

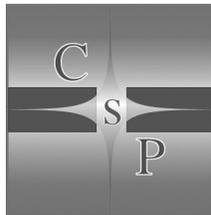
AfroEurope@ns



Afroeuropa@ns:  
Cultures and Identities

Edited by

Marta Sofía López



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

AfroEurope@ns: Cultures and Identities, Edited by Marta Sofia López

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*To my Afroeuropean nephew and niece, Pascual and Lia Ndongo.*



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# INTRODUCTION

MARTA SOFÍA LÓPEZ

## 1. “AfroEuropeans”: the genesis of a project

The publication of the present collection of essays, together with the creation of a web page (<http://www.afroeuropa.eu>) and an e-journal (<http://journal.afroeuropa.eu>) are some of the most visible results achieved till now by the international research group “Afroeuropa@: Culturas e Identidades Negras en Europa,” coordinated from the University of León, Spain, and financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education. The fact that Spanish academic institutions are receiving governmental funding to deal with topics such as the black presence in Europe, migration and interculturality is no doubt related to the perceived social relevance of these issues to our country and the need to tackle with them by taking advantage of the experience of other European countries which have been facing the phenomenon of immigration for much longer than Spain, traditionally a country of emigrants.

The supposedly “massive” arrival of African immigrants in Spain in the last decades has set off all sorts of alarms in the country, and informations about *cayucos* reaching the coasts of the Canary Islands or mainland Spain are recurring headlines in the news. Significantly enough, however, and according to official statistics, the number of African (legal) immigrants currently living in Spain is almost irrelevant if compared to that of other Europeans or Latin Americans. If we discount immigrants from Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, who are not generally perceived as African or “black,” the total number of individuals of Sub-Saharan origin with a certificate of registration or a residence card in the country does not reach 125,000 people, an insignificant number if compared to the total of just over four million immigrants reflected by the 2006 census (9.3% of the total population), or the about 40,600,000 Spanish nationals. Even if this amount could be doubled or trebled if we take into account illegal immigrants, black Africans would not yet reach 1% of the population. As a matter of fact, no Sub-Saharan African nation appears among the most frequent countries of origin of immigrants in

Spain (Morocco, Ecuador, Romania, United Kingdom and Colombia being the first five<sup>1</sup>). However, reading the newspapers or watching television in this country, one would get the idea that the whole of the African continent is intent on invading the nation, or at least on using our territory as a gateway to reach the more affluent countries to our North. It is undeniable that the presence of black communities, not only in the great cities like Madrid or Barcelona, or the agricultural areas of Andalusia, Catalonia and Murcia, but also in small towns and villages all over the country has visibly increased in the last years; but the data I have just shown reveal how small a percentage of the population they actually represent.

We should also add that many black individuals now living in Spain are not of African origin, but Latin Americans from Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia or Brazil, among other countries. Therefore, the constant political talk about the need to reinforce our frontiers and the general perception that we are being assaulted from the South are from my perspective utterly unjustified. But fear of “the other,” and specifically “the black other,” seems to be deeply ingrained in our collective psyche, in Spain as in the rest of Europe. I do not pretend to suggest that other immigrant communities are not marginalized and even criminalized in the collective imaginary and in the media: Arabs and Eastern Europeans, particularly Ukrainians and Romanians, are also discriminated against, not to speak about our own Roma communities. But from an attitude of patronizing tolerance towards blacks in the sixties and seventies and a generalized self-perception of Spain as a non-racist society we have come to a very different reality at the turn of the century: rampant racism in the media and in society at large, mass repatriations as the governmental response to migration, and a general climate of distrust towards black immigrants.

In this context, a number of black and white academics from different locations and national origins (Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, Congo, Nigeria, Spain, France, Britain...), who had been informally collaborating and networking for a while, decided in 2004 to set up the research project “Afroeuropa@s: Identidades y Culturas Negras en Europa.” On the one hand, we felt the urgent need to explore the cultural richness that black communities have for a long time brought and are still bringing with them from Africa and from the Diaspora into Europe, as one way to counteract the societal perception that black immigrants arrive “naked” in our continent, like black slaves arrived in the Americas, “sans rien, démunis de tout, de ses instruments, de ses coutumes et de ses dieux,<sup>2</sup>” as Glissant would put it, with nothing to offer and a lot to demand from our welfare societies. On the other hand, we thought that it was not less urgent to

analyze and compare the situation of different black communities and their cultural productions in a trans-national framework, given the facts not only of globalization and mundialization, but also the internal socio-political European dynamics, where some degree of internal cohesion is an obviously desirable goal. It is true that in many respects the history and the actuality of black migrations across Europe are incommensurable between regions and nations but, as we will see, several parallelisms emerge as we contemplate this internal diversity.

