi è questo il punto: i soldi che mancano, e la rendita che ti manca, tu appunto la trovi attraverso le benefattrici, però se hai una benefattrice, questa benefattrice ti può ricattare, ti può dire qualcosa sul lavoro, dunque ci sono i rapporti tra le persone che i soldi creano. Elizabeth Bennet

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

alla fine si sposa Darcy, ma quel *gap* che Darcy è molto ricco lei lo sente. L'arroganza di Darcy deriva dalla rendita che ha Darcy. Perché questa cosa è indubbia. Quindi è chiaro che io vengo da una scrittura 'europea', ma è anche una scrittura che posso contestare. Se io penso a Jane Austen, lei si è posta il problema del colonialismo a un certo punto: in *Mansfield Park* si chiede: "Ma questa famiglia Bertram, da dove prende i soldi?". Sempre i soldi! I soldi li prende dalla colonia, li prende da Antigua. E quindi, quando uno parla di colonialismo, deve pensare che è una faccenda di capitale, è una faccenda di soldi. Effettivamente tu mercifichi quelle persone perché ti serve il loro lavoro. Il lavoro ti crea guadagno. Sono marxista quando dico queste cose però effettivamente la schiavitù non è che viene da chissà cosa; è perché serviva gente da schiavizzare, quindi quando tu schiavizzi qualcuno lo devi inferiorizzare, e quindi devi creare tutta una serie di meccanismi che costringono quel corpo (nero in quel caso) a diventare merce. E non l'hanno fatto diventare merce solo gli europei, ma anche gli arabi, gli africani, quindi la storia della schiavitù è veramente una roba molto complessa. E io, appunto, quando ho scritto questo libro… per ritornare all'identità… è chiaro che le gabbie identitarie ci sono, e abbiamo tutti gabbie identitarie, però c'è anche la possibilità di uscirne fuori. Questo libro è per me uscire fuori dalla gabbia identità, tutti i libri che ho scritto. Da me il mondo letterario si aspetta un determinato tipo di narrazione, che è la narrazione autobiografica, che io voglio fare. Il prossimo libro lo voglio fare autobiografico, ma non solo autobiografico; voglio un po' giocare con lo schema dell'autobiografia, c'ho pensato tanto. Da noi si aspettano un tipo di racconto, pietistico spesso, che ti fa piangere perché sei soltanto disgraziato e non pensano mai che possiamo scrivere della fiction con dello stile, del dialogo, dei personaggi anche ambigui. Lafanu Brown ha delle sue ambiguità, ma le donne che le stanno intorno hanno altrettante ambiguità, cioè io mi sono divertita molto a creare Mc Canzy che è la sua benefattrice, che è una donna che vuole avere i suoi 'negretti', li chiama proprio così, intorno, vuole comandare su di loro, ma è anche un po' disgraziata: ha avuto un brutto matrimonio da cui si è liberata solo con la vedovanza, solo la vedovanza l'ha resa libera… Ho quindi cercato di sfuggire all'identità attraverso la scrittura, che è quello che faccio sempre. Il problema che gli altri ti vedono in un solo modo, sempre. C'è un personaggio nel libro, di nome Leila, che è una

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

generazione che ha una certa età, e tutti mi dicono: "Ah, ti assomiglia tanto Leila, è una quarantenne come te! Sei tu Leila!". Io non ho mai avuto un papà farmacista e non ho mai avuto una casa così piena di gente. Io ho dato a Leila delle cose che non ho avuto nella mia vita, però automaticamente il pensiero delle persone è: "Quel personaggio sei tu", quando, invece, io volevo fare solo un ritratto generazionale per far vedere che le cosiddette 'seconde generazioni' erano e sono anche cinquantenni, quarantenni, e non solo bambini. Quando si parla di 'seconde generazioni' in Italia, pensano solo ai bambini piccoli, ma ci sono persone, purtroppo, che non sono più bambini, e, quindi, a me colpisce quando qualcuno dice: "Ma questa padella, nel racconto *Salsicce*, l'hai usata veramente tua madre?" È come ogni volta negare la fiction, l'immaginazione dello scrittore. E tu dici: "No, veramente quella padella l'ho inventata!" E quindi tutto è sempre complicato, a volte ci sono anche domande veramente scomode, che tu dici: "Ma perché mi sta facendo questa domanda?" Ma alla fine il valore della scrittura è quello che entra nel cuore dei lettori e delle lettrici e quindi superi le barriere identitarie che ha la gente in testa. Mentre con i lettori e con le lettrici non ho mai problemi, le barriere superiori le ho trovate in accademia. L'accademia vuole metterci in una casella molto molto precisa, quando tu non sei molto molto precisa.

Biasiolo: Innanzi tutto grazie per questo webinar e grazie a Igiaba che è veramente fantastica. Siccome si è parlato appunto di *Corinna* di Mme de Staël e si è parlato anche di Jane Austen, volevo chiedere se esiste… so che la letteratura diciamo 'della migrazione' – sebbene non mi piaccia chiamarla così – si basa, se penso ad esempio alla letteratura francofona, anche sull'intertestualità. E volevo sapere anche se nella letteratura 'italofona' o italiana, ma scritta comunque da persone con origini africane e non solo africane, quindi in generale, è presente questa intertestualità… Mi riferisco sia a un'intertestualità interna e, quindi, nello specifico relativa alla letteratura italiana o italofona sia a un'intertestualità esterna, anche extra-europea. E seconda domanda, se mi è consentito: Quale riscontro, Igiaba, hanno i tuoi testi al momento in Somalia? Cioè, c'è un ritorno in Somalia come in Europa, o meno? Grazie mille.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Scego: Allora comincio a risponderti dalla seconda domanda. È paradossale quello che succede ai testi. Bisogna pensare che la Somalia non aveva una grossa industria editoriale prima della guerra e, dopo la guerra, zero. L'editoria non esiste quasi. Esistono dei libretti molto piccoli, e io, se devo dire la verità, non ho mai scritto per la Somalia, effettivamente questi libri, li ho scritti forse per la diaspora somala. E alla diaspora somala, effettivamente alle più giovani, arrivano i miei libri vedo, però quelle che hanno apprezzato di più i miei libri – può sembrare paradossale – sono le donne brasiliane. Questa cosa per me è un mistero della fede, cioè non ho capito bene perché le afrobrasiliane, tutte le brasiliane, anche le bianche in realtà, hanno adottato veramente i libri che ho scritto. Sono usciti in Brasile e sono diventati una specie di libri cult, cioè vengono citati moltissimo, ecc. E io mi sono fatta una domanda per questo. Penso che io comunque parlo di una diaspora nera; la Somalia, invece, è un Paese che ha ancora molti problemi a definirsi nero. E un Paese che pensa di essere arabo e di essere quasi bianco, quando tu sei nero veramente, hai la pelle nera… quindi sei daltonico!?! C'è veramente un problema da questo punto di vista, dunque non si considera un Paese africano, sembra paradossale dire così, ma effettivamente è una cosa che abbiamo riscontrato. E adesso sta un po' migliorando grazie alle esperienze della *Congresswoman* di Ilhan Omar che invece abbraccia la sua *blackness*, però c'è ancora molto scetticismo su questo. Poi, io ho deciso anche di non parlare sulla Somalia, cioè nel mio ultimo libro, a parte la parte contemporanea di questa ragazza, che appunto parte dalla Somalia… però, etnicamente, i miei libri sono un po' 'libri mondo'. E ho notato in ambienti somali non amano molto parlare di rifugiati, e tu dici: "Ma come?". I rifugiati poco tempo fa venivano chiamati 'Titanic'. C'è proprio una sorta di rifiuto da chi sta bene verso chi sta male. "Io sono migrato, sì, ma non ho fatto come questi pezzenti su un barcone", cioè io ho sentito queste cose. E tu dici: "Ma come? Tu dovresti essere solidale!" Vige la regola di chi è arrivato prima. E quindi è un po' problematico. È problematica soprattutto questa mancanza di editoria. Non c'è una vera usanza, diciamo, una vicinanza al libro come la poteva avere invece la generazione dei miei fratelli che avevano biblioteche, librerie… Cioè la Mogadiscio che ho conosciuto io era pienissima di biblioteche. Adesso questo non c'è più. E poi c'è stato anche un Islam molto radicale ultimamente in Somalia,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

quindi… tutto viene distrutto. Io non credo che avrò mai un riscontro nel mio Paese di origine. Di questo sono abbastanza certa. In alcune persone del mio Paese d'origine sì, mi scrivono dalla diaspora, soprattutto da quando sono uscite le traduzioni in inglese. È molto interessante, li ho anche incontrati, ho incontrato un gruppo di somali all'LGBTQ, di solito si nascondono, però quando vedono uno scrittore o una scrittrice si rivelano, e questo è interessante per me, in quanto vedi una complessità del Paese che non immaginavi possibile.

E invece sull'intertestualità non so risponderti. Io lo faccio, però non so; qualcuno dovrebbe fare questa ricerca.

Fänger: Anch'io ho pensato, quando hai citato questo passo di Cervantes, Igiaba, al tuo racconto breve *Salsicce*… Mi sono occupata nella mia tesi magistrale del binomio 'cibo e identità' e del passo in cui la protagonista di *Salsicce* entra nella macelleria e c'è questo confronto tra l'essere italiana e somala e di mangiare la carne di maiale o no. Mi stavo chiedendo se anche in quest'ultimo romanzo, che ancora purtroppo non ho letto, il cibo ha un ruolo…

Scego: Oggi è uscita una cosa sul cibo che abbiamo scritto in tre, abbiamo fatto un dialogo... non so come fartelo avere… è un dialogo sul cibo, sul maiale. È un dialogo a tre, mio, di Wolf Bukowski e Lorenzo Mari. Lo trovi in *Quinto tipo*. È uscito proprio oggi, quindi… magari può essere utile. In questo romanzo, in realtà, c'è qualcosa che succede alla protagonista, che è un po' quello che succedeva a Zuhra in *Oltre Babilonia*. Zuhra non vedeva i colori, invece la protagonista del mio ultimo testo non sente i sapori. In entrambi questi libri, come in *Adua*, c'è di fatto un'aggressione sessuale alle protagoniste. Adesso ho finito questo ciclo di aggressioni, grazie a Dio, ma volevo fare tre libri che avevano al centro questa paura di perdere il corpo che è la paura che vivono gli afroamericani, gli afrodiscendenti, gli europei, tutti. Cioè, a un certo punto, qualcuno può leggere il tuo corpo in maniera sbagliata e questa cosa può provocare grossi guai, può portarti alla morte, come è successo a George Floyd. George Floyd… alla fine, bastava un controllo, no? E invece è morto, è morto per niente, per 20 dollari e questo poliziotto gli si è seduto letteralmente sul collo. È una roba terribile. E questa roba terribile succede sempre. Io sono partita da questa violenza

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

coloniale in tre libri per raccontare comunque perdite di corpi. E quindi dopo l'aggressione, che è un'aggressione reale – la protagonista dell'ultimo testo si ispira a due donne realmente esistite che sono vissute a Roma alla fine dell'Ottocento. L'una si chiamava Edmonia Lewis ed era una scultrice, l'altra si chiamava Sarah Remond ed era un'abolizionista, in Italia è poi diventata ostetrica. Lei è sepolta nel Cimitero acattolico, purtroppo non c'è più la tomba, ma c'è una targa, perché è finita in un ossario –, queste due donne, in due momenti diversi della loro vita, hanno subito un'aggressione: una è stata buttata giù dalle scale in un teatro, e l'altra è stata ferocemente massacrata di pugni e forse violentata. Non abbiamo certezza della violenza. Però probabilmente avvenne. E io mi sono ispirata a questi due fatti, il teatro e la violenza e, a un certo punto, per spiegare la violenza sessuale, ho usato i colori. Un po' come in *Oltre Babilonia* lei non vedeva il rosso, in questo libro lei perde i colori, progressivamente, e le rimane il nero. E poi perde il sapore, e quindi è l'assenza di cibo. E solo in Italia riuscirà, in un qualche modo, a sentire il cibo, quando si sentirà in un rifugio rispetto a un'America che vorrà distruggere il suo corpo. E questa cosa mi ha molto colpito perché io, una volta, ho chiesto a una afroamericana che vive qua, una signora di nome Pia… che mi ha detto: "Ah che bella Roma! Io vivo a Roma da due anni". E io le ho chiesto: "Perché ti sei trasferita a Roma?" E lei: "Perché non mi sparano". E io sono rimasta agghiacciata perché effettivamente è un buon motivo per trasferirsi in una città nuova. Negli Stati Uniti, forse noi non ce lo possiamo immaginare, ma quello che è successo a George Floyd è veramente ordine del giorno. È successo a … Breonna Taylor, a tanti… ma è successo anche a Martin Luther King, a Malcom X… gli hanno sparato, li hanno uccisi. E, quindi, questa signora che candidamente… è una signora della media borghesia, abbastanza benestante, che ha usato Roma come base per andare a Parigi e in altri posti… mi ha detto così. Io quando ho scritto il romanzo mi sono ricordata di quel "Qui non mi sparano" e, in un certo senso, ho voluto far capire qual è la differenza: la distruzione del corpo e cosa ha significato in quell'epoca per un personaggio come la Brown venire in Italia. Non è che in Italia sia esente dal razzismo, infatti, lei, nel corso del romanzo, anzi all'inizio del romanzo, capirà subito come esiste la violenza in Italia perché è una violenza venuta dal colonialismo, però volevo anche far vedere come i corpi cambiano a

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

seconda della geografia e come cambia anche il razzismo, perché il razzismo distrugge tutto. Mentre in Italia non è un razzismo che ha costruito la nazione, ossia esiste un razzismo ma non l'ha costruito la nazione, negli Stati Uniti è la base della nazione. Quindi anche attraverso questo non sapore, questo sentirsi protetta e sentirsi minacciata volevo far capire un po' il personaggio.

Gröne: Mi interesserebbe il Suo rapporto a questa etichetta, ossia 'letteratura della migrazione', perché mi sembra che noi tutti non siamo molto contenti di quest'espressione. Potrebbe commentarla, per favore?

Scego: Non lo so… perché io non mi sento immigrata, cioè sono figlia di migranti, no? Quando mi dicono 'letteratura della migrazione' questo significa che tu fisicamente ti sei spostato da un posto all'altro. Io sono nata, cresciuta e sto ancora a Roma. Sono veramente romana tipica. Perché questa cosa è incredibile quando la dico: "Sono come Alberto Sordi". Sono qui ancora. E, allora, dov'è la migrazione? È chiaro che c'è la migrazione come esperienza 'altra', che è l'esperienza dei genitori … io, a molte cose, ci sono arrivata attraverso lo studio, l'osservazione, quindi è un'etichetta che un po' mi sta stretta. Io semplicemente mi definisco appartenere alla letteratura italiana e basta, o letteratura e basta. Ma io definirei anche i miei colleghi, che arrivano dalla migrazione, esempio Amara Lakhous, 'letteratura italiana'. Non è che Conrad lo definiamo 'letteratura della migrazione', Ágota Kristóf la definiamo 'letteratura della migrazione', Zadie Smith la definiamo 'letteratura della migrazione'. È 'letteratura inglese', è 'letteratura francese', ecc. Quindi è un'etichetta che, secondo me, è servita all'inizio per far uscire fuori dei nomi, soprattutto quelli degli anni Duemila, ecc., però poi è diventata una gabbia perché presuppone che l'autore deve solo scrivere di migrazione. Quando io ho scritto questo libro tardo-vittoriano è chiaro che sono storie di migrazione perché è la storia di una che va da un Paese all'altro, però non è la migrazione classica come la possiamo intendere oggi. C'è anche in quel che racconto la migrazione classica, però, quello che è diverso è lo stile della scrittura, quindi io userei sempre la definizione 'letteratura italiana'. Il contenuto non deve condizionare lo stile e anche l'etichettatura.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Schwarze: Igiaba ha sottolineato l'importanza della 'memoria'. 'Fare memoria per la storia'. Mi sembra possa essere molto utile per la riflessione ora, specie in questo periodo, soprattutto per i giovani. Magari, Igiaba, qualche parola sull'importanza della memoria storica per le generazioni di oggi.

Scego: Questa è una domanda molto vasta. In realtà 'memoria' è una parola davvero complessa. Significa tutto e niente. L'importante è non fare una memoria rituale, che è vuota di significato, ma fare arrivare ai giovani le storie in più modi possibili, con film, con libri, con gite, con un lavoro sulla struttura urbanistica delle città, cioè creare musei. Adesso a Roma nascerà un museo nuovo, che si chiamerà italo-africano "Ilaria Alpi", proprio sul colonialismo, e siamo molto tutti in attesa. Io ho visto i magazzini, c'è molta roba, molto interessante. C'è molto da vedere come sarà allestita quest'ala di museo, perché occuperà l'ala del "Pigorini", e comunque diventerà un centro studi, dove molte persone che si occupano di questo potranno visionare oggetti, situazioni, ecc. Quindi, secondo me la memoria deve sempre essere accompagnata da cose concrete, perché, senno, i giorni della memoria – lo abbiamo visto – sono importanti, ma vanno riempiti anche di azioni quotidiane negli altri giorni dell'anno.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Joanna Boampong

(Accra)

Coping to Survive?
A Study of Female "Afro-Diasporic" Actors of Spain

Abstract

Recent critical debates have begun to take account of Spain's relevance for questions pertaining to diasporic experiences in general and, to some extent, those specific to African diasporic figures. Undoubtedly news headlines of boatloads of African immigrants landing on Spain's shores have drawn attention to the country's relevance to immigration debates. However, apart from these recent headline-grabbing movements, other legal and legitimate migrations also exist and have lasted much longer. As a country that has, for a long time, erroneously been considered racially homogenous, it is important to examine the experience of the descendants of African migrants whose presence there precludes the publicity-pulling stories of illegal immigrants arriving dead or alive at the country's shores.

This article specifically explores and reflects upon the ways by which these Afro-Spaniards, specifically female Afro-Spaniards whose existence, until recently, was hardly acknowledged, negotiate their survival in Spain. What subject positions are cultural actors who bear marks that distinguish them to be of "Afro" extraction forced to assume within Spain's socio-cultural and political ambit? What coping mechanisms or strategies must female Afro-Spaniards employ in the face of gestures that seek to silence, question, or even negate their presence within the space they call home? What impact do these strategies, in turn, have on their future actions and their interactions with the other? Beyond the traditional media readily deemed "appropriate" for critical reflection, but which scantily carries the experiences of these individuals, the study largely draws on and examines "new" or non-traditional media forms that equally contribute to the meaning-making process and provide reference points for critical contemplation. These include such media as blogs, YouTube videos, online news sources, interviews, music, and anecdotes. By this, the paper seeks to explore the subversive value to be derived from their inclusion with the "canon" in much the same way as, by taking a stance and asserting their

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

relevance, "Afro-Spanish" subjects shake the very core of established paradigms. Ultimately, these varied reference points for analyses provide the basis for a more comprehensive conceptualization of Spain's socio-cultural setup and the "Afro-Spanish" experience as a whole.

News headlines of boatloads of African immigrants landing on Spain's shores or bodies of perished African souls washed ashore have drawn attention to the continued attraction the country has for prospective immigrants, especially those who see it as an easy route to enter Europe undocumented. However, more historical migrations that were both legal and legitimate also took place and have been much longer lasting than the recent phenomena. In other cases, such as those of immigrant offspring born in Spain, the presence of Afro-Spaniards is not a question of migration at all. As Spain is a country sometimes erroneously considered to be racially homogenous, it is important to examine the experiences and coping strategies of Afro-descendant Spaniards whose circumstances are largely occluded in that country and vary significantly from those that mainstream media is wont to portray. Spain's migratory patterns have generally been characterized as unique. Migratory flows of people of color into Spain did not rise to notable levels until after the 1990s. According to Afro-Europe, International Blog, by 2010 Spain had about 683,000 migrants of African descent, representing 1.5% of the population, and just over 10% of foreigners according to the High Council of Black Communities [Alto Consejo de las Comunidades Negras]. This figure is quite striking and reflects a general trend in increased migration of people of color to Europe in general (Aixelà-Cabré 2020). However, people of African descent were living in Spain before the 1990s: The Council of Black Communities reports that, in 1998, there were some 77,000 Afro-descendant migrants and, in 2009, about 7,500 descendants of Africans were born in Spain.

In 2010 the number of migrants from Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish speaking country south of the Sahara, was estimated by Afro-Europe to be a little over 23,000 people. It is the African country with the third biggest group of African migrants in Spain, after Senegal (47,000) and Nigeria (35,000). Compared to that of those other two countries, migration from Equatorial Guinea has been very different. In

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

the first place, as a former colony of Spain, Equatorial Guinea at a time was considered to be a Spanish province. Thus, its peoples were "entitled" to all the rights of citizenship enjoyed on the peninsula. With the attainment of independence and subsequent declaration of the country as "materia reservada" by General Franco's regime, these rights were lost. Subsequently, with the resultant dictatorship that came on the heels of gaining independence, many Equatorial Guineans found themselves caught in limbo in Spain: out of status within Spain yet unable to go back to Equatorial Guinea. Still, a good number of people fled into exile and settled in Spain. Today, it is argued that perhaps Equatoguineans represent the most integrated Black community of African descent in Spain, comprising not only a second generation but a third one as well (Aixelà-Cabré 2020).

In spite of the long history of the existence of Afro-descendant peoples legally in Spain, their lives and stories largely remain outside the purview of traditional, mainstream media and communication networks. In an anthropological study on Africans in Europe, Toasijé (2009) demonstrates how engrained this practice is when he submits that

> it is not only the past African achievements in Spain that have no recognition, even the most recent contributions of the Equatorial-Guinean gift to Spain in scientific research, politics, literature, and many other aspects of modern Spain have not been recognized. (2009: 349)

He further underscores the institutionalization of this phenomenon when he affirms

> José Maria Aznar Lopez, Spanish president from 1996 to 2004, stamped his imprint on the ending of the African contribution in Spain by criminalizing immigration in official discourses such as the 'Seville Sommet' of the 21st and the 22nd of June, 2002. (Ibid.: 350)

Correlatively, the predominant images mainstream media is wont to show are of African immigrants illegally flooding entry points in makeshift boats. More serious instances of what plays out on the news show drowning victims in need of rescue, or washed-up bodies of prospective African immigrants who have perished at sea in an attempt to reach

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Spain. The following observation by Toasijé further underscores this practice:

> The anomalous concentration of information regarding nonregular immigration as a kind of new crime on television, press, and radio shows the fact that Europe in general and Spain in particular, because of racist myths forged in slavery and colonial eras, fear African migration. (Toasijé 2009: 351)

These images undoubtedly portray Africans as "aliens" trying to force their way into a foreign space and leave a lasting impression especially on people who see themselves as the country's "natives".

Additionally, most mainstream media portrayals of Africa, characterized by famine and destitution, violence and wars, and abject poverty, often constitute the only images seen of people of African descent. Consequently, it can be argued that "native" Spaniards extrapolate the desperation that such scenes depict onto people of color in general in spite of the differences in the circumstances that account for their presence in Spain. Whatever the excuse or explanation that may be ascribed, the fact remains that Afro-Spaniards have to wade through a host of unpleasant experiences and endure treatments that, being inimical to their well-being as a people, require they adopt coping measures to survive. As we take a close look at some of the actions, inactions, behaviors, attitudes, pronouncements, and practices that affect the welfare of Afro-Spaniards, it is necessary to first examine the media through which their experiences are made known.

The media by which the experiences of female Afro-Spaniards are exposed are varied and usually fall outside the scope of mainstream or "official" locations of discourse. It can be projected that such media, outside the "canon", co-opt for themselves the "authority" denied them in the mainstream. Thus they remain free of the "influence" or, if you will, censorship that would have been brought to bear on them. These alternate media generally eschew the filters that mainstream media may apply or enforce on communicating these experiences. The stories and experiences predominantly found in new media forms such as blogs, YouTube videos, interviews, documentaries, Instagram, Twitter create

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

spaces for self-expression and auto-reflection, where the hitherto silencing, subjugation, and occlusion of Afro-Spaniard voices is questioned and ultimately reversed. As this study seeks to underscore, while alternate media provide different means, and sometimes the only means by which these experiences are revealed, they also serve as useful avenues for examining the coping strategies employed.

Stress and coping theories

Stress has been identified as a key factor in requiring coping strategies. As H.W. Krohne (2002) notes, the term was first used in physics to analyze the problem of how manmade structures must be designed to carry heavy loads and resist deformation by external force. Thus, stress referred to external pressure or force applied to a structure. The term has been co-opted into the behavioral sciences and, with this switch, experienced a change of use. Within the behavioral sciences, the term now generally denotes bodily processes created by circumstances that place physical or psychological demands on an individual (Selye 1976). These external forces that impose themselves on the body or individual are termed stressors (McGrath 1982). Although significant, these descriptions of stress have been found to be inadequate. A key deficiency is that these descriptions dwell solely on external factors without taking into account the cognitive mediation or internal processes the individual undergoes that make the external events stressful to the individual. In other words, the external stimuli that are exerted on an individual cannot in and of themselves constitute stress. Rather, certain (pre-existing) conditions within the individual would need to come into play for the external force to be stressful. These conditions may include level of maturity, personal outlook, previous experiences, emotional state, and goals, etc.

Lazarus (1993) proposes a more comprehensive theory involving an individual’s appraisal of the significance of what is happening for their well-being and coping, that is, the efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands. Stress is therefore seen as a relational concept and not as a specific kind of external stimulation or a specific pattern of physiological, behavioral, or subjective reactions. Rather, it is

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

viewed as a relationship ('transaction', or negotiation) between individuals and their environment. Consequent to evaluating a situation, different kinds of stress arise. These are generally identified as harmful, threatening, and challenging. Harm refers to the psychological damage or loss that has already occurred. Threat is the anticipation that harm may be imminent. Challenge arises from demands that a person feels confident about mastering. Determining factors of these different kinds of stress are closely related to specific emotional reactions. Lazarus (1993) distinguishes 15 basic emotions, some negative – anger, fright, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy, and disgust. Positive emotions included here are happiness, pride, relief, and love. Hope and compassion are two emotions that are seen to have mixed valence.

Presenting a more synthesized conceptualization, Susan Folkman defines stress as "a situation that is appraised by the individual as personally significant and as having demands that exceed the person's resources for coping" (Folkman 2010: 902). As she further expounds, determining whether a situation is stressful can only be achieved by appraising or evaluating it to determine its significance. She identifies primary appraisal, shaped by a person's beliefs, values, and goals, and secondary appraisal, referring to the person's evaluation of the coping options. The options are determined by both the situation, such as whether there are opportunities for controlling the outcome, and by the person's physical, psychological, material, and spiritual resources for coping. In her view, whether a situation is considered as harmful or as a loss, a threat, or a challenge depends on the two forms of appraisal, which in turn, generate emotions. Anger or sadness are associated with loss appraisals; anxiety and fear are associated with threat appraisals; and anxiety mixed with excitement is associated with challenge appraisals. Folkman concludes that the personal quality of the appraisal process explains why a given event can have different meanings for different individuals.

With respect to coping, Folkman defines it as:

> [T]he thoughts and behaviors people use to manage the internal and external demands of stressful events. Stress and coping theory originally posited two kinds of coping: problem-focused coping, such as planful problem-solving, to address the problem causing distress using strategies such

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> as information gathering and decision making; and emotion-focused coping to regulate negative emotion using strategies such as distancing, seeking emotion support and escape-avoidance. (2010: 702)

Furthermore, Folkman identifies an additional kind of coping – meaning-focused coping – which regulates positive emotions. According to her, meaning-focused coping draws on deeply held values and beliefs in the form of strategies such as goal revision, strengths gained from life experience, and reordering priorities. As she reveals:

> The various types of coping often work in tandem, such that the regulation of anxiety (emotion-focused coping), will allow the person to concentrate on making a decision (problem-focused coping), which in turn is informed by a review of underlying values and goals (meaning-focused coping). Ideally, there would be independence among these processes so as to permit prediction. In reality, however, we are looking at a dynamic system of processes that are highly interactive. (Ibid.)

This exposition clearly establishes the close association between coping and stress. Stressful events invariably call for a reaction in one form or another based on an individual's underlying temperament and his or her assessment of the situation. Logically, and as will be surmised from the experiences of Afro-Spaniards presented here, individuals may react differently and employ different coping mechanisms to the same external aggravation. In the same vein, what may be distressful for one person may not be the case for another, what one person may assess to be a threat may be seen to be a challenge for another at a given material moment. Does this situation imply that an occurrence, a pronouncement, or an experience in and of itself cannot be evaluated to be stressful or traumatic and requires that some measure of coping is applied?

In the context of the foregoing, what pertains to Afro-Spaniards, especially female Afro-Spaniards living in Spain? What subject positions are they forced to assume within Spain's socio-cultural and political ambit? What measures does the female Afro-Spaniard draw on to cope with the situation?

In an opinion piece entitled "Racism is alive and kicking in Spain and is not just a US problem" (June 2, 2020), Laurence Dollimore, digital editor of *The Olive Press*, a leading expatriate newspaper in Spain,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

brings into focus the stories of several Afro-descendant peoples who have experienced racist behavior in Spain. As he rightly points out, "[p]eople like to imagine Spain as a liberal paradise with sun, sea, and sangria, but its racism continues to be an open secret – or a well-known fact that no-one is bothered to deal with" (2020: np). One example he cites is how routinely hundreds of teenagers use blackface in their Balthazar costumes during the annual Three Kings parade that dates back to 1880s. Since blackface depicts an extremely racist and painful history and, while perpetuating demeaning stereotypes of black people, also reinforces notions of white supremacy (Harmeet Kaur 2019), its enduring reach and normalization in Spain is rather telling. Dollimore's article further mentions other racially discriminatory acts such as the refusal of entry into establishments with a "no blacks" policy, name calling on the streets and at sporting events, and the denial of rental space to Afro-descendant people. The observation Dollimore makes to the effect that, "while the chances of seeing acts of racism are lowered, entrenched racism is very much still real" (2.6.2020) goes a long way to showing the pervasive nature of the problem Afro-Spaniards are confronted with.

Presenting a different perspective, in an article entitled "Tú, yo, los otros", Cynthia García (2020), journalism graduate and regular contributor to the online magazine *Afroféminas,* submits that a systematic and institutional racism exists "que se aprende desde la cuna" [that one discovers from birth], and it is manifested daily. For this reason, "no te sorprendes porque lo has escuchado toda tu vida y aprendes que tienen el poder y la palabra de designarte como quieran mientras ignoran tu voz y le quitan valor" [you are not surprised because you have heard it all your life and you learn that they have the power and the say to call you anything they want while they ignore your voice and diminish its value]. As she indicates, not only do Afro-descendant people suffer affronts to their person, they are also ignored, their experiences are not valued, and their voices are not heard. Thus, the denial of the existence of racism in Spain is a practice that seeks not only to silence the voices of the people who suffer it but also to render them invisible within society.

Echoing most of the issues raised in Dollimore's article, Sara Rosati, in an article for *El País* (January 18, 2017) entitled the "The

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

everyday racism black Spaniards face", examines a short video by Laura Robayna in which four young black Spaniards recount their experiences. The four Afro-Spaniards, Paula Prudencia Napi Collins, Moha Gerehou, Rubén H. Bermúdez, and Nayr Macedo, underscore the plight of young Afro-Spaniards who have to contend with questions, pronouncements, attitudes, and behaviors that ultimately destabilize their sense of self and belonging in society and force them to trigger coping measures. It is worth examining the responses that the four Afro-Spaniards in the video provide to the producers of the video who posed a series of questions including Why are you black? When did you realize you were black? Have you suffered discrimination? How do the media represent you? What do you want to change?

When 22-year-old political science student Nayr Macedo declares "we never decided that we were black, yellow or blue… It's other people who tell me I'm black", she strikes at the very core of the situation where an external force seeks to impose itself on and influence the thinking and perception that one has of oneself. It suggests that, effectively, it is other people who set out to define the identity of Afro-Spaniards, thereby denying or depriving them of the basic right of their self-determination. In most cases, Afro-Spaniards come into an awareness of their blackness and "difference" at an early age from the behavior of other children towards them in school. These may include the refusal to play with them, not being invited for play dates, and name-calling. Nayr Macedo recalls being called "una negra de mierda" [a shitty black girl] by kids in school and Moha Gerehou recounts being asked whether his skin runs when he takes a shower. For Ruben Bermudez, the song "Cola Cao" from the *Los conguitos* movie was sung at him by other kids. These episodes recounted by Nayr, Gerehou, and Ruben are aptly captured in Santiago Zannou's short film *Cara sucia* (2004) [Dirty Face]. Mateo, the main protagonist of the short film endures being laughed at, shunned, and taunted with shouts of "cara sucia" [dirty face] by children in his new school. As a result, he attempts to "clean" himself up by scrubbing his skin with cleaning agents. The turmoil and anguish that we see Mateo going through are definitely emotions that Nayr, Gerehou, and Ruben identify with and express in their submissions. Interestingly, *Cara sucia* was categorized under short fiction in nominations for the 19th edition of the Premio Goya. This categorization is reflective

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

of the institutionalization of the exclusionary practices that Afro-Spaniards have to endure at all stages of their lives. As young adolescents and young adults, Afro-Spaniards are confronted with discriminatory attitudes ranging from being denied entry into night clubs to being solicited on the streets, and being required to provide identification by the police when they, as male Afro-Spaniards, are seen with a Spanish girl.

Nayr Macedo talks about the time when a professor goes as far as to ask her "What's a black girl like you doing in university? Perhaps you should look for a husband because you shouldn't be here". The professor's question and subsequent remark are stress-inducing on many levels. They perpetuate the stereotype that Africans and African-descendant people are lacking in intellectual acumen. They also suggest that, as a (Afro-descended) woman, Nayr can only be accorded value through marriage. Still they seek to delimit where Nayr should be positioned within the society. Within the academic environment where the encounter takes place, the professor already occupies a position of authority with respect to his students. Therefore, with his pronouncements, he delegitimizes Nayr's own motives for attending the university and poses a threat to her academic success. These actions and other similar treatment, from others who see themselves as "natives" and thus belong to the material space more than the Afro-Spaniard, serve to destabilize the Afro-Spaniard's sense of selfhood. Undoubtedly, to overcome the odds she is confronted with, Nayr will have to adopt a coping mechanism. She can resolve to work extremely hard to prove her capability to the professor and do everything within her power to demonstrate to him that she indeed belongs to the university. On the other hand, she can decide not to deal with the situation and even withdraw from the university. Both actions constitute a means by which the student may deal with the situation, but whether she takes one course of action over the other depends on several factors, such as, her life goals, previous experiences, temperament, outlook on life, self-expectations, family support, etc.

In her book *Ser mujer negra en España* (2018) [Being a black woman in Spain], Desirée Bela-Lobedde recounts the incredulity people exhibit when she describes or identifies herself as a Spaniard. They are even more amazed to find out that she not only speaks Spanish but

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

is also fluent in Catalán. Bela-Lobedde, whose parents are from Equatorial Guinea, was born and raised in Barcelona, Spain and had no contact with her parents' country of origin until much later in her life. As she bemoans, people actually question why or how a black person would say she was a Spaniard: "Si eres española, ¿por qué eres negra?" [How come you are black if you are a Spaniard?; Bela-Lobedde 2018: 158]. The question perpetuates the erroneous assumption that one has to be white to be a Spaniard and refuses to accept Bela-Lobedde's affirmation of self-identity. This experience is echoed by Najat el Hachmi, Morrocan-born Spanish writer and winner of some of Catalan's most prestigious literary awards – *Premio Ramon Llull de novela* (2008), *Premio Sant Joan de narrativa* (2015), and recently the much-acclaimed *Premio Nadal* (2021). She notes that "la ciudadanía como la conocimos los hijos de los inmigrantes en Cataluña era a través de la catalanidad y ahora nos piden explicaciones a nosotros de por qué nos incorporamos a la catalanidad y no a otra cosa" [citizenship, as we the children of immigrants in Catalonia knew it, was through Catalannes and now they ask us to explain why we chose Catalan identity and nothing else; Corroto 12.09.2019]. Inherent in the questioning and demand for explanation in Bela-Lobedde's and Hachmi's examples is a non-acceptance of their self-identification. Furthermore, in rejecting their self-identification as Spaniards, the questioning subjects position themselves as the purveyors of knowledge. Ultimately, these questions seek to invalidate Bela-Lobedde's and Hachmi's status within Spanish society. Questions that inquire as to where Afro-Spaniards are from, when they arrived in Spain and/or when they are returning to their country are equally invalidating. They impose onto the Afro-Spanish subject a sense of unbelonging, illegitimacy, and instability.

In a video response to the question posted on her Youtube channel *Negra Flor* ¿Cómo vivir en España como una mujer negra? [How to live in Spain as a black woman?], Desirée Bela-Lobedde recounts a score of situations, attitudes, actions, and pronouncements which seek to negate and deny her place as a black woman within the society. Her comprehensive account of her experiences is accompanied by the measures she adopted to handle the circumstances. It is noteworthy that Bela-Lobedde exhibits a keen sense of understanding of her situation as an Afro-descendant woman in Spain. She observes that, as a minority

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

person living in Spain, one should expect that things will not be easy. This sense of understanding seems to condition her evaluation of and subsequent reaction to the potentially stressful episodes she is confronted with in her daily life. In Bela-Lobedde's opinion, Spain has a kind of racism which, although it cannot be described as blatant, is very present and manifests in subtle undertones, what she terms as "microagresiones" [micro-aggressions]. For example, a black woman is not expected to hold an administrative position in the public sector. She sees the situation as that in most racialized contexts, where black and minority women are often associated with domestic work or the service industry.

In an article that appeared in *El Diario* on January 21, 2016 "Racismos cotidianos: 'Para ser negra eres muy guapa'" [Everyday racisms: 'For a black woman you are very beautiful] Antoinette Torres Soler, cofounder of *Afroféminas*, an online journal that seeks to present a more holistic image of black women, makes the following affirmation which, while underscoring the point just made, highlights another aspect of the Afro-Spaniard's dilemma: "Se da por hecho que las mujeres negras somos vulnerables, que no tenemos estudios, que no somos de aquí..." [It is assumed that black women are vulnerable, we are not educated, we are not from here…]. As the title of Soler's article implies, black women are cast in a specific mold of appearance and are not expected to be endowed with beauty. Furthermore, the comment "para ser negra eres muy guapa" [for a black woman you are very beautiful] ignores that beauty is subjective and that its determination is not limited to a given set of criteria. The framing of what is supposed to be a compliment within the context of the words "para ser negra…" rather makes it denigrating. The identification of someone as being black, yellow, or white is a practice that overlooks the basic humanity of all people and forms the basis upon which a hierarchy in interrelations is created among people. For her part, Desirée Bela-Lobedde outlines another perspective to the expression that pervades the experience of female Afro-Spaniards, that is, the exoticization of the black woman or women of color. "La exotización reduce a cualquier mujer no blanca a la categoría de cosa, de menos persona; y por eso, sobre todo en el caso de las mujeres negras se comparan algunos de nuestros atributos con eso, con cosas" [Exoticization reduces any non-white woman to the category of

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

a thing, less of a human being; therefore, especially in the case of black women some of our features are compared with that, with things; Bela-Lobedde 2018: 102-103]. As she further submits, the issue is compounded by the fact that the person to whom the "compliment" is made is not expected to find anything wrong with it because it was said with the best of intentions.

If, as an adolescent, she experienced a more blatant form of racism or discriminatory treatment, as an adult, she finds that it is more subtle; it can be seen in the sexually suggestive looks that older men, for example, give her. Questions such as how long she has been living in Spain to be able to speak Castilian Spanish so well and people refusing to sit on the empty seat by her even though the bus is full and all seats are taken are some examples. Noteworthy is Bela-Lobedde's admission that perhaps, as an adolescent, she was more susceptible to the comments and attitudes that sought to denigrate her. This increased susceptibility implies that, having suffered such denigrating treatment since childhood, she has become less susceptible to its influence as an adult. It also means that, from an early age, she has had to adopt measures that have enabled her to cope and survive in a society where she is assailed at every turn by denigrating attitudes and situations. This idea is echoed by Sara Jiménez who, as a lawyer of Roma origin, confronts more if not most of the marginalizing attitudes Afro-descendant women face in Spain. As she affirms, "cuando eres tan discriminado en tu día a día parece que es lo normal. Llega un momento en que asimilas ser rechazado" [when you face so much discrimination in your daily life it appears to be the normal thing. There comes a time when you assimilate being rejected; in Sánchez 20.3.2017]. Similarly, Desirée Bela-Lobedde submits "[h]ace mucho que dejé de ofenderme por este tipo de cosas" [It's been a while since I stopped being offended by this kind of thing; Bela-Lobedde 2013a]. While painting a rather sad picture of the extent to which the marginalization of the Afro-descendant Spaniard is normalized, the comment also implies that the Afro-Spaniard is resigned to this fate.

It can be argued that the apparent "acceptance" or resignation, as expressed in Jiménez's and Bela-Lobedde's statements, indicate a pragmatic approach to the derogatory experiences facing Afro-Spaniards. While an Afro-Spaniard may choose to adopt a confrontational coping

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

measure to deal with these external negative interferences, the varied forms in which they manifest and the frequency with which they occur make it nigh impossible for him or her to be able to respond to every single stressor. A response to every stressor would require an extraordinary amount of effort and time and prove to be counterproductive. As indicated in her videos, Bela-Lobedde resolves that "[no] me puedo quedar con lo negativo" [I cannot let the negativity weigh me down]. If she does, she will continue to feel diminished to the point of losing all self-worth. To counter the negativity, she also resolves that "tengo que hacerme valer" [I have to assert myself], and continue with her life. She even adopts a set of mantras, which she practically recites to herself everyday: "Que no ofenda quien quiere sino quien puede" [Offence is not caused by those who want to but by those who can] and the famous quote by Victor Hugo "Quien me insulta siempre no me ofende jamás" [Turn a deaf ear to offensive words]. She does not allow all those comments to affect her; otherwise she would be allowing others to control her life. That is not to say that a huge amount of effort and self-control is not required to face the many "micro-aggressions" that the Afro-Spaniard encounters at every turn. As Bela-Lobedde admits, it means being alert, being on guard all the time, and it takes a toll on her.

In an article titled "The individual and collective experiences of Afro-Spaniards" published in the online multimedia, multidisciplinary journal, *Afropean*, Eric MB makes the following assertion, which underscores the extra exigencies people of African descent born in Spain must endure:

> Vivir en España siendo un sujeto postcolonial racializado como negro resulta ser agotador. Cansa y agota el tener que dar tantas explicaciones sobre cosas que, para nosotras, las personas racializadas como "no-blancas" son más que obvias. En algunos casos concretos, no es de extrañar que sintamos un desarraigo absoluto hacia lo español como identidad.
> [Living in Spain as a postcolonial subject racialized as black is exhausting. It is tiring and draining to have to give so many explanations about things which, for us, persons racialized as "non-whites" are more than obvious. In some specific instances, it is not surprising that we feel a deep sense of disconnection towards Spanish as an identity.] (MB 30.11.2017)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

From the comment quoted above, one can get a fair idea of how disconcerting it must be for Afro-Spaniards to have to explain their very existence in the only space that they know as home and have been raised in. Furthermore, it suggests that they have to live their lives like outcasts, as people ostracized from the very society they have grown up in. Consequently, even beyond suffering the effects of racial discrimination, they suffer a deeper consequence where their very being and existence is questioned and destabilized. Therefore, by resorting to "feeling a deep sense of disconnection to Spanish as an identity", Eric MB is expressing the kind of coping mechanism employed to endure the uncomfortable situation he is confronted with. If Afro-Spaniards have to endure this kind of treatment from an early age and have to adopt the coping strategy described, it is likely that, by the time they reach adulthood, their reactions will have become automated.

In commemoration of the International Day against Racism, the Spanish newspaper *El Diario* of March 20, 2017 features the experience of four Afro-descendant persons who have suffered racial abuse. That feature article also reveals some of the diverse ways by which Afro-Spaniards cope with practices that seek to undermine their self-worth and sense of belonging. In the first place, one observes that Winnie, one of the people affected "no tarda en encontrar los momentos racistas que permanecen en su memoria. Que le generaron preguntas, pero también culpas" [readily recalls racist episodes etched on her memory. Which raised many questions for her but also caused her guilt; Sánchez 20.3.2017]. She recalls an episode she suffered as an adolescent at the hands of her teacher and in front of her classmates. Although she does not relate the specific details of the incident, she describes her reaction as "[c]uando pasó, nunca lo relacioné con un episodio racista y concluí: 'será que soy tonta y no valgo'" [when it happened, I never linked it to a racist episode and concluded I must be stupid and not worthy; ibid.].

This statement exemplifies the acceptance of responsibility coping approach but also reflects an escape-avoidance mechanism. Whether consciously or not, she chooses to blame herself for the slight to her personhood and, in the process, does not confront her teacher or address the situation. The fact cannot be overlooked that, since the expression came from her teacher, Winnie found herself in an unequal power rela-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

tion and her reaction or non-reaction would have far-reaching repercussions. Her remark that "[h]e vivido muchísimos episodios racistas de pequeña sin identificarlos" [I experienced many racist episodes as a little girl without identifying them as such; Sánchez 20.3.2017] reveals the extent to which she has had to internalize such external destabilizing affronts to her person. She recounts an episode when, as a young girl of nine years, she travelled on the bus with her aunt. Apparently older folk had entered the bus but, because she and her aunt had not seen them, they did not offer their seats. So people started making such disparaging remarks as "[e]n esos países tienen muy mala educación" [in those countries they have very bad manners; ibid.] to their hearing as if they did not understand Spanish. As she laments "[n]o importa que sea española" [never mind that I am a Spaniard; ibid.]. Here the assumption is immediately made that, having physical traits that categorize them to be of African descent, they could not be Spaniards and therefore could not understand Spanish. From all indications, neither Winnie nor the aunt with whom she was traveling on the bus responded to the remarks from the other passengers. It is not clearly stated whether Winnie and her aunt consciously decided to walk away from a potential confrontation with their accusers. Nevertheless, according to the criteria outlined in Lazarus' (1993) ways of coping questionnaire, their reaction or non-reaction constitutes a self-control or escape-evasion mechanism.

As an adult, Winnie recounts an episode at her workplace when, out of the blue, a client begins to touch her: "Me tocaba como si fuera una mascota. Después de decir que qué piel más suave, le daba vuelta a mi mano comentando que la palma era blanca." [She stroked me as if I were a pet. After saying how smooth my skin was, she turned over my hand commenting that my palm was white; Sánchez 20.3.2017]. Effectively her body is reified and becomes an object of study, but from all indications Winnie did not react in a physically negative way to the invasion of her personal space and the treatment of her body as an object of study. According to her, "[m]e recordó la época en la que los negros estaban en el circo" [it reminded me of the time when Black people were in the circus; ibid.]. This reaction is consistent with the one she exhibited as a student in the episode with her professor. As we can see, she did not call out or react in a verbally or physically violent way. Rather, she connects the event to a practice from the past. It could well

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

be that her reaction was necessary in order to preserve her job. It could also be that, as a black woman, she has grown used to a consistent pattern of experiencing demeaning attitudes and therefore let it pass. Then again, perhaps her mood at the time could have contributed to her non-reaction because Winnie admits that she usually does not remain silent in the face of such demeaning attitudes. As a member of the group *Empoderamiento Femenino Afrodescendiente en España* (EFAE) [*Female Afrodescendent Empowerment in Spain*], she sees the need to fight against the inherent racism in society so that it is not repeated rather than to normalize it. More importantly she finds it necessary to make more visible the existence of Afro-Spaniards.

Another Afro-Spaniard whose case is featured by the commemorative *El Diario* edition is Yasmin, whose most memorable episode of racist treatment was also at the hands of her professor and occurred in front of her classmates. On the day of the March 11, 2004 bombings in Spain her professor stated in class that she could well be a female suicide bomber, Muslims are terrorists and she should be ashamed of herself. Her reaction, "Yo me sentí fatal" [I felt terrible; Sánchez 20.3.2017], justly communicates the extent to which the pronouncement by her professor affected her. Since the statement came from a person in authority such as her professor, Yasmin is thrust into a situation of marginality in an unequal power relation. With these words, the professor, as an older person and also as someone from whom Yasmin is to acquire knowledge, literally isolates and pushes Yasmin to the margins. She is exemplified as an object of terror and a danger to society. Indirectly, he marks her as a person to be avoided, effectively ostracizing her. As Yasmin reports, one of the immediate consequences of the professor's remarks was name-calling and taunting from her classmates. With this huge emotional burden, she began to score bad grades, which further earned her more derision as being "mora" [moor]. Furthermore, after the episode, she was shunned and could not make any friends at school. In effect, Yasmin is stripped of any sense of belonging, a crucial aspect of the social set-up of any group of people. Like Winnie, Yasmin is currently a member of a group that fights discrimination and stereotypes against Muslims: *SOS Racismo*.

It can be gathered from Winnie and Yasmin's stories that, while they adopt a given coping measure to deal with the stressful situation at

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

the moment it occurs, they also adopt another that is expected to yield results over the long term. In that case, they adopt the self-control or escape-avoidance coping measure in their early years and resort to a planful problem-solving strategy in their later years. While, on an individual level, they may be seen to be avoiding confrontation and may appear not to be dealing with the aggressions exacted upon them, as members of the various advocacy groups, their work is aimed at fighting systemic discriminatory practices as a collective.

In an interview with the digital newspaper *AhoraEG* on March 2, 2020, Lucía Asué Mbomío, awarded the 2020 Human Rights by the *Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España* [*Pro-Human Rights Association of Spain*], reveals that as a result of being questioned so many times "cuánto cobra" [how much she charges] when she sets out to meet with someone on the street, she resorted to carrying a book on subsequent occasions: "Para que se vea que estoy leyendo" [For them to see that I am reading; *AhoraEG* 2.3.2020]. This conscious effort on her part to carry a book so that people see she is reading is a coping strategy aiming to forestall the assumption that she is a prostitute on the street and avoiding solicitation, undesirable comments, or questions. This constitutes a planful problem-solving measure that anticipates a probable situation and prepares to avert it. It also shows that she has learnt from past experiences and has developed a mechanism that will help her handle the situation. While people who deem themselves to be "native" to Spain only have to show up at a meeting point and do not have to take any anticipatory measures when they have to wait to meet friends on the street, the female Afro-Spaniard cannot afford that luxury. Should she just show up on the street and wait, she risks being taken for a prostitute and the likelihood of being propositioned is almost guaranteed.

In her interview with the digital newspaper *AhoraEG* on March 2, 2020, Lucía Asué Mbomío, underscores the pressure that Afro-descendant Spaniards have to bring to bear on themselves within the society:

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> El punto de partida es sentir que tienes que demostrar más, desde que eres pequeña, para que te consideren igual que el resto. Eso no es justo, con todo, supongo que sirvió para forjar mi carácter y provocó que fuera bastante estudiosa.
> [The bottom line is you feel you have to do more, from childhood, to be considered equal to the rest. That is not fair; nevertheless, I suppose it has helped to form my character and caused me to be quite studious.] (*AhoraEG* 2.3.2020)

In some cases the conditions they encounter as Afro-descendant Spaniards contribute significantly in determining their career paths, as is the case with Lucía Asué Mbomio, who studied to become a journalist but also writes and dedicates a lot of time to fighting unjust, erroneous representations of Afro-descendant peoples in Spain:

> […] llevo ya algunos años denunciando, a través de charlas y artículos varios, cómo los medios de comunicación, las películas o la publicidad en España representan de forma poco fidedigna a las personas africanas y afrodescendientes, estigmatizándonos o re-estigmatizándonos.
> [For some years now I have been denouncing, through seminars and various articles, how the media, films or advertisements in Spain wrongly represent African and Afro-descended peoples, stigmatizing or re-stigmatizing us]. (Ibid.)

The same is true for Desirée Bela-Lobedde, whose decision to create *Negra flor,* now renamed *Desirée Bela*, make videos, and write blogs about black people's experiences was largely on account of being fed up with what she calls "aesthetic apartheid" within Spanish society, that is, the situation where the needs of Afro-descendant peoples are simply not catered for and, when available, cost far more than the regular products on the market. Bela-Lobedde contributes an interesting perspective when she observes that young people find it strange that she is black, lives in Spain, and is a Spaniard. In fact, they assume the right to determine how Spaniard the Afro-descendant person is: they go out of their way to make you feel different in a bad way, the level of education and the kind of work and positions that, as Afro-Spaniards, you are expected to hold. As an adolescent, there is the need to belong to a group, to have a worth, and not to be rejected so often. However, all too often, there is

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

a pervasiveness of hurtful comments and insinuations intended to communicate that the Afro-descendant person cannot be a Spaniard. Although these are experiences that make Afro-Spaniards mature and fast, they have to spend a great deal of their time casting off all the labels that have been put on them.

To a large extent, the advent of the internet has made it possible for socially conscious Afro-Spaniards to write about themselves, their experiences, and their aspirations not only as a counterpoint to the problematic representations in the mainstream media but also as a means of simply making their presence felt. In this case, writing a blog, recording a video, granting an interview, or even taking to Instagram become coping mechanisms to the extent that these actions, in the long run, seek to remedy a situation. In her article *in Afroféminas* "Tú, yo, los otros", cited earlier, Cynthia García (2020) goes as far as to submit that these are the only means by which the experiences of Afro-Spaniards can be made known.

Conclusion

Afro-diasporic female subjects find themselves in Spain for various reasons, they come with varied backgrounds, and with different socio-cultural baggage. They have different expectations, goals, interests, temperaments, ambitions, and worldviews, to name a few. They comprise a heterogeneous group whose idiosyncrasies reflect the dynamism that is life itself.

One may argue that it is a part of life for everybody to have to negotiate their way through situations of various kinds, and that, by being dynamic, life requires that one constantly adjusts and readjusts ones thinking, perception, actions, and reactions. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that the kind of attitudes and situations Afro-Spaniards are confronted with have their basis on the tone of their skin and demand a form of negotiating that goes over and beyond what the "average" person has to deal with. The overwhelming consensus from Afro-Spaniards and foreigners on the whole is that racism permeates the very fabric of Spanish society. As a logical consequence, it can be strongly argued that the life of the Afro-Spaniard, particularly the female Afro-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Spaniard in Spain, comprises a continuum of stressful, deprecating episodes that make the application of coping measures repeatedly necessary.

With the blogs, videoblogs, interviews, music, they become actors because they are forced to assume positions or personas that may be new to them or that they may be prepared or even not prepared for. They have to improvise and adapt to the situations that may confront them at any time. Failing that, they risk remaining an invisible presence in the space they rightfully belong to.

Works Cited

Aixelà-Cabré, Yolanda (2020): "The presence of the colonial past: Equatorial Guinean women in Spain", in: *Itinerario*, 44(1) Cambridge University Press, p. 140-158.

Abril, Guillermo (11.10.2009): "Ser negro en España", in: *El País Semanal*, in: https://elpais.com/diario/2009/10/11/eps/1255242413_850215.html (accessed: 28.6.2021).

AhoraEG.com (2.3.2020): "Entrevista a Lucia-Asué Mbomio Rubio: Periodista y Escritora afrodescendiente", in: *AhoraEg.com*, in: https://ahoraeg.com/modelo-de-mujer/2020/03/02/entrevista-a-lucia-asue-mbomio-rubio-periodista-y-escritora-afrodescendiente/ (accessed 20.5.2020).

Bela-Lobedde, Desirée (2013a): *Ser mujer negra I*, Video, in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fevqny1XMbo (accessed 12.10.2018).

– (2013b): *Ser mujer negra II*, Video, in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnT6aK0ce8I (accessed 12.10.2018).

– (2018): *Ser mujer negra en España*, Barcelona: Plan B.

MB, Eric (30.11.2017): "The individual and collective experiences of Afro-Spaniards", in: *Afropean. Adventures in Black Europe*, in: https://afropean.com/the-individual-and-collective-experiences-of-afro-spaniards/ (accessed 28.6.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Corroto, Paula (9.12.2019): “Entrevista: Najat El Hachmi: ‘Hay que prohibir el velo en los colegios españoles’”, in: *El Confidencial*, https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2019-09-12/najat-el-hachmi-siempre-han-hablado-por-nosotras-hijab_2222343/ (accessed 28.6.2021).

Dollimore, Laurence (2.6.2020): “Racism is alive and kicking in Spain and is not just a US problem”, in: *The Olive Press*, in: https://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2020/06/02/opinion-racism-is-alive-and-kicking-in-spain-and-is-not-just-a-us-problem/ (accessed 21.1.2022).

Folkman, Susan (2010): “Stress, coping and hope”, in: *Psycho-Oncology*, 19, p. 901-908.

Garcia, Cynthia (15.9.2020): “Tú, yo, los otros”, in: *Afroféminas*, in: https://afrofeminas.com/2020/09/15/tu-yo-los-otros/ (accessed 28.6.2021).

Kaur, Hermeet (7.2.2019): “This is why blackface is offensive”, in: *CNN*, in: https://www.google.com/cnn/2019/02/02/us/racist-origins-of-black
face/index.html (accessed 20.8.2020).

Krohne, Heinz W. (2002): “Stress and coping theories”, in: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~schez/folien/Krohne_Stress.pdf (accessed 10.12.2018).

Lazarus, Richard S. (1993): “Coping theory and research: Past, present, and future”, in: *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 55(3), p. 234-247.

Munevar M., Dora Inés/Wabgou, Maguemati (no date): “Mujeres africanas en Madrid: vidas y experiencias”, in: http://mugak.eu/revista-mugak/no-12/mujeres-africanas-en-madrid-vidas-y-experiencias (accessed 28.6.2021).

Olías, Laura, Miguel Campos/Caballero Medina, Pedro (20.1.2016): “Racismos cotidianos: ‘Para ser negra, eres muy guapa’”, in: *elDiario.es*, https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/video-racismos-cotidianos-negra-guapa_1_4232082.html (accessed 17.8.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Rosati, Sara (18.1.2017): “The everyday racism black Spaniards face”, Video, English Version by Alyssa McMurtry, in: *El País*, in: https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2017/01/11/inenglish/1484151919_267996.html (accessed 11.2.2020).

Sánchez, Gabriela (20.3.2017): “En España la gente no se considera racista pero lo es”, in: *elDiario.es*, in: https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/espana-gente-considera-racista_1_3523263.html (accessed 13.6.2020).

Toasije, Antumi (2009): “The Africanity of Spain: Identity and Problematization”, in: *Journal of Black Studies*, 39(3), p. 348-355.

Zannou, Santiago (ed.) (2004): *Cara sucia*, España: Centre d’Estudis Cinematogràfics de Catalunya (CECC), in: https://vimeo.com/108810859 (accessed 18.8.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Danae Gallo González

(Gießen)

El pelo afro y la afro-descendencia en España en el documental *Afro, así es mi pelo* (2013)

Abstract

This article analyzes the discourses produced by four Spanish women of African descent in the documentary *Afro, así es mi pelo* (2013), directed by Javier Sánchez Salcedo for the *Mundo Negro* platform. The goals are, first, to 'close read' the documentary's articulation of concepts such as 'race' and 'negritude' in the interviewees' emplotment of their hair and to analyze the functions these emplotments have in the sense of Hayden White's term (1973). Second, it compares the discourses and the concepts emploted in the documentary with those used in other linguistic areas of the "Romania", such as that of 'Négritude'. In doing so, this article presents first operational hypotheses on the circulation of audiovisual discourses about Afro-descendance in the "Romania", which, in turn, will contribute to systematizing these discourses in contemporary Spain.

"No soy americana, no llevo en la sangre ni raza gitana ni paya llevo por dentro. I'm not Afro-American, this is my country; I am from the barrio, Madrid siempre será el centro" (Buika 2005: 01:46-01:50). Esta es la intersección identitaria en la que se inscribe Concha Buika, cantante nacida en España, pero de origen guineoecuatoriano y una de las voces más fuertes del colectivo que ella misma denominó *New Afro Spanish Generation*, título de esta canción. Desde que Buika diera nombre y visibilidad a los "afro-españoles" en el mundo de la música ha podido observarse una paulatina organización de este colectivo en España. Ejemplo de ello fue la reactivación de la Asociación Panteras Negras en la primera década del siglo XXI (2001-2013),[1] del Centro

[1] Cf. Lavapiés 2017. Esta publicación ofrece un buen resumen de la historia de este movimiento y de su orientación política panafricanista garveísta.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

d'Estudios, Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Afroespañola en 2013, o de la creación un año después del máster oficial interuniversitario autodenominado afro-español "Culturas y Desarrollo en África".[2]

Más recientemente, el asociacionismo y la visibilidad de los afrodescendientes han aumentado significativamente, como muestran la entrada al Congreso de los Diputados de Rita Bosaho, la primera diputada "negra" en la historia de España en 2015, la creación en 2016 del exitoso festival anual "Afroconciencia" (desde 2018 re-denominado "Conciencia Afro") y de las plataformas en línea *Afroféminas* y *NGX Magazine* entre otras muchas, así como la fundación de la asociación antirracista de madres de afro-descendientes *Ukuaji* en 2018.[3] En los últimos años, el mundo editorial ha sido testigo de la entrada de autores afrodescendientes al mercado como Lucía Mbombío (2017, 2019), Desirée Bela-Lobedde (2019), Débora Ekoka (2019), Odome Angone (2019) o Silvia Albert Sopale (2019) con obras que plasman a través de diferentes géneros la experiencia de ser "negra" en España. Además, las reivindicaciones del colectivo se han visto recogidas en los medios generalistas, como es el caso de los periódicos *El salto*[4] o *El País*[5] y en la radio y televisión públicas (cf. Martínez/Muniain 2019). No obstante, esta inclusión siempre tiene lugar en secciones dedicadas al tema y fuera de las mismas, únicamente de manera puntual.

A pesar de todos estos avances, los afro-descendientes[6] siguen sin gozar en España, ni de gran atención académica, ni mediática, ya que

[2] Este máster surge en el seno del Grupo de Estudios de las Sociedades Africanas (GESA), que, aunque fue reconocido oficialmente en 2005 por la Generalitat de Catalunya lleva trabajando en temas "afro-descendientes" desde los ochenta.

[3] Borst y Gallo González 2018 hacen un análisis discursivo de estas plataformas y de sus homólogas portuguesas.

[4] La sección "España no es (solo) blanca" en el periódico *El salto.* Cf. El salto 2017-2018.

[5] La sección "África no es un país" en *El País* (cf. Huete Casado 2019).

[6] Se sigue la nomenclatura consensualmente adoptada en la Conferencia Regional de las Américas, llevada a cabo en Santiago de Chile en 2000. Con este término se denomina a los/as descendientes de personas africanas nacidas fuera de África, no solamente de las que llegaron al continente americano como parte del comercio de esclavos/as. Se considera que las personas afro-descendientes independientemente de si son descendientes de esclavos/as, continúan siendo víctimas de discriminación por las consecuencias epistémicas de la matriz colonial racializante (cf. Quijano 2000) que justificó la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

su presencia en los medios audiovisuales generalistas delante o detrás de la cámara es muy escasa (cf. Green 2012: 512; García Barranco 2011: 5)[7].

Ilustración 1: © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 00:44)

Este artículo se propone contribuir a llenar este hueco investigador al analizar las convergencias y divergencias en los discursos que producen cuatro mujeres españolas afro-descendientes en el documental *Afro, así es mi pelo* (2013), dirigido por Javier Sánchez Salcedo para la plataforma *Mundo Negro*.[8] El objetivo es, por un lado, en base a un entendimiento constructivista de la identidad, llevar a cabo una lectura detallada ('*close reading*') de la articulación que realiza el documental de conceptos como 'raza' y 'negritud' en el entramado del pelo afro de las entrevistadas. Además, se propone examinar las funciones que tiene este entramado en el sentido del término de Hayden White (1973), es decir, como "la manera mediante la cual se expresa una secuencia de eventos moldeados en un relato" (ibíd.: 8, traducción de la autora de

esclavitud y que incita a la internalización de la misma por parte de los/as propios/as afro-descendientes.

[7] Entre las (pocas) excepciones a la regla podemos nombrar a Stuart Green, a Aurelia Martín Casares y a su grupo de investigación en la Universidad de Granada y a los trabajos de Julia Borst y Danae Gallo González.

[8] El rol de este realizador se discutirá más adelante en este artículo.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

este artículo). Por el otro, pretende poner los discursos y los conceptos que en él se entrelazan en relación con otros similares y en algunos casos ya pretéritos en otras áreas lingüísticas de la "Romania", como el de la '*Négritude*'. De esta manera se presentarán hipótesis operativas sobre cómo circulan los discursos audiovisuales en torno a la intersección "afro" en el área lingüístico románico que contribuirán, a su vez, a la sistematización del discurso sobre la afro-descendencia en la España contemporánea.

Estos discursos contemporáneos no pueden entenderse en profundidad sin conocer las particularidades de España en su relación con el "otro-negro" en su vertiente histórica (cf. Wright 2015: 14; Green 2014: 53). A pesar de la gran narrativa (cf. Lyotard 1979) "blanqueadora" que sostiene la 'comunidad imaginada' (cf. Anderson 1983) de España (cf. Martín Casares 2012; Herzog 2012), los afro-descendientes formaron parte de la población de la actual "España peninsular" desde mucho antes de que comenzara la trata de esclavos/as transatlántica (cf. García Barranco 2011: 6). Durante el periodo de *Al-Andalus* (711-1492), pero especialmente en los siglos subsiguientes con el así (mal) llamado "descubrimiento" de América (1492) y el comercio transatlántico de esclavos/as, el número de afro-descendientes aumentó exponencialmente en la Península Ibérica. No obstante, no todos vivieron el llamado "pasaje del medio" en los barcos negreros hacia el continente americano y la subsiguiente experiencia de esclavitud en el mismo, sino que fueron directamente "importados" a la Península Ibérica desde África. En los siglos XVI y XVII las actuales España y Portugal albergaban el mayor número de población africana y afro-descendiente de toda Europa, en su mayoría esclavizada (cf. Martín Casares y Barranco 2009: 52; Cortés López 1989: 18-19). Irónicamente, en paralelo al aumento de la población afro-descendiente en España, tiene lugar el progresivo "blanqueamiento" de España en el nivel del discurso que invisibiliza la diversidad demográfica del país (cf. Fra-Molinero 2009: 147).

Con la abolición de la esclavitud a finales del siglo XIX, se dice que la población "negra" comenzó a declinar. No obstante, este descenso se debe a que desde las esferas gubernamentales se intensificó la diseminación del discurso fundacional de la identidad nacional como homogénea en términos "raciales" siguiendo la ideología de la "raza" imperante en la época y a la silenciación de la historia afro-descendiente en

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

la Península Ibérica (cf. García Barranco 2011: 5). No todos los libertos, ni sus descendientes salieron del país y los diversos flujos migratorios hacia España a lo largo de los últimos siglos confirman la presencia – más o menos numerosa, más o menos constante– de afro-descendientes en el país (cf. Ferrero Turrión 2011: 87).

A pesar de ello, España sigue entramando su identidad nacional de manera más o menos consciente como 'comunidad imaginada' en torno al (supuesto) color de su piel, que se concibe como "blanco". Este significante "blanco" se instaura, además, en el sentido de los *Critical Whiteness Studies,* como norma no marcada e invisible de lo que significa ser "español" dentro de una matriz discursiva racializante (cf. Quijano 2000) y racista de dominación que articula la "españolidad blanca" como símbolo de superioridad, secularización, progreso e inteligencia (cf. Tißberger 2016: 29). Por ello, se supone que toda persona "no-blanca" seguramente sea extranjera, lo que relega a los afro-descendientes independientemente de su nacionalidad al estatus de migrante. Esta asunción ya implica cierto grado de rechazo, en tanto en cuanto niega la pertenencia de los afro-descendientes a la 'comunidad imaginada' de España. Además, la reciente crisis económica que sacudió al país con especial virulencia deterioró la actitud hacia la migración sobre todo entre 2007 y 2011 e incrementó las actitudes discriminatorias hacia los afro-descendientes (cf. Rinken 2011: 222; Fernández, Valbuena/Caro 2018: 144). Los medios de comunicación de masa y la recurrencia con la que han cubierto las noticias de la migración subsahariana irregular como preocupantemente hambrienta, desesperada y masiva ha favorecido a su vez la asunción metonímica de que toda migración es irregular y supone un problema económico para el país (cf. Berriane/de Hass 2012: 2). Además, la asunción acrítica de estos discursos mediáticos y la suposición de que toda persona "no-blanca" es extranjera, migrante y necesitada económicamente ha provocado que en muchas ocasiones los afro-descendientes españoles se vean integrados en estos discursos xenófobos e invisibilizados como colectivo.[9] Esto mismo ha dificultado

[9] Según las últimas encuestas disponibles en el momento de la publicación de este artículo, las del 2016: "los resultados del análisis de actitudes y percepciones de los españoles hacia la inmigración en 2016 y su comparación con los años anteriores, muestran una evolución bastante favorable en prácticamente la totalidad de las variables que miden las actitudes racistas, intolerantes o xenófobas de los encuestados, alcanzando

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

el acceso de personas afro-descendientes a puestos de trabajo en los medios de comunicación de masa que les permitan influir en la toma de decisiones de cómo visibilizar y dar voz al colectivo o influir en la representación del mismo.[10]

Con *Afro, así es mi pelo* se tomó una vía alternativa a la de los medios de comunicación de masa al publicar el documental de manera gratuita en línea en Vimeo y en YouTube. Estas plataformas surgieron gracias al lanzamiento de la Web 2.0. en 2004, lo que supuso toda una revolución en el entendimiento de los medios de comunicación y también en lo que se refiere a la circulación de voces y de imágenes de los afro-descendientes, ya que el sistema incluye una serie de funciones que posibilitan la interactuación y la colaboración entre personas como creadoras de contenido. André Lemos llama a estas funciones de la Web 2.0. 'post-masivas' (cf. Lemos 2010: 417).[11] No son novedosas en la red, porque estas ya se ejecutaban en los medios de comunicación análogos desde hace décadas, como por ejemplo en los fancines y otros medios alternativos. Además, la esfera digital no está exenta de desigualdad social, de racismo y xenofobia: si bien es cierto que la primera brecha digital ha quedado superada en Europa, a saber, la brecha al acceso a la tecnología digital en relación con la "clase" social de pertenencia (cf. Ragneda/Muschert 2018: 2), no existe consenso sobre la capacidad y la motivación de los y las usuarias de sacar provecho de las potencialidades de Internet en función de sus orígenes sociales, ni sobre la verdadera posibilidad de extrapolar la agencia adquirida en Internet al mundo "real", la segunda y tercera brechas digitales respectivamente

en muchos casos, en 2016 los mejores comportamientos de las series analizadas" (Fernández/Valbuena/Caro 2018).
Los mensajes racistas y xenófobos del partido de extrema derecha VOX y la entrada de este partido en el Congreso de los Diputados con 24 escaños en las elecciones de abril de 2019 muestran el calado y la perdurabilidad de estos discursos que culpan al migrante de los problemas de España.

[10] Esto no quiere decir que en los medios de comunicación no trabaje o haya trabajado gente afro-descendiente. Lucía Mbomío, periodista afro-descendiente ha recopilado una lista de 40 reporteros/as, presentadores/as o tertulianos/as negros/as que han trabajado en la televisión en España desde los 60 (Mbomío 2018b).

[11] Lemos no usa el prefijo "post" para aludir a algo que llega al final del proceso de los medios de comunicación de masa, sino para expresar una manera nueva de entender lo que no puede incluirse en la etiqueta de medios de comunicación de masa (cf. Lemos 2010: 417).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

(cf. Azzolini/Schizzerotto 2017: 15). No en vano, como afirma Nakamura, Internet no sólo sirve de plataforma para poner en escena identidades "raciales" de manera creativa y crear una sensación de comunidad entre sus integrantes, también reproduce estereotipos y narrativas racializantes. Asimismo, como advierte la autora, las identidades "raciales" autoconstruidas en línea no son subversivas, liberadoras o progresistas *per se* (cf. 2002). Sin embargo, este artículo considera que la Web 2.0. impulsó de manera significativa la potencialidad de crear un entorno comunicacional más participativo, multidireccional y en cierto modo liberado de algunas de las trabas de los medios de comunicación de masa (cf. Lemos 2010: 404).

El documental *Afro, así es mi pelo* fue dirigido por Javier Sánchez Salcedo para *Mundo Negro digital,* suplemento a la edición impresa de la revista homónima publicada mensualmente desde 1960 bajo la iniciativa de los Misioneros Combonianos de la Iglesia Católica desde 2007 (cf. "Sobre mundo negro" 2017). Si bien hoy en día el equipo redactor cuenta con personas afro-descendientes, tanto la dirección de la revista como la gran mayoría de los/as periodistas no lo son, por lo que podría argüirse que el producto cultural no recoge la expresión del significado que tiene el pelo afro para los afro-descendientes en España. El emisor principal en el sistema comunicativo es un hombre "blanco", Javier Salcedo, que produce, además, bajo el auspicio de una congregación católica misionera[12]. Y a pesar de que esta rama misionera se expresó en contra del racismo bajo el que operaban las misiones en África (cf. González Fernández 1993: 153-163), no debe olvidarse ni la imposición epistemológica que subyace a la lógica de la acción misionera, ni la responsabilidad histórica de la iglesia católica en la esclavitud, en la colonización y sus consecuencias.[13] Esto lleva a retomar la discusión sobre el concepto del 'subalterno' de Spivak (1988) y plantear si el documental "habla por" las afro-descendientes y reproduce los mecanismos que les impiden acceder a un lugar de enunciación propio.

[12] Los técnicos de imagen y sonido y los diseñadores gráficos son Pedro Garrido –marido de Sofía, una de las entrevistadas en *Afro,así es mi pelo*– y María de Cos. No se ha encontrado información acerca de si son o se consideran afro-descendientes.

[13] Véase al respecto de la responsabilidad de la iglesia católica en la colonización y el racismo por ejemplo Zavala (1972: 60), Calpini (2018) y Klein (2010).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

No obstante, el documental está colgado en plataformas en línea de libre acceso, lo que hace que deba repensarse el proceso comunicativo que tiene lugar con la visualización del vídeo, ya que la lógica de búsqueda en esta plataforma hace que en muchos casos se acceda al contenido sin que se pase por el filtro de quién ha sido el emisor principal. Es decir, que en muchos casos los receptores interpretan el mensaje de *Afro, así es mi pelo* sin darse cuenta de que el emisor es Javier Salcedo para *Mundo Negro*. La composición del documental hace que, además, deba relativizarse la idea de un mensaje producido por un emisor único, Javier Salcedo, que "habla por" las entrevistadas. El vídeo ilustra la entrevista de cuatro mujeres afro-descendientes intercalando sus respuestas en torno a seis bloques temáticos que se separan visualmente a través de rótulos numerados y con títulos. El entrevistador o la entrevistadora y sus preguntas no aparecen en ningún momento, ni visual, ni auditivamente. De este modo, como ya indica el pronombre posesivo 'mi' en el título del documental, *Afro, así es mi pelo,* el vídeo se convierte en una plataforma en la que se da voz y presencia única y exclusivamente a la experiencia personal de las protagonistas. No obstante, debe tenerse en cuenta que la voz a la que accede el receptor está mediada e influida por las preguntas no diegéticas elegidas por la persona que las entrevista y por el proceso de postproducción en el que se selecciona qué partes de las entrevistas se muestran, cuáles no y cómo estas piezas se montan en el producto final.

El documental, de unos treinta minutos de duración, comienza con voces femeninas no diegéticas acompañadas de imágenes de mujeres afro-descendientes en actitud sonriente y en un ambiente distendido que insisten en la belleza del pelo afro y presentan, así, indirectamente la temática y el modo de lectura del documental. Después de la portada con el título *Afro, así es mi pelo*, este se vuelve más tradicional a nivel narrativo-formal: se estructura en torno a las entrevistas realizadas a cuatro jóvenes madrileñas afro-descendientes: Sofía, Ngolo, Gaelle y Winie.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ilustración 2: © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 01:08; 02:18; 02:38; 01:28)

Excepto Sofía, la mayor, de 32 años, que dirige su empresa de cuidado del cabello afro *Sofiablack,* todas ellas son estudiantes y tenían en el momento del rodaje del documental entre 19 y 26 años de edad. Tras una definición de Sofía y de Ngolo de lo que es el pelo afro y de sus características –su fragilidad y su necesidad de hidratación–, el rótulo número 1, "Desde niña desrízate el pelo", introduce el primer tema sobre el que torna la entrevista.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ilustración 3*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 01:58)

Ilustración 4*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 02:14; 02:45; 03:54; 03:05)

Las respuestas de las protagonistas se escuchan en un intercalado entre las imágenes sincronizadas de la entrevista e imágenes congeladas de las cuatro sosteniendo una foto de ellas de niñas o de adolescentes. Las entrevistadas relatan los recuerdos de su pelo en este periodo de su vida: todas afirman que llevaban peinados típicamente afro, como los "afros" propiamente dichos en el caso de Gaelle, trenzas, coletas y moñitos en

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

el caso de Winie y Sofía. Ngolo no hace mención a esta etapa y se refiere directamente al período en el que empezó con los tratamientos de desrizamiento capilar, a los cuatro años. El resto sitúa este proceso de desrizado más tarde en torno a los ocho o los diez años de edad aproximadamente. A pesar de las obvias semejanzas en su experiencia, la semántica visual de las fotos seleccionadas por Gaelle y Sofía –de muy niñas, con trencitas– y las de Ngolo y Winie –de adolescentes, con el pelo alisado– indican diferentes modos de entramar su identidad en el presente de la narración, como se examinará a continuación.

Si bien todas las protagonistas comparten la experiencia del tratamiento desrizante con el agresivo producto químico y todas se refieren a los insoportables picores y las quemaduras que les provocaba en el cuero cabelludo, no todas le otorgan a esta etapa el mismo protagonismo en su entramado retrospectivo. Únicamente dos de ellas, Ngolo y Winie, ponen énfasis en esta etapa y se paran a valorar su aspecto físico de entonces, reconociendo que se desrizaban el pelo bastante a menudo por motivos estéticos, ya que se veían guapas con el pelo alisado. Es decir, aceptan que la auto-percepción de su aspecto físico en aquel momento era positiva. Asimismo, al mostrar sus fotos, incluyen material visual a su narrativa textual y añaden otro nivel semántico de tipo visual que refuerza el énfasis en esta fase como parte integral de la narrativización de su historia de vida.

Las otras dos, Gaelle y Sofia, no niegan haber pasado por ello, pero al no mostrar fotos de este periodo, ocultan visualmente esta etapa de su vida. Al mismo tiempo, con la decisión de enseñar fotos de su pasado "afro" y ocultar el periodo "no-afro", crean un entramado selectivo pero naturalizado de su "yo" en el presente. Sofía se excusa por haber aceptado el desrizado arguyendo que a esa edad era vulnerable y que se dejó "comer la cabeza", expresión con la que se hace hincapié en que el desrizado fue un desvío de su "verdadero yo". Asimismo, al igual que Gaelle, disculpa a su madre por haberle hecho pasar por el desrizado. Esta última afirma que "a los 10 años nos empezó a desrizar el cabello a mí y a mi hermana, bueno porque es más fácil a la hora de peinar para ir a clase y no se tenía que preocupar" (02:23-02:33). Sofía, por su parte comenta:

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> [l]ógicamente en los años 80 no había mucha información acerca de cómo cuidar el pelo. Entonces, ella, la verdad es que lo hacía súper bien, yo me veo mis coletitas, mis moñitos… A la edad de 6 u 8 años, no recuerdo bien, una amiga le dijo: ¡pero ¿cómo llevas a tu hija con ese pelo?! y le recomendó una famosa peluquería aquí en Madrid […] y ¿qué hicieron?: desrizarme el pelo. (03:05-03:40)

Según la entrevistada, su madre, "blanca", no comenzó a desrizar el pelo a su hija por verdadera convicción, sino por la inseguridad que le produjeron ciertas presiones sociales que le transmitían que no sabía cuidar del pelo de su hija "en condiciones", como indica el uso despectivo del demostrativo 'ese'. Este tema se retoma en otro apartado del documental, por lo que se volverá al análisis del mismo más adelante.

El segundo rótulo: "Historia del pelo afro. Desde la esclavitud hasta hoy" da paso a una parte del documental dominado por Sofía. Esta hace un resumen de los diferentes acontecimientos que han ido influenciando la estética capilar de los afro-descendientes a lo largo de la historia, –desde la esclavitud y sus consecuencias hasta el día de hoy– mientras se intercalan y apilan fotos de época.

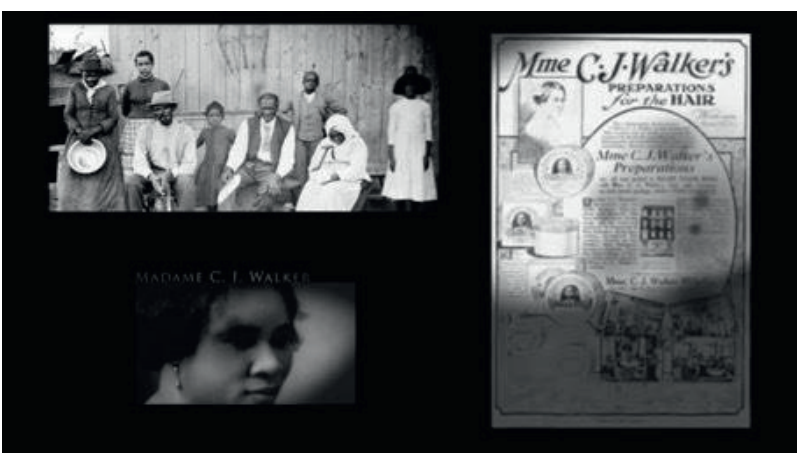


Ilustración 5*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 06:07; 07:40; 07:49)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ilustración 6*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 10:20)

La entrevistada explica los orígenes y los motivos de la práctica de desrizarse el pelo entre africanos/as y afro-descendientes argumentando que muchas personas esclavizadas se ocupaban de la higiene del pelo de sus amos/as. El estatus social y la buena calidad de vida que tenían los/as amos/as y la percepción negativa que tenía este grupo dominante de los rasgos de los/as esclavos/as, "propios de la raza negra" (07:35), llevaron a que se vieran obligados a emular la estética dominante y a querer ocultar su pelo con sombreros y fulares. Sin embargo, comenta, no fue hasta alrededor del 1800 cuando Madame C.L. Walker introdujo "la primera línea de productos exclusivos para la mujer negra" (07:40). En ese periodo Garret Morgan desarrolló y comercializó el primer desrizante capilar por casualidad, cuando, al tratar de buscar la solución para suavizar el tejido de sus telas para evitar pérdidas económicas por la rotura de agujas, se dio cuenta de que el producto que había desarrollado también podía aplicárselo a su pelo. Tras este hito, la narradora Sofía hace una gran elipsis y retoma la historia del pelo afro en los años sesenta del siglo veinte. Así establece al movimiento estadounidense *Black Power* como el origen de la lucha por concienciar a los afro-descendientes de que deben estar orgullosos de sus raíces africanas, de que: "Tú eres negro y tu belleza es negra" (10:44).

Nótese que esta narrativa, aunque haga uso de términos como el de 'raza', controvertidos hoy en día sobre todo en círculos académicos de

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Europa, pero típicos de la comunicación transatlántica de los movimientos de la *Négritude* y del *Harlem-Renaissance,* iniciados por Aimé Césaire y Léopold Sédar Senghor y por William DuBois respectivamente alrededor de los años treinta, continuados por Frantz Fanon en los cincuenta y utilizados en su vertiente semiótica en la actualidad sobre todo en el contexto latinoamericano (cf. Segato 2010), el documental los deja de lado en la historia (selectiva) que traza del pelo afro.[14]

Asimismo, es notable que Sofía, en su historia del pelo afro, no haga referencia ni al *natural hair movement* estadounidense, ni más significativo para los propósitos de este libro, al *mouvement nappy* francés o al italiano, que se dio a conocer de manera especialmente significativa en el siglo XXI con el *boom* de internet.[15] De este modo, la entrevistada, en su función de narradora, propone un entramado de la historia del pelo afro que, a partir de la selección y la elipsis de elementos históricos, traza una genealogía "afro-estadounidense" en la que se basa la articulación de la afro-descendencia en España que propone el documental.

El tercer rótulo: "Rechazo y criminalización" introduce el análisis de las entrevistadas de las razones por las que se aferraron al pelo desrizado durante –lo que el documental presenta como– un periodo de tiempo largo. Como ya indicaba la selección de fotos de la infancia y su significado en el entramado identitario de las chicas, en esta parte el protagonismo recae en Wini y Ngolo. Gaelle ni siquiera aparece en esta sección y el tono de Sofía es muy diferente al de las otras entrevistadas. Ngolo es la que más se abre a reconocer su "yo" pasado "no-afro". Reconoce que "no me gustaba mi pelo porque no era el pelo que yo veía en la calle. Quizás me hacía sentirme demasiado diferente" (11:01-11:08). "[…] Me hacía sentirme parte de un grupo" (12:29). No obstante, la entrevistada va más allá y reconoce haber adoptado lógicas endoracistas cuando afirma que al ver a alguien con el pelo afro pensaba:

[14] No obstante, nótese que algunos de los teóricos de la *Négritude* de los años 30, a pesar de su uso del término 'raza', no la concebían en su dimensión biológica (cf. Fernández 2010: 114), sino, como en el caso de Césaire, como "constructos sociales inventados para justificar la conquista" (Oliva 2014: 83).

[15] El documental no utiliza el término 'nappy' en ningún momento. Sobre el movimiento *nappy* en Italia, véase el artículo de Borst y Neu-Wendel en este volumen.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"¿Por qué no se arregla? ¡Qué mal, qué horror, qué cutre!" (13:17-13:27). Así, internalizando discursos racistas, criticaba a aquellos afro-descendientes que no se asimilaban y no presentaban su pelo según el llamado "adecentamiento" dominante.

A diferencia de la clara vergüenza ajena de corte endoracista que caracteriza el discurso de Ngolo, Winie arguye de manera más matizada que admiraba a las que lucían su pelo afro. La admiración venía de la fuerza y de la personalidad que, supone, caracterizaba a estas mujeres, pero reconoce que "no me atrevía a hacerlo […] me sentía más guapa, las que lo tenían afro eran seguras de sí mismas" (15:05-15:12), pero no guapas. Es decir, que valoraba la agencia de las que llevaban el pelo afro pero no lo consideraba estético. Sin embargo, en su historia, Winie pronto se aleja de este "yo anterior". Reprocha a las cantantes negras que se aclaren la piel y que siguan la estética dominante "blanca" porque tienen "el canon de belleza […] un poco confundido" (13:43). Si el uso de la tercera persona del plural, 'tienen', ya marca gramáticamente que Winie no se incluye en este grupo, el uso de los deícticos posesivos en la siguiente afirmación completa la visión de los grupos de los que se demarca y en los que sí se circunscribe: "Yo creo que *piensan* que no es bonito porque piensan que *su* raza, *nuestra* raza, es inferior al resto de las razas […] y yo no quiero ser inferior a los demás, pues no me dejo el pelo afro y así me acerco […] al resto de las razas" (11:48-12:10). Recurre una vez más al uso de la tercera persona del plural para alejarse de las que llevan el pelo liso ("piensan") y se distancia en un primer momento con el posesivo 'su' de lo que llama su "raza" de la de propia. Sin embargo, a pesar de las diferencias de percepción del pelo afro, rectifica su distanciamiento y enfatiza que se trata de "nuestra raza", en primera persona del plural, incluyéndose así en el grupo de "raza negra" mientras se señala el pecho. Esta es la identidad colectiva, de tendencia esencializante, en la que articula su "yo", ahora independientemente del peinado o de las percepciones más o menos endoracistas de sus integrantes.

La insistencia en las palabras 'raza' y/o 'negro/a' a las que Sofía también hace referencia a lo largo del documental –aunque curiosamente sea la única que reconoce ser hija de española y de padre de

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

origen africano[16]– resulta, para académicos convencidos como Stuart Hall (2014) de que la "raza" es un "*floating signifier*", un "significante flotante, vacío", especialmente chocante. No obstante, no debe olvidarse, como advertía Nakamura, que las identidades articuladas en línea no tienen por qué ser "progresistas" *per se* (cf. 2002), o más bien, corresponder con las premisas post-estructuralistas/post-modernistas del mundo académico y con sus modos consensuales y en cierto sentido algo elitistas de argumentación. Una consulta superficial de varios blogs del movimiento *nappy* francés e italiano no muestra resultados que puedan indicar que el uso del término 'raza' sea común entre los afro-descendientes de estas comunidades lingüísticas. No obstante, para confirmar la circulación de discursos y de estos conceptos en la "afroromania" europea serían necesarios análisis comparativos multilingües que ayudaran a dilucidar estos aspectos, objetivos, que, sin embargo, transcienden el alcance de este trabajo.

Sofía, por su parte, no habla ni de su fase desrizada, ni de sus sentimientos al respecto. Esta tendencia a silenciar este período de su vida ya se observaba en la fotografía de infancia que eligió mostrar en el apartado anterior. En su entrevista resalta un comentario, indignado, y desde una perspectiva más politizada, de que "se sigue criminalizando mucho el tema del pelo afro, porque lo vamos heredando de padres a hijos en *nuestras* propias familias [que] *piensan* que si tú tienes un pelo afro no es un pelo bueno" (11:43, cursiva de la autora de este artículo). Nótese de nuevo el distanciamiento de la entrevistada de las imposiciones de la cultura afro-descendiente mayoritaria en España a través del uso de la tercera persona del plural en el "piensan" para referirse al endoracismo de la comunidad negra, a la presión grupal y a la 'micro-hegemonía' (cf. Blommaert/Varis 2011) instigada dentro de las propias familias, es decir, a la normatividad que gobierna los detalles de la vida social en un grupo determinado y que se establecen como emblemas de su identidad.[17] En contraposición a lo que entrama como una imposi-

[16] No especifica la nacionalidad de su padre.

[17] Con el concepto de 'micro-hegemonía' Bommaert y Varis enfatizan la multiplicidad de hegemonías y normatividades grupales coexistentes en diferentes ámbitos de la vida de una misma persona. Este fenómeno de la presión grupal afro-descendiente lo observa también Spaulging en el contexto estadounidense (2016: 129; véase también Craig 1997: 401).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

ción afro-descendiente de la "belleza negra blanqueada" y su cultura sojuzgadora del pelo natural, especifica que ella no juzga a las afro-descendientes que llevan el pelo liso. No obstante, añade un matiz, cuando insta a "que lo hagas porque te gusta, no porque pienses que llevar el pelo afro es malo, pero que se empiece a descriminalizar el pelo afro" (15:21). Con la metáfora penitenciaria que recoge el término 'descriminalizar' Sofía apela en vocativo a la comunidad africana y afro-descendiente en España y reivindica que dejen de estigmatizar el pelo afro y que se liberen de los discursos valorativos y correctivos que encierran ciertas elecciones, que deberían ser, meramente estéticas.

El rótulo 4, como su propio título indica, "Descubrimiento", supone un punto de inflexión en la articulación de la identidad de las protagonistas desde el endoracismo o la sumisión a estéticas "blanqueadoras" hasta la concienciación y liberación de los mismos y la decisión de llevar el pelo afro. En este proceso, todas las entrevistadas afirman haber tenido un referente femenino afro-descendiente que les ayudó en su transición: Ngolo, su cuñada, Winie, su hermana, y Gaelle y Sofía, otras afro-descendientes en Internet.

Para Ngolo el punto de inflexión llegó cuando consiguió deconstruir el discurso de que el pelo afro era el reflejo de la falta de adecentamiento y de higiene. Comenta que se dio cuenta de que su cuñada, la que se convertiría en su referente, llevaba el pelo afro pero no era una descuidada: "La empecé a ver cómo se cuidaba el pelo […] y descubrí un pelo bonito" (15:57-16:01). Así, el prejuicio de la falta de adecentamiento que imposibilitaba la percepción estética del pelo afro quedaba desbloqueado, lo que hizo que Ngolo pudiera percibir el pelo afro como bonito. Para emular a su referente, la entrevistada reconoce que: "entonces es cierto que al principio lo hice un poco por estética. También lo hice porque el pelo estaba ya quemadísimo de tanto rubio, de tanto liso" (16:17-16:26). De este modo, que la protagonista alegue que su decisión de dejarse el pelo afro tenía motivos mayoritariamente estéticos y de salud capilar, conlleva que, a estos motivos, se le sumaron otros con posterioridad y que, por lo tanto, hubo un desarrollo en el rol que adquiría su pelo en su entramado identitario, como se analizará más adelante en este artículo.

Winie, por su parte, entrama este proceso como algo a lo que estaba destinada. Afirma que empezó a cuidarse el pelo afro todas las mañanas

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"como si algo en el destino hubiera dicho: tienes que ir con el pelo afro porque eres negra, no sé" (17:04). No arguye con razones ideológicas e instituye este cambio como una desembocadura natural ligada al color de su piel.

Sofía sí que reconoce que no se sentía a gusto con su pelo alisado. A diferencia de Winie y Ngolo declara que no tenía la sensación de que tuviera el pelo bonito. La percepción de que el cabello liso no le quedaba bien le llevó a cortárselo cada vez más corto, hasta que –expone– decidió raparse el pelo, es decir, hacer lo que en la jerga se llama hacer un "*big chop*" e investigar en blogs cómo dejarse el pelo natural. Comenta que estos blogs eran "de Estados Unidos, lógicamente, y en otros países europeos" (18:27). La entrevistada establece como "lógico" que los blogs que encontró fueran de Estados Unidos en su mayoría, pero no explica la razón de dicha lógica. No obstante, teniendo en cuenta la genealogía del pelo afro centrada en Estados Unidos que esbozara la misma Sofía con anterioridad, no extraña que la reitere aquí al sugerir que los "afro-estadounidenses" guían cualitativa o cuantitativamente la producción y circulación del conocimiento sobre el pelo natural.

Gaelle va más allá y apunta que tomó la decisión de dejarse el pelo natural inspirándose en vídeos de YouTube. Según la entrevistada, el cambio se debió a que "quería ver cómo era mi pelo natural. Cuando llevas mucho tiempo con el pelo alisado como que se te olvidan tus rizos" (17:52).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

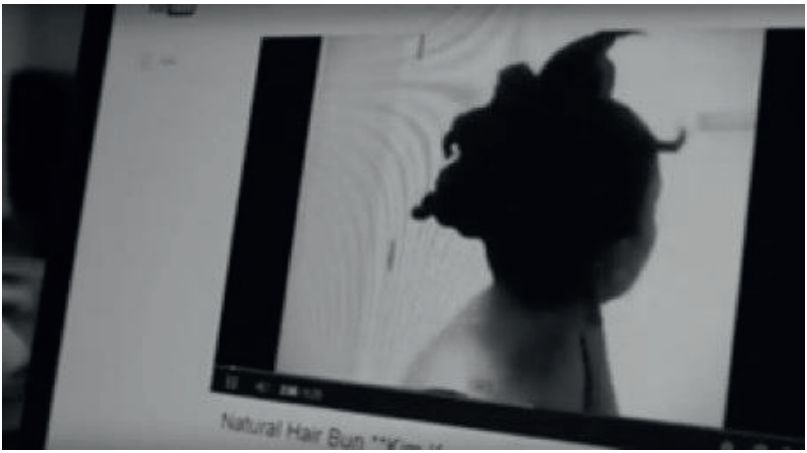


Ilustración 7*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 19:40)

Ilustración 8*:* © Sánchez Salcedo (2013: 19:40)

Las entrevistas se intercalan con tomas metatextuales de vídeos de YouTube y no debe pasar desapercibido que, aunque la entrevistada no lo comente, los vídeos que está mirando son mayoritariamente anglófonos, excepto uno, que es francófono. La preminencia de las fuentes anglófonas en las que se basan Gaelle y Sofía, junto con la genealogía "afro-estadounidense" de la historia del pelo natural que proponía la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

segunda en el apartado anterior y la música de jazz extradiegética que acompaña las entrevistas a lo largo del documental, refuerzan la hipótesis operativa que presenta este artículo: que este documental entrama la identidad de las protagonistas en torno al pelo y a una genealogía mayoritariamente "afro-estadounidense".[18] De hecho, Gaelle insiste en este uso metafórico de lo genealógico y dice que a través de Internet y de los intercambios de información sobre cómo cuidar el pelo afro "empieza a formarse una familia" (19:48) independientemente de la nacionalidad de sus integrantes.

Winie, sin embargo, no parece compartir este sentimiento cuando comenta que la información que trasmiten la televisión y los blogs sobre cómo tratar el pelo afro es relativamente escasa. Según esta entrevistada, precisamente la más joven del grupo, su fuente de aprendizaje es el intercambio de ideas y consejos con amigas offline. Esto podría apuntar a que a diferencia de Sofía y Gaelle, Winie ya estuviera integrada en una red offline afro-descendiente afín al pelo natural antes de iniciar su proceso de transición capilar, lo que, por su parte, habría facilitado el proceso al no haber tenido que enfrentarse a la presión grupal contra el mismo al que sí que tuvo que hacer frente, por ejemplo, Sofía. A su vez, esta transición "menos confrontativa" explicaría que la transición del pelo alisado al pelo afro no tome gran preponderancia en el entramado retrospectivo de la misma y que la entrevistada recurra al destino como explicación de la desembocadura natural hacia el "verdadero yo" que refleja su pelo afro. Ahora bien, a pesar de que las protagonistas presentan diferentes valoraciones sobre el rol y la efectividad de internet y de las redes sociales, todas ellas coindicen en enfatizar el carácter aglutinador del intercambio de información sobre el pelo en su articulación identitaria como mujeres conscientes de su afro-descendencia.[19]

Bajo el rótulo "Me gusta/no me gusta" las entrevistadas comentan las reacciones que tuvo su entorno más cercano a su transición al pelo natural. Todas concuerdan en que el círculo que más resistencia puso a su transición no fue el "blanco", sino el "negro". Sofía enfatiza que "por

[18] Véase la entrevista a Bela-Lobedde en este volumen o su autobiografía *Ser mujer negra en España* en la que comenta que comenzó su carrera inspirándose en vloggers afroamericanas.

[19] A este punto se volverá más adelante en este artículo.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

el lado de mis amistades blancas, todo han sido elogios" (22:05), pero que la mayoría de sus amigos negros le han "criminalizado el pelo" (22:11). Ndongo reitera esta idea entre risas al decir que su abuela sigue "intentado a día de hoy que me desrice el pelo" (21:26). Gaelle matiza algo más cuando comenta que sus amigos han reaccionado con curiosidad. No especifica el color de la piel de sus amistades, pero dice que "quieren tocar, quieren saber qué tipo de textura es" (21:59) y justifica esta típica exotización del pelo afro con un tono un tanto paternalista: "es que están tan acostumbrados al pelo lacio que ven un poco de volumen y ya se emocionan con tanto rizo" (21:59). Winie explica que la reacción de su entorno ha sido positiva porque, afirma, está más guapa. Arguye que el afro le queda mejor porque es la "naturaleza" de su pelo. De nuevo, la más joven del grupo aduce a motivos estéticos un tanto absolutos en base a la naturaleza de su cabello.

La última pregunta de la entrevista está encabezada por el rótulo "Orgullo". Las imágenes que abren este apartado muestran a Sofía y a Gaelle en un local de una asociación "afro-española", como se deduce de parte del cartel que aparece en pantalla (21:34; 25:12), aunque no se llega a reconocer cuál es. Este escenario llama, indirectamente, al activismo, a pesar de que las protagonistas no utilizan en ningún momento dicho término. Sin embargo, de sus respuestas puede deducirse que lo que se les pregunta no es qué entienden por orgullo, sino por qué llevan el pelo natural. De este modo, el rótulo "orgullo" y la semántica visual afro-descendiente y asociacionista-activista guía el cierre de la articulación identitaria que propone el documental: una narrativa *coming of age* de desarrollo psicológico hasta la instalación de las entrevistadas en el orgullo de llevar el pelo afro como reconocimiento de su afro-descendencia.[20] Las protagonistas muestran una preferencia por los términos 'negro/a' y 'raza', pero las combinan con los términos "afro" (25:26) y "afro-descendiente" (por ejemplo 1:02), en ocasiones con modos de argumentación propios de este último concepto, otras, en un modo que podría ser tachado de esencialista en su vertiente más o menos estratégica (cf. Spivak 1987: 205). Sin embargo, el punto de llegada que entrama el documental es, pues, la conciencia afro-descendiente, es decir, la conciencia de que son descendientes de africanos/as y, por lo

[20] Una definición de "afro-descendiente" se da en la nota a pie de página número 6.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

tanto, víctimas de las consecuencias de matriz colonial racializante (cf. Quijano 2000), que las entrevistadas se encargan de deconstruir a través de la práctica del cuidado del propio cabello natural, del que se sienten orgullosas.

No obstante, no todas las entrevistadas tematizan este orgullo al que quiere guiar la edición del documental. Gaelle comenta que lleva el pelo natural porque le gusta, "con estos ricitos, con tanto volumen" (27:14), es decir, no aduce razones ideológicas, ni "raciales", tan solo estéticas. Ngolo lo hace para "sentirse afro" (25:26), que para ella: "es sentir que tengo una similitud, tanto físicas, obviamente, como culturales con los negros, aun siendo de diferentes países" (25:35). "Es reivindicar que es mi naturaleza, que soy así, que el hecho de que yo lleve el pelo afro es que así nace mi pelo de negra. No tengo por qué falsificar o querer cambiar cualquier aspecto de mi negritud" (26:05-26:21).

De esta manera, Ngolo articula su identidad explícitamente alrededor del pelo afro, como marcador físico de su "negritud", que entiende como algo esencial a su "yo" a través de la metáfora de su "naturaleza". Al significante 'negritud' le da, pues, un significado muy cercano al que le dieran Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor y Léon Gontran Damas, entre otros, al término *Négritude*.[21] Como lo entendieran estos intelectuales, Ngolo constituye su pelo como reflejo de su toma de conciencia de que pertenece a una hermandad cultural transnacional "negra" que se opone a la opresión que la sociedad occidental "blanca" infringe a los afro-descendientes reconociendo su belleza sin imponerse códigos estéticos eurocentrados. Mientras tanto, la cámara muestra a Ngolo con un mapa de África a sus espaldas o con discos de vinilo de cantantes "afro-estadounidenses" mientras se escucha música de jazz extradiegética, por lo que las semánticas visuales y acústicas refuerzan el componente transnacional de su identidad en el presente del vídeo.

No obstante, aunque su afirmación transluce cierto orgullo, al que llamara el movimiento de la *Négritude*, Ngolo no usa este término. Es Winie la que hace referencia explícita al orgullo al afirmar que le gustaría llegar a una posición de poder representando los rasgos de la "raza

[21] Existen grandes diferencias en la evolución del uso del término de los autores en relación a los objetivos para los cuales lo utilizaron, aunque una presentación detallada de las mismas excede el alcance de este artículo. Véase a este respecto, por ejemplo, el resumen presentado por Govera y Silva (2018) o el de Oliva Oliva (2014).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

negra" (26:02). Insiste en el uso del término 'raza' y añade que "no quiero triunfar en la vida con el pelo súper liso, sino como una negra orgullosa de sus raíces" (26:24). Con la referencia a las "raíces" la entrevistada reconoce el legado de los que constituye como sus ancestros de "raza" negra, utilizando de nuevo un vocabulario propio del movimiento de la *Négritude*.

La que más activista se mostraba a lo largo del vídeo, sorprende. Sofía, se ciñe a la variabilidad de estilos y opciones del afro para justificar el haber optado por el pelo natural, mientras se muestran imágenes de la página de Facebook de su empresa *Sofiablack*, una tienda de productos de cuidado del pelo afro. Aduce que "los estilos y las opciones que te ofrece el pelo afro son infinitos" (27:23). Sin embargo, tras esta aparente desideologización puede entenderse que se esconde una estrategia de tipo pedagógica que tiene como objetivo empoderar a las generaciones afro-descendientes más jóvenes en España insistiendo en los aspectos diferenciales positivos del pelo afro. Entendida de esta manera, esta estrategia podría incluirse dentro del llamado "activismo estético", que según la definición de otra activista estética, Desirée Bela-Lobedde "es la lucha [decolonial, no solo de la mente, sino también del cuerpo] contra el canon estético imperante, blanco y eurocentrado" (Bela-Lobedde en Jurado 2018) dando recursos empoderadores a las mujeres negras "para que aprendan a cuidar de su piel sin aclararla y de su pelo afro natural sin utilizar productos para alisarlo y transformarlo químicamente" (en Mbomío 2018a).[22]

En conclusión, la estructuración del documental en seis partes diferenciadas –desde el momento en que se truncó su identidad por el desrizado, su fase de rechazo de su pelo "natural", el descubrimiento de su belleza afro, hasta llegar a sentirse (más o menos explícitamente) orgullosas de ello– propone una clara narrativa *coming of age* de desarrollo psicológico de las entrevistadas hasta el autodescubrimiento, empoderamiento e incor-poración de una conciencia afro-descendiente en su identidad a través de la articulación de la relación con su pelo. Esta

[22] Este activismo se inscribe dentro de la cuarta ola del feminismo que reclama explícitamente el derecho a apropiarse la feminidad estereotípica de manera empoderante y de exponerla en las redes sociales a su gusto. Esta última modalidad del feminismo considera las redes sociales como plataformas legítimas en las que hacer activismo en línea (cf. Rivers 2017).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

conciencia supone reconocer la prevalencia epistemológica de la matriz colonial racializante (cf. Quijano 2000) que justificó la esclavitud de africanos/as y afro-descendientes y que, hasta entonces, más o menos interiorizada, les hacía imponerse lógicas racializantes y prácticas eurocentradas del ("buen") adecentamiento del cabello.

Todas coinciden en su afirmación de haber sentido y seguir sintiendo, aunque en diferentes grados, rechazo por parte de la "comunidad negra/afro-descendiente" en España por haberse decidido por la estética afro para el pelo y/o opresión grupal para volver a alisárselo. Por el contrario, su interacción con la "sociedad mayoritaria blanca" no se tematiza en el documental como problemática en el presente de la narración.[23] La explicitud de las entrevistadas al detallar la reacción de diferentes grupos sociales en los que se mueven revela cómo las protagonistas navegan entre diferentes 'micro-hegemonías' (cf. Blommaert/Varis 2011) y entre las normatividades grupales que estas implican en diferentes ámbitos de su vida.

Si bien a grandes rasgos la experiencia expresada por las cuatro entrevistadas recoge ciertos paralelismos, hay ligeras divergencias en el modo en la que la expresan. Winie y sobre todo Ngolo –ambas de piel más oscura– insisten en el entramado del proceso de re-descubrimiento de su pelo en su fase endoracista con más claridad y dibujan, por lo tanto, un arco evolutivo más amplio en el esbozo de su *coming of age*. Solo Ngolo habla de su "negritud" explícitamente, pero todas, excepto Gaelle –que aduce motivos meramente estéticos– hacen uso de una terminología y una argumentación muy cercana a la de la solidaridad transnacional esgrimida por las diferentes vertientes del movimiento de la *Négritude* de los años 30 y 50 y constituyen su pelo natural como propio de su "raza".

Esta rama de pensamiento histórica fue fruto de la comunicación interlingüística a ambos lados del Atlántico en la que la lengua francesa tuvo gran preminencia. Sin embargo, el entramado principal del documental con su insistencia en Estados Unidos y/o la lengua inglesa como fuentes informativas actuales y pioneros en la historia del pelo afro en

[23] Se concibe la "sociedad mayoritaria blanca" en el sentido de los *Critical Whiteness Studies* como un discurso social en y sobre una sociedad en la que ser "blanco" y adoptar estéticas capilares eurocentradas se entrama como norma no marcada.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

sus vertientes opresora y liberadora y en las semánticas visuales y acústicas que privilegian imágenes y música de época de origen "afro-estadounidenses", establece una genealogía mayoritariamente estadounidense en la que se integran las protagonistas que confirma la tesis de Antumi Toasijé Pallas Valencia sobre el papel fundamental que tuvo la influencia afro-estadounidense en la segunda generación de la diáspora africana en España (cf. Pallas Valencia 2019: 898).

En el caso de Sofía y de Gaelle esta tendencia es clara por su acercamiento al movimiento del pelo natural a través de Internet. La accesibilidad y circulación potencial de discursos multilingües sobre el pelo afro que ofrece la red parece no actualizarse en el ejemplo de las entrevistadas del documental *Afro, así es mi pelo.* En ningún caso se hace referencia al movimiento *nappy*, de gran fuerza e impacto en el mundo francófono e italófono en la actualidad. Asimismo, una primera investigación de estos movimientos en Internet no arroja resultados que indiquen que recurran a retóricas, términos y discursos reminiscentes a los de la *Négritude*, como hacen, en diferentes grados, las entrevistadas en el documental. De todo lo dicho con anterioridad, puede deducirse como hipótesis operativa que los discursos identitarios audiovisuales sobre el pelo afro no circulan especialmente bien en el espacio "afro-románico".

Para poder confirmar estas hipótesis sería necesario, en primer lugar, ampliar el rango de productos audiovisuales en línea sobre la articulación de la afro-descendencia a partir del pelo en diferentes ámbitos dentro de España, dentro del área lingüístico castellanoparlante y del románico en diferentes regiones del mundo. En segundo lugar, habría que verificar cuantitativa y cualitativamente si la recurrencia a una genealogía anglófona se trata de una preferencia/necesidad idiomática de las entrevistadas o si por el contrario en el momento de la producción de este documental en 2013 no existía gran número de blogs y/o vlogs en idiomas románicos. Asimismo, habría que examinar si el panorama ha cambiado desde entonces hasta la actualidad. Por último, sería prometedor incluir el análisis de los comentarios de los usuarios de YouTube para analizar cómo entran en diálogo con la articulación identitaria propuesta por este documental.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bibliografía

Albert Sopale, Silvia (ed.) (2019): *No es país para negras*, Oviedo: KRK.

Anderson, Benedict (1983): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Editions/NLB.

Angone, Odome (ed.) (2019): *Las españolas afrodescendientes hablan sobre identidad y empoderamiento*, Madrid: Verbum.

Azzolini, Davide/Schizzerotto, Antonio (2017): "The Second Digital Divide in Europe. A Cross-National Study on Students' Digital Reading and Navigation Skills", en: *Research Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies*, 2, pp. 1-17.

Bela-Lobedde, Desirée (2019): *Ser mujer negra en España*, Barcelona: Plan B.

Berriane, Mohamed/de Haas, Hein (eds.) (2012): *African Migrations Research: Innovative Methods and Methodologies*, Trenton: Africa World Press.

Blommaert, Jan/Varis, Piia (2013): "Enough is Enough: The Heuristics of Authenticity in Superdiversity", en: Ingrid Gogolin/Joana Duarte (eds.): *Linguistic Super-Diversity in Urban Areas – Research Approaches*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 143-159.

Borst, Julia/Gallo González, Danae (2019): "Narrative Constructions of Online Imagined Afro-diasporic Communities in Spain and Portugal", en: *Open Cultural Studies*, 3, pp. 286-307.

Calpini, Rodolfo (2018): *La contradicción misionera: La política de Ratzinger y Papa Francisco*, Roma.

Carid, Maxime Leeds (1997): "The Decline and Fall of the Conk; or How to Read a Process", en: *Fashion Theory*, 1(4), pp. 399-419.

Cortés López, José Luis (1989): *La esclavitud negra en la España peninsular del siglo XVI*, Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

El salto (2017-2018): "España no es (solo) blanca", en: *El salto*, en: https://www.elsaltodiario.com/espana-no-es-solo-blanca/listado (último acceso: 12.02.2020).

Ekoka, Débora (ed.) (2019): *Metamba Miago: relatos y saberes de mujeres afroespañolas*, Valencia: United Minds.

Fernández, Mercedes, Consuelo Valbuena/Caro, Raquel (2018): "Evolución del racismo, la xenofobia y otras formas de intolerancia en España. Informe-Encuesta 2016", en: *Ministerio de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social*, p. 1-181, en: http://www.mitramiss.gob.es/oberaxe/ficheros/documentos/InformeRacismo2016.pdf (último acceso: 30.04.2019).

Fernández, Mirta (2010): "Raza, racismo, Negritud y visión de África en Aimé Césaire", en: *Temas*, 64, pp. 110-117.

Ferrero-Turrión, Ruth (2011): "Migration and Migrants in Spain after the Bust", en: Demetrios Papademetriou et al. (eds.): *Migration and the Great Recession: The Transatlantic Experience*, Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, pp. 86-105.

Fra-Molinero, Baltasar (2009): "The Suspect Whiteness of Spain", en: La Vinia Delois Jennings (ed.): *At Home and Aboad. Historizing Twenteeth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance*, Knoxville, TN: University of Tennesee Press, pp. 147-169.

González Fernández, Fidel (1993): *Daniel Comboni en el corazón de la Misión Africana. El movimiento misionero y la obra Comboniana: 1846-1910*, Madrid: Ed. Mundo Negro.

Govera, Marcos/Silva, Marielvis (2018): "Reflexiones en torno a la negritud: lucha político social y reivindicación identitaria", en: *Horizontes Filosóficos: Revista de Filosofía, Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales,* 7 p. 33-48, en: http://revele.uncoma.edu.ar/htdoc/revele/index.php/horizontes/article/view/1808/1878 (último acceso:18.06.2019).

– (2012): "The Musical Routes of the Spanish Black Atlantic: The Performance of Identities in the Rap of Frank T and El Chojín", en: *Popular Music and Society*, 36(4), pp. 505-522.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

– (2014). "The African Diaspora in Europe: New Atlantic Routes and Roots in the music of Concha Buika", en: *The Journal of Romance Studies*, 14(2), pp. 50-61.

Hall, Stuart/Haine, Renee/Jhally, Sut/ Quarzo-Cerina, Allessio (2014): *Race: The Floating Signifier*, San Francisco, CA: Kanopy Streaming.

Herzog, Tamar (2012): "How Did Early-Modern Slaves in Spain Disappear? Antecedents", en: *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts*, 3(1), pp. 1-7.

Huete Casado, Lola (ed.) (sin año): "África no es un país", en: *El País*, en: https://elpais.com/agr/africa_no_es_un_pais/a/ (último acceso: 30.01.2019).

Jurado, Ángeles (29.11.2018): "Llevar el cabello afro natural es una forma de resistencia", en: *El País*, en: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/11/21/africa_no_es_un_pais/1542755805_331394.html. (último acceso: 30.01.2019).

Klein, Thoralf (2018): "Mission und Kolonialismus – Mission als Kolonialismus. Einblicke in eine schwierige Wahlverwandtschaft", en: Claudia Kraft, Alf Lüdtke, Jürgen Martschukat (eds.): *Kolonialgeschichten: Regionale Perspektiven auf ein globales Phänomen*, Frankfurt del Meno/Nueva York: Campus, pp. 142-161.

Lavapiés (17.07.2017): "APN Asociación Panteras Negras 2001-2013 – Historia de lucha y continuidad del proceso juvenil afro", en: *Reparación Africana – 4IPGC. Revista de la 4ª Internacional Panafricanista Garveyista Cimarrón Rastafari*, en: http://reparacionafricana.blogspot.com/2017/07/apn-asociacion-panteras-negras-2001.html (último acceso: 30.01.2019).

Lemos, André (2010): "Post-Mass Media Functions, Locative Media, and Informational Territories: New Ways of Thinking About Territory, Place, and Mobility in Contemporary Society", en: *Space and Culture*, 13(4), pp. 403-420.

Lowe, Kate (2005): "The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe", en: Thomas Earle/Kate Lowe (eds): *Black Africans*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

in Renaissance Europe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-47.

Lyotard, Jean-François (1979): *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Paris: Minuit.

Martín Casares, Aurelia (2012): "Historia y actualidad de la esclavitud: claves para reflexionar", en: Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos et al. (eds): *Laberintos de libertad. Entre la esclavitud del pasado y las nuevas formas de esclavitud del presente*, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, pp. 13-24.

Martín Casares, Aurelia/Barranco, Marga G. (2009): "Musical Legacy of Black Africans in Spain: A Review of Our Sources", en: *Anthropological Notebooks,* 15(2), pp. 51-60.

Martínez, Lola/Muniain, Maite (11.04.2019): "'Metamba Miago', la doble lucha de ser mujer negra en España", en: *Arteesfera*, http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/audios/artesfera/artesfera-metamba-miago-doble-lucha-ser-mujer-negra-espana/5135031/ (último acceso: 30.01.2019).

Mbomío, Lucía (2017): *Las que se atrevieron*, Madrid: Sial.

– (28.02.2018): "Voy a hacer un hilo que incluya a todas las personas negras que recuerdo (o me han chivado) que han estado trabajando en televisión en calidad de reporteras/os, contertulias/os o presentadoras/es, en los últimos 40 años", en: https://twitter.com/luciambomio/status/1101042862676983808 (último acceso: 30.04.2019).

– (19.09.2018): "El activismo estético implica descolonizar también el cuerpo, no solo la mente", en: *Pikara online magazine*, en: https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2018/09/desiree-bela-lobedde-libro/ (último acceso: 30.04.2019).

– (2019): *Hija del camino.* Barcelona: Grijalbo.

Misioneros Combonianos (2017): "Sobre mundo negro", en: *Mundo Negro*, en: http://mundonegro.es/sobre-mundo-negro/ (último acceso: 30.04.2019).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Nakamura, Lisa (2002): *Cybertypes. Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, Nueva York: Routledge.

Oliva Oliva, María Elena (2014): *La negritud, el indianismo y sus intelectuales: Aimé Césaire y Fausto Reinaga*, Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria.

Pallas Valencia, Antumi Toasijé (2019): *Presencia e influencia africana y africano-descendiente denominada negra en la historia y prehistoria de España, frente a la desafricanización y ultraeuropeización en la construcción del pasado*, Tesis doctoral defendida en la Universidad de Alcalá.

Quijano, Aníbal (2000): "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina", en: Edgardo Lander (ed.): *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires: CLACSO, pp. 777-832.

Ragneda, Massimo/Muschert, Glenn (2018): "Introduction", en: idém. (eds.): *Theorizing Digital Divides*, Londres: Routledge, pp. 1-7.

Rivers, Nicola (2017): *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rinken, Sebastián (2011): "El impacto de la crisis económica sobre la opinión pública ante la inmigración", en: Caballero Gualda (ed.): *Inmigración, ciudadanía y gestión de la diversidad*, Sevilla: Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, pp. 221-224.

Sánchez Salcedo, Javier (2013). *Afro, así es mi pelo*. Madrid: Mundo negro digital.

Segato, Rita (2010): "Raza es signo", en: Claudia Mosquera-Lavé/Agustín Laó Montes/César Rodríguez Garavito (eds.): *Debates sobre ciudadanía y políticas raciales en las Américas Negras*, Cali: Universidad del Valle, pp. 555-579.

Spaulging, Carine (2016): "From Brandy to Beyoncé: Celebrity and the Black Hair Care since 1992", en: Josephine Metcalf/Carina Spaulding (eds): *African American Culture and Society After Rodney*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

King: Provocations and Protests, Progression and "post-Racialism", Londres: Routledge, pp. 123-140.

Spivak, Gayatri (1987): *In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*, Nueva York: Methuen.

– (1988): *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Tißberger, Martina (2016): "Critical Whitness", en: *fiph. JOURNAL,* 28, pp. 24-31, en: https://fiph.de/veroeffentlichungen/journale/cover-downloads/fiph_026_RZ_Journal_Ausgabe_28_Martina_Tissberger.pdf?m=1570630401& (último acceso: 30.01.2021).

White, Hayden (1973): *Metahistory the Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wright, Michelle (2015): *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Zavala, Silvio (1972): *La colonización española en América*, México DF: SEP-Setentas.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Joanna Boampong / Julia Borst

(Accra/Bremen)

Activismo afro en España
Una entrevista con Desirée Bela-Lobedde

Abstract

In this interview, Afrodescendant Spanish writer and online content creator, Desirée Bela-Lobedde, talks about antiracist and Afrofeminist activism and the importance of the internet for Africans and Afrodescendants in Spain as they seek to become visible and voice their own stories. She refers to her own experiences as a Black woman growing up and living in Spain – or more precisely in Catalonia – and provides insights into the diverse forms of racism and discrimination African and Afrodescendant women suffer in Spanish society. Moreover, she reflects on the recent rise in activism within the Afrodiasporic community in Spain and explains why aesthetic activism plays a decisive role in empowering racialized women in Spain, who are constantly confronted with the predominant stereotypes of beauty and femininity.

Desirée Bela-Lobedde, española nacida en Barcelona de padres guineoecuatorianos, es escritora, creadora de contenidos online y activista antirracista y afrofeminista. En 2011 se inició en el mundo de los blogs abordando asuntos que conciernen a la comunidad afro en España y, particularmente, a las mujeres afrodescendientes. Al principio de su carrera como creadora de contenidos online, su primer blog, *Diario de la negra flor* – complementado, entre otros, a través de un canal de YouTube denominado *Los vídeos de la negra flor* –, trataba sobre todo del cuidado del pelo afro natural, de cuestiones de moda y maquillaje y de sus experiencias personales como mujer negra en España. No obstante, Bela-Lobedde siempre ha considerado que su tarea es la de promover conocimientos sobre las culturas de África y sus diásporas y señalar visiones alternativas de la comunidad afro que rompen con los estereotipos establecidos. En su blog revisado y que desde 2018 lleva

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

su propio nombre (*Desirée Bela*), continúa dedicándose a lo que ella misma denomina el "activismo estético": milita a favor de la "normalización" del pelo afro en la sociedad española y de un activismo feminista y antirracista, indicando así los entrelazamientos de la estética con cuestiones de identidad (cf. Bela-Lobedde, "Quién soy"). A parte de ser creadora de contenidos online, también participa con asiduidad en eventos antirracistas y afrofeministas. En 2018 publicó su primer libro, que tuvo mucho éxito: un texto autobiográfico que, inspirado en el vídeo de YouTube homónimo, se titula *Ser mujer negra en España* y que, según la autora, no solo cuenta su propia historia, sino la de infinitas mujeres negras en España (cf. 2018b: 17). Asimismo, Bela-Lobedde es autora de textos que han sido publicados en la plataforma en línea *Medium* y de un segundo libro titulado *Minorías: historias de desigualdad y valentía*, publicado en 2021, que recoge testimonios de mujeres que viven situaciones de discriminación.

Boampong/Borst: A modo de introducción podrías hablar un poco sobre tu familia. ¿Cómo era tu vida en familia de niña y adolescente?

Bela-Lobedde: Soy hija única por parte de madre y así es cómo me he criado. Tuve una infancia tranquila, aunque pasaba más tiempo con la familia que me criaba que con mi madre, que trabajaba mucho. No tengo mucho que decir sobre el barrio (o los barrios, diría yo) en los que crecí, pero siempre he vivido en un pueblito bastante tranquilo. En cuanto al colegio, religioso y femenino, supongo que tengo la experiencia de muchas de mis compañeras: las profesoras y las monjas eran muy estrictas; algunas profesoras nos daban miedo. Humillar y ridiculizar a las alumnas estaba a la orden del día (y no me refiero solo a mi colegio, sino a la época). Yo tenía mi grupito de amigas con las que me llevaba bien. Con algunas me veía también fuera del colegio. A pesar de todo, lo pasábamos bien.

Boampong/Borst: Indicas en tu obra *Ser mujer negra en España* que no te identificas con Guinea Ecuatorial aunque es el lugar de origen de tus padres. ¿Qué historias de Guinea Ecuatorial te contaron tus padres de niña y qué pensabas de este lugar?

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bela-Lobedde: Como ya he dicho anteriormente, y por circunstancias ajenas a nuestra voluntad, de pequeña pasé muy poco tiempo con mi madre, así que de pequeña no tenía a nadie que me contase historias sobre Guinea, así que no podía pensar nada porque, de niña, Guinea Ecuatorial no estaba en mi pensamiento. Cuando llegué a la adolescencia y empecé a relacionarme con mi padre, él sí me hablaba de sus días en Rebola siendo niño. Mi padre siempre ha hablado con nostalgia y con amor de Guinea Ecuatorial y eso era lo que me transmitía.

Boampong/Borst: ¿Cuándo empezaste a darte cuenta de que la gente te veía/trataba diferente? ¿Compartiste tus experiencias con tus padres?

Bela-Lobedde: Empecé a darme cuenta siendo bastante pequeña. Reaccionaba dejándolo pasar, porque tampoco sabía muy bien qué tenía que hacer o decir al respecto. Siempre he vivido con mi madre y ella no solía hablarme sobre las relaciones raciales.

Boampong/Borst: ¿En tu opinión: por qué se ha tardado tanto en España en aceptar a la gente de color o afrodescendientes? ¿Y cómo describirías la situación particular de las mujeres negras y españolas?

Bela-Lobedde: Creo que se ha tardado tanto en aceptar que hay gente negra en España desde hace siglos porque en el sistema educativo no se explica y creo que deriva del intento de borrado consciente de la contribución histórica de las personas africanas y afrodescendientes a la historia de España. La gente cree que la presencia de personas africanas o afrodescendientes en el territorio español se inicia con los movimientos migratorios de principios de los años noventa del siglo pasado. Pero si en el colegio no se explica que, fruto de la colonización, hubo personas negras en España desde hace siglos, nunca se va a saber.

La situación de las mujeres negras en España es de doble discriminación. Por género y por raza. Los estereotipos más habituales, además del hecho de que siempre se nos extranjerice y no se piense, en un inicio, que podemos ser españolas, es la creencia de que nuestro perfil académico y profesional es bajo o que nos dedicamos a trabajos de economía sumergida. Además de eso, estamos sometidas a la fetichización

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

constante y a la hipersexualización. Se hacen comentarios sobre nuestros cuerpos, nuestra piel y nuestro pelo constantemente, se nos considera exóticas como si fuese algo positivo, y lo peor de todo es que no podemos sentirnos ofendidas.

Boampong/Borst: En uno de tus escritos identificas un fenómeno que denominas "racismo institucional" e indicas que lo ha impregnado todo – la educación, la cultura, la política, el lenguaje. ¿Hasta dónde crees que se ha llegado en la lucha contra este fenómeno?

Bela-Lobedde: La denominación de racismo institucional no parte de mí. La Unión Europea, en su reciente resolución B8-0212/2019 sobre los derechos fundamentales de las personas de ascendencia africana en Europa reconoce su existencia. No creo que se haya llegado hasta ningún lugar en la lucha para combatir este fenómeno; no quiero desmerecer todo lo que se ha hecho y se hace desde la sociedad civil, ni mucho menos; pero desafortunadamente, las personas, colectivos y entidades civiles que combatimos esto nos quedamos cortas, ya que no estamos respaldadas por un marco normativo que exija la eliminación de esta discriminación. Al contrario: siento que la lucha para combatirlo en todos los frentes debe empezar ahora que la Unión Europea ha aprobado esta resolución.

Boampong/Borst: En vista de este "racismo institucional" que sigue existiendo en España y que provoca que los afrodescendientes se sientan extranjeros ¿cómo es posible que te puedas identificar tanto como española? ¿Cómo describirías el lugar desde el que hablas?

Bela-Lobedde: Yo me he identificado como española por una cuestión de cabezonería. Me movía algo que yo enunciaría como: "cuanto más me niegas, más te voy a decir que soy de aquí". Conforme pasan los años, evoluciono, aprendo y desaprendo, me va costando, cada vez más, identificarme con estructuras tan grandes como una nación. Así que ahora, cuando me preguntan de dónde soy o de dónde me siento, me limito a responder que soy de Vilanova i la Geltrú, el pueblo en el que

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

me he criado y donde todavía vivo, y que al final es mi marco de referencia más tangible. Al final siento que estoy en una especie de crisis de identidad constante, pero ya estoy cómoda en ella.

Boampong/Borst: ¿Cómo se podría explicar la diseminación creciente del activismo afro en España en los últimos años? ¿Y cuál fue el punto de partida de tu propio activismo? ¿Te inspiraban movimientos negros y afrodescendientes de otras culturas? Entre los distintos medios que empleas – el activismo digital, las charlas, las contribuciones a revistas – ¿cuál te parece más impactante en cuanto a tu objetivo de cambiar actitudes? ¿Por qué motivos te has decidido a dejar el medio del blog y a escribir un libro 'tradicional'?

Bela-Lobedde: Creo que el auge del activismo afro en España está posibilitado por la existencia de las redes sociales, que nos permite conocernos, reconocernos, visibilizarnos y conectarnos. Surgen alianzas, colaboraciones y redes de apoyo que antaño era más difícil que surgieran. Yo me adentré en el activismo por mi propia necesidad, porque sentía que tenía que hacerlo por mí y por mis dos hijas. Al principio, como empecé por la cuestión estética, me inspiraba en vloggers afroamericanas. Después, conforme empecé a ampliar temáticas, empecé a entrar en contacto con personas afrodescendientes y africanas en España, y muchas de ellas siguen siendo mis referentes a día de hoy.

En cuanto a los medios que empleo, creo que todos son impactantes a su manera, así que no me atrevo a anteponer a ninguno por encima de los otros. La persona que viene a una actividad presencial, me ve y me escucha en persona y se lleva una experiencia; la persona que me ve en un vídeo se queda con otro aspecto y quien lee mis artículos o escucha mi podcast recibe otro impacto diferente. Al final yo creo que todo suma. Yo me considero una comunicadora, así que me parece que un libro tradicional es una forma más de comunicar.

Boampong/Borst: En el tomo *Las españolas afrodescendientes hablan sobre identidad y empoderamiento*, editado por Odome Angone en 2018 (2018a), así como en tu página web explicas que las personas 'racializadas' tienen que descolonizar los cuerpos ("Qué hago", Bela-Lobedde s.f.; 2018a: 83) ¿Qué entiendes por este "activismo estético"?

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

¿Nos puedes hablar un poco de la campaña #YoSoyMiPropioCanonDeBelleza en este contexto? En esta campaña pedisteis a varias mujeres afrodescendientes que visibilizaran su belleza publicando fotos en internet para luchar contra la parcialidad del canon de belleza eurocentrista y crear referentes para otras mujeres afrodescendientes.

Bela-Lobedde: El activismo estético es precisamente una de las formas de vehicular esa descolonización de los cuerpos. Es entender que debemos superar unos estándares de belleza eurocéntricos que ensalzan los rasgos caucásicos e infravaloran los demás; es comprender que seguir esos cánones de belleza es perjudicial para la salud física y emocional de las mujeres negras. Llevar a la práctica el activismo estético es cuidar de mi cabello y mi piel en su textura y su tono naturales, y es ofrecer recursos para que las mujeres que quieran hacer lo mismo puedan hacerlo. La campaña #YoSoyMiPropioCanonDeBelleza la pusimos en marcha Deborah Ekoka (United Minds) y yo. Criticaba el canon de belleza que prevalece en España y que discrimina a las mujeres negras en el sentido de que niega nuestros rasgos identitarios (la piel oscura y el pelo rizado) pretendiendo que creamos que seremos más bellas cuanto más clara sea nuestra piel y cuanto más liso llevemos el cabello.

Boampong/Borst: En tu libro exiges que las mujeres afrodescendientes, marginadas en el debate público español, narren sus propias historias. ¿Cómo pueden conseguirlo? ¿Qué papel tiene internet en este contexto? A consecuencia de los vídeos titulados "Ser mujer negra en España" que publicaste en YouTube en 2013 te viste afectada personalmente por comentarios altamente racistas que te hicieron cerrar el canal durante algún tiempo. ¿Cómo valoras entonces las oportunidades y las restricciones que comporta este medio?

Bela-Lobedde: Yo no hablaría de exigencia; no soy quién para exigir nada a nadie. En todo caso, lo que hago en mi libro es animar a que contemos nuestras propias historias. Pienso que internet universaliza oportunidades, así que creo que esa es la forma que tenemos las mujeres afrodescendientes de recuperar espacios y hacernos visibles. Podemos publicar artículos en un blog, podemos grabar vídeos, publicar podcasts, escribir poesía… podemos reivindicarnos en las formas que sean

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

más significativas para nosotras. Eso sí: hacerse un hueco en la red no es algo que suceda de la noche a la mañana. Hay que ser constante. En cuanto a las oportunidades y restricciones de internet, creo que hay que tener siempre presente que se trata de un arma de doble filo en tanto que, al tiempo que permite difundir un mensaje, nos sitúa en un espacio de exposición en el que ese mensaje muchas veces puede no ser recibido y dar lugar a ataques bastante descarnados. Así que considero que eso es algo que hay que tener presente siempre y hay que aprender a gestionar las emociones que generan estas situaciones de forma que nos impacten lo menos negativamente posible.

Bibliografía

Bela-Lobedde, Desirée (2018a): "Desirée Bela-Lobedde Boleche. *La negra flor*, Barcelona", en: Odome Angone (ed.): *Las españolas afrodescendientes hablan sobre identidad y empoderamiento*, Madrid: Verbum, pp. 81-83.

– (2018b): *Ser mujer negra en España*, Barcelona: Plan B.

– (2021): *Minorías: historias de desigualdad y de valentía*, Barcelona: Plan B.

– (s.f.): *Desirée Bela*, Blog, en: www.desireebela.com/ (último acceso: 22.01.2021).

– (s.f.): *Los vídeos de la negra flor*, en: YouTube, en: www.youtube.com/user/EbonyNegraFlor/featured (último acceso: 22.01.2021).

– (s.f.): *Medium*, en: desireebela.medium.com (último acceso: 17.02.2021).

– (s.f.): "Qué hago", en: *Desirée Bela*, en: www.desireebela.com/que-hago/ (último acceso: 22.01.2021).

– (s.f.): "Quién soy", en: *Desirée Bela*, en: www.desireebela.com/quien-soy/ (último acceso: 22.01.2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Laura Büttgen

(Aachen)

Les Afropéennes élèvent la voix
Le potentiel subversif dans l'œuvre de Léonora Miano

Abstract

In this study, we examine the subversive potential of contemporary female Afro-Europeans who raise their multi-faceted voice to draw attention to their needs, fears and concerns during their search for identity in the middle of Parisian society. On the basis of the Afropean novels of the Afro-French author Léonora Miano, we analyze a cross-border style of writing that seems to be a novelty in Afro-French literatures. We find that the so-called 'Afropeans' are shaped by different family tragedies that are connected to the historical wounds caused by the transatlantic trade, colonialism and slavery. This study discloses Miano's poetic of negation and refusal because of our analysis of the linguistic and cultural technics of subversion. Simultaneously, it represents the discovery of cultural hybridity and the acquisition of sociocultural realities of Afropeans. In conclusion, the study advances our understanding of Afropea as a third-space of individual and cultural emancipation and empowerment.

1. Introduction

Stéréotypés, rejetés et marginalisés, les Afrodescendants, qui ont en partage des expériences afro-européennes, semblent mener une vie en bordure de la société française. L'auteure afro-française Léonora Miano, qui sera introduite au début de l'article, prête dans ses œuvres, romans ou nouvelles, sa voix aux soi-disant « Afropéennes » et « Afropéens » (Miano 2012a : 84) qui, ressortissants des immigrés africains ou antillais en France, sont à la recherche de leurs chemins et leurs appartenances identitaires. Appartenant à la génération « des enfants de la postcolonie » (Waberi 1998 : 8), nés après les indépendances de l'Afrique francophone, Léonora Miano reprend dans ses œuvres la

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

quête de l'identité qui s'avère être le thème central de toute une génération d'une diaspora africaine en France depuis les années quatre-vingt-dix (cf. ibid.). À partir du roman *Blues pour Élise. Séquences afropéennes. Saison 1* de Léonora Miano, publié en 2010, l'objectif de cet article est de détecter le potentiel subversif des voix féminines, celles des « Afropéennes ». Celles-ci prennent la parole pour se faire remarquer avec leurs besoins et vœux dans « le refus d'une identité nationale réductrice et crispante » (Miano 2012a : 86) et semblent se libérer du lourd poids des clichés et des stéréotypes.

D'abord, les voix féminines dans l'œuvre de Miano seront analysées en particulier en ce qui concerne leur construction identitaire. Forgées par leurs destinées différentes et hétéroclites, les voix des Afropéennes se reflètent dans un discours varié et critique en pleine émergence, sur la vie entre tradition et modernité, race et genre, illusion et désillusion. Ensuite, nous esquisserons leurs motivations et aspirations en intégrant une analyse linguistique de leurs expressions et langage subversifs.

2. Une écriture frontalière

Dans son écriture, Léonora Miano, « une Afro-occidentale parfaitement assumée » (Miano 2012a : 26), née en 1973 à Douala au Cameroun, s'inspire de plusieurs influences. Elle met en relation sa « *multi appartenance* » (ibid. : 25) avec l'idée d'une 'identité frontalière', ancrée dans un lieu qui ne sépare ni ne divise mais qui, au contraire, fait se rencontrer (cf. ibid.). Inspirée par les écrivains noirs de l'Amérique et de la Caraïbe – notamment par les concepts de *créolisation* (voir Glissant 1997) et de la construction de la *Relation*[1] d'Edouard Glissant, un Martiniquais des Antilles françaises – la frontière est, selon Miano, un lieu qu'elle habite, où les mondes se touchent et les langues se mêlent (Miano 2012a : 25). De plus, elle a fait des études en littérature américaine et elle écrit en faisant usage de ses langues. Dans son recueil d'essais *Habiter la frontière*, elle constate d'une manière récurrente :

[1] En 1990, Édouard Glissant concrétise dans son essai *Poétique de la Relation* le concept clé de *Relation* selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'autre (voir : Glissant 1990).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

« J'écris telle que je suis. J'écris ce que je suis » (ibid. : 28, 30). Miano emprunte souvent la structuration de ses récits à la musique de jazz, un genre musical, qui a été créé au sein des communautés afro-américaines au Sud des Etats-Unis à la fin du XIX^e^ siècle. Pour elle, le jazz du XX^e^ siècle, avec son héritage de la musique euro-américaine et afro-américaine, est une « musique métisse par excellence » (ibid. : 29). Dans ses écrits, elle transmet le rythme, la tension, la polyphonie, la répétition ou le chorus du jazz à ses textes. À côté du jazz, qui symbolise « le mélange », elle se laisse inspirer par le soul, « le hurlement », et le blues, « la réalité » (ibid. : 30) ce qui se voit dans le titre de l'œuvre analysée.

Dans les chapitres suivants, nous constaterons que Léonora Miano est également influencée par les auteurs de la *Négritude*, qui ont produit leurs œuvres entre 1930 et 1960, et par les auteurs africains francophones à partir des années 1970.

D'un point de vue littéraire, Miano appartient à une génération d'écrivains afro-français qu'Abdourahman A. Waberi appelle les « enfants de la postcolonie » (Waberi 1998 : 8). Dans sa classification des littératures africaines francophones, il reprend la notion de « postcolonie » d'Achille Mbembe[2] et se permet ainsi un clin d'œil aux enfants de minuit[3] de Salman Rushdie, parce que ceux-ci sont nés après les indépendances en Inde à partir de l'année 1960. Parmi les auteurs des *enfants de la postcolonie*, la « quatrième génération » (Waberi 1998 : 8) selon la classification de Waberi, on retrouve de jeunes auteurs d'origine africaine vivant et publiant en France, nés après les indépendances de l'Afrique francophone. Ils se proclament écrivains avant d'être noirs et s'assument comme « bâtards internationaux » (ibid.), c'est-à-dire comme auteurs multiculturels et transcontinentaux qui questionnent leur identité et leur appartenance. Les thèmes littéraires de cette génération se caractérisent, en général, par un côté provocateur :

[2] Dans *De la postcolonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine*, Mbembe saisit la postcolonie en tant qu'espace socio-historique et politique qui reflète non seulement la réalité, mais aussi « l'identité propre d'une trajectoire historique donnée : celle des sociétés récemment sorties de l'expérience que fut la colonisation […] » (Mbembe 2000 : 140).

[3] Le roman *Les enfants de minuit* (1981) de Salman Rushdie traite de mille et un enfants, nés à Bombay le 15 août 1947 à minuit, à savoir au moment où l'Inde accède à l'indépendance et à leur lien fort avec au l'enchaînement à l'histoire de leur pays.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

par exemple, en préférant l'arrivée en France au retour au pays natal, ou par le refus de la vision du monde de la génération précé-dente, celle de la littérature de la décolonisation et de la désillusion des années 1970 (cf. ibid. : 8 et sq.).

Les générations précédentes des littératures africaines francophones sont, selon Waberi, celle des *pionniers* (1910-1930), celle de la *Négritude* (1930-1960) et celle de *la décolonisation et du désenchantement postcolonial* (à partir des années 1970) (ibid.). Les années 1970 correspondent à l'émergence d'une littérature pleine de désillusion face aux dictatures des régimes postcoloniaux. Les auteurs qui sont devenus une référence de cette littérature sont par exemple Sony Labou Tansi, l'écrivain congolais qui a publié en 1979 *La Vie et demie,* Amadou Kourouma, l'auteur ivorien, qui a écrit *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968), et Tierno Monénembo, l'auteur guinéen francophone des *Crapauds-brousse* (1979). À cette époque-là, les écrivaines sénégalaises Mariama Bâ (1979), Aminata Sow Fall (1979) et Ken Bugul (1984) forgent par exemple les débuts d'une écriture féminine africaine francophone. Les écrivains femmes, influencées souvent par leurs diverses expériences au foyer, prennent la parole et décrivent – par exemple chez Bugul – leur propre vie ou – par exemple chez Bâ et Fall – à travers des romans épistolaires, des histoires de vies des femmes fictives. Leurs sujets dépeignent la condition de la femme, les différents bouleversements sociaux d'après les indépendances africaines francophones et les expériences d'immigration en France. Elles dénoncent avec ardeur des comportements patriarcaux et des obstacles à l'essor de la femme et contribuent ainsi à une illustration de la vie des femmes africaines d'hier et d'aujourd'hui.

Miano a elle-même été témoin de transformations historiques et culturelles multiples, par exemple pendant son enfance au début de l'ère post-coloniale[4] à Douala ainsi qu'au cours de son immigration à Paris. Face à ce constat, elle semble continuer cette tradition d'une écriture féminine africaine et marque ses écrits de sa propre empreinte esthétique et stylistique. À côté des auteurs féminins contemporains comme

[4] Dans ce contexte, nous adoptons la définition de Moura selon laquelle « post-colonial désigne le simple fait d'arriver après l'époque coloniale » (Moura 1999 : 4).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Calixthe Beyala (2009) et Fatou Diome (2004), Miano aborde dans ses textes des thèmes traitant la présence noire en France et en particulier, la condition de la femme africaine. Par exemple, dans *Écrits pour la parole* (2012b), un recueil destiné à la scène ouverte, Miano consacre ses textes courts aux Françaises noires qui souffrent mais sont rarement entendues.

Léonora Miano est devenue célèbre grâce à une trilogie dans laquelle elle a déjà imposé sa voix. Les trois romans intitulés *L'Intérieur de la nuit*, *Contours du jour qui vient* et *Les Aubes écarlates*, publiés entre 2005 et 2009 par la maison d'édition Plon, ont une scénographie fictive en Afrique équatoriale. Les œuvres ont été saluées par le public et la critique et Miano a même obtenu le Goncourt des Lycéens en 2006 pour *Contours du jour qui vient*. En 2010, le roman *Les Aubes écarlates* était finaliste du Prix des 5 continents de la francophonie. De manière tout à fait inédite, le roman *La saison de l'ombre* (2013) s'interroge sur l'événement de la traite transatlantique. Lauréate du prix Femina, Miano met en scène des personnages qui sont restés dans leurs villages africains. Elle y montre surtout le point de vue des femmes et de mères qui sont non seulement en quête de leurs fils enlevés, vendus et disparus, mais tout autant en quête de leur identité.

Avec le roman précédant *Blues pour Élise*, *Tels des astres éteints*, publié en 2008, Miano est l'écrivaine qui inaugure le terme et la thématique des « Afropéens » vivant en France, dans la nouvelle *Afropean Soul et autres nouvelles* (2008b). Avec le terme *Afropéen* ou *Afropéenne*, elle désigne les personnes d'ascendance subsaharienne avec des attaches européennes fortes, souvent appelés « franco quelque chose » (Miano 2012a : 139) en France.

Depuis son premier roman, *L'intérieur de la Nuit,* Miano « travaille sur la couleur afin de l'affranchir du regard du passé » (ibid. : 85). *Blues pour Élise* n'est donc pas un discours rancunier sur la présence noire à Paris ou en France. C'est plutôt un roman léger qui déploie une réflexion cachée sur des questions aussi profondes que la quête identitaire et la vie entre tradition et modernité. Au-delà, il montre les illusions et désillusions des protagonistes concernant leurs conditions de vies comme femmes, noires et Afro-européennes à Paris. Dans le roman, Miano donne ainsi la parole aux femmes noires qui font office de porte-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

paroles d'individus qu'on entend peu. Ainsi, elle esquisse des portraits loin de tout cliché 'prémâché' qui se-ront examinés dans ce qui suit.

3. Les voix féminines de *Blues pour Élise*

Dans *Blues pour Élise*, il est question de jeunes femmes, issues de parents immigrés de l'Afrique subsaharienne et de la Caraïbe en France[5], qui forment un groupe qui s'appelle « Bigger than life » (Miano 2010 : 78). Les héroïnes sont des Parisiennes, financièrement indépendantes et capables de s'imposer. « Bigger than life » est devenu leur devise (cf. ibid. : 77). Le roman montre ainsi un portrait de femmes de différents âges, qui toutes mènent leurs vies de façon différente. Ces femmes ont cependant en commun des doutes non seulement propres à leur féminité, mais aussi à cause de leur origine africaine ou caribéenne. Elles sont perpétuellement confrontées aux représentations que d'autres personnages se font d'eux : femmes, noires et afro-européennes. Mais quand sont-elles juste humaines ?

Les « Bigger than life » sont Akasha, Malaïka, Amahoro et Shale (cf. Miano 2010 : 78). Akasha, la protagoniste qui ouvre le roman, est une femme mélancolique et déçue par ses amours avec des hommes de l'Afrique subsaharienne. Malaïka est une femme qui assume ses rondeurs et qui ne veut pas se soumettre aux idéaux de beauté des sociétés occidentales. Amahoro, quant à elle, vit un conflit avec son mari, parce que celui-ci doute de la fidélité de sa femme. Élise, doyenne du groupe et mère de Shale et Estelle, est marquée par des blessures anciennes : c'est ainsi qu'Élise garde un secret de famille qu'elle ne révèle qu'à la fin du roman à Shale, sa fille qui a été engendrée dans son pays natal africain lors d'un viol, motivé par des raisons racistes (ibid. : 78 et sqq.). De plus, il y a la protagoniste Kimmy, qui travaille comme hôtesse d'accueil dans une entreprise.

[5] Certains personnages descendent de captifs subsahariens déportés dans la Caraïbe et d'autres sont issus de parents venus d'Afrique subsaharienne pour s'établir en France au XX^{e} siècle.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Dans leurs conversations, où elles évoquent leurs amours, leurs déceptions et leurs aspirations, elles se positionnent toutes de façon différente. Leur sort commun est symbolisé par leurs cheveux crépus. Devenu un point central dans le récit, la thématique du cheveu est l'expression des doutes propres à leur féminité, naissant de leur ascendance africaine et caribéenne, qui leur confère une place particulière dans la société française. Sur ce point, leurs différentes coiffures – de la perruque au style occidental avec des cheveux longs et lisses jusqu'à la coupe « afro », courte et frisée – reflètent leurs besoins et leurs souhaits variés concernant leur adaptation et insertion dans la société française. Par exemple, il y a des femmes qui se rasent la tête ou elles se coupent les cheveux pour ne laisser que les racines crépues (ibid. : 80). Ainsi, elles manifestent qu'elles ont abandonné le défri-sage des cheveux pour retrouver une esthétique plus naturelle et concordant avec leur ascendance africaine ou caribéenne, loin des exigences de beauté européennes mentionnées plus haut.

Pourtant, la vie moderne dans la ville ainsi que l'exercice de la profession continuent de confronter les femmes afro-européennes aux exigences de l'idéal de beauté selon les normes occidentales. Comment gèrent-elles ces défis quotidiens qui ont un grand impact sur leur construction identitaire ? Voici quelques exemples : la patronne de Kimmy exige qu'elle porte une « *coiffure conventionnelle* » (Miano 2010 : 43) qui convient mieux à l'image de la société française que ses tresses, qui lui donnent une apparence, au-delà de sa couleur de peau noire très voyante, « trop ethnique » (ibid.). Par conséquent, Kimmy, excédée, déclare à ses copines qu'elle en a

> ras-le-bol qu'on culpabilise celles qui se défrisent les cheveux, assez qu'on les pointe du doigt, qu'on les dise honteuses de leur couleur, comme si le noir disparaissait avec le défrisage, comme si les gens étaient tout à coup plus aimables, comme s'il était plus simple de trouver un logement. (Ibid.)

Mais bien que Kimmy se fasse faire de belles tresses, elle met en évidence le fait qu'elle ne se sent pas moins noire qu'une autre malgré son ancien défrisage de cheveux. Par contre, Akasha répond : « la quête d'une chevelure lisse est la marque de l'aliénation, de la détestation de soi » (ibid. : 45). Pour Akasha, même les extensions pour les cheveux

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

doivent être abandonnées. Élise, l'autre membre du groupe « Bigger than life », objecte que personne ne lui dictera les codes de sa liberté (cf. ibid. : 48). Pour Akasha, cependant, l'argument de la liberté individuelle semble un argument spécieux si on ne se sent libre qu'en se travestissant :

> Elle tait ce qu'elle sait de l'origine du défrisage, ne dit pas non plus que le port du cheveu dénaturé est majoritaire chez les femmes d'ascendance subsaharienne, ce qu'on observe dans aucun autre groupe ethnique […]. (Ibid.)

Akasha lie donc avec amertume le verbe « travestir » aux cheveux dénaturés et à une attitude artificielle, adoptés par ses amies d'ascendance africaine, reflétant leur effort d'intégration. Mais alors que la définition d'une liberté individuelle par Kimmy et Élise ne coïncide pas avec leur désir d'intégration dans la société française, Akasha, elle, assume par conséquent plus ses racines africaines en favorisant le retour aux cheveux naturels (cf. Miano 2010 : 48).[6]

Cette discussion entre Akasha et Kimmy montre que les questions d'image et de regard semblent primordiales pour ces femmes. Cela s'explique par leur statut de minorité dans la société ainsi que par leurs angoisses d'avoir à d'assumer les parties africaines en elles. Les femmes sont intérieurement écartelées et perturbées, puisqu'elles ressentent encore la douleur et les répercussions du passé colonial.

Miano écrit :

> La douleur est celle de déchirures intérieures, d'écartèlements, de difficiles remembrements. Le défi est de faire en sorte que les heures sombres du passé deviennent enfin l'Histoire, pas un présent perpétuel. Les femmes

[6] Miano se réfère ici indirectement à une conception de l'altérité, résultant de l'ambivalence de l'identification psychique pendant le colonialisme, abondamment analysée par le précurseur des idées postcoloniales, Frantz Fanon, né à Fort-de-France, Martinique. À partir du regard de l'Autre, Fanon manifeste les processus psychiques d'identification ambivalents à l'intérieur de la relation coloniale. Dans *Peau noire, masques blancs*, publié en 1952, Fanon décrit que dans le regard de l'Autre, c'est-à-dire dans le regard du colon blanc, se reflète le rejet de l'être noir. Par contrecoup, le Noir se sent gêné par la présence du colon blanc, en se sentant en proie aux stéréotypes de la société française, dominants dans l'Histoire coloniale et le discours colonial (cf. Basto 2008 : 48).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> noires du troisième millénaire cherchent leur place, dans un espace aux limites mal définies, entre aliénation et quête de la pureté identitaire. D'ici une heure ou deux, elles vont payer Coco, prendre à nouveau le métro, tenter de n'être que des femmes. (Ibid. : 49).

Ainsi, Léonora Miano met en évidence une conscience diasporique qui unit les Noirs de l'Afrique, de la Caraïbe et des Amériques à travers un passé commun, forgée par l'esclavage et la traite transatlantique. C'est la raison pour laquelle Miano fait usage du concept *Afropea* qui désigne un endroit utopique, une invention « d'un ancrage pour ne pas sombrer » (Miano 2012a : 86). Ainsi, le néologisme *Afropea* est pour les Afropéens l'expression d'une « maturation progressive de leur parcours identitaire » (ibid.) :

> *Afropea*, c'est, en France, le terroir mental que se donnent ceux qui ne peuvent faire valoir la souche française. C'est la légitimité identitaire arrachée, et c'est le dépassement des vieilles rancœurs. C'est la main tendue du dominé au dominant, un geste qui dit qu'on sera libre parce qu'on accepte de libérer l'autre. (Miano 2012a : 86)

Pour souligner ce « terroir mental » (ibid.) des Afropéens, nous ajoutons le concept de « melancholia africana » (Etoké 2010 : 27), forgé par Nathalie Etoké dans son ouvrage *Melancholia africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire* (2010). À partir de son concept qu'elle intitule *melancholia africana*, elle veut « embrasser cette mélancolie qui colore l'existence des Noirs en Afrique, en Europe, dans la Caraïbe, et en Amérique du Nord » (ibid. : 28 et sq.). Etoké cherche ainsi à saisir « comment les Subsahariens et les Afrodescendants gèrent la perte, le deuil et la survie dans une pratique du quotidien contaminé par le passé »[7] (ibid. : 27). Le passé dans lequel la *melancholia africana* est enracinéese définit dans l'œuvre d'Etoké par la traite négrière, l'esclavage et la colonisation. Au-delà, Etoké aborde l'idée d'une conscience diasporique des Noirs qui est non seulement liée à la mémoire, mais surtout « un sentiment d'appartenance qui con-

[7] Avec les termes 'Subsahariens' et 'Afrodescendants', par exemple, Léonora Miano désigne, d'une part les immigrés de la première génération en France originaires de l'Afrique subsaharienne francophone et d'autre part, les personnes de la deuxième génération, nées de l'immigration africaine.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

tribue à une plénitude existentielle » (ibid. : 33). Au sein de la conscience diasporique, la douleur est intégrée en tant que partie de la *melancholia africana*. Ceci révèle la nécessité pour les générations présentes d'assumer et de pardonner les blessures et ruptures du passé pour mieux se retrouver dans un monde en mouvement (cf. ibid. : 36).

De cette façon, Miano reprend dans *Blues pour Élise* le thème de la douleur, qui a déjà été central dans ses romans précédents, surtout dans *Tels des astres éteints*. Ce roman, publié en 2008, met en scène trois protagonistes qui sont psychiquement et physiquement écartelés entre la capitale française, l'« Intra-muros » (Miano 2008a : 81) et le Mboasu, un pays en Afrique équatoriale. Paris se manifeste comme catalyseur de la claustrophobie des personnages qui errent dans la ville et se sentent apatrides. En quête de leur identité, ils ont besoin de s'enraciner quelque part. Pour les protagonistes Amok et Shrapnel, fascinés par l'histoire, la langue et le style de vie des anciens colons, l'Afrique représente un endroit qu'ils veulent quitter (Miano 2008a : 62 et sq.). Par contre, pour la protagoniste féminine, Amandla, l'Afrique représente dès son enfance à la fois un mythe et un désir profond. Selon Amandla, l'Afrique représente « le rêve du Pays Primordial » (ibid. : 83) et son unique objectif, c'est un retour aux sources. Pour les protagonistes Amok et Shrapnel, la patrie ressemble à un enfer qu'ils veulent quitter à tout prix : « Le pays, c'était cet indestructible en soi […]. Pour Amok, la distance n'avait pas fait du pays un paradis perdu. Il ne s'agissait toujours que d'un séjour infernal dont il cherchait sa sortie » (ibid. : 42). Amok est le fils d'un Africain qui a trahit les siens en aidant le colonisateur (cf. Miano 2008a : 198 et sq.). Son père exerçait régulièrement son « *droit de correction* » (ibid. : 27) et battait sa mère dont il traitait le corps comme bien (cf. ibid. : 25). Amok se perçoit comme fils de cette violence et produit de l'endurance maternelle (ibid. : 27). Cela explique pourquoi le continent africain suscite chez Amok la mémoire d'une enfance violente dont il ressent « la blessure inguérissable » (ibid.). Il a intériorisé une culpabilité historique qu'il lui est impossible d'appréhender. Par conséquent, contrairement aux protagonistes de *Tels des astres éteints* qui sont surmenés par leurs problèmes existentiels en tant que migrants africains, les « Bigger than life » parviennent à mieux confronter cette douleur grâce à leur amitié

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

profonde et à une réévaluation de thèmes du quotidien, comme le montrent les passages suivants.

Dans *Blues pour Élise*, les Afropéennes et Afropéens discutent librement de la problématique des sentiments d'appartenance identitaire des jeunes vivant en minorité dans la capitale française de l'ancien empire colonial. Pour Estelle, la fille d'Élise, qui discute avec Ernest, un jeune homme originaire des Antilles, les Afropéens tendent plutôt à rechigner à s'affirmer Européens. Cette tendance contraste avec le comportement des Afro-Américains, selon l'avis d'Estelle, qui ont lutté pour se faire respecter. Elle constate que le problème des Afropéens est lié à leur identité « dédoublée » (Miano 2010 : 105) ; ils ne se sentent pas à leur place en Europe (cf. ibid.). Elle donne l'exemple que les Afropéennes et Afropéens en France portent souvent des patronymes qui les rattachent au continent africain, même si leur culture et leur mode de vie sont avant tout européens (ibid.). Pour Estelle, il ne reste qu'une solution :

> Les Afropéens devraient mettre un terme à leurs tergiversations identitaires, cesser d'attendre d'être nommés et légitimés par la majorité. Ils devaient s'inventer, s'imposer, se dire. (Miano 2010 : 106)

Cette citation montre bien que les Afropéennes et Afropéens attendent d'être réhabilitées par (le regard de) la majorité française. En même temps, la citation révèle que les Afropéennes ont besoin de représentations positives d'elles-mêmes. Pour arriver à ce but et mettre fin à leurs tourments identitaires, les Afropéennes veulent donc s'inventer et s'imposer en vue d'un avenir meilleur. En imposant leur place dans la société française, elles commencent à donner leur avis sur des thèmes qui les concernent et les affectent autant que les personnes d'ascendance occidentale. Ce processus ainsi que le potentiel subversif de leur langue et langage sera analysé dans les paragraphes suivants.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

4. L'analyse du potentiel subversif de la langue et du langage des Afropéennes

Dans ce contexte, nous entamons l'analyse de la langue et du langage des Afropéennes du roman *Blues pour Élise*, devenus un moyen de subversion contre les structures dominantes dans une société d'anciens colonisateurs. Vu d'une perspective étymologique, le mot *subversion* provient du verbe latin *subvertere* et signifie ‚renverser' ou 'bouleverser'. La subversion peut être tournée contre un ordre établi et des principes que l'on croyait immuables ou contre l'autorité, qu'elle soit sociale, politique, religieuse ou littéraire et artistique.

Dans les études littéraires postcoloniales[8], les critiques[9] dénoncent souvent comme mythe l'idée coloniale de l'homme oriental, subordonné à l'homme occidental. Sur fond de ces thèses, le théoricien indien Homi K. Bhabha, qui fait partie des critiques des théories postcoloniales les plus influents sur la recherche contemporaine, a étudié d'une manière profonde et essentielle les ambivalences dans le discours colonial. Par exemple, dans son article *Of Mimicry and Man : The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984), il cite le psychanalyste Jacques Lacan et introduit ainsi la signification de « mimicry » :

> Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. […] It is not the question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled back-ground, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare. (Bhabha 1984 : 125)

[8] Dans *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (1999), Jean-Marc Moura distingue le sens strictement historique du « post-colonial » (avec un tiret) du sens dialectique du postcolonial (cette fois sans tiret). La notion « postcolonial » se réfère selon Moura « à toutes les stratégies d'écriture déjouant la vision coloniale, y compris durant la période de la colonisation » (Moura 1999 : 4).

[9] Les principaux fondements des études postcoloniales se situent dans les œuvres de Frantz Fanon *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) et *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961), dans l'œuvre *Portrait du colonisé* (1957) d'Albert Memmi et dans l'ouvrage *L'Orientalisme* (1978) d'Edward Saïd.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bhabha révèle une technique postcoloniale en se basant sur les conceptions sur l'inconscient de Lacan[10]. A travers la *mimicry*, Bhabha expose que l'imitation et la moquerie aident le colonisé à décoder le colonisateur – l''Autre'.

La signification des ambivalences dans les discours coloniaux est donc primordiale pour notre analyse, parce qu'elle est en rapport avec le potentiel subversif dans la langue et le langage des Afropéennes. Hawkins ajoute que les rapports entre la culture des colonisateurs et celles des anciens colonisés étaient complexes et souvent occultés. De cette manière, les relations coloniales n'étaient pas forcément à direction unique : du colonisateur au colonisé (cf. Hawkins 2001 : 104). Plus concrètement, cela signifie qu'il ne s'agissait pas seulement d'une imposition de modèles coloniaux, mais plutôt « de leur subversion et de leur approbation à des fins tout autres par les peuples anciennement colonisés » (Hawkins 2001 : 104).

À partir de la critique postcoloniale, il nous semble que Miano subvertit le discours de l'ancienne hégémonie coloniale pour dresser un portrait plus authentique des Afropéennes. Dans l'œuvre *Blues pour Élise* (2010), Miano fait usage d'une langue orale, vigoureuse et salée, pleine d'anglicismes et de créolismes qui pimentent le texte, écrit en français. Il semble même qu'elle s'émancipe de l'usage classique de la langue française, dispersée et inculquée par les anciens colons aux classes privilégiées lors des décolonisations. Ainsi, Miano exécute une subversion linguistique en s'appliquant à construire un vocabulaire nouveau, capable de dire la France d'aujourd'hui. En ce faisant, nous constatons qu'elle suit par exemple les pas d'Ahmadou Kourouma, l'auteur ivorien des *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968), premier roman dont la caractéristique la plus marquante de son premier roman est son usage naturel de la tradition orale pour transmettre ses messages. Grâce à son premier roman, Kourouma a ouvert la voie à la francophonie, qui se base également sur le dialogue entre la langue française et

[10] Par exemple, dans *Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse*, publié en 1956, Jacques Lacan se réfère aux travaux de Sigmund Freud sur l'inconscient que celui-ci a désigné comme concept explicatif du fonctionnement psychique. Dans cette étude, Lacan a même remanié et renouveler la réception de Freud en s'appropriant des outils théoriques de la linguistique comme les concepts sur le langage, la langue et la structure et en les intégrant dans les théories de la psychanalyse.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

les langues des populations utilisations le français (cf. Gassama 1995 : 72). Dans ses textes, Miano mêle le français, l'anglais, le franglais, le créole et l'américain. L'écriture de Miano, qui se caractérise par une esthétique frontalière (cf. Miano 2012a : 29), est hybride[11], sans identité unique et précise. Elle recourt à une onomastique qui est onirique, autant pour les lieux que pour les personnages : par exemple, le nom Mboasu, ce pays d'Afrique équatoriale, qui sert de cadre fictif aux romans de sa trilogie africaine, ou le prénom Malaïka, qui signifie « mon ange » en swahili (Miano 2010 : 92). Dans *Tels des astres éteints*, les titres des chapitres sont américains, issus du répertoire du jazz *: Afro Blues*, *Straight Ahead*, *Angel Eyes*, *Round Midnight*, *Come Sunday*. Dans *Blues pour Élise*, les titres des chapitres reflètent des influences linguistiques et le monde cosmopolite des Afropéennes à Paris : « *Sable sister* », « *Radiées de la douceur* », « *Fantaisie impromptue* », « *The man I love* », « *Figures de l'altérité* », « *Beau gusse* », « *C'est l'amour* », « *Blues pour Élise* ». Deux interludes, qui font une scission entre les six premiers chapitres, s'appellent « Ton pied, mon pied ». Cela signifie « à la vie, à la mort » (ibid. : 200) – un terme qui s'emploie le plus souvent pour parler d'amitié. Miano aime emmêler ses langues pour peindre d'une manière la plus authentique les univers hybrides des protagonistes :

> Il y a toujours, dans le soubassement de la phrase, une multitude d'autres langues. Celles dans lesquelles je ne pense pas mais que je ressens. J'écris dans l'écho des cultures qui m'habitent : africaine, européenne, africaine américaine, caribéenne. Tout cela vient naturellement se loger dans le texte. Mon esthétique est donc frontalière. Elle utilise la langue française, mais ses références, les images qu'elle déploie sur la page, appartiennent à d'autres sphères. (Miano 2012a : 29)

Grâce à son écriture frontalière, Miano subvertit les frontières qui divisent les langues en instaurant des affrontements et enlacements qui donnent naissance à son écriture exceptionnelle.

[11] Ici, nous nous référons à la notion d'« hybridité culturelle » que Bhabha a définie dans *The Location of Culture* (1994) comme « une manière de déstabiliser l'ordre colonial, en appelant à la négociation » (Bhabha 2007 : 75). La théorie prend en compte l'ambivalence de l'identité culturelle coloniale dans les processus de constructions identitaires.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Dans *Blues pour Élise*, le premier chapitre, *Sable sister*, met en évidence autant l'ascendance antillaise d'Akasha et de sa mère Marianne que l'usage partiel de la langue créole. Akasha arrive à la conclusion, marquée par ses propres expériences traumatisantes avec les hommes ainsi que celles de sa mère, qu'elle veut ouvrir un nouveau chapitre dans sa vie. Ainsi, elle annonce le premier jour de sa nouvelle vie et la réinvention de son existence (cf. Miano 2010 : 13). Cela signifie, concrètement, qu'elle veut rompre avec la tradition antillaise dont sa mère était une proie. Car Marianne a été dénoncée par son mari africain, venu de la Terre Mère, en tant que descendante d'esclaves, comme femme sans généalogie. Dans les années suivantes et jusqu'à son divorce, Marianne fut donc appelée *canne à sucre* et fut aussi traitée comme une matière (ibid. : 19). Cette expression péjorative souligne d'autant plus sa fonction et son identité considérée comme inférieure :

> L'homme, influencé par les sages paroles des anciens de chez lui qui sont, comme chacun sait, des bibliothèques vivantes, finit par oublier le temps des roucoulades et des embrassades. Il s'employa à traiter sa femme comme ce qu'elle était devenue à ses yeux : une chose faite pour être mâchée, pressée, recrachée, dès lors qu'on en avait extirpé tous les sucs. (Ibid. : 15)

En se référant encore une fois à la conception de l'altérité, nous constatons que Miano laisse revivre les ambivalences identitaires et les rivalités entre les Noirs de l'Afrique et ceux des Antilles françaises ou d'Haïti, composés majoritairement de personnes d'origine africaine et de métis. Cela montre que ces rivalités sont encore présentes à l'époque postcoloniale. Elles sont consécutives aux stéréotypes, développés lors de l'esclavage et du commerce triangulaire. Les tournements identitaires de Marianne, la protagoniste du roman *Blues pour Élise*, ont leur origine dans le regard de l'Autre, qui mènent à une intériorisation d'une image de soi inférieure. Ceci explique le renforcement de l'aliénation de soi-même que sa fille Akasha, refuse de subir à son tour. Il en ressort qu'elle ne veut plus correspondre au « *poteau mitan* »,[12] c'est-à-dire à l'idéal de la femme antillaise. Elle dit résolument :

[12] Le « poteau mitan » est la traduction française de l'expression créole antillo-guyanaise « poto mitan » qui désigne originairement le poteau central dans le temple vau-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

> Fini de passer pour une amazone, une icône. […] Aujourd'hui, elle congédiait la femme poteau mitan. Elle ne serait plus la femme increvable, taillable et corvéable, la déesse vivante pour laquelle il n'y eut jamais de septième jour, celle qu'on célébra autant qu'on la craignit, qu'on idolâtra pour mieux s'en détourner, son éclat décidément trop puissant, trop éblouissant. Fini de marcher sur les traces de ses [d'Akasha] aïeules, pour n'être, sur une rive ou l'autre de l'océan, que madone ou bête de somme. (Miano 2010 : 13 et sq.)

Grâce à l'usage de créolismes, elle se décommande d'une manière subversive auprès des hommes qu'elle a rencontrés afin de ne plus être qu'elle ne soit plus obligée de suivre le même destin que sa mère. De cette manière, nous voyons de nouveau que les créolismes restent pour Akasha des outils linguistiques lui permettent de décrire sa réalité de vie en France.

Une autre technique que Léonora Miano utilise est l'intégration du chant créole dans le récit. Par exemple, Shale raconte à Amahoro le contenu d'un texte mythique qu'elle avait écrit elle-même. Dans l'histoire, intitulée « *La Vraie Vie de Sambo* » (Miano 2008a : 144), tous les épisodes commencent de la même façon. Au centre de l'histoire de Shale se trouve une petite fille, Sambo, qui essaie de voir le visage de son père (cf. Miano 2008a : 145). Pendant qu'Amahoro écoute à l'histoire, elle croise un jeune homme qui chante en créole : « *An pati ka loué tèt a yo, pou dot moun palé pa bouch a yo. Vèyé pou vwè k ilang ka palé* » (ibid.). En note de bas de page du roman, la traduction dit : « *Certains louent leur esprit pour que d'autres parlent à travers eux. Assurez-vous de savoir décoder leur langage* » (ibid.). Le chant en créole remplit une fonction didactique au niveau de contenu et au niveau linguistique. Au niveau du contenu, le chant est intégré dans le roman quand Shale explique à Amahoro que la fille de son roman ne parvient pas à faire connaissance de son père. Parallèlement, le lecteur attentif sait que Shale ne connaît pas non plus son géniteur non plus. Au niveau linguistique, Shale ne maîtrise pas non plus la langue créole, si bien à tel point qu'elle ne peut pas décoder la traduction des lignes en créoles. Par

dou. Le « *poto mitan* » décrit en créole, le pilier central sur lequel repose la case et sans lequel toute la maison s'écroule (cf. Miano 2010 : 13). L'expression décrit un individu qui est au centre du foyer et autour duquel tout s'organise et sur lequel tout s'appuie. Ainsi, ce terme sert à désigner le soutien familial, qui est souvent la mère.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

conséquent, elle n'est pas capable de comprendre l'indice clé que les lignes en créole décrivent à propos de sa propre quête identitaire.

Cette technique est utilisée encore une fois à la fin d'une discussion des Afropéennes concernant le port du « cheveu dénaturé » (Miano 2008a : 48) qui est majoritaire chez les femmes d'ascendance subsaharienne. A ce moment, les chœurs d'une chanson oubliée de Pascal Vallot, un auteur et interprète français, né en 1967 en Guadeloupe, s'élèvent : « atitid an nou ke sové nou » (ibid.). La ligne en créole signifie en français : « *C'est notre attitude qui nous sauvera* » (ibid.). Dans ce contexte, le message du chant nous semble comme une sagesse populaire.

La fonction didactique de la langue créole se réfère à la douleur et aux déchirures intérieures des Afrodescendantes qui sont en train de chercher leur place. La langue créole rappelle – ainsi que les cheveux crépus en tant qu'héritage africain – à l'histoire du commerce triangulaire et du trafic négrier entre l'Afrique, les Amériques et l'Europe, que les Afropéennes ont en commun aussi bien avec des ancêtres d'Afrique subsaharienne qu'e celles avec des ancêtres de la Caraïbe ont en commun.

Pour souligner l'hybridité des cultures et des langues qui forgent la France de nos jours, Miano a ajouté « *Le Glossaire des interludes* » (ibid. : 199) à la fin du roman. Là, on trouve aussi les traductions des mots en *camfranglais*[13] ou en *pidgin english*, utilisées souvent dans les dialogues ordinaires des Afrodescendants. Par exemple, le mot *Mbeng* vient du douala Mbengué et signifie, à l'origine, l'Occident. Mais dans l'usage camerounais, ce terme n'est employé que pour la France. En *pidgin english* du Cameroun, le substantif *mop* signifie la bouche. En revanche, le verbe *mop* signifie embrasser. Ces exemples soulignent d'autant plus que les éléments subversifs dans la langue des Afropéennes se mélangent d'une manière naturelle avec leur *français standard*.

Dans le chapitre suivant, le lecteur apprend, dans une rétrospective, qu'Akasha voulait jadis faire connaissance avec des hommes dont les

[13] Dans ce glossaire, on peut voir qu'un autre élément de subversion de la langue française qui se détache dans le roman est l'usage du *camfranglais*, un argot hybride brassant l'anglais, le français et les dialectes camerounais.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

mœurs et l'apparence lui étaient familières. Ceux-ci pouvaient être soit des « pharaons noirs désormais sans sceptre ni territoire » (Miano 2008a : 21), soit des « driveurs réfractaires à l'ordre et à la loi […] » (ibid.) ou des « rois du marronnage dont les tours HLM étaient devenues les mornes protecteurs » (ibid.). Akasha établit, sur un ton ironique, un jeu de symboles masculins de la mythologie égyptienne et créole qui sont transmis aux réalités des immigrés noirs de la France d'aujourd'hui. D'abord, elle aborde les 'pharaons noirs', ce qui souligne son enthousiasme pour l'Histoire de la Terre Mère – l'Afrique.[14] Ensuite, elle fait usage du terme créole 'driveur' pour décrire les vagabonds migratoires d'ascendance antillaise qui errent de nos jours dans le système politique et juridique en France. Les 'rois du marronnage' semblent symboliser finalement les déserteurs des anciens esclaves antillais qui étaient habitués à se cacher dans les mornes, c'est-à-dire dans les collines martiniquaises. Aujourd'hui, ils se cachent, comme l'imagine Akasha, dans les HLM, situés dans les périphéries de la banlieue parisienne.

Ces exemples nous montrent que leur langue subversive est métaphorique et pleine d'exagérations, à la fois ironique et satirique.

Au-delà des créolismes, Miano cache dans son œuvre des références qui attirent l'attention vers les poètes de la *Négritude* : Léon G. Damas, Aimé Césaire et Léopold Sedar Senghor. Celles-ci soulignent notre hypothèse d'une nouvelle conscience de soi des Afropéennes. La quête d'amoureuse d'Akasha nous sert à nouveau d'exemple : en comparant les hommes aux étoiles à l'éclat ambré et aux 'feux sombres' que le sort avait voulu éteindre, elle prend à cœur de raviver leur éclat (cf. Miano 2010 : 25). Ici, nous analysons l'expression 'feu sombre' sur

[14] Par exemple, l'historien et anthropologue Cheikh Anta Diop a travaillé à partir de la langue, de la tradition et de la religion, sur les liens entre la culture africaine et la culture égyptienne. Le kémitisme panafricain, une tendance identitaire, trouve sa source dans les travaux de Diop cherchant à faire connaître et renaître la philosophie des anciens Égyptiens ou kémites, en tant qu'héritage culturel de l'Afrique. Dans l'œuvre de Miano, les protagonistes féminines Amandla de *Tels des Astres éteints* (2008a) et Akasha de *Blues pour Élise* (2010) y font référence en abordant le sujet de la réappropriation et revendication de ses origines ainsi que du retour aux sources.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

fond d'un poème que Césaire a dédié à Léon-Gontran Damas.[15] Le poème s'appelle « Léon G. Damas : feu sombre toujours » et fut publié en 1982 dans la collection de poèmes intitulée *Moi, Laminaire*. Ce poème commence par les vers :

> soleils
> oiseaux d'enfance déserteurs de son hoquet
> je vois les négritudes obstinées
> les fidélités fraternelles
> la nostalgie fertile
> la réhabilitation de délires très anciens
> je vois toutes les étoiles de jadis qui renaissent et sautent
> de leur site ruiniforme
> je vois toute une nuit de ragtime et de blues
> traversée d'un pêle-mêle de rires
> et de sanglots d'enfants abandonnés. (Césaire 1990 : 90)

Dans ce poème, Césaire se souvient de Damas, qu'il appelle « frère, feu sombre toujours ». Il se rappelle leur amitié profonde, leur combat pour la quête de la liberté et leur unité spirituelle, liée à la philosophie de la *Négritude*.

Inspirée de cette spiritualité et solidarité, Akasha, adepte de la *Négritude*, tente d'entrer en contact avec les hommes d'ascendance subsaharienne afin qu'ils puissent échanger sur les conditions d'être noir en France. Mais elle ne parvient pas à raviver l'éclat ambré de ces hommes. Habitant dans une chambre louée dans la banlieue nord, des questions concernant sa condition de vie la tourmentent : « *Qui a imaginé ce lieu pour y loger des humains ?* […] Était-ce cela qui effrayait les hommes ? » (Miano 2010 : 22). Elle s'est égarée avec ses aventures amoureuses sur les voies sinueuses d'un mythe et vit, par conséquent, plusieurs échecs amoureux qu'elle dénomme « le nègre bleu » (ibid. : 23), « le lascar » (ibid.), « le bigot » (ibid. : 24) « mauvaise imitation de Black Panther » et « l'ultime – le grand afro blues » (Miano 2010 : 25). Miano écrit : « Alors, pour les approcher, Akasha était descendue du piédestal où les femmes d'ascendance subsaharienne avaient été pla-

[15] Les caractéristiques de la poésie damassienne sont la dénonciation radicale des agressions contre les Nègres, l'opposition aux actes sous-entendant une infériorité ou une supériorité raciale et la préconisation de l'unité et de la solidarité.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

cées, sacralisées, abandonnées » (ibid. : 23). Akasha est un exemple d'Afropéenne influencée, d'une part, par la tradition et l'héritage culturel d'Afrique subsaharienne, par exemple illustrés par ses illusions vis-à-vis des « mâles de bronze » (ibid.), et, d'autre part, confrontée à la réalité dure et à la désillusion concernant par exemple la réalisation de sa mission d'amour et ses conditions de vie. Ainsi, elle en arrive à la conclusion suivante : « Il n'y avait plus rien à dire, elle en avait fini avec les astres éteints » (ibid. : 25). Ici se cache une autre référence à l'œuvre *Tels des astres éteints* de Miano, puisque les protagonistes sont des antihéros, qui sont littéralement des « désastres ». Au-delà, Amandla et Amok se révèlent incapables d'entretenir une relation amoureuse à cause de leurs idéologies différentes et à cause de leur incapacité à se distancier du passé colonial.

Les Afropéennes trouvent d'autres inspirations dans le monde anglophone, par exemple dans le couple 'noir' et 'héroïque' Barack et Michelle Obama. Barack Obama, dénommé tendrement « brother b. » (ibid. : 192), montre qu'une vie heureuse et couronnée de succès est possible à l'écart de la domination blanche. Cette conception de la vie des Afropéennes, qui prennent également en considération les Noirs des Amériques, révèle la conscience diasporique dont parle Nathalie Etoké. Au-delà, les membres de « Bigger than life » sont nourries d'une force et d'un pouvoir qu'elles appellent « *newbian pawa* ou *power »* (ibid. : 194), déclenchés par l'élection de Barack Obama en tant que premier président noir des États-Unis. Cette adoration se reflète autant dans le terme « *black love* » (ibid. : 31*) ou « newbian luv »* (ibid. : 189)*,* symbolisant la nouvelle égalité au sein des couples noirs, que dans leur maxime qui est aussi le sous-titre du dernier chapitre : « *Let's Barack our lives !* » (ibid.). Vu sous l'angle de l'hybridité culturelle, le terme « newbian » se réfère d'un côté aux Noirs « neufs », c'est-à- dire aux Africains-Américains métis ainsi qu'au peuple des Nubiens.[16] De l'autre, il nous rappelle les origines musicales du terme représentant l'Afrique et l'Europe : d'abord à l'album musical *Adventure in Afropea* (1993) du groupe de musique belge, aux origines zaïroises Zap Mama,

[16] Les Nubiens sont un groupe ethnolinguistique originaire du Soudan actuel et du sud de l'Égypte. Ils proviennent des premiers habitants de la vallée centrale du Nil qui est considérée comme l'un des premiers berceaux de la civilisation.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

et ensuite à l'album *Princesses Nubians* (1998) du groupe afro-français *Les Nubians*, qui était inspirée par Marie Daulne du groupe *Zap Mama*.

Pour nous, la notion représente également une référence à la sphère anglophone du concept *Afropea*, par exemple à l'écrivain et bloggeur britannique Johny Pitts, né d'un père noir américain et d'une mère britannique blanche. Depuis 2014, il partage ses expériences afropéennes sur le site Afropean.com. En 2019, il a publié *Afropean : Notes from Black Europe*, un ouvrage qui présente les Afro-Européens[17] dans leur propre histoire et révèle de manière similaire les contradictions et les obstacles auxquels ils sont en butte.

5. Conclusion

Dans son œuvre *Blues pour Élise*, Léonora Miano se dédie d'une manière profonde à la condition d'être femme, noire et Afro-européenne en France aujourd'hui. Grâce à son écriture frontalière, Miano se focalise sur la reconquête de la parole de la voix féminine sur des thèmes culturels, sociaux, politiques et économiques. Elle se fonde sur plusieurs influences, par exemple celle de la littérature afro-caribéenne et afro-française ainsi que des registres musicaux différents qui ont leurs origines dans la musique afro-américaine.

À côtés des écrivaines afro-françaises contemporaines comme Fatou Diome et Marie Ndiaye (2009), elle écrit les histoires des femmes qui refusent l'humiliation mais qui adorent la vie. Avec son potentiel subversif, transmis par le langage et les expressions des Afropéennes, Miano esquisse non seulement les univers hybrides des protagonistes, mais aussi son 'esthétique frontalière' au sein des littératures africaines francophones.

L'écrivaine afro-française présente autant dans *Tels des astres éteints* que dans *Blues pour Élise* deux postures différentes autour des esquisses identitaires des Afropéennes et Afropéens en France. À partir d'ici, se ré-vèle probablement la différence la plus frappante : en comparaison avec les Afropéens de *Tels des astres éteints*, tristes et mélancoliques (cf. Miano 2008a : 53 sq.), les Afropéennes de *Blues*

[17] En anglais : « *African-Europeans* ».

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

pour Élise semblent avoir tiré les leçons du passé. Tandis que le passé colonial a encore une grande influence sur les protagonistes de *Tels des astres éteints* (ibid. : 56 et sq.), qui culmine dans le suicide de Shrapnel (ibid. : 337), les protagonistes de *Blues pour Élise* sont capables de mieux avancer dans leur vie. Les anti-héros afropéens de *Tels des astres éteints* se transforment ainsi dans *Blues pour Élise* en 'héroïnes afropéennes'. Les « Bigger than life » sont en train de déve-opper un style de vie positif qui met en relief leur liberté individuelle.[18] Bien que certaines d'elles courent après l'amour, elles ont pour code d'honneur de se faire respecter par les hommes.[19]

Les personnages afropéennes valorisent l'amitié et la solidarité, dont le poème « Léon G. Damas : feu sombre toujours » d'Aimé Césaire était une allégorie. Ces valeurs trouvent leur origine dans l'histoire familiale douloureuse d'Élise. Celle-ci sert de fil conducteur du roman en liant le passé (en Afrique) avec le présent (en France). Élise est, comme doyenne du groupe, la protagoniste qui unit les mémoires 'noires et blanches' d'antan et d'aujourd'hui. Ainsi, elle incite les *Bigger than life* à s'exprimer sur leurs expériences afro-européennes en France. Bien que son histoire familiale soit tragique, celle-ci montre également que l'amour et la confiance entre Élise et son mari, qui a accepté la fille Shale comme la sienne, donnent confiance en soi à une nouvelle génération de jeunes femmes afropéennes.

Néanmoins, les portraits littéraires des Afropéens et des Afropéennes dans l'œuvre de Miano font preuve qu'ils continuent tout autant à souffrir des blessures historiques – comme la traite négrière, la colonisation et l'esclavage[20] – que les personnes d'ascendance africaine ou caribéenne restés sur le continent africain ou dans la Caraïbe. Ces œuvres de Miano révèlent ainsi qu'un « travail de mémoire » (Miano 2012a : 127) est primordial pour les Afrodescendants. Ce travail semble

[18] À la fin du roman, Miano annonce une suite du roman qui s'appelle « Paris Boogie. Séquences afropéennes. Saison 2 ». A ce jour, le roman n'est pas encore publié.

[19] Par exemple, dans le dernier chapitre *Newbian luv,* il s'agit de l'égalité au sein des couples noirs.

[20] Dans son recueil de textes théoriques intitulé *L'Impératif transgressif* (2016), l'écrivaine invente des concepts pour penser et dépasser les idéologies actuelles. Ainsi, elle propose l'Afrophonie plutôt que la francophonie, la Déportation Transatlantique des Subsahariens, plutôt que la traite des esclaves.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

indispensable d'une part pour mieux se réconcilier avec leur héritage subsaharien et d'autre part pour mieux s'approprier une nouvelle conscience de leur propre valeur afin qu'une meilleure affirmation de leur identité afropéenne.

Nous en concluons que dans *Blues pour Élise*, Miano met en scène une émancipation individuelle et culturelle des Afropéennes ayant lieu dans le « tiers-espace »[21] (Bhabha 2006 : 99) qui s'appelle « *Afropea* » (Miano 2012a : 86). Pour elles, être « afropéen » ou « afropéenne » exprime une façon de se réconcilier avec le passé et avec sa propre expérience. Les expressions et le langage subversifs au sein des discussions vives des protagonistes nous servent de preuve. En sortant de la caractérisation raciale et de l'identification de la nation comme référent identitaire, Miano projette le terme « Afropéen/ne » même dans une « ère/aire post-occidentale » (ibid. : 140). Celui-ci transcende « les conceptions occidentales de la nation et de la race qui se sont imposées en Afrique avec la colonisation, pour inventer quelque chose de bien plus apaisé, de beaucoup moins belliciste » (Miano 2012a : 140).

Miano montre que la subversion linguistique et culturelle relève d'une poétique de la négation et de la contestation, souvent dotée d'une fonction didactique. En même temps, l'usage de la langue française standard, qui est parfois truffée par exemple d'expressions en créole, en anglais ou en *camfranglais*, reflète la façon la plus naturelle et facile pour des Afropéennes de s'exprimer. De cette manière, les différentes techniques subversives révèlent leur découverte de l'hybridité culturelle, leur appropriation des réalités socio-culturelles actuelles ainsi que la prise de connaissance d'eux-mêmes en tant qu'Afropéennes.

Avec *Marianne et le garçon noir*, publié en 2017, soit la même année de publication de l'œuvre de Fatou Diome *Marianne porte plainte* (Diome 2017*)*, Miano montre qu'elle reste fidèle non seulement à la représentation des Afropéens dans la littérature de la diaspora africaine en France mais aussi à son écriture frontalière et à sa poétique

[21] Selon Bhabha, le tiers-espace « rend possible l'émergence d'autres positions. Ce tiers-espace vient perturber les histoires qui le constituent et établit de nouvelles structures d'autorité, de nouvelles initiatives politiques, qui échappent au sens commun » (Bhabha 2006 : 99).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de négation et de contestation. Cependant, elle y adopte le point de vue masculin des Afropéens et examine, à la suite de violences policières, l'expérience des Noirs de sexe masculin dans l'hexagone. Grâce aux contributions d'auteurs d'origine subsaharienne, elle y déploie également une parole politique qui se révèle à la fois complexe et sensible.

Bibliographie

Bâ, Mariama (1979) : *Une si Longue Lettre*, Paris : Le Serpent à plumes.

Basto, Maria-Benedita (2008) : "Le Fanon de Homi Bhabha. Ambivalence de l'identité et dialectique dans une pensée postcoloniale", dans : *Tumultes*, 31, p. 47-66.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1994) : *The Location of Culture*, London/New York : Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. (2007) : *Les Lieux de la culture. Une théorie postcoloniale*, Paris : Payot & Rivages.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1984) : "Of Mimicry and Man : The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", dans : *October*, 28, special issue *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, p. 125-133.

Bhabha, Homi K./Rutherford, Jonathan (2006) : "Le tiers-espace", dans : *Revue Multitudes* : « Multitudes », 26, p. 95-107.

Beyala, Calixthe (2009) : *Le Roman de Pauline*, Paris : Albin Michel.

Césaire, Aimé (1982) : *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry (1946-82)*, Charlottesville : The University Press of Virginia.

Diome, Fatou (2004) : *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, Paris : Librairie générale française.

– (2017) : *Marianne porte plainte*, Paris : Flammarion.

Etoké, Nathalie (2010) : *Melancholia africana. L'indispensable dépassement de la condition noire*, Paris : Éditions du Cygne.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Fanon, Frantz (1952) : *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris : Seuil.

– (1961) : *Les Damnés de la Terre*, Paris : Éditions Maspero.

Fall, Aminata Sow (1979) : *La Grève des Bàttu*, Sénégal : Nouvelles éditions africaines.

Fenoglio, Irène (1999) : « Egyptianité et langue française. Un cosmopolitisme de bon aloi », dans : *Entre sable et Nil. Les écrivains d'expression française en Egypte. 1920 – 1960*, Paris : CNDP, p. 15-25.

Gassama, Makhily (1995) : *La Langue d'Ahmadou Kourouma, ou Le français sous le soleil d'Afrique*, Paris : ACCT-Karthala.

Glissant, Édouard (1997) : *Traité du Tout-monde*, Paris : Gallimard.

– (1990) : *Poétique de la Relation*. *Poétique III*, Paris : Gallimard.

Hawkins, Peter (2001) : « Littérature francophone : littérature postcoloniale? », dans : Véronique Bonne (éd.) : *Frontières de la francophonie ; francophonie sans frontières*, Paris : L'Harmattan, p. 103-109.

Husung, Kirsten (2006) : *Discours féministe et postcolonial : stratégies de subversion dans* Les Honneurs perdus *de Calixthe Beyala*, Växjö : Växjö Universitet.

Kourouma, Amadou (1968) : *Les Soleils des indépendances*, Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

Lacan, Jacques (1956) : « Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse », dans *La psychanalyse*, 1, *Sur la parole et le langage*, p. 81-166.

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

Memmi, Albert (2002) : *Portrait du Colonisé. Précédé de Portrait du Colonisateur*, Paris : Gallimard.

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

– (2006) : *Contours du jour qui vient*, Paris : Plon.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

– (2008a) : *Tels des Astres éteints*, Paris : Plon.

– (2008b) : *Afropean Soul et autres nouvelles*, Paris : Plon.

– (2009) : *Les Aubes écarlates. « Sankofa cry »,* Paris : Plon.

– (2010) : *Blues pour Élise. Séquences afropéennes*, Paris : Plon.

– (2012a) : *Habiter la frontière. Conférences*, Paris : L'Arche.

– (2012b) : *Écrits pour la parole*, Paris : L'Arche.

– (2013) : *La Saison de l'ombre*, Paris : Grasset.

– (2016) : *L'Impératif transgressif*, Paris : L'Arche.

– (éd.) (2017) : *Marianne et le garçon noir*, Paris : Pauvert.

Monénembo, Tierno (1979) : *Les Crapauds-brousse*, Paris : Seuil.

Moura, Jean-Marc (1999) : *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.

Ndiaye, Marie (2009) : *Trois Femmes puissantes,* Paris : Gallimard.

Rushdie, Salman (1983) : *Les Enfants de minuit*, Paris : Stock.

Said, Edward W. (2005) *L'Orientalisme*, Paris : Seuil.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (2008) : *Les Subalternes peuvent-elles parler ?*, Paris : Amsterdam.

Tansi, Sony Labou (1979) : *La Vie et demie*, Paris : Seuil.

Tchak, Sami (2000) : *Place des fêtes*, Paris : Gallimard.

Waberi, Abdourahman A. (1998) : « Les enfants de la postcolonie : esquisse d'une nouvelle génération d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire », dans : *Notre Librairie*, 135, p. 8-15.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger

(Gießen)

"Bahia Houses" at the Crossroad between the Past and the Present – *Um defeito de cor* (*A color defect*) by Ana Maria Gonçalves

Abstract

"Bahia Houses" are houses built in Brazilian style in several cities on the west coast of Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their architects were "freed" Brazilian slaves who came back to Africa, where they experienced an upward mobility, they never were able to develop in Brazil. The Brazilian novelist Ana Maria Gonçalves wrote a voluminous novel *O defeito do cor* (2015 [2006]) on this phenomenon, focusing on her main character, Kehinde/Luisa, born in Africa, brought as a slave to Brazil and then a returnee. She lived in three European colonies: Portuguese, French, and English. The author portrays different stages in her life, from being a domestic slave to becoming a very successful commercial woman as a designer and architect of Bahia houses, whose spaces reflect power relations in different local settings in European countries overseas.

A book entitled *Unheard Words*, published in 1986, contains essays on and interviews with female authors in Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. Mineke Schipper, a professor of comparative literatures, writes in her foreword that she considers this book to be an introduction to a "subject of which much more could be said" and continues by stating that, to her knowledge,

> there are no English or French works which deal with the subject on an 'intercontinental' scale, and it is rare to find publications on women and literature outside Europe which cover even one country, region or culture. (Schipper 1986: 7)

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Thirty-five years later, in the area of "global" studies", much more is now being said about this subject, and Schipper's effort seems pioneering at time in which many (although not enough) texts by and on women writing in- and outside Europe have and are being produced. In the meantime, the five authors interviewed in *Unheard Words* have become quite famous: Miriam Tlali (South Africa), Etel Adnan (Libanon/France), Astrid Roemer (Suriname/The Netherlands), Nabaneeta Deb-Sen (India), and Cristina Peri Rossi (Uruguay/Spain). They write in English, French, Dutch, Bengali, and Spanish respectively.

Today, female authors belong ever more to the classics in world literatures. The concept of "Afrodescendant" female authors emerged in Europe some decades after the African American writers in the USA had characterized themselves as such, with Toni Morrison, winner of the Nobel Literature Prize 1993, as the most famous example. In the southern part of the Americas, "afrodescendiente" has even become a qualification implying a reaction against discrimination and marginalization from the public space. Nevertheless, the criticism voiced in discussions on this African American identification have not primarily concentrate on the "postmigratory" diasporic experience; another topic has been prioritized, the memory of slavery. This is a substantial difference to migrant writing in Romance-speaking Europe, where that emphasis does not figure as a prime concern.

To give an example of Afrodescendant women writing in the Romance-speaking Americas, I will concentrate on a most outspoken female author in this respect, Ana Maria Gonçalves, a Brazilian writer from Minas Gerais. She has written a standard work in Brazilian-Portuguese literature, *Um defeito de cor* (*A color defect*; 2015 [2006]), a novel already in its seventeenth edition despite its 951 pages. The book tells the story of an African woman in the nineteenth century. She is captured as a young girl on the West-African coast, enslaved and sent to Brazil, where she lives through different stages of slavery: as a domestic slave living in the *senzala pequena* (housing for domestic slaves) on the sugar plantation, as a slave in the whale-oil factory living in the *senzala grande* (housing for field and other working slaves), as a marketing seller and then a shop keeper in the city, manumitted and developing her own business before deciding to return to Africa. On that con-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

tinent, she becomes a successful decorator specializing in “Bahia Houses” and, at the end of her life, she goes back to Brazil to see her “lost” son.

The special feature of this novel consists of the main character living on both continents, not just as a traveling visitor but as a migrant who has to earn her living. This transatlantic migration, consequently, implies the concept of “oceanic modernity”, which brings circumstances on different continents together to analyze the logistics of the narrative (Phaf-Rheinberger 2014). To investigate this concept of oceanic modernity further, I have implemented a comparative approach to African and Latin American literatures in the Spanish and Portuguese languages with a focus on the memory of slavery.

The term “modernity” has been much discussed in cultural studies on Latin America, with Enrique Dussel and Mabel Moraña (2008) as two outstanding scholars. Both claim that a single modernity does not exist; there are, rather, multiple cultural interpretations. Enrique Dussel, an Argentinian philosopher living in Mexico, breaks down the idea that modernity emerged in European Romanticism to characterize the most advanced urban cultures. Instead, he argues that the blind spot in European philosophy is not seeing that modernity arrived on all continents with European expansion (Dussel 2010). Mabel Moraña, a literary critic born in Uruguay, addresses these diverse counter discourses, characterizing them as religious, mestizo, peripheral or marginal modernities. They reveal the effects of “coloniality at large”, of the perpetuation of colonial mentalities also after independence.

The concept of modernity relates to social dynamics in urban societies without explicitly taking into account the transoceanic connections of these “modern” conglomerations. Yet, they are connected with those water roads, instrumental for the migration of people, ideas, politics, sciences, cultures, religion and commodities between the continents. The transatlantic slave trade and the memory of slavery are crucial bindings that relate cultural studies of Latin America to Africa and vice versa.

Research on slavery in Latin America, especially in Cuba and Brazil, started at the end of the nineteenth century and extended to the other countries throughout the twentieth century. The word slavery and looking African (= Black) is often used as an equivalent for “labor”. The

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Peruvian singer Susana Baca, the "Soul of Black Peru", expresses this paradigmatically in the song "María Landó", about a woman who "just works/just works/work for someone else", not even noticing the difference between day and night (Baca 2001: song 7).[1] Baca was the first to interpret this song on "slave work", the lyrics of which were composed by the Peruvian poet César Calvo in 1967 and set to music by Chabuca Granda, *the* singer of "creole" music in the Andean world.

In my analysis of selected literary works by contemporary African and Latin American authors, oceanic modernity becomes linked to contemporary situations in which migrants to Europe work under circumstances that resemble the slavery conditions in the past (Phaf-Rheinberger 2017). This relationship between historical slavery and "modern slavery", therefore, is at the base of my analysis of *Um defeito de cor*, which recounts the life cycle of the main character Kehinde, an African-born woman, and her attachment to the transatlantic water roads when she is on her way to establishing herself and making herself a home with her family in Brazil and then in Africa.

The Story of Kehinde

Um defeito de cor is conceived as a letter in the first-person singular, which Kehinde is writing to her son in Brazil. As a child, his Portuguese father sold him as a slave, after which Kehinde lost his tracks. The reader learns that she is writing this letter after receiving the message that her son is alive. She wants him to know every significant detail of her life and constantly interrupts the chronology of her arguments with comments, which makes her story even more personal.

Kehinde was born in Savalu, not far from Ouidah in today's Benin, and brought from there as a slave girl to Pernambuco. She first works on the Island of Itaparica, then in the cities of Salvador da Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, before deciding to go back to Ouidah and later to Lagos, still the biggest city in Nigeria. This combination of being "captured" in Africa, being a "slave" and a "free" woman in Brazil, and then a

[1] Original versión: "siempre trabaja/siempre trabaja/trabajo ajeno" (Baca 2001: song 7).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"returnee"[2] in Africa is exceptional and we have no other examples in the literature of the Portuguese language, or even in other languages, of such a main character in the nineteenth century.

Gonçalves' letter-novel is a special case because, in general, there is little information about Black women writing in Latin America at that time. In the USA, knowledge of the existence of such texts is only thanks to the Schomburg Library project on Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, coordinated by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The organizers of the project found and/or re-published many unknown manuscripts by authors such as Nancy Prince, Suzie King Taylor, Bethany Veney, Louisa Piquet, Elisabeth Keckley, Matty Johnson, Lucy A. Delaney, Kate Drumgoold, Annie L. Burton, not to speak of the most famous North American slave woman writer, Phillis Wheatley, among others. However, none of these authors spoke of returning to Africa, notwithstanding the founding of the state Liberia by the USA in 1847, long before Marcus Garvey organized the "back to Africa" movement and the UNIA.[3]

Gonçalves' novel succeeds in bringing together many historical facts and cultural knowledge about Brazil, Benin and Nigeria from a Black female perspective. When Kehinde reaches the Ilha dos Frades near the Bahian coast, all her family members are dead. The author emphasizes her curiosity, when arriving in the "New World", admiring these new landscapes and, especially, the city: "The direction in which I saw, at a distance, some constructions shining in the sunlight, wedged between the mountains, a city that seemed much bigger than Ouidah and Savalu together" (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 63).[4] In Salvador da Bahia, Kehinde is sold on the slave market and embarks on a boat to the island of Itaparica. From this point onwards, she is really in Brazil because now "we" (nos) are the "Blacks" (pretos; ibid.: 73), very different from the "whites", who are well-dressed and carried on shoulders in a

[2] Returnees are Afrodescendant Brazilians who "return" to the West Coast of Africa in the nineteenth century. In Lagos and Benin that are called *agudás*, in Togo *amarôs*, and in Ghana *tabom*.

[3] UNIA, Universal Negro Improvement Association, 1914-c. 1927.

[4] Original versión: "A direção na qual eu vi, ao longe, algumas construções brilhando à luz do sol, equilibrando-se sobre montanhas, uma cidade que parecia ser muito maior que Uidá e Savalu juntas" (in: Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 63).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

carriage. They do not speak African languages or worship African religions, and they consider the Portuguese language and Christianity obligatory for the slaves.

Having the task of being playmate of the white girl in the Big House, besides other duties of cleaning and helping out in the kitchen, Kehinde learns to read and write. Tragic events cross her path, instructing her that a slave girl is not the owner of her own life and body: violation, murder, corporal punishment, violence, isolation, oppression, cruelty, bad treatment in general. At the same time, however, the book does not limit itself to mourning the situation. Lively discussions among the slaves about their circumstances, religious habits and the people in their environment unfold a broad cultural panorama of Brazilian slave society. Without access to official instruction, slaves try to get some education. Kehinde befriends Fatumbi, the house teacher of the white girl, and she maintains this contact after moving to Salvador.

In that city, she becomes a maid in a house of English owners, where she observes how to make cookies and puddings and learns the language. With these capacities, later on, she is quite successful as a marketing woman, setting up her own business as far as her slave condition permits. Because of her Hausa friends, such as Fatumbi, who are Muslims and well-educated, she experiences first-hand the Malê-revolt (Reis 1996) against all whites in 1835 and gets into trouble because of the consequent xenophobia against Africans. As a result of that situation, she moves to Rio de Janeiro, always in search of her son.

Kehinde's strong African-creole background helps her in her personal and business life. Being an African herself, she does not idealize Africa. In a discussion with Fatumbi, Kehinde asks him pertinent questions about slavery in Africa, and he answers with examples from the Mandingas and the Congo kingdom. However, when she asks him about having heard him talking about slaves who had slaves themselves, he suddenly changes the topic of conversation.

The author describes many situations in such great detail that her book seems a novel of customs (Spanish genre of the nineteenth century), including proverbs, language expressions and religions that refer to Kehinde's native continent. In the bibliography at the end of the book (2015 [2006]: 949-951), Gonçalves mentions António Olinto, who wrote *A casa da água* (1975; *Water House* 1985) about a Brazilian

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

returnee family in Lagos. She equally refers to João Ubaldo Ribeiro's bestseller *Viva o povo brasileiro* (1984; *An Invencible Memory* 1989), in which slave work in the Bahia region (Recôncavo) plays an important role. Without a doubt, these books must have been relevant for Gonçalves, and she even copies a scene of violation from Ribeiro's book inserting some modifications (Phaf-Rheinberger 2017: 57).

Notwithstanding, the style of her "letter" equals more the tone of the diary *Quarto de despejo* (1960; *Child of the Dark* 2003), written by Carolina Maria de Jesus, about the daily life of a Black woman in a favela of São Paulo in the 1950s. The diary reproduces Carolina's daytime rhythm, determined by having enough income to feed and dress her three children, and also reveals her self-determination and critical views on society, albeit without any reference to Africa. This lack of reference to Africa is the opposite in Gonçalves' manuscript, with her precise descriptions of Kehinde's Yoruba/Vodou background. Gonçalves seems to describe the process of "religious decolonization", as do Arjun Appadurai's (1981) claims regarding the management of the Hindu temples under colonial rule in southern India. By comparison, the religious decolonization process is different in Brazil, officially a Christian country, where Kehinde has to hide her religious orientation and her objects of veneration. To describe this situation so explicitly implies breaking with tabooed issues and Gonçalves demonstrates the presence of many religious traditions and customs. Her Kehinde finds stability in her *orishas*, the small religious pieces she always carries with her. African religions, alongside Catholic, Protestant and Muslim worldviews, are parts of Gonçalves' nineteenth-century Brazil as well as in Africa.

Back in Africa

The last two chapters of *Um defeito de cor* take place in Ouidah and Lagos. The voyage of 26 days from Salvador to Ouidah, leaving on 27 October and arriving on 22 November 1847, is the contrary from the journey in the opposite direction as a slave some decades earlier. Kehinde now travels comfortably on a cargo-vessel, *The Sunset*, being master of her own destiny. She does not expect big things and, indeed,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"I did not like what I saw at all" (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 731).[5] This transatlantic journey is incredibly instructive. From discussions with people on board, she learns about business in Africa, especially about the slave trade, from which African and English merchants equally profit. This learning is the real "new" issue before arriving in Africa and prepares Kehinde for her subsequent metamorphosis.

After disembarking in Ouidah, she reconnects with people she had known before. Besides, she is pregnant by her future husband, John Stuart, a "dark mulatto" (mulato escuro; ibid.: 735) born in Sierra Leone, involved in the trade routes of the English with Brazil and doing business with different settlements on the West-African coast. Kehinde meets him on *The Sunset,* and he tells her that, in Africa, you need to have the support of an influential person, who receives a certain percentage of your selling, to protect your business. This protector, in Ouidah, is Chachá (Francisco Félix de Souza, 1754-1849), a historical personality, a returnee and "blood brother" of the King of Dahomey. Gonçalves describes Kehinde's indirect involvement in the slave trade because of trading with arms, although she (and John) know well that these arms are used in wars for obtaining as many captives as possible to be sold as slaves.

When Kehinde arrives in Ouidah, the French and Portuguese involvement in the transatlantic trade is more or less balanced and depends on the benevolence of the king of Dahomey, who has absolute control in this part of the region. In the meantime, while earning good money with the arms trade, Kehinde makes contacts with the "Brazilian community" and discovers that, like herself, they are nostalgic for everything identifying with Brazil. Therefore, she starts her business of Brazilian products and, then, decorations for houses until setting up her specialization of "Bahia Houses" (Casas da Bahia). After Chachá's death and that of her husband John, the growing French influence in Ouidah makes her decide to move to Lagos (African name Eko): Unlike the British colony, the French dismiss the capacities of the Brazilian community. The high demand for her specialization in Nigeria means that Kehinde becomes a well-to-do woman whose children study in France.

[5] Original versión: "não gostei nada do que vi" (in: Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 731).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

The “Brazilians” find themselves much more civilized than the Africans, who are repeatedly addressed as “savages”, a term Kehinde never uses when in Brazil. Obviously, being from Brazil confers someone with a different status than that of the uneducated African population, with whom Kehinde has little regular contacts. This change of mentality towards a colonial vocabulary is the consequence of being successful and belonging to the highest circles, in which the “Brazilians” are considered as “whites” notwithstanding the “color defect”, which hardly plays a role in Kehinde’s private life in Lagos. Her metamorphosis is emphasized by her change of name. Kehinde was proud of her African name in Brazil never using her Christian name Luísa. But now, she uses exactly this name in Africa, adding Luísa Andrade da Silva and thus aiming to appear even more Brazilian. John tells her that many influential people of African descent in Africa do the same: they have a “hidden” African name and use a more Christian one in everyday life.

Especially in the Christian religions, Kehinde perceives the permeability of the “color defect”: She observes the presence of black and “mulatto” priests in the English Protestant church and white and exceptionally “mulatto” priests, who count as whites of the French and Portuguese Catholics. Personal contacts and religion decide upon success: they are a source of information about every detail important for trade. The “letter” also describes the Muslim returnees in Porto Novo, the port city at the south coast of Benin. It is a point of attraction for Muslim-returnees, who are successful in delivering slaves to Chachá through establishing themselves on local points of the caravan routes along which they transport the slaves from the interior to the coast (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 871-874).

Bahia Houses

Gonçalves has repeatedly confirmed that she has never been in Africa herself and, therefore, her novel is the result of historical and literary research (sources mentioned in her bibliography). She is also familiar with Black Brazilian traditions, being an Afro-Brazilian woman herself. Her nineteenth-century woman is very different from the first-person

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

narratives in the Schomburg project mentioned before. Its coordinator, Henry Louis Gates Jr., introduces every one of the 40 volumes with his "Foreword In her Own Write" (1988: VII-XII) and starts telling the story of Phillis Wheatley, the author of a first volume of poetry written by a Black woman in Boston and published in London in 1773. A two-paragraph phrase introducing the book states that this "young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa" is the real author of these verses. Gates emphasizes the pioneering role of Black women authors for the African American literary tradition; they even dominate the final decade of the nineteenth century, from 1890 to 1910, "The Black Woman's Era". Most of these works, as Gates states, were forgotten and out of print, which made this series necessary to grasp the significant contribution of Black female authors.

In contrast to the years in which Carolina Maria de Jesús published her work, writings of Afro-Brazilian women are prolific in Brazil today. Gonçalves is not looking for forgotten Black women authors; she does not mention one female Afro-Brazilian author in her bibliography, only Maria Graham, a white English author of travel books in the nineteenth century, and three contemporary female Brazilian academics, historians and anthropologists. Notwithstanding, her book is entirely written from the Black-woman perspective modifying the trope "Mama Africa" – the nickname of the famous singer Miriam Makeba in the anticolonial movement. Gonçalves' "mother" in Africa is not presented as a model-mother, as she repeatedly says about herself, and she does not identify with the continent but rather with her longing for Brazil, not least for finding her son. The official abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 only indirectly plays a role for her. She observes that this is very much celebrated by the Brazilian returnees in Lagos, the city in which she was living that year. The English governor even sends ships to Brazil to bring the ex-slaves back to their mother continent, but without much success.

Gonçalves does not seem to have a problem with what Henry Louis Gates Jr. entitled as "ending the Slavery Blame-Game" (2010), the taboo on addressing the role of Africans themselves in the transatlantic trade: "slavery was a business, highly organized and lucrative for European buyers and African sellers alike". Gates also states that the

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

"Middle Passage […] was sometimes a two-way street" and that, under those circumstances, "it is difficult to claim that Africans were ignorant or innocent".

The documentation Gonçalves mentions in her bibliography sustains this issue: African chiefs, kings and returnees, among other people, participated, directly or indirectly, in the slave trade. In this way, the author carefully unmasks the entanglements of transatlantic commerce. The social dynamics of this global trade in the context of the memory of slavery are portrayed differently in Brazil and in colonial Africa. In Brazil, the white elite is at the top and the Black slaves are the working class, making everybody try to look as "white" as possible. In Africa, this top is divided into different groups, the African kings and their court, the "white" Portuguese, French, and English and the Brazilian returnees, who consider themselves to be white and constitute a separate group.

This difference is emphasized by Kehinde's business with "Bahia Houses", expressing the "longing for home", a trope recurrent in Caribbean literature, present in the work of many – also female – authors from this region, prototypically characterized by permanent migrations (Olwig 1999, Thompson 2015). In a recent publication *To Be at Home. House, Work, and Self in the Modern World* (2018), Andreas Eckert writes that "houses and homes [are set] in a broad historical perspective as the crossroads between the self, work, and the world" and that "power structures are inscribed in space, and space reflects social organization and defines the people in it" (2018: XIII).

This position of the self at the crossroad of power structures at the West-African coast is symbolically expressed through these "Bahia Houses", constructed by Luísa/Kehinde in African cities. They "open" up to the world, give protection and stability, and, in this case, modernity is not seen in Europe but in Brazil. The houses are designed along the model of the houses of the former owners in Salvador, with whose descendants Kehinde becomes friends while having an intensive correspondence. She writes that the "Brazilians" desire city houses that are, as much as possible, like the ones in Brazil because they judge the houses of the Africans as poor, ugly and old. For their part, the Africans say that the "Brazilians" are traitors and have sold themselves to the whites, whereas the Brazilians characterize the Africans as "savages,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

brutes, underdeveloped, and pagans" (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 756).[6] This difference is repeatedly emphasized, for instance, when Luísa/Kehinde writes that her new house in Ouidah looks like the house of her former Mistress in Salvador da Bahia:

> The big room was divided in three spaces separated by screens and by beautiful clay vases for flowers […] Such vases made a big impression, because in Africa you were not used to cultivate flowers and much less to have them in the house, as an ornament. That was our custom, of the Brazilians, and we loved to have them in our well-cultivated garden plots which, for themselves, already showed that there lived a patrician. (Ibid.: 851)[7]

Again, the distance between the different groups seems to be less rigid in religion. The Catholic cathedral in Lagos, in the construction of which Luísa/Kehinde participates, attracts a lot of Africans to conversion and, in this way, they become closer to the Brazilians than ever before. Religious spaces play quite an important role in the urban environments with their temples, churches, mosques, and cathedral and also in the homes (altars in a special room) and outside, in the surroundings of sacred trees.

In short, at a time when the former sugar plantation owners in northeast Brazil were becoming impoverished from a lack of slave workers, as portrayed in *Dom Casmurro* (1899) by the Brazilian author Machado de Assis, the Brazilian community in Lagos (and Ouidah) has achieved a high standard of living. The quality of life for this "Brazilian" elite is much better than in their land of birth, in which the former "top" level lives with "nostalgia for slavery" in their big, now almost empty houses, even when reconstructed in the "old" style (Chalhoub 2018: 143-147). In those houses, they miss their "self" of the past, a self, surrounded by slave servants and family members. In contrast, the "self" in Bahia

[6] Original versión: "selvagens, brutos, atrasados e pagãos" (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 756).

[7] Original versión: "a sala era dividida em tres ambientes separados por biombos e por lindos vasos de barro para flores […] Tais vasos fizeram muito efeito, porque em África não era usual cultivar flores e muito menos tê-las dentro de casa, para enfeite. Era um costume nosso, dos brasileiros, e gostávamos de ter em nossos terrenos jardins bem-cuidados que, por si, já mostravam que alli morava um patrício" (Gonçalves 2015 [2006]: 851).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

houses in Lagos is not nostalgic for slavery and has problems with Brazil, even after the official abolition. Returnees and travelers voice their negative experiences in this respect in a country in which the “color defect” continues identifying them with the former status of being a slave. At this “crossroad” between two worlds, Bahia houses on the west coast of Africa function as the expression of “Black” modernity, being more advanced than most Africans in Africa or the African-descendants and impoverished “whites” in Brazil. Nevertheless, in both cases, none of them are part of the official power structure in their respective societies. In Brazil, “the color defect” continues posing huge problems, and this might explain Gonçalves letting the Kehinde’s life end on the boat close to the coast in the Atlantic Ocean, because returning to Brazil might have been the start of a completely different story.

The Relevance of the “Color Defect”

Gonçalves’ voluminous “letter” is a huge success in Brazil, as mentioned before. The author is an important public voice in debates on racism and African descent, and she maintains a blog for expressing her opinions.[8] Her book is much less read in other Portuguese-speaking countries, such as those in Africa, and not yet translated into any other language. When Gonçalves read from her work at the International Literature Festival in Berlin in 2013, the audience reacted enthusiastically to her presentation. However, it seems, that no publishing house wants to take the financial risk of translating this 951-pages manuscript for a non-Portuguese-speaking readership.

Gonçalves wrote and published *Um defeito de cor* during the tenure of the Lula-government,[9] when much attention was being paid to reorganizing education on the history of African descent in Brazil and on African history. For the first time in Brazilian history, the traumas of discrimination were being taken seriously and important works were being published, which fueled Gonçalves’ historical meta-fiction. In this essay, I have shown how her book addresses many issues relevant

[8] Blog: anamariagoncalves.blogspot.com.
[9] Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was the president of Brazil from 2003 to 2010.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

to migration and the post-migratory context in general. It describes the changes of personality that come with migratory moves, such as the double-naming often identified with Jewish citizens in Christian societies (Mendes-Flor 1999), problems with languages, religion and education, complicated family ties and lack of political representation. For Kehinde's life in Brazil, the memory of slavery is tantamount, and she considers the ocean as a connecting space, "Yemaya's water, symbol of life and death" (Phaf-Rheinberger 2017: 64). Water roads in general accompany her life and give it an immediate link to transatlantic dynamics, the consequences of which are still felt as "coloniality at large", as also stated in the writings of other Black (female) contemporary authors in Brazil and elsewhere. Gonçalves'letter/monologue intends to make this change of mentality understandable. She establishes a dialogue with the reader on the self-perception of a Black female migrant and her transcultural experiences at different stages of being a (forced) migrant on her way to a better life.

The characteristics of this ambiguous social upwards movement show many similarities with nowadays "modern slavery", a legal concept since the Modern Slavery Act in the United Kingdom in 2015. As Andreas Eckert writes, "Space is a central object of rule" and it "places often very local histories into a global framework" (2018: XV). The effects of "trafficking people" over the waters is a rewarding business, then and now. In this sense, Gonçalves' cautious and accurate reconstruction of Bahia Houses as the ultimate sign of "Black modernity" in Africa, albeit addressing the nineteenth century, becomes very much a contemporary event.

Works Cited

Appandurai, Arjun (1981): *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South India Case*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baca, Susana (2001): "María Landó". CD *Lamento negro*, Song Nr. 7, Bath, UK: Tumi.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Chalhoub, Sidney (2018): "A House for the Missing Self: Nostalgia for Slavery and its Times in Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro*", in: Felicitas Hentschke/James Williams (eds.): *To Be at Home. House, Work, and Self in the Modern World*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, p. 143-147.

Dussel, Enrique (2012): *Der Gegendiskurs der Moderne*: Kölner Vorlesungen, Wien: Turia + Kant.

Eckert, Andreas (2018): "Preface", in: Felicitas Hentschke/James Williams (eds.): *To Be at Home. House, Work, and Self in the Modern World*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, p. XV-XVI.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis (1988): "Foreword in her Own Write", in: *Six Women's Slave Narratives*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. VII-XII.

– (23.04.2010): "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game", in: *The New York Times*, p. A27 of the New York edition.

Gonçalves, Ana Maria (2015 [2006]): *Um defeito de cor*, Romance, Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Record.

Jesus, Carolina Maria de (1960): *Quarto de despejo: diário de una favelada*, São Paulo: Livraria Francisco Alves.

– (2003): *Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*, New York: New American Library.

Mendes-Flor, Paul (1999): *German Jews: A Dual Identity*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Moraña, Mabel/Dussel, Enrique/Jáuregui, Carlos A. (eds.) (2008): *Coloniality at Large. Latin America and the Post-Colonial Debate*, Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Olinto, António (1975): *A casa da água*, São Paulo: Círculo do Livro.

– (1985): *Water House*, New York, NY: Carroll & Graf.

Olwig, Karen Fog (1999): "Narratives of the Children Left Behind: Home and Identity in Globalised Caribbean Families", in: *Journal*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 25(2): Caribbean Migration to Europe and North America, p. 267-284.

Phaf-Rheinberger, Ineke (2014): "Oceanic Modernity. Remembering Slavery in Brazil and Angola", in: Michael Mann/Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger (eds.): *Beyond the Line. Cultural Narratives of the Southern Oceans*, Berlin: Neofelis, p. 233-271.

– (2017): *Modern Slavery and Water Spirituality. A Critical Debate in Africa and Latin America*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.

Reis, João José (1996): *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

– (2004): *Rebelião Escrava no Brasil: A História do Levante dos Malês em 1835*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Ribeiro, João Ubaldo (1984): *Viva o povo brasileiro,* Rio de Janeiro: Nova Frontera.

– (1989): *An Invencible Memory*, New York: Harper & Row.

Schipper, Mineke (ed.) (1986): *Unheard Words. Women and Literature in Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America*, London: Allison & Busby, (1. ed. in Dutch 1984).

Thompson, Rachel Grace (2015): *Narratives of Return: The Contemporary Caribbean Woman Writer and the Quest for Home*, PhD Goldsmiths College, University of London, in: https://research.gold.ac.uk (accessed 19.02.2019).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Melibea Obono

(Malabo)

Relato: "*Mberbí*: el llanto más grande de las mujeres"

Abstract

Melibea Obono is an Equatorial Guinean writer and a committed activist who advocates for the rights of women and LGTBQI+ people in Africa in general and in Equatorial Guinea in particular. In both her literary work and her activism, she denounces the rampant sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity in her country. She is one of the most well-known and productive writers of her generation and has published several short stories, journalistic and activist texts, and novels – among others, her highly praised book *La Bastarda* (2016), considered as the first Equatorial Guinean LGTBQI+ novel. In her previously unpublished short story "*Mberbí*: el llanto más grande de las mujeres", she denounces the oppression of females in the patriarchal society of the Equatorial Guinean Fang.

Julia Borst / Danae Gallo González: Notas introductorias a Melibea Obono y su obra literaria

Trifonia Melibea Obono Ntutumu, nacida en Evinayong (provincia de Centro-Sur, Guinea Ecuatorial) es periodista y politóloga de formación y, desde 2012, docente en la Facultad de Letras y Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (UNGE) de Malabo. Desde 2013 forma parte del equipo investigador y docente del Centro de Estudios Afro-Hispánicos (CEAH) de la Universidad de Educación a Distancia (UNED) en España.

A pesar de correr el riesgo de ser perseguida por el gobierno de Obiang, es una activista comprometida por los derechos de las mujeres y el colectivo LGTBQI+ y no se desanima en la lucha tanto contra la homofobia y la heteronormatividad como contra el machismo y el patriarcado en la sociedad guineoecuatoriana. Más allá de su faceta como activista, Melibea Obono es una de las escritoras guineoecuatorianas

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

contemporáneas más conocidas y prometedoras. Un año después de que su cuento "La negra" se incluyera en la antología *Baiso: ella y sus relatos* (2015), editada por la guineoecuatoriana Remei Sipi Mayo, publica su primera novela, *La herencia de bindendee* (2016). Su segunda novela, *La bastarda* (2016), que se considera la primera novela LGTBQI+ escrita en Guinea Ecuatorial, ha gozado de un éxito sin precedentes. En este libro, Melibea Obono toca un tema tabú en la sociedad guineoecuatoriana y cuenta cómo su protagonista Okomo, una adolescente de la etnia fang en búsqueda de su padre, descubre su homosexualidad y se rebela contra el sistema de valores de su etnia, que no le permite a vivir una vida autodeterminada y le oprime como mujer, lesbiana e hija de madre soltera y lesbiana. Desde entonces, la autora ha sido muy prolífica y ha publicado varios textos, entre ellos una colección de cuentos, textos testimoniales y varias novelas. Además, textos suyos han aparecido en antologías de literaturas africanas como *Doce relatos urbanos, doce voces femeninas* (2019) y *New Daughters of Africa* (2019). Su obra gira alrededor de temas feministas, como la opresión de la mujer y la violencia de género en Guinea Ecuatorial y especialmente en las comunidades fang, critica el racismo predominante en países europeos como España y, sobre todo, denuncia el maltrato de las personas LGTBQI+ tanto por las autoridades guineoecuatorianas como por sus propias familias y la sociedad guineoecuatoriana en general. Su libro de relatos *Las mujeres hablan mucho y mal* ha sido galardonada con el premio Internacional de Literaturas Africanas Justo Bolekia Boleká 2018. En 2019 ganó el Premio Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI) por *La bastarda* además del Premio Mujer Ideal de Guinea Ecuatorial. Parte de su obra ha sido traducida al inglés, al francés y al alemán. Melibea Obono escribe también un blog (trifoniamelibea.weebly.com) donde publica textos activistas y colabora con diversos periódicos y plataformas digitales.

La obra de Melibea Obono es activista por todos los costados. Ya nos hemos referido a su escritura de temática comprometida que no duda en meter el dedo en la llaga en lo más profundo de las epistemologías fang y colonizadora en sus vertientes más misóginas, racistas y LGTBQI+-fobas. También su estilo es incisivo y refrescantemente molesto. La autora combina magistralmente una semántica y una sintaxis

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

altamente elaboradas con un lenguaje y estilo entrecortado, bruscamente coloquial e incluso obsceno. Domina a la perfección el cambio de ritmos temporales, juega deliberadamente con el estilo directo e indirecto sin marca textual alguna y convierte a la metalepsis en su más íntima aliada ante la estupefacción lectora. Asimismo, la escritora que aquí nos concierne pone en práctica –si bien en diferentes grados a lo largo de su producción literaria– el extrañamiento lingüístico constante que rompe conscientemente con lo que los teóricos de la traducción llaman el discurso fluido. Introduce sin piedad para el lector no hispanoguineoecuatoriano expresiones en fang en el texto e impide así el peligro de un posible borrado de la singularidad guineoecuatoriana que acechan en toda traducción cultural familiarizante y eurocentrista. No obstante, en su compromiso activista, la autora molesta para remover conciencias, pero defiende la comunicación efectiva y por ello, brinda una explicación cultural detallada de cada expresión fang a nota a pie de página, haciendo al lector no versado en fang parar literalmente a leer y así escuchar la singularidad del que el colonialismo español y sus consecuencias hasta el día de hoy, han constituido como el Otro. El relato original que sigue a estas líneas lo ha compuesto Melibea Obono en exclusiva para este volumen y es buen reflejo de su brillante y cautivadora escritura activistamente molesta.

La obra literaria de Melibea Obono (en español y traducida a otras lenguas)

(2015): "La negra", en: Remei Sipi Mayo (ed.): *Baiso: ellas y sus relatos*, Barcelona: Mey, pp. 95-139.

(2016a): *La herencia de bindendee*, Viena: En auge.

(2016b): *La bastarda*, Madrid: Flores raras.

(2017): *La albina del dinero*, Barcelona: Altaïr.

(2018a): *La bastarda*, Trad. Lawrence Schimel, New York: The Feminist Press.

(2018b): *Las mujeres hablan mucho y mal*, Madrid: Sial.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

(2019a): *Yo no quería ser madre: vidas forzadas de mujeres fuera de la norma*, Barcelona: Egales.

(2019b): *Allí abajo de las mujeres. Djí ené bina bito así*, Barcelona: Wanafrica.

(2019c): "El nativo", en Ángeles Jurado (ed.): *Doce relatos urbanos, doce voces femeninas*, Tegueste (Tenerife): Baile del Sol, pp. 29-49.

(2019d): "Let the Nkúkúmá Speak", Trad. Lawrence Schimel, en Margaret Busby (ed.): *New Daughters of Africa*, Oxford: Myriad, pp. 895-899.

(2020): *La bâtarde*, Trad. Anne-Laure Bonvalot, Paris: Passage(s).

(2021): *Wem gehören die Bindendee?* Trad. Susanne Doppelbauer, Wien: Löcker.

Melibea Obono:

Mberbí: el llanto más grande de las mujeres

Los domingos se llaman conmemoraciones consagradas en las aldeas de la etnia fang, en mi pueblo fang. Mamá lo sabe, yo también.

Los domingos, hasta donde yo recuerdo, personifican lo canonizado: las fincas rústicas, antes de café, luego de cacao, primero de los ancestros.

Y sí, también de la paz oficial.

La búsqueda de mis bragas.
Mamá, dónde están mis bragas.
Tus bragas, las patrulla tu padre.

Los domingos, cuando yo era más chica, mis bragas y las de mis contemporáneas siempre estaban retenidas por las madres, por los padres,

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

por las tribus de los ancestros, por los *binchima*[1] de *Akamanam*[2], por los presidentes de las comisiones de seguimiento del Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial, por los diputados de las zonas geopolíticas, por los *be tie poletique*[3] antorchados del fuego, por la oposición política (*é bot á ngam á yat*[4]), por los sacerdotes, obispos y el Papa.

Recuerdo la aldea despierta al ritmo del cantar de las caminatas masculinas. Hoy todavía les oigo arrastrar los pies a mis padres del clan en dirección a la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres para esperar de comer.

Los domingos en los pueblos fang y en mi pueblo ocultan el manuscrito que en la vida escribirá el feminismo académico. Cada individuo conoce su lugar en la estratificación social y con un orden infranqueable. Hace dos siglos y medio que al respecto se firmó un convenio: el tiempo que duró el régimen de la esclavitud y su prolongación surrealista, la Guinea Ecuatorial independiente en los documentos oficiales.

[1] *Binchima:* plural de *enchima,* significa policías y/o militares. Antiguamente se llamaba así a los varones/miembros del cuerpo de seguridad, protectores de las tribus, los clanes.

[2] *Akamanam:* en el pasado se llamaba *Akamayong* (protección del clan), o fuerzas armadas y de seguridad encargadas de proteger el clan. En la Guinea Ecuatorial de hoy se llama *Akamanam* a la Protección Civil, una sección de las fuerzas de seguridad del estado, que, en principio, se creó como cuerpo policial destinado a reducir la inseguridad ciudadana. Sin embargo, constituye uno de los gremios más desprestigiados del país por varias razones: se le atribuyen prácticas de extorsión a la población inmigrante, atracos a la población inmigrante con recursos, robos a la población civil, violencia sexual a las mujeres, especialmente en las noches, etc. Tan mala es su reputación que el grupo musical Ela Nguema Ganster ha elaborado varias canciones en su honor detallando la desvinculación de su cometido con su modus operandi. La canción se titula "*Akamanam dont talla*".

[3] *Be tie poletique:* constituye la élite política guineana. El Gobierno del Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial (organización política en el poder desde el año 1979) utiliza este término para referirse de manera peyorativa a los partidos de la oposición y estos a su vez para desprestigiar al ejecutivo. La población sabe diferenciar entre gobierno y oposición. El término *be tie poletique, á tie poletique*, se utiliza especialmente para infundir miedo en cualquier persona que opina sobre la gestión pública.

[4] *É bot* á *ngam á yat:* hace referencia a la oposición política. Significa "los del otro lado".

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Los domingos, incluso hoy, ya no son cosas de mi infancia porque me estoy haciendo mayor y nada ha cambiado, el catequista toca la campana a las cinco de la madrugada y como todo hombre de estado del acá geopolítico cuya identidad es el *melongo*[5] en la mano y en la voz, se levanta con el cantar del gallo y todo el mundo obedece a pies juntillas, porque en Guinea Ecuatorial solo existe un hombre, de cabeza cortada y verga de rigidez intacta. Un único hombre, más los cien *binclima* –policías y militares– reproducidos a partir de su especie. Todos se rigen por la verga.

Su excelencia, el generalísimo, propiedad del poder, canta como el gallo, con la verga.

El gallo, *nnóm kú*, representa el poder absoluto en el mundo fang.

Mamá lo sabe. Lo contó un domingo con mis bragas a sus pies.

El *nnóm kú* es el principio y el fin.

El *nnóm kú* personifica la supremacía política, la gerontocracia del pasado, del presente, del futuro, el espacio del mundo en el que los miembros del gobierno más jóvenes son los *chavales*, recaderos de los monjes de la Salle, los hermanos mayores, los *grand friend*[6].

Cualquier persona no se integra en la Salle del poder, excepto de recadero. Para acceder a la Salle del poder se requiere la conversión a *mesémelugu*[7], el rey de los brujos, porque la brujería significa perversidad en la gestión pública; vivir por y para el *engóng*[8], el pueblo fang de los inmortales.

El poder no se muere. Mis bragas fallecieron. Una pena.

[5] *Melongo:* látigo confeccionado para azotar a menores (mujeres entre estos) que no se comportan como estipulan las normas del clan.
[6] *Grand friend:* hermano mayor. Ejerce los mismos roles que el patriarca en la familia y en la política.
[7] *Mesémelugu:* es el brujo –varón– más destacado del mundo fang y de los grupos afines a la etnia fang. Su autoridad trasciende a los gobernantes que representan instituciones y en sus manos está la designación de los jefes de los clanes.
[8] *Engóng:* pueblo mítico de la etnia fang. Representa la inmortalidad del poder y de los habitantes que residen en su circunscripción.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

El *nnóm kú* es el ir y venir de la brujería, *é kum ókong*[9], allá, donde se designa el poder diurno, se cuenta a voces y entre dientes, con la verga apuntada en los rostros de las mujeres.

El gallo, decían las personas mayores en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, cuando yo era más chica, simbolizó el quehacer político del Gobierno de Francisco Macías Nguema, el primer varón que se declaró único milagro de Guinea Ecuatorial. Te cuento.

Oye, ¿sabías que se llevó *Papá Masie* –este hombre de discursos brillantes, primer gobernante de la Guinea Ecuatorial independiente–, mis bragas a la tumba? ¿Tú sí? Yo no. En serio. Mamá lo sabe. Por eso, es razón de investigación y de asombro la rapidez con la que los be tie poletique se declaran vitalicios de la República. El feminismo académico nunca escribirá este manuscrito.

Lo único que ven las personas sin recursos ni carnet de hermano militante para adentrarse en la sociedad y hacer un trabajo de campo sostenible, es el e kum ókong. Porque un hermano militante convicto, y no camuflado, lo tiene todo free, gratuito, libre, alcanzable.

Libre. Impuestos de este mundo que no se pagan. Acceso a las vidas humanas con libertinaje agravante. Y es que la silla del poder sabe al cantar mañanero del gallo y nadie la quiere abandonar, desde mucho antes de que llegaran los mitangan –los blancos–, y fabricaran Guinea Ecuatorial, su creación más opaca, ingobernable, silenciosa.

La silla del poder sabe a miel, a brujería. Huele a las bragas, a las mías de la infancia. Me prohibieron exponerlas en los espacios públicos con la amenaza de melongo atravesando mis nalgas. Y desde que Macías se declarara único milagro de Guinea Ecuatorial las cosas no han cambiado. Mis bragas siguen allá, escondidas y hoy, 2020, mi país y mis bragas siguen necesitando un milagro porque la economía está de entierro. La educación está de entierro. Las mujeres están de entierro. Mis bragas siguen sin verse en los espacios públicos. Conviven con la verga de los be tie poletique.

[9] *Ekum ókong:* institución que otorga el poder a los dirigentes fang. Es un poder otorgado por los brujos más destacados del territorio fang.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

El catequista es el primer hombre que se deja dibujar después del cantar del gallo en los pueblos fang y en mi pueblo, y exclusivamente los domingos. Y si no es un domingo, lo hace el pregonero, cuyos mensajes siempre proceden del poder ejercido por los varones negros y que en los pueblos fang y en mi pueblo, comentarios de las personas mayores en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, está comandado con la verga y ungido de la sangre humana: el sacrificio de personas a cambio de ser designado gobernante en el é kum ókong y como consecuencia, en la vida real, ya que los gobiernos en los países negros no son legítimos, están bañados de sangre humana recién brotada de la muerte –edjue nsút mot ene edjue meki–.

El catequista es el hombre que con el kalashnicov apuntando a las cabezas de mi pueblo y la tuya, toca la campana de los domingos. A continuación, se introducen en escena los cuerpos especiales: la paria, formada por individuos de la casta subterránea que trabaja por vocación. La infancia se asoma. Lava la cara para acompañar al segundo cuerpo especial: las mujeres.

Todo el mundo, desde entonces, al río, a por el agua, a por la limpieza del cuerpo, a por la limpieza de la ropa. De manera especial, a por el trabajo de prepararles el desayuno a los hombres sentados en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres fumando banga, escuchando el Nvet Oyeng, espantando las moscas de sus pies con el acué –escobilla–, hablando de sexo, etc.

Yo recuerdo en la infancia a mis madres de las tribus construyendo rascacielos de cestas de ollas, platos, tenedores, cuchillos, ropa familiar. Las niñas entre tanto, custodiábamos las bragas, las nuestras, las tuyas no. Ya estábamos en la edad de aprender que las bragas de las mujeres no podían exponerse en los lugares públicos.

Los tendederos de ropa en los pueblos fang se construyen. Son una obra de arte. Son cuerdas gruesas, a veces finas, colgadas entre un palo y otro. Se dejan ver también en los alrededores de las viviendas, allá donde llega el sol. Mamá y las mamás del clan nunca explicaron las razones de por qué las bragas de las mujeres no se podían colgar junto a las demás ropas, yo tendría entonces diez años. Yo quería hacerlo. A

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

la pregunta de, mamá, por qué no, contestó con un mandamiento del silencio: "los caminos de Dios son inescrutables".

Las bragas de las niñas producen miedo. Yo les tenía miedo a mis bragas. Las niñas fang les tienen miedo a sus bragas. No comprenden por qué no las pueden exponer y colgar con el resto de la indumentaria. Y es que las advertencias de "cállate" a la niña fang que pregunta, suenan como las campanas de los domingos, cuando la autoridad ilimitada y vitalicia está por llegar, el sacerdote. Y es que en los pueblos fang y en mi pueblo se venera al Vaticano como al gallo, el nnóm kú, el hombre de cabeza cortada. La verga.

Las campanas de los domingos en los pueblos fang y en mi pueblo suenan a lo grande. Y lo entiendo. No existe detalle más placentero que mandar en el lugar pactado, luego de ser agredido, Guinea Ecuatorial. Las campanas de la iglesia católica suenan como la voz de mi padre y de mis padres del clan mandando callar a toda la familia. Y en las familias fang se espera que un hombre pegue gritos para ser respetado. Por eso no extraña que se mueran en el apogeo de la juventud y de enfermedades que largamente venían padeciendo.

Los gritos de papá. Los gritos de mis padres de la tribu. Los regaños a mis bragas de niña preguntona. En la infancia no se entienden muchas cosas, pero ahora que soy adulta por error, puedo pensar. Y pienso que las mujeres fang nunca son adultas. Siempre andan tuteladas por alguna justificación normalizada, convertida en costumbre y luego documentada como ley en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres afincada en la capital, la Cámara de los Diputados se ubica en Elon Mengazing, la Isla de Bioko.

Recuerdo que mis bragas nunca tuvieron lugar de descanso. Mamá me perseguía con ellas, hasta que las colgaba en la parte trasera de la vivienda pegada al vertedero, a la inmundicia.

En los ríos de los pueblos fang y de mi pueblo, las mujeres se bañan cubiertas de una braga. Este recuerdo es imborrable y se reproduce en las ciudades de Bata y Malabo. Se puede ver una aglomeración de mu-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

jeres en los pozos de agua de los barrios, en los ríos, en los grifos comunes, en la desdicha de la escasez de agua potable que iba a llegar con el horizonte 2020, y no ha llegado. Sabíamos que no llegaría.

Mujeres de todas las edades en los ríos, en los pozos de agua, en los grifos de la colonia carcomidos. Cuerpos destrozados por los partos interminables. Vaginas desgarradas con un dolor de por vida. Vientres con caminatas del bisturí para salvar vidas de la descendencia de las tribus, los bienes supremos de las tribus.

Los recuerdos de las mujeres lavándose las vulvas, nunca entendí la estrategia. En medio del río se agachaban con las piernas abiertas, los dedos bien adentro de la vagina. Así aprendí que se aseaba una mujer con la braga hasta las rodillas.

Luego llegaron las mujeres mitangan de la Cooperación Española con sabiduría de mitangan con un fin, sensibilizar que no, que allí adentro los dedos no limpiaban nada. La vulva tenía su propia vida, su flora de protección y, por favor, había que dejarla funcionar con naturalidad.

Las blancas de la Cooperación Española, ellas, tan odiadas en mi pueblo como los be tie poletique del ngam á yat. En una sesión de consejos de higiene organizada en la escuela del pueblo, toda la historia sobre la vagina se divulgó.

Los hombres se habían enfadado. Las mujeres de la cooperación no caían bien. El primer error que cometieron: mandarles a los hombres a los centros de salud para vacunar a la infancia, sus esposas se encontraban trabajando en las fincas. Lo recuerdo muy bien. Recuerdo el enfado dibujado en los rostros de mis padres de las tribus a los que producía deshonra cargar a su descendencia en los espacios públicos para no parecerse a las mujeres. Segundo error.

El segundo error tenía que ver con su forma de vivir. Las cooperantes pisaban los espacios sin miedo, la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, entre estos. Y los abuelos se quejaban, "serán muy blancas, pero tienen vaginas, son mujeres, qué pintan aquí". Mujeres sin descendencia oficialmente, sin planes de matrimonio, de sexo sin compromiso y castellano de expresión rápida. Las mujeres que hablaron de la vagina en voz alta, sin denigración.

Mis madres de la tribu, ni caso. Mis padres de la tribu, ni caso. Los ríos de los pueblos fang y de mi pueblo, más los pozos y grifos de agua

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de las capitales, siguen acogiendo a mujeres que esconden sus bragas y destrozan la salud de sus vaginas en el momento de asearse.

Recuerdo muy bien un domingo, el especial, antes de la entrada a la iglesia, a las diez de la mañana, hora establecida. No, las once, hora de llegada del sacerdote al que se esperaba con una comitiva: el ofertorio abundante, alguna niña esperando en la cama para su relajación posterior, y varias amantes peleándose por sus servicios sexuales y económicos.

¡Qué domingo! Regresé del río con un cubo de agua más grande que mi anatomía. Era la costumbre.

Recuerdo que se me olvidó la braga sobre el armario. Estaba muy cansada y la olla de bambucha me observaba con codicia. Madre, mientras la bambucha se peleaba con mi apetito ávido, trajo la braga y la colocó sobre mi cabeza. Descubrí que se encontraba allí porque las gotas de agua se caían sobre mis hombros. Así que la guardé conmigo, a mi lado, encima del banco que me ayudaba a estar sentada. Y bien. En el mismo lugar se quedó cuando me fui a la habitación para cambiarme de la ropa de estar por casa a la ropa de los domingos, las fiestas de guardar y también las de no guardar. Nada. Otra vez mamá encontró la braga y la lanzó en mi cara, y de la cara se cayó al suelo.

Y en el suelo se quedó mi braga de niña inconsciente.

Al salir de misa, un grupo de amigas se vino conmigo hasta la casa familiar. Encontramos a mi padre esperando la llegada y con mis bragas colgadas en el melongo. Aquel domingo no me pegó. Sin embargo, fuimos recibidas en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres.

Mamá y las madres de las amigas estaban de pie, escuchando, nosotras también. Cuatro varones de la tribu ostentaban el enfado al otro lado de la cama de bambú, y las niñas de pie, con las miradas enfocadas entre nuestras piernas, en el suelo, yo qué sé.

Los cuatro varones, padres de mis amigas, más papá, ardían de enfado. Nuestras madres narraron los lugares en los que olvidábamos las bragas, las niñas del pueblo, y sin ningún pudor: sobre los armarios de cargar el agua de consumo familiar, sobre los bancos de sentarnos, sobre las camas de la cocina, sobre los cubos de agua, sobre las ventanas de las cocinas y de los salones, sobre los bancos de sentarse las mujeres

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

en las afueras de la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, sobre las mesas de comer, sobre las tapaderas de las ollas de comida, sobre las mesas de comer en las viviendas de guardar bienes familiares decentes. Y continuaron.

Las bragas de las niñas, abandonadas sobre las cestas de ir y venir de la finca. Sobre las carpetas de los cuadernos. Sobre las mochilas de la descendencia más chica. Encima de los libros de estudiar. Encima de la Biblia. Sobre el xilófono de la iglesia un día cualquiera de hambre aldeano con las y los menores adentrándose en la iglesia para buscar a Jesucristo acostado en el pesebre.

Todavía recuerdo, entonces era una niña que se protegía de Akamanam para que no arrancara mis bragas, las veces que las muchachas abordamos el belén para saber si Jesucristo se dormía con una hermana mayor o pequeña, y si esta llevaba bragas: mojadas, secas, olvidadas en alguna parte del mundo. Y Jesucristo era único, sin hermanas custodiando las bragas.

Las niñas fang son felices con sus cuerpos hasta que llega la adolescencia precoz.

Las calles del pueblo, entes de la llegada de la adolescencia precoz, las reciben con los nombres "dueñas del juego", sí, a ellas. Juegan en medio del polvo fabricado por el sol del ecuador y muchas veces en cueros, solamente cubiertas de bragas sostenidas con ayuda de una cuerda. Descalzas. Es el nseng –el espacio público y de representación institucional del mundo fang–.

La infancia se recrudece con el recuerdo de las bragas, el deber de esconderlas, hasta que trascienden sus cuerpos de niñas a adolescentes –mong á mina a evom mina–.

La noticia corre. El cuerpo delata la inocencia con todo crecidito. Los senos se asoman. La Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres se informa. El cuerpo de alguna niña fang se ha preparado para la fiesta masculina.

Y te cuentan la historia, las mujeres mayores, a ti no. Hablan entre ellas y al final te informas. Por alguna razón se decidió en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres que las niñas y las mujeres adultas compartieran los espacios, casi todos.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

El nseng, sin las mujeres, es el centro de la vida en el mundo fang. Acoge la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, el poder, la anarquía, la exclusión de la juventud masculina y de las mujeres.

El nseng, sin las mujeres, decide dónde se cuelgan las bragas de las niñas, dónde se esconden y cuándo se arrancan.

El nseng, sin las mujeres, decide el destino del cuerpo de la mujer antes de nacer y a la llegada de la menstruación.

El nseng, sin las mujeres, dictaminó que la violación sexual a una niña tenía un nombre, adjabga; la violación a una mujer que ha entrado en climaterio tenía un nombre, adjabga.

El nseng decidió que las mujeres, a partir de la adolescencia, con la llegada de la menstruación hasta su marcha, les pertenecían a los hombres. Los cuerpos de ellas, las mentes de ellas, la libertad sexual de ellas, en este periodo, volarían hasta el cielo. La palabra violencia sexual no tendría patria ni nación.

De niña, me gustaba el nseng, así de limpio, extenso, lugar del juego a la palabra en los actos públicos. Lo envidiaba. Lo quería tomar.

En el nseng se recibía a las autoridades de la comarca con canciones y sacrificios de lo más preciado: los bi yem, que son los animales domésticos.

En el nseng las voces de los varones sonaban como los truenos del continente negro en época de lluvia.

En el nseng se conmemoraba el aluk fang, el matrimonio, con escenificaciones y juegos que daban risa, luego pena, más tarde el llanto de las mujeres.

Me gustaba este espacio, sobre todo su capacidad de mandar pegar, callar, castigar y decidir.

El látigo en la mano alguna vez como los varones. Soñé y mucho. Sí. La idea estaba bien. El pueblo, en pie, de rodillas, tumbado, proclamaría mi poder procedente del Dios fang, Nzama ye Me baga me Ncom Bot.

Yo era una niña entonces. Una pena.

Una niña fang que no aprende no es una niña fang porque en la infancia lo aprenden todo. Interiorizan que son "nadie", que no llegarán a nada porque sus madres del clan no lo son. Viven las idas y venidas

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de las mujeres del poder cuyas labores en el poder se alejan días tras día del ejercicio del poder.

Mis madres del clan en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, recuerdos de cuando era más chica, al salir de misa, aquel día que mi braga estaba colgada del melongo, citaron los lugares de olvido de las bragas de las niñas. Sin embargo, de ellas, de las madres del clan, aprendimos que los cuerpos de las niñas a partir de la adolescencia se abandonaban. Ya serían los cuerpos de las mujeres y los cuerpos de las mujeres tenían que reproducir bienes para los ejércitos de las tribus; para las naciones, los clanes.

Por eso las niñas teníamos que saber esconder las bragas, y especialmente, escondernos de los hombres.

El Mberbí, que es el llanto más grande de género femenino, –mbetbí, mbet ébi, é bii e nén–, acorralaba a las mujeres inconscientes.

Y el Mberbí no se juzgaba en la Casa de los Hombres. Está casado con el clan. Los ancestros lo aman. No representa una infracción.

El Mberbí en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres no tenía nombre.

Las imágenes más bonitas de la historia, del mundo fang, seguro que te acuerdas de ellas, yo también.

Las imágenes de un pueblo fang con el sol cayéndose en el atardecer. Recuerdo a las mujeres regresando de cualquier sitio juntas: de la finca, del río, de los viajes a las ciudades, de las peleas, de limpiar la iglesia sin perspectiva de decir misa alguna vez.

Las mujeres, enfadadas o enamoradas, juntas, siempre.

Las recuerdo hablando entre ellas, en los días de regreso y de marcha a la finca.

Las recuerdo, juntas, explicando que de esta manera se enfrentaban a la indefensión jurídica de la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, el rostro del esingang –persona malvada–, residente en los tramos de los bosques más largos que se cruzaban, en compañía, más las plantaciones de calabazas, ñames, cacahuetes.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Las niñas fang aprenden a silbar por miedo, por amor, por autodefensa.

Las niñas fang aprenden a avisar cuando están en peligro, en medio del bosque, para el conocimiento de otras mujeres, de los hombres no.

Las madres del clan se encargan de enseñar.

Mamá me enseñó. Qué recuerdos, entonces era una niña que recién disfrutaba del placer de la banga presente en todos los espacios de los pueblos fang y de mi pueblo: los canutos tirados al suelo en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres; los canutos tirados al suelo de la cocina; las compras de la banga de Akamanam que se caían al suelo, siempre en los bares, y nunca en los restaurantes luego de emborracharse; en todas las huertas de los pueblos fang y de mi pueblo; en las risas de los be tie poletique del ngam á yat, etc.

Las madres del clan se encargan de enseñar. Siempre. Lo recuerdo muy bien, entonces era una niña de tiñas alquiladas en los dedos de mis pies, en las plantas de mis pies, en las bragas de la infancia.

Mis madres no hablaban del Mberbí con las niñas. No obstante, los temblores de sus cuerpos, la tristeza en sus miradas, los recuerdos que se canturrean en compañía femenina, simbolizaban sus vidas en peligro.

La infancia termina como el trueno, como los domingos en los pueblos fang y la fiesta del ejercicio del poder vaticanista. Es la señal de la llegada de la menstruación y la interiorización del proceso de esconder las bragas por su origen, por lo que protegen, por lo que cubren, por los mitos que lo acompañan.

Las bragas cambian de nombre al inicio de la adolescencia, ya no se llaman bragas sino el Mberbí.

El nombre, Mberbí, lo escuché por primera vez en el río, un domingo. Una niña de trece años se llevó al río el rascacielos. Su mamá estaba ingresada en el hospital con dos de sus últimas hijas enfermas de brujería, así que después de servirle a su padre sentado en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, se marchó a trabajar como todas las mujeres los domingos. Platos, cucharas, tenedores, ollas, ropa, hermanos que adecentar para la misa, coronaban sus labores mañaneras más la llegada de la regla, descubierta en las manchas adornadas en su falda por las mujeres mayores.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Estábamos todas las niñas pendientes.

La menor recibió la advertencia: la pregunta de si llevaba puesto el Mberbí.

Ella, como todas las niñas, desconocíamos el origen y el significado del término.

Hablaron claro las madres del clan: “Oye, no eres una niña ntangan. La braga se llama Mberbí y en breve, si no te proteges, llorarás el Mberbí”.

Yo había aprendido en el colegio de los mitangan que una braga se llamaba braga. Ahora que soy adulta, recuerdo que desde la infancia tuve acceso a varias escuelas y no era la primera vez que me llegaba el nombre. Eché la memoria al pasado. Las mujeres lo citaban en todas partes. Había que ser lista para saber a qué se referían. No había que ser muy lista para saber a qué se referían.

Había que leer libros no escritos por la civilización de los mitangan sobre las vidas de las mujeres para averiguar que el mundo de mis madres se tornaba al vivir porque sus bragas no estaban custodiadas por la institución por excelencia del mundo fang, la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres, el Abáa bi Tom.

Del Abáa bi Tom que se habla en todos los libros con nostalgia. Había que recuperarlo en su integridad: lloran los varones, llora la Salle del poder con la verga maneando, lloran las mujeres, lloran los be tie poletique del ngam á yat y los antorchados del fuego. Yo no quiero recuperar la estructura de una institución que no protege mi integridad física.

El Abáa be Fam, lo vi apropiándose del discurso en la boca de cada varón. Lo vi expropiando el derecho a la palabra a los varones jóvenes.

Lo vi en el reino de la gerontocracia.

Lo vi sin decir la palabra Mberbí, pero sí castigando a las mujeres que lo habían sufrido.

Este método de castigo es el mismo que se rige en el Parlamento, en las fuerzas armadas de seguridad del estado y en las instituciones judiciales, que en la práctica funcionan como la Casa de la Palabra de

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

los Hombres. Por eso las mujeres no le llaman Abaá como los varones negros y varones mitangan. Tiene nombres propios: Abáa mi Tie. Abáa Medjó. Abá bi Tom. Abá be Fam.

Y la tradición fang está en pelea contra la civilización occidental porque Occidente sabe encargarse de destrozarlo todo e imponerse allá donde se aloja. Y ante la desaparición del material de construcción para la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres porque ya nadie lo encuentra rentable, se ha encontrado una solución de supervivencia.

El Parlamento, las viviendas de las ciudades y de los pueblos, encargados de la recepción de las visitas importantes, la resolución de los problemas y la representatividad, se llaman Ndé Abáa (la casa de la Casa de la Palabra). Occidente con el capitalismo le ha obligado al varón fang a incluir la cocina en el interior de la vivienda. Sin embargo, los be tie poletique que sí gobiernan desde el Ekum Ókong y lucen dinero de procedencia dudosa, construyen las viviendas con una división sexual de los espacios.

En Malabo y Bata relucen viviendas lujosas en las que la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres brilla en las afueras de la residencia familiar: es el espacio de los varones de la familia y en sus interiores reciben visitas familiares y de las amistades masculinas. Se trata de la transición de la institución ancestral fang del campo a la ciudad.

Mamá, dónde están mis bragas. Hija, lo sé, están en la Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres de la capital. Ella sabe lo que subsiste en el imaginario colectivo.

El salón de las viviendas, el espacio del ocio televisivo y del uso de la palabra, se llaman Ndá Abáa.

La sección de las viviendas que acoge los televisores, el equipo de música, los armarios que aguardan los licores, la puerta que da acceso al nseng junto a la terraza en las ciudades, se llaman Ndá Abáa. Son los espacios de los varones.

Las habitaciones y la parte trasera de la vivienda corresponden a las mujeres. Le atañe a este espacio la labor de cocinar para los eventos, organizar la limpieza, custodiar a la descendencia, y cuidar a las personas enfermas.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Dónde están mis bragas, mamá. Tus bragas están donde deben estar, en tu mente, con los be tie poletique antorchados del fuego, con los be tíe poletique del ngam á yat, con los gobernantes del Ekum Ókong, con el mberbí, el llanto más grande de las mujeres.

En la infancia de una niña fang se aprende a interiorizar la culpa.

La culpa de que el destino de tus bragas es responsabilidad tuya.

El destino de tu braga y de lo que protege la braga es responsabilidad tuya. Tú cuidas de tus bragas.

Tú cuidas de que ningún hombre te agreda sexualmente y si ocurriese, sería culpa tuya.

Yo sigo buscando mis bragas con el mberbí. Mamá sabe dónde están. La Casa de la Palabra de los Hombres de la capital, la Cámara de los Diputados, las colgó con el melongo, ayer, tras una reunión que terminó en guerra, en Ekum Ókong.

Malabo, 2021

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Roxane Pajoul

(Nashville, Tennessee)

Ni ici, ni là-bas : négocier la relation France-Antilles au travers des couples mixtes dans la littérature antillaise

Abstract

In this contribution, we will explore the silencing of Caribbean writers Michèle Lacrosil and Jacqueline Manicom. We will argue that both authors provide a valuable and fundamental commentary on Caribbean identity amidst French assimilation, commentaries dismissed because of their gender. Each writer also gives insight into Caribbean women's position facing their multiple oppressors – France's (white) institutions and male-led (black) *Négritude* movement. Yet, with little academic consideration and harsh critiques at the publication of their works, these female authors were relegated to the background as women obsessed with whiteness. The deeper interpretation that they offer about the relationship between France and the Caribbean was overlooked: in both texts, we read the female body as a negotiation ground in the aftermath of slavery. We will propose an analysis through the angle of "gendered taboo" since it is our contention that these women were silenced because of the intersection of their race and gender and the ones of the characters they portray.

Dans le cadre du thème proposé par cet ouvrage, *Unheard (of)*, nous nous intéressons dans cette étude à deux auteures issues des Antilles françaises, Michèle Lacrosil et Jacqueline Manicom, toute deux victimes de ce que nous percevons comme un *tabou genré*. Nous choisissons le mot « tabou » en référence à l'analyse de Sigmund Freud, *Totem et Taboo* dans notre tentative de comprendre des silences littéraires et discursifs imposés par un code non-écrit à l'encontre de peurs inexpliquées (Freud 1912 : 28-29). Lors de la parution de leurs ouvrages dans les années soixante et soixante-dix, par des maisons de presse parisiennes (notamment la prestigieuse Gallimard pour Lacrosil), leurs travaux ont non seulement été critiqués mais également réduits au silence

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

du fait de ce que nous voyons comme une audace intolérée : deux femmes de couleur érudites, auteures, proposant des récits de personnages féminins et de leurs désirs interdits. En effet, dans *Cajou*, Michèle Lacrosil raconte les derniers jours menant au suicide d'une chimiste antillaise à cause du racisme dont elle est victime et de sa relation toxique avec un homme blanc. Dans *Mon examen de blanc*, Jacqueline Manicom aborde la question de l'identité antillaise au travers de la vie d'une anesthésiologiste noire qui a eu une relation avec un homme blanc.

Les deux récits se positionnent parfaitement dans les problématiques de *Unheard (of)* dans la mesure où les auteures abordées ici se trouvent au confluent d'une identité ambiguë. En effet, les Antilles sont devenues françaises en 1946 et font donc partie de l'Europe actuelle, mais sont souvent étudiées dans le contexte du bassin Caraïbe pour souligner les similitudes culturelles régionales, et créer une cohérence phénotypique. Dans ce volume, notre but est de contribuer à une réflexion Afro-européenne mettant en parallèle plusieurs nations européennes et leurs relations avec leurs anciennes colonies et femmes de descendance africaine.

Lacrosil et Manicom correspondent à ces femmes qui ont une relation complexe avec leur île, la France, tout en participant à la définition d'Afro-européennes, mettant en avant les complexités raciale et identitaire engendrées par les colonisations occidentales et la traite esclavagiste. Notre contribution a pour but de démontrer que ces auteures ont été réduites au silence sans que leur message réel ne soit entendu : nous argumentons ici que leurs littératures sont des prises de position quant aux questions de relation entre la France et les Antilles (depuis la départementalisation de 1946) et ses ramifications qu'elles réifient à travers le couple mixte, femme noire/ homme blanc. Jusqu'à présent, aucune connexion entre ces deux sujets n'a été analysée, ce qui confirme l'incompréhension de leurs travaux. Nous souhaitons ainsi redonner la parole à ces femmes qui ont osé braver le tabou du couple mixte et qui ont elles-mêmes été rendues tabou à cause de cela.

Notre examen sera décomposé en trois angles d'étude : dans un premier temps appréhender le couple mixte ; ensuite l'examiner à la lumière de l'inconscient antillais ; enfin, dénoter l'originalité de ces deux romans comme apports essentiels à la compréhension de la crise

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

identitaire post-esclavage et post-départementalisation. Tout au long de notre analyse, nous garderons à l'esprit le traitement qu'ont reçu les auteures du fait non seulement de leur genre, mais aussi du sujet qu'elles ont choisi ainsi que leur position singulière pour l'époque – des femmes éduquées et émancipées.

Le couple mixte polarise. Un symbole de rassemblement pour certains, il représente pour d'autres la trahison de la « race ». Ces faits, qui sont vrais de toutes les relations mixtes[1], s'avèrent d'autant plus vrais pour les couples mixtes noir-blanc. L'histoire coloniale de la France sur le continent africain, puis esclavagiste en Amérique et dans les Antilles, complique bien plus les liens dans ces couples, qui sans le vouloir réifient cette histoire et ses conflits, comme nous le verrons ci-dessous. Aux Antilles, ces couples sont appelés « couple domino ».[2] Nous nous trouvons face à un tabou extrêmement paradoxal dans la mesure où ces couples existent, sont visibles et de plus en plus nombreux, mais étrangement, n'étaient encore que peu représentés dans la littérature antillaise et dans certains médias jusqu'à récemment. Proportionnellement, il n'est pas exagéré de parler d'invisibilité littéraire. Depuis l'essor de la littérature antillaise dans les années trente jusqu'à aujourd'hui, nous avons compté, sauf erreur de notre part, la publication de onze ouvrages dont l'intrigue contient des couples mixtes[3]. Il est vrai que le sujet est plutôt moderne, l'idée de mixité entre des couples de religions, d'ethnie, de nationalité voire de classes différentes étant un phénomène ayant évolué à partir des années soixante.[4]

De plus, il nous a été donné de constater que la production littéraire sur le sujet est majoritairement celle de femmes et qu'elles tendent à représenter des couples mixtes femme noire/homme blanc et non l'inverse. Devrait-on interpréter ce choix comme ce que Frantz Fanon a qualifié de désir de *lactification* (1952) ? L'absence substantielle

[1] Voir Gabrielle Varro « Les 'couples mixtes' à travers le temps » (2012 : 28) qui remarque par exemple que les lois antijuives du régime de Vichy bannissait les unions mixtes.
[2] Voir par exemple l'introduction de l'ouvrage de Roger Little (2001).
[3] Pour les Antilles françaises uniquement. Parmi les hommes traitant de couples mixtes, référençons : René Maran (1962 [1947]), Bertène Juminer (1963), Jean Bernabé (2004). Parmi les femmes, référençons Mayotte Capécia (1948, 1950), Michèle Lacrosil (1961), Jacqueline Manicom (1975 [1972]), Maryse Condé (1987, 2000, 2001, 2005).
[4] Gabrielle Varro, sociologue de la mixité (2012).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

d'études sur le sujet nous suggère que ce schéma spécifique (femme antillaise qui écrit sur le couple mixte noire/blanc) génère le plus de résistance dans les milieux intellectuels et populaires antillais. Les recherches sur le couple homme noir/femme blanche ont reçu très peu d'attention dans le monde académique ;[5] le couple femme noire/homme blanc encore moins,[6] d'où l'urgence de notre étude.

Néanmoins, notre volonté de traiter ce sujet comme « tabou » provient de ce que nous voyons comme la réception biaisée d'auteures, réduites à un silence métaphorique à cause de leur genre mais aussi d'incompréhensions de leurs travaux. En effet, les romans de Michèle Lacrosil et Jacqueline Manicom ont souvent été perçus comme l'expression d'un complexe d'infériorité. Nos recherches au moment de l'écriture de ce chapitre nous indiquent qu'en dehors de Maryse Condé,[7] aucune autre femme n'a publié récemment sur le couple domino femme noire/homme blanc aux Antilles, soit depuis 1972. Il semble évident que leurs choix de dépeindre des relations interraciales sur fond de complexités psychologiques de leurs personnages, et la considération de leur propre genre ont généré ces amalgames ou une condescendance misogyne de la part de leurs contemporains et de la critique académique. Ceux qui ont écrit sur ces auteures au moment de la parution n'ont pas été tendres (Smith 1974, Condé 1981). Pour com-prendre de telles réactions, nous nous devons tout d'abord d'expliquer le couple mixte.

[5] A notre connaissance, il y a deux études approfondies sur le sujet du couple Noir/Blanche : la monographie de Roger Little (2001) et le chapitre de Rosamond King « One Love? Caribbean Men and White women » (2014).

[6] Sauf erreur de notre part, la seule étude complète sur le sujet est la thèse de doctorat de Pia Thielmann (2000).

[7] Maryse Condé est l'auteure antillaise qui a bravé tous les tabous ou presque. Deux de ces romans récents traitent de couples mixtes noire/blanc mais leurs intrigues ne se situent pas dans les Antilles françaises ou en métropole, d'où notre choix de ne pas les inclure dans cette étude : *Célanire-cou-coupé* (2000) dont le récit se passe en Côte d'Ivoire et *La femme cannibale* (2005) qui se déroule en Afrique du Sud.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Le couple mixte aux Antilles : chiffres *versus* littérature

La relation mixte ou « domino » est indéniable. Elle n'est certes pas majoritaire, comme nous le verrons, mais elle est grandissante depuis les mouvements migratoires entre les Antilles et la métropole, mis en place après la départementalisation, mouvements que nous allons rapidement expliquer ici. Comme le souligne habilement l'article « Migrations antillaises en métropole » (2000) de la géographe Stéphanie Coudon, les migrations féminines post-départementalisation contribuèrent aux plans de la métropole qui avait pour but de faire baisser la natalité et le chômage aux Antilles, tout en donnant aux antillaises des postes peu-qualifiés dans l'hexagone : « En faisant partir les femmes, on faisait partir des futures mères. » (Coudon 2000 : 3) Concernant les chiffres de ces migrations, le politologue Fred Constant estime à 160000 migrations par l'intermédiaire du BUMIDOM[8] entre 1963, date de la création du programme, et 1980 juste avant l'arrêt du programme (Constant 1987 :16) lorsque le gouvernement décide d'encourager les antillais à retourner dans leur département (« 365000 Domiens vivent en métropole », n.p.).

En parallèle, un mouvement de métropolitains qui viennent s'installer aux Antilles pour aider à développer les îles[9] amplifie le contact entre les populations antillaises et métropolitaines, créant ainsi plus d'opportunités pour la mixité, ce qui était rare avant 1950. La formation progressive de couples mixtes dans la deuxième partie du XX^{ème} siècle s'apparente à cette période de transition et n'est pas toujours vue d'un bon œil aux Antilles, particulièrement puisque le corps

[8] Rappelons que le BUMIDOM est l'acronyme du Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations dans les Départements d'Outre-Mer. Il s'agissait du bureau créé en 1963 pour aider les Antillais à trouver des postes en métropole.

[9] Michel Desse : « En effet avec la départementalisation en 1946, l'État français se lance dans une politique de rattrapage, de mise à niveau afin de combler les retards en matière d'enseignement, de santé, de transports, de logements. Cette politique est très progressive, lente durant les années 1950 et 1960, elle s'accélère par la suite, nécessitant l'arrivée de fonctionnaires métropolitains qui occupent en majorité les emplois de catégorie A et B de la fonction publique. Pour motiver les fonctionnaires métropolitains et rendre attractifs des postes aux conditions de vie difficiles du fait de l'enclavement et de l'isolement, l'État met alors en place une surrémunération s'élevant à 40% du montant du salaire » (2007 : 10).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

de la femme antillaise est perçu comme un symbole de l'île et semble subir une forme d'envahissement, rappel du « viol fondateur ».[10] Les avantages auxquels ont droit les métropolitains qui viennent y travailler, nourrissent ce sentiment d'appropriation dans lequel l'histoire se répète, et une impression de spoliation se développe, particulièrement pour l'homme noir.

Pourquoi une absence littéraire sur le sujet lorsque la réalité nous indique que le couple mixte, même s'il reste certes minoritaire sur l'île, fait partie du quotidien antillais ? En effet, nos visites dans les Antilles françaises entre 2012 et 2017 démontrent l'existence évidente (et croissante) de couples mixtes noir(e)/blanc(he) confondus. Par ailleurs, la presse, les médias et les réseaux sociaux démontrent eux aussi que la question est contemporaine et mérite notre attention, avec tout son poids historique et symbolique.[11] La difficulté réside dans la publication de données exactes, la France ne collectant pas d'informations sur les ethnies. Nos recherches nous ont néanmoins amenés à trouver quelques indications approximatives concernant les couples mixtes dans le cadre des Antilles françaises. Parmi elles, la grande enquête statistiques « L'enquête Migrations, Famille et Vieillissement » réalisée en 2009-2010 en Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane et à la Réunion (Claude-Valentin 2015). L'étude, la première d'une telle ampleur dans les DOM, a été dirigée par l'INED (Institut national d'études démographiques) et l'INSEE (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques) et avait pour but de mieux cerner la notion de « famille » dans les territoires Outre-Mer.

L'analyse des résultats de l'enquête s'avère particulièrement utile dans son traitement du couple mixte. Selon l'article, les couples mixtes forment entre 16% et 19% de la population en Martinique et Guadeloupe (Valentin 2011 :62). L'étude nous apprend aussi que parmi ces couples mixtes, entre 50 et 52% contiennent un conjoint né en

[10] Nous empruntons cette expression à l'anthropologue Stéphanie Mulot citée plus loin dans notre étude.

[11] Citons certains sujets de forums : « Couple mixte (métro-antillais): comportement de l'homme antillais? » (2009) ; « Pourquoi les mecs blacks préfèrent les métros ? » (2002). Citons également la seule thèse de doctorat (en sociologie) que nous ayons trouvée qui se soit focalisée sur le sujet des couples mixtes métro-antillais : Marina Coll (2007).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

métropole. Bien que l'origine n'indique en rien la couleur de peau du partenaire cela nous permet néanmoins d'avoir une idée approximative : en nous basant sur le pour-centage le plus bas (16%), cela signifie que 8% des couples aux Antilles sont avec un partenaire métropolitain. Force est de constater que le couple mixte, personne de couleur/Blanc(he), correspond à une réalité de la vie dans les Antilles.

Du côté littéraire, rappelons-que seuls onze ouvrages ont été publiés sur le sujet depuis l'essor de la littérature antillaise, dans les années trente. La première figure littéraire qui nous vient à l'esprit lorsque nous pensons à la relation Noire/Blanc dans la littérature antillaise est celle qui a longtemps été appelée Mayotte Capécia, mais qui s'avère en fait être Lucette Ceranus Combette. Dans son analyse de la psyché antillaise, le psychiatre antillais Frantz Fanon (1952) avait présenté le premier roman de celle-ci, *Je suis Martiniquaise,* comme l'évidence d'un complexe d'infériorité par rapport à l'homme blanc et de son désir de se blanchir, ce qu'il avait appelé désir de *lactification.* Ce que nous surnommons le « cas Capécia » se présente comme un rappel fondamental pour cette analyse dans le cadre littéraire et académique. Avant de poursuivre notre examen, il est essentiel de rappeler que Fanon avait fait un amalgame entre le personnage et son auteure, ayant toutes les deux le même prénom. Suite au travail d'analyse de la chercheuse Christiane Makward dans *Mayotte Capécia, Ou, L'aliénation Selon Fanon* (1999), et à deux examens détaillés d'Arnold James publiés en 2002 et 2003, il a été mis en évidence que les romans de Mayotte Capécia seraient en fait le produit de la construction du journal d'un amant de Combette et d'un éditeur métropolitain. Par conséquent, nous suivrons pour cette étude l'exhortation de James de ne plus considérer les travaux de Capécia comme romans antillais à part entière. Toutefois, nous continuerons de citer Capécia comme l'auteure officielle par but de clarté, ne possédant ni le nom de l'éditeur ni celui de l'amant, et pour rester cohérent avec les analyses sur le sujet.

Notre mention de Capécia est donc uniquement d'ordre référentiel, en tant que récit *prétendument* écrit par une femme de couleur qui décrit sa relation à un homme blanc. Dans un premier temps, il nous semble incon-testable de voir dans la bataille académique entre Frantz Fanon et Mayotte Capécia les conséquences d'un non-dit qui fustige la femme antillaise qui ose exprimer ouvertement un désir envers l'homme blanc.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Nous croyons en effet qu'au-delà de l'erreur de Fanon d'associer l'auteure et son personnage, c'est aussi le sexisme de celui-ci qui nourrit son analyse. En effet, même si les deux romans ne sont pas ceux de l'auteure en question, il apparaît néanmoins évident que la centralité du couple mixte dérange à cause de l'histoire coloniale et de ses répercussions sur l'ego de l'homme noir. Les propos racistes, maintenant révélés comme étant ceux d'un éditeur certainement métropolitain blanc, sont évidemment extrêmement problématiques. Mais c'est l'analyse psychologique cinglante de Frantz Fanon sur le désir de *lactification* de Capécia qui a, non seulement placé Capécia au rang d'animal de foire psychiatrique (le cas d'école de la haine de soi de la femme noire) tout en en faisant d'elle un paria littéraire dont le récit ne peut être entendu. Pour preuve des répercussions littéraire que produisit le jugement de Fanon, « Maryse Condé dit avoir pleuré quand un critique a comparé ses premiers livres à ceux de Mayotte Capécia » (Steven 1998).

L'écriture du couple domino tel que vu par la femme a par conséquent été associée et enterrée avec le nom « Capécia », devenant tabou et suggérant que reconnaître une relation avec un homme blanc *voulue* (et non celle du viol colonial) est nécessairement maladif. Rappelons que dans son traitement d'un personnage masculin, Jean Veneuse (René Maran 1962 [1947]), Fanon avait excusé les désirs de celui-ci pour une femme blanche comme un rite initiatique (1971 [1952] : 58), normalisant ainsi les envies de celui-ci. En revanche, lors de son analyse de Capécia, l'auteure devient la réification de « Toutes ces femmes de couleur échevelée, en quête du Blanc » (ibid. : 39). La généralisation est troublante. Au fond, le « cas Capécia » pose la question : peut-on décrire une relation entre une femme de couleur et un blanc dans la littérature antillaise lorsque l'on est une femme ? Est-ce que cela peut se faire sans être analysé comme un désir de *lactification* ? Comment et pourquoi des siècles de mécanismes s'enchaînent et s'attaquent à ces auteures lorsqu'elles le font ? Enfin et surtout, que nous apprennent *réellement* leurs récits ? Le rôle de l'analyse psychiatrique du « cas Capécia » par Frantz Fanon permet de comprendre le tabou littéraire qui s'est mis en place *de facto* parmi les auteures antillaises.

Par ailleurs, nous voyons aussi dans le développement et la valorisation du mouvement de la *Négritude* (~1930-1960) la mise en place d'une interdiction implicite supplémentaire. En effet, la période se veut

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

celle de la fierté noire, telle que définit par les intellectuels antillais majoritairement masculins (voir cependant Sharpley-Whiting 2002) qui voient dans la *Négritude* une victoire de leur reconnaissance ontologique tardive. Rappelons les travaux de l'anthropologue Stéphanie Mulot, qui dans son article « Redevenir un homme en contexte antillais post-esclavagiste et matrifocal » nous parle de « castration coloniale » (Mulot 2009 :118). Elle démontre que l'homme blanc est le détenteur du pouvoir tandis que l'homme noir est valorisé pour sa force physique et sexuelle. Grâce à cette analyse, Mulot explique les conséquences sur la masculinité antillaise, notamment le besoin depuis l'esclavage de reconquérir le phallus perdu (ibid. : 125-126), ce qui nous semble évident dans la promotion de la *Négritude*. Le mouvement représente non seulement une avancée spectaculaire pour l'identité antillaise mais nous y voyons également un détachement de la valorisation physique de l'homme noire au profit de sa valorisation intellectuelle.

Dans un tel contexte rassemblant le succès de la *Négritude*, une reconnaissance de l'intellectuel noir et les semblants d'égalité que promettait la départementalisation, l'effet de romans comme ceux de Lacrosil ou Manicom apparaissent nécessairement comme des menaces. Comme le souligne la chercheuse en études antillaises Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (1992), ces auteures sont alors sans le savoir des féministes avant-gardistes, décrivant des personnages revendiquant leur autonomie physique, sexuelle et professionnelle. Lorsque nous considérons ce désir d'indépendance, il semble alors évident que du point de vue de leurs contemporains, ces femmes ou ce qu'elles représentent, soient incomprises. Qu'elles osent en plus rejeter leur identité noire au profit d'un rapprochement à l'homme blanc, s'avère un rejet de la *Négritude* : un obstacle au besoin de reconnaissance de l'homme noir, tant attendu, mais aussi un rejet de leur compatriotes antillais. Enfin, à cette même époque post-départementalisa-tion se mettent en place multiples tentatives d'assimilation prônées par le gouvernement français, avec simultanément l'arrivée de métropolitains qui font peu à peu partie du paysage, comme démontré plus haut, et à la fois, la montée du chômage et les départs en métropole. Il est évident que la perte d'une mainmise sur la femme noire, y compris au niveau littéraire, contribue à cette anxiété.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Si le « cas Capécia » explique l'immobilisme littéraire sur le sujet jusqu`à aujourd'hui, qu'en est-il du comportement de la population antillaise à l'égard du couple Noire/Blanc ? Il est évident que l'esclavage la connote nécessairement comme violente. Cependant, nous démontrerons ici comment au-delà de l'esclavage, c'est la construction raciale à travers les siècles, combinée aux effets de la départementalisation qui produisent un tabou qui persiste dans l'inconscient antillais.

Couple mixte face à l'histoire et à l'inconscient antillais

La construction raciale entre la France et ses colonies dans les Antilles s'est faite à travers les siècles et est connue de tous dans les grandes lignes, mais demeure en réalité bien plus complexe sur le plan juridique et avec de nombreuses répercutions psychologiques qui n'ont absolument pas été prises en compte par l'Etat français (ou les antillais eux-mêmes) jusqu'à récemment.[12] En effet, cette construction a été le fruit non seulement d'un antagonisme construit sur les phénotypes noir/blanc mais aussi et surtout de la manipulation juridique et culturelle de l'éventail phénotypique si courant aux Antilles du fait de métissages, pour, tantôt les associer au colon blanc puis les rejeter parce que noir. Dans son essai *La condition noire*, l'historien Pap Ndyaie utilise le concept américain de « colorisme », « pour référer à ces nuances [entre le blanc et le noir] et à leurs perceptions sociales » (Ndyaie 2008 :71). C'est dans ce va-et-vient identitaire que se place l'Antillais, mais c'est aussi paradoxalement la raison pour laquelle il cherche à invalider le couple Noire/Blanc, la source d'un système d'oppression multiple dans l'inconscient antillais. Ici, nous avancerons trois points clés qui expliquent la perception des couples mixtes aux Antilles : dans un premier temps les répercussions psychologiques de l'esclavage ; dans un second temps l'exploitation des métissages « utiles » ; et enfin, la complexité juridique du statut d'anciennes colonies.

[12] Voir à ce sujet le travail de la chercheuse au CNRS Christine Chivallon (2002) et le combat politique de l'ancienne députée Guyane, Christiane Taubira, qui a œuvré pour la loi reconnaissant la traite de l'esclavage comme crime contre l'humanité en 2001, appelée « Loi Taubira ».

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

La colonisation de l'Afrique puis l'esclavage ont établi un système de hiérarchie des couleurs, le Blanc dominant le Noir, même si cette dynamique de couleur n'était pas mentionnée dans le *Code Noir* (1685) qui faisait uniquement une distinction entre maître et esclave.[13] Ce système a très vite été compliqué par les métissages résultant du « viol fondateur » (discuté ci-dessous), puis des viols répétés dans les plantations, qui ont conduit à une classification raciale telle que celle répertoriée par Moreau de Saint Méry (1796) avec cent-vingt-huit catégories. A cette époque, il y a déjà eu une première division entre les esclaves de maison et ceux des champs, dans laquelle Pap Ndiaye lit une sorte de favoritisme selon si la couleur de l'esclave était plus claire ou plus foncée (Ndiaye 2008 :79). En créant cette hiérarchie parmi les esclaves, le maître leur inculquait inconsciemment que le pouvoir s'obtenait avec la blancheur, s'entourant des esclaves plus clairs. Par ailleurs, il créait aussi des divisions entre esclaves, assurant ainsi sa domination malgré leur supériorité numérique.

A cela s'ajoute le terme « viol fondateur » de l'anthropologue Stéphanie Mulot (2007) avec lequel elle explique la tension résiduelle du triangle homme noir/homme blanc/femme noire. Mulot avance sur le plan psychanalytique et sans remettre en question les faits historiques, un désir consensuel entre l'homme blanc et la femme noire, qui amènerait alors à effacer l'homme noir. A la fin de son analyse, elle démontre qu'en entretenant le mythe du viol fondateur, les antillais entretiennent un « nœud mémoriel » (ibid. : 522) qui les pousse à une attitude schizophrénique parce qu'ils ne reconnaissent pas leur ancêtre blanc et donc haïssent une part d'eux-mêmes.[14] Bien que son argument

[13] Voir à ce sujet Dominique Rogers : « Au XVII[ème] siècle, le Code noir ne mentionne aucun argument pigmentaire ou racial pour justifier l'esclavage. […] Si l'usage favorise l'affranchissement des métis, la loi ne distingue que les affranchis et les libres de naissance » (2003 : 85).

[14] Mulot imagine en effet l'hypothèse que le viol fondateur (qui a été souvent été mystifié comme l'origine du peuple antillais), n'ait pas eu lieu. Elle suggère à la place que l'idée d'un désir entre l'homme blanc et la femme noire serait castrateur pour l'homme noir et donc que les antillais ressassent le viol fondateur pour nourrir leur ressentiment envers l'ancêtre blanc et de ce fait « proposer une version de l'histoire qui […] rétablisse [les hommes noirs] dans leur statut de sujets désirants et surtout désirés, et qui permette de penser la rencontre sexuelle autrement, en évitant toute compromission entre la femme noire et son maître. En effet, le non-consentement de la femme serait la preuve de sa fidélité affective à l'homme noir » (Mulot 2007 : 520).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

soit troublant, et même problématique, son analyse est utile car la notion de viol fondateur est bel et bien la source d'une peur réelle d'un désir entre l'homme blanc et la femme noire, qui laisserait l'homme noir d'autant plus désemparé et impuissant que le trauma de l'esclavage lui impose un rejet total de tous, même de sa compagne. Une peur profonde de connivence entre la Noire et le Blanc au détriment ou sans échappatoire pour l'homme noir, explique que même si le mythe n'en est pas un, il fait partie de l'inconscient de l'homme noir.

Par ailleurs, les Antilles ont vu une période de ce que nous voyons comme des « métissages utiles ». Jacques Houdaille (1981), maître de recherche sur les minorités et les métissages à l'INED, examine la constitution des populations dans les colonies avant 1760. Son étude minutieuse des registres paroissiaux de l'époque nous donne des statistiques quant à la composition des mariages mais aussi l'origine de certains habitants selon les catégories « France », « étranger », « colonie », « créole », « couleur » (Houdaille 1981 : 271). Le plus intéressant dans ses travaux est de noter les disproportions du nombre de femmes françaises par rapport aux hommes français, ce qui selon Houdaille prouve que pour se reproduire les hommes ont été obligés de faire des enfants avec les esclaves dans le but spécifique de peupler les îles, brouillant temporairement les lignes raciales, et surtout, les enfants étant ensuite libérés pour produire une population libre qui travaillerait avec leur père (ibid. : 269-270). Ce fait est également rapporté dans l'ouvrage fondateur de Chantal Maignan-Claverie, *Le métissage dans la littérature des Antilles Françaises. Le complexe d'Ariel*, dans lequel elle souligne que « dans la première phase de la colonisation, le métissage appartient à l'ordre de la patrilinéarité et a une fonction assimilatrice ». Le fils hérite du père, de son nom et son argent, et en vient parfois lui-même à posséder des esclaves (Maignan-Claverie 2005 :136). Maignan-Claverie ajoute qu'à cette même époque (à la fin du XVII^{ème} siècle) la condition de mulâtre servile n'est pas envisagée à quelques exceptions près (ibid. : 137). Le nombre d'affranchissements devient cependant tel durant la seconde partie du dix-huitième siècle, que plusieurs mesures sont mises en place pour contrôler les naissances métisses, et donc les relations interraciales. Ainsi, « [c]e fut l'accroissement de leur nombre qui incita Colbert à faire appliquer

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

l'adage du droit romain : 'partus sequitur ventrem' [...] »[15] (Le Père Labat cité dans Houdaille 1981 : 270).

Par conséquent les travaux de Houdaille et de Maignan-Claverie montrent clairement que les relations interraciales et les métissages n'étaient pas toujours vues comme une menace. Leurs recherches établissent que l'association entre Blanc et femme de couleur était encouragée lorsqu'elle signifiait un avantage pour le développement des colons ou de la France (ce que Maignan-Claverie appelle « logique […] de la peuplade », 2005 : 126). Par la suite, l'état français réalisa qu'une égalité progressive à travers les relations mixtes et les procréations signifiait une perte financière et de pouvoir importants. Il devint donc essentiel de maintenir une idéologie raciste pour l'empêcher. Cette tolérance temporaire pour peupler l'île, puis son désaveu par peur de menacer le système de plantation, marquent ce que nous voyons comme le premier pas vers l'institutionnalisation d'un appareil juridique, ciblant précisément le métissage et donc le couple mixte.

Ce qui nous amène donc à notre troisième et dernière considération : le point de vue juridique. Ainsi, l'application de ces lois va déterminer ce que le métis représente et va instaurer une peur *légale* qui nourrit aussi le tabou, le métissage n'étant toléré que dans les règles prescrites par l'état français. Maignan-Claverie met en avant l'édit de mars 1685 qui remet en cause l'affranchissement automatique des mulâtres (ibid. : 155) mais surtout les punitions spécifiques à l'homme blanc qui s'allie à la femme noire, perçu comme un abaissement de la race. Parmi ces punitions, citons par exemple l'impossibilité de leur donner leur titre de noblesse. Les mulâtres ne sont pas en reste. Au milieu du XVIII^{ème} siècle certains ne sont plus autorisés à prendre le nom de leur père ayant parfois pour conséquence de ne plus recevoir d'héritage (ibid. : 158).

La construction raciale se poursuit lors de l'abolition de l'esclavage (1848) et constitue un évènement traumatique supplémentaire malgré l'optimisme qui résonne avec la libération des esclaves. En effet, cette période est une nouvelle fois celle de paradoxes où les nouveaux affranchis pensent obtenir une liberté et une égalité inconditionnelle selon

[15] Littéralement traduit comme « l'enfant suit le ventre », sous-entendu que l'enfant prend le même statut que sa mère (Gaffiot 1934).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

les principes de la Révolution Française. En réalité, ils sont rapidement plongés dans les limbes juridiques[16] que mettent en exergue la politiste Silyane Larcher et l'historien Clément Thibaud dans le dossier de recherche « Race et citoyenneté aux Amériques (1790-1850) » (2015). Thibaud résume très bien la situation lorsqu'il écrit : « c'est lorsque menace l'indistinction entre les 'races' que de nouveaux dispositifs émergent pour rétablir les différences » (2015 : 9-10).[17]

Silyane Larcher se penche quant à elle sur les détails juridiques qui démontrent une interdiction des droits civiques quasi-immédiat des nouveaux affranchis grâce à des ressorts idéologiques avec la mise en avant d'une fabrication anthropo-historique. En effet, c'est (ironiquement) en blâmant leur ancienne condition d'esclaves que les représentants à l'Assemblée Nationale justifiaient l'exclusion du suffrage des anciens esclaves. Alors que l'abolition de l'esclavage prend fin en février 1848, le parlement passe une loi en novembre de la même année pour conférer un statut juridique *particulier* aux colonies car l'ancien esclave n'a pas assez d'esprit critique pour être décisionnaire (Larcher 2015 :151) C'est donc de ce décalage juridique entre l'abolition et la départementalisation que nait la confusion lorsqu'il est question de la citoyenneté des antillais : d'une part les antillais se croient français depuis plus longtemps que les niçois ou les bretons, mais de l'autre, il leur a été interdit de voter et d'être citoyens dans le sens entier du terme.

Enfin, avant 1946, un autre évènement finit de compliquer l'imaginaire antillais par rapport à la question de la couleur : la colonisation française en Afrique de l'ouest. La division de l'Afrique entre les puissances coloniales lors de la conférence de Berlin en 1884-1885 nous semble essentielle dans la mesure où elle marque le rapprochement entre les Antillais, « citoyen français », et les Africains. Nous marquons l'appellation de citoyens car comme nous venons de le voir, les Antillais n'étaient pas totalement égaux aux métropolitains. Il n'empêche que les Antillais, qui se considéraient français à part entière, furent

[16] A ce sujet voir aussi l'article de Myriam Cottias « Les 'vieilles colonies' comme lieu de définition des dogmes républicains (1848-1905) » et celui de Jean-Pierre Sainton « De l'état d'esclave à 'l'état de citoyen' » tous les deux publiés en 2003 dans la revue *Outre-Mer*.

[17] Thibaud note reprendre cette idée de J.-F. Schaub, *Pour une histoire politique de la race* (2015).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

utilisés dans les colonies en Afrique comme démontrés par les romans du guyanais-martiniquais René Maran. Ces hommes servaient d'intermédiaires d'autorité, l'africain les voyant comme l'oppresseur quotidien au lieu de l'homme blanc, instituant des conflits d'ordre moraux entre opprimés. Ils étaient aussi des intermédiaires raciaux, comme l'ont démontré Véronique Hélénon dans *French Caribbeans in Africa* (2011 ; voir également Calmont/Audebert 2007 : 114) et Frantz Fanon (1952 et dans son article « Antillais et Africains », 1955). Ce rapprochement eu pour but d'implémenter une hiérarchie coloniale raciale qui confirma aux Antillais ce qui leur avait été inculqué dans les colonies, c'est-à-dire que la blancheur de la peau s'accompagne nécessairement de pouvoir. Dans le même temps, le traitement que recevaient eux-mêmes les Antillais de la part de leurs supérieurs blancs, les cantonnaient à un entre deux autant physique (entre la France et l'Afrique, entre le supérieur blanc et le colonisé noir) mais aussi et surtout psychologique (impression d'avoir du pouvoir et finalement ne pas en avoir du tout).

Selon nous, c'est l'alternance de l'inclusion et du rejet combiné à un déni des faits qui aggrave les conséquences au niveau psychologique et donc dans l'imaginaire antillais. Ce sont ces oppositions entre désirs d'appartenance et déceptions qui entretiennent néanmoins le tabou sur la couleur de peau dans la mesure où la métropole demeure celle qui inculque les règles, un rappel constant de son contrôle esclavagiste et colonial.[18]

Dans ce contexte, les couples mixtes sont toujours vus comme une forme d'anomalie. Pourquoi créer une relation avec l'oppresseur ? Pourquoi accepter ses critères ? Comme nous l'avons constaté plus tôt, la relation entre l'homme de couleur et la femme blanche est plus souvent tolérée parce qu'elle sera perçue comme une revanche sur l'homme blanc ; tandis que l'accès au corps de la femme antillaise/noire continue d'être associé à une forme d'invasion contre laquelle il faut se défendre. Par conséquent, il est plus aisé de comprendre comment les désirs de la

[18] Pour plus de détails sur le mal-être antillais, voir les travaux de la psychanalyste et psychiatre martiniquaise Jeanne Wiltord, membre du GAREP (Groupe antillais de recherches d'études et de formation psychanalytiques). Par exemple dans son article « Les DOM : une chance (perdue) de parole ? » (2009).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

femme antillaise deviennent tabous lorsqu'ils semblent être complices de cette trahison. Néanmoins, cela n'excuse en rien la réception des travaux de Lacrosil et Manicom, eu égard à leur liberté créatrice, mais surtout face à un message qui a été mal interprété.

« Counterarchival source »[19] : L'importance de la voix de la femme noire. Non M. Fanon, nous ne souhaitons pas toutes être lactifiées

Dans *Framing Silence* (1997), l'auteure et chercheuse haïtienne Myriam Chancy se penche sur ce qu'elle appelle les « lacunes » de l'histoire et de la littérature d'Haïti desquelles la femme haïtienne a été tronquée. Chancy fait un constat de la double oppression que subissent celles qui écrivent, c'est-à-dire la surdité de l'occident quant à leur quotidien et l'oppression de leurs confrères sur leur territoire. Elle note néanmoins la productivité de nombreuses auteures, textes qu'elle analyse dans son ouvrage comme des récits révolutionnaires mais hors des normes littéraires traditionnelles. Nous voyons dans ce travail d'excavation la recherche d'une vérité enfouie à cause de carcans imposés non seulement à la femme mais aussi spécifiquement à la femme de couleur. Similairement, notre étude des textes de Michèle Lacrosil et de Jacqueline Manicom est une considération du point de vue particulier de la femme antillaise, qui a été enfoui sous couvert de leur position de femmes de couleur éduquées au début de l'émancipation féminine en France et aux Antilles, mais aussi d'un prétendu complexe racial.

Par ailleurs, dans son article « Strategies of Caribbean Feminism », Donnette Francis utilise le terme de « counterarchival source » où elle fait référence au pouvoir de la littérature, expliquant que le texte littéraire est souvent la source dans laquelle on constate des moments de résistances qui ne sont pas toujours visibles autrement – et particulièrement en ce qui concerne la sexualité des femmes antillaises. L'argument de Francis se base notamment sur ce qu'elle appelle « anti romance, »

[19] Nous empruntons ce terme à l'article de Donnette Francis « Strategies of Caribbean Feminism » (2011).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

c'est-à-dire l'échec de relations amoureuses, où sont représentées toutes les complexités de la résistance :

> Dans un projet révisionniste, de telles anti-romances Antillaises réécrivent l'intrigue amoureuse hétérosexuelle au travers d'un *Bildungsroman* raconté par l'adulte, réévaluant des manières alternatives d'appartenir à la nation en déplaçant l'intérêt sur les complexités sexuelles domestiques et à l'étranger, et, enfin, de résister aux représentations historiques traditionnelles en créant des sources à l'encontre des archives pour recréer l'histoire »[20] (Francis 2011 : 337 ; nous traduisons)

Cet extrait de son article est particulièrement parlant dans le cadre de notre étude dans la mesure où nous percevons chez les héroïnes de Lacrosil et Manicom, deux femmes qui retracent leurs vies amoureuses sur fond de conflits entre la France et les Antilles. Alors qu'il est possible de voir leurs désirs pour l'homme blanc comme une volonté de se blanchir, ce qui serait une continuation presque logique de la crise identitaire antillaise, nous démontrons ici que les personnages de Cajou et Madévie nous offrent une histoire « à l'encontre des archives », où la femme de couleur défie les attentes et propose sa propre histoire.

Dans la suite de cette analyse et en suivant les traces de Myriam Chancy et de Donnette Francis, il nous semble essentiel de faire parler ces femmes qui n'ont pas été *entendues*, comme l'indique le titre de ce volume *Unheard (of)*. Dans la même veine, il est temps de resituer le discours de la femme antillaise concernant le couple mixte parce qu'il implique beaucoup plus qu'il n'y paraît. Loin de dénier l'intériorisation de schémas coloniaux qui produisent un discours raciste et une haine de soi, il est nécessaire de percevoir la trame de fond qui ressort de questionnements présents tout au long de ces textes, qui ont parfois été occultés. Alors que le récit féminin est souvent décrit comme intime, personnel, privé, par opposition présumée d'un récit masculin historique et politique, nous démontrerons que les deux ne sont pas incompatibles. En effet, là où certaines lectures ont limité l'étude du texte à la

[20] « As a revisionist project, such Caribbean anti romances rewrite the heterosexual love plot through an adult-narrated *Bildungsroman,* rethink alternative ways of belonging to the nation by shifting the focus to the sexual complexities of dwelling at home and abroad, and, finally, resist canonical historical representations by creating counterarchival sources to replot history » (Francis 2011 : 337).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

question raciale, nous placerons notre examen dans le contexte décortiqué plus tôt. En d'autres termes : la relation mixte crée un malaise chez les antillais si elle est uniquement perçue comme un choix entre deux phénotypes. Il nous semble plutôt que le couple mixte écrit par des femmes antillaises offre plusieurs interprétations. Leurs commentaires sur l'identité post-départementalisation en tant que femmes noires éduquées se mettent en place au travers de trois points principaux : la violence, la réalisation de la duperie et enfin et surtout, la résistance, aspect le plus essentiel dans chaque texte.

Nous constatons en effet chez ces protagonistes féminins les séquelles évidentes d'intériorisations des schémas coloniaux avec un intérêt pour la blancheur qui est la source d'une névrose. La relation à l'homme blanc s'avère alors nécessaire pour réifier les non-dits qui habitent l'histoire antillaise. Dans *Cajou* (1961) de Michèle Lacrosil, le personnage éponyme est docteur en chimie et travaille pour un laboratoire en métropole. Le roman raconte ses quatre derniers jours avant son suicide. Dans une série de flashbacks, elle revient sur son enfance, en Guadeloupe, dans un quartier aisé avec une mère blanche. Elle raconte son besoin constant de se prouver à cause de sa couleur de peau, qu'elle n'accepte pas, la poussant à exceller dans ses études et sa carrière. Mais rien n'y fait. Elle refuse de croire en sa réussite professionnelle et personnelle, pensant que la société paternaliste française a pitié d'elle. Lorsque son amant, Germain, un collègue blanc, lui dit qu'il l'aime et veut l'épouser, elle ne le croit pas et décide de se suicider.

Dans *Mon examen de blanc* (1975 [1972]) de Jacqueline Manicom, Madévie est une anesthésiste qui a fait ses études en métropole et qui est revenue exercer en Guadeloupe. Elle sort d'une relation avec un métropolitain qui l'a rejetée suite à la désapprobation de la famille de celui-ci quant à sa couleur de peau. Le récit évolue avec le dialogue intérieur de Madévie, entre son dédain envers ses compatriotes qui se font exploiter par la métropole et son investissement politique dans la deuxième partie du récit. Cette évolution se fait métaphoriquement avec trois hommes. Xavier est son amant métropolitain blanc, fils d'un riche industriel. Cyril est son chef de service en Guadeloupe. Il est blanc également. Enfin, Gilbert est un guadeloupéen noir, instituteur et membre syndicaliste, qui se bat contre la délocalisation. Il implique Madévie

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

dans les réunions syndicales pour qu'elle comprenne mieux les transformations qui secouent les Antilles dans les années soixante.

Dans ces deux récits, le couple mixte peut être vu comme une personnification de la France qui « joue » avec ses anciennes colonies : en effet dans les deux récits les deux jeunes femmes se retrouvent enceintes d'hommes blancs à leur insu et sont ainsi à leur merci. Bien que les partenaires semblent réellement impliqués dans les relations (comme la France en « offrant » la départementalisation après un siècle d'attente), celles-ci demeurent abusives et teintées du passé. Par exemple, dans les deux romans les rapports intimes sont décrits en détails, souvent violents, voulus ou non. Madévie, qui désire Xavier, est vierge, conditionnant leur premier rapport sexuel à la douleur (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 38). La symbolique de ce premier contact, rappelant « le viol fondateur », est nécessairement historique et politique. De son côté, Cajou perd elle aussi sa virginité dans ce qui est un viol réel. La relation compliquée qu'elle a avec elle-même la pousse à laisser Germain la posséder, comme une punition qu'elle s'inflige. Lorsque plus tard, désormais en relation officielle ils discutent de cette première fois, Germain se vante de s'être jeté sur elle et d'avoir pris du plaisir lorsqu'elle avait crié (Lacrosil 1961 : 215). L'ensemble de la scène, comme le roman lui-même, est remplie de sous-entendus quant à la relation entre Germain et Cajou et en parallèle, celle de la France et des anciennes colonies.

En effet, dans les deux romans, ces femmes se posent de nombreuses questions quant à leur couleur de peau et leur identité. Cajou et Madévie sont pleines de paradoxes, à la fois désirant être à tout prix intégrées à la France, tels les DOM avant la départementalisation, mais petit à petit effrayées de constater les sacrifices que cela représente pour leur identité, et par-dessus tout, de constater la violence de l'assimilation. Tout comme d'autres spécialistes avant nous, nous sommes surpris par les réflexions de Cajou et Madévie quant à leur obsession pour la blancheur. Cependant, nous y voyons plutôt des exemples caricaturaux d'un mal être.

Par exemple, Cajou, qui perçoit sa couleur comme un fardeau, reconnaît régulièrement « Je ne me suis jamais aimée » (Lacrosil 1961 : 29), et développe une relation obsessionnelle, quasi-amoureuse pour ses deux seules amies, toutes deux blanches. Son obsession pour leurs che-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

veux est particulièrement parlante : elle veut les toucher, voire même les voler (ibid. : 144) comme si en prenant leurs cheveux ses problèmes d'identité (son désamour, le racisme dont elle est victime) disparaitraient. De son côté, Madévie, l'anesthésiste, se focalise dès le début du roman sur l'une de ces collègues, Marie-Dominique et sur sa blancheur :

> Je voudrais être *belle, blonde, blanche et claire* comme Marie-Dominique. Je voudrais avoir le joli nez de Marie-Dominique. Au lieu de tout cela, je ne suis qu'une mulâtresse, avec une peau en chocolat, comme disent les petits enfants de France qui n'ont pas l'habitude des gens de couleur. (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 14 ; nous soulignons)

L'énumération « belle, blonde, blanche et claire » est rendue musicale par l'allitération du son [b], tel un slogan ou une sorte de formule magique qui associe [b]lancheur et [b]eauté. Elle fait opposition aux descriptions des femmes antillaises qui défilent devant Madévie pour accoucher, années après années, de ce qu'elle appelle « un autre petit nègre, candidat immédiat à la misère » (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 48). Dans son monologue intérieur, les femmes noires sont caractérisées par leurs « vulves déchirées » et « vagins mal rapiécés » (ibid. : 47), beaucoup moins poétique que la blancheur et le joli nez de Marie-Dominique.

Ces liens évidents entre les personnages et la réalité de la relation entre les Antilles et la France confèrent aux textes une portée politique, historique et juridique qui n'ont pas toujours été mises en avant. Seules les analyses de Clarisse Zimra (1977), Betty Wilson (1987) et Kevin Meehan (2006) font le lien entre le roman de Manicom et la départementalisation. Lacrosil est évincée, les analyses convergeant souvent vers la psychose du personnage et sa relation à la question de la couleur.[21] Pourtant, il nous semble évident que les deux textes traduisent une crise de conscience qui secouent les deux protagonistes. La relation

[21] Seule la chercheuse en études postcoloniales Ginette Bâ-Curry (*'Toubab La!' : Literary Representations of Mixed-Race Characters in the African Diaspora*, 2007) nous semble jusqu'à présent avoir fait le meilleur travail de fond sur Lacrosil. Bâ-Curry a eu accès à quelques rares interviews de Lacrosil et elle a eu pu obtenir les interprétations de l'auteur sur ses propres écrits au cours d'un échange épistolaire datant de 1999. Elle n'aborde cependant pas la départementalisation ou les relations mixtes.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

à l'homme blanc, qui est mise au premier plan est en réalité le reflet de la crise complexe qui secoue les territoires ultra-marins dans la vingtaine d'années qui suit l'inclusion des Antilles parmi les départements français.

Nous lisons dans cette obsession à la couleur exagérée une métaphore de l'idéalisation de la départementalisation *avant* 1946. Les Antillais s'imaginaient en effet que leur intégration à la métropole signifierait la fin de nombres de leurs problèmes qui étaient issus de leur situation coloniale, comme justement la fin de l'association entre leur condition et la couleur de peau, ou encore l'amélioration de la situation économique et sociale des Antilles qui était catastrophique.[22] En parallèle de leurs réflexions sur la couleur, nous trouvons néanmoins une critique construite et complexe. Les réflexions des personnages sur la métropole sont équivoques, leur admission répétée de vouloir blanchir la race (« elle était prête à devenir blanche pour lui plaire », Manicom 1975 [1972] : 41) située aux côtés de diverses formes de résistance nous démontrent comme évident qu'il s'agit en réalité d'un subterfuge pour provoquer le lecteur, un fait qui n'est jamais men-tionné dans les analyses littéraires que nous avons trouvées sur les deux auteures.

Notons par exemple que les deux femmes étudient constamment le monde qui les entoure, qu'elles le questionnent et y résistent non seulement par leurs actions mais aussi avec leurs choix. Là où de précédentes analyses ont vu une obsession pour la blancheur, nous lisons une tentative de réparation du trou mémoriel : la petite fille métisse grandie entourée de Blancs, tandis que son père, qui était noir, est décédé lorsqu'elle avait deux ans. Un psychologue conseille alors à la mère de ne plus faire référence aux ancêtres esclaves et à l'histoire coloniale, fermant alors la porte sur les questions de la petite fille (Lacrosil 1961 : 41). En fait, c'est symboliquement l'assimilation complète qui est recommandée, déniant l'existence même d'un passé, et empirant la confusion qui règne en elle. Telle les Antilles au moment de la départementa-

[22] Voir l'article de José Nosel « Appréciation de l'impact économique de la départementalisation à la Martinique » (1996). A titre indicatif, le PIB (Produit Intérieur Brut) double entre 1950 et 1959, démontrant que la départementalisation représente un boom économique, basé sur l'injection de fonds provenant de la métropole, avec une hausse de la consommation. Cependant, malgré l'amélioration des conditions de vie, le chômage reprend progressivement le dessus.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

lisation et de la période qui suit l'intégration des Antilles à la France, les questions identitaires sont refoulées d'un revers de main, avec la simple indication « d'oublier ». Mais il est évident que l'oubli est impossible puisque la peau se présente comme un rappel incessant du trauma de l'esclavage et du traitement que la France a fait de ses colonies *justement* à cause de leurs phénotypes. Cet incident est également essentiel pour le reste de l'ouvrage et il est trop souvent ignoré par les analyses académiques, jugeant le personnage de Cajou neurotique parce qu'elle ne s'aime pas.

En effet, remarquons qu'à travers son personnage, Lacrosil présente un problème inhérent aux antillais, non (seulement) avec leur couleur, mais surtout dû au fait de ne pas avoir pu bénéficier d'une histoire familiale solide (et métaphoriquement, nationale/régionale/locale) comme celle des populations blanches. Le déracinement de l'Afrique et l'imposition d'une histoire apprise à l'école mentionne « nos ancêtres les gaulois » (Fanon 1971 [1952] : 120) et non celle des descendants d'esclaves ou des peuples Caribes. Le personnage de Cajou, aussi neurotique ou psychotique qu'on le pense, est en fait aux confluents de couches historiques et psychologiques de son île natale. Les allusions répétitives à la couleur peuvent donc être un symptôme de l'union forcée de la France et de ses colonies, mais aussi de trous mémoriels qui compliquent la perception des antillais.

Et justement, Germain, son compagnon blanc, est la représentation à peine déguisée de la métropole, qui ignore constamment les peurs et les réflexions de Cajou. Alors qu'il apparait comme « conciliant » et la soutient dans ses moments de crises, il lui répète aussi sans cesse « quand tu seras ma femme » ou « quand nous serons mariés » suggérant qu'avec leur union *tous* les problèmes identitaires de Cajou seront résolus. Le paternalisme de Germain est manifeste pour le lecteur averti. Ainsi, de l'obsession de Cajou pour sa couleur et les miroirs, Germain dit « C'est à moi de […] te restituer ton vrai visage » (Lacrosil 1961 : 216), suggérant que c'est lui qui a le pouvoir de la soigner (une forme d'assimilation mentale). Il finit d'ailleurs par lui avouer qu'il l'a mise enceinte exprès, pour la forcer à l'épouser (ibid. : 221).

A la fin du roman, nous analysons le suicide de Cajou comme son refus d'être possédée, et l'enfant qu'elle porte (que Germain a déjà désigné comme garçon) doit par conséquent périr. L'accouplement ne

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

peut avoir lieu. Ainsi, même si Cajou est perçue comme passive au début du roman, silencieuse face aux désirs de son amant, elle n'en manque pas moins de constater que son attitude envers elle est non seulement raciste mais aussi paternaliste. Par conséquent, la mort de Cajou symbolise une forme de résistance dans laquelle, se soustrayant aux choix imposés par son amant (un mariage, un enfant), par son patron (une promotion dont elle ne veut pas), et par les institutions (le psychiatre qui lui impose une histoire unique), elle finit par dicter son propre choix. Par ailleurs, comme le souligne Myriam Chancy dans *Framing Silence* (1997) ou Chantal Kalisa dans *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature* (2010), c'est aussi une réponse envers le monde patriarcal (noir *et* blanc) qui se fait à travers ce refus de se marier à son compagnon selon les conditions imposées par celui-ci et de porter un enfant non voulu. En tuant son personnage, il semble que Lacrosil déplore également une impasse sur le manque de communication et d'écoute suivant la départementalisation de 1946 et pointe du doigt une assimilation forcée.

Le personnage créé par Jacqueline Manicom, Madévie, n'est pas en reste concernant sa remise en question du système. Comme l'ont souligné les articles de Clarisse Zimra (1979) et de Betty Wilson (1987), l'évolution de Madévie est à mettre en parallèle avec celle son île. Selon Zimra, *Mon examen de blanc* trace le devenir de Madévie, qui, en changeant d'amant, symbolise les relations entre la femme antillaise et les hommes, et symboliquement le sort de la Guadeloupe : « Woman as slave ; Woman as pupil ; Woman as equal » (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 152). Dans sa relation avec le métropolitain Xavier, Madévie est subjuguée. Elle veut plaire et se met complètement à la merci de celui-ci. Sa deuxième relation, platonique, est celle avec son supérieur, un chirurgien Béké-France qui croit lui apprendre la musique classique. Enfin, Madévie s'éprend de Gilbert, un instituteur guadeloupéen syndicaliste qui souhaite l'indépendance de la Guadeloupe. Avec lui, Madévie s'épanouit et s'investie en politique.

Betty Wilson s'intéresse à la relation France-Antilles mais aussi au statut de Madévie comme assimilée, qui doit accepter sa part de responsabilité dans le traitement de la métropole envers la Guadeloupe (ibid. : 55). Wilson revient par exemple sur la façon dont le patron traite les antillaises qu'il accouche et son paternalisme à peine déguisé, face au-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

quel Madévie reste silencieuse au lieu de s'imposer. Elle accepte aussi le rôle d'élève que lui donne Cyril et prétend qu'il lui apprend la musique classique alors qu'elle est déjà très érudite. Zimra et Wilson terminent néanmoins leurs articles de façon optimiste, la première en démontrant que les expériences amoureuses de Madévie ont fait tomber l'homme blanc de son piédestal (Zimra 1979 : 154), la deuxième démontrant que Gilbert a libéré Madévie, et qu'après une passivité exhibée tout au long du roman, celle-ci peut maintenant agir seule (Wilson 1987 : 55-56).

Comme Zimra et Wilson nous voyons un lien évident entre la protagoniste et son île, mais notre analyse se focalise beaucoup plus sur la départementalisation de 1946 qui est clairement mise en cause dans le roman et que les deux chercheuses mentionnent trop rapidement. Le chercheur Kevin Meehan (2006) est le seul à parler clairement de l'échec de la départementalisation dans le récit de Manicom et nous le rejoignons sur ce point. En effet, alors que la relation à l'homme blanc semble dominer le texte, les références à la départementalisation ponctuent l'ensemble du récit de manière beaucoup plus évidente que dans *Cajou*. Meehan se focalise sur la révolution qui se prépare en arrière-fond du roman et sur l'utilisation de la maternité dans le texte comme son fondement. Nous nous concentrons plutôt sur le fait que le roman a été publié presque vingt après le changement de statut des anciennes colonies, l'heure étant donc au bilan. Tout comme pour *Cajou*, le couple mixte est en crise dans le texte et illustre ainsi la crise qui traverse les Antilles, lorsque la population réalise qu'elle est toujours traitée comme une exception, après avoir cru aux espoirs avancés par le rattachement à la France. La dédicace de Manicom faite « Pour ceux qui sont morts sur la place de la Victoire en mai 1967 » centralise le récit dans un contexte politique inévitable.

Le récit de Madévie est basé sur des flashbacks de sa vie métropolitaine avec Xavier, qui se superposent à sa vie présente en Guadeloupe, comme une réflexion détaillant ce qui l'a amenée à sa condition actuelle, une technique similaire à celle de la narratrice de *Cajou* qui revient sur sa vie lors de ses derniers jours avant son suicide. La rétrospective permet de voir l'évolution de la protagoniste et de mieux cerner ses positions, tout en convaincant le lecteur qu'il/elle doit réviser son

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

jugement sur les Antilles, comme Madévie le fait éventuellement. D'un côté nous y voyons Madévie jeune et naïve, ayant grandi « bien éduquée dans l'admiration du Blanc » (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 38) qui se donne à Xavier sans trop réfléchir et qui est prête à se blanchir pour lui (ibid. : 40). D'un autre, le *docteur* Ramimoutou, comme Madévie aime à être appelée (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 18), se questionne sur les naissances à la chaine de ses consœurs guadeloupéennes qui produisent, telles des machines, les futurs pions du BUMIDOM ; elle réfléchit à « Ces magiciens blancs qui ont hypnotisé les hommes à la peau noire, les sarcleurs de canne à sucre, jusqu'à leur faire croire que le bon Dieu est Blanc » (ibid. : 27). Dans un début de conscientisation, elle défend la beauté de la couleur noire dans un discours imaginaire à un nouveau-né :

> Petit nègre, petit frère qui vas naître, même si plus tard ta maman te répète sans cesse : 'Nèg ni malédiction[23]' je te prie en grâce petit frère, ne la crois pas, ne l'écoute pas ! Ce dicton n'est qu'un mensonge vieux déjà de quatre siècles, que l'on répétait à nos aïeux venus douloureusement d'Afrique, pour leur faire accepter la misère. (Ibid. : 47)

La transformation entre son envie de se blanchir pour Xavier et cette exhortation à ne pas accepter le rabais de la couleur noire, traduit d'une révélation qui se fait au fur et à mesure du roman.

Au contraire du personnage de Cajou dont nous avons pu connaître l'enfance et la source de ses traumas, la transformation de Madévie se fait uniquement en tant qu'adulte. Elle est fulgurante, le résultat de sa relation à deux hommes blancs. Ce qui l'en ressort, c'est ce que Fanon décrit dans son chapitre « Le Nègre et la psychopathologie » lorsqu'il dit que l'Antillais se pense blanc jusqu'à ce qu'il arrive en Europe, là où il est confronté au racisme (Fanon 1971 [1952] : 121). Madévie, même si elle reconnaît être plus cultivée que Xavier, ne possède que cela, sa culture, un atout invisible et intangible, au contraire de sa couleur de peau qui porte l'histoire de son île. Tandis que Xavier, riche fils d'industriel, a l'avantage de son sexe, de sa classe et surtout de sa couleur, tous rapidement percevables. Celle-ci s'entête pourtant, per-

[23] Manicom traduit en note de bas de page « Les nègres ont de la malédiction ».

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

suadée de sa valeur et liste dans un monologue intérieur les raisons pour lesquelles sa relation avec Xavier est possible, malgré la question de la couleur :

> *Cet été-là, elle croyait encore aux choses qu'on lui avait apprises dans les écoles antillaises : des ancêtres gaulois, voyons ! Elle était doublement française : d'abord pour être née dans une colonie française, ensuite parce qu'on lui en avait donné la ferme assurance lors de la départementalisation en* 1945, *alors qu'elle était déjà une petite fille qui comprenait beaucoup de choses. Les nègres d'Afrique sont des sauvages, lui avait-on dit, tandis que les Antillais sont presque des Blancs. Pourrait-il y avoir des choses insurmontables entre Xavier et elle ?* (Manicom 1975 [1972] : 43 ; en italique dans le texte)

Comme pour Cajou, dont certaines remarques nous paraissaient exagérées, ici aussi Manicom semble provoquer le lecteur, paraphrasant à peine subtilement Fanon : l'antillais est français, il est éduqué, il est supérieur au Noir d'Afrique ; pourquoi cette relation avec le blanc ne serait-elle pas possible ? Sa relation avec Xavier est une réponse : Madévie est confrontée au rejet de l'état français malgré la départementalisation des Antilles. L'égalité promise ne remplace pas trois siècles de hiérarchie raciale, et quelques soient les efforts faits pour se « prouver » au Blanc, que cela soit les diplômes ou l'éducation musicale classique dont elle dispose (l'examen de blanc du titre du roman), les efforts sont vains.

La désapprobation de la famille de Xavier précipite la fin de leur relation et Madévie, alors enceinte, adresse une réponse symbolique au système : elle s'avorte. Le geste est fort, chargé : le docteur, formée en métropole par un système qui prétend vouloir faire d'elle une égale, utilise ses connaissances pour rejeter ce même système. De plus, d'une certaine façon, Madévie s'auto-mutile, elle arrache à son corps la trace tangible de son erreur. Son corps ne sera pas la matrice de l'apprivoisement du peuple antillais. Encore une fois, telle une réponse à Fanon, l'avortement de cet enfant, dont le père est blanc, réfute le soi-disant désir de *lactification* de la femme noire antillaise.

L'évolution de Madévie, dont nous avons dit qu'elle se fait en changeant de partenaire, se poursuit dans un deuxième temps dans sa relation avec Cyril, son patron, qui est aussi le chirurgien avec lequel

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

elle travaille. Alors que dans les premières pages Madévie démontre un certain intérêt amoureux pour Cyril, celui-ci s'avère être un homme calculateur et dangereux, un produit de la métropole, envoyé dans les Antilles pour servir de pion, et en échange, faire fortune. Sous son intérêt apparent des Antilles, le bon chirurgien enchaîne les opérations pour encaisser un maximum d'argent, prétextant parfois opérer des appendicites qui n'existent pas. Sous ses airs bonhommes, le chirurgien n'hésite pas à frauder pour gagner plus, aux dépens de ses patients, qui n'en sauront jamais rien.

Après le choc d'une prise de conscience que la départementalisation n'a résolu aucun des problèmes raciaux entre la France et les Antilles, représenté par sa relation avec Xavier, c'est sous l'apparente gentillesse de Cyril que Madévie fait l'expérience de la réelle tromperie. Le métropolitain vient cette fois aux Antilles et impose ses règles, mettant en exergue une crise que réifie la confrontation entre la femme de couleur et l'homme blanc, une situation d'oppression séculaire. Cependant, les récits de Cajou et Madévie compliquent ce discours d'oppression en y ajoutant la question de l'éducation et donc de la classe. Grâce à leur éducation métropolitaine réussie (rappelons que Cajou est docteur en chimie et Madévie anesthé-siste), elles sont toutes les deux en possession de moyens de résistance mais elles portent également le poids moral d'être conscientes d'une oppression politique, sans pour autant être capables d'agir. Cette conscience représente une pression exacerbée pour Cajou qui vit seule en métropole et qui réalise qu'avec sa couleur de peau, elle demeure une « étrangère » faussement intégrée. Ne voyant pas d'issue à sa situation, elle choisit le suicide.

De son côté, Madévie prospère psychologiquement à partir du moment où elle comprend les mécanismes qui emprisonnent le peuple antillais. Elle trouve en la personne de Gilbert, un antillais syndicaliste, le soutien pour envisager une solution autre, une connaissance et un investissement politique dans son île, ce que Gilbert reconnait être un travail de longue haleine à travers l'éducation progressive des antillais. Sans pour autant être exagérément optimiste (à la fin du texte, la révolution gronde et Gilbert est tué), Manicom offre elle aussi un point de vue sur la relation France-Antilles bien plus critique qu'il n'y parait, une perception malheureusement peu appréciée à sa juste valeur.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Conclusion

Lors de cette étude, nous avons suivi l'exhortation de Myriam Chancy et de Donnette Francis à considérer les travaux d'auteures caribéennes comme étant « à l'encontre des archives » et défiant les attentes. L'analyse des contextes historiques et littéraires de ces deux textes corroborent notre argument que c'est le genre des auteures et leurs choix de traiter de la question (taboue) du couple mixte aux Antilles qui les a invisibilisées. Le choix de deux femmes éduquées de mettre en scène deux protagonistes qui sont aux prises à la fois avec leur couleur et l'histoire raciale et politique de leur territoire a peut-être choqué les intellectuels de leur époque. Le silence quant à leurs productions, leur quasi-invisibilité littéraire jusqu'à aujourd'hui, nous semblent être des signes évidents que leur discours a été snobé. Pourtant, les deux textes sont remplis de moments de résistance, à la fois physiques dans le refus de porter des enfants non désirés, mais aussi métaphoriques avec le questionnement d'un système racial hiérarchique sous couvert d'une assimilation culturelle corrompue.

Au lieu de lire une glorification du désir envers l'homme blanc, ces récits réifient le carrefour de relations complexes avec la métropole. Les romans de Lacrosil et Manicom sont au croisement d'une prise de conscience de la signification de la départementalisation, à la fois comme un avancement (une simili de reconnaissance de la part de l'ancêtre blanc) tout en étant un trauma supplémentaire, celui de la réalisation de la duperie, du énième rejet. Certaines études ont mis en exergue l'esprit de résistance non seulement des auteures mais des protagonistes elles-mêmes dans ce qui a été perçu comme l'affichage d'une autonomie (Paravisini-Gebert 1992) et d'une résistance à une violence genrée (Kalisa 2009, en particulier le chapitre 2). Notre analyse a renforcé ces interprétations en y ajoutant la perception encore trop souvent négligée de la femme antillaise quant à la départementalisation, au niveau identitaire particulièrement.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Bibliographie

Abdouni, Sarah/Fabre, Édouard (février 2012) : « 365000 Domiens vivent en metropole », dans : *Insee,* 1389, dans : https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1281122 (consulté le 19.07.2017).

Arnold, Albert James (2002) : « Frantz Fanon, Lafcadio Hearn et la supercherie de 'Mayotte Capécia' », dans : *Revue de littérature comparée*, 302(2), p. 148-166.

– (2003) : « 'Mayotte Capécia' » : De la parabole biblique à Je suis Martiniquaise », dans : *Revue de littérature comparée*, 305(1), p. 35-48.

Bâ-Curry, Ginette (2007) : *'Toubab La!' :Literary Representations of Mixed-Race Characters in the African Diaspora*, Newcastle, U.K. : Cambridge Scholars.

Bernabé, Jean (2004) : *Le partage des ancêtres*, Paris : Ecriture.

Calmont, André/Audebert, Cédric (2007) : *Dynamiques migratoires de la Caraïbe*, Paris : Karthala.

Capécia, Mayotte (1948) : *Je Suis Martiniquaise*, Paris : Corrêa.

– (1950) : *La négresse blanche*, Paris : Corrêa.

Chancy, Myriam J. A. (1997) : *Framing Silence : Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press.

Chivallon, Christine (2002) : « L'émergence récente de la mémoire de l'esclavage dans l'espace public: enjeux et significations », dans : *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, 89, dans : http://chrhc.revues.org/1534 (consulté le 24.07.2017).

Claude-Valentin, Marie (2011) : « L'enquête Migrations, Famille et Vieillissement [Première grande enquête menée dans les DOM pour mieux cerner les défis de demain] », dans : *Politiques sociales et familiales*, M 106, p. 98-103, dans : http://www.persee.fr/doc/caf_2101-8081_2011_num_106_1_2657 (consulté le 27.04.2017).

Coll, Marina (2007) : *La notion de mixité à l'épreuve des couples métro-antillais : entre mixité nommée et mixité vécue*, thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 5.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Condé, Maryse (1981) : « Man. Woman and Love in the French Caribbean Writing », dans : *Caribbean Quarterly*, 27(4), p. 31-36, dans : www.jstor.org/stable/40653426 (consulté le 15 juillet 2017).

– (2000) : *Célanire Cou-coupé : Roman Fantastique*, Paris : R. Laffont.

– (2001) : *La Belle Créole*, Paris : Gallimard.

– (2002) : *La Vie Scélérate*, Paris : Pocket.

– (2003) : *Histoire de la femme cannibale : Roman*, Paris : Mercure de France.

Condon, Stéphanie (2000) : « Migrations antillaises en métropole », dans : *Les cahiers du CEDREF*, 8-9, dans : http://cedref.revues.org/196 (consulté le 23.07.2017).

Constant, Fred (4e trimestre 1987) : « La politique française de l'immigration antillaise de 1946 à 1987 », dans : *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 3(3), p. 9-30, dans : http://www.persee.fr/doc/remi_0765-0752_1987_num_3_3_1142 (consulté le 19.07.2017).

Cottias, Myriam (2003) : « Les 'vieilles colonies' comme lieu de définition des dogmes républicains (1848-1905) », dans : *Outre-mers*, tome 90(338-339), p. 21-45.

Desse, Michel (déc. 2007) : « Du désir d'île à l'installation, les circulations migratoires des Métropolitains à la Martinique », dans : *Études caribéennes*, 8, dans : http://etudescaribeennes.revues.org/932 (consulté le 24.07.2017).

Fanon, Frantz (1955) : « Antillais et Africains », dans : *Esprit*, 223, p. 261-269, dans : www.jstor.org/stable/24254174 (consulté le 12 juin 2017).

– (1971 [1952]) : *Peau noire, masque blanc*, Paris : Seuil.

Francis, Donette (2011) : « Strategies of Caribbean Feminism », dans : Michael A. Bucknor/Alison Donnell (éds.) : *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 332-344.

Freud, Sigmund (1951) : *Totem et tabou. Interprétation par la psychanalyse de la vie sociale des peuples primitifs. 1912*, Paris : Payot.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Hélénon, Véronique (2011) : *French Caribbeans in Africa : Diasporic Connections and Colonial Administration, 1880-1939*, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

Houdaille, Jacques (1981) : « Le métissage dans les anciennes colonies françaises », dans : *Population*, 36(2), p. 267-286, dans : www.persee.fr/doc/pop_0032-4663_1981_num_36_2_17173 (consulté le 6 juin 2017).

Juminer, Bertène (1978 [1963]) : *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri*, Paris : Présence africaine.

Kalisa, Chantal (2010) : *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature*, Lincoln, Neb : University of Nebraska Press.

King, Rosamond S. (2014) : « One Love ? Caribbean Men and White women », dans : idem. *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*, Gainesville : University Press of Florida, p. 161-194.

Kyémis (13.04.2017) : « L'amour ne fait pas tout », dans : *Les bavardages de Kyémis*, dans : https://lesbavardagesdekiyemis.wordpress.com/2017/04/13/lamour-ne-fait-pas-tout/ (consulté le 07.07.2017).

Lacrosil, Michèle (1961) : *Cajou,* Paris : Gallimard.

– (1973) : *Sapotille et le serin d'argile*, Fort-de-France : E. Désormeaux.

Larcher, Silyane (juillet-septembre 2015) : « L'égalité divisée. La race au cœur de la ségrégation juridique entre citoyens de la métropole et citoyens des 'vieilles colonies' après 1848 », dans : *Le mouvement social*, 252, p. 137-158, dans : http://www.cairn.info/revue-le-mouvement-social-2015-3-p-137.htm (consulté le 10.05.2017).

– (2014) : *L'autre citoyen : l'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage*, Paris : Armand Colin.

Little, Roger (2001) : *Between Totem and Taboo : Black Man, White Woman in Francographic Literature*, Exeter : University of Exeter.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Louis XIV (1897) : *Le Code Noir. Édit du Roi sur les esclaves des îles de l'Amérique*, dans : Lucien Peytraud (éd.) : *L'esclavage aux Antilles françaises avant 1789 : d'après des documents inédits des archives coloniales*, Paris : Hachette, p. 158-166.

Maignan-Claverie, Chantal (2005) : *Le métissage dans la littérature des Antilles françaises : le complexe d'Ariel*, Paris : Karthala.

Makward, Christiane P. et al. (1996) : *Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française: de Marie de France à Marie Ndiaye*, Paris : Karthala.

– (1999) : *Mayotte Capécia, Ou, L'aliénation selon Fanon*, Paris : Karthala.

Manicom, Jacqueline (1975 [1972]) : *Mon Examen de blanc*, Paris : Presses de la Cité.

Maran, René (1962 [1947]) : *Un homme pareil aux autres*, Paris : Albin Michel.

Meehan, Kevin (2006) : « Romance and Revolution : Reading Women's Narratives of Caribbean Decolonization », dans : *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 25(2), p. 291-306, dans : www.jstor.org/stable/20455283 (consulté le 02.04.2022).

Moreau De Saint-Méry, Médéric Louis Élie (1796) : *Description topographique et politique de la partie espagnole de l'isle Saint-Domingue*, Philadelphie, n.p.

Mulot, Stéphanie (2007) : « Le mythe du viol fondateur aux Antilles françaises », dans : *Ethnologie française*, 37(3), p. 517-524.

– (2009) : « Redevenir un homme en contexte antillais post-esclavagiste et matrifocal » dans : *Autrepart*, Presses de Sciences Po, 49, p. 117-135, dans : http://www.cairn.info/revue-autrepart-2009-1-page-117.htm (consulté le 26.09.2016).

Ndiaye, Pap (2008) : *La condition noire : essai sur une minorité française*, Paris : Calmann-Lévy.

Nosel, José (1997) : « Appréciation de l'impact économique de la départementalisation à la Martinique », dans : Fred Constant/Justin Daniel (éds.) : *1946-1996 : Cinquante ans de Départementalisation Outre-Mer*, Paris : L'Harmattan, p. 25-72.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth (hiver 1992) : « Feminism, Race, and Difference in the Works of Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil, and Jacqueline Manicom », dans : *Callaloo,* special issue *The Literature of Guadeloupe and Martinique*, 15(1), p. 66-74, dans : http://www.jstor.org/stable/2931400 (consulté le 17.10.2015).

Rogers, Dominique (2003) : « De l'origine du préjugé de couleur en Haïti », dans: *Outre-mers*, 90(340-341), p.83-101.

[s.n.] (29.08.2009) : « Couple mixte (métro-antillais) : comportement de l'homme antillais ? », dans : *Au féminin.com*, dans : http://amour-couple.aufeminin.com/forum/couple-mixte-metro-antillais-comportement-de-l-homme-antillais-fd3226361 (consulté le 24.07.2017).

Schaub, J.F.(2015) : *Pour une histoire politique de la race*, Paris : Seuil.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean (2002) : *Negritude Women*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota.

Smith, Robert P. (1974) : « Michèle Lacrosil : Novelist with a Color Complex », dans : *The French Review*, 47(4), p. 783-790, dans : www.jstor.org/stable/388452 (consulté le 15 juillet 2017).

Stevens, Christa (1998) : « Entre fatalité et contestation : la littérature des femmes », dans : Danièle de Ruyter-Tognotti/Madeleine van Strien-Chardonneau (éds.) : *Le roman francophone actuel en Algérie et aux Antilles*, Leiden : Brill, p. 149-161.

Thibaud, Clément (2015) : « Race et citoyenneté dans les Amériques (1770-1910) », dans : *Le mouvement social*, 252, p. 5-19, dans : https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-mouvement-social-2015-3-page-5.htm (consulté le 10.05.2017).

Thielmann, Pia (2000) : « Hotbeds : Black-White Love and its Representations in Selected Contemporary Novels from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean », Dissertation, University of Kansas, *ProQuest* (consulté le 9 mai 2017).

Varro, Gabrielle (2012) : « Les 'couples mixtes' à travers le temps : vers une épistémologie de la mixite », dans : *Enfances, Familles, Générations*, 17, p. 21-40.

Wilson, Betty (1987) : « Sexual, Racial, and National Politics : Jacqueline Manicom's *Mon Examen De Blanc*", dans : *Journal of*

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

West Indian Literature, 1(2), p. 50-57, dans : www.jstor.org/stable/23019559 (consulté le 02.04.2022).

Wiltord, Jeanne (2009) : « Les DOM : une chance (perdue) de parole ? », dans : *La revue lacanienne*, 4, p. 66-71, dans : http://www.cairn.info/revue-la-revue-lacanienne-2009-2-page-66.htm (consulté le 22.06.2017).

Zimra, Clarisse (été 1977) : « Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers », dans : *L'esprit créateur*, special issue *French-Speaking Literature of the Caribbean*, 17(2), p. 103-114.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Contributors

Kaha Mohamed Aden, writer, playwright, and scholar, was born in 1966 in Mogadishu and has been living in Pavia (Italy) since 1987, where she graduated in Economics. Through writing in Italian – a language she also perceives as another home –, she aims at reconciling both entities to form a new "living space". In her works, among others the collection of short stories *Fra-intendimenti* (2010) and the novel *Dalmar. La disfavola degli elefanti* (2019), Aden focuses, for instance, on Somalia's past and present (also with regard to the critical periods of Italy's colonialism and its trusteeship administration of Somalia from 1950-1960) as well as on experiences of racism and discrimination in contemporary Italy.

Aminata Aidara (1984) is an author of Italian and Senegalese origins. She grew up in Italy and now lives in the south of France. She studied French literature at the University of Turin and at the Sorbonne in Paris. Her thesis (2016) focused on the writings of young French people with an immigrant background, viewed through literary anthropology. As a result of that research, she set up a literary project, *Exister à bout de plume*, which further led to a literary competition and publishing writings by young people with an immigrant background. Since 2009, she has published short stories written in either French or Italian and, in 2014, won the prize Premio Chiara inediti 2014 for *La ragazza dal cuore di carta*. She presented a weekly program on literature for TV5Monde. She now works for the magazine *Africultures*, writing literary critiques and conducting interviews, as well as collaborating with different magazines and revues. She is also a French Literature teacher in a high school in the south of France. *Je suis quelqu'un* (2018, Gallimard) was her debut novel, and she is currently working on a sequel.

Ubah Cristina Ali Farah – is a writer, playwright, activist and literary scholar. She was born in 1973 in Verona and lived in Mogadishu before returning to Europe (among other countries, also to Italy) at the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. She has published several novels that link Italy and Somalia, starting with her first novel *Madre piccola* (2007) to her latest novel *Le stazioni della luna* (2021), which deals

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

with the highly controversial trusteeship administration of Somalia (1950-1960) by the former colonial power, Italy.

Desirée Bela-Lobedde is an Afrodescendant Spanish writer, online content creator, and activist who speaks up against racism and for the empowerment of racialized women in Spain. She gives workshops, writes her own blog and has written two books – *Ser mujer negra en España* (2018) and *Minorías: historias de desigualdad y valentía* (2021) – that deal with the experiences of racialized women who suffer from multiple forms of racism and discrimination. In the early phase of her activism, she dedicated herself, in particular, to what she calls "aesthetic activism" to critically denounce the predominant stereotypes of beauty and femininity racialized women are confronted with in European societies while she is, nowadays, focusing on a variety of issues generally related to structural racism and white privilege in Spain.

Joanna Boampong is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages (Spanish) at the University of Ghana, from where she graduated with an undergraduate degree in Spanish and French. She proceeded to earn her MA and PhD in Spanish from the University of Southern California, USA. Over the years, her research activities have covered topics in Literary Criticism, Afrohispanic Studies, Hispanophone Studies, Transatlantic Studies, Postcolonial Theory/Studies, Feminist Theories, and Women's Studies and Spanish Language Pedagogy in Africa. Her particular research interests lie in studying literature that engages in issues arising from contacts and interactions among the cultures of Africa and its diasporas in the Spanish-speaking world and exploring women's agency and self-realization. She has won several academic awards including a University of Ghana Office of Research and Innovation and Development (ORID) grant in 2011, allowing her to explore the foundational fictions of Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone literatures; a Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2013 from the highly competitive African Humanities Program of the American Council of Learned Societies (AHP-ACLS) for her project that undertook comparative analyses of the new writings of contemporary female writers of Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone literary traditions; and in 2014, an African Studies Association Presidential Fellowship. She is the founding Director of the Centre for Latin American

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Studies at the University of Ghana and is currently working on an Andrew Mellon Funded Project titled "Illuminations: Patterns of Knowledge on Africa and Latin America".

Julia Borst is a postdoctoral researcher and principal investigator in a self-acquired research project ("The Spanish Black Diaspora: Afro-Spanish Literature of the 20th and 21st Century", funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG – German Research Foundation) at the University of Bremen. She was an interim full professor in French and Francophone literary and cultural studies at U Bremen (April-Sept 2021). Since 2018, she has been deputy director of the Institute of Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies (INPUTS) at U Bremen. She was awarded a PhD in Romance literary studies from U Hamburg in 2014 and an M.A. in Romance philology and economic policy from U Freiburg i. Br. in 2007. She is an awardee of the Heinz Maier-Leibnitz Prize 2021, the Sibylle Kalkhof-Rose Academy Prize for the Humanities 2019, and the Berninghausen Prize 2016. She is furthermore author of a monograph on violence and trauma in contemporary Haitian novels and of various articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *The French Review*, *French Studies*, *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, *Research in African Literatures*, *Open Cultural Studies* and *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, and co-editor of special issues in *Research in African Literatures* ("Migratory Movements and Diasporic Positionings in Contemporary Hispano- and Catalano-African Literatures", 28(3), 2017), *EnterText* ("Crossing Thresholds: Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge", 12, 2018), and the *Journal of Global Diaspora and Media* ("Textures of Diaspora and (Post-)Digitality – A Cultural Studies Approach", 3(1), 2022). Her research interests are Afroeuropean studies, diaspora studies, Equatorial Guinea, violence and trauma in literature, postcolonial theory, Caribbean studies, decolonial gender studies, diasporic communities and (post-)digitality, and multidirectional memories, the Shoah and the Global South.

Laura Büttgen obtained a Phd in French literature and cultural studies in 2019 from RWTH Aachen University, where she also underwent a teaching training degree for French and Spanish at senior schools from 2007-2012. Before being an executive manager at the Rectorate at RWTH Aachen University from 2018-2020, she took a sabbatical at

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III University (France), in 2016. She has been an academic lecturer at the Episcopal Academy of the Diocese of Aachen since 2020. Her published works include her dissertation on *Afrique(s)-sur-Seine: dynamiques frontalières de l'identité et de l'habitus chez les auteurs afro-français nés de la postcolonie* (2019, Shaker), the article "Les femmes subsahariennes comme moteur de bouleversements profonds de la société" (*Lendemains*, 174-175, 2019), an analysis of the novel *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* and a biogram of Calixthe Beyala in the encyclopedia *Kindler's Online-Literaturlexikon* (2018), and a review of *Créativité intermédiatique au Togo et dans la diaspora togolaise* (edited by Susanne Gehrmann and Dotsé Yigbe in 2016) in *Romance Studies* (130(2), 2018). She is also a co-author of "Industry on Campus. Innovationschancen aus der Allianz Wissenschaft – Wirtschaft" (in: *Geld für die Wissenschaft*, edited by Wolfgang A. Herrman, TUM. University Press, 2020).

Mimina Icir Di Muro was born in Africa, in one of the few parts of Africa that is "exotic" for Africans too. Growing up in a hunter-gatherer village has indelibly marked her life. She is the first dual-culture Bassari. Her father is Italian and her mother Bassari, a small population located between south-eastern Senegal and Guinea Conacry that still has ancestral customs and traditions. With her arrival in Europe at the age of 16, she embarked on an African studies course, becoming a native anthropologist. Every topic she has dealt with so far has somehow been related to Africa, Africanity and the African diaspora: from academic publications to creating music documentaries and video clips. She recently collaborated in making movies as assistant director and dialogue coach. Her publications and projects include "Jeux de miroirs, Deux perspectives sur le cycle initiatique bassari (Guinée, Sénégal), Expériences initiatiques du genre" (with Laurent Gabail, in: *L'Homme*, December 2021), "Masques et sorcellerie: deux façons d'administrer la société (pays bassari, Sénégal oriental)" (in: *Journal des Africanistes*, 83(2), 2013: 92-115) and the music video documentary *Paolo Baldini DubFiles at Song Embassy, Papine, Kingston 6* (2016, available on YouTube).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Danae Gallo González is Assistant Professor in Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures and Literatures at the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen in Germany. She is the recipient of the McCrary Award (2012) and the Dr.-Herbert-Stolzenberg-Award (2015) for outstanding university teaching. Her work has focused on gender studies, queer and sexuality studies and on the cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War, Franco's dictatorship and the transition to democracy. Her monograph on life writing by republican exiles of the Spanish Civil war in Algeria – *¡Recuerda! Scribo ergo sum(-us): La escritura del yo de los exiliados políticos de la Guerra Civil en la Argelia colonial*– was published by Iberoamericana Vervuert (2018). She is currently researching the politics of (self-)representation of "non-white" and/or "non-heternormative" bodies in contemporary audiovisual and literary productions of Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Equatorial Guinea and the Hispanic Caribbean through the prism of affect and alliance among minoritized groups. She is the editor of *Trans* Times. Projecting Transness in (TV) Series*, Campus Verlag (2021) and co-editor of *Hispanos en el mundo. Emoción y desplazamientos históricos, viajes y migraciones*, De Gruyter (2021).

Maria Kirchmair (Dr. phil.) is currently holder of an Erwin Schrödinger Fellowship (granted by the FWF/Austrian Science Fund: Project J 4385-G), researching on the topic "The Mediterranean in Italian fiction and film from *Verismo* to the present" at the Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali within the framework of the *Centro Studi Postcoloniali e di Genere* (*CSPG*), Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" (Italy). Her expertise is Italian postcolonial literature studies from an interdisciplinary perspective. In her research, she is mainly interested in Italian literary and cultural studies (focus on 19th, 20th and 21st centuries), postcolonial studies, theory of space and Mediterranean literature and cinema. Relating to her doctoral thesis on Italian postcolonial narrative literature, she published a monograph entitled *Postkoloniale Literatur in Italien. Raum und Bewegung in Erzählungen des Widerständigen* with transcript (2017). She studied Italian and Geography at the University of Innsbruck as well as at the Rome universities "La Sapienza" and Roma Tre and held at the Historical Institute in Rome a research fellowship awarded by the Austrian Academy of Science. At the

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

University of Innsbruck, she had several teaching assignments for Italian literature and worked as a research assistant.

Amina Marini was born in Como in 1983 to a Somali mother and an Italian-Somali father. She is a granddaughter of the Italian presence in Somalia, a complex story, the burden of which her father bears and one that has certainly influenced the course of her life and her perception of herself. She maintains she had no fixed adult figures of reference, but above all, none in whom she could reflect herself due to multiple and inconstant influencing figures: from the nuns of different religious orders in which she lived in three different institutes to the comings and goings of more or less dependable relatives to an erratic relationship with her parents. Marini states how all this led to a belated awareness of being an Italian black woman, which only more recently led her to escape the chaos in which she had wanted to hide and read more consciously about events and her relationships in a process of integration and redial. The confusing intertwining of her personal life has also been the guiding thread of her professional life, which is still in the making. Marini had several work experiences abroad in an attempt to move permanently, but after one year in Mexico, she decided to live permanently in Cuneo. She worked for eight years for a well-known Italian tour operator, subsequently embarked on a short journey with a digital start-up, then had several experiences in the incoming tourism sector, catering, large-scale distribution and event organization.

Stephanie Neu-Wendel has been Assistant Professor (Juniorprofessorin) at the Department of Romance Studies: Literature and Media at the University of Mannheim since 2013. She received her PhD in 2011 at the University of Hamburg, with a work on the baroque mock-heroic epic poem *La secchia rapita* (*Alessandro Tassoni (1565-1635). Metamorphosen des Epos*, Frankfurt am Main et al.: Peter Lang 2012). Prior to her position at Mannheim University, she worked as coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology (ICN) at Hamburg University and as eLearning coordinator at the Faculty of Humanities, also at Hamburg University. Her research interests include works on transcultural and postcolonial Italian literature, in relation to factuality/fictionality studies (“‘Unidentified Narrative Objects’ and the Reinterpretation of Italy’s History. Fictionality, Factuality and Authorial Posture in

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Timira and *Point Lenana*", in: Cindie Aaen Maagaard/Daniel Schäbler/ Marianne Wolff Lundholt (eds.): *Exploring Fictionality: Conceptions, Test Cases, Discussions*, Odense, UP of Southern Denmark 2020, 41-69; "Zwischen Dokumentation und Fiktion: Migration und postkoloniale Blicke im Dokumentarfilm *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008) von Andrea Segre/Dagmawi Yimer/Riccardo Biadene und im 'romanzo meticcio' *Timira* (2012) von Antar Mohamed/Wu Ming 2", in: Eva-Tabea Meineke/Anne-Rose Meyer/ Stephanie Neu-Wendel/Eugenio Spedicato (eds): *Aufgeschlossene Beziehungen: Italien und Deutschland im transkulturellen Dialog: Literatur, Film, Medien*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann 2019, 301-320; "Le 'roman métisse' *Timira* (2012) de Antar Mohamed et Wu Ming 2: le colonialisme en Italie raconté dans une synthèse du récit fictionnel et factual", in: *Cahiers de Narratologie* 26 (2014): *Nouvelles frontières du récit. Au-delà de l'opposition entre factuel et fictionnel*).

Hanna Nohe is Assistant Professor at the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Bonn university. After studying Spanish and English in Freiburg i. Br., Salamanca and Berlin, she wrote her doctoral thesis at the graduate school "Foundational myths of Europe in literature, art and music" at the universities of Bonn, Paris and Florence under the direction of Mechthild Albert and Michel Delon. Published in 2018 under the title *Fingierte Orientalen erschaffen Europa*, it analyses cultural identities in the fictitiously oriental epistolary travel novel of Enlightenment from a comparative perspective, examining texts in Italian, French, Spanish, English and German. Moreover, Hanna Nohe has contributed articles on the theatre of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro*, fantastic literature and the migrant subject in peer-reviewed journals such as *Hipogrifo*, *Revista Iberoamericana*, *Boletín de Literatura Comparada* and collective books. At present she is working on the migrant subject's socioeconomic perspective from the Global South in current literature in Romance languages.

Koku G. Nonoa is a literary and cultural scholar with an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research interest in theater and performance art. He is a postdoctoral researcher in German Studies at the University of Luxembourg, where he is a member of the steering committee of the Master's program "Theater Studies and Interculturality" and a member

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

of the consortium team of the key research area "Migration and Inclusive Societies" (MIS). His publications include *Postdramatic Theatre as Transcultural Theatre* (2018, eds. with Teresa Kovacs), "Le théâtre contemporain en Europe face aux variations et défis d'un texte sur l'épineuse question migratoire: Les suppliants d´Elfriede Jelinek" (2018, *Variations* – Literaturzeitschrift der Universität Zürich), "COVID-19 Crisis: Response-Ability and Responsibility of Theatre" (2020, eds. Georg Mein/Johannes Pause), *Gegenkulturelle Tendenzen im postdramatischen Theater* (*Countercultural Tendencies in Postdramatic Theatre*, 2020), and "Negotiating Migration in European Theater in/beyond 'Thinking-as-Usual'" (2021, eds. Annimari Juvonen/Verena Lindemann Lino).

Melibea Obono is an Equatorial Guinean writer and a committed activist who advocates for the rights of women and LGTBQI+ people in Africa in general and Equatorial Guinea in particular. In both her literary work and her activism, she denounces the rampant homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity in her country. She is one of the most well-known and productive writers of her generation and has published several short stories, journalistic and activist texts, and novels – among others, her highly praised novel *La Bastarda* (2016), considered as the first LGTBQI+ novel in Equatorial Guinea. As a political scientist, she also teaches at the Universidad Nacional de Guinea Ecuatorial (UNGE) in Malabo and is part of the Centro de Estudios Afro-Hispánicos (CEAH) of the Universidad de Educación a Distancia (UNED) in Spain.

Roxane Pajoul is an Assistant Professor of French at Tennessee State University, a Historically Black University. Her scholarly interests surround Taboo Topics (the perception of non-heteronormative sexualities in the Francophone Caribbean, mixed-race couples, and race relations in France); Women and Gender Studies, particularly the representation of women in the media; and research interests pertaining to Black France.

Joana Passos is a senior researcher at CEHUM – Centre for the Humanities at University of Minho, Portugal. She holds a PhD from Utrecht University, The Netherlands (2003). She is part of the research

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

group GAPS – Gender, Arts and Postcolonial Studies. She has published a book on the history of Goan literature in Portuguese; she has co-edited three critical anthologies on Postcolonial Studies in the Portuguese world and three special issues of the journal *Diacrítica*. She has also published around fifty articles. She is a lecturer in the PhD Program on Compared Modernities at CEHUM. She has translated several key critical essays from English to Portuguese, and she has carried through a series of interviews with established writers. She has been a team member in the following research projects: *Afroeuropeus* (University of Léon, Spain, 2008-2014); *Pensando Goa* – USP, São Paulo, Brazil (proc. 2014/15657-8); *Prémios Literários de Língua Portuguesa*, sponsored by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (2014); NILUS – Narratives of the Indian Ocean, University of Lisbon (PTDC/CPC-ELT/4868/2014); WOMANART, University of Minho (PTDC/ART-OUT/28051/2017).

Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger, Independent Researcher, affiliated to the Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen, Germany, specialist in cultural histories of Africa (Spanish and Portuguese), Latin America, and the Caribbean. Teaching experiences in various countries. She translated into German and introduced two poetry volumes of Nancy Morejón: *Ruhmreiche Landschaft* (2020) and *Wilde Kohlen* (2021) and also edited and translated the anthology *Augen* (2020). Recent book publications: *Modern Slavery and Water Spirituality. A Critical Debate in Africa and Latin America* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017); *Caribbean Worlds-Mundos Caribeños-Mondes Caribéens* (edited with Gabriele Knauer, Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020). Recent articles: "'Holland' in the Caribbean: Voids between the Spanish-speaking World and the Lower Countries" (in *New Perspectives on Hispanic Caribbean Studies*, Magdalena López/María Teresa Vera-Rojas, New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2020: 165-183); "¡No es fácil! Europa y los sueños de las jineteras" (in: *¿Un sueño europeo? Europa como destino anhelado de migración en la creación cultural latinoamericana,* Verena Dolle, ed., Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020: 199-213); "'Container Art' – António Ole (Angola) und Sergio Raimondi (Argentinien)" (in: *Der Mensch und das Meer – wie Erzählungen unseren Umgang mit dem Ozean beeinflussen*, Ulrike Kronfeld-

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Goharani/Aletta Mondré/Franziska J. Werner, eds., Kiel: Wachholz, 2020: 251-264).

Simonetta Puleio holds a degree from the University of Pisa in German and English Studies (with a thesis in German philology) and in Modern Literature (with a thesis in German literature). After several years as a German language and literature teacher in various secondary schools in Tuscany (Pisa, Lucca, San Miniato, Piombino, Cecina), in 2007 she moved to Germany, where, since Spring 2008, she has been working at the Institute for Italian Studies (Romance Literatures II) at the University of Stuttgart as a language teacher on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI). Since 2008, she has also cooperated with the Italian Institute of Culture Stuttgart, organizing film shows, conferences and events for the Week of the Italian Language in the World (Settimana della Lingua Italiana nel Mondo). From 2016 to 2019, Simonetta Puleio was also lecturer for Italian language and society at the Department of Romance Studies, University of Tübingen.

Marita Rainsborough completed her habilitation at Leuphana University Lüneburg and holds a PhD from the University of Hamburg. Currently, she teaches at the Institute of Romance Studies, University of Kiel, and at the Institute of Philosophy and Sciences of Art, Leuphana University of Lüneburg. Since 2018, she has been an associate member of the Center of Philosophy University of Lisbon (CFUL). Her research focuses on French philosophy, contemporary legacy of classical German philosophy, intercultural philosophy, and African philosophy and literatures. The publication of her doctoral thesis is entitled *Die Konstitution des Subjekts in den Romanen von Rachel de Queiroz. Eine diskursanalytische Untersuchung* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2014). She is co-editor of the book Martin Neumann/Marita Rainsborough (eds.): *Rethinking Postcolonialism. Rutura, transgressão e transformação nas literaturas lusófonas de África* (Lisboa: Colibri, 2017). Her postdoctoral thesis is published under the title *Foucault heute. Neue Perspektiven in Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2018). Together with Paulo Jesus and Inácio Valentim, she co-edited a special issue on "Kant in Africa and Africa in Kant" in the journal *Estudos Kantianos, Marília* (9(2), 2021).

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

Igiaba Scego, who was born in Rome in 1974 and whose parents are from Somalia, has published several novels and short stories, among them *Oltre Babilonia* (2008), *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010), *Roma negata* (together with the photographer Rino Bianchi), *Adua* (2015), *La linea del colore* (2020), *Figli dello stesso cielo. Il razzismo e il colonialismo raccontati ai ragazzi* (2021) and *Cassandra a Mogadiscio* (2023). Scego's works often deal with themes such as transcultural identities and the link between language, literature and identity. They also represent counter-narrations of Italy's colonial past, with references to the relationship between Somalia and Italy.

Clara Schumann studied Comparative Literature, Political Science, and African Studies at the Free University of Berlin, the Humboldt University, and the University of Vienna. She is currently completing a PhD project at Humboldt University engaging with gender, Cameroonian migration literature, and the transnational literary field.

Juliane Tauchnitz studied Romance Literatures, Communication and Media Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and at Paris-IV Sorbonne, France. After graduating, she worked as a journalist and at the same time prepared her doctoral thesis on *La Créolité dans le contexte du discours international et postcolonial du métissage et de l'hybridité. De la mangrove au rhizome* ("The Créolité in the Context of the International and Postcolonial Discourse of Métissage and Hybridity. From Mangrove to Rhizome"), published by L'Harmattan (Paris, 2014). Her postdoctoral project focussed on "*Entre las dos orillas*. Construction of a becoming Cultural Space in Hispano-Moroccan Literature". She has been co-editor of the two scientific book series *Passagen* (Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Olms) and *Transversalité* (Paris: L'Harmattan) as well as Co-Director of the Francophone Research Centre Leipzig. Currently she is Substitute Professor for Spanish and French Literature at the University of Würzburg.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783487423555 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY-SA