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## From Francophonie to World Literature in French

Thérèse Migraine-George

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## From *Francophonie* to World Literature in French



FROM  
*FRANCOPHONIE*  
TO WORLD  
LITERATURE  
IN FRENCH  
Ethics, Poetics, & Politics

Thérèse Migraïne-George

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# Introduction

## *Francophonie and Littérature-Monde, Friends or Foes?*

### Literature, French, and the World

This book looks at how contemporary French-speaking writers' call to replace the designation "Francophone literature" by "*littérature-monde en français*" (world literature in French) points to French and Francophone literary studies as a site of renewed transnational debates on issues of identity, ethics, and aesthetic universality. In 2007 the publication in the French newspaper *Le Monde* of a manifesto titled "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français" ("Toward a 'World Literature' in French") and signed by forty-four writers from various parts of the French-speaking world, including France, triggered a wealth of international conferences, newspaper articles, and scholarly publications enthusiastically embracing or sternly disputing these writers' proclamation of the "end" of Francophonie and the concomitant "birth" of *littérature-monde en français* (Barbery et al. 2010, 113).<sup>1</sup> A collective volume of essays, *Pour une littérature-monde*, edited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud (2007), was published shortly after the manifesto. Because Francophone studies have become an integral scholarly discipline in the Anglo-American world while remaining a

peripheral field in French academia, this terminological debate also foregrounds ongoing transatlantic discussions on literary ethos and taxonomy, on the practice, status, and function of literature.

These new theoretical debates frame my close readings of works by several contemporary French-speaking writers—Tierno Monénembo, Nina Bouraoui, Hélène Cixous, Marie NDiaye, Maryse Condé, and Lyonel Trouillot—who straddle continents and express a clear resistance to being labeled “Francophone” writers. Their works elude dogmatic categories, be they ethnic, sexual, or stylistic. These writers explore the writing process itself as a moving space of cross-cultural interrogation, multifarious affiliations, and creative dissidence. I argue that it is precisely by defending the aesthetic autonomy of their work that they posit literature as a site of ethical responsibility, conceived both as unconditioned and unconditional opening to the world and as engagement with concrete modes of alterity. The works I examine here thus illustrate what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls “partial cosmopolitanism” at the juncture of local “allegiances”—to a culture, a nation, or a specific community—and “loyalty to all of humanity,” or, as Appiah also puts it, “universal morality” (2007, xvi–xviii). My book aims to show that world literature in French, which challenges the ideological and institutional tenets of Francophonie, constitutes a significant pretext for probing not only the fictions of identity but also the ethical challenges created by a cosmopolitan world in which local identities are being questioned by others’ need for cultural recognition and understanding.

While stressing literature as a borderless or worldly practice, the proponents of *littérature-monde* are careful not to reinstate a literary homogeneity that would subsume all differences and argue for a de-centered approach to literature. They reject an exclusively metropolitan conception of French and the leveling of a history that uniformly collapses writers from former colonizing and colonized nations within an allegedly color-blind French “Republic of Letters.”<sup>2</sup> For the signatories of the manifesto, the fact that several of the most prestigious French literary prizes of 2006 were awarded to foreign-born French-

speaking writers (“*écrivains d’outre-France*” [Barbery et al. 2007, 2]) is a “historic moment” or “Copernican revolution” that “reveals what the literary milieu already knew without admitting it: the center, from which supposedly radiated a franco-French literature, is no longer the center. Until now, the center, albeit less and less frequently, had this absorptive capacity that forced authors who came from elsewhere to rid themselves of their foreign trappings before melting in the crucible of the French language and its national history: the center, these . . . prizes tell us, is henceforth everywhere, at the four corners of the world” (Barbery et al. 2010, 113).<sup>3</sup>

Rather than simply endorsing littérature-monde as the groundbreaking advent—or “birth”—of a brave new literary world, however, my study proposes to put forth the fruitful complexity of the debates fostered by the manifesto. By pulling writers out of the regional and continental frameworks to which they are typically confined, especially those set up by the fault lines of African and Caribbean studies, and by looking simultaneously at these writers’ aesthetic and political agendas, I argue that the sometimes heated debate between the proponents of Francophonie and the champions of littérature-monde is not simply a “*querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*,” a clash between an established category and a new school of thought; rather, it highlights the ever-increasing mobility of literary and cultural producers—for example, a great number of African and Caribbean writers now live and publish in Europe and North America—and the concomitant intricacy of literary aesthetics that strive to account for rhizomatic relations between the local and the global, the particular and the universal. In their introduction to the collective volume *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*, Susan Suleiman and Christie McDonald state that literature in French, at every stage of its history, has been informed by global issues of cultural multiplicity, migration, and diaspora. Likewise, my study argues that the notion of littérature-monde, which foregrounds contemporary writers’ cross-cultural experiences and transformations, (re)places “negotiations with otherness and boundary crossings at

the very center of French literary history” (Suleiman and McDonald 2010, x).

In an article that traces the affiliation of *littérature-monde* back to Édouard Glissant’s *Tout-monde*—a seminal notion in Caribbean and literary studies at large—Eric Prieto sees the manifesto as “a reaction to changes in the global cultural marketplace, . . . more of a symptom than a movement, more an acknowledgment of a state of affairs than the bold new departure it claims to be” (2010, 112). For Prieto, Glissant’s *Tout-monde* underscores the importance of “finding a third path between the two main identitarian threats that have emerged in the era of globalization—essentialism and homogenization,” thereby allowing for a much-needed “reconceptualization or reframing of the postcolonial condition” (2010, 117, 120) that staves off abstract universalism and narrow militantism and that stresses global exchanges, hybridization, and interdependence.<sup>4</sup> While the manifesto may be “part of a shrewd marketing campaign” (Prieto 2010, 111), *littérature-monde* similarly points to literary studies in French as a teeming space of reflection on literature and the world, literature in the world, and the world in literature. Moreover, it resonates with ongoing discussions among writers and scholars who have long challenged the national framing of literary studies and privileged instead comparative and transnational approaches. The debates surrounding Francophonie and *littérature-monde* can therefore be seen as being attuned to the issues raised by many contemporary Anglophone theorists in particular, who have set out to reconceptualize world literature from the perspectives of postcolonial criticism and globalization.

### A Case Study in Littérature-Monde: The Marie NDiaye Controversy

The productive complexity of Francophone writers on the French cultural scene is particularly illustrated by the awarding of the 2009 Goncourt Prize to Marie NDiaye, a woman writer born in France of a

black Senegalese father and a white French mother. After the presidential election of Nicolas Sarkozy, NDiaye moved to Berlin with her family and declared in an interview that her decision was largely motivated by what she saw as Sarkozy's "monstrous" and "vulgar" France (quoted in Kaprièlian 2009). Although NDiaye is not one of the manifesto's signatories, the ensuing controversy highlights many of the issues that subtend my analysis. Despite the criticism leveled against her by Éric Raoult, a right-wing deputy who argued that Goncourt recipients had a "duty of reserve" (*devoir de réserve*) in expressing such "insulting" public opinions, NDiaye declared after receiving the prize that she maintained her opinion on the French president's politics and that she found "the way in which the problem of immigration has been tackled for the past two and a half years . . . unacceptable" (Leménager 2009). While many articles applauded the winning of the Goncourt by "the first black woman," NDiaye nonetheless insisted that she did not "represent anything or anyone" and that her "African roots don't mean much, except that people know of them because of the colour of [her] skin and [her] name" (Flood 2009). NDiaye, who was raised in suburban France by her mother, has also consistently refused to be labeled a "Francophone" or "African" writer because of her lack of close connection to African culture (NDiaye 1992; C. Rousseau 2009a).

Incidentally, this polemical exchange occurred while a highly controversial debate on national identity, launched by the French government, was taking place.<sup>5</sup> Although there is no direct correlation between the debate and the controversy sparked by Raoult, the latter's chastising admonition of NDiaye can be seen as symptomatic of French conservative politicians' concern over public representations of national identity or integrity. The "duty of reserve" that NDiaye, as a Goncourt recipient, should demonstrate, according to the right-wing politician, points to his expectation that NDiaye should not overtly criticize France insofar as it rewarded her by giving her its most prestigious literary prize. Raoult went on to say that NDiaye now had to be a "less militant" ambassador of French culture (Salmon 2009) and that "when

she is abroad to defend French culture and a student raises his/her hand and says, ‘Do you think that France is a monstrous country?’” NDiaye should rightly say that “her remarks were ‘excessive’” (“Affaire NDiaye” 2009).<sup>6</sup> According to Raoult, and with no pun intended, “a personality who defends the literary colors of France has the duty to demonstrate a certain respect toward our institutions” and therefore also “to respect the national cohesion and image of our country” (quoted in Dubois 2009). As Dominic Thomas rightly asserts about what he calls the “Marie NDiaye Affair,” Raoult’s comments betray deeply entrenched assumptions regarding both the white, European identity that has supposedly cemented French history and immigrants’ expected compliance (although NDiaye herself is not an immigrant) with certain social standards (2010b, 147).

While acknowledging that otherness, or “*étrangeté*,” is one of her literary “obsessions” (quoted in Argand 2001), NDiaye insists that she does not see herself as the spokesperson for anything in particular (C. Rousseau 2009b) and invokes the right to express herself freely as a Goncourt recipient and, “simply,” as a writer (“Devoir de réserve” 2009). NDiaye’s refusal to recant her opinion was vigorously supported by left-wing and moderate political figures and by numerous writers, who derided Raoult’s comments, warned against political and moral censorship, and endorsed NDiaye’s claim for complete freedom of expression. As Tahar Ben Jelloun, himself a member of the Goncourt Academy, remarked, “The writer is neither a diplomat nor a soldier. It’s someone solitary who disrupts all bearings” (quoted in Cojean 2009).

This controversy further highlights the tightrope walked by French-speaking writers who, because of a particular national origin and/or the color of their skin, find themselves in an uneasy and defensive relation with the French literary and publishing field, which, as the manifesto indicates, relegates them to the exotic margins of Francophonie. Indeed these writers disavow the cultural and at times quasi-ethnographic treatment of their work and claim a universal practice of literature that stresses their creative skills rather than their national or ethnic origins.

As Alain Mabanckou, one of the manifesto's signatories, comments, "'French' writers are very rarely asked to justify their aesthetic choices or to show what their place is in French literary history and how they relate to social change in France" (2011, 75). Anna Moï, a writer born in Vietnam and also one of the manifesto's signatories, stigmatizes the widely held conception according to which "non-French, Francophone writers born out of colonization are Madagascan, Maghrebian, or Vietnamese before being writers, as opposed to Samuel Beckett or Nancy Huston. . . . As if coming from southern countries was a hindrance to the universality of literary expression" (2006, 54). Moï's remark echoes Maryse Condé's complaints, years earlier, about the folkloric perception of her work: "In France, I always feel perceived in a somewhat exotic fashion. You should read the reviews of my books in French papers. For instance, my novel *Les derniers rois mages*, which is a rather sad book, is often termed a 'humorous' and 'savory' tale. In *Le Monde* there was a review entitled 'Le Tim Tim de Maryse Condé,' which means that the book was immediately associated with a tale from the West Indian oral tradition. In France I have a rather hard time counteracting the exotic fashion in which West Indian literature as a whole is perceived" (quoted in Pfaff 1996, 105–6).

For writers such as Marie NDiaye, Alain Mabanckou, Anna Moï, or Maryse Condé, the challenge therefore seems to lie in finding a creative equilibrium between what Moï terms "the universality of literary expression," on the one hand and, to use a Glissantian notion, the "opacity" of their specific sociocultural identity, which resists translation and transparency, on the other hand. To borrow also from the title of Glissant's interview, "Solitaire et solidaire," featured in *Pour une littérature-monde* (Artières 2007), so-called Francophone writers shuttle back and forth between politics and poetics, solitude and solidarity. This fruitful unbalance similarly sets the stage for the scholarly dissention that, since 2007, has both spurred attacks on the manifesto and brought Francophonie under renewed critical scrutiny. It remains to be seen whether "littérature-monde" will be able to dis-



place “Francophone literature” in the future, but the reactions that it has provoked so far have already brought about a salutary “crisis” (a word sharing an etymological root with “criticism”) that has revived debates on the coherence and legitimacy of Francophone studies.

### *Littérature-Monde in Question*

The call by many prominent writers to replace the label “Francophone literature” by “littérature-monde en français” has unleashed enthusiasm and support but also skepticism or even plain rejection on the part of various other writers and critics. For Patrick Chamoiseau, “littérature-monde” is a “generous absurdity” since “world novels” can be found in every century, in the works of Goethe, Mallarmé, Joyce, Faulkner, or García Márquez, for example. For Chamoiseau the urgency lies rather in dismantling “the false perception of a unity of the world” and in going from certainty to uncertainty, traveling to wandering, order to chaos in order to privilege the aesthetics of Relation that Glissant already called for (2011, 191). Chamoiseau’s criticism reflects earlier comments by critics for whom the new formulation involves an uncritical or even naive use of the word “*monde*.” Specifically, to quote Safoi Babana-Hampton, the usage recalls “certain elements of aesthetic discourse of cosmopolitan modernity” in such a way that the manifesto “slip[s] into an unfortunate universalist stance, falling short of taking into account its own historicity” (2009, 483–84). Babana-Hampton’s opinion is sharply echoed in Françoise Lionnet’s own unequivocal critique of the manifesto, which “is a well-meaning but clumsy attempt at renaming other literatures in order to have them fit into the world Republic of Letters as defined and understood by a universalizing French perspective” (2009, 203). For Lionnet the manifesto ends up reinforcing the centralizing and selective hegemony of the modern Parisian literary doctrines while claiming to be decentering such literary dominance. Lionnet thus sounds a particularly ironic judgment on the signatories of the manifesto, “Paris-based writers” who, she

suggests, ultimately aspire to win “a seat at the banquet of canonical games or at the *Académie française*, that ever vigilant guardian of the standard language, even if its role is also to accept—and legislate—poetic deviations from the norms” (2009, 213, 217).<sup>7</sup> While acknowledging that littérature-monde has provided a welcome opportunity for practitioners of Francophone studies to discuss ongoing changes in their academic field of research, Thomas Spear curtly dismisses the topic by stating, “There is no need for a *littérature-monde*,” a “literary and publishing phenomenon” largely circumscribed to Saint-Germain-des-Prés and which has created “much ado about nothing.” Far from being revolutionary, for Spear the manifesto merely marks a slight shift of perspective on the part of the French publishing establishment represented by *Le Monde* and by the “Galligrasseuil” publishers (Gallimard, Grasset, and Seuil) (2010, 164–65).<sup>8</sup>

In addition to accusations of dogmatism, shortsightedness, and literary envy, some critics have blasted the manifesto for its lack of political engagement. For Charles Sugnet the manifesto constitutes a regressive “retreat from the urgent intellectual and artistic work of confronting the aftermath of colonialism in France” and blatantly ignores the legacies of poststructuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminism (2009, 237–38). In a similar vein one of the most extensive critiques has come from the French author Camille de Toledo, who, in his book *Visiter le Flurkistan ou les illusions de la littérature monde* (2008), delves into what he sees as the limits, contradictions, and illusory claims of the manifesto, which, he argues, ends up producing its own constraining and reductive ideology while naively dreaming to escape into an “outside” world of unknown places and people, of faraway adventures, dusty roads, and epic thrills. While claiming to liberate fiction, he states, the manifesto confines it to the “clearing [*clairière*] of truth, of the real” and therefore radically reduces the “possibilities of literature” (2008, 30). Finally, Christopher Miller sees one of the pitfalls of the manifesto in its “good-faith idealism,” which could potentially distract both attention and resources from “the world of

inequalities and differences that a *Tout-Monde* or a *littérature-monde* might ignore.” “The deeply-etched lines of literary marginalization and inequality,” Miller concludes, “will not disappear overnight, and least of all with the publication of one manifesto” (C. Miller 2011, 48).

Indeed the status of writers who have embraced *littérature-monde* by signing the 2007 manifesto and/or contributing subsequently to *Pour une littérature-monde* remains ambiguous as they willingly or unwittingly participate in the promotion of Francophone studies, from which they have gained much international recognition and many privileges by being offered prestigious university positions and by being invited to numerous conferences and colloquia. (Alain Mabankou, for instance, who teaches in the department of French and Francophone Studies at UCLA, was invited to talk at the 2009 Conseil International d’Études Francophones (CIEF) congress and at the 2012 Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium.) As Véronique Porra pointedly remarked, “The signatories of the manifesto, contributors to the volume, are in large part themselves privileged interlocutors or actors of Francophone institutions, if not even promoters of the Francophone discourse. Several of them have until now put up very well with the demands of the Francophone literary system, including its confinement to allegedly marginal positions: those which in fact consist in reproducing peripheral contents and have become *sine qua non* conditions to occupying paradoxically central positions in the field of competition in relation to the consecrating authorities” (2008, 37).

While the signatories of the manifesto and various contributors to the collective volume stigmatize the marginalization of “Francophone” writers whose literary production is always measured against the great literature of “French” writers, such opposition has become at least partly untenable since many of these supposedly marginalized “Francophone” writers also benefit from a publishing network and support—organizations, bookstores, librarians, publishers, festivals, and events dedicated to promoting Francophone literature—that may

not be available to other writers. In a scathing blog titled “What ‘littérature-monde?’” Pierre Assouline underscores the distorting views of the manifesto: “What this manifesto, which rebels against the threats of Franco-French arrogance and its indifference to the world, doesn’t say, is that today a young author from the Balkans or Africa has more chances of making him/herself known because he/she is so often solicited by grants, festivals, collections, and such than his/her unknown counterpart from Maine-et-Loire” (2007). Other critics similarly point out that Francophone writers, rather than being marginalized, fare better than many French novelists in terms of literary recognition and book sales and can therefore be seen as enjoying an enviable position (Borzeix 2006, 43).

Many of these Francophone writers are now *de facto* resisting their marginalization in some exotic literary periphery by living and working out of what continues to be considered the center of the French/Francophone literary and publishing world: Paris. Alison Rice, for instance, notes, in an essay she wrote on the various interviews she conducted with women writing in France and coming from various parts of the world, that positioning these women writers in a “‘Francophone’ periphery” has become complicated insofar as nearly all of them have relocated from their native countries to Paris (2009, 445). Although the notion of *littérature-monde* purports to challenge the Manichean and discriminatory opposition between (mostly white) French-speaking writers from France and (mostly non-white) French-speaking writers from outside of France, the rhetoric of the manifesto itself tacitly operates on the basis of such a dichotomy by celebrating the success and recognition of “*écrivains d’outre-France*” (by opposition to French writers) on the Parisian literary scene and by further contrasting the narcissistic sterility of French literature with the “poetic inspiration” and “vital energies” that suffuse *littérature-monde* (Barbery et al. 2010, 116, 114). William Cloonan pinpoints the blind spots of such a sweeping generalization by noting that the theoretical prescriptions of the *Nouveau Roman* do not predominantly shape contemporary

French novels any longer and that “fiction written by ‘Hexagon’ authors [authors from metropolitan France] today is certainly as varied, imaginative, and challenging as what their colleagues ‘outre-mer’ are hailed for producing” (2008, 48).

By claiming that *littérature-monde* has brought the world back into literature, the signatories of the manifesto, as Cloonan points out, might be indeed replicating an outdated dichotomy between a sclerotic French literature still obsessed by the mirror-games of the Nouveau Roman and a fast-paced, breathtaking, and adventurous literature produced by writers who have traveled wide and far.<sup>9</sup> Lydie Moudileno criticizes “the vitalistic trope of the exotic other” underlying such a dichotomy and further highlights the problematic nature of the manifesto’s rhetoric by stating that “beyond the levelling gesture, the historical relationship between Europe and its Elsewhere(s) is preserved, with all the hierarchical implications that historically produced binary carries with it” (2010, 121). In other words, what Kaiama Glover calls “the ambivalent transnationalism of a literature-world—in French” (2010, 99) brings to the forefront not only the fictitiousness of the center-periphery dichotomy around which Francophone studies are implicitly structured, but also the entrenched binary oppositions that undergird the manifesto and some of the texts featured in *Pour une littérature-monde*.

## Defense and Illustration of Littérature-Monde

The manifesto and its companion piece, *Pour une littérature-monde*, are crafted in the image of the *littérature-monde* that they extol: in the terms of the manifesto, they are “carried along by an extraordinary poetic inspiration,” full of a “creative” and “polyphonic” “effervescence” (Barbery et al. 2010, 114, 116) that does not shy away from lyricism, fieriness, and contradictions. But nowhere do the writers who signed the manifesto or those featured in *Pour une littérature-monde* claim that they are trying to define a new school of thought. Although she

accuses the manifesto of dogmatism, Lionnet herself points out that manifestos as a genre have a “performative” function and constitute a form of “intervention whose success depends on their visibility” (2009, 207) rather than on their absolute coherence. Exploring the reasons why a writer like Maryse Condé, who has been famously weary of literary doctrines and programs such as *créolité*, nonetheless signed the manifesto and published a text in the collective volume, Stéphanie Bérard remarks that littérature-monde, “far from smothering her, offers her a space of freedom”: “Le Bris, in his introductory chapter to the manifesto . . . is very careful not to establish any program, rule, norm, preferring the image of the ‘family’ to that of the ‘clan,’ ‘coterie [*chapelle*],’ or movement. . . . This freeing from dogmatism and theorization claimed by littérature-monde no doubt explains why writers from various geographic, cultural, and sociological horizons choose to gather under the same aegis” (2009, 498). Hence the contradictions highlighted by various critics can be seen as a strength of the manifesto rather than a weakness, a mark of its fluid and polyphonic qualities rather than a sign of its incoherence.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly critics seem sometimes to fall into their own contradictory wishful thinking, reproaching the manifesto for lacking a specific agenda while also condemning it for its universalizing claims. This, in a sense, might betray the critics’ own frustrations at being unable to box the signatories’ intentions into a systematic program or theory. While deploring the lack of continuity and consistency among the essays featured in *Pour une littérature-monde*, Kathryn Kleppinger, for example, reproaches their authors for failing to question “French notions of cultural universalism” and thereby also for reinscribing a dominant “universal aesthetic” that does not reflect on its own violence (a reflection inspired by Pascale Casanova’s analysis in *The World Republic of Letters*) (2010, 81). Kleppinger assumes that proponents of littérature-monde should have a program (a word she uses repeatedly in her essay), although littérature-monde in fact draws its strength precisely from the fact that it is not a program but rather an energizing

battle cry—a manifesto—against some of the prescriptive claims of Francophonie. At the end of her essay, Kleppinger seems to concede, albeit unwittingly, that “inconsistencies” among the essays featured in *Pour une littérature-monde* might, in fact, reflect their open philosophy and common desire to create “a greater awareness that French literature [comes] . . . in many shapes and sizes and that all of these variations are worthy of the same kinds of attention” (2010, 83).

Ironically some of the most strident critics of the manifesto find themselves in the paradoxical position of lecturing the very writers whose works inspire and shape their critical work and of admonishing them for refusing to endorse labels that appear to be ultimately much more useful and necessary to these critics’ own work than to the writers themselves. Lionnet confesses to be “baffled” and “appalled” by what she sees as the “clumsiness” of the manifesto and thus berates “the distinguished Francophone writers who have transformed the world of contemporary literature” for not living up to the greatness of their own creative work (2009, 204–5). While Sugnet accuses the manifesto of being a prescriptive “retreat from the urgent intellectual and artistic work” of confronting the conjoined legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism in France (2009, 237–38, 250), his criticism of the manifesto as lacking historical consciousness and political engagement can also be read as a chastising prescription that most writers and artists would no doubt consider to be a form of unwanted diktat.

Time and time again so-called Francophone writers have expressed their displeasure toward, or even rejection of, the Francophone label and labels in general. Such is the case for the writers on whom I focus in this book. Maryse Condé in particular expresses her skepticism in a 2003 interview: “You have to make Maryse Condé a French or Francophone writer in order for her to be studied in universities. I don’t think much of these terms. What amuses me is the word Francophone, because it encompasses people who have nothing in common, apart from the fact that they speak French. . . . I’m convinced that what people call ‘Francophone literature’ is going to disappear,

or at least undergo profound changes. . . . The label ‘Francophone’ is extremely fragile” (Alexander et al. 2006, 19). In addition, Alison Rice notes that among the sixteen women writers of French whom she interviewed in Paris between 2005 and 2008—coming from places such as Algeria, Japan, Vietnam, and Bulgaria—only one “was eager to describe herself as a ‘feminist,’” and none of them “were enthusiastic about the term ‘Francophone.’” They eloquently expressed reservations on a number of levels to having this categorization applied to their work and their person” (2009, 445). Yet critics cling to labels partly, or largely, because such labels provide the very foundations on which academic disciplines (and careers) are based and because they help channel much-needed resources toward specific departments and programs that, in the United States, are often structured around identity politics.<sup>11</sup>

Unsurprisingly scholars who have specialized in Francophone studies in Anglo-American academia—where Francophone studies have been very successful in establishing themselves—overwhelmingly come to the rescue of Francophonie while largely discrediting the manifesto. The collective volume *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde* (Hargreaves, Forsdick, and Murphy 2010) in particular, which features some of the most prominent voices in a mostly Anglo-American-based academic field of Francophone studies, is strikingly homogenous in its virulent rejection of littérature-monde. The academic unease created by the manifesto can, in fact, be gauged by the very eagerness with which many of the critics downplay or dismiss its literary and scholarly significance. Along with Thomas Spear, who questions the critical validity of littérature-monde (2010, 164), Chris Bongie swiftly dismisses littérature-monde as “a seductive buzz phrase” and mocks the manifesto for being full of “exuberant puffery” (2010, 125, 145). Littérature-monde is, after all, intended to be about *littérature* and *le monde*, yet in many of these authors’ essays, the focus seems to be obsessively shifting back toward issues of academic and disciplinary battle lines. While several of these crit-



ics accuse littérature-monde of being mostly a Parisian affair and of having, in the end, no real global relevance, their discussion, in turn, does not always engage with the complex literary relevance of this topic but mostly bears on the academic boundaries of Francophone studies for the purpose of either shoring up or questioning them. Lydie Moudileno's own conclusive statement in her essay featured in *Transnational French Studies* thus honestly recognizes that practitioners of Francophonie "as a field of scholarly investigation" simply cannot "afford to trash it just yet" (2010, 123).

One of the most telling aspects of the critical backlash provoked by the manifesto, which proposes to undo constrictive labels and categories, is the new labels and categories that scholars have produced or reproduced in order to tame, normalize, and standardize this strange and fiery creature that is littérature-monde so that it can, once again, become a neat and compliant object of scholarly inquiry. As Fabienne Kanor mockingly wonders, "Am I without knowing it a Creolofrancophone author? A Negropolitanophone writer? Francoperiphericophone? Negroparigophone? Francophone? . . ." (2007, 241). Simona Livescu, for instance, proposes a renewed use of *francité*. For her this label is useful to talk about a category of authors, such as Eugène Ionesco or Eduardo Manet, whom she qualifies as "French-Francophone" because such authors "embod[y] both the presence of 'oneness' and the presence of 'otherness' at the same time (carriers of a French identity through their heritage, but carriers of alterity through their birthplace and primary formative cultural environment)" (2009, 346–47). Conceding that Francophonie does indeed carry some constraining and exclusive connotations, Lionnet suggests that "it would have been much more far-sighted to propose instead that the term *francophonies* (in the plural) be maintained in order to underscore the geographic and historical multiplicities that it conveys, thus enabling a more interesting dialogue with the Goetheian concept of *weltliteratur* and the English 'world literature,' both of which imply an understanding of the *world* of literature as fundamentally transnational and polyphonic"

(2009, 210; emphasis in original). Lionnet's terminological recommendation is particularly interesting as it suggests precisely what the proponents of *littérature-monde*, through their own terminological preference, are calling for: a strategic and salutary move away from the Francocentric dichotomy between "French" and "Francophone" carried by the notion of "Francophonie" and toward a more openly transnational notion of *littérature-monde* inspired by Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* and by the field of "world literature" as it has become established in Anglophone academia.<sup>12</sup>

The vigorous debates generated by the manifesto will not end with the permanent surrender or defeat of either the Francophonie or *littérature-monde* proponents. Instead one of the hermeneutic virtues of *littérature-monde* consists in destabilizing critical categories and forcing us to rethink, to use Achille Mbembe's terms, "the problem . . . of the collapse of worlds, their fluctuations and tremblings, their about-turns and disguises, their silences and murmurings" (2001, 8). As Mbembe further notes, however, such fluctuations and uncertainties do not condemn us to lawless chaos, nor do they disable thinking and theorization: "Every representation of an unstable world cannot automatically be subsumed under the heading 'chaos'" (2001, 8). Rather, it allows us to explore new, uncharted ways of thinking and to break away from slogans, from dogmatic and prescriptive statements and from what Mbembe calls, in relation to discourses on Africa, "crass judgment" (*brutalité expéditive*) (2000, 21) "at the cost of an extraordinary impoverishment of reality" (2001, 9, 17). Likewise, *littérature-monde*, which has been derided by various scholars for being mired in contradictions and failing to present a coherent theoretical front, does not aim to be prescriptive or programmatic but, rather, to be disruptive to a certain institutional segmentation of literature and to question the epistemological *modus operandi* of French and Francophone studies as they have become firmly ensconced in Anglo-American academia. In his 1999 seminal study on Francophone literature, *La Francophonie littéraire: Essai pour une théorie*, Michel Beniamino states that "the

fundamental interest presented by Francophone studies is that they modify the corpus on which are founded a certain number of concepts and question their epistemology" (1999, 214). Such an epistemological, methodological, and institutional shift has now become the task of littérature-monde studies.

### Transatlantic Debates: Francophonie and Postcolonialism

Far from being simply "a storm in a Parisian teacup" (Forsdick 2010, 91), the debate that has surrounded the littérature-monde manifesto has been rendered especially interesting by its transnational and, more specifically, transatlantic dimension. Although the manifesto, as noted above, has triggered both support and skepticism on both sides of the Atlantic, the criticism that it has attracted seems to have been especially severe in Anglo-American academia, where Francophone studies have laid deep academic roots. While the proponents of littérature-monde stress the importance of challenging a traditional Francocentric view of Francophonie and its underlying binary structures, many critics point out their ongoing effort to accomplish such a task by joining postcolonial and Francophone studies, thereby arguing for a more historically and politically informed reconfiguration of the field of Francophone studies rather than for its expeditious "trashing" (Moudileno 2010).

Despite the fact that an increasing number of writers from French-speaking countries, many of them living in France, are being recognized and awarded prestigious French literary prizes, Francophone studies have struggled to take hold in French academia, where they tend to be treated as a discipline separate from "French" literature and better suited for comparative literature programs (Murphy 2002, 165). Significantly Abdou Diouf, former president of Senegal and the current secretary-general of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), responded to the manifesto by publishing in *Le Monde* an article deploring the French "dispassion" (*désamour*) toward

Francophonie, as well as the lack of interest that it commands in the media and among researchers (2007, 24). By contrast, Francophone studies have flourished in Anglo-American academia, which in many ways can be seen as being largely responsible for the increased visibility and legitimization of Francophone literature. Shortly after Diouf's intervention in *Le Monde*, French president Nicolas Sarkozy himself publicly came to the rescue of Francophonie in an article published in *Le Figaro*, where he urged the creation of Francophone positions at French universities in order to prevent writers and scholars such as Maryse Condé, Alain Mabanckou, or Achille Mbembe from migrating to the United States. In this article Sarkozy denounced the paradoxical status of Francophonie: "The heart and future of Francophonie are less and less French, but, paradoxically, more and more Anglo-Saxon. Francophonie saved by America? This caps it all! [*Un comble!*]" (2007, 14). As an illustration of Sarkozy's point, several French-speaking writers emphasize the fact that their works initially sparked better critical attention in the United States than in France. For example, Maryse Condé finds "the gaze of American critics . . . less exotic than that of their French counterparts"—because, she says, African American writers have trained critics in the United States against looking at their works as peculiar objects requiring completely different forms of critical evaluation (quoted in Pfaff 1996, 106). Likewise, Azouz Begag recalls how two years after publishing his first novel (in 1986) and long before French readers became interested in such "emerging writings," he was invited by Cornell University to talk about his experience as a Beur writer (Begag et al. 2010, 104–5).

As an additional illustration of the transatlantic paradox that has shaped the history of Francophone studies, the signatories of the manifesto cite, as a prototype for their *littérature-monde en français*, the development of a vibrant transcontinental literature in English, born in England in the 1980s, that has featured authors from multiple cultural backgrounds such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie.<sup>13</sup> David Murphy recalls the following:

In a landmark 1983 essay, the celebrated Anglo-Indian author Salman Rushdie famously proclaimed that “‘Commonwealth literature’ does not exist.” Essentially, Rushdie was reacting against what he perceived to be the marginalization of writing by Britain’s former colonial subjects, which he believed was relegated to an inferior position in relation to both British and American literature. Although the category of “Commonwealth literature” had emerged from the academic and publishing world as a way of identifying and celebrating the emergent literature of the former colonies, in Rushdie’s view, this inclusive gesture effectively excluded such writing from mainstream fiction, conflating its literary status with the ethnic identity of the author. (2010, 67)

Hence the signatories of the manifesto question the “strange disparity” between the persistently marginal and “exotic” status of Francophone writers, on the one hand, and the increasingly mainstream literary status of Anglophone writers from the former British Empire in Great Britain on the other hand (Barbery et al. 2010, 115).<sup>14</sup>

Both Goethe and Madame de Staël, who are often cited as the nineteenth-century patrons of the “world literature” concept, warned their readers against the isolationism of French literature (Xavier 2010, 62). In the light of such traditional French literary parochialism and of the particular success of Francophone writers in Anglo-American academia, it comes as no surprise that the manifesto at first drew much more attention outside of France, especially across the Atlantic, than within French academic and literary circles (Célestin et al. 2010, 1). The champions of *littérature-monde* themselves acknowledge French intellectuals’ delayed interest in this rejuvenated approach to literature in French. The website for the *Étonnants Voyageurs* festival, an itinerant international literary and visual festival founded by Michel Le Bris in 1990 and functioning as the crucible and showcase for *littérature-monde*, thus challenged the willingness in the French intellectual community to discuss the manifesto and therefore

commended the initiative taken by the École Normale Supérieure in Paris to organize a week-long colloquium in March 2010 on the topic “‘Littérature-monde’ in the heart of the Francophonie week” (“École Normale Supérieure” 2010).<sup>15</sup>

The resistance in France to developing the study of Francophone literature in academia can be explained by a number of factors, including a traditional French resistance to, or repression of, identity politics; an enduring faith in the universal values of literature; a commitment to critical interpretation as a formal practice largely separated from objective realities; and, consequently, a concomitant reluctance to create academic fields of studies, such as queer studies or postcolonial studies, on the basis of multicultural or minority identities.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the limited impact of Francophone studies in France needs to be analyzed in the light of the equally limited impact of postcolonial studies, which, according to Pascal Blanchard, tend to be perceived in France “as holding a strong ability to destabilize ‘national unity’ and the social body, thereby explaining the great difficulty today to work both on the effects of colonization in France and on postcolonial heritages” (2010, 136). Lydie Moudileno points out “a move away from Francophonie toward ‘postcolonial Francophone’ studies in the last few years” in French institutional culture (2010, 115); for Blanchard, however, the debate on national identity launched by Sarkozy’s government is another avatar of the repression of France’s colonial history by the French state since African countries became independent, as shown especially by the absence of museums on the history of slavery and colonization in France. As Carla Calargé (2010) indicates, this repressive distortion of French colonial history—illustrated also by the original text of the February 23, 2005, French law stating the “positive role” of colonization, or by Sarkozy’s 2007 “Discours de Dakar,” in which he asserted that the colonizers “took” but also “gave” a lot of infrastructures and knowledge—further explains why Francophone literature has flourished not in France but in the Anglo-American context, where postcolonial studies have been taken seriously and

Francophone literature has been able to escape—by acknowledging and confronting it—the burden of ideological tensions that has weighted it down in France.

The rise of Francophone studies in the Anglo-American world has been fostered by the development of postcolonial, cultural, and feminist studies, which, in turn, have largely tapped into the writings of French-speaking authors and philosophers such as Frantz Fanon, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Simone de Beauvoir. The development of such fields of study has been accompanied by an ever-growing doubt, to put it in Naomi Schor's terms, about "the future of universalism as anything but an illusion at worst, or at best a noble ideal with unsurpassed emancipatory potential" (2001, 64).<sup>17</sup> The publication of several collections of essays on Francophone postcolonial studies in particular illustrates an important shift in the critical approach to Francophonie (Moura 1999; Britton and Syrotinski 2001; Salhi 2003; Murphy 2002; Forsdick and Murphy 2003; Murdoch and Donadey 2005; Hargreaves, Forsdick, and Murphy 2010). From being mainly confined to French departments, the study of Francophone literatures and cultures is becoming increasingly positioned "as a comparative and relational project" (Salhi 2003, xi) that, by building thematic bridges between Francophone literatures and other literatures—Hispanic, Lusophone, or Anglophone—can ultimately foster, in Jean-Marc Moura's words, "a postcolonial, indeed global vision within which 'Literatures of the Southern Hemisphere' would be seen to constitute a multilingual space based on shared historical rather than purely linguistic considerations" (2010, 34).

Various leading Anglophone theorists of comparative literature and world literature such as Haun Saussy, David Damrosch, Emily Apter, Paul Jay, Franco Moretti, and Simon Gikandi (among many others) have long questioned nationalistic approaches to literature in general and the traditional hegemony of so-called "English" literature in particular in the field of Anglophone literatures. Commenting in a 2001 article on the prolific development of diasporic English literatures, Paul Jay,

for instance, stresses the spurious ambiguity of “English” and remarks on the “need to find a way to accommodate the transnational and postnational perspectives of globalization studies in our programs and curricula without subordinating the heterogeneous literatures we deal with to outdated critical paradigms” (2011, 108). Such early questioning among literary theorists based in Anglo-American academia can be seen as a further explanation for the success of Francophone studies in an intellectual environment that was already open to challenging the entrenched boundaries of national literatures.

The distrust expounded by many writers toward the ideological legacy of Francophonie thus undergirds the transnational paradoxes that have marked the academic institutionalization of Francophone studies. Rather than being simply inspired by an ingrained distrust toward postcolonial studies, however, the proponents of *littérature-monde* might be seen, in the light of Eric Prieto’s analysis, as being better aligned with Glissant’s “post-postcolonial” thinking because of their endeavor to reimagine literature from a global and even universal vantage point while being simultaneously attuned to the specificities and even inequalities of local situations and conditions.<sup>18</sup> As Prieto notes, “Just as the manifesto’s author [Michel Le Bris] argues for the need to leave behind the limiting emphasis on French exceptionalism in order to embrace the more inclusive category of world literature, Glissant has left behind his former regionalist, anticolonial stance . . . in a way that allows him to meet the authors of the manifesto on this more international, cosmopolitan, cooperative—and thus *post-postcolonial*—conceptual terrain. In both cases there is a movement away from an oppositional particularism and toward a neutral forum in which free exchange is fostered” (2010, 114; emphasis in original). Rather than simply shunning postcolonial studies, the signatories of the manifesto and contributors to the collective volume might therefore find themselves more at home in Glissant’s fluid and multidimensional “post-postcolonial” *Tout-monde* than in a postcolonial Francophonie.



### A Short History: Francophonie in the Vortex

Besides laying bare the political basis of Francophonie—presented in the manifesto as “the last avatar of colonialism” (Barbery et al. 2010, 116)—and dismantling what they see as one of the last bastions of neocolonial Francocentricism, the proponents of *littérature-monde* have been keen to expose its many structural and ideological ambiguities. In particular, they highlight the contrived tension, at the heart of Francophonie’s history, between the centralizing linguistic oneness that constitutes its *carte d’identité* and the global diversity that it purports to champion. This tension between sameness and difference is perfectly, albeit uncritically, summarized on the official website of the OIF, which presents itself as the—paradoxically one and singular—“voice of diversity.”<sup>19</sup> Charles Forsdick highlights a similar tension by pointedly describing the relationship between the “French” and the “Francophone” as an “oxymoronic pairing” loaded with concealed ideological biases. The conjunction “and” in this pairing, Forsdick remarks, is deeply ambiguous in that it functions either as a “conjunctive” or a “disjunctive” marker that either links or separates the “metropolitan” and the “non-metropolitan” (2011, 96).

In an essay featured in *Pour une littérature-monde*, Tahar Ben Jelloun further stigmatizes the “ambiguous matriarchy” in the heart of Francophonie, which allows writers from “elsewhere” a certain amount of difference while keeping them under tight control (2007, 117). For Ben Jelloun, this ambiguous allegiance expected from Francophone writers is symbolized by the “family pictures” of African leaders neatly grouped around the French president. In the *Figaro* article where Sarkozy comes to the rescue of Francophonie, his concomitant effort to define French national identity underscores the tensions inherent in Francophonie as both an institution promoting “cultural diversity” (Diouf 2007, 24) and a Trojan horse for French hegemony. Indeed Sarkozy’s celebration of a “lively and popular Francophonie” is couched in a nationalist rhetoric that stresses the “intact prestige” of French,

which, he states, he has witnessed during his travels abroad, and of what he calls the “influence [*rayonnement*] of our country” (Sarkozy 2007).

This implosive paradox or tension between unity and diversity, illustrated by Sarkozy’s combined defense of French national identity and Francophonie, harks back to the historical advent of Francophonie. As the story goes, the term “Francophonie” was used for the first time by the French geographer Onésime Reclus in his book *France, Algérie et colonies* (1880) to designate the growing number of French-speaking people around the world as a positive result of French colonization. During the suns of independence era of the 1960s and early 1970s, French presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou joined leaders of newly independent African nations such as Léopold Sédar Senghor and Habib Bourguiba in their call for an “idealistic community linked together by a common language (French), and a shared culture based on the republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity” (Majumdar 2003, 1). Senghor famously extolled Francophonie as “this *integral Humanism*, which weaves itself around the earth: this *symbiosis* of the ‘dormant energies’ from all the continents, all the races, awakening to their complementary warmth” (1964, 363; emphasis in original). Senghor’s celebration of French as a “Sun shining outside metropolitan France [*l’Hexagone*],” as a precise and nuanced “language of culture” that expresses French “humanism,” “morality,” and “universal character” (1964, 358–63) echoes Antoine de Rivarol’s equally well-known eulogy of French, its “incorruptible” syntax and “admirable clarity,” in his *Discours sur l’universalité de la langue française* (1783), as well as l’Abbé Grégoire’s celebration of French as a privileged means of expression for foreign authors, including African writers (1808).<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1970s, however, the promoters of Francophonie have defended it increasingly as a champion of cultural and linguistic pluralism in a world threatened by the globalization of American media culture.<sup>21</sup> “Paradoxically,” Peter Brown notes, “the Secretary General of the oif, Abdou Diouf, claims to accommodate, even welcome, in the name of ‘ouverture’ and ‘diversité culturelle,’ the fact that only about

half the member countries are French-speaking in any real sense" (P. Brown 2011, 29). Current defenders of a renovated, modernized Francophonie, such as Michel Guillou and Dominique Wolton, call for the development of a new or "third" Francophonie that "stands for dialogue and globalized exchanges within the French-speaking geocultural unity" (Guillou 2008). While some champions of the Francophone project support such a "third" Francophonie, Francophonie can be seen as occupying an originary "third space" that is constitutive of its very essence, a nebulous netherworld between unity and diversity, sameness and difference. Drawing from Michel Serres's *Tiers-instruit*, Mireille Rosello notes that the attempt "to formulate a theoretical and historical model of 'Francophone studies' . . . always ends up in what Michel Serres calls the 'third' space, the middle of the river, the vortex that any migrant discovers after leaving the native land and before reaching the shore. The idea of 'Francophone studies' is not the name of a new border but a turbulence that creates distance between different pedagogical territories" (2003b, 125). Significantly in 2003 Rosello described Francophone studies as a "performative statement" whose usefulness could become questionable within the following decade (2003b, 124).

Other scholars underscore the performative and discursive value of Francophonie by pointing to its slippery and phantasmagoric semantics. In an article ominously titled "The Discursive Constitution of a World-Spanning Region and the Role of Empty Signifiers: The Case of Francophonía" and after expounding a lexical and narrative analysis of texts produced by Francophone organizations and summits and of French presidential speeches and articles published in *Le Monde*, Georg Glasze concludes that the geopolitical notion of "Francophonía" is constructed around changing signifiers, myths, and topoi that ultimately aim to "reproduce ideas of a superiority of French language and culture" (2007, 675).<sup>22</sup> In a similar vein, Matthias Middell looks at the discursive constitution of "Francophonía" as a diffuse "world region" rather than a "territorial totality": "This variety of states and

regions scattered over several continents, whose sociolinguistic status is not amenable to easy homogenisation, is held together by a kind of cipher for a transnational community. But this semantic coding tells us nothing about what francophonie is and why the concept is used. Nonetheless, we do have some clear indication here of a discursive reality and its authors” (2003, 207). The oxymoronic nature of the expression “discursive reality” highlights here yet once again the fragile, slippery, or even deconstructive foundations of Francophonie as a geopolitical and even linguistic entity.

The institutional dimension of Francophonie also appears to be marred by various ambiguities. The importance of the OIF, whose overall structure has been compared to that of the United Nations, should not be underestimated.<sup>23</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who served as the UN secretary-general from 1992 to 1996, also served as the first secretary-general of the OIF from 1998 to 2002. However, it is precisely because of its dubious sociopolitical agenda and lack of engagement with issues of power and oppression that various writers contend with Francophonie as a transnational organization. Other international organizations, such as the United Nations or the IMF, have been held under similar suspicion because of their bureaucratic heaviness; their ethical blindness; their lack of neutrality; their failure to engage effectively and lastingly with human rights; the discrepancy between their global “aura” and claims, on the one hand, and their practical effectiveness on the other hand; and, despite their commitment to developing bilateral agreements between northern and southern countries, their limited impact on global economic development (Blustein 2003; Power 2008).<sup>24</sup>

Significantly Peter Brown notes that during the Francophone summit held in Moncton, Canada, in 1999, “Amnesty International was publicly critical of the human rights records of more than thirty of the fifty-two francophone countries represented, and the Canadian press lambasted the Chrétien government for laying down the red carpet to a number of ‘criminals’” (P. Brown 2011, 25). Although the Moncton

summit was followed in 2000 by the Bamako Declaration, which “provided an institutional framework for consideration by the oif of issues of democracy, rights and liberties in the *espace francophone*” (P. Brown 2011, 26), an editorial published in 2002, entitled “Freedom Francophonies” and subtitled “The world organization of French-speaking nations cannot be taken seriously as long as its members [are] silent about press freedom,” further denounced the fact that the Francophone summit held in Beirut in 2002 “began by banning a journalist from its proceedings and ended by agreeing to meet next time in a nation [Burkina Faso] where the president’s brother is the chief suspect in the murder of a newspaper publisher” (“Freedom Francophonies” 2002, 9). During the following years the oif became more active in sanctioning and even suspending the membership of countries in which human rights violations had been recorded, based especially on the reports produced by an Observatoire des Droits Humains that it established (P. Brown 2011, 26). Nevertheless, one can wonder to what extent an organization like the oif, which lumps together former colonizing and colonized nations within one loosely defined and even more loosely problematized linguistic and cultural network, serves an elitist Francophonie, which, like other transnational organizations, is “micromanaging” from its governmental and institutional headquarters (Power 2008, 519). To use the title of the book *Transnationalism from Below*, edited by Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998), such a “Francophonie from above” stands in opposition to a “Francophonie from below,” which would be based on what Smith calls “transnational grassroots politics” (1994, 15).<sup>25</sup>

Hence many scholars agree on the impossibility of summoning up a concise definition of Francophonie as a hybrid and polymorphous concept that needs to be viewed from multiple and partial angles—linguistic, institutional, cultural, literary, and geopolitical. Francophonie and Francophone literature are, in fact, far from carrying the same meaning or definition everywhere. In universities in Quebec, for example, French Canadian literature is not defined as

“Francophone” literature but rather as, mostly, Québécois literature. Amadou Koné also notes that “In Africa, Francophonie refers more to a political entity than to literature” (2003, 69). Robert Chaudenson ironically recalls the way Alain Decaux summarized his experience as the “minister of Francophonie” at the 1995 Francophone summit: “I was the minister of Francophonie for three years. The first year, I tried to understand; I continued the second year. The third year, I left my department without having fully understood” (quoted in Chaudenson 1995, 39). Although Dominique Wolton advocates the contemporary multicultural virtues of a “third Francophonie,” his own definition of Francophonie as “a *constructivist paradigm*, tied to a normative horizon” (2006, 78; emphasis in original) betrays the uncertainty of its actual reality. For Robert Jouanny the shifting dimensions of Francophonie—or, to use Rosello’s term quoted above, the “turbulence” that it creates—is in fact constitutive of its elusive nature: the “Francophone literary space,” he writes, is “a moving space which is difficult to capture, subjected to laws and conditions of constant evolution . . . a relative space, simultaneously ideological, aesthetic, and linguistic” (2000, 7). Because of its vague structure Francophonie has often been perceived as a hodgepodge, an *auberge espagnole*, or, to use the term that Charles de Gaulle once applied to the UN, a curious “*machin*.” Finally, Francophonie has suffered not only from abstruse definitions; “*désamour*”; indifference from the French population, media, and researchers; and now plain rejection from the littérature-monde apologists, but also from frequent mockery toward its “francophoney” aspects.<sup>26</sup>

Instead of striving to contain this untenable tension between sameness and otherness, unity and diversity, within a seemingly coherent literary and scholarly field, the proponents of littérature-monde celebrate the explosion of unity into unbridled multiplicity, the “creative effervescence” of many voices—in contrast to “the voice of diversity” advertised on the website of the OIF—and the ever-growing development of a “constellation” or “a vast polyphonic ensemble, without concern

for any battle for or against the preeminence of one language over the other” (Barbery et al. 2010, 116). They position themselves squarely in the vortex and tap into the “Third Space of enunciation,” described by Homi Bhabha as “the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference” because its exploration allows us to “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (1994, 38–39). Rather than shoring themselves against the turbulence of the vortex described by Rosello, they revel in the middle of rivers and oceans and show that the long overdue recognition of “écrivains d’outre-France” (Barbery et al. 2007), marked notably by the increasing number of literary prizes awarded to them, is not simply, to use the terms of the manifesto, “a random detour before the channel returns to the riverbed” (Barbery et al. 2010, 113) but, rather, an irrepressible tidal wave.

### The Francophone *Différance*

The tension between unity and difference that has marked the development of Francophonie is also reflected in the linguistic agenda that subtends Francophone literature. While the manifesto “Pour une ‘littérature-monde’ en français” (“Toward a ‘World Literature’ in French”) similarly stems from the premise that a language, French, can constitute the basis for a transnational literary community, many of the writers who support littérature-monde emphasize the need to liberate themselves from the centralizing thrust of French (fostered notably by the Académie Française through its attempted control over what should and should not become part of the French language) in order to unveil the linguistic *différance* embedded in the Francophone project. Interestingly the title of the collective volume published after the manifesto was shortened to *Pour une littérature-monde*, as if its editors and/or authors wanted to question even more explicitly the linguistic unity implied by “en français.” While the rhetoric of the manifesto is already suffused with images of liberation from the “chains” of certain linguistic, cultural, and literary discourses (Barbery et al.

2010, 114, 116), many of the writers featured in the collective volume further comment on their tense relation with a language, French, that encapsulates the centralizing and assimilationist heritage of the “one and indivisible” French Republic, whose official language carries the universal values of the 1789 revolution and was used to create an allegedly civilized colonial empire.<sup>27</sup>

Discourses, in their Foucauldian and Althusserian acceptation, are sites of power and disciplinary containment. Although Francophone writers have long rebelled against any kind of linguistic homogeneity and experimented with multiple stylistic and even terminological variations inspired by the multiplicity of their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds—Ahamadou Kourouma’s *Les soleils des indépendances* (1970), for example, has often been studied in this light—Francophonie can still be viewed as a site of such institutional and discursive control because the French language, which anchors the entire Francophone project, has been historically wedded to power. From the foundation of the Académie Française in 1635 to the creation of the OIF in 1970, French became instituted as a strictly regulated signifier of national identity.<sup>28</sup> Cerquiglini thus points out the progressive imposition of French, from the sixteenth century onward, as a centralizing language of political power that also undergirds the Francophone project:

In France, the wedding of language and power is ancient; this is shown by the founding myths of the *Serments de Strasbourg*, of *francien* (the assumed dialect of the Île-de-France that became the royal language), and the edict of Villers-Cotterêts (1539), seen as the progressive constitution of a state language. Francophonie is merely the extension to the world, during the twentieth century, of this ability to produce politics. French then possesses a stable and normalized base. Since the seventeenth century, the grammatical work has gone swiftly; its main object was syntactical accuracy, monumentalization on the model of Latin. . . .

Afterward, the specificity of French lies in its being both a



*language* and a *logos*. Both were constructed under the sign of unity: it is indeed this *monologism* which, specifically, founds Francophonie. (2006, 36–37; emphasis in original)<sup>29</sup>

Paradoxically French was initially defended as a living language, the language of the people, by opposition to the elitist use of Latin. In his manifesto *Défense et illustration de la langue française*, published in 1549, Joachim Du Bellay advocates the use of a language, French, considered to be barbaric by Latin users. As a spokesperson for the various poets who will form the Pléiade, Du Bellay argues that French is a fluid, flexible, and rejuvenated language that can incorporate new words (Hue 2006, 3).

It was therefore to be expected that the debate on French national identity, or “Frenchness,” launched in November 2009 by the Sarkozy government and Éric Besson, his minister of Immigration and National Identity, would include questions on the French language itself. As noted by Bruce Crumley, “The discussions are to take place during hundreds of locally organized town-hall meetings involving education, union and cultural officials and ordinary people concerned about the state of French identity. Among the questions Besson has suggested for the debates: Should France implement ‘integration contracts,’ which would set minimal levels of language and cultural knowledge for citizenship” (2009). As an example of the persistent attachment to a tightly controlled, policed (or polished) type of French, Alain Bentolila, a linguistics professor in Paris, argued in 2009 in *Le Monde* that “linguistic power,” or the ability to speak French well, should be equally distributed throughout France to prevent social fragmentation and “*communautarismes*” (the formation of exclusive or sectarian communities). A debate on national identity, he claimed, required such commitment to a stable, democratic use of good French across the French territory. Although Bentolila stated that “it is not about defending here the immutable beauty of the French language,” he concluded that “To be capable of vigilance and resistance against all

perverted uses of the language, to be prepared to impose one's own discourses and texts in agreement with one's free thinking, constitute the foundations of our national identity and make us citizens of a secular and fraternal republic" (2009). While asserting that this "linguistic power" allowed every "citizen" to express himself or herself freely, Bentolila placed himself in the long tradition of conservative French scholars and politicians who defend French linguistic unity and purity as a necessary cornerstone of national identity.

Francophone literature developed against the artificial homogeneity or monolingualism of French literature and in an attempt to bring forth its constitutive heterogeneity or plurilingualism.<sup>30</sup> Maryse Condé, for example, provocatively (re)claims French as her own language—a language that she entirely appropriates for her personal use and literary purposes—and ironically concludes that her unwillingness to share "her" language might preclude her from being a "true" Francophone writer: "I don't want to share French with anybody. It was forged for me only. For my personal pleasure. . . . I don't care about the way it has been used by others, strangers of whom I don't want to know anything, whether their name is Marcel Proust or Léopold Sédar Senghor! I might therefore not be a true Francophone writer" (2007a, 215). As Condé's irreverent stance indicates, French often becomes a space of interrogation and experimentation for French-speaking authors who tend to operate, to use Beïda Chikhi and Marc Quaghebeur's terms, between "filiation" and "dissidence" (2006). Interestingly many of the novels I examine here focus on issues of representation, language, or translation by featuring characters and narrators who are writers and artists. Through their literary *mise en abyme* of the topos of writing as a space of self-exploration, these writers question both language and identity as topographic formations fraught with differences.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the development of Francophone studies has allowed the slow decentering of French as a hegemonic and centralizing language by reintroducing both history and space into the study of French literature. According to Farid Laroussi and Christopher

Miller, the temporal model to which students and scholars of French literature had become used—that is, the division of French literature into centuries—became challenged in the 1980s and '90s by the “spatial model” (2003, 1), which accompanied the emerging study of Francophone literature. Hence in an essay featured in *Pour une littérature-monde*, the Djiboutian-born writer Abdourahman Waberi describes French literature as a limited and tightly circumscribed space within a vast French-speaking archipelago: “We must highlight the fact that literature from France is only an islet that buzzes, drones [*psalmodie*], and creates in the middle of a French language archipelago” (2007, 72).

However, many French-speaking writers’ rejection of the Francophone label now points not only to the persistent ideological ambiguities underlying Francophonie but also to the potentially repressive nature of a discourse that has institutionalized itself to the point where it can be seen as reinstating a form of exclusive control and censorious regulation. For Rosello, while Francophone studies have typically been “the province of pioneers and dissidents,” Francophone studies practitioners may now be perceived as increasingly “dominant” rather than “oppositional” within the academic system and maybe even as clinging “to the illusion of disempowerment” (2003b, 128).<sup>32</sup> In many ways the very development of Francophone studies can be seen as having reinforced rather than decentered the canon, while in the process also safely containing Francophone literatures within a separate and “other” space. As some critics have shown, the inclusion of Francophone texts and topics has had an economic purpose in U.S. academia, “helping to curb dwindling enrollments in French through its varying cultural and geopolitical foci” (Donadey and Murdoch 2005, 3). Similarly scholarly works now often feature titles indicating the study of a specific topic (violence, the family, sex, etc.) “in French and Francophone literature” for the purpose of widening their audience and marketability rather than necessarily to interrogate the relations between the “French” and “Francophone”

corpus. While Francophone literature can otherwise be an endless source of tortured questioning for its theorists and authors, it is simply and unquestioningly added here, thereby signaling a paradoxical form of subtraction or displacement that continuously postpones a critical examination of the complex relation between “French” and “Francophone.”<sup>33</sup>

Réda Bensmaïa argues that during the 1980s the ignorance or indifference toward Francophone literature was predicated, as he puts it, drawing on both Heidegger and Derrida, on a “crossing-out,” a “scotomization process,” an “interdict” or “black out” based on a repressive “language of the Law” (2003, 19–20). One can wonder to what extent the field of Francophone studies has now become predicated on a similar “crossing-out” of what does not fit into its own predetermined categories. Various critics’ call to introduce postcolonial studies into Francophone studies has thus been partly motivated by the need to undermine the problematic reinscription of the French/Francophone dichotomy. As David Murphy notes in his defense of postcolonial Francophone studies, “For too long, Francophone studies has been seen as a supplement to traditional French courses, bearing little relation to French studies, rather than as a questioning of our understanding of what the object and parameters of French studies should be. I believe that the process of decentering French studies is both necessary and urgent, and the development of a postcolonial theory of Francophone studies is central to this task” (2002, 185).

French-speaking writers’ rejection of “Francophone literature” in favor of a “world literature in French” further allows the implosion of this center-periphery dichotomy. *Pour une littérature-monde* is exemplary in its globally inclusive representation of French-speaking writers from France, various European countries, and French-speaking countries and regions around the world. While French writers had traditionally not been qualified as Francophone writers and, as Anna Moï suggests, “white” French-speaking writers have often been seamlessly incorporated into the canon of French literature, such a new

configuration points to the entire field of literature written in French as a field of ricocheting differences. In other words, all French literature has always been Francophone, and Francophone literature is consequently always already French. By studying one chapter of Rabelais's *Pantagruel* in the light of Naomi Schor's critical attention to the "alienating powers of literature," (2003, 166), Tom Conley demonstrates the Francophone "latency" of French canonical texts based on what he calls the "fabulous alterities of canonical writings" (2003, 173, 176). Looking at the sense of estrangement felt by Rabelais's chronicler/narrator in a French region that throws the world upside down, thus "exoticizing" regional France in the 1530s, when the "new world" had just been explored, Conley remarks that "when a literary object is scrutinized in detail, its own virtues pertain to geographies of difference. Literature that does not qualify to be either French or Francophone" (2003, 168–69).

In her brilliant endeavor to "theorize Francophonie," Emily Apter further demonstrates that the other, the "border," as Derrida shows, is inscribed inside the French language itself, thereby generating unending "geographies of difference" (Conley) and severing all organic connections between French and France: "Contrary to what one might expect, the prosthetic 'other' in Derrida's title 'monolingualism of the other' is not polyglottism, but an aporia within ipseity, an estrangement in language as such. For Derrida, untranslatability is the universal predicate of language names. So how might Derrida's aporia deconstruct the nationalist nominalism of language names? By locating an always-prior other within monolingual diction, the aporia loosens the national anchor from the language name, wedging a politics of the subject between the name of a nation and the name of a language" (2005, 302). In the same vein several of the writers featured in *Pour une littérature-monde* emphasize the "othering" process that necessarily accompanies writing, regardless of the writer's national or ethnic origins. For Anna Moï writing is the very space of the "universal stranger," and "[we] always write in a foreign language,

even if it is in our native language” (2006, 17, 33). As for Nimrod, the “quest for the other . . . is the goal of all literary activity worthy of this name”; in addition, he stresses the heterolingual or plurilingual nature of all literature in French by stating that writers have always had to reinvent another language in order to fulfill their particular creative agendas: “The revolution performed by French literature can be measured by the fact that, from Chrétien de Troyes to Rabelais, and from Corneille to Queneau, it has always been necessary to invent a new language” (2007, 226, 231).

As several critics have pointed out by commenting on the manifesto’s shortcomings and sweeping generalizations, *littérature-monde* itself, seen as both a literary and theoretical project—albeit loosely defined—runs the risk of reforming into a seamless discourse that, after staging a coup against Francophonie and proclaiming its iconoclastic libertarianism, could become reinstitutionalized into a (new) field of studies. In an effort to counter any potential unification or reduction of their creative purposes, the writers featured in *Pour une littérature-monde* therefore repeatedly insist on the importance of plurality and openness. Rather than calling for a *littérature-monde*, Lyonel Trouillot, for instance, believes in an “*écriture-monde*” that will be shaped by “*littératures-mondes*.” “The plural,” he states, “seems essential to me” (2007b, 201). Likewise, Fabienne Kanor dreams of “original languages in order to express worlds” (2007, 241). As for Gary Victor, he opens his essay by claiming, “I don’t know what a *littérature-monde* is” (2007, 315) and warns against restrictive national or ideological labels that prevent literature from breathing and thriving freely.

### Francophonie Reviewed and Recycled

Despite the flurry of debates, conferences, and publications that *littérature-monde* has spurred since its official coining in the 2007 manifesto, the future viability of the term will need to be assessed. Although new books and collections of essays now appear to be en-

dorsing this term at the expense of Francophonie, it remains to be seen whether littérature-monde is merely a passing terminological fad or whether it has truly displaced Francophonie.<sup>34</sup> For Jean-Marc Moura, “The Manifesto represents the desire for a ‘post-Francophonie,’ in essence a generalized Francophone world where France would become a French-speaking nation amongst others” (2010, 29); while it is true that the proponents of littérature-monde rebel against the binary view of the world that Francophone studies have promoted by separating French and Francophone literatures, the advent of such a “post-Francophone” era might be more wishful thinking than reality. Responding to the summary question that she poses in the title of her essay “*Francophonie: Trash or Recycle?*,” Lydie Moudileno decidedly opts for the second alternative and concludes that “the battle for the legitimacy of Francophone studies in the Anglo-Saxon and French worlds is not over” (2010, 123).

Moreover, the Francophone umbrella covers an intricate nexus of institutions, academic fields, and linguistic and cultural practices that, while appearing to be constantly shoring themselves against the transnational hegemony of English, are far from being on the brink of collapse.<sup>35</sup> As I have stated, many critics stress the continuing significance and relevance of Francophonie as a literary, linguistic, institutional, and even geopolitical concept. For Matthias Middell, for example, “francophonía” as “a world region” constituted by a network of “diffused territories” is a pertinent global concept insofar as it highlights “rapidly changing social constellations, along with hybrid identifications in the postcolonial context and the decentering of the attributions of meaning” (2003, 207, 219).<sup>36</sup> Rather than calling to replace one terminology by another, the signatories of the manifesto point out the dubious ideological underpinnings of Francophonie in order to bring it into critical scrutiny and, as illustrated by the vigorous debates they have generated, to trigger a salutary reexamination of the coherence and legitimacy of Francophone studies. For Michel Le Bris it is “a certain idea of Francophonie” rather than the entire

notion of Francophonie that has lost its *raison d'être*. According to him, the increasing number of literary prizes attributed to so-called Francophone writers signals “the toppling over of an era” and “the death certificate for a certain idea of Francophonie perceived as a space on which France would bestow its lights to the benefit, one has to assume, of masses still engulfed in darkness. The end of this Francophonie, and the emergence of a world literature in French” (2007, 24). In his defensive response to the manifesto, Abdou Diouf points out “the determining part played by Francophonie in peace and reconstruction efforts” on the African continent (2007); responding in turn to Diouf, Alain Mabanckou denies the notion that the manifesto constitutes a “crusade” against the Francophone institution and acknowledges the oif’s commendable efforts to promote cultural exchanges as well as both linguistic solidarity and diversity, although he, like Le Bris, ultimately condemns the underlying neocolonial agenda of Francophonie (Claire 2007).

As noted above, various scholars’ and critics’ attempts to reformulate Francophone studies through terminological variations might reflect their need or desire to rescue, protect, or bolster the institutional foundations of Francophone studies; however, such terminological experimentations also signal the vitality of a discipline that periodically finds itself at hermeneutic and scholarly crossroads while moving toward increasingly open self-definitions. As Françoise Lionnet points out by proposing the term “*francophonies*,” insisting on the geographically and historically polyphonic nature of literatures in French allows for a more fruitful dialogue with the transnational notion of “world literature” (2009, 210). Jacqueline Dutton similarly stresses the necessary plurality of Francophonie by suggesting that its survival lies in its “futures,” which she sketches out as being “utopian,” “digital,” and “plurivocal” (2011, 2–3). As another example, Marjut Johansson and Fred Dervin contrast what they call a “*francophonie liquide*” (promoting a plural and locally contextualized view of French as a lingua franca) with a “*francophonie solide*” (the “imagined” Francophone community



presented in official texts and institutions):

On the one hand, we have delimited what we call *francophonie solide*, which corresponds to Francophonie as it is presented in official texts, representations, and institutions. We analyzed it as a community imagined in the sense of Anderson's definition . . . ; this community relies on certain recurrent preestablished discourses and has been produced and reproduced in the course of history. We went from this view of *francophonie solide* to multiple and situational contexts for the use of French. We delimited Francophone Circles—the first one being that of countries of speakers for whom French is, for the majority of them, their maternal tongue, the second one that of countries where speakers must resort to French on a regular basis. In our opinion, the third circle, which in the Anglophone world is that of English as an expanding world lingua franca, designates situational contexts for the use of French as a lingua franca. We characterized it as *francophonie liquide*. (2009, 399)

Interestingly for Johansson and Dervin this “*francophonie liquide*” corresponds to a “third space” of both specific and fluid Francophone practices, reminiscent in some ways of the “third Francophonie” advocated by Guillou and Wolton in the context of globalization and multiculturalism; of Rosello's use of the image of the “vortex,” situated in the turbulent middle of the river, to describe Francophone studies; and of Bhabha's “Third Space of enunciation,” on which I commented above.

As Simona Livescu points out, the commitment shown by several French-speaking writers to various social and political issues further paves the way for a possible reconceptualization of Francophonie in relation to human rights literature: “The personal and professional paths of Francophone and French-Francophone North African, Cuban, Latin-American and Eastern European writers in Paris intersect significantly. As part of the same literary juries or the same human rights

associations and organizations, more or less ‘peripheral’ writers like Abdellatif Laâbi, Eduardo Manet, Eugène Ionesco, Milan Kundera, or Dumitru Tsépeneag interact in the centre, creating a [*sic*] fluid and mostly unacknowledged (sometimes formal, sometimes informal) networks testifying to social suffering across the globe” (2009, 359). “World writers in French” undoubtedly share both a passion for the aesthetic freedom of their literary craft and an acute awareness of the world in which they evolve and create. Their lack of ideological agenda, their openness to an ever-changing and expanding world, and their commitment to writing as an activity that resists authoritarian pressures enable them to engage with sociopolitical issues and human rights, as illustrated, for instance, by the recurrence, in contemporary Francophone African literature, of themes related to the issues of political corruption and abuses, ethnic and genocidal violence, or the phenomenon of child soldiers (Thomas 2011, 143).

The Étonnants Voyageurs festival, which has become a showcase for littérature-monde, can be seen as a significant platform for a grassroots kind of Francophonie, a “*francophonie liquide*” mindful of local contexts and concrete sociocultural issues. This itinerant festival, which has traveled to other countries such as Mali and Haiti, draws increasingly wide participation from people interested in meeting writers and filmmakers from all over the world. Significantly the motto of Michel Le Bris, creator and director of this festival, is “To open French literature to all the winds of the world” (Peras 2009).<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the edition of the festival that was supposed to take place in January 2010 in Haiti but was canceled because of the earthquake (the events were then rescheduled for the May 2010 festival in Saint-Malo, France), the intended co-president of the festival, Lyonel Trouillot, emphasized its democratic goals by highlighting writers’ projected meetings with schoolchildren in various cities, as well as their participation in roundtables and *cafés littéraires*, which would be “free and open to the public.” “To all publics,” added Trouillot: “If literature is one of the highest forms of individual expression, it also needs to bring people

together” (2010b).

Such back-and-forth movement between individual expression and collective identification, between a lucid commitment to the realities of the world and the uncompromising assertion of their creative freedom ultimately fosters a flexible connection among “world writers in French.” As I have indicated, several contributors to *Pour une littérature-monde* do not explicitly endorse this new terminology and state their defiance toward confining labels and categories. In fact, all the writers I study here have expressed their reluctance to being called “Francophone” writers, but only two of them, Maryse Condé and Lyonel Trouillot, are among the manifesto’s signatories and have contributed a piece to the collective volume. For the writers of *littérature-monde*, literature is an ambivalent enterprise that, as Le Bris states, unfolds between the text and the world, in the hyphen that both keeps them apart and connects them inseparably: “I have often been asked to ‘define’ this word. But it is quite simple: two words, ‘*littérature*’ and ‘*monde*,’ with, between them, a hyphen. To be invented by each writer, since this hyphen is the very space of the work” (2009). In other words, the rejection of preestablished definitions by many contemporary French-speaking writers and their simultaneous celebration of a literature that is both one and plural, universal and particular, do not conceal a deep-seated wish to take flight into poetic transcendence but, on the contrary, express their desire to face the world in all its complex beauty and injustice. Proclaiming, in the terms of the manifesto, that the task of writers and artists is to give “a voice and a visage to the global unknown—and to the unknown in us” (Barbery et al. 2010, 116) does not necessarily lead to a mystical crusade or a retrograde profession of faith but rather points to the writer’s responsibility to account for the unbounded complexity of the world and to the critic’s duty to probe equally complex relations between a text and the world that it purports to express, imagine, or (re)create.

The texts on which I focus exemplify their authors’ conviction that it is precisely within textual spaces that important negotiations

with aesthetics, politics, and ethics take place. Rather than analyzing these texts as straightforward instantiations of the littérature-monde project—which, as I have hoped to demonstrate, should rather be seen as an anti-project—I argue that they illustrate some of the key issues brought forth by the current debates on Francophonie and littérature-monde. By reclaiming their radical autonomy as writers who cannot be pinned to a specific locale, the writers I selected are producing a holistic literature, both universalistic and humanistic, that is focused simultaneously on human rights and stylistic experimentation, gender issues and linguistic research, poetics and the economy. They creatively tackle the various questions that have been at the heart of the literary and theoretical debates I have sketched here, both exploring and challenging the multilayered relations between the “self” and the “other,” the “center” and the “periphery,” cultural definitions and transnational experiences, universal outlook and local commitment, humanistic thinking and differences, language and representation.

The first chapter of my book, “Writing as Mimicry: Tierno Monénembo’s Colonial Avatar,” focuses on *The King of Kahel* to examine how Guinean-born Monénembo challenges traditional dichotomies between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery, “French” and “Francophone” identities, “us” and “them.” Winner of the 2008 French literary Prix Renaudot, *The King of Kahel* is a fictionalized biography of the French explorer Olivier de Sanderval, who, in the early 1880s, set off to conquer the Fula region of Fouta Djallon (in modern Guinea). Rather than opposing the silence of colonized people to the rise of vibrant, anti-colonial voices during the independence and postcolonial period, Monénembo focuses on Africans’ own perceptions of the eccentric and barbaric European “other” during the colonial era. My second chapter, “Writing as Desire: Nina Bouraoui and Hélène Cixous,” draws on Jacques Derrida’s essay *Monolingualism of the Other* to argue that in Bouraoui’s *Tomboy* and Cixous’ *Reveries of the Wild Woman*—both published in French in 2000—Bouraoui and Cixous

use writing to probe their hybrid identity and uncanny sense of alienation against the historical backdrop of the torn relationship between France and Algeria. Rather than positing a lost identity that needs to be restored, both writers' introspective search unfolds through the process of writing itself.

My third chapter, "Writing as Otherness: Marie NDiaye's Inalterable Humanity," looks at how, in her work, NDiaye explores the production of social, cultural, and racial marginalization while asserting her radical freedom as a writer. By emphasizing the arbitrariness of norms and conventions, NDiaye points not only at her own liminal status in the exclusive Parisian literary world that awarded her the 2009 Prix Goncourt, but also at the forced institution of the Francophone "other" on the basis of his or her cultural and ethnic origins. Chapter 4, "Writing as Explosion: Maryse Condé's Transnational Textual Bodies," argues that Condé probes the creative ethos of her characters—many of them artists and writers—in order to highlight the ambiguous relationship between text and readers. Her novel *Les belles ténébreuses* (2008), in particular, illustrates Condé's persistent engagement with issues of political oppression and racial discrimination, as well as her relentless claim for aesthetic irreverence. Chapter 5, "Writing as Remembering: Lyonel Trouillot on Love and Haiti," focuses on *L'amour avant que j'oublie* (2007a) to argue that Trouillot, who has been an active contributor to the various debates and events surrounding littérature-monde, further explores the relations between aesthetics and politics, poetry and action, artistic autonomy and social commitment. Thus Trouillot's work exemplifies many French-speaking writers' views of literary creation as a space of both intimate expression and civic responsibility, a space in which literature and the world are inextricably intertwined.