Furthermore, much as the concept of “the Black Atlantic” has been questioned and criticized from different standpoints, Afro-European lives, identities and cultures cannot be explored or analysed without taking into account a multiplicity of locations, politics, ideas and peoples circulating across the Atlantic, and the fact that we have been able to involve in the production of this volume researchers from and/or established in several different African, American, Caribbean and European countries attests to the growing interest that the academic world worldwide is devoting to the phenomenon of “Afro-Europeanness” at the moment, a fact that necessarily should be contemplated in relation to the wider “Black Atlantic” framework. But if one of the recurring criticisms of Gilroy’s work is that he is too focussed on the black American experience, our particular emphasis lays more on the African and European sides of the triangle.

## **2. What does the “Afro” in “Afro-European” stand for?**

Maya G. Vinuesa recounts in her essay, included in this volume, how she came across the term “Afro-European” for the first time, the word we afterwards chose to name our collective enterprise:

The first time I heard a person calling himself “Afro-European was” ... at the First Meeting of Black and African Communities in Madrid, in September 2003. A young Black Spanish man who identified himself as a member of the Black Panthers expressed his regret about being isolated linguistically and culturally from his African American brothers and sisters. Born of a first generation of Africans who settled in Spain since the 1970s, he said that people like him had never had access to the body of black literatures and philosophy throughout their years of formal education in Spain, and neither had they had access to these works in Spanish libraries or bookshops. ... These Black Panthers claimed that they felt “Afro-European” with particular identities and cultures which needed to be articulated in Spain and in other European countries.

Eager as we were to embrace the term “AfroEuropean,” obviously being not an academic neologism but a term of self-description for a black community, for us in the team this word posed no small problems to begin with: should the “Afro” in “AfroEuropeans” and the adjective “black” in our motto imply a colour, a geographical place of origin, a cultural heritage? In Britain, “black” as an ethnic definition tends to apply to very diverse groups of non-whites; in France, with its republican ideas, there is little place for it in the political discourse: after all, Senegalese or Martinican immigrants have been traditionally considered, at least in strictly legal terms, as French citizens in a supposedly colour-blind society; in Spain “black” is basically a racial category and it refers almost exclusively to skin pigmentation; thus the term applies equally to a Cuban or and Angolan, but not to a Moroccan or even less an Indian. And so on and so forth. Therefore, it is not easy to define on a (European) continental scale what “black” means, or who it is intended to apply to.

In terms of place of origin, a new problematic emerges from the very complexity of these varied definitions of “blackness,” even if they all emerged out of the historical contacts between Europe and the rest of the world: does a black Dominican count as an “AfroEuropean”? Or an Egyptian? The history of slavery, imperialism and colonialism has enormously complicated the definition of what being “African” means. Furthermore, in terms of race, culture and religion Africa is so internally diverse that trying to homogenize it according to crudely geographical terms is utterly absurd. As for (a) cultural tradition(s), things are not much more straight-forward. According to Bikhu Parekh:

Culture is articulated at several levels. At the most basic level it is reflected in language, including the ways in which its syntax, grammar and vocabulary divide up and describe the world. Societies sharing a common language share at least some cultural features in common. And when a group of individuals acquires a wholly new language as many colonial subjects did, they also learn new ways of understanding the world. Culture of a society is also embodied in its proverbs, maxims, myths, rituals, symbols, collective memories, jokes, body language, modes of non-linguistic communication, customs, traditions, institutions and manners of greeting. At a slightly different level it is embodied in its arts, music, oral and written literature, moral life, ideals of excellence, exemplary individuals and the vision of the good life. Being concerned to structure and order human life, culture is also articulated in the rules and norms that govern such basic activities and social relations as how, where, when and with whom one eats, associates and makes love with, how one mourns and disposes of the dead, and treats one’s parents, children, wife, neighbours and strangers (Parekh 144).

Yet, comprehensive as this account is, it is of limited use when speaking about black diasporan cultures in Europe. Although Bikhu Parekh reflects on culture from the perspective of contemporary multicultural societies, and specifically the United Kingdom, his definition is still too static to suit our purposes. To begin with, black Europeans do not share a single tongue. As opposed to the situation in North or Latin America, black communities in Europe must face the enormous ordeal of the absence of a common language; in this respect, their situation resembles more that of black Caribbean peoples, originally dispossessed of their mother tongues in the plantations and afterwards further split by their use of French, English, Spanish and Dutch. AfroEuropeans express themselves in French, English, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Portuguese... The young man in the story told by Maya G. Vinuesa hits the nail on the head when he underlines the linguistic and therefore cultural isolation of Spanish and other European blacks, with the possible exceptions of those located in France and Britain. What about those in Portugal, Germany, Italy, even Russia?

It is also impossible for these diasporic communities scattered across Europe to share a collective memory: they have arrived from many different African countries, from North and Latin America, from the multifarious Caribbean: contexts and societies so dissimilar among themselves that there is not much in common among these peoples, except perhaps an ancestry or a racial origin which in some cases has been diluted by centuries of displacement, mixture, fusion. In an attempt to deal with these enormous internal diversities, Michelle M. Wright argues in her book *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004) that “[c]ultural traditions, historical traditions, and political traditions will ... serve only limited use” at the time of producing an inclusive African diasporic subjectivity. “An *intellectual* tradition, however,” she further argues, “is an entirely different matter” (Wright 3). But even if I absolutely agree with her on the cohesive potentialities of such intellectual tradition, where names such as DuBois, Césaire or Fanon among others are essential, we must admit that their currency outside the Anglophone and Francophone worlds has not been as widespread as one would expect, as the young Afro-Spanish man also put forward and regretted. Furthermore, not all members of the different diasporas (in America, the Caribbean or Europe) nor all Africans in the continent partake of the gifts conferred by such black intellectual tradition. Bob Marley enjoys no doubt more prevalence in any corner of the world where a black community is present than W.E.B. DuBois or Aimé Césaire. Popular culture and movements are surely more significant at the time of constructing a collective identity

than any “intellectual tradition.” Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela or the Black Panthers can surely still mean something where the name of Léopold Senghor does not ring a bell.

However, coming mostly from a philological and humanistic tradition, we in the team tend to privilege literature as a sort of fortunate middle space between the black “intellectual tradition” (and of course contemporary theory) and the “contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living” (Bhabha 307). Although we recognize and value the role of music, theatre, film and the rest of the visual arts in the construction of collective cultures and identities, we have chosen for the purposes of this collection of essays, with only one exception based on oral testimonies, to focus mainly on fictional written texts. “Does the incommensurable act of living—so often dismissed as ethical or empirical—have its own ambivalent narrative, its own history of theory? Can it change the way we identify the symbolic structure of the western nation?” (Bhabha 303). To these questions rhetorically posed by Homi Bhabha in his seminal essay “DissemiNation,” our answer would be that the increasing volume of narratives being produced by black Europeans reveals much not only about that “incommensurable act of living,” but also about the ways in which the western nations are re-imagining themselves. Despite their myriad internal differences, black communities in and out of Africa constitute a moving, shifting nation without borders, where, as Gilroy so influentially argued, individuals and cultural practices constantly circulate, are created and re-appropriated in different locations and thus defy any traditional notion of “national cultures,” of origins or fixed boundaries.

Considering their diversity and exploring their commonalities can be an extremely pedagogical exercise at the time of understanding the world we all live in. But the thousand histories and herstories contained in Afro-European narratives do also have another extremely salutary effect: they can seriously teach us to deflate the pompous oratory of the Western nations on egalitarianism, human rights, democracy, freedom and so many other tall words that are so often employed with an unjustifiable degree of self-complacency to celebrate our purported unique social, economic and political achievements. Once and again, the history of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, which many nations and individuals in Europe would willingly forget and erase, resurface in the narratives produced by Afro-Europeans. The realities of current discrimination, racism, poverty, exploitation, forced migration, political exile, global inequalities and misdevelopment are ever present in such texts. Joan Anim Addo expresses this most powerfully in her poem “Warning This Poem Uses Offcuts”:

These words are taken from the off-cuts  
discarded from unsuccessful craftings:  
black, racism, prejudice.

How they persist in inscribing themselves!  
I have collected sacks full of such off-cuts  
spilling out of each: racism, prejudice, black.

I am told that to be taken seriously.  
I should avoid such words. Cut them out:  
Prejudice, racism, black.

Are not indicative of universal experience.  
Otherwise, I'd be tempted to keep them in, convinced  
there must be some reason for their re-appearing.

...

The liberal minded say they've heard all that before;  
it plays on guilt. Too emotive, that's the term. Or too cliché  
heard in the sixties; the trans Atlantic seventies.

...

I am learning that poems with black, prejudice, racism  
write their own rejection slips  
however much you change the ordering.

I am using them today, finally, simply because it seems to me  
that black, prejudice, racism, recycled,  
could be at least be useful as a disposable poem. (Anim Addo 110-111)

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Like the image that Robert Cohen borrows from Wittgenstein to develop his definition of “diaspora,” that of the different fibres in a rope “which does not get its strength from any fibre that runs through it from one end to another but from the fact that there is a vast number of fibres overlapping” (Cohen 179), Afro-European identities and cultures, as reflected and elaborated in literary texts, can be also said to be produced by a series of overlapping threads: at its core, racial issues are unavoidable, and even if the “dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically” (Cohen 180), Sub-Saharan Africa in this case, has taken place during a period of several centuries, the idea of the continent as an ancestral or real homeland keeps re-emerging in different texts; on many

occasions, this “collective memory” acquires a certain mythical quality, though not necessarily; furthermore, for those migrants who arrived at different stages from the Americas, the homeland is not always unavoidably Africa, but the New World. The ideas of movement, travel, displacement, relocation, or “errancy” (Glissant) are powerful thematic concerns, as well as their reflection in particular aesthetic practices or literary genres: autobiography, travelogue, memoir... There is no doubt a myriad testimonies of “a troubled relation with host societies” (Cohen 180) in Afro-European texts, frequently countered by “a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries” (Cohen 180), even despite the linguistic barriers we have already mentioned. And last but not least, many Afro-European writers do express and embody “the possibility of a distinctive, creative, enriching life” (Cohen 180) in Europe.

### 3. The essays in this collection

The essays in this collection constitute what I humbly consider a pioneering attempt at establishing a comparative framework for the study of black literatures and identities in the European Union. Much work is yet to be done in this area, since as far as I know very little has been written about black Europeans on a continental scale. It is true that the field of Black British Studies has experienced an exponential growth in the last years, with such groundbreaking titles as Kobena Mercer’s *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, Kwesi Owsu’s *Black British Culture and Society: A Text-reader*, James Procter’s *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing and Writing Black Britain, 1948-98: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Alison Donnell’s *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture*, Wambu Onyekachi’s *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Black Britain*, Mark Stein’s *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, Kadija Sesay’s *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature* and many other monographies and collections of essays, not to mention the seminal works of theorists like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall.

But other European countries are still very tentatively exploring the contributions of their black populations to the world of culture and to society in general. While Britain, France and Italy can boast an abundance of literary texts produced by black immigrants or nationals, as the essays by Sabrina Brancato, Papa Samba Diop and those included in the second part of this volume confirm, other countries, like Spain, Portugal, Russia or Germany have known this far nothing like such an explosion. It is only a question of time, I am sure, that the black populations all over Europe

will reach the protagonism they deserve in the literary arena, but the variegated histories of each particular country and society do not favour an even development. The differences between the European nations surveyed in these essays are clearly revealed in the articles that comprise the first part of this collection, "Mapping Afroeuropa."

H. Adlai Murdoch's piece, "European Caribbean Communities: Articulating Diaspora and Identity," establishes an illuminating comparison between the Caribbean diasporas in France and Britain; the inclusion of sociological, demographic and historical facts clarifies his analyses of literary and filmic works so as to advance in our understanding of the commonalities and differences between black communities in both countries. Papa Samba Diop proposes in his essay "Les écrivains francophones subsahariens de la Nouvelle Génération: De nouveaux rapports à l'Afrique?" a journey through the works of African and French-born black authors which explores their changing attitudes to the African continent, and also to their land of adoption. Sabrina Brancato's contribution, "From Routes to Roots: The Emergence of Afro-Italian Literature," shows the vigour of this emerging literary corpus, and underlines a number of stylistic and thematic characteristics which could be easily applied to other Mediterranean contexts. Both Joana Passos and Mbare Ngom, confronted with the realities of Portugal and Spain, where immigrants have produced a very scant number of literary works, focus their essays on colonial and post-colonial literatures in Portuguese and Spanish. Their contributions are however engaging and profoundly suggestive, since they point at the usually forgotten fact that Afroeuropa is not quite the result of contemporary migrations, but the fruit of many centuries of contact between the two continents, a relationship marked more often than not by exploitation, injustice and violence against the colonized on the part of the colonizers. Christel N. Temple's essay uses a traditional African concept, "Sankofa," to analyze the actual or virtual returns of a number of Afro-European (German, Russian and French) women writers to their cultural matrix, whereas Cassandra Ellerbedueck's piece explores through a combination of theoretical perspectives and field research the contemporary construction of Afro-Germanness.

It is interesting to note that these articles are written from a amazing variety of perspectives and disciplinary fields: African Studies, Postcolonial Literatures and Theory, Black British Studies, Diaspora Studies, Francophone Literatures, Sociology, Ethnology and so on: the promising field of Afro-European Studies receives its energy and richness from many different sources, and as it grows it incorporates critical and theoretical perspectives developed in Europe, in America, in Africa or the

Caribbean. This extraordinary wealth of thought and analytical power attests to the dynamism of this discipline, which participates by virtue of the multifarious academic community involved in it of the most exciting insights developed by creators and thinkers alike all over the globe.

The second part of this collection, "A Focus on Women," is almost exclusively concerned with the work of anglophone women writers. If, as I previously asserted, the field of Black British Studies has been by far the most dynamic one in the continent, it is still necessary to dedicate a particular effort to the texts produced by women, since they reveal a concern with the particular situations of black Afro-European females where racial, gender and class issues become inexorably intertwined. Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul or George Lamming, among others, discovered to the world the predicaments of the first generations of black migrants who arrived in Britain in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was the task of a younger generation of woman writers to expose the plights of the female migrant, and consequently, to "gender the diaspora," as Asunción Aragón contends in her text. Joan Anim-Addo, Mar Gallego, Maya G. Vinuesa and myself explore in our essays these previously silent and silenced experiences, with the certainty that, as Homi Bhabha asserts, "it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity" (320).

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (<http://www.ine.es>, page visited on 25/09/2007) and Ministerio del Interior del Gobierno de España: (<http://www.mir.es>, page visited on 25/09/2007).

<sup>2</sup> "Migrations et Mondialité. Entretien avec Édouard Glissant." Propos recueillis par Landry-Wilfrid Miampika Paris, le 29 juin 2002, publié le 15/08/2007. [http://www.africultures.com/index.asp?menu=revue\\_affiche\\_article&no=2842](http://www.africultures.com/index.asp?menu=revue_affiche_article&no=2842). Page visited on 1/10/2007.

**PART I:**  
**MAPPING AFROEUROPE**

# EUROPEAN CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES: ARTICULATING DIASPORA AND IDENTITY

H. ADLAI MURDOCH

This essay examines the ways in which the European Caribbean diaspora inscribes critical paradoxes of migrancy and citizenship, encompassing both the English-speaking Commonwealth Caribbean and displaced inhabitants of French Caribbean overseas departments who became citizens of France. This project thus reads the diasporic intersections and transformations of Britishness, Frenchness and Caribbeanness engendered in the metropolises by these migration-based demographic shifts. These European communities are virtually 1% of the population in both cases, and their cultural and identitarian hybridities increasingly destabilize our current notions of nationality and belonging.

It is clear, then, that any inscription of the Caribbean as diasporic community involves the implicit recognition of an imperial, external presence within the region, which in its turn mediates the very “Caribbeanness” of the term Caribbean itself. At the very least, then, any reconsiderations of the complex construct that is the diasporic Caribbean will compel us to revise long-held notions of the role and place of “center” and “periphery” in a post/colonial context, and to bring into play important concepts of location, cultural fusion and creolization as ways of interrogating and displacing rigid assumptions of identity drawn on an ever-evolving modernity and an incessant cycle of migrant movement. Indeed, the history of the Caribbean and its people does not conform to traditional diasporic patterns and exigencies of exile, dispersal, and return. Nor, for that matter, do we discern a single national entity of overwhelming political and psychological importance looming large on the diasporic horizon, a place that mediates both origin and return. Ultimately, these protean practices exploit the implicit slippage between voluntary and forced migration, a dichotomy of voyages toward and away from home exacerbated in this Caribbean context by a plurality of temporal perspectives that range from the inception of slavery, the

contractual indentureship that followed emancipation and the labor-driven mass movements to various metropolises of the late twentieth century.

What immediately distinguishes the French Caribbean experience of migration from its British counterpart is the fact of overseas departmentalization. Indeed, the instantiation in 1946 of this “egalitarian” relationship with mainland French departments placed the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique (as well as French Guiana and Réunion) on a completely different footing with regard to migrancy and the movement of peoples, from their Caribbean counterparts in, say, Antigua or Trinidad. The primary distinction to be made here, then, once the postwar migratory movements began, is that Guadeloupeans and Martinicans who chose to move to the metropole were not Commonwealth citizens—either from British colonies or from incipiently independent countries—moving to a mother-country that would, despite its seeming literary and cultural familiarity, nevertheless remain stubbornly foreign, as in the British case, but rather were moving from periphery to center of a country of which they were already citizens. At the same time, however, their presence in these metropolitan centers, in ever-increasing numbers, brought into sharp focus their latent capacity to reshape the national population, in both demographic and cultural terms, along with the symbolic corollary of refashioning the longstanding tenets of Frenchness and Britishness. Indeed, the racial, cultural, and historical characteristics that distinguished these Caribbean arrivants from their metropolitan counterparts would lead in time to a radical rethinking of the constitutive character of the French and British nations.

With no restrictions on the arrival of West Indians from British colonies, since they were officially British subjects, large-scale West Indian migration into the UK is recognized as beginning with the docking of the *MS Empire Windrush* with its 450 West Indian passengers at Tilbury in 1948. Figures cited by the British Home Office show that the 15,301 British residents claiming to be born in the Caribbean in 1951 had mushroomed to 171,800 ten years later and to 304,000 in 1971; by 1981, reflecting a subsequent migration wave made up primarily of children and dependents of previous migrants, 275,000 of Britain’s West Indians claimed a birthplace outside the UK, while 244,000 of them claimed British birth. A decade later, in 1992, it was confirmed that the total West Indian population in the UK had surpassed 500,000, and stood at about 0.9% of the population.

While the French experience is marked by France’s total immigrant population of about three million, out of a national total of 60 million, by and large, the term “immigrant” is not taken, for example, to refer to other

Europeans like, say, the Portuguese, who presently constitute the predominant immigrant group in France. Rather, as Winifred Woodhull succinctly points out:

It refers to the influx of non-Europeans, some of whom are not immigrants at all. These include people from France's overseas departments in the Caribbean (Martinique and Guadeloupe), as well as from former French colonies such as Vietnam, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). (32)

Thus the very range of application of the French term *immigré(e)* implicitly incorporates all minority groups, regardless of demographic origin, into its folds; for example, as Freedman and Tarr point out:

A woman who was born in France, has been brought up in French society and has French nationality, but whose grandparents originally migrated to France from Vietnam, for example, will still find herself labelled as an "immigrant." The same is true of ethnic minority communities in France originating from Martinique and Guadeloupe, even though these are still French territories. (2)

For these Caribbean *dom-tomiens*, migratory movement was organized and facilitated from the early 1960s by the state agency BUMIDOM (Bureau pour la Migration des Départements d'Outre-Mer), and close to one hundred thousand Guadeloupeans and Martinicans arrived in the metropole in this way over the twenty-odd years of the Bureau's existence until its closure in 1981. Given their now overwhelming mainland presence sixty years into the era of overseas departmentalization, such patterns engender a precipitous double bind for the Antillean departmental subject, who is simultaneously citizen and foreigner, French and West Indian, black and, thus, (perceptually) non-French.

Ultimately, ethnicity, particularly with its added Caribbean resonances of hybridity and history, became a primary tool in the dismantling of the "Black-English" binary through which existing national discourses of identity sought to reduce the otherness of this movement to the colonial center. Traditional notions of "race" and nation were made to give way to more malleable concepts of culture and identity, as growing patterns of decentralization, demarginalization and transformation appropriated the British national space and forced it to confront its own dissolution in the diversity and difference of diaspora culture and expression. One classic example of the ways in which these "new ethnicities" enabled the deconstruction of national prejudices was Paul Gilroy's telling critique of Raymond Williams' unconsciously ethnocentric stand on "British

culture.” Essentially, Williams equates “Britishness” with “whiteness,” relegating immigrants to a form of “inauthentic ... national belonging.” As Gilroy points out:

Williams combines a discussion of “race” with comments on patriotism and nationalism. However, his understanding of “race” is restricted to the social and cultural tensions surrounding the arrival of “new peoples.” For him, as with the right, “race” problems begin with immigration ... His alternative conception stresses that social identity is the product of “long experience” ... These arguments effectively deny that blacks can share a significant “social identity” with their white neighbors who, in contrast to more recent arrivals, inhabit what Williams calls “rooted settlements” articulated by “lived and formed identities.” (49-50)

Such exposure of the unacknowledged racial hierarchies and stereotypes lurking in the shadows of the British national landscape and shaping the production of its discourses did much to ease the stranglehold of singularity in which visions of “Britishness” were implicitly grounded.

It was that critical, creolized hybridity of the displaced Caribbean subject which, valorized by the appropriation of the designation “black,” showcased the adaptability and continuity of Caribbeanness within a diasporic framework. The key role of such new cultural and demographic structures in the broadening and transformation of British identity is neatly glossed by Kobena Mercer:

The *emerging cultures of hybridity*, forged among the overlapping African, Asian, and Caribbean diasporas, that constitute our common home, must be seen as crucial and vital efforts to answer the ‘possibility and necessity of creating a new culture’ ... The mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridized identities point to ways of surviving, and thriving, in conditions of crisis and transition. (3-5; emphasis in the original)

This mixing and fusion was always already at work in the Caribbean, engendering its composite identitarian structures from its African, East Asian, Chinese, and European elements. As these patterns began to replicate themselves on British soil, overlapping with pre-existing demographics and transforming and being transformed by them, an Anglo-Caribbean performative site slowly began to take shape, encompassing West Indian migrants born in the region, their second- and third-generation progeny born in Britain, and the resulting artistry of “cut and mix,” in Dick Hebdige’s telling phrase, that, at bottom, was neither purely British, nor purely West Indian, but crucially more than the sum of both.

Drawing on self-designations that range from Black British to Franco-Antillais, these metropolitan groups' increasing use of the term "black," meant to subsume a plethora of political and ethnic attitudes, positionalities, and differences into a single, overarching, political and ethnocultural signifier; and works simultaneously to expose and destabilize false but fixed assumptions of "race," ethnicity, and nationalism. As Baker, Best and Lindeborg point out, "'Black' thus makes ethnicity a temporal configuration, one that is made to appear always in tension with a fixed 'Englishness.'" (5)

By thus adopting and adapting the term "black" as a sort of conceptual tool aimed both at illuminating the struggle for difference and at redefining the ethnocultural essentialisms undergirding nationalism and culture, what became

both striking and at the same time unsettling is the way in which "black"'s site of enunciation is dramatically shifted away from vernacular politics and rearticulated in the theoretical space of representation. (12)

Reversing the pattern of the stereotype, or indeed escaping its clutches, is by no means an easy task, especially given the entrenched binary configuration through which such structures operate. Indeed, in a well-known and cogently argued essay, Benita Parry has shown that simply overturning these binaries does nothing to mitigate their pernicious influence, particularly within a postcolonial context:

To dismantle colonialist knowledge and displace the received narrative of colonialism's moment written by ruling-class historiography and perpetuated by the nationalist version, the founding concepts of the problematic must be refused. (28)

Thus a strategy that contests such racialized strata of representation by substituting an alternate set of "positive" images that, in Stuart Hall's words, "construct[s] a positive identification with what has been abjected" would indeed be useful, but ultimately, as a discursive rejoinder, would also be of limited value, as he points out:

Reversing the stereotype is not necessarily to overturn or subvert it. Escaping the grip of one stereotypical extreme ... may simply mean being trapped in its stereotypical "other." (272)

By *dis*-placing and *re*-placing the binary basis of the construct, then, the construction and production of Anglo-Caribbean images would evolve

within a more fluidic, pluralistic framework; while firmly grounded in difference, the gradual but ineluctable expansion of the ground and means of representation would become the primary means whereby the Anglo-Caribbean British presence contested its demonization and inscribed its critical cultural and discursive doubleness. On a larger scale, such counter-strategies gathered both form and content into a new representative regime that sought to dismantle longstanding prejudiced (and prejudicial) hierarchies of signification even as it introduced alternative sites and simultaneities of difference, in a series of gestures that essentially established and defined the scope and validity of “black Britishness” and *franco-antillanité* as accepted demographic discursive categories.

By adopting what was essentially a subversive strategy of decentering and defamiliarization, one which simultaneously set the stereotypical regime against itself while also setting new paradigms for black Euro-metropolitan subjectivity in the fields of film, fiction, television, art, and music, it became increasingly and ineluctably clear that the Euro-Caribbean subject was there to stay.

The insistent hybridity of the migrant Caribbean diasporic subject, the concatenation of contextual factors of displacement and difference that rendered her/him “less than one and double,” in Bhabha’s felicitous phrase, would transform and expand the parameters and boundaries of Caribbean migrancy as public performance of this diasporic doubleness insistently took shape. Critically, however, for those diasporic figures made subject to the discourse of the new nation, the hoary trope of representational binarism was immediately and ineluctably apparent. As Stuart Hall succinctly puts it:

[P]eople who are in any way significantly different from the majority—“them” rather than “us”—are frequently exposed to this *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes ... And they are often required to be *both things at the same time!* (229; emphasis in the original)

Such deliberate discursive splitting grounds contemporary representations of the Caribbean metropolitan diaspora to a large degree, and inflects in myriad ways its double inscription in the spaces of ‘home’ and ‘away’; but further, it illustrates the fact, as Saussure reminds us, that difference is relational, in that we understand such concepts as “blackness,” “Britishness” and “Frenchness” by contrasting them with their implicit opposites. So not only are these concepts infinitely malleable signs, but their shifting shapes open up new, alternative possibilities for joining

difference to national discourses in ways that ultimately metamorphose the meaning of the nation.

Indeed, in one of the more telling incongruities of modern-day France, the country's vaunted universalist claims, as well as the concomitant, if unheralded ghettoization arising unbidden from the deliberate construction of satellite communities stemming from postwar French waves of immigrant (re)colonization of the metropole, find their roots in the racial hierarchies that served French colonialism and the *mission civilisatrice*. The cultural characteristics of "otherness," that are assigned then to such groups tend to result in the maintenance of an ambiguous identitarian framework, one that ultimately reinscribes the displaced *domien* within an internal colonial relationship to the dominant nation-state. Once on metropolitan soil, such subjects often find that they hardly correspond to the prevailing national image of what it means to be French, and as a result, their relationship to the state—their very identity as citizens—is constantly questioned, despite the termination of the long colonial history that bound them to the state in the first place. In the context of a republican nation-state that long functioned as an empire, both the implicit contradiction framed by appealing to universal citizenship on the one hand, and the pursuing simultaneities of inclusion and exclusion on the other, confound and complicate the national implications of an assimilationist immigration praxis. These suggestions of varied levels of national belonging, and their corollaries of difference and duality, are precisely the perspectives and attitudes that today's "postcolonial" France cannot shake off, as Etienne Balibar claims, "Racism in France is essentially colonial, not in terms of a 'leftover' from the past but rather in terms of the continuing production of contemporary relations." (1745)

These persistent attitudes, often equally grounded in issues of nationalism and belonging, were supported early on by the practice of suburban housing allocations for migrant workers paid into by employers, both public and private. Sought after for their convenient combination of cheap rents and relatively spacious accommodation, these projects soon became the home for growing numbers of newly arrived foreign workers. Subsequently, as French Caribbean migrant citizens were stereotyped and excluded, they also sought refuge in the familiar. The resulting concentrations of these arrivants on the large public housing estates in the northern and eastern suburbs of Paris—Aulnay-sous-Bois, Maisons-Alfort, Garges-les-Gonnesse—meant that, in fairly short order, the dominant ethnic and demographic majorities of the French Caribbean islands were recreated in microcosmic communities across the metropolitan landscape, their specific cultural patterns and practices—speech, food, music—slowly

but inexorably (re)creolizing—in Edouard Glissant’s geopolitical use of the term—their immediate surroundings as well as the dominant cultural patterns of the metropole at large.

Overall, then, what I am considering is the metropolitan inscription of these transnational Caribbean communities, and their demographic consolidation in and figural recolonization of such areas as Seine-Saint-Denis, Notting Hill or Shepherd’s Bush that have, over time, both interrogated and redefined transatlantic notions of homeland and identity. For if, as Khacha Tölölyan defined the concept: “*Diaspora* is concerned with the way in which nations, real yet imagined communities, are fabricated, brought into being, made and unmade, as culture and politics, both on the land people call their own and in exile” (3), the integrationist identitarianism that has long characterized European nationalist patterns calls on immigrants to assimilate, and blames them for any perceived failures along these lines. But one of the key paradoxes of the departmental French Caribbean nexus of migration and citizenship is the subjection of these French subjects to a reductionist pattern of stereotyping based on race, in which many Antilleans are often ironically assumed to be extra/legal immigrants or part of an amorphous group of “others” for whom assimilation into mainstream Frenchness is deemed to be largely impossible. In a sense, then, their assertion of their cultural distinctiveness and difference is virtually a form of resistance and survival, a reaction to the imposition of this outsider status that drives subsequent acts of cultural self-assertion. Indeed, the *antillanité* that emerges in response to the metropolitan challenge is unique in a number of ways, as David Beriss suggests:

In France, however, they were challenged to invent an Antillean identity that had never existed in the islands ... To be recognized as culturally distinct, Antilleans used art, social policy, and religion to shape their identity in ways recognizably French in form but Caribbean in substance. (21)

The demographics provide the tipping point; with fully one-quarter of Antilleans born in the region having moved to France by the early 1990s<sup>1</sup> and with over 70% of the metropolitan Martinican and Guadeloupean population resident in and around Paris, it would be here that the resulting acts of resistance and recognition would be centered.

This insistently black, migrant presence has transformed the complex ethnocultural structures and stratifications of both London and Paris, even as it forms a new Caribbean diaspora whose amorphous geographical boundaries locate its subjects in an explicitly transnational and transformative

space of hybridity and renewal. Thus the transchannel phenomenon of Caribbean sociocultural congregation in jobs and housing ultimately places in contention Renan's historical claims regarding the nation's intrinsic desire for unity, supposedly marked by "the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form, ... the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life." (19)

In other words, whether migrating as Commonwealth citizens of the Empire or full-fledged citizens of the hexagonal *patrie*, Caribbean arrivants to these European metropolises were immediately and inalterably marked as ethnically and culturally other, inferior and inadmissible, an unwanted, denigrated Caliban to the nation's proud Prospero. From a nationalist point of view, these new European populations see themselves as European, certainly, but also as part of a 'black' diasporic international Caribbean community that has vibrantly reinvented itself beyond its geographical boundaries. The task of self-representation undertaken by this community sets out to combat subtle discriminatory practices across the economic, social and political domains through increasingly imaginative discourses in both literature and film. In representational terms, the "Black British" movement of the 1970s and 1980s joined culture to politics at a critical moment, contesting and dis-placing the ingrained racisms of "Britishness" even as the desire for cultural affirmation gave rise in France to such new cultural movements as *antillanité* and *créolité*, whose reshaping of literary codes and practices would soon be increasingly apparent.

Turning to the literature, then, and beginning with Gisèle Pineau's *Exil selon Julia*, the family that is the subject of this narrative had moved to France as part of the great migratory waves that sent both Antillais and others to that country—initially as part of a needed French post-war labor force, and then as part of a more generalized escape from high unemployment and poor living conditions—from the 1960s to the 1980s. The novel opens with the imminent return of the narrator's family to their native Guadeloupe after an eleven-year period spent in France. The parallel trajectories of metropolitan unease traced by the narrative appropriate the narrator's traumatic experience of French school, and the grandmother's painful attempts to integrate into a "foreign" culture in order to highlight the feelings of "foreignness" of these French Caribbean subjects now displaced to the metropole. Called "Négresse à plateau," among other names, by her white classmates, and encouraged to "Retourner dans ton pays" (110) ["Go back home"], the narrator is singled out as different by the teacher as well, in an act that embodies the adage